

"REACHING FOR A NEW PLATEAU"

INTRODUCTION Life seems to be a series of plateaus. Growth and development seem to occur in infrequent, good-sized steps up to a new level, and then there seem to be long periods of leveling off. We find this in so many areas of human achievement - in science, even in fashion...which are plateaus that sometimes some of us don't understand very well.

At a certain crossroads in the White Mountains of New Hampshire where the Spring thaw is apt to make travel very difficult...almost impossible...there was a big sign fastened to a tree which said, "Take care which rut you choose, because you may be in it for the next twenty miles". Well....we...

We all get into "ruts". I think that one of man's biggest problems is that he sometimes fails to recognize that he is a spiritual being with infinite capacities for growth and accomplishment within him. He doesn't have to stay in same "rut"...on the same plateau. There are times when he timidly takes his place on the next higher level, almost feeling that perhaps he really doesn't belong there. Reaching for a new plateau - this is what I want to talk to you about this morning for several minutes. Let me work into it by saying this....

DEVELOPMENT I've often felt that one of the most unfortunate phases of classical, Christian theology is in the idea of the "debasement" of man, that man has "fallen" from his original, grand state. The truth is that man has always been advancing as a race, slowly but always improving...but his progress has been greatly hampered by this belittling idea - the total depravity or sinfulness of man's nature.

But the God-man never fell. It is only the sin-man that has fallen. And what is sin, but the frustration of human potentiality, "missing the mark", alienation from God. It is man's inferior way of looking at himself, his self-depreciation that has often crippled him. The old theology taught us to belittle ourselves, to think of ourselves as incurable sinners, as worms in the dust. That pessimistic interpretation of man doesn't do much for him. Far better it is to think of man made in the image of God, "a little lower than the angels" said the Psalmist, to assert his divinity rather than his "total depravity. He was made erect so that he could stand up and look everything and anything in the face.

VICTIMS INSTEAD OF MASTERS In our modern life we are apt to allow ourselves to become enmeshed in things trivial compared with the great truths of life. We allow ourselves to be mentally and thereby physically depleted, by the fast pace of life, until we are pre-occupied with too many things depleting us, too few "soul-changing" and "soul-charging" things. It is when we are spiritually undernourished that we find our progress in life levels off and find ourselves on a plateau where the things we desire and need are high, seemingly beyond us. So, we settle into a rut...becoming ~~victim~~ instead of the master of our circumstances..."drifting to and fro" on a plateau!

In time, we become obsessed with the idea that the next higher plateau is a high mountain beyond our reach. "It's impossible" we say to ourselves. "Beyond our abilities". "I can't do it". This habit of dwelling on difficulties and magnifying them weakens character and it paralyzes the initiative in such a way as to hinder us from ever darking and attempting to undertake some new thing.

If the Alps had looked so formidable to Napoleon as they did to his advisors and counselors he never would have crossed them in mid-Winter. Remember what Napoleon said, "There are no Alps. There shall be no Alps". In his mind, there were no barriers. It reminds me of the enthusiastic golfer playing in the rain. "What rain" says he to his wife.

JESUS AND MOUNTAINS Jesus said,

"If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move hence to yonder place', and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you".

This is a remarkable statement, a remarkable claim. "You will say to this mountain, 'Move....to yonder place'...and it will move". There is irresistible force and a powerful, compelling affirmative expressed with unflinching determination. Whatever may be the mountains in your life, the obstacles that keep you from rising to the next higher plateau, say to those things, "move... move to yonder place". Believe it. There is a law, the truth and the force of which we are just beginning to intelligently grasp, and it can be stated like this:

"There is something in the universe that always responds to brave, intrepid thought. To aspire toward a higher level of life, of achievement, is the first essential of all attainment."

REACHING FOR THAT NEW PLATEAU

We need to realize that reaching for a new plateau is sometimes reaching out of the rut of human consciousness. So, we are often resisted, criticized, and even condemned. But we must press on with courage. Jesus himself was resisted and even crucified because He was a revolutionary, challenging some old ideas and old ways. Down the ages the race of man has taken periodic steps upward to new plateaus of life by reason of the fact that occasionally a great thinker or spiritual leader was let loose on the planet, one who refused to dwell in the shadows of doubt and limitation. Such persons dreamed expansively and they believed their dreams could be achieved. They refused to listen to those voices who have said, "it can't be done....you'll never do it".

Some years ago a clerk in the Patent Office turned in his resignation. It was an interesting document touched with pathos. He found the work congenial. He said he was sorry to leave, but his conscience would not allow him to continue to draw pay under false pretenses since there was nothing left to invent. The year of his resignation was 1833.

Contrast that with this word from George Bernard Shaw. He once wrote,

"The only man who behaves sensibly is my tailor; he takes my measure anew each time he sees me, while all the rest go on with their ~~only~~ measurements, and expect me to fit them". ~~OLD~~

Reaching for new plateaus - in whatever field we may be. Thoreau has an appealing word in his classic, Walden.

"If one advances confidently in the direction of

his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours. He will put something behind. He will pass an invisible boundary. New, universal and more liberal laws will begin to establish themselves around and within him, or the old laws be expanded and interpreted in his favor in a more liberal sense, and he will live with the license of a higher order of being."

THREE STEPS Now putting this law of creative achievement through faith into a one-two-three technique as Thoreau suggests would probably come out looking something like this.

First, envision the thing you want. Dream big your "impossible dream". Get a mental picture or conception of it. Get in clear in your mind. See yourself as doing it and being it.

Secondly, have faith in that dream and begin to act on that faith. Believe that you can do this thing. Believe in the possibility that is made yours because of the all possibility of the spirit of God within you, at work inside of you, nourishing you.

And third, press on in perseverance - in determination, courage and will toward the achievement of that goal. Who was it who said, "Quitters never win; winners never quit". Sounds like Vince Lombardi. And remember what the Duke of Wellington offered as the explanation for the victory of the British over the French at Waterloo.

"The British soldiers are not braver than their enemies; they are simply braver five minutes longer".

Thoreau said you will come to live "with the license of a higher order of being". Anytime anyone has broken through the barrier of limitation, he has come to live with the license of a higher order of being. So it is in medicine, science, psychology, human relations, sports - all across the board in man's experience in this world.

ONE THING NEEDFUL But one thing is certain - before you can achieve a higher plateau of accomplishment, you must come to dwell in that place in your imagination. As I said last week, practice some "imagineering". You must come to see yourself as doing and being that which you desire. Said Browning in that unforgettable line,

"A man's reach should exceed his grasp,
else what's a heaven for..."

Dream largely, envision widely, reach out in confidence to entertain the possibility of a new plateau in your life. Walk confidently in the direction of that dream. Carry that word of Virgil, "They can because they think they can!"

FAITH Resolve to get on the side of the Master of Life by knowing, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me". You know when Jesus used the word faith, "according to your faith be it done to you", He used it in the sense of though. As he used the word "faith", it is nothing more or less than a

clear-cut positive thought, that when set into operation and held to becomes dynamic and formative. Mind you, faith doesn't keep us from meeting crises, for life is filled with change and change means growth and adjustment. Faith is brave, intrepid thought which draws on the forces of the universe for guidance and protection. Faith is courage that has said its prayers!

A NEW SEASON For some this new season may mean stretching and reaching for a new plateau in life. Move out to meet it. Say to that mountain of limitation that may be there - "move to yonder place". Be aware of the spirituality of your own life. Take that next step looking up and out beyond the appearances of life's changing conditions to the unchanging Reality behind it all. Yes, get on the side of the Master of Life, remembering His word that "all things are possible to them that believe!"

This is the "truth" that Jesus proclaimed. We need to hear it. We need to carry it with us, putting it in that place of our lives where we keep the things that are most important....to be taken out and remembered when the going gets tough. Ask yourself in these quiet moments: are you going to reach for that new plateau....or are you going to settle for the same old rut that you've been in for some time. The choice is yours. I close with these beautiful and inspiring lines of Edna St. Vincent Millay:

"The world stand out on either side,
No wider than the heart is wide.
Above the world is stretched the sky,
No higher than the soul is high.
The heart can push the sea and land,
Farther away on either hand.

The soul can split the sky in two,
And let the face of God shine through".

LET US PRAY Grant us, Lord, that we have heard with our ears this hour, we may believe in our hearts. And what we believe in our hearts, we may now practice faithfully in our lives. In the spirit of Christ who said, All things are possible to them that believe". Amen.