

doing even the common courtesy of telling us that she was going. So, we cooked a good meal, provided all the niceties for her. Her vacant chair was a silent testimony to one of the malignant symptoms of our day. God wants you to reconfirm your reservation. Every large church has on its regular mailing list scores of people who have been dead for years. But believe me, and I do not overstate it, there are hundreds on the role who are dead in spirit but who never have been buried by any mortician!

EVIDENCES OF RECONFIRMATION

That brings me then to ask, "What evidence is there for reconfirming?" How can you know for certain that you are going along? Is it a matter of guesswork? Hardly. One sure way of doing this is returning to the altar. That is where you were originally, then why not go back? The ease of overdoing it isn't as pronounced as you have been led to believe. The danger of this day is not emotional spasms in church. Our danger is the sin of the dry eye! Down at the altar one will be smitten by the conviction that you cannot tell God that you love only one time and expect that to suffice. No more so than one filling of the tank with gasoline will run permanently. You must check in so God will know where you are standing.

Am I not speaking now to throngs of people who because of little spirits, or bickering jealousies, or some trivial misunderstanding are at odds with their church? Perhaps some of you haven't been inside a church for a long, long time.

Then God has led me to ask you, "Are you still planning to go along?" If so, then you need to reconfirm your reservation by swallowing your pride, and returning to that sacred spot wherein God dwells.

Just now it seems that I hear some saying, "But preacher, are you implying that if one is once saved that he isn't always saved?" I am saying simply that if one is once saved he will always act like he is saved! He will go on through conversion until his life is made in the image of the Giver of Life. Let us be done with this foolish notion that one can make a public profession of faith at twenty-five years of age, then live the rest of his life as though there were no Bible, no God, nor Christ and then expect to be saved in the end. Brother, that simply is not so! But if he is genuinely saved, he will give evidence that he is taking the trip. He will fall down, yes, but the difference is that he resents being down and will struggle to get back up. He, like the brilliant artist of Sienna, who stood before his work of art for a long time after finishing it, then was heard to say, "May God forgive me that I did not do it better," will always want to do it better.

Permit me to close the sermon by telling you that God will leave without you! It breaks His heart to do so, but let there be no misunderstanding about it. God can do without us. But can we do without Him? Ah, that's the most needed question. All our self-importance notwithstanding, when God makes up that final passenger list, He wants to know if you still plan to be on it.

IF I WERE SATAN

October 13, 1957

Scripture: Romans 2:1-11

Did you ever wonder what you would do if you were Satan? If I were Satan and really wanted to succeed at the job, I think I would major on several things.

First of all, I think I would try to convince people that the Christian religion impoverishes life—that it is a pretty dull affair, staid, outmoded, and at best, represents the left-overs of priestcraft and sup-

erstitions. I would speak as old Nietzsche by saying, "God is dead and let's get back to the business of running the world as we please." I would do my level best to knock the polish and luster off of Christian faith. As a matter of fact, Satan has succeeded to a great extent in doing exactly this. To millions the idea of God and religion excite nothing more than idle curiosity. The notion of God is so tarnished and tame, worn so slick by

words that while it serves as a nice tradition it does not invade life with purpose and pleasure.

What does it mean to have a God anyway? Sort of an apothecary to which one can rush when he is sick, or a Quartermaster's Corps when he is hungry? Or is it like what Martin Luther so ably said, "God to me is one on whom you can hang your heart."

"GOD LIMITS LIFE"

It is easy to see why some folks don't have much interest in God. They believe that He limits them—that to follow Him takes all the fun out of life. What a deception! God doesn't limit anyone; He releases you. There is no mental sterility worse than that which conceives of God as dull, lusterless pastime. If we understand Jesus at all, we understand Him as living a worthwhile life; life that is full, radiant, superlative. I am firmly convinced that God intends His followers to be happy. Not that happiness is the ultimate end of living but it is an essential one. You can't be a very good prayer unless you pray happily in belief. You can't be a good giver unless you give generously while loving to do it. You don't support the great causes on earth unless your motivation is springing from a heart that is at peace with its Maker.

It was said of the British schoolman, principal Rainey by one of his adolescent boys, "Principal Rainey must go to heaven every night when he falls to sleep because he's so happy every day." What a compliment that the waking hours would find us so radiantly happy in service that some lad got the notion that we were in heaven last night! Yes, if I were Satan, I'd try to take all the triumphant joy out of Christian religion, leaving it a naked, unsightly thing, denuded of its graces, robbed of its serenity and replaced by asceticism, mortification and boredom.

"A GRAIN OF SALT"

Then if I couldn't succeed in that strategy, I would try another. I would say, "Then at least take your religion with a grain of salt." Just have enough religion

to be respectable, to pay your debts, to get along in society, but all this talk about walking the second mile, of turning the other cheek, loving the unlovely, giving up your money and time to help some others . . . ah, that is one for the books. Don't get too worked up about this business of missions, after all, if God wants the heathen saved, let Him save him! We have enough to do by sweeping our own front yards. Anyway, who wants to be known as a fanatic! So, keep everything under firm control . . . don't let your enthusiasm get out of hand. Lead with your head, not your heart. "When zeal becomes too fervent, turn on the hose of caution and common sense . . . and out it will go with little expense."

If I were Satan, I would reason and talk like that. Simply because no known strategy works more successful with human nature. Man, in the main, has always taken his religion with a grain of salt. Oh, to be sure, there have been those magnificent fools for Christ's sake who have faced the heat of flames, who braved the elements counting no cost too high to gain the excellency of a knowledge of Jesus Christ. But their numbers have been few . . . at least few compared to the hordes who have had just enough religion to get by on.

Friends, a little religion like a little learning, is a dangerous thing—dangerous in that it will deceive you into believing that you have enough to save you. If a little religion is enough, then how do you explain those words of Jesus that "you must be born again?" That "if any man would be my disciple, let him first deny himself, take up his cross and follow me." That doesn't sound like a little bit, does it? Let this be understood: that Jesus did not suffer on Golgotha to teach man a nice little teapot faith. He knew that sin does its work thoroughly and is not removed by nice liturgies or fine ecclesiasticisms.

"GRAVE ENDS ALL"

Now; if the first two approaches did not work too well, I'd try a third one: that it doesn't really matter in the long run how you live, seeing that the grave

ends all. This is fertile soil for cynicism, next agnosticism, then atheism. The grave, like a yawning chasm, swallows us all: rich and poor, black and white, old and young, lovers and loveless, sain and sinner—all march to that dark chasm from which no one ever returns. To inject doubt about life's survival beyond the grave is to degrade the nature of life on this side of the grave. When you lose respect for the purpose of life, then goes one's self-respect and his respect for others. Hence, the modern predicament in which we find ourselves. When Satan can get folks to asking, "What's the use?" he is already on second base.

Take nature for instance: Satan could have a field day by pressing the irregularities and seeming heartlessness of nature. God's created world, I mean. Oh, it is true that now and then nature combines her forces in an intelligent magnificent purposiveness when all the elements seem to be working together. But then in the next moment there is a tidal wave over Cameron, La. where hundreds of innocent people lose their lives. Tornado, fire, flood, epidemic . . . drought . . . all take their toll among saints and sinners. So Satan can press the issue: "If your God is what you say He is, why doesn't He control the forces of nature for man's good?" Press the point a bit further and say with Job's wife, "Curse God and die." Or with Shakespeare, "Life is a tale told by an idiot full of sound and fury signifying nothing." Say that "Life is an unpleasant interruption of nothingness."

Does it really matter how one lives? Oh, let us not be deceived: "God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." Yes, it does matter how we live here because the way we live here determines where we shall live hereafter. All the vain babblings of cynics notwithstanding, God has made it crystal clear that every deed done in the flesh shall be accountable. The world looks at us six days a week to see what we mean on the seventh. The eye still is a better pupil than the ear. Christians are to be much like that strange phenomenon of nature—the Gulf stream. It flows from the equator toward the Pole right out in the midst of the cold ocean waters. A stream of warm gulf water flowing in the midst

of the cold, ocean water—and that without losing its warmth. In just such manner, Christians are to live in a cold, cruel world without losing their warmth of sympathies, love and purpose.

"PLENTY OF TIME"

If the idea that Christian faith is a dull affair, that religion should be taken with a grain of salt, and that one may live as he please since it doesn't matter in the end . . . if these three would not win, then if I were Satan I would pull the ace out of the deck, the one sure-fire method that will work with more people than any other: namely, I would tell them that there is plenty of time, so wait until later. Like this sermon on this broadcast; Satan is saying to some, "Now don't you know that it is possible for a speaker to maintain a certain grip on your emotions, and emotions aren't trustworthy, so, wait a minute and the message will be over, and you can return to your former attitude." Oh, friends, that is the voice of Satan. Some of you have intended for years to do the right thing but you just keep putting it off. And every day in which you postpone it makes it easier to put it off one day more.

No, the emotions are not your weakest faculty. God can be apprehended through them as well as through thought and will. God says that now is the accepted time . . . today is the day of salvation. Maybe right now you feel that certain tingle inside, a kind of buoyancy, a resolve to rise up and go to God. But watch out! Then Satan eases in his word too . . . he says, "Wait until you can see it a bit more clearly, then there is plenty of time."

An old legend relates how a king gave a walking stick to his jester . . . his official court fool. "Take this stick a gift from me," said the old king to the clowning fool, "but I want you to give it to the man you find who is a bigger fool than you are." Weeks and months passed. A few years slipped by and the old king lay dying. The joking jester came back to visit the sickly king, the man who had given him the walking stick years ago. Seeing the far-off gaze in the king's eyes and hearing the rattle of death in his