

# The Place and Power of Memorized Scripture

An Address by REV. W. H. GEISTWEIT, D.D., of Chicago, at the International Sunday-school Convention in Toronto, June 27th.

I HAVE in mind to-day an old man, something over seventy years of age, who has grown partially blind. He is one of those rare, sweet souls, whom to meet is always to receive a benediction. One never leaves him without new inspiration to do better and to be better. Now and then I meet him on the street in the great city where I live, and he takes hold of my arm as we walk together, he chatting gaily of things that make for the best of life. He is always quoting some rich selection from some favorite author, some striking passage from the Scriptures. He does it so naturally, so sweetly, that one is led to feel that he lives by the things he has hidden in his heart. On one occasion I said to him: "I am amazed at your memory and the things you have stored away in your heart. How did you come to do it?" His reply was simple, quiet, yet charged with a certain intensity of feeling—for any reference to his approaching blindness is a delicate matter:

"When I was quite a young man, I carefully thought over the days that were passing, and I reasoned that the time might come when my eyesight would not be as strong as it was then. So I began to memorize things; I charged my mind with the best selections from books, withal taking care to learn a great deal of Scripture. My fund grew very large. The days and years passed, and I am an old man now; my eyesight is failing"—he said it so softly—"and you cannot realize what comfort it is to me to recall the precious things that lie in my heart; I repeat them over and over again, and life is made fresh and new by reason of them." The place of memorized Scripture was in the days of his young manhood; the power of it was evident in the years of his latter manhood, even down to old age.

I have in mind another old man, who lived far back in the years, several thousand ago, and more. He was about to leave his people. His parting message is one of the choice things in literature. As he came to consider the law of God (and there wasn't so very much of it written then), he urged its study upon the people, especially cautioning them to diligently teach it unto their children. He said:

And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.—Deuteronomy 6, 6-9.

So spake Moses, the man of God, to the people of the long ago. The place of the memorized Scripture was in the childhood of the nation, and the power of it was to issue in a people thoroughly grounded in the oracles of God, made strong and virile and peculiar, because the Word of God was hidden in their hearts.

A little while after, when giving his parting message to his successor, he again urged the worth of constant attention upon the book of the law. The people should teach it unto their children; they should write it upon the doorposts of their houses; they should bind it as frontlets to their eyes. Joshua, the leader into the new land, was himself to be a constant student of the self-same law.

This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night; that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and thou shalt have good success.—Joshua 1, 8.

The place of the memorized Scripture was to be in his quiet moments by day or night; and the power of it was to be manifested in the way he passed over—a prosperous way, one bright with the promise of good success.

I have in mind, also, another man; he must have been old when he summed up that which I am about to repeat to you. He had lived unto the years of calm contemplation, of wide experience. He was describing the steadfast man; the fruitful man; in a negative and a positive way he drew his outline. And this was the way he did it:

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he

shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.—Psalm 1, 1-3.

The place of the Scripture was in the man's heart, inwrought by daily and nightly meditation; the power of it was in evil withstood, a fruitful life, a fadeless tree, a prosperous way.

## AN OVERCOMING FORCE.

Long, long afterwards, a young man found himself driven resistlessly into a strange, wild, weird wilderness. There was a terrific battle to be fought. He was to look in with the forces of evil, and he was to overcome! It is significant to note the weapon of his warfare. His was not a conflict with flesh and blood; there were principalities and powers against him; the prince of the power of darkness closed in with him in nightly conflict. Again and again did he resist to his enemy, and his weapon was the Word of God, which he had been taught in common with all Hebrew children at his mother's knee. And Satan was vanquished.

Just a few years after that he was at the end of his short, but, oh, such a stormy life. Lifted on a painful cross, his whole being quivering with pain, the things that rose to his lips were quotations from the old Book; the last cry was the heart-leap of an old psalmist, "Into thy hands I commend my spirit." So Jesus of Nazareth, Son of Man, and Son of God, God the Father unveiled, was himself the greatest example of the place and power of memorized Scripture.

Looking back over a life full of what the world now calls the strenuous, a great soul was commending his friends to the best things—as he went from them, never to look into their faces again. And his combination was this:

And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.—Acts 20, 32.

The place and power of the inwrought Scripture was the consuming thought of Paul's farewell message to his Ephesian friends.

Peter, in his last word, rises to a great thought when he reminds his friends that God had given "exceeding great and precious promises, that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature." So the place and power of the memorized Scripture was the inner life transformed into the divine life!

From the picture of the old liberator, talking to his children in the wilderness, as they were about to go over Jordan, through the years to one of the last of the Apostles, I have traced the teaching of the Book itself as to its place and power in human life. Much more might be added by way of elaboration, but enough has been given to furnish a background for a few modest words as the subject comes in touch with our own lives. I am here to-day to plead for some of the riches of the past, which, in the great sweep of things, we have left behind, and almost forgotten. It is the place and power of the memorized Scripture in human life. Not one word of criticism of the elaborated systems of teaching; nothing shall be said against the most modern principles of pedagogy. "These things ought ye to have done," but looking back over the years that lie behind, remembering the sweetness and the power of the Scriptures as they were taught in a time when the heart was open and the mind playful, one feels like adding, "and not to leave the other undone."

## A MEMORY DYNAMICAL.

Here is the plea for memorizing Scripture in order to the development of life itself. A Southern woman was telling me of her experience with children. She said she thought it strange that so little attention was given to the Proverbs in the teaching of children; so she began to give them a verse a week. They were to memorize it and give their experiences at the end of the week. One lad, of an unusually quick temper, who had an unfortunate habit of screaming when things did not go to suit him, had quite a time with one of the verses. It was not only memorized, but carefully explained to him. When he made his report, he said: "We were having quite a time at our house; some things I didn't like; I got so mad I wanted to scream, and kick, but I ran into the hallway, to get away for a moment, for I remem-