

"THE RESOURCES OF THE INNER LIFE"

INTRODUCTION

Henry Drummond once wrote this about the life of Christ: "Christ's life outwardly was one of the most troubled lives that was ever lived.....but his inner life was a sea of glass"

Henry Drummond, as most of you know, was a 19th century Scotsman converted by Dwight L. Moody to the Christian religion. About 1890, he wrote a little book called The Greatest Thing in the World - a book which I venture to say has been widely read by many English speaking Christians. And yet one wonders whether Henry Drummond, with all his insight and understanding of the life of Christ, had sufficient accessibility to the inner life of Jesus to suggest that it was always as smooth as a sea of glass.

I am not prepared to answer that question. However, this we do know beyond any shadow of doubt - that Jesus did move through the storms that raged around him with a remarkable steadiness.

ONE EXAMPLE

Remember the time early in his public ministry when he was invited to read the lesson in the synagogue of his hometown. He read from the Book of Isaiah, and then he was asked to comment on the meaning of what he had read. Apparently the people were pleased with the way he read the passage of scripture, but when he began to tell them what it meant - when he began to try to open their eyes to the meaning of the present moment and to enlarge their horizons, they, like many people, preferred to be small, preferred to remain blind. They were filled with anger; they thrust him out; they led him to the brow of the hill that they might cast him down headlong. Luke, in his Gospel, records this line: "But he passing through the midst of them went his way".

What was going on inside the mind of our Lord we shall never know. But this we do know. We know that when the people of his own home town turned against him, when his own life was in danger, he was not paralyzed by fear nor poisoned by doubt. He was not intimidated - he did not capitulate - he did not fight back. He went his own way - calmly, quietly, steadily. This much we know - that on this occasion and on many other occasion - he was able to ride the storm without being ridden by it. He was able to live in the midst of confusion without being confused. He was able to move through violent disturbance without being himself either disturbed or diverted.

HOW DID HE DO IT

Our question is this: how did he do it? And with that question goes another even though unspoken - can we possibly do the same.. even to a lesser degree? But first - how did he do it? How did he manage to ride the storms of life and not be ridden by them? Did he have an invisible bodyguard? Was he surrounded by a corps of guardian angels that refused to let anything touch him, anything that might endanger his life? Did he have some invisible stabilizer that kept him steady no matter how furiously the waters raged? Some there are who believe that he had this divine protection. Perhaps Luke himself thought this and when he wrote that line - "He passing through the midst of them went his way" was intending to suggest that he was protected from the hostile crowd by the aura of his divine nature. To me, however, this is not the secret of his inner steadiness.

Some may wonder if he had one of those temperaments that is not easily touched by anything or anyone around him? This might account for this unusual ability to ride the storms of life. This I can say with definite assurance: there is nothing in the story of Jesus that suggests that quality of steel. There is nothing about him that suggest a cool temperament protected by a hard shell of indifference or insensitivity or unresponsiveness. Why....everything in the story of Jesus suggests the most delicate sensitivity and the most sympathetic responsiveness.

He was in a crowd, surrounded by hundreds of people. One woman was there...behind him, in great distress. She touched his garment; he knew it! A young man, bursting with enthusiasm, ran up to him to ask what he must do to inherit eternal life, real life, the abundant life; he loved him! A city was lost in its own folly and blindness; he wept over it. In a garden at night, he was facing the supreme trial of his life; his three closest friends slept while he sweated out his agony; he was hurt by their failure. A criminal on a cross, dying beside him on his cross; his heart went out to him. This was no man of steel. This was a man who was sensitive to every thought and every movement, to every need and every desire of the people around him.

Certainly, this one thing we can say with assurance. If he could keep himself upright when the world was upside down, it was not because he kept himself out of the world. He did not live apart from the world, protected from its tragedies and all the things that make life difficult for people. He lived in the midst of it and almost deliberately exposed himself to the world's pain and suffering.

If then, Jesus did not have either divine protection or human peculiarities of temperament that enabled him to move untroubled through troubled waters, how then did he do it? The answer, I think, is to be found in the resources of his inner life.

AN OUTER LIFE AND AN INNER LIFE

And here we begin to approach the heart of this meditation. Like all of us, he had an outer life and an inner life. Actually - our life is all one piece, but for the sake of convenience when we talk about it and think about it, we have to think about it in its various aspects, and this is one convenient way to think of the experience we have every day. We - like Jesus - have an outer and an inner life.

Our outer life consists, as did his, in the things that are happening around us and to us. These things are not always favorable to us. Sometimes, indeed, they seem to be aimed directly against us. They were against him. The circumstances of his life were not always favorable to him, and many of the people with whom he lived his life were slow, ~~stupid~~, and often cruel. Sometimes with the best of intentions, they put obstacles in his way which even he could neither climb over nor circumvent.

Nor are these things in our outer life things that are always under our control - nor were they under his control. There is a story in the Gospel tradition that tells how he once stopped a storm on the Sea of Galilee and whether he actually did, we do not know for sure, but this we do know: there were some storms that he did not and could not stop. He could not stop the storm that was brewing among his own people to rebel against Rome. He could not stop the storms of selfishness that were seething inside individuals all around him; those storms he could not always stop. And when a storm of rage and envy rose against him, he could not stop it. This was his outer life - your outer life - made up primarily of the things that happen to us, not always favorable to us, and over which we do not always have control.

His inner life, on the other hand, like yours and mine, was quite different. It was the life of his thoughts - his ideas - his ideals - his beliefs - his dreams - his hopes - his ambitions - his prayers. This, you see, was a quite different life. This was a life going on inside of him. It was not entirely independent of his outer life. There were times when the physical strains overtaxed his inner life and drew heavily on his available resources. The body can and often does overdraw its account, and it so often seems that the inner life is completely at the mercy of the outer. On the other hand, sometimes the conditions of the outer life drew out of him and developed qualities of the inner life.

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What happened to him outwardly, he could not always control. If he went without eating, he was hungry and weak; and if he went without rest, he was tired and his mind was not as alert. On the other hand, what happened inside him, ~~what was going on inside him~~, was stimulated and developed by what was happening to him, as by a challenge and, as he grew in physical strength, he grew in grace and in power inwardly so that in the end he could transcend anything that happened to him outwardly.

It was the inner life that determined the shape and the quality of the outer, and that inner life was fed by streams of energy that kept it strong, so that in the end - picture this - picture Jesus at the end, having given all of his young life, all of his energy, excitement, enthusiasm and wisdom to start a new order of things that might be called the Kingdom of God. Picture him standing before Pilate - the Roman governor, unjustly accused, unmercifully deserted and abandoned by all his closest friends. When Pilate gave him a chance to answer the false accusations made against him, he stood there and (as it is recorded in the Gospel) - "Answered him to never a word; inasmuch that the governor marveled greatly". Not a word in self-defense; not a word in protest or accusation. The time for words had passed. He was the Word! It was the triumph of the inner life over the outward circumstances that threatened to wreck it. Before that foreign governor, who had no interest at all in what Jesus had been trying to do, he could stand in perfect composure, shaken not at all by the storm that was gathering, sure and steady, never more kingly than now when least a king.

INCONCLUSION

It was his inner life that enabled him to ride the storm. Our interest in the inner life of Jesus is not purely impersonal and objective. Our interest rests upon one or two facts which I shall put before you briefly at the end. One thing is this. We know from experience that life is never going to accommodate itself to us. We know from experience that there are going to be rough seas ahead. They may be in your own personal life. They may be in the social life of the world.

And we also know that when a storm comes there are some people who can rise above it and who somehow are never wrecked by it. We see this quality in some of our friends; we see it in some of the great ones of our time. What we want to know is what is it that they have in their lives that enables them to cope so effectively with the pressures of life. What resources do they have in their inner lives that enable them to rise above the circumstances of life no matter how dangerous or disastrous they may be.

On the Sunday mornings in Lent this year, we shall spend time looking at the life of Jesus with this particular thought in mind - the resources of his inner life. And as we carefully examine them we shall be thinking of them in terms of our own life.

And as we look at him, we will remember what one of his greatest followers said not long after Jesus went to the cross:

"Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day....." "This is the reason why we never collapse"

LET US PRAY

O God, draw us to thyself as we find thee in Christ Jesus; and as we think upon him and enter into the spirit of his life, may his life enter into ours that we may be steadied, ready to meet every emergency, that we may never stagger no matter how uneven the motions of the world may be, and that we may go on our way never complaining about the weather we meet or about anything that befalls us. Amen

LET US PRAY

Draw us to thyself, O God, as we find Thee revealed in the life of the man from Nazareth.

As we think upon him and enter into the spirit of his life, may his life enter into ours...

THAT we may be steadied in moments of despair and discouragement, ready to meet every emergency.

THAT we may never stagger no matter how uneven the motion of the world may be...

THAT we may go on our way never complaining about the weather we meet, or the things that befall us...

As we come to thy table this hour - Our Father - may these moments nourish our spiritual lives - and may we depart with a deeper and a stronger faith in thee - for all that is to come.

Remember Jesus - we ask this in his name.