

Golden Cage

Study given by W. D. Frazee—August 31, 1968

I am always glad when we can listen to the words of Jesus as He spoke to His disciples here in this world. The Christian life is more than many take it to be. To many religion is something that should keep us out of the penitentiary, the police court, the nightclubs, and gambling dens, and as long as possible out of the cemetery. But there is another side to religion as we shall see in our text this morning:

"From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto His disciples, how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day." Matthew 16:21.

Here was the Master, who knew all things and could foresee everything, telling His disciples He was going up to Jerusalem. And when He went there He was going to be betrayed, denied, rejected, beaten, and crucified. Common sense would say, Why go if you know that is what is ahead of you? As I said, religion is for many people supposed to be a way of keeping out of trouble. Here Jesus was telling His disciples He was going right into the thick of the very worse trouble.

Notice Peter's reaction:

"Then Peter took Him, and began to rebuke Him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee" verse 22.

As men would look at it, that was a very reasonable response. In other words, take care of yourself, Lord. Take better care of yourself than that. If that is what is awaiting you in Jerusalem, keep away from Jerusalem. Don't walk into trouble.

Notice Jesus' response to Peter's response:

"But He turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind Me, Satan: thou art an offense unto Me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men" verse 23.

In other words, Peter, you are talking like men talk. You do not see the vision.

If you will read back in the chapter, you will find that just a few moments before Jesus had commended Peter for his glorious vision of Christ the Messiah. Yes, Peter recognized Jesus as the Son of God, and in Peter's mind that was the best reason for Jesus to avoid any such experience that awaited Him in Jerusalem.

This was given not just for that occasion, and not just for those few people.

"Then said Jesus unto His disciples, If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it. for what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" verses 24-26.

This is one of those divine paradoxes which we love to study if the Holy Spirit leads our minds, and we simply find riddles unless the Holy Spirit is leading us. Anyone who will save his life will lose it, and anyone who will lose his life for Christ's sake will find it.

I tell you that one of the greatest longings of my heart is to see people happy. And I know the only way they can be supremely happy is to take heaven's way. So many people spend so much of life finding out that what they thought they wanted does not satisfy. And all the while the One who made us and knows our inner longing offers us the path of life.

But the difficulty is two things. The path Jesus offers us seems to take away the things we think we want, and seems to offer in their place things we don't want.

I wonder what is the matter? I will tell you. It wasn't always this way. In heaven everyone was happy doing just exactly what he wanted to do when there was no cross at all.

Why couldn't it go on that way? Because Lucifer decided to go ahead with a different program. There are only two principles in the universe. There can only be two. One is love, the other is selfishness. Love is not selfishness, and selfishness is not love.

For six thousand years Lucifer has been seeking to demonstrate the superiority of selfishness. Personally I don't think he has done a very good job of it, do you? But he convinces most of each generation that if they will only give him a chance, this time he is going to make them happy. This time, if they will only eat of the forbidden fruit, they will be more beautiful and wise and happier than ever.

As one of my friends put it, "We learn little, and we learn slowly."

Here is Jesus with these twelve men He has chosen personally to represent Him, and He has been with them most of the period of His ministry. The day of His death is approaching, and still He hasn't been able to help them understand what it is all about.

As it is to many today, religion was a way to keep out of trouble, and here was a Man going right into trouble. What was the matter with Him. Couldn't they help Him some way to see a better view of things?

They tried. He tried all the harder to turn them from their efforts to help Him. Are we trying to help God this morning to keep us out of trouble? Are we trying to avoid the cross? Are we trying to convince our Savior that we do enough if we keep out of the bad things?

I remind you, this principle we are studying is the basis of the plan of salvation. Jesus did not leave anything bad when He left heaven. He did not give up any wrong thing when He came to earth. He gave up good things. He did not give up good things so He could be saved. He gave up good things so we could be saved.

The call of the Master is the call to devote the life to sacrificial service, and then to crown it all, if need be, with sacrificial death.

"If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it" Matthew 16:25.

I think of David Livingstone. After years of earnest effort and self-denial beyond what most of us know, he at last received a Doctor's degree. He could have had high and important positions, but there was a call in his heart. Africa called. And there he gave his life away. His heart is still in Africa. His body lies in Westminster Abbey surrounded with the great of Great Britain's history in ages past.

Did he throw his life away? When he had to journey through those tropical jungles tortured by fever with no one of his own race or nation to minister to him, was he a fool, a failure? No. He was one of those who knew the mystery we are studying this morning. "And whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it."

I don't think David Livingstone was sorry one minute for the life God had called him into. And the answer to you and me this morning is not that all of us should catch the next boat for Africa. That isn't the answer. The answer is that Jesus has a specific plan for every life which few people ever find and few carry out.

Do you know why? They are too selfish. This was what Jesus was trying to expose in the life of those disciples that they might seek Him not merely for a revelation, but for a power to cure that selfishness. It took the tragedy of Gethsemane and Calvary to do that, friends. Thank God, that cured them.

That is what it will take to cure us. We shall have to linger with our Savior under the olive trees. We shall have to follow Him to the judgment hall. We shall have to behold Him

as He is nailed to the cross, and watch with Him through those weary hours as His life ebbs away.

And we need to understand it isn't just bootlegging and murder, rioting and violence that caused the death. The basic thing is selfishness inherent in human nature.

I want to tell you, the selfishness that is most abhorrent to God is religious selfishness; sanctimonious selfishness that finds its satisfaction in keeping us out of the penitentiary, out of trouble, out of scandal, and living a good normal citizen's life with all the good things. Nothing bad. No trouble. No scandal.

And at last, like the rich man in the story Jesus told, finding ones self in hell, with Lazarus clear across the gulf in Abraham's bosom.

Covetousness, selfishness, pride—these are the sins that are most abhorrent to God.

My dear friend, Elder Luther Warren, who has been sleeping for many years, used the expression when he spoke to young people, "Play fair with God."

Do you know what will happen if you and I play fair with God? If we go to God and say, Jesus, you gave everything for me, I will give everything for you, now what do you want me to do?, He will lead us into paths that are not of our choosing.

Somebody says, that is just what I am afraid of.

Well, as long as you are afraid of it, you will never know the mystery, never know the glory, and never know the joy.

I pray that in some heart this morning there will be awakened the spirit of David Livingstone, the spirit of Paul, the spirit of Joseph Bates, the spirit of the Master. Heaven is waiting to pour out its richest and best gifts to and through those who withhold nothing.

"There is no limit to the usefulness of the one who by putting self aside makes room for the working of the Holy Spirit, and lives a life wholly consecrated to God."

The Savior Himself had to meet this temptation. Did you know that? I am going to read something interesting. Listen carefully:

"To the heart of Christ it was a bitter task to press His way against the fears, disappointment, and unbelief of His beloved disciples. It was hard to lead them forward to the anguish and despair that awaited them at Jerusalem. And Satan was at hand to press his temptations upon the Son of man" *The Desire of Ages*, page 486.

These are the temptations of Satan pressing the heart of God. Listen why:

"Why should He now go to Jerusalem, to certain death? All around Him were souls hungering for the bread of life. On every hand were suffering ones waiting for His word of healing. The work to be wrought by the gospel of His grace was but just begun. And He was full of the vigor of manhood's

prime. Why not go forward to the vast fields of the world with the words of His grace, the touch of His healing power? Why not take to Himself the joy of giving life and gladness to those darkened and sorrowing millions? Why leave the harvest gathering to His disciples, so weak in faith, so dull of understanding, so slow to act? Why face death now, and leave the work in infancy?" *Ibid.*

Who was pressing those temptations upon Jesus? Satan. And he will do it to you. When God presents to you a call, a challenge, don't forget there will be a cross in it. And don't forget there will be an enemy who will show you a field where you can supposedly labor without a cross. Don't forget that.

Satan will show you a way to live where you can be more comfortable, more respected, more recognized, and better paid. This is what He offered Jesus. This is what he offered to the disciples. But Jesus steadfast set His face to go to Jerusalem. He knew that for Him life meant the cross. He invites each one of us to that same experience.

But what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Oh, can a person lose his soul simply by trying to do the Lord's work in a way that is convenient and comfortable, and avoid the difficulties and troubles and crosses? Indeed. This is the trap in which many of the remnant are being caught. The challenge of the cross is the same today as it was when Jesus spoke the words of our text.

Listen carefully. Christ had to meet this particular temptation in the way that is mentioned. Why must it be this way? Because selfishness is a virulent, malignant disease. It must be cured. And the only way it can be cured is through the cross. Jesus had to take the cross in order that He might reveal to us the terrible character of selfishness.

As we approach the cross and share with Him the sorrow for selfishness, we too shall be glad to give our lives that others may enter into the fellowship of this mystery. Oh, that God may help us to do it. And I pled with you, do not listen to the rationalization of men or devils that would lead you from this principle. Please, for Jesus' sake.

I was thinking. Suppose we had a cage here this morning. Can you imagine an iron cage with steel bars? There is a door in it. You can see out. There are bars and a lock.

Here is the gate-keeper. He says to you, If you will be willing to spend the rest of your life in this cage, I will give you a million dollars.

How many of you would go in? He gets no takers. So he changes these bars from iron to silver. They glisten and sparkle. Here is a silver cage. He ups the price. Two million dollars if you will spend the rest of your life in this cage.

A man or woman, a boy or girl, steps forward and says, Yes, give me the two million and I will go in. Of course you will feed me? Oh yes, I will feed you.

Would you go? Ah, he says he will make those bars golden bars. Think what it would mean to live in a golden cage. Wouldn't that be wonderful?

We laugh of the absurdity of it, but this is what millions are doing. They are not even getting a golden cage, and for a lot less than a million or two they are selling their lives in slavery to selfishness. That's it. But if the music is loud enough and the bars are gilded enough and the food is tantalizing enough with spices and the smell of Egypt, some people still think that to leave that cage would be to leave security. After all, prisoners do get fed three times a day.

But what would it profit a man if he should gain the whole world and lose his own soul?

I know that when we stand at judgment day and everybody in the universe is there, and the drama of the ages is unfolded on the canvass of the sky, everybody will wish he had chosen the path Jesus opened up. Everybody will recognize then that the best way is the way of Calvary.

If we accept it this morning we must do it by faith and love. Faith that the One who made us knows best what will satisfy us. Love for the One who gave all for us. We would rather die with Him than live without Him. Oh, I pray that some heart this morning may be torn from the idols that have interposed between the heart and Him.

Idols need not be some ugly objects fashioned of wood and stone. They may be beautiful plants, wonderful desires. Anything that keeps you from the road of the cross is an idol. I pray the Holy Spirit may apply to our hearts these wonderful truths.

You notice in what I have read from *The Desire of Ages* that Jesus was tempted by the enemy with the thought to go ahead with His work of preaching and healing instead of going up there and dying. Why did Satan tempt Him with such a temptation? Did Satan want Him to go on teaching and healing? Yes, Satan was perfectly willing for Jesus to do that if that was the way that would divert Him from the Father's plan.

Satan didn't offer Jesus a cigar or a glass of whiskey. Satan didn't suggest how nice it would be to run down to a night club or theater. He tempted Jesus with wonderful suggestions about how to do His work better and more successfully. These are the temptations he brings to you and me today. Oh, for Jesus' sake let us pray for a revelation of the cross. Let us be willing to take the blood-stained path.

In these vesper studies from week-end to week-end we have been studying the problems of survival. I think this is one of the greatest text in the Bible on survival:

"Whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and
whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it" Matthew
16:25.

These are the survivors. In all ages the children of God have walked in narrow paths. But this is particularly so of the remnant. We are going onto the narrowest path that has ever opened up before the people of God.

Let us prepare to bleed with Jesus. Let us accept the preparatory experiences into which He calls us. Let us be willing to turn from the recognition of the world, the

remuneration of the world, the applause of the world, and even of our own friends. And let us chose for Jesus the way of the cross.

This may be in things that seem very little. It may be in standing true to a responsibility where trials and difficulties are all about us. It may be continuing in a thorny path when just over the way is an easy road. But to the one who has heard the call of Jesus and answered it there is but one question. Where is my Master? I want to be with Him.

I will tell you where we will find Him. We will find Him where the battle is the hottest, the trials the greatest, the sacrifice the most difficult. Shall we join Him?

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