

## THE GREATEST SAYING IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

TEXT: "He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8)

INTRODUCTION George Adam Smith, who devoted the major part of his life to Biblical studies, called that particular verse of scripture the greatest saying in the Old Testament. He saw in it the best epitome of true religion to be found between the books of Genesis and Malachi. It is a simple, comprehensive statement of what God expects of you and me and of all men everywhere. It makes unmistakably clear that religion and morality are linked to each other. Religion, that is, the inner life of the soul, and morality, that is, the outer life of conduct, are not separate, distinct entities but are one and indivisible.

TO DO JUSTICE "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice". There is nothing ambiguous about that. It is as explicit as it is emphatic. The whole stress is on action, on conduct rather than creed, on fair dealing not pious professions. So often we come across people who admire justice in the abstract, as an ideal, but who fall short in specific life situations, like the woman about whom Gogol, the Russian playwright tells, who wept her eyes out at a play depicting the miseries of the poverty stricken peasants but left her coachman all through the performance sitting in the winter cold on the open box seat of her carriage, and stormed at him on the way home over some minor if not fancied misdemeanor. Everybody recognizes justice as one of the cardinal virtues but actuality has to be put into what would otherwise be an abstraction. No good comes of merely admiring justice; justice has to be done.

Long ago Socrates defined justice as giving to everyone what is his own, what is his due. Harry Emerson Fosdick, in one of his earliest books, "The Meaning of Service" worked out in practical detail what this ought to involve for us as individuals. Let me read it to you:

"Justice says: you are a white man. Then put yourself in the place of the Negro whose father was freed when he was a youth, and whose great, great, great grandfather was brought over against his will on a slave ship from Africa, and see from the inside, how the problem of this man's life must appear to him. You are an American. Put yourself in the place of Great Britain, and France, and Italy and Japan and China, and those who but lately were our enemies, to see how this tangled world's problems must appear to them. You are a laboring man. Put yourself in the place of the employer, and see from his angle the perplexing problems of our economic life. You are an employer. Then put yourself in the place of the laboring man, to see how life must appear to him"

report" he said. Later he sent for the nurse and read to her the report he had prepared. She listened to it in pitiful silence. A nervous tremor in her cheek, she was half-fainting from shame and misery. "Have you anything to say?" Cronin asked. She shook her head and then suddenly stammered "Give me another chance".

The idea had never even occurred to Cronin. She must pay for what she had done. He dismissed her curtly and signed the report. But he never slept, for all through the night - echoing, drumming in his head, were the words: "Give me another chance". In the morning he tore up the report. That was a long time ago. We are told that this same student nurse who had erred so fatally later became the matron of the largest children's hospital in Wales. Her career was a model of service and devotion. She was worshipped and loved by the children who came under her care.

TO WALK HUMBLY WITH YOUR GOD

"What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God"

Humility has often been misunderstood and on occasion misrepresented. It does not mean self-disparagement or the refusal to accept responsibilities for which we are fitted. It does not mean doubting our own capacities or hesitating to voice our own convictions. I think that the distinguishing mark of the genuinely humble person is his complete freedom from self-consciousness. The proud are encased in egoism. They monopolize the conversation, chatter endlessly about themselves and their doings, hear little of what is said to them, and are so pathetically athirst for compliments that they go out of their way to invite them. But on the other hand, the truly humble - and this is the title to their greatness - never court observation; they shun any kind of personal advertisement; their central thought is not of themselves but of their work - the causes to which they are committed, the service they can render to their friends and fellow human beings.

Nobody can put on Christian humility. It's something you feel - feel only because of the greatness and holiness of God. Some time ago someone loaned me a copy of Harry Golden's "Only In America". Remember the first chapter in it; it's called, "Why I Never Bawl Out a Waitress" It begins: "I have a rule against registering complaints in a restaurant; because I know that there are at least four billion suns in the Milky Way - which is only one galaxy" He goes on to speak of there being billions of galaxies; and winds up, "When you think of all this, it's pretty silly to worry whether the waitress brought you string beans instead of lima beans" And we could go on and add, and yes it's pretty to silly worry about some of those other things that we tend to worry about. Pride is inevitable, I should think, for people who have no God. But humility is a natural outlook for those who believe in Him, and know of his greatness, and who are thankful to Him for sending Christ into the world.

It has been said that "The true way to be humble is not to stoop till you are smaller than yourself, but to stand at your full height against some higher nature that will show you what the real smallness of your greatest goodness is" As one of the saints put it, the secret of humility is "always to be looking up" - not looking

in at what we are pleased to think of our merits and virtues; not looking out on our neighbors with critical and censorious eyes; but always looking up to One in whose sight we are all sinners, to One who for us and for our salvation long ago made Himself of no reputation, took upon Himself the form of a servant, and humbled Himself even unto the death of the Cross.

"He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God"

LET US PRAY:

Accept these thoughts, O God, and lead us out into a greater appreciation and understanding of the truth.

Hear us when we pray for all the peoples of the earth, especially for those who are hungry, homeless, exploited, enslaved. Break down, we beseech Thee, the barriers which keep mankind apart. And foster throughout the world every movement which unites men and women in common endeavors, in brotherhood and goodwill.

We ask this in the spirit of Jesus Christ. Amen