

## "FROM WEAKNESS TO STRENGTH"

### INTRODUCTION

All of us experience moments of discouragement. I suppose it would be strange if it were not so. For where there is human endeavor, there is also occasional failure. And where there is occasional failure, there is bound to be some discouragement. Discouragement may result from several different factors. On the one hand it may spring from the fear that we have not done as well as we might have done. Or it may grow out of the realization that we have lost something which we treasured. Or worse still, it may result from a head on collision with a conspiracy of circumstances over which we have had very little control. Naturally and rightfully we have these moments of discouragement. However those among us who are spiritually healthy quickly rebound from such moods and in time come to see things in a more pleasant perspective.

It is when discouragement becomes chronic that we need to be concerned about ourselves. We find that Jesus had something to say to people with whom discouragement was a sort of cankering distress. To those who were discouraged about their immediate circumstances, he said: "Do not be anxious for the morrow - what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, or what ye shall put on - your Heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things" And to others who were discouraged about the future, he said: "Lift up your eyes unto the fields, for they are white unto the harvest"

And then, of course, there were those who were painfully discouraged about themselves and what their lives were adding up to. To them Our Lord said: "With God all things are possible". Remember how it came about. It all happened when a young man approached him. The young man was cultured; he was in earnest; he was well to do; and he came with a searching question. He wanted to know what he must do to share in the kingdom of God. And in blunt and forceful language Jesus told him that he must rid himself of whatever it was that stood in the way of sincere discipleship. It was as simple as that. But it was not simple to the young man. To him it seemed an unreasonable demand. And surprisingly enough it seemed unreasonable to the disciples of Jesus. They were astonished. And looking at the retreating figure of this young man, they asked Jesus, "Well then Lord, who is it that can be saved?" Jesus silenced them with words which you and I ought never to forget: "With men it is impossible, but with God all things are possible". You might say it's as though he were saying "The trouble with this young man is that he is seeking to do it all by himself".

### DEVELOPMENT

"With men it is impossible, but with God all things are possible". You're familiar with these words. For years we have used them as a doxology. But I wonder, if deep down in our hearts, we really believe them. There is nothing that God cannot do. I think we could sue these words to greater advantage than we do in our lives. Suppose we draw closer to them and center our thoughts around them. For instance, here is a young man, a fine product of the present time - educated, energetic, cultured. But he seems to be continually downcast, discouraged, frustrated

by his lot in life. We see his likes on the streets, or he works by our side. For one thing, he'll tell you that he's discouraged about the state of affairs in the world - upset by the headlines - the world doesn't seem to offer him a very comforting future. But even more than this, he's discouraged about himself. He works hard, but he never seems to get anywhere. He tries, but he never seems to succeed. He makes money, but he has nothing to show for it. He wants to get along with people, but he just can't seem to agree with anyone. He wants to be loved and liked, but he just doesn't seem to realize success in this area. He's discouraged. He comes to picture himself as a complete failure. "What's the use of trying" he'll say to you. "I'm just not worth anything. It's impossible"

Now it's to such a person that Jesus says, "Hold on. Wait a minute now. You can't do it all by yourself. And remember you're not alone in this. You need the help of Him who is above and beyond us all. With God all things are possible. It's a matter of companionship. What one cannot do, two can. With him, with his help, we can always accomplish a great deal more than we can by ourselves."

Actually when you come right down to it, it is beyond words to describe what we can do when we do it with God. And how revealing the Bible is in this matter. For instance, here is Moses, standing before a seemingly impossible task, saying, "Lord, I just can't do this. I am slow of speech, and I have a slow tongue." But you know the story of Moses and what took place when he did what he had to do with God. Or take the case of Peter, denying his Lord. You know what happened to this stumbling and fumbling man when he really began to work hand in hand with the Lord. The last time we see him there is not a bit of weakness about him. All of the uncertainty is gone. He knows what he wants - whom he defends - how to die. Moses, Peter - the Bible is full of them - men and women who have moved from weakness to strength when they began to work hand in hand with God. It is a matter of companionship. What one cannot do, two can.

And here you and I are. It is as though God were saying to us, "You count. Whatever your talents, you count. Whatever your strength or your weakness, you count for something" It is as though Jesus were speaking across twenty centuries saying, "With God you can do anything". And how this sets our hearts to singing with new hope. See how God leads us from weakness to strength.

HE HELPS US TO BELIEVE THAT A SMALL BEGINNING MAY HAVE A GREAT ENDING

ending. It's strange how some of us have come to think lowly of small things and small beginnings. We need to be reminded that small things, small beginnings are important. People today want to start at the top, at the other end. Too many can't see the value of the discipline of climbing round by round up the ladder; they don't want the penalty of hard work and much learning and practical experience. Not for them the discipline of disappointments and the drudgery of small and humble tasks.

For one thing, he helps us to believe that a small beginning may have a great

Once upon a time there was a man who in his search for literary material came upon all sorts of legends and historical gossip. The material was scant. It was poorly told and when first seen appeared to be wholly incredible, usually ending in mass murder. With literary skill and an uncanny insight into human nature, this man took these stories and breathed life and reality into them. The names of these stories? Hamlet, Macbeth, King John, King Lear. It's something of the same sort of thing with us. Just as Shakespeare breathed life into those old legends, so God breathes new life and hope and encouragement into the hearts of those who take the trouble to get close to him. With God we can do anything. He helps us to see that small things are always cradled in possibility and covered with the mantle of the future. And how much Jesus made of that. A woman finds her lost coin and an entire town sings and dances and rejoices. A sinner repents and there is joy in heaven. A cup of cold water pressed to parching lips, and words which sound like a triumph song, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these, my brethren, ye have done it unto me". So small a beginning but so great an ending.

#### SOMETHING TO LIVE FOR

In the second place, we move from weakness to strength whenever we find something to live for. We do not have to be giants, either in mind or in body, to live for something great and good. All a man needs is a great heart. Every man and every woman can have a cause and live for it. A man can live by the work of his hands and he can live by the work of his mind. He can live by his business, but he cannot or he ought not to live for his business. If he does, something in him will die. He cannot live for the work he does. If he does, he will have nothing to die for.

Each of us can find something to live for - something which we cannot buy and cannot sell, something which has no monetary value because it is too valuable. When we stop to look at those whose lives have really mattered, women like Jane Adams, Madame Curie - men like Lincoln, Gandhi, Schweitzer, we soon discover that they were not civic minded in our common sense of the word but rather that they were dedicated people, in love with a cause. Something to live for. What do you live for?

#### INVOLVED IN THE STREAM OF LIFE ABOUT US

And then in the third place, we move from weakness to strength when we become involved in the stream of life about us. There are times I think when all of us tend to live as though we were passengers on a tourist train. Everything we see is interesting and exciting, but nothing really concerns us. It is merely something to talk about when we get back home. This, I think, tends to be very true with people like ourselves who make their homes in this metropolitan community. We live here in the city, but we're not vitally concerned with community affairs. We prefer not to become involved in organizations that have civic improvement in mind. There is wrong doing, vice, corruption, delinquency. We do nothing. Perhaps we send a donation of a dollar or two and feel we've done our part. So often that is where our responsibility ends. There are honest men who seek our aid and who need our support. We're silent, uncommitted, uninvolved. Sitting on the side lines, we want no part of it. Sometimes it seems to me

that Christ must look down upon us as Jeremiah looked at the uncaring, heedless throngs of his time and said, "Is it nothing to you all ye who pass by"

Nothing cuts more sharply into our complacency than those words from the crucifixion story: "They sat and watched him there". People yawning, dumbly watching a tragedy and not wanting to become involved; Pilate didn't want to become involved, so with a touch of the dramatic, he washed his hands. So vice prospers, sin grows mountain high, young minds are befouled, our society becomes more and more corrupt, America grows weak within, because people - respectable Christian people, people like you and me, do not want to become involved. We move from weakness to strength when we become involved in the stream of events.

CONCLUSION Moving from weakness to strength. From discouragement to encouragement. When Christ takes hold of us, he reminds us that with God all things can be done. You ask where does a person begin. How does one go about it. What is the first step. It is not really difficult. For is he not waiting to come into our hearts, in our lives. Is he not, in a sense, in our hands. For better or worse, at our mercy. We have this treasure, as Paul says, in earthen vessels. The very thought of it. God in our hands - at our mercy. To neglect him or to use him. It's up to you. How long has it been since you have let him rule your life - to listen for a voice beyond your own voice, to live in harmony with a will beyond your own will.

LET US PRAY: O Thou who are beyond and yet within the stream of events which so quickly pass by, open our eyes that we may see thee. If we cannot reach thee, tell us that there are others who do, so that we may be steadied and prepared to meet whatever happens to us without panic, knowing that within this stream of life, Thou art always ready to help. Amen