

Sept. 4, 1960

# EARTH IS THE

BY DR. J. WINSTON PEARCE

ONE OF THE common experiences of life is to personally realize the truthfulness of the Apostle Paul's words, "Who is sufficient unto these things?" (II Cor. 2: 16). All about us there are needs to be met; and we have not the wherewithal to meet them. There are opportunities to grasp but we are not able to attain unto them. There are rich relationships to enjoy but we are inhibited. There are religious realities for which we long, but somehow we never enter into them. We are constantly surrounded by limitations; if we could just break jail, the jail of limitation and insufficient funds to meet life's demands and opportunities!

Well, today let us look at an old, old story that may speak to our condition and experience. The story is found in the second book of Kings and the fourth chapter. A woman had lost her husband; the husband had made no provision for the welfare of his wife in such an eventuality;

he died owing heavy debts. The creditors came to collect their dues.

Having nothing with which to meet the debts, the creditors were on the point of doing what the law sanctioned in those crude and cruel days. The creditors were about to take the woman's two sons and sell them into slavery. The poor mother was frantic at the thought of such a thing. She went to the prophet Elisha with her story, asking for his help.

"What do you have in the house?" asked the prophet.

"Nothing," said the woman, "nothing but one little pot of oil."

"Go," said Elisha, "and borrow vessels, buckets, cans, jars, containers from your neighbors, borrow all you can. Then go into the house with your sons, close the door and start pouring oil from the little oil pot. When you have filled one container, fill another and another." The woman did just as she was told. When every container had been filled,

# LIMIT

she sought the Prophet Elisha and asked for further instructions.

"Fill more vessels," said Elisha.

"There are no more vessels," said the woman; "every vessel that I borrowed has been filled to the brim and the oil has stopped flowing."

Said Elisha, "Then, go sell the oil, pay your debts and live on the rest, you and your sons."

That is the simple, dramatic, ancient story. At first, I suppose we are ready to dismiss it with a wave of the hand as being one of those fanciful stories from far away places with strange sounding names, something that "can't happen here." But, take a second look.

## UNLIMITED

The story says that earth is the limit, not Heaven. As long as there were empty containers, the oil kept flowing. The clear implication is that it would have kept flowing as long as there were empty containers. The mat-

ter of securing and furnishing empty containers was in human hands. The supply of oil was in the hands of God. If there had been more faith and energy exerted in the securing of empty containers, more divine resources would have been available to fill the emptiness. But, when the containers were all filled, the oil stopped flowing. It always does; God does not waste and squander His resources. Still, the only limitations were earth-made, not Heaven's lack. The limitations were unnecessary limitations. The woman might have done more than pay her debts and have a scanty sum left over. Her own life and the life of her sons could have been lived on a different level.

Certainly this truth applies in the realm of nature. Run it out and see. God's life-giving air is all about you (even though man may contaminate it); how much is available? As much as your lungs can use. The limitation is at the point of use, not at the point of supply.

You visit a beautiful flower garden. How much of the beauty may you enjoy and carry away with you? As much as your capacity will permit. Some individuals will carry away much more than others, but that must be explained on the basis of appropriation, not on the basis of nature's reluctance.

The same is true of art and literature and music. Two people visit an art gallery, read a book,

hear a concert. One man carries away much more than the other. But, do not blame the pictures, the poetry or the symphony for that. You blame the lack of appreciation and capacity on the part of one man and the developed appreciation and enlarged capacity of the other.

"Earth is crammed with Heaven,  
And every bush afire with God,  
But only those who see take off their  
shoes

The rest sit around and pluck  
blackberries."

This great principle is no less true and applicable in the realm of human and divine relations. Let me talk for a minute to the young; soon you will be back on campuses and in halls of learning; you will have the opportunities to know and be friends with the living and the dead. What will be the limitation of these relationships? It will be your lack of capacity and your inhospitable spirit to ideas and persons of the past and the present. Sometime ago, a friend of mine quoted a nursery rhyme with devastating effect. Listen,

"Pussy cat, pussy cat, where have you  
been?

I've been to London to visit the  
queen.

Pussy cat, Pussy cat, what did you  
there?

I chased a little mouse under her  
chair."

My friend was disturbed about that! And well he might have been for there was Buckingham Palace, Westminster Ab-

bey, St. Paul's Cathedral, London Bridge, St. Martin's-In-The-Field, the haunts of Dickens and the homes of the Brownings. What did that cat do? She chased a little mouse under the chair; she did just what she would have done at home! And, that is just what many of you students will do as you enter the halls of learning. That nursery rhyme has been parodied to fit you.

"Joe College, Joe College, where have  
you been?

I've been to college where things  
can be seen.

Joe College, Joe College, what did you  
there?

I followed a routine of thinking  
bare."

Shame on you! You do not need to do that sort of thing! You can crawl under the skins of the great of the ages. You can see the world through the eye of soldier, poet and philosopher. You can see that history is really HIS-STORY. You can become a part of all that you have met and you can meet the best. You can be true and honest though the heavens fall. You can be clean and noble in the midst of any Sodom. You can be true to the royal in yourself, chaperones or no chaperones.

Now, let me drive down three  
pegs and tie this truth to them.

First, if we are to rid ourselves of these earth-bound limitations and make the most of Heaven's abundant resources we must recognize our need. We

must see that the creditors are at our door, even as they were at the door of the poor woman in our story. We must see that these creditors mean business; they are not making a social call; they will take the dearest things in this world that we have if we do not pay. Does someone say, "Come now, preacher, don't be dramatic! No creditor is going to take my children and sell them into slavery!"

And I ask, "Are you so sure about that, now?"

Do you think that you are able to keep and protect them against the bill collectors of pressure, temptation and sin? Or is there something that God must do for you and through you? It may be that I speak to some father and mother who know, and know with pain, whereof I speak. There was a time when you felt so very safe and sure about that child; you knew that your love and care and home were all that were needed. Other parents might have problems but not you. Today you are not so sure.

### LOST IDEALS

Or, again, what about your own ideals, principles, convictions. They were clear and bright enough at one time. No young Galahad ever went forth in search of the Holy Grail with more hope and higher dreams than you. Today, well, today you

are not so sure. Business is business, everybody is doing it, competition is fierce, the demand is that you run with the herd, life is a game and to get ahead you have to play ball.

But, why go on with this painful analysis? You know, and God knows, that this sermon has your own name and address on it! You know the old spiritual was everlastingly right when it said that it was not your mother nor your brother but you who are standing in desperate need of prayer. Well, I have good news for you today, my brother, my sister. That recognition of need is the first step in the direction of God's resources. If the creditors are at your door, so be it. Take another step.

In the second place, if the resources of God are to become available to our need we must accept some responsibilities. The blame for our present plight is our own; no more alibis, excuses, rationalizing. The fault lies at our door, not God's. The limitation is from earth's side, not Heaven's. When the father came to Jesus asking for help for his epileptic boy, he said to Jesus, "If you can do anything have mercy on us." As quick as a flash Jesus came back, "If you can, all things are possible to him who believeth" (Mark 9: 23). As if to say; you have the if in the wrong place. It is not if I can; it is if you will. Heaven

is ready, able and willing. But, what about you? Are you willing to be God's man that your child may be God blessed?

Attention has been called to the analogy in the financial world. Sometimes when an estate is being settled the administrator is faced with these facts. Here is what these stocks and bonds are worth on the books and here is what they are worth on the market today. Frequently a great gulf divides. You may have a whole fistful of stocks on a gold mine; those stocks may be listed on the books at one hundred dollars each. But, when you check the market value, you may find that the stocks are not worth the paper they are printed on. Sometimes the situation is reversed, of course. Sometimes the stock is worth more than its book value.

### BIBLE LISTINGS

Now, I ask, how do your Christian resources compare with Bible listings? Listen:

"My God shall supply all your needs," is that market for you or is it just the Book's listing?

"I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me," Book or market?

"The things that I do shall you do and greater things

than these shall you do because I go to the Father," Book or market value?

"All things are yours and you are Christ's and Christ is God's." That's the Bible's market; is it yours?

"It is no longer I that live but Christ liveth in me," the Book or the market?

There is a third peg that I would like to drive down. If we are to claim these resources we must realize that it rests upon the individual. We do not have to wait until everyone sees this as we see it; we do not have to wait until the environment is just right; we do not wait until it is easy; this is a personal, intimate, individual matter. It is the old command that came to Simon Peter by the sea of Galilee, "Follow THOU me." Will you do it?

It is all up to you—you there in your home, in your business, at the office, at work or at play—you there in the living room, bedroom, kitchen or yard—you there in the car on the highway—you in the boat on the lake or river—it is all up to you. You may turn to God *now* for cleansing from sin, for an infilling of his fulness for your emptiness.

May God move you to let Him do this mighty thing in you, to you, for you and through you this day is my prayer.

This sermon was preached on The Baptist Hour on September 4. A fuller discussion of this theme may be found in Dr. Pearce's book, *The Window Sill of Heaven*, published by Broadman Press, Nashville, Tennessee.