

of human adoration. God is a spirit and that fact prevents our boxing Him in.

It is just as sensible to look for music by tearing open a violin as it is to look for God in a test tube or temple. He is not there . . . to be viewed; He is there to be experienced in the laboratory called a human soul. So, if you are in the number waiting to find such a "realistic" God before you commit yourself to Him, let me urge forsaking that notion even now. You cannot see atoms either . . . yet we know something of their incalculable explosive potential.

NEVER TOO LATE

It is never too late to commit yourself no matter how few coupons you have left in your book of years. God wants the rest of your allegiance even if Satan has received most of the years that have gone before. It is a shame that one serves the devil for sixty years or more then turns

to God as the last move. But better late than never.

There have been many who got a late start but tried to make up for lost time. But let me warn you: it is not easy. As a matter of fact every day you put it off it becomes harder. The rut gets deeper, the mind satisfies itself in a specious security that all is well. This actually is the type of death-sleep induced by Satan to prevent old people from turning to God.

The break through will cost in heart struggles but it can be done. God still moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform. One can drink from the springs only by climbing high in the mountain. But my, how it is worth it! Religion is a journey not a destination . . . and he who puts his feet on that path whether at eight or eighty will eventually wind up at the portals of the heavenly city. Why not give God your unexpired term by yielding your heart, your mind, your soul to Him right now?

WANDERING IN THE WILDERNESS

August 17, 1958

Beneath the groans of tired, sweaty men with their heavy chains, there arose a monotonous, incessant prayer, "let my people go." God's people were enslaved in Egypt and the Egyptian task masters were severe tyrants. Then a leader, Moses, was found who led the people through the waters of the Red Sea out into the freedom of Sinai's wilderness.

It should have taken the Israelites a few months to make the trip through this desert wilderness to Palestine. Instead, it took them forty years. Why? Why such a lifetime for so short a trip? Instead of progress, they roamed around until they were divided into little groups searching for food and water. Sickness broke out among them; one trial after another came their way until forty years were consumed in aimlessness.

Friends, life today for us can be little more than wandering in a wilderness. The real hazards are not so much geography as they are mental and emotional. It's true that a rough country slows one's

pace, but a rough mind and soul slow it even more. The real blockades are not serpents, jagged rocks and howling nights but the inner pitfalls and the snaretraps of mind and soul. There are many wildernesses and today I point out a few.

THE WILDERNESS OF DOUBT

One is the wilderness of doubt. This all-engulfing Sinai can so blockade life that one can wander around it the rest of his days without ever getting anywhere. Like those early Israelites we begin to ask, "Is Jehovah with us or not?" "Did we leave God down in Egypt or did we bring Him along?" And just remember it hadn't been two months since they had experienced the miraculous deliverance through the waters of the Red Sea!

Is God with us? Haven't you seen those who supposedly gave their hearts to Christ and a few months later doubting the very existence of Christ? Ah, human nature is a strange contradiction especially when it

wanders around in the wilderness of doubt. All of us come to that place when we doubt many things now and then, but some folks seem to be chronic doubters, they can't quite ever really believe anything with positive conviction.

One of America's common tragedies is the host of young students who are exposed to a few courses in religion and philosophy while in college. Such exposure results in exploding some of their early-learned notions about God and religion. Then it becomes the thing to do to debunk all religion and get lodged in the subjunctive mood. Some live a lifetime in that type of sophomoric ignorance.

HONEST DOUBTING

Now, honest doubting is a tonic to the soul. To question the fundamentals of the faith and hammer them out on the anvil of one's own experience will prove them all the more truthful. It is of little value to accept something as true merely because one has been told that it is true. But once seeing the evidence, the facts, then to act as though the evidence is lacking is not only foolish but absurd.

If one would doubt his doubts as readily as he does his beliefs, he would be on the way to a short cut out of the wilderness. What these people of God had to learn was that God is as present in the wildernesses of life as He was down in Egypt. To limit Him to any locale is to overlook His omnipresence.

Jonah had to learn this the hard way. Taking flight aboard a vessel going in the opposite direction in which God told him, he sought comfort by hiding in the hold of the ship. When he was cast overboard, my what a revelation to find that God even confronted him on the bottom of the sea.

Elijah, Daniel, the Hebrew Children . . . all proved the hard way that a lion's den, or a juniper tree, or a fiery furnace could not bar the presence of God Almighty. But it is right at this point that many increase their doubting; they say, 'If God is everywhere, why isn't there more evidence of His presence? Why can't I ever see His footsteps? Why not feel Him more plainly?'

Such questions are as sensible as one who tears a violin apart looking for the notes of music. God is a spirit and man is flesh and the two are forever different and separable. Only in eternity will spirit be like spirit. Until then, we must be content with the seldom revealed flashes of divine illumination which sometimes come at the setting sun, or in the grateful eye of a be-friended beggar or in the consolation of a clean conscience wherein God is apt to dwell.

DOUBTS AND DISAPPOINTMENTS

Friends, what do you do with your doubts when you are disappointed? Such are the moments when the low cycle of life is prone to get us down. At such times it is not damning to doubt the very fact of God. If we are honest, we must all admit such has happened. Just remember then that the sun has a sinking spell once every evening but it comes back up the next morning. So can the human spirit despite its dogged doubting.

My officer friend said in quivering words, "I am ready to give up. Try as hard as I may, I can't lick that old defeated feeling. Somewhere along the line, I don't know where, I have lost my faith in God and it is better to be honest and admit it than to be a hypocrite before these men. I am going to resign my commission and call it quits."

After trying to understand his mood of depression by telling my chaplain friend that his minus signs were as indispensable to God's plan as his plus signs, we finally agreed to go to bed without any definite decision. Next morning I asked him, "How about it today, are you ready to resign?"

He said, "You know a strange thing happened. Last night I dreamed that I walked up to God and told Him that I was ready to resign. God looked at me and answered, 'If you resign then I will re-sign your commission.' Re-sign . . . the same letters but pronounced differently. You resign it but I will re-sign it." My, what assurance to know that in the wilderness of doubt one can be in the convoy of God.

DOUBTS LEAD TO IDOLS

Little wonder that when one exercises his doubts long enough he soon will turn to idols instead of God. Such was the case with the Israelites. A golden calf was far more tangible to them than some elusive spirit, so they cast the image, danced around it in the pagan security of nearness. But why should we be so hard on those early people when the same sin is everywhere among us today.

The idols of our own casting are legion in number . . . idols depicted in the life of a young man who, while walking down the road, found a \$2 bill. From then on he was always walking with his head down in search of another. In forty years he found 29,000 buttons, 54,000 pins, 17 pennies, a bent back and a miserly disposition. He lost the glow of the sunlight, smiles

on the faces of friends, the songs of the birds, beauties of the flowers, and the radiance of the skies. And all because his head was down!

No exaggeration at all . . . for the direction one looks can become his god . . . the nature of his search, the desire of his soul.

Oh, let us look up this day and cut a clean swath through this jungle undergrowth of doubts and cynical questions about God. Then go straight through this tepid, malarial swamp where life is threatened by a thousand hazards. The sunlight of serene living is in Canaan where God's people should have gone a long time ago. Whatever the nature of your wilderness, be it financial, physical, emotional, mental . . . whatever it may be, God is all-sufficient. Trust Him now to lead you out.

THE PAIN OF SELF-DENIAL

August 24, 1958

Scripture: Luke 9:23-26

To speak of the pain of self-denial in a day which would rather hear one speak of self-expression is to draw the fire of millions. The art of denying ourselves, even elemental pleasures, is nearly unknown. In His forthright statement about being a disciple, Jesus said, "If any man would come after me let him deny himself . . ."

Quite well He knew that if there is no self-denial, there would not follow any cross-bearing and steady following Him in service. Most of today's psychology is aimed at self's assertion, bringing oneself out, realizing the maximum expression, translating desire into reality. Restraint, renunciation, denial seem to speak of a by-gone era when men were afraid to face the facts of life.

DENYING DIET

Historically self-denial has been thought of as doing without certain food on specified days. While it takes a degree of self-discipline to push back from the table, this is hardly what Jesus referred to in His

directive. If one denies himself of a new suit of clothes or a trip to the beach and gives the money to some deserving cause, is this not fulfilling what Jesus said? Hardly. There is no doubt but what such foregoing of new clothes in order that others might at least have some kind of clothes is commendable charity, but the question keeps rising, what does Jesus mean by denying oneself?

Just this: let one make of himself a stranger to himself. In no other attitude can one become the true servant of God. Such does not mean a scathing, ascetic, negative attitude toward one's self as though the death impulse had taken over. Not that at all. One can refrain from meat . . . all kinds of meat, as a matter of fact he can be a complete vegetarian and still be a stranger to God.

The holy man can trample live coals to prove his devotion to his religion but such hardly qualifies the spirit within. Every type of bodily rigor can be endured in the name of religion without remotely approaching this statement of Jesus that if any man would be His