

## A QUEST FOR SOULS

Comprising all the Sermons Preached and Prayers  
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TWELVE -

### THE DEADLY DANGER OF DRIFTING

NOON SERVICE, JUNE 18, 1917

#### PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

My heart has been warmed and cheered from day to day, by the large number of busy men and women who have felt inclined to come to this mid-day service. It is deeply significant that such throngs have it in their hearts to come to this noonday meeting. I would daily propose to the Christian men and women before me that we give ourselves unstintedly to helping the people religiously, throughout all the week before us. I pray you to forget it not that there can be no substitutes for personal work in behalf of people who need GOD. I pray you to remember it, that all about us are men and women who are drifting away from the right, because of the lack of the right kind of personal appeal from the friends of GOD. The highest title that JESUS gives His people is the title of "**Friend.**" I am speaking to many friends of GOD at this Monday meeting. O ye friends of GOD, do your best to win other friends for Him these passing days! Bring them to the mid-day meetings. Bring them to the night meetings. Have the right kind of conversations with them. And above all, beseech GOD for the light and leading of His HOLY SPIRIT in this work that we are all trying to do, both publicly and privately.

Text: "**Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.**" (Hebrews 2:1)

And now to the morning message. If you were asked the chief danger to us all, what would your answer be? It would be interesting to know your answer. What is the chief danger to us all? The Bible tells us. It is the danger of drifting away from the path of duty and of right and of safety. That is the chief danger for us all, and there is a Scripture which points that for us, which I quote you:

**"Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip."**

There is your revealing word, that word "**slip**", which means "*to drift*." "**Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.**" The chief danger for us everyone is indicated there in that little word "**slip**" which we will consider in its meaning of "*drift*." It is the danger of drifting away from the path of duty and of right and of safety - simply the danger of drifting.

That is the chief danger of us all. There are many expressive figures in the Bible touching human life.

In one place we are asked the question: "**What is your life?**" and the answer is given us in the very next sentence: "**It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.**" It is like a morning cloud dissolved in the sun.

In another place the Bible compares life to the swift ships of the sea.

In another place human life is represented as the grass that groweth up in the morning, but on the evening of that same day the grass is cut down and withereth.

Again, it compares life to the eagle that hasteth to its prey. There is no more impressive and expressive figure for us, for human life, than this figure here of drifting. You can see it.

The life boat goes down the stream. The current bears it on, and that is the faithful picture of human life. And because of the ease and the danger of drifting, therefore we are warned here by the Word of GOD to take heed to the things we have heard, lest haply we drift away from them.

This warning is for us all. Not one of us may be absolved from it. Not one of us but that urgently needs this warning concerning the peril of drifting. It is a warning for Christian people, I should say, first of all.

Every Christian needs to heed this warning here given against the awful peril of drifting.

The Bible is filled with admonitions to us right at that point.

**"Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation."**

How often the Bible rings with that bugle call! "**Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.**"

How that truth is emphasized in the Bible! How we are warned against the snare of pride, and how the fearful consequences of pride are set out before us in the Bible!

What foes we are reminded of in the Bible that lie in wait to entrap us, and to deceive us, and to sidetrack us from the right path! There is our own flesh, and we are never to lose sight of the fact that though the spirit is born again, when we believe on CHRIST as our Saviour, yet the flesh is unregenerated and will be unregenerated until it shall be raised from the dead.

These redeemed spirits live in houses that are not yet regenerated, and we are never to lose sight

of the fact that we must reckon with our flesh as we go along in the Christian life.

And then there is the world about us, with its amusements and its spirit against GOD. And then in addition to that, there is a great evil personality in the world, whose name is Satan, be-darkening and deceiving and misleading, and seeking in every way he can to seduce us from the right path.

Here is this great triple alliance, the flesh and the world and Satan, and we are to watch all the time, or we shall, by these influences which this triple alliance shall suggest, drift away from the right path.

- We are exhorted **to war a good warfare.**
- We are exhorted in the Bible **to fight the good fight of faith.**
- We are exhorted in the Bible **to put on the whole armor of GOD that we may be able to stand, and, having done all, to stand.**

Now, we are not to lose sight of the fact, my fellow Christians, that the Christian life can be lived shabbily or it can be lived gloriously. We are not to lose sight of that fact. We can follow CHRIST afar off, or we can walk beside Him, and be His conscious friends and comrades and fellow-workers. We are not to lose sight of that solemn truth - the Christian, life can be lived shabbily or it can be lived gloriously.

Oh, the supremest tragedy, I think, in all the world is that so often saved people, people born again, people who shall at last reach heaven - the tragedy is untellable and incomparable, I think. that even saved people live the Christian life shabbily.

All about us, what revelations there would be if men's hearts were uncovered, and we were to trace the stories of their declensions, their departures from CHRIST, even after He saves them! All about us there are pictures of men and women who began the Christian life well - oh, how hopeful was their promise! - and yet they were bewitched away from that blessed course, and they have gone drifting and floating.

They have floated with the tide, and have neglected to stem it. And the great apostle here summons us, challenges us, to watch, that we do not go down the currents with that easy flowing tide.

Why do Christians go away from CHRIST? The reasons are all about us. If a Christian neglects the vital duties and habits that go along with the Christian life, then he will go drifting down that stream.

- Let a Christian neglect church attendance, and he will soon be into trouble. "**Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together,**" is an injunction ringing in the Bible like some mighty trumpet.
- Let any Christian be careless on that point of constant, habitual, high-principled church attendance, and he will soon be in trouble.
- Let any Christian neglect the vital matter of secret prayer, and he will soon be in trouble. There can be no substitutes for secret prayer.

- Let a Christian neglect the vital habit of daily turning to the Word of GOD to get therefrom GOD's counsel and comfort, and such Christian will soon be in trouble.

The Christian life has its reasonable and vital habits, just as the physical life. Let the physical life be ignored and maltreated, and the physical life shall be preyed upon, and shall be victimized with declining health. And the Christian life in just the same fashion shall be beaten upon and undermined, if the habits that go with it are ignored and forgotten.

How do Christians get away from the right path and go drifting down the stream?

Sometimes it is because of business reverses. I have lived long enough in a modern city - twenty years in one pastorate - to see how men are often crippled and thrown into the deep currents because of business reverses. Full many a time men's hands hang down and their hearts faint when business reverses come. and they seem shattered and broken and oftentimes fearfully crippled in their faith, when business reverses come. Business men need GOD's wisdom and help, every day and hour, in their daily business.

And then sometimes it is a sorrow that comes into life, a blinding, bedarkening sorrow, a crushing sorrow, that causes people to drift away from CHRIST. Sorrow has one of two effects in a life. Sorrow embitters, sorrow sours, sorrow takes life's sweetness out; or sorrow makes the beaten one draw nearer to the Lord and cling the more closely to Him.

Full many a time when a sorrow comes - this or that or the other sorrow - the soul turns away from the source of healing and comfort, and goes drifting down the stream, missing GOD's proffered help for any soul that will wait upon Him.

And then full many a time drifting away from GOD comes on because the soul is wrong in its relations toward some other human being. I have lived long enough to find out that the wounds and the hurts and the frictions that come to the human heart, out of wrong relations between man and man, make up one of the saddest chapters in human life.

Let a man be wrong in his heart toward another human being, and such man is crippled dreadfully in the sight of GOD. There is no place in the human heart for hate, if a man is going to get on well with GOD. A man loses the sense of perspective, a man's vision is blurred, a man's life is all poisoned, if he gives place in his heart for hate toward any human being.

I have lived long enough to see that life's frictions and rivalries and competitions and contacts and collisions often turn human beings away from GOD. I know two brothers who have not spoken to each other in years and years. Both of them are nominally church members. I asked each of them, at separate times, just a little while ago: "How are you getting along in the Christian life?" and each one answered in effect: "Oh, sir, bad enough. It has been years since I have had any peace or power as I have tried to pray and tried to serve GOD." It could not be otherwise.

The brothers quarreled over their Father's will, and they parted asunder, with anger each toward the other, and they have gone on in such fearful course through the passing years. Oh, my brother men, human life is too big for that, too worthful for that, too important for that. GOD's favor is too valuable for that.

Our holy religion is too precious for that. We are to come like old Abraham came and spoke to his nephew, Lot, when the herdsmen of Lot and the herdsmen of Abraham were quarreling and were divided, and Abraham said to his nephew: "Lot, my boy, there must be none of this. Let there be no strife between your herdsmen and mine, between you and me. We be brethren. You go your way and I will go mine. You take your pastures and I will take mine. We will not have any strife."

The human heart that would serve GOD must come to the place where it will not be sidetracked from the path of happiness and duty in the Christian life by collision with or animosities toward some other human life.

Full many a time drifting comes just at that point. There comes some experiences into the human life which shatter confidence, and which make the soul stand back aghast, and which raise a score of questions about religion, and down the stream the life goes, and church attendance is given up, and church habits are broken, and on and on and on with the tide such poor life goes floating down. Oh, it is pitiable and it is terrible!

And sometimes the Christian life gets all wrong with GOD and goes drifting down the stream because of admission into it of some wrong thing - of some secret sin.

I am thinking now of a well known man whose case puzzled numbers of us, and when we looked into it at last we found he had accustomed himself in the secret place, without even the knowledge of his wife, to an ill-fated drug, that be-darkened and deadened and turned him away from the right path.

Let a man admit into his life any evil thing, and coddle it, and pamper it, and keep it there, and he is all sidetracked from the right course, and down that stream he will go drifting.

Some secret sin will shrivel and wither his peace in the sight of GOD. **"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me."**

Oh, how pitiable and how terrible it all is! At last such Christian, all broken and drifting, and to the largest degree useless, shall come up empty-handed in the sight of GOD. It is an-awful thing to be saved just by the skin of one's teeth. It is an awful thing to think of meeting CHRIST empty-handed, with the works of our life all burned up, but they shall be, if they are not in harmony with the will of GOD.

Do I speak today to drifting Christians? I pass my eye and hand down every pew before me, and would pause at the door of every heart. Do I speak to drifting Christians? Turn your boat up-stream, whatever it costs, whatever the price. Oh, my drifting fellow Christians, turn your boat up-stream! You have too much at stake to go on like that. Whatever the price, whatever the cost, turn that boat up-stream. Set yourself with a resolution deathless: "I am going to recover my feet. I am going to retrace my wrong steps. I am coming home. I am coming back to my Father's house. I will burn the bridges." Turn your boat up-stream, oh, drifting Christian!

But I have a word more for the one who is not a Christian. There, is to be sure, a great peril to

the Christian that he shall drift, but I have a serious word to the one not a Christian. There are currents to make you drift, and they are terrible. There are currents in this stream on which your boat floats to beat you down and to keep you away from heaven and away from GOD. What are those currents?

There is the daily atmosphere that is about you, the atmosphere impregnated with worldliness and with materialism, with all their down-dragging pressure and tendency. There is the subtle atmosphere about you to keep you away from GOD. How difficult in some atmospheres it is to pray! How difficult in some atmospheres to think seriously! All about us is the down-dragging atmosphere, to make us forget sin and death and the judgment and the world to come, and our personal accountability to GOD.

The atmosphere about you may easily cause you to drift. Such atmosphere tells us: "When in Rome do as the Roman does." The very atmosphere about you constantly inclines your boat to go down the stream.

What other current is there to cause your boat to go down the stream? There is the daily task. We are preoccupied. We have our hands full, our heads full, our hearts full, our lives full. There is the daily task. Over there in Luke's gospel JESUS gives a faithful picture of human life.

He spoke a parable to them, saying: "**The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully, and he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits and my goods? And he said, This will I do; I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods, and I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years. Take thine ease. Eat, drink and be merry.**"

Wasn't it fine? Oh, no, it was not fine. This man forgot that his soul could not be fed on corn. This man forgot that he was doomed to die. This man forgot that he must answer God. This man said:

**"I will say to my soul, Thou hast much goods laid up for many years. Take thine ease. Eat, drink and be merry**

- No matter if the drought comes,  
- no matter if no crops are made,

I have enough for years. I will not worry. "**Take thine ease. Eat, drink and be merry.**"

but GOD, who is the unseen but real factor in every human life, said to him: "**Thou fool, thou fool, this night shall thy life be required of Thee. Then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.**" A man's daily business, profitable and proper business, a man's daily tasks, profitable and proper, if he does not watch, shall make him lock GOD and light and heaven out of his life and miss all that is highest and best, and bring him to doom and death.

What other current is there to make you drift? There is the deadening that comes from familiarity

with religious things, to make men drift.

I said to a sexton in one of our cemeteries: "Doesn't this daily digging of graves depress you?" And he said: "Not now, sir, not now. When I first began to dig these graves out here, I was blue from night until morning and from morning till night. I went to my bed at the end of the day's work, to dream through the night about digging graves, and I dreamed about seeing the big caskets, and the tiny caskets, and all, but now, sir, I have got past all that. I could lie down in the midst of these graves now and sleep without any disturbance. I have been in it so long, I have touched it so much, I have become so familiar with it, it makes no impression upon me at all."

Oh, that deadening power, if we resist light from GOD! That is a fearful Scripture which says that the Gospel is the savor of life unto life, or of death unto death. A man hears the Gospel and resists it. He is weaker and worse off than ever before. The Gospel is the savor of life unto life, or of death unto death. There is the undoing power, the deadening power, the corroding power, the wasting power of familiarity with religious things.

And along with that is the deadening power that comes with time.

A business man, who has made good in the world's big affairs, a splendid man in many ways, said to me a little while back, when I talked to him about religion and the higher call, after we had talked perhaps two hours:

"Sir, you think I have won in life."

I said: "Yes, in a way, you have."

"Well," he said, "the world would say I have won in life, with all this business success," and then he turned upon me with his care-worn face and said: "I would give every dollar I have if I could cry about personal religion like I used to when I was a sixteen year old boy. But," he said, "I have given myself, I have given my life, I have given my hands, I have given my brain, I have given my blood, I have given my manhood, I have neglected my family, I have given my all, to win, and I do not seem to have any feeling any more at all." And he is not yet quite fifty years of age. Yes, yes, the currents are all about you to beat you down.

There is another serious word to be said, and that is that we can go drifting down the stream and not know it.

Many a Christian is terribly backslidden in his heart and does not realize it. You remember the story about Samson. Samson wist not that his strength had departed from him, and when he went out to grapple with his task he was utterly paralyzed. His strength was gone, and he wist it not.

You remember that description of Israel of old-gray hairs were upon his head, but he did not know that he had gray hairs. A man can drift and be far down the stream, almost to the rapids, almost to the frightful plunge over the precipice, and not know it at all.

Oh, soul, wrong with GOD, I am coming in this last moment to beg you to turn your boat up-stream.

Is there anything in your life wrong in the sight of GOD? Do you wince when you think of bringing your life to the gaze of Heaven - to the inspection of GOD? Do you wince? Then I pray you, be candid, and I pray you, be serious, and I pray you, be purposeful, and I pray you, be determined, and I pray you, be highly resolved. I pray you, turn that boat up-stream.

You have too much at stake to go longer and further down the stream. Act up to the light you have.

A noted woman, in the darkness, terrible darkness, and that religious, said to one: "What on earth shall I do? Everything about religion is dark as night to me? What shall I do?" And that one whom she questioned gave her back this wise answer: "Oh, lady, act as if GOD were, and you shall come to know that He is." And in just a few hours she came back, His surrendered, trusting child. My fellow-men, my gentle women, act up to the light you have.

Have you drifted? Are you drifting? Is there something in your life wrong in the sight of GOD. Is your boat going down the stream? I pray you, I challenge you, I beseech you, I summon you, I call to you - turn your boat upstream and turn it without delay, and turn it before it is too late.

A young fellow heard a preacher in the other days, and was greatly moved, and the preacher said: "When you have a religious impression, the time to act upon it is right then. The time when you hear GOD's call, in the which you ought to respond is right then." And the young fellow walked down the aisle and publicly made his surrender to CHRIST, saying:

"It shall be right now that I take CHRIST as my Saviour," and he went back to the saw-mill in the mountains where he worked, and the boys said that next morning he sang all the morning. Religion in the heart makes men sing. The boys said that he sang all the morning, as they moved the great logs to the saw-mill, and as he went singing all that morning - the first morning that he had ever known what it was to be CHRIST's trusting disciple and follower - about noon his body was caught somehow in the machinery and crushed and mangled, so that a little while thereafter he went away into dusty death.

When they got him out he faintly said: "Send for the preacher, that preacher in the church house at the foot of the mountains last night." The preacher fortunately was soon found and hurried up the mountain to the mill, and he bent down by the side of the dying fellow, and took his hand and said: "Charley, I have come. What would you like to say?" And with a smile on his face that was never on land or sea, he faintly pressed the minister's hand and said: "Wasn't it a glorious thing that I settled it in time?"

Oh, my men and women, my men and women, I beseech you, in the great Saviour's name, turn your boat up-stream before it is too late! **Now is the accepted time. Now is the day of salvation.** Let it be your time - your day. Lord, save thou the people and they shall be saved!

### THE CLOSING PRAYER.

And now, Holy Father, as the people go out from this mid-day service, may they go to practice the truth they have heard. May they go to put into life the summons, the challenge, the exhortation, the entreaty of GOD's Book which has been brought us this hour. May the drifting

Christian say: "As for me, whatever others may or may not do, GOD help me, I am going to turn my steps in the right way to-day." May such one say with Joshua: "**As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.**"

O, we pray that the drifting Christian, no matter what caused the drifting, nor how and where it began; may such Christian this day come back and walk humbly with CHRIST, and be saved from those burning memories, and those accusations of conscience, which ever follow waste and drifting in the Christian life.

And still more do we pray, Lord JESUS, that the soul in this place that is going down life's stream, without hope and without GOD, not saved, not ready to live, not ready to die, not ready for any world, all wrong with GOD, wrong with the moral universe, wrong with time, wrong with eternity, wrong with earth, wrong with heaven, wrong in every right respect, because wrong in the chiefest way - may such man or woman now be helped of GOD's grace to say: "As for me, this day, GOD help me, my life is going to be linked with the will of CHRIST."

May every soul in this presence wrong with GOD, now say: "As for me, this day I will seek the Lord, and I will follow Him wherever His light and leading shall point the way." Deepen this work of grace profoundly in the hearts of this multitude this mid-day hour, O Thou life giving Lord, and all through this fair city, may GOD, by His Divine spirit, make many a visit to-day, summoning the people in the upward way.

The grace of the Lord JESUS CHRIST be with you all and each BI now you go to abide with you forever. Amen.

~ end of chapter 12 ~

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