

Problems

Sermon #1035

Study given by W. D. Frazee—June 14, 1959

When we get into a situation and we don't know the answer, we usually speak of it as a problem. The word problem is getting to be quite a word these days. It is used to cover a great many things, and there are a great many problems to be covered. Nearly everyone has a problem. Some have many problems. Some seem to have nothing but problems.

Our test is a promise, and it suggests that the answer to our problems lies in God. The setting of it is interesting. Jeremiah was in a problem. He had been for awhile in the court prison. Most of us haven't had that problem yet, but we will have it pretty soon.

The reason why we haven't had it yet is because that is what is called graduate work. We need to get our preparatory work in order to be ready for that kind of problem. But Jeremiah was taking graduate work, and he was in the university of the prison. He was shut up there. In that setting the Lord gave him the message:

"Call unto Me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee
great and mighty things, which thou knowest not"
Jeremiah 33:3.

The margin for mighty things is hidden things. Call unto Me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great things, mighty things, hidden things, which thou knowest not.

Friends, that is encouraging. Whatever your problem, God's word to you is to call unto Him, and He will answer.

Someone says, That's the trouble. I have prayed and prayed and I don't seem to get anywhere.

There is a text on that too:

"Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest
not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou
takest no knowledge?" Isaiah 58:3.

Here are some people who were praying, even to the point of fasting. When men cannot persuade God, fasting has been a human trait to do something extra to impress Him. Many heathen religions have various rites and ceremonies designed to get the attention of the gods. People perform long pilgrimages, or lie on beds of spikes, or flog themselves, or go without food, or in other ways afflict the body.

They think that when they have done things like that, God ought to listen. If He wouldn't listen ordinarily, He certainly ought to listen when they go all day without food. That really ought to get His attention and get an answer. But these people still were not getting an answer. The point is, even in Bible times there were people who were trying to get God to solve their problems, yet it seemed that they didn't get an answer.

In commenting on this chapter in Isaiah Sister White says:

"But God answers prayer for those who place themselves in the channel of His blessings" *Ministry of Healing*, page 256.

Suppose I am up in the hollow, and I am thirsty and wish very much that I had a drink. Where can I get one? The spring is flowing up there. If I will go over to it, there is water flowing from the rock. But I could die of thirst within a stone's throw of it if I insisted. God wants us to pray to Him for many things and about many things. But my dear friends, one of the great purposes of prayer is to help us find where the channel of His blessing is.

When the children of Israel got to Marah out there in the desert, they found the water was bitter. The people complained to Moses, and Moses cried to the Lord. When Moses cried to the Lord, what did God do? He showed him a tree. Where had the tree been all the while? Right there.

Moses didn't have to go back to Egypt to get the tree nor the water. Neither did he have to go over into Canaan to find some peculiar herb and bring back. The tree was right there. It was shown to Moses in answer to prayer.

Prayer itself didn't change the waters at all, did it? No. They were just as bitter after Moses finished praying as they were when he started praying. But in answer to his prayer, Moses was given the solution to the problem. God said, Moses, there is a tree. Cut it down and put it into the waters, and they will be made sweet.

Did it work? Yes. We are told it was Christ Himself that put into that tree the properties that sweetened the waters. Don't ask me to explain all that, because I can't. But I do believe it just the same as if I could explain it.

I am reading here that God answers prayers for those who place themselves in the channel of His blessings. I want to find, and help you find, and have us all find the least common denominator of all these problems. In finding it, we shall find the solution to these problems.

There is a great foundation principle that underlies the great mass of problems in the world today. There is a solution which, if we learn it, will handle so many of them. I shall not argue the point of whether it is one hundred percent. I shall just say the great majority. Most of the problems are based upon a fundamental common denominator, and they have a common solution. Shall I tell

you what that common denominator is? Well, perhaps before I do we will read a few more texts.

I want you to turn over with me to 1 Kings 17. Here was a woman who had a problem. It was a material problem. It was a problem that dealt with money, or the things that money can buy. It was a problem that dealt with food. It was a problem that dealt with living or starving to death. A very practical problem. A three dimensional problem. A problem that involved the life of herself and her son.

Everything about this picture is discouraging. The woman was a widow. She had a little boy. He apparently wasn't old enough to help with any solution. He just added to the problem because he was one more mouth to feed.

It was a time of famine. Everyone was having problems. On top of it, a man came from a long distance who said he was a prophet of God and wanted to be fed. That compounded the problem. With that setting, let's read the story:

"So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering of sticks: and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink. And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand. And she said, As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake. All I have is a handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks that I may go and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die" 1 Kings 17:10-12.

I want to ask you something. Are any of you facing material problems that have to do with money or the things that money could buy if you had it? Are any of you facing that kind of problem? Which has the harder problem, you or this widow? Is there anyone that has a financial problem or a material problem that is as bad as she had? I doubt it. But if you do, it is all right. Listen to the way this got worked out.

She told her story and told it straight and truthful. She said, All I have left in the house is just a little bit of meal and a little bit of oil, and that's all. That's the last. I was just getting ready to make a little fire, fix this up, and my son and I are going to eat it. After that we are going to die. There is no more to be had anywhere.

"And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou hast said. But make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son. For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth" 1 Kings 17:13-14.

God was after the solution to the basic problem. The basic problem is not meal or oil, or the money to buy them. That isn't the basic problem. It isn't your

basic problem if you are confronted with finances, or lack of them, or any material problem. That isn't the basic problem. Do you know what the basic problem is?

I will tell you what it is. It is self. Some people spell it with four letters. You can spell it with one letter. You know what that one is, don't you? I. That's the way Lucifer spelled it. A good many others have been spelling it that way.

That's the basic problem, my friends. Not just with material things, but with physical things, mental things, and spiritual things. With all these many problems the basic root problem is self.

There is only one answer to that problem. Instead of feeding self and pampering self and ministering to self and catering to self and sympathizing with self and pitying self, turn that thing clear around and be outgoing. Be thinking of others. It's all here in one wonderful sentence:

"Those who would be overcomers must be drawn out of themselves" *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, page 207.

Last month down in Florida on the beach I picked up a shell. Low and behold, a crab put his little pinchers out. Dr. Harmer and I did a little surgery on that thing. I say surgery. Part of it was not intentional. The fellow stuck his pinchers out and I got hold and started to pull. You know what happened? I pulled them off. Dr. Harmer helped me, and we finally got the whole thing pulled clear out. Then we had an empty shell. That's what I wanted, an empty shell. I didn't want that living crab in there.

Now did you know you had a crab in you? Well if you don't know it, ask your roommate.

Those who would be overcomers must be drawn out of themselves. But that's only the first part of the sentence.

"Those who would be overcomers must be drawn out of themselves; and the only thing which will accomplish this great work, is to become intensely interested in the salvation of others" *Ibid*.

That seems to make it pretty clear, doesn't it? Lord, that's what I want to happen. If you will help me to get all my problems solved, I promise you I will do that very thing.

Such an expression has been used so often that it is almost tripe. Some people get the cart before the horse. If we are trying to get God to solve all our problems so that after they are solved we can go and work for Him, we have the cart before the horse.

"Our heavenly Father has a thousand ways to provide for us of which we know nothing. Those who accept the one principle of making the service of God supreme, will find

perplexities vanish, and a plain path before their feet"
Ministry of Healing, page 481.

As I was meditating on these things, my mind went to that matchless passage where the Lord says:

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord" Isaiah 55:9.

I don't look at things the way you do, Jesus says. I have a different angle of approach to come from.

I don't suppose any of us would have had the audacity to go up to a poor widow who had only enough for a piece of a meal and suggest to her that the solution to her problem was in feeding us first. I don't suppose that we would ever think of such a thing. Anyone that would be heartless enough to do it wouldn't be interested in solving her problem. The idea of doing that as the way to get her problem solved would never have occurred to a human being.

It did to God. He sent his prophet on purpose for miles and miles in order to get there at the particular time when that was the last thing the widow had in the house. He could have sent Elijah a week before, and she might have said, Well, I don't have very much. It looks like it might last only a week, but I will share what I have with you. But God saw to it that the prophet got there when all there was left was just a little meal and a little oil. Just enough for one last meal.

The prophet said, Please feed me first. God said, That's the way to get your problem solved.

"For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth. And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days" 1 Kings 17:14-15.

The margin says a full year. I would think that was many days to be eating out of a barrel that was almost empty and a cruse that was almost spent. But there are some people who would have developed ulcers sometime during that year, or high blood pressure or a nervous breakdown. The idea of living under a situation in which every day you didn't know if you were going to have enough for the next day or not. It worked all right in that case. It was based on faith, simple obedience to God's Word.

I want to ask you friends, was that widow drawn out of herself? Was the very solution that was given to her one that in its very nature called for her to think of others? Sure. You can see that. That's the whole lesson of it.

Let's go to John. We will go to Matthew also because Matthew tells some things that John doesn't, and John tells some things that Matthew doesn't.

"When Jesus lifted up His eyes, and saw a great company come unto Him, He saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? And this He said to prove him: for He Himself knew what He would do" John 6:5.

Notice the disciples solution to the problem. It is very interesting:

"And when it was evening, His disciples came to Him, saying, This is a desert place, and the time is now past; send the multitude away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves victuals" Matthew 14:15.

They had the problem solved. Their solution was to let the people solve their own problem. Send them away so they can go into the villages and buy for themselves.

"But Jesus said unto them, They need not depart; give ye them to eat" Matthew 14:16.

The Lord threw the problem back on them and made it their problem.

"And they say unto him, We have here but five loaves, and two fishes" Matthew 14:17.

They thought they were out from under the problem again. First they tried to get rid of it by suggesting where it ought to be taken care of. Now they are seeking to get rid of it by proving that they can't do it. We have here but five loaves, and two fishes. Jesus said:

"Bring them hither to Me" Matthew 14:18.

I can fancy some of them saying, Wait a minute. What are we going to eat? There goes all there is around here. The little boy might have given it to the Master, and the Master might have let us have a bite. But here He thinks he is going to feed others with it.

I want to ask you something. Before they got through that afternoon did they all have something to eat? Yes. It is proved that they had enough by the fact that when they got through they collected twelve baskets full of the remnants left over. Everybody had all they wanted and there were twelve baskets full to prove it.

Jesus and His disciples ate, but they ate last. When did the widow eat? She ate last. Do you see what Jesus is getting at?

Do you have a problem? Well there is somebody else that has a problem. If you will get out of yourself and take hold of the problem of somebody else who needs help more and worse than you do, God will see to it that in that very experience you will find the solution to you own problem.

Did the widow do it that way? Yes. Did it work? Yes. Did it work that way with the disciples on this occasion? Yes. Was there enough? Yes.

Suppose the widow had said, No, I am sorry. You will have to go to some home where they have more than I do. All we have got is enough for ourselves, and not even that. Would her statement have come to pass? Would it have proved that she didn't have enough? Yes. She would have starved to death saying, It's a good thing I didn't give to that man that came by, because we haven't even enough for ourselves, and we are starving to death. She would have proved to her own satisfaction it wouldn't work.

Suppose instead of bringing the bread to Jesus the disciples had gotten it from the boy and said, Look here, we have got to eat, and there is hardly enough here for us. But we will at least get a little, so we are going off here in the corner and eat some. Would they have proved to their own satisfaction that there wasn't even enough for them let alone the multitudes? Yes. But when they let God do it His way, and His way is not our way, they were drawn out of themselves.

We are told they felt a thrill of joy as they distributed that food to the multitude. Just see them going from one to another. How happy they must have been passing out that bread to the hungry. Fifty here. A hundred there. And we are told that the bread multiplied in their hands as well as in the hands of the Master. It multiplied in His hands as He broke it. It multiplied in their baskets as they distributed it. Oh, what a thrill of joy. And with all of them served and eating, Jesus and the disciples sat down and ate of the heaven blessed food. That is God's way to solve problems.

I am afraid that in some hearts the question may come, Would God do that for me? I shall always remember an experience that I witnessed and participated in some years ago. I held meetings in a certain city, and I came back to it a number of years later. While there I met a woman who used to come to the meetings. She had been a Sabbath keeper. When I met her on this occasion, she told me that she hadn't been keeping the Sabbath.

As I talked with her about it, she said the reason was because she had to make a living for herself and her children.

I said to her, "Sister, don't you know that the Lord sent manna and fed the children of Israel in the wilderness for forty years? Don't you know He opened the Red sea?"

She said, "Yes, but God wouldn't do anything like that for me."

I looked at her and said, "That's right sister. The Lord wouldn't do anything like that for you because you would never let yourself get to the place where He would need to do something like that."

When do miracles happen? The hour of man's extremity is the hour of God's opportunity. Oh, for living, active faith that will venture out with God to the limit of human resources, and use the last that we have to help others rather than to selfishly take care of our wants, our desires, our wishes. Do you see friends?

Let's go to Isaiah 58. This is the chapter where we found some people who were praying and who were so anxious about it that they were even fasting, and yet they complained that God didn't hear them. He didn't answer. They still had their problem.

Then the Lord told them what the answer was. He told them if they really want to fast in a way to please Him, they were to undo the heavy burdens, and let the oppressed go free, and break every yoke. Now watch:

"Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house?" Isaiah 58:7.

Whose bread? Thy bread. Just what the widow did for Elijah.

"When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily" Isaiah 58:7-8.

What do you infer from that as to one of the things they were praying about? Well they must have been praying about health because God said, You are going to get some health. When? When you start in to feed the hungry and clothe the naked and bring poor people to your house, then you are going to find some health.

Isn't that interesting? You wouldn't think that poor, weak, sick people could take anyone to their house, would you? You would think that the answer would be to relieve them of all their burdens. Get them into someplace where everybody would wait on them and build them up and get them strong, and then let them start in the welfare program. Probably that is the way the New Deal would figure it out. The Social Security agency.

But God says, "My ways aren't your ways and My thoughts aren't your thoughts." Why does God do it this way? Because we are back to the least common denominator of most human problems. What is it? It is self.

The biggest thing that makes us sick is selfishness. I am not trying to take in a hundred percent of the territory tonight. If there is anyone who wants to squeeze out of it, I will give you some room, and I won't press you on it. But there is someone who is going to get some help here tonight. There is someone who is going to say, I can see what is the matter with my problem. I have got a focal infection, and the focus is self. And notice that the way to get help on it isn't just to pray and weep about it. "God answers prayer for those who place themselves in the channel of His blessings."

The way to get interested in others is to do something for others. It is true that if you are interested in others you will do something for them, but it is also true that in the very doing the interest grows. Haven't we all experienced it? Thank God for the privilege of service.

That's the reason for medical missionary work. That's why the Devil is forever interested in brands of so called medical missionary work where it is like a machine, and human beings become cogs in it. God is interested in a medical missionary program where you and I are brought in close contact with people to help them, and where helping them costs us in money or time or inconvenience, or all of it put together. That's the best type of medical missionary work. Why? Because it draws on our selfishness just like Dr. Harmer and I worked on that crab to get him out of that shell.

God says to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and bring the poor to your house. When you do this:

"Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily" Isaiah 58:8.

The whole chapter is wonderful. Read it. It is for us. Here is a divine comment:

"One of the surest hindrances to the recovery of the sick is the centering of attention upon themselves. Many invalids feel that every one should give them sympathy and help, when what they need is to have their attention turned away from themselves, to think of and care for others" *Ministry of Healing*, page 256.

Oh friends, how are you going to get rid of that crab in you? There is only one way. Nobody is going to come along like we did and pull it out. No. It has got to be drawn out. And the only thing that will accomplish this great work is to become interested in others.

Here is a poor invalid lying in bed thinking of self, being waited on hand and foot and wishing it could be waited on more, you understand. I feel sorry for anyone in that condition. I have been in bed enough to know it is no happy place to be; no place that a person would choose to be. I recognize that there are some people that are in bed, and it isn't because they are selfish either. I am just taking in part of the territory tonight.

I am saying to you that there are some people who could get well if they could get hold of what I am studying tonight. I am saying to you that there multitudes of people that could get well and happy if they could just take hold of Isaiah 58.

"The fifty-eighth chapter of Isaiah is a prescription for maladies of the body and of the soul. If we desire health and the true joy of life, we must put into practice the rules given in this Scripture" *Ibid*.

Let us thank God for a program of medical missionary work which includes getting the people we are trying to help into the channel of helping others. We should try to find some way to get everyone we are waiting on to wait on someone

else. Let's use some good sense about it. Let's think about it, for this is the channel of blessing. You can apply it to the spiritual problems as well.

I must tell you about a little experience I heard of not long ago which illustrates again what I am speaking of in this matter of the common denominator of selfishness.

There was a woman who was up in Chicago visiting. As she was walking along the street two cars ran together, and there was a terrible smashup. There were two or three bodies lying there with blood running.

She was telling about it the next day to some friends, and she said, "Not long before that I had a home nursing course, a Red Cross first aid course, and I remembered what I had learned. I went over and sat on the curb, and put my head between my knees, because that's the way to keep from fainting."

The point is, she didn't see anything funny about what she had said. Who was she thinking about? Herself. And it's possible to be a nurse and be thinking about yourself.

We are going into some terrible catastrophes in just a little while. Germany and Japan had them in the last war, and don't think this land of light that has been favored for all these years is going to escape. What are we going to think about when troubles are all around us a hundred times more than they are now? Are we going to think about how we can get away from all this and be where nothing is ever going to touch us? If there was a chance to get a place so far removed from the needs and sorrows and problems of humanity that they would never touch us, there are more people than we would like to think about who call themselves medical missionaries who would be standing in line to get a few acres in that location.

You say, But Brother Frazee, I thought we were supposed to get in retired places.

We studied Enoch's outpost not long ago. Enoch got into retired places all right, but they were within traveling distance of the cities where the need was, where the sin was, where the sorrow was.

Friends, the plan of salvation is not something in which you and I selfishly isolate ourselves from the needs and sorrows and worries and sicknesses of others. Oh, no. Our Lord Jesus left the courts of glory where all was bliss, and came down and pitched His tent by the tents of men. He came into this pest house of a world, this laser house of sin and woe, and Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses. As a result He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, yet He was anointed with the oil of gladness.

You and I can find the solution to our problems whether they are material, physical, or mental, whether our problem is lack of money or lack of health, or whether we are restless and discontented. And if we have a spiritual problem that try as we may we can't find peace and joy in God, the things we are studying tonight may throw some light upon it. I offer it to you in that spirit.

Those who would be overcomers must be drawn out of themselves, and the only thing which will accomplish this great work is to become intensely interested in the salvation of others. I am so glad, therefore, that God has offered to let us link up with Him in this great work of helping others and blessing others. Aren't you friends?

We don't deserve it. We are awkward. Even our best efforts are blundering, and we do a lot of things the wrong way. But I thank God He lets us help. Aren't you glad He lets us help? I am so glad He is personally, and through His human agents, always ready to help us do it better.

He could send the angels down to feed the hungry, to put fomentations on, and give hot foot baths. He could send the angels down to pray with people and answer their questions from the Bible. He could send them to sit down and visit people and pray for them. The angels could come and do it. But dear ones, you and I would miss such a precious experience. I am so glad He has invited us to do it. None are excluded. No matter how weak we are, no matter how young or how old, no matter how inexperienced, there is something we can do.

How can we do it? The first thing is to just kneel down at the feet of Jesus and say, Lord, here am I. Send me. What will you have me to do Lord? And then remember that the Lord Jesus accepts gladly every human agency that is surrendered to Him.

He accepted the five loaves and the two fishes that the little boy gave Him. Did He use them? Will He use us and what we have? Yes, He will friends, and in a way that will draw us out of ourselves and get us intensely interested in the salvation of others.

I suggest that we do that very thing tonight. Calmly but earnestly give ourselves fully to the Master and say, Dear Lord, there is just one thing I want. I want to please You. I want to make You happy. I want to live for others. I want to forget about myself and I want to think about the problems of others. And Lord, take me and use what I have, and give me whatever I need to help others.

As we do that, Jesus will accept us. The only thing that will accomplish this great work is to become intensely interested in the salvation of others.

The Bible says to overcome evil with good. The way to forget something is to get interested in something else so it never even comes to your mind. We are not to go about moaning and groaning because we are so selfish. We will never get unselfish that way. God answers prayer for those who place themselves in the channel of His blessings. Thank God for a practical way to help ourselves and help others.

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