

"THE HIGH ROAD AND THE LOW ROAD"

INTRODUCTION

The sermon this morning goes back to a sermon that I preached four weeks ago entitled "Taking The High Road". Those of you who were here that Sunday will recall that I tried to point up the fact that running through every problem situation in life are two solutions: a high grade solution and a low grade solution. You'll recall that my closing sentence was something like this: "Try the high road (i.e. the high grade solution). For if you do you'll discover in the long run, as so many others have discovered, that it will make all the difference in the world". This sermon is something of a footnote to that sermon of four weeks ago. To be sure, it's a rather lengthy footnote. It's intended for all those who have tried this high road, and have failed. It's for the married woman who has tried gallantly to make a go of her marriage, but who finally comes to the point where she honestly feels that she must travel the low road of divorce. It's for the couple that decides to take in the mother in law, and who after some time come to the realization that things are not working out successfully, and that other arrangements must be made. In a sense, it's for all those people who have tried honestly and seriously to cope with a situation in the highest and best terms that they know of, but who eventually come to the point where they feel they must travel the low road. I must say in all honesty to you that these people were on my mind several weeks ago, but I didn't want to blunt the edge of what I was saying by qualifying it. This, however, I would do this morning.

REASONS FOR FAILURE

Now I think it always helps when we have failed at anything in life to know and to try to understand the reasons for our failure. This often helps us to avoid experiencing failure a second time. In this sort of thing there are usually three reasons involved as to why we failed, and I'll just touch upon them briefly.

To begin with, we may have failed because we weren't willing to accept outside help. I tried to make it clear to you in the sermon four weeks ago, that if a person choses to travel the high road, then in all probability he will need some kind of outside help. In my own mind, I would say that there are two sources of outside help. There are people, and there is God. Both are needed. Some people fail in their effort to take the high road because they're too proud to seek outside help. Some people fail because they're too shy to reveal their weaknesses and shortcomings to a counsellor, a doctor, a psychiatrist, or a minister. They would rather keep their weaknesses a secret. And then there are some cases where people do not know how to turn to God. They're not skilled in the way of prayer, meditation, or creative silence. And do deprived of these infinite resources and the help them comes to men when they get down on their knees in prayer, they experience failure in their attempt to travel the high road.

The second reason for failure may grow out of the fact that they did not have the help and the cooperation of those immediately concerned in their problem. Once again in referring to the sermon of four weeks ago, you'll remember that I suggested that if you chose to take the high road, shall we say, through a domestic problem, then your husband or your wife will have to be the kind of person who will take that high road gladly with you.

The third reason for failure, and perhaps the most significant one, rests in the fact that you may have some physical defect or some condition

responsible for your failure. You know as well as I do that there are some people who have a nervous system that can stand almost anything. There are some people who can take a great amount of stress, strain and pressure. There are some people who apparently are gifted with a temperament that can adjust or attune itself to almost any situation. On the other hand, some people do not have this kind of temperament. I think it's only fair to say that we ought to make some allowance for the physical weaknesses and emotional shortcomings of people, allowance, that is, for some of these things that we are not directly responsible for. But, just let me add this one word of caution (and it's an important word of caution), let others make these allowances for your own shortcomings, and you get into the habit of making allowances for the physical weaknesses and emotional shortcomings of others. Don't run the risk of excusing yourself on the basis that your nervous system is just too frail or too delicate to stand the strain of doing something that you secretly don't want to do anyway!

HIGH ROAD IS NOT ALWAYS THE SAME. CHANGES WITH CHANGING CIRCUMSTANCES.....

Now let me move on and say this to you. Your failure may not be as serious as it once appeared to you to be. And for this reason. I think

the high road, or if you will, the high grade solution is not always the same in every situation. That is, this high road sometimes changes and shifts with changing circumstances. It's not a form of rationalization mind you, but simply a case of facing the facts. The roads that the automobiles travel along are fixed and usually do not change. The low road around a mountain is essentially the same road. The high road over it is always the same road. But it's not true with the roads that we travel in life. What appears to be the high road in the beginning may turn out in the long run to be the low road. The high road is not always the same. It changes with changing circumstances. This may sound confusing to you, and you may not agree. Perhaps an illustration will help to bring out the meaning of this statement.

I think we can see this idea exemplified in the life of our Lord. You're recall that in the early days of his ministry Jesus returned to Nazareth and preached to the people in his hometown. He wasn't accepted. Perhaps it was a case of jealousy among the town people, the kind of jealousy that exists when a hometown boy makes good and then goes back home. Remember how they tried to destroy him by taking him to the edge of a cliff and throwing him over it. But Jesus somehow managed to escape. The high road for him on this occasion was for him to escape and to live. The time had not yet come when he should die. But eventually the time did come. It came one or two years later. On this occasion, he was sure that the only way for him was the high road of complete obedience to the cross. To have escaped at this time would have been for him to follow the low road of personal safety and self concern. What appeared for him in the beginning to be the high road later turned out to be the low road. The high road changes under changing circumstances. It does not always lead in the same direction.

Perhaps it would be helpful to see this principle in operation in one or two specific cases. Let's take the case of a woman who after a period of time realizes that her marriage is not working out. The husband and wife are not compatible. They're not getting along. There is tension and friction and very little love. The woman is very idealistic and is determined to avoid the low road of divorce even

though the husband feels that it might be the solution. In this case, it happens that a child is involved. And for the sake of the child, the wife feels it best to avoid the low road. The tension continues to exist. The home atmosphere is not good. Finally the woman comes to the conclusion that it would be better for them to separate and go there own separate ways rather than subject the child to the crippling atmosphere existing in that home. At this time, the high road would be to enter the divorce court, and in a sense, make the most out of a poor situation.

Let's take another situation. This one's entirely different. The person is on a new job and is anxious to do everything there is to do in connection with that job. It's a big job. He tries to meet every need. He tries to do his work with a thoroughness that will meet the approval of both men and God. But he gradually comes to see that he has the strength and the capacity to do only a little and to do it well. In the beginning his high road was to try to do everything. His high road changed. What appeared to be the high road in the beginning later became the low road.

In all of this, I'm trying to drive home the idea that we must come to terms with the facts of a situation. There comes a time when we must, in all honesty to ourselves and to others, accomodate ourselves to those facts. It may be a case of making the most out of a poor situation. To put it in a phrase, there may come a time when the highest thing we can do is to travel the low road, but to travel it in such a way as to make it a high road!

WHEN DOES THE TIME
COME TO TAKE THIS
LOW ROAD.....

There is one question that this brings up, and I imagine that some of you already on your lips, and it's this: how do you know when that time comes? I think we ought to face

this question. I'm really not too sure when it comes, but I will say this that it doesn't come quite as often as we think it comes. I think all of us have greater resources for the high road than we think we have. I don't want you to get the idea that I'm taking back some of the things that I said in the other sermon. As I said before, most of the time we expect to little of ourselves. Most of the time, we're too eager and ready to accept the counsel of our friends which encourages us to take the low road. The time, I feel, does not come very often when we have to make this change and say to ourselves:

"Well...what I thought was the high road seems to be no longer the high road, and so I must take a different course."

One of the ways that all of us can tell when the time comes is to keep in mind this principle. The HIGH ROAD is always the way of fulness of life for all concerned, not physical existence, but richness of life...complete spiritual and physical fulfillment. When you have to decide between two possible ways the chances are that the high way will always be the way which brings the fullest life for the greatest number of people. Not for yourself necessarily. I'm always concerned about our habit of looking out for ourselves in these situations. It is natural to do it, but we do not need to and we do better when we do not. Our business is to think about the lives of other people.

Take the case once again of the family that decides to open the doors of the home and take in the mother in law. If after years of trying to make the situation work out the wife is neurotic, the child delinquent, and the father unhappy then the chances are that that is not the high road any longer because it is not producing fullness of life for anybody. Other arrangements ought to be made.

And look once again at Jesus. He knew that to die in Galilee in those early days would be to throw his life away. People had not yet heard his message. He had not done his work. Nothing would have been accomplished. He also knew that when it came to Calvary, ^{But} to die would be to give his life away, to give life to everybody, to make life available in an abundant, rich, full way to the whole world. And therefore he knew that that was the high road for him to take at that time.

I would like to end this sermon as I did the sermon of four weeks ago by repeating the appeal as strongly as I can to you. When you are facing a problem through which there are two ways, try the high road. As our Lord once said to his disciples:

"Launch out into the deep and let
down your nets."

But I should like to add this: if, when you sincerely launch out into the deep you find that your lungs are poor and your stroke is weak, then you had better put in for the shallower water near the shore.

The conclusion of it is, and this I think is hard for some of us to accept, that sometimes the most heroic thing that you can do is the humiliating thing. Sometimes the high road may be the low road in your own estimation and in the judgment of the world. And you have to know in yourself that you are traveling it because at the time it is the best and the highest and the finest thing you can do under the circumstances. It is the way of life for all concerned.

See There! - God's signpost standing at the ways
Which every man of his free will must go -
Up the steep hill - or down the winding ways -
One or the other every man must go.

He forces no man, each must choose his way,
And as he chooses so the end will be;
One went in front to point the Perfect Way,
Who follows fears not where the end will be.

Let us pray:

In the midst of our confusion, O God, show us thy way. When we tray the high way and meet defeat, save us from despair and disappointment. Give us the strength to take the lower road in such a way that other people traveling it will be lifted up to new heights. We remember in all these things how Jesus went the high way, first through life and then through death. Amen

See there! God's signpost standing at the
ways
Which every man of his own free will must
go.

Up the steep hill - or down the winding
ways...

One or the other each man must go.

He forces no man, each must choose his way
And as he chooses so the end will be
One went in front to point the perfect way
Who follows fears not where the end will
be.