

Lessons from the Ladder

#0084

Study Given by W. D. Frazee—December 15, 1972

A ladder is, of course, to climb, to make it possible to get higher. God used this figure with Jacob, you remember. He showed him a ladder. Where was the bottom of the ladder? On the earth, right where Jacob was. The top of the ladder was clear up in Heaven at the throne of God. So I want you to imagine a ladder much higher than this one, but this will give us something to look at.

The first thing I want you to notice about climbing on a ladder is this: The important thing if you're going to get to the top is to be headed in that direction and to keep moving. Will you agree with me on that? The person who is clear down at the first round of the ladder is nearer the top than the one who is halfway up the ladder and just sitting there. You see that, don't you? Because the one who's down at the bottom and keeps taking a step is eventually going to get to the top. But the one who is halfway up and he's just sitting there, how long will it take him to get to the top? He never will.

Direction is vital. It's possible to get halfway up and then decide to turn around and go back. People do that in their Christian life sometimes.

Judas began and got partway up, but he never got near the top. Pretty soon he started going down again.

King Saul had that experience. At the time of his anointing as king, the Lord gave him another heart. He was turned into a new man, and he started up. But Saul never got to the top. We find him finally going so far down that he even entered into spiritualism, consulting the witch of Endor.

Where we are on the ladder is not so important as the *direction* we are headed. Are we going up, or are we going down?

In the Christian way, it's who we're looking at which determines which way we're headed. Jesus says:

“Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth:
for I am God, and there is none else” Isaiah 45:22.

In that dream that the Lord gave Jacob, God spoke to him from the top of the ladder. God is speaking to each one of us to come up higher, and be holier still. Jesus, taking our humanity, came where we are, and by His Spirit, He's not only calling us up, but He's walking with us. The vital thing is *which* way we are looking. Are we looking to God, or are we looking to the world?

I was impressed with the editorial in this week's *Review*. It's written by our General Conference president, Elder Robert Pierson. This is the *Review* of December 14, [1972], it's on the inside cover. The name of the editorial is "This Leavening Process." He told us that the inspired source says, "I feel deeply over this leavening process which seems to be going on among us." This statement is taken from *Testimonies to Ministers*, page 181. The president of our General Conference calls the attention of all of us that just ahead of us is the time of the great shaking and sifting. In fact, we're even now entering into it. He quotes from *Great Controversy*:

"As the storm approaches, a large class who have professed faith in the third angel's message, but have not been sanctified through obedience to the truth, abandon their position and join the ranks of the opposition. By uniting with the world and partaking of its spirit, they have come to view matters in nearly the same light; and when the test is brought, they are prepared to choose the easy, popular side" *Great Controversy*, page 608.

Speaking of the approaching test over the mark of the beast, Inspiration says:

"Those who have step by step yielded to worldly demands and conformed to worldly customs will not find it a hard matter to yield to the powers that be, rather than subject themselves to derision, insult, threatened imprisonment, and death" *Testimonies for the Church, Volume 5*, page 81.

It is those who have step by step *yielded* that finally take just one more step and go out and mingle with the world and join the ranks of the opposition. The Devil's game is to get you and me, wherever we are on the ladder, persuaded that perhaps we're a little higher than we *need* to be; that perhaps we can get into Heaven on *this* round than the *higher* round. And that nobody is really up there any way on those higher rounds. So why should I struggle and make an effort to reach higher? Then I look around and see a number of people who apparently think it's all right to be on a round below me, so I slip and slide a little, and I'm down there. But I'm comfortable because I have lots of company. Then I'm influenced to take another step down. And finally, when the great test comes, do you know how many more steps there will be for multitudes in the church? Just one more step down and out. That's the picture and that's what this editorial is about.

The president of our General Conference speaks about some specific things:

"When I see the extreme fashions, the rings, the necklaces, the large brooches, the highly ornamental watches, and the elaborate men's jewelry more and more apparent among us, it is not the precious stones that cause me the most concern. It is that leavening process, that pride, that love of self, that love of the world, that *compromise* these objects reveal that makes me anxious

for God's people whom I love and long to see in the kingdom. Too many of us are heading back into the world."

Heading back into the world. I suppose one reason that the matter of dress and adornment is so apparent is that it's so *apparent*. But there are hundreds of things just as important that may be hidden. Concerning all of these things, it is well that we heed the admonition of the apostle, "Let a man examine himself." Examination? Yes. Who is to be examined? Himself. Who is to examine himself? The man. Each one. Every soul is to examine himself in the light of God's word. And the point of the examination is not so much where I am on the ladder, not where I am in comparison with those around me, but which direction am I headed? What progress am I making, and is the progress upward or downward?

Keep in mind that there is no way to go up without getting further away from down. There is no way to get closer to Heaven without widening the gap between us and the world, especially when the world is going further down all the time. It's a wonderful thing to know that when we *choose* to look to Jesus instead of looking to the world, He counts us as though we had already attained and were at the top.

This is justification by faith. This is righteousness as a free gift. If you give yourself to Him, and accept Him as your Savior, then sinful as your life may have been, for His sake, you are accounted righteous. Christ's character stands in place of your character, and *you* are accepted before God just as if you had not sinned. Can you have it any better than that?

So I do not have to think when I have taken the first or second or third step that I wish I could be up there, and *then* I'd feel restful and happy and accepted. No. The man on the first round is accepted just as much as the man on the highest round if he's looking to Jesus. It's that simple, and don't make it complicated.

The thief on the cross was God's great demonstration of that principle. Where did he look that dark day on Calvary? He looked to that Man on the cross in the middle. And looking, he found salvation and acceptance. The medical evangelist, Luke, tells the story in the 23rd chapter of his Gospel. Looking at that crucified Savior, he said, "Lord, remember me." Jesus said, "I tell you truly, this very day, you will be with me in paradise." He was accepted right then. If the *thief* can be accepted right now, *I* can be accepted right now.

Remember that there were two thieves, one on either side of the Master. Both of them, at first, reviled Him and cursed Him. They urged Him that if He was really the Christ, why doesn't He save Himself and each one of them. They were making fun of Him. Even if Christ decided He wanted to help, don't you think that thief would have to stay in the doghouse a week before he could really feel accepted? The man had been cursing and swearing and ridiculing the Savior. But that one thief got help as soon as he looked to Jesus. That's *how* you and I get help, and that's *when* we get help.

There are so many illustrations God has used to teach us this wonderful lesson:

“Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth”
Isaiah 45:22.

The children of Israel, as Numbers 21 tells the story, were going through the desert, and as they sometimes did they fell to murmurings. They were murmuring about the lack of bread, the kind they want, and murmuring about water. When you touch a man's stomach, you get pretty close to his nerve. There is quite a connection between the stomach and the brain. And so these Israelites were murmuring and complaining. God let some serpents that were there in the desert, that hitherto He had protected the people from, move in and take over. The ones who were bitten began to swell up and die as the poison filled the system. Then the people cried again, but this time not in murmuring but in pleading, and God always hears His children when they cry. Israel had been going down; literally, they had been talking about going *back* to Egypt. But now, as they feel the sting of the serpent, they turned around and started looking upward and heavenward. And they cry to God. And now Jesus gives them a parable. This time it's not a ladder, it's a serpent of brass.

“And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live” Numbers 21:8.

How can the dying, serpent-bitten man live? By *looking*. By *looking*. Oh friend, can you and I live by looking? Amen.

“Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth” Isaiah 45:22.

The message is the same tonight that it's been from Eden's gates, “Look and live.” But we will never see Jesus by looking at the world and the Devil. We will never be filled with faith and hope by studying the world, its fashions, its customs, and being influenced by it. One of two things will happen. We will either be attracted by the world and led to move in that direction because we see something we want, or we will become discouraged with any thought that we can climb heavenward, and we'll just fall off the ladder and drop into despair. Many a soul has done that.

In December 1844, the Lord's messenger was given a vision. She saw the people of God traveling on a narrow path cast up high above the world. Just ahead was Jesus. Now and then somebody would get discouraged, and Jesus would raise His right arm. And from it came a light that waved over the band. He encouraged them to look to Him and move forward.

Oh friends, if we will look to Jesus we'll be saved.

“If they kept their eyes fixed on Jesus, who was just before them, leading them to the city, they were safe” *Early Writings*, page 14.

It's possible for us in the church to get to looking to other people. Someone in the home disappoints us. Someone in the church hurts our feelings. Someone in the ministry fails to set the right example. And the enemy whispers, "If that's the way they're going to do, what use is it for you to try?"

It's a wonderful thing to settle it at the beginning of the Christian life and keep settling it, that God has given us just one place to look, and that's to Him. "Look unto Me, and be ye saved." How wonderful it is to keep looking to Him, and keep climbing up the ladder. Not that we may be accepted, mind you. We're accepted as soon as we start looking to *Him*. We do not climb in order to be accepted. We look to Him to be accepted, and we climb because we want to be like Him. We want to *be* like what He *counts* us to be.

Wouldn't you like to be like Jesus? Well, you can be counted that way, right now. And the process of climbing into the actual experience of reflecting Jesus' image fully, that's the work of a lifetime. How wonderful it will be when the Savior comes to greet Him from the top of the ladder. This is the experience of the translated ones. This is the experience Enoch had.

I'm not here to engage in a theological discussion as to what the top of the ladder means, and how much we all fall short in our weak humanity. That isn't the point, friends. My faith is simple. I know this: that when I give myself to Jesus, I am accepted just as if I had not sinned. That's my title to Heaven. And as long as I keep looking to Jesus, I have got that title in death or in life. Isn't that wonderful? The second thing I am abundantly certain of is that Jesus wants me to make progress every day in climbing the ladder. He guarantees to have me ready, not merely *accepted* so that I have a title, but converted and changed so that I'm *fitted* for Heaven. It's His righteousness in both cases.

"Those who come up to every point, and stand every test, and overcome, be the price what it may, have heeded the counsel of the True Witness, and they will receive the Latter Rain, and thus be fitted for translation"
Testimonies for the Church, Volume 1, page 187.

The Latter Rain, friend, is up here, it's not down here. Accepted, yes, tonight. But oh, friends, if we want the Latter Rain, we want to be climbing the ladder. And I want the Latter Rain, don't you? Yes. I don't want to camp on the first or second or third rung.

"God leads His people on, step by step. He brings them up to different points calculated to manifest what is in the heart" *Ibid.*

There's the ladder again. That's what these steps are for, friends; they're definite things. How many of you are here tonight that once didn't know that the seventh day was God's Sabbath according to the Fourth Commandment? Why, look at that. Half this audience at one time didn't know that. Was there a step for you to take on that at one time in your experience? You took that step, didn't you? Are you

thankful? Is that the only step on the ladder? No, it's a step, but it's not the only step. And I could mention a lot of other things here tonight, couldn't I?

It's too bad when we look back at the steps we've taken and number them one, two, three, four, and we begin to add them up, and we think, "My, I think all the changes that have come in my life, I guess I'm nearly there." The best is ahead, friends. Let's not stand where we are or sit where we are, and especially, let's not go to sleep where we are. What do you say?

It was sleeping, when Jesus had him pray, that caused Peter's downfall. Jesus had tried to teach Peter the lesson of looking to Him. He taught him that on the water at Galilee. Peter saw Jesus walking on the water, and he thought, "My, wouldn't that be nice if I could walk on the water too." You know, it's amazing what some people can get if they ask for it. And Peter asked for it and he got it! I suppose some of the other disciples thought that maybe Peter was Jesus' pet, right then. They watched Peter, (and maybe Peter began to think he was a pet too), and he looked around to see what James and John and Andrew thought of him out there on the water walking along. And when he turned his eyes away from Jesus, he lost the power to walk on the water. That's when you and I lose it.

These steps that we take up the ladder do not become eternally fixed in our character merely because we have taken them. To have them eternally fixed in our character, we must keep climbing. Many a man has taken steps away from the world. He has accepted the Sabbath, given up liquor and tobacco and cursing and swearing, and a lot of other things. Then as he ceases to climb and he takes his eyes off God and he puts his eyes on his brethren, either in admiration or criticism, he loses the power and begins to slide back. And remember, when you slide back, the steps that you took going *up*, you retrace going back. The things that you *quit* doing going up, you begin to pick up and start doing again going back. Forgetting or disregarding the edges of the Sabbath, neglecting to pay a faithful tithe, failing to be present at divine worship, dropping the family altar now and then, and finally, entirely. All these things are steps that when we're going up, we get more and more like Jesus and less and less like the world. But on those same steps as we're going down, we begin to do what we have ceased doing, and we quit doing the precious things that God had taught us to do going up.

The point is not where you are tonight. The point is, which way are you headed? And that depends upon where you are looking.

I was meditating on the experience of Jonah. Jonah's test was not giving up whiskey or tobacco or any other bad thing. As we get further along up the ladder, the test is not giving up bad things, it's taking on special missions that God has for us. And it won't do when God calls Jonah to Nineveh to say, "Well Lord, I don't want to go to Nineveh and you haven't made anyone else go to Nineveh, and so I'm going to Tarshish. Tarshish is a perfectly respectable place to go, and I think I'll go there." Did he go? At least he started.

And listen: Jonah didn't give up his church membership. He didn't even give up witnessing, because if you read the story you'll see that he had told the people on the boat about God. But Jonah was simply going in the *opposite* direction to where

God had called him. He *had* been looking to God, but climbing up the ladder with God, but no matter how far up the ladder, when God said, “Jonah, take another step with me, two, three or four perhaps, and I want you to go with me to Nineveh,” Jonah started and went in the opposite direction, for if you look at the map, Nineveh is in one direction and Tarshish is exactly the opposite. And every mile that Jonah went he was getting farther from where God told him to go. He landed at the bottom of the ladder, just about as deep as he could get.

God never forgets us. The Savior Who did not forget Peter on Galilee, for when Peter was sinking and cried, Jesus stretched out His hand and saved him. So it was with Jonah. Down there in the whale's belly, he *cried* to God, and he changed his direction of looking. He quit looking to Tarshish. Let's see what Jonah said while he was right down in the whale, right down in the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea:

“Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple” Jonah 2:4.

Jonah turned *around*. Do you know that's what conversion means—to turn around? He had been going down. And down, down, down he went. But finally, when he had gotten so far he couldn't go any farther, he said, “*This* is not what I want. I'll lose my life; I'll lose my *soul* here.” And he turned around like the thief there on the cross and cried to Jesus. Now notice the results of this turning and looking to Jesus:

“When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD: and my prayer came in unto thee, into Thine holy temple” Jonah 2:7.

Jonah understood the sanctuary. He knew the real one was in Heaven. Tonight, my friend, we have a place to look. Jesus, our wonderful Savior, is in the Temple in Heaven, holding up His wounded hands for us. And to *every* one of us, no matter where we are on the ladder, He says, “Look to Me, and I'll help you take another step up.”

The important thing is not where you are with reference to anyone else in the world. No matter how low you are on the ladder, you're accepted fully if you're looking to Jesus. There is another step for you to take tonight, no matter how high you are on the ladder, there's another step to take. And the Holy Spirit will help us to know that next step to take. Let's keep taking the steps, and remember, not to get accepted: it's looking to Jesus that makes us accepted. Let's keep taking the steps because we want to be *like* Him, and because we want to *let* Him open the way in our own hearts and in the church, that the Latter Rain may come in all its fullness.

Let's send Jesus the word that we're looking to Him. Let's send Him the word that we want to take another step upward. Oh, how sweet it is to walk with Jesus. And we're accepted all the way along, from the very first step on through, as we keep looking to Him.

As somebody's put it in verse:

It fortifies my soul to know
That, though I perish, Truth is so:
That, howsoe'er I stray and range,
Whate'er I do, Thou dost not change.
I steadier step when I recall
That, if I slip, Thou dost not fall.
—by Arthur Hugh Clough

Nobody will ever be lost by stubbing his toe on the upward way. Everyone that's lost, it will be by turning away from Christ. As long we're looking heavenward, there's no possibility of being lost. This should encourage every fainting heart.

[Testimony service]

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