

THE DAY SPRING

BY
CARLYLE MARNEY, TH. D.



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THE DAY SPRING

Up where the foothills of the Colorado begin to level out I stopped with a visitor to our country at a beautiful spring — — — source of supply for a valiant little creek that sets out to drain all the hills it can.

My friend and I wanted desperately to drink. A rider far down the range had pointed to the spring as the only one around.

But when we knelt to drink the spring was so clogged with dead matter that we drew back with distaste. The once beautifully clean source was all cluttered up!

The source of our light is spoken of as a "spring," spring of the day—the place where the dawn begins—synonym for dawn within the heart of God. . . .

figure of the beginning of God's love for all the races. Paul has it in mind in the introductory phrases of his grand theological work. Paraphrased, it could read,

"For in the Gospel the dawn comes up for us in terms of God's righteousness given from faith to faith, for the just live from faith!"

This is the Day-Spring. This is the welling up of our dawn—where God's righteousness eternally begins its work with us is always in the realm of faith—ours and His!

But the source is eternally being cluttered and covered over. Men go on forgetting that God always begins His work in terms of their lostness—He never begins anywhere else—and He always begins in terms of Faith!

At times we have almost lost the Day-Spring. Men crowd in to the waters of Christianity down below the source. They make what Christianity has done incidentally to be the main thing—the source—and forget that—

The New Testament has no word for any man who remains an unbeliever!

Not a single word,
except,

Repent and Believe the Gospel!

The New Testament code of conduct has no claim
upon any unbeliever! It is not for you!

The only message of the New Testament for men outside
the grace of God is,

Repent and Believe the Gospel!

This God of the New Testament,

This God who presses His claim to all lost men,

That God in whom the Source takes its source,

is NEVER

a reformer, setting out to revise by legislation—

a social worker, coming in to look over a "case"—

a program-planner, saving the world with bureaus—

He is NOT

*a slogan-maker, or a banner-waver at the conventions of
do-gooders;*

*an arbitrator, hoping by the peace of the two to make
peace for the many;*

*a self-improvement expert, giving men a little form-
ula to recite before their mirrors every morn-
ing:*

He NEVER was, as some have felt,

The Manager of a Guide Service for Tourists,

who are wandering around at leisurely pace;

nor has He ever been

a sort of glorified Housing Authority,

expert in juvenile and senile delinquency,

passing out Relief.

The New Testament knows practically nothing of social needs. This God has not even a word for society as such. Not at first. This God who presses His claim to all hearts has only ONE initial command:

Repent and Believe The Gospel!

He never sends us to a derivative at the first. He never has us begin by reform or social service. He never begins with a lesser business than

Repentance and Belief,

The Gospel has no other initial word.

The Golden Rule does not apply to you before this word has been received.

The Sermon on the Mount is not fit subject for your study yet.

All the marvelous social claims of the Gospel ethic are not yours until you have repented and believed the Gospel.

He never sends us to a lesser business at the first! This is the Day-Spring,

Repentance and Belief

out of
which pours all that is good in organized Christianity.

Yet, men persist in

SOME FALSE ASSUMPTIONS

that cover up this spring like my spring
in the hills was covered:

It is untrue:

that Christ has any message for unbelievers
except "repent and believe!"

that God exerts any claim on any man, state or
nation for "lip service";

that social and civic agencies and organizations can receive and pass on *any* of Christ by the mere repetition of certain of His teachings in their codes, by-laws, and creeds;

that governmental figures can acquire any merit from casual and occasional references to the guidance of Deity—God has little to do with much that happens in most government councils;

that the loyal support of any group, organization, or ideal that makes use of *any* of Christ's moral preachments as a substitute for personal surrender to the claims of Christ has any value whatever in enduring terms.

Who can, in Christ's Name, say he believes anything Christ says do who will not first believe Christ?

We have falsely assumed that the Gospel message puts any requirement on any man ahead of its requirement to repent and believe.

"Except ye believe that I am He," regardless of your cleanliness,

regardless of your morality,

your faithfulness,

except you have made your personal surrender,

believing surrender,

"Ye die in your sins!"

Salvation—God's *Lebensraum*—room to live—Salvation—the giving to man of his full integrity and health

is not to be found in

pious impulses that send you to see the sick sometimes,

or annual indications of your "moral" support at

Easter and Christmas.

Salvation is not to be found in your participation in community hymn-singing,

or holy-year pilgrimages,

or the well-advertized "popular,

bright and breezy, services."

Christianity is *not*, and never was
a means of getting "good,"
a useful ally for winning wars,
(Constantines "*In this sign, Conquer*,"
to the contrary notwithstanding)
nor,
a tool for maintaining national prosperity,
nor,
a cult for the promotion of physical health,
or the contact with departed spirits,
or the prolongation of Anglo-Saxon domination.

The "Kingdom of Heaven" never meant that or these!

It is out of

RELiance ON THESE WRONG ASSUMPTIONS that
men frequently have given themselves to certain psuedo-
Christian acts which replace the Day-Spring.

They will rely upon membership in certain organizations
in America working at the race problem. A man can belong
to all four hundred of them and still know no personal pos-
session of the Spirit of Christ.

They rely upon their support of certain drives, programs,
and community endeavors, good in themselves.

They will "learn the lingo," use the vocabulary of belief.
They will even participate in worship and Christian action.

Some, many, even go so far as to give gifts, generous gifts.

Many men put great confidence in the worth of their
observance of strict moral codes commonly thought to be
"Christian" but actually "Stoic."

Thousands rely on a type of stream-lined institutionalism
that observes the amenities of traditional worship.

Like a church I saw advertising its

"Five Minute Church Service

For Folks in a Hurry!"

Sing one verse of a hymn—

pray for thirty seconds—

preach (?) for three and a half minutes!

and, if you are in a hurry,

you've had your shot for the week.

All this "Christianity!" It is typified in the quarterly
"meeting" of the strictly limited social groups that make
up the men's clubs of the suburban "sets":

long rows of thick-jawed, overstuffed, inventory-worried,
high-blood-pressured, cardiac, successful young men,
mingling with
their blood-brothers,
and no others,

over half-baked ham,
watery green beans,
sick apple slaw,
and soggy pie

listening to

anaemic platitudes,
mouthed after dinner,
by some pale prelate,
who salts his sop
with
slang and stale jokes

to hold their "interested"—
bored eyes.

Then "All join hands" and *really* sing—

"Give a little, live a little, try a little mirth;
Sing a little, bring a little, happiness to earth;
Pray a little, play a little, be a little glad;
Rest a little, jest a little, if the heart is sad.
Spend a little, send a little, to another's door;
Give a little, live a little, love a little more."

Sweet fellowship, stirring beyond words!

But isn't all this a far-cry from that piercingly personal death-warrant.

*"For God so loved the world that He gave
His only begotten Son!?"*

The sum-total of the lives based on these ridiculously ineffective assumptions is illustrated every week of the year in any city in some citizen:

He is *prominent*—business, or government, profession or politics, or property; a *surface* Christian;

He is critically sick—¹

The *Doctor* will not tell him—

He comes in smiling, so the patient won't know he is going to die;

The *Friends* will not tell him—

They mumble about how much "better" he looks than on yesterday's visit, so that he won't get the idea he is going to die;

The *Preacher* mustn't go in—

unless he is a very close friend; he might think he is going to die—

The *Wife*, meanwhile, does not tell him, and is searching for insurance papers and will,

which he likely does not have,

since it would have reminded him of his death.

Then he dies:

The *Undertaker* tries his best to make him look not dead;

The *Friends* try to act as if he were only away;

The *Floral "Offerings"* try to make it all bright
and sunny;

¹George A. Buttrick uses this figure here expanded to illustrate a basic point in chapter IV, *Christ and Man's Dilemma*.

The *Newspaper* lists all his accomplishments and organizations, as if it mattered, and only at the funeral must we stop our dodging and come to the truth: to-wit,

This man is dead!

Only at that moment, the moment of the funeral address, is the Gospel permitted to speak in some lives.

It is too long delayed!

He is dead!

He can't find the Day Spring!

For this man the Gospel has no Good News!

In one of Dorothy Sayers plays, *Judas* (another business man of some prominence) speaks to the High-Priest following the great betrayal. . . .

"Do you know what hell-fire is? It is the light of God's unbearable innocence that sears and shrivels you like flame. It shows you what you really are. . . .

Priest, it is a fearful thing to see one's self for a moment as one really is!

. . . . I tell you,

there is no escape

from God's innocence."

All of us stand there! In the blazing light of God's innocence—it exerts its inalienable claim upon our lives.

The breadth of the thing is staggering!

The burden of expressing the thing is beyond bearing! Who is sufficient to give words to it!

Who can say it for so widely divergent a group in education, in background, in morals, belief, practice, gospel?

Who can do it?

Is there *One* word for us all?

for *you* who have found peace in Christ?

for *you* who are on the border line of Christian peace
and joy?

for *you* who are struggling with temptation, often
losing the victory?

for *you* who are being overborne by illness, hardship,
privation, misunderstanding,
maladjustment, and sin?

for *you* who are rebellious against God, against
Christ, against His church, who
are seeking to justify your selfish
lives in enmity toward the Cross?

for *you* who are helpless and hopeless, with dark
minds and darker lives?

Is there *One* word for us all?

The New Testament knows nothing of averages. It has no
average or mean between extremes. Every *One* is of infinite
value.

But is there not *One* word that will fit us all?

Indeed!

"The just live, and by their faith"

Repent and Believe this Gospel!

REPENTANCE AND BELIEF = FAITH

Faith!

There is no verb for it in English.

There is no denial of it in Experience.

The language breaks down!

The one great act of the God-Man drama has no word
for the act!

The only place verb is needed must use substantive
"repentance and belief!"

"To faith it!"

To pitch out blindly on the darkness?

No!

Rather:

the free, responsible, chosen response of all that
makes me Person to the call of God's self-giving!

Faith!

The just shall live. . . . and by their faith!

Repent and Believe this Good News!

Repentance?

The one word that contains all essential ideas in the
first stages of the Christian life.

Repentance?

Waking from sleep; turning from idols.

Repentance?

That change of mind in which I come to see my
defection as God's innocence sees it.

Repentance?

Reaction to sin as God reacts,
a change of thought about Sin and God,
A change of feeling,
A change of the will.

Repentance?

Gift of the goodness of God.
A permanent soul-attitude to self.
A permanent moral process.
A fixed habit of my soul.

Repentance?

A turning of the will from the life and service
of myself to the life and service of God.

Repentance

that knows that anything contrary to God's will
is contrary to my welfare.

Repentance

that looks backward and forsakes—

forward and accepts!

Belief!

that hears as if it would obey once for all;

that has no heart except for trust;

that knows—at last—

that a man meets God

in God's Son—The Christ!

Belief!

that has learned that this Good News

can only become my personal possession

in connection with a believing surrender

to the Person of Jesus Christ.

Belief!

in one in whose presence one can afford

to act as if trust were final and complete.

Belief!

with respect to Him who taught us to "faith" it!

Belief!

with respect to His ability to do what He said He could—

forgive my sin,

guide my destiny,

bear my guilt,

restore my soul,

die and rise,

lose and find,

be broken and live!

Belief!

I believe Him!

Repentance

Belief

Faith

Faith that encounters God—

Faith that appropriates His Grace for its own—

Faith—the first living cell of the Christian life—
the root grace of all other graces—

Faith—the universal requirement for *Lebensraum*—

Faith—intensely personal and individual—

Faith—that undergirds with enduring powers—

Faith—that feeds on Devotion and Doubt!

The just shall live by faith!

Child of repentance—belief and God's grace.

And so, one day in May, 1738, a sick, despairing little man went "very unwillingly" to a Society in Aldersgate street where "one" was to read Luther's *Preface to the Epistle to the Romans*. . About a "quarter before nine" while "he" was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ. . . .

"Not that human notion and dream that some hold for faith . . . an idea in their hearts, which says, 'I believe.' . . . Faith is . . . a divine work in us. It changes us and makes us to be born of God. . . . It kills the old Adam, makes different men in heart and spirit, mind, and power. . . . O, it is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith. . . .

then,

"My heart was strangely warmed."

". . . faith is a living, daring, confidence in God's grace, so sure and certain that a man would stake his life on it a thousand times."

And John Wesley closed the entry for that immortal day in May with his own small hallelujah—

"Once I was always conquered—
Now I conquer!"

Perhaps he meant what John Masefield means. . . .

"Something above the wreck
is always steady still."



