

The Way of Holiness.

The Associational sermon of the Central Association of Nova Scotia. Preached June 28th, at Upper Canard, by Rev. Chas. R. Freeman, M. A., Pastor of the Bridge-water Baptist church.

And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, yea fools, shall not err therein. No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast go up thereon, they shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there: and the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion: and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads: they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. Isaiah 35:8-10.

A little more than ten years ago, there sat in a room, in a college town in the south, two room-mates. The one was just beginning his college course, the other was nearing the close of his; and on his lap that morning there lay an open Bible, and from it he was reading the words which I have chosen as a text for this morning. His clear mind quickly discerned the natural divisions of the text, and saw in it a wealth of material that he would gladly have woven into sermon form. But the double duties of student and pastor had already proven too much for his strength. He was never permitted to put into sermon form the thoughts of that hour nor to complete the course to the end of which he had made such a near approach. He was nearer the end of the King's great highway than he knew.

For more than ten years the text and some of the thoughts of that morning have been repeatedly in mind, and today, in grateful acknowledgement of a friend of other days, I shall attempt to present God's message as best I can from these words.

Two characteristics marked the ancient Hebrew: he had a genius for religion and a highly imaginative mind. His deep religious sentiments found expression in most picturesque language. He saw, he thought, he spoke in figurative form. He sought through the figures of the things he saw around him to reconstruct in the minds of others the pictures of his own thought.

The Old Testament is a rich storehouse of the thoughts of the imaginative mind of the ancient Hebrew.

As he thought of the journey of the righteous man from earth to heaven, he thought of it as along the King's highway: a way that was appointed by the King, protected by his power and that led to his capital.

So in our text, the writer speaks of the way of holiness which is appointed by the King as so plain that a wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein; so secure, so protected by his power, that no lion nor ravenous beast is found upon it, and that leads to the capital of the great King, into everlasting joy.

In considering this subject to-day, let us have regard for the natural divisions and think of the way of holiness.

I. As a plain way.

II. As a secure way.

III. As a way that leads to everlasting joy.

1. The plainness of this way is distinguished by two marks:

a. The absence of all that is unclean. Under the old Jewish law, to touch an unclean thing meant ceremonial defilement, and to avoid such defilement must have meant the constant exercise of considerable care. On this highway one traveling is free from all such care, for here no unclean thing is found. On all the other ways of life, we are constantly mingling the clean and the unclean, the man of pure and noble thoughts and the man of vilest imagination, but on this way are found only the pure in heart.

This, then, is a distinctive mark from all other highways, and he is wise who chooses this way.

There comes to us from mythological times, a story that Hercules once, on a journey, came to a point where two roads met. He was in doubt which to take. From one there emerged a maiden in gaudy attire, beckoning him her way. Hercules asked her name and she replied, "My name is Pleasure, but my enemies call me Vice." From the other road there emerged another maiden in modest attire, beckoning him her way. Hercules asked her name and she replied, "My name is Virtue." On the journey of life we each come to that point where two roads meet. The one is the plain but difficult road of duty, purity, holiness. The other, the attractive, easy road of self, indulgence, impurity, vice and careless neglect. The choice of the difficult road of duty, purity, holiness, must be accompanied with effort to follow it, else one will inevitably drift into the easy way of self-indulgence and neglect. No man of any worth, who, when riding his wheel, comes to a place where two roads meet, the one leading up a hill to a town where duty demands his presence, and the other leading down to a village below, where he has no business, will throw up his feet and coast on down, simply because the wheel runs easier down hill than it does up. Yet this is the way hundreds of men are doing to-day. They say they will not be Christians because they fear they cannot live a Christian life and they do not wish to appear before the world in a false light. Now, I have great regard for the man who is conscientious and does not wish to appear before the world in a false attitude; but is this really the final reason for not accepting Christ? Or is it, when more carefully sifted, really this: that to lead a Christian life means continuous and deter-

mined effort to do right, and they who plead fear of failure, are unwilling to make the necessary effort?

2. A plainness such that a wayfaring man, yea a fool, need not err therein.

While this is a plain way and easily distinguished from others, it is not necessarily a smooth way. The very marks of plainness render it rough and valuable.

In Matthew we find this road described as a straight and narrow way. We live on an incline plain and all in life that is best and worth striving for, is above us. People in social life are ever striving for something that is just a little higher, men in business are seeking for more business, the true student is never contented with present attainments, but is ever reaching out for more knowledge.

In like manner the road to heaven is not a smooth, macadamized one, like the drives of some city park, but often leads up steep hills of difficulty and thro' valleys of sharp trial. The Saviour says, "He that cometh after me must take up his cross and follow me." This evil world is no friend to grace. Its currents are not set Godward. While these marks distinguish this road from other roads, they, at the same time, give value to it.

Men value those things that cost something. No student works so diligently as he who has to earn every cent that he spends. He knows the value of his time and the cost of his money, hence his care in investing it.

In my library are several books which have been presented to me by the authors, but I have never yet found time to read carefully through one of them. Some of them may be of as great value as some other books that I have read, but I have not felt the need of these books. There are other books in that same library that I have felt that I must have, and I have purchased them with my hard earned money. These books I have tried to read carefully and digest the thought. I value them because I have felt the need of them.

This same principle holds good in religion. Men value their religion in proportion as they have felt their need and realized the greatness of Christ's sacrifice. Men like Carey, Judson, or John G. Paton, sacrificing as they have, for the cause of Christ are surely in a better position to appreciate the greatness of Christ's sacrifice for us than we who have never sacrificed for him. Henry Martyn, after winning the first honors at Cambridge, determined to consecrate himself to the humble toils of a foreign missionary. "Oh," he wrote in his diary, "it is an arduous thing, an awful thing, to rout out every worldly ambition and every earthly affection, and live only for another world." In this sacrificing for God and his fellow-men, he shared the spirit of his Master, and out of these very crosses that he carried, he wrought the ladder which carried him up to a glorious world-wide influence in the Kingdom of God.

It seems to me to be one of the greatest mistakes of our time, that we have pictured to ourselves religious life to be so easy and so little different from the worldly life that a nominal Christian can travel the same way as a non-professor, or if he travels the King's highway, we have lowered our conception of it, until even the King's highway of holiness, like the way of the world, leads down the hill until we cannot distinguish the one way from the other nor the travelers thereupon.

This is not the idea of the way of holiness that has moved the world in the past nor will it ever move the world. There is a conviction inwrought in the mind of man that God's way of holiness is different from his own way, and in this conviction he is right.

It is not a road without difficulty and the higher you make the standard of Christian living so long as you do not make it mere theory or mysticism, the more attractive it will be to men and the more favor it will have in their lives. To lower the standard of Christian living, thinking to attract the world, is a great mistake. Unregenerated men have little use for a standard that is scarce above their present mode of living. They want something that is genuine and nothing less than God's eternal truth will satisfy them. The King's highway of holiness does not run parallel with the way of the world and so close as not to be distinguished, but is plainly and easily distinguished. If your standard of the way of holiness is not high enough for you to be certain of a marked difference between the Christian way and the way of the world, be sure it is not high enough.

Having now thought of the way of holiness as a plain way, let us now think of it as

II. A secure way.

1. Our text tells us that no lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast go up thereon, they shall not be found there.

We have said that the Hebrew saw, thought and expressed his thought in figurative language. As he thought of the security of this highway, or way of holiness, danger, in his mind, took the form of a crouching lion by the wayside, and he says "No lion shall be there." No danger, like a crouching lion ready to spring upon its prey shall be found on this way. The thought of the lion was perhaps suggested by the lions that came among the Samaritans. However that may be, the absence of lions and ravenous beasts represented the security of the way.

2. The man who really travels the King's highway need fear no danger. No real harm will come to him so long as he is on the highway of holiness. It is only when he has

wandered from the straight and narrow way into the forests of sin that he is in danger. It is there that he finds lions crouching and ready to spring upon him.

John Bunyon, in his immortal allegory, makes his Pilgrim to encounter, at a very early stage of his pilgrimage, "two lions in the way." He was afterwards told that the ferocious looking beasts were "placed there for trial of faith where it is, and for the discovery of those who have none." The Pilgrim heard the lions roar, but he went on, keeping in the midst of the straight road, and they did him no harm, for the lord of the road had mercifully muzzled them.

If vice, wild passion and unbridled appetites, hatred or envy have a place in your heart, you may be sure you have wandered from the highway of holiness, for these devouring lions cannot travel on the King's highway.

To say that this way is secure, is not to say that the Christian upon that way will not meet the hardships of life, that he will not have sorrow and temporal losses. He may even have to suffer death for the cause of Christ, for many have been the martyrs of each century. The body suffered, but the spirit still traveled the King's highway. The suffering of the Waldenses of Southern France, the story of the Israel of the Alps, the persecutions in Scotland and Ireland, bear witness to the suffering of the faithful. The worst the world could do was only to hasten physical death, and this but brought them to the end of the King's highway, into the presence of the great King, into everlasting joy.

Now let us think of the City that lieth at the end of this way.

III. A way that leads to everlasting joy.

1. This is the only way that leads to everlasting joy. It is less inviting at its entrance than many others, but it leads to a city more grand than all others. John, in the Apocalypse, found human language incapable of expressing its glory. He had at his command that richest of all languages, the Greek, and when he had exhausted the very power of language, he still recognized that he had given but a faint picture of the Holy City. Every sentence of the Bible regarding it tells either of the undesirable things that will not be found there, or of the presence of things that will contribute to man's greatest happiness. The grandest thought of all concerning that city, is that of the Saviour's presence.

John says it will need neither the sun nor the moon to shine upon it, for the glory of the Lord will brighten it and the lamp thereof will be the Lamb.

Grand beyond description. Entrance there means everlasting joy.

2. Only the redeemed travel this road. Only those who, by faith in Christ, as the Divine Son, share in the benefits of his atoning work.

Here we have to guard not only against wild beasts, but often against our fellow men. On that highway, we travel without fear of the man who walks beside us, for in our text we are told that no unclean thing will be found upon this way, and in Revelation we are told that into that city, which lieth at the end of this highway, there shall in no wise enter any unclean thing, or he that worketh an abomination or a lie; but only they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Let us then bear in mind the facts concerning the way of holiness: it is a plain way, a secure way, and it leads to everlasting joy. Let each who travels this way say with James: "Count it all joy, my brethren, when ye fall into manifold temptations; knowing that the proof of your faith worketh patience. And let patience have its perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, lacking in nothing."

Facing "the Unpardonable Sin."

If there is one mental trouble above that seems to call for sympathy and tenderness of treatment, it is the fear that one has committed "the unpardonable sin," and now stands facing hopelessly the eternal consequences of this wrongdoing. Nor is this fear an utterly exceptional one. Many a sensitive conscience has suffered from it for years. It is worth serious thought on the part of all who would help souls.

Several conversations which the writer has had with one of these troubled souls illustrates one phase of this difficulty and a way of meeting it. A young man who was active in Christian work, and who was a confessed follower of Christ, had puzzled over the words of our Lord that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit could not be forgiven. Thinking over the subject persistently, he had come to fear that he had committed that sin, and he was oppressed accordingly.

"As I read the Bible," he said, "Whosoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world nor in that world which is to come. Now I fear that I have, at some time, spoken in that way. If I have, there is no hope for me."

"Did you do this deliberately, and with a purpose of doing it? Or did you merely do it triflingly and irreverently?"

"It is the thing itself that is spoken of by our Lord, without reference to the inner spirit of the speaker."

"Have you regretted your thoughtless and irreverent evil speech?"

"Yes, indeed I have, many and many times. But that doesn't make any difference in the case of a sin that will not be forgiven in this world or the next, in spite of our repentings."