

THE PATHWAY TO THE HIGHER LIFE

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THE words from which I wish to speak to you, you will find in Mark so, from verse 35, "And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto Him, saying, Master, we would that Thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we desire." It looks very bold, but they remembered that those were the words that Christ had used, and so they avail themselves of His promise. "And He said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you? They said unto Him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on Thy right hand, and the other on Thy left hand, in Thy glory." This last verse gives us our subject—*The way to the higher life*. Here we have two men asking for a place on the throne of glory. And we have our blessed Jesus teaching us what the real way is to the higher life. Oh, let us all yield ourselves to His teaching, and every heart say, Blessed Lord, teach me to-night!

Or, I might give as the subject of my address, *The path of consecration*. We talk so much about it. Let us to-night study in the words of Jesus, and in His presence, what the path of consecration is. And our first thought is this: *The blessing which consecration seeks*. What is that? You cannot find it put more beautifully than in the words of the Bible: "Grant unto us, that we may sit . . . on Thy right hand . . . in Thy glory." Three things they ask—nearness to Jesus; likeness to Jesus; power for Jesus.

Nearness to Jesus—is not that what your heart longs for, when you talk of consecration? Oh, if I could only be having Him all the time with me, always near, and be every day conscious of His presence! And more; they desired not only nearness to Jesus—to be with Him on the throne—but *likeness to Jesus*. This is not beyond His heart. He has promised it. But they asked not only for nearness and likeness to Jesus, but for *the very power of Jesus*, that they might use it for Him. What a blessed answer it was that they gave Jesus! It meant more than they knew. There were elements in it that were not good, but what a large answer it was to the Saviour's request, "What would ye that I should do for you?"

And Christ comes to every one of us with the same question. Come now and formulate your petition, and tell Jesus what you

want. Are you ready to whisper to Jesus as your answer, "Lord, perfect nearness to Thee; Lord, perfect likeness to Thee; Lord, perfect power for service for Thee"? Is that your heart? Are you content with the grovelling life of a man who is only just saved, who is just a Christian and nothing more? Or, do you want to aim at the very highest? Do so, my brother, and I pray God to give it you.

And now, as to the second point. The first is, the blessing that consecration seeks. The next is, *The mistakes that consecration makes*. Jesus says at once, "Ye know not what ye ask." Yes, this petition of the disciples was an ignorant one. And oh, remember that in our prayers and consecration there are often terrible mistakes, and much ignorance; but it is ever our comfort to know that Jesus spoke very kindly and tenderly to those disciples, and that for our ignorance and errors He will not cast us off.

What were their mistakes? One was that they were asking for the fruit, and the root had not been planted. They were looking above, and Christ said, as it were, "Look downward; I must have the root." A child sometimes plants a branch, with beautiful fruit upon it, at the seaside, in the sand, and makes a "garden." And we are always wanting only the fruit and the blessing, but Christ wants us to have the root deep down.

Another mistake was this: They did not remember that what they wanted was not His to give. He had not the position to give it. The Father alone could give it—to them who were prepared for it, and for whom it was prepared. How careful Christ is to honour the Father. He wants to bring us to God. He took great trouble to draw the disciples to believe in Himself, but He took infinite trouble to say, in other words, "I am only here to take you up to God." May we all learn that Christ says, "It is the Father that has got the blessing, and you must go to Him through me." Some people think that if we talk too much of God, Christ will lose His place. Brethren, Christ will then become doubly precious, for the more I long for heaven, the more I find I cannot get there without Christ. God help us to seek God in Christ!

And there was still more ignorance. They did not know that their desire for glory was *carnal*. It was mixed up with the idea of a temporal kingdom; and therefore the Saviour said, in effect, "You do not know what you are talking about." Further, there was selfishness in it. They wanted to have the best places, and be above the other disciples. "My disciples, you do not know what you ask." And, dear friends, just at the time when one is dealing more earnestly with souls about salvation, one wants to say, Remember, you do not understand it all. One dear sister said very earnestly yesterday, "Explain to me what it really means,

that dying in Christ." And another spoke to me to-day about being filled with the Spirit. I have so often to say to such, Do not try to understand it perfectly, but go, in your darkness, and ask for something beyond what you can understand, and then let God deal with you in the glory of His love. Confess your ignorance and say, "O God, this thing is too great, I cannot comprehend it; but I will trust Thee for it."

Oh! The mistakes we make in our consecration! There is often selfishness, and there is often pride, and there is often carnal apprehension, and the desire for being very happy and holy and useful; and self is at the bottom of it.

Now, Christ does not want His disciples to be deluded by an unsatisfactory consecration, and He helped them. And that brings us to the next point—The *consecration that Christ demands*. "Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" "This is the consecration which Christ asks us as the path to the higher life.

Think what it means. What is the cup? You know that refers to Gethsemane. And what was that cup, concerning which He asked the Father that it might be taken away? You know, if you study your Bible, that the Bible speaks only of two cups—the *cup of wrath*, and the *cup of blessing*—the cup of the wrath of God, and the cup of blessing and thanksgiving. Which cup was it respecting which Christ had to say, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me"? It was the cup of wrath on account of our sins—that accursed death upon the tree of Calvary. But, oh, thank God! He drank it, and He comes now to give it to us to drink; but the curse is out of it. And what is it to us? Nothing but this—you know what Gethsemane means—the *surrender of the will*. That is the cup. It cost Him a struggle to say, in other words, "Thy will shall be done; I will drink it up": but He conquered. And Jesus comes and says to us, too, "Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" You know what that means? Did not He say, speaking of His death, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished"? He felt, long before, the agony in His soul that was Calvary, that was the Cross, that was His baptism; and He asks the disciples, "Can ye . . . be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" "Christians, you want the higher life, you want the glory, and you want the nearness and likeness and power of your Lord; but He asks you, Can you-drink my cup, and are you willing to be baptized with my baptism? Do remember that there is no path to the glory but through death! Why is it some Christians are unwilling to surrender themselves to it? Because they do not see the need of it, they do not see that it

is a righteous sentence that sinful nature should be condemned to death, and that, in the very nature of things, it is an absolute necessity that, in order to get rid of their life, they must die before God's life can come in.

Someone said to me yesterday, when talking of these things, "And must we then die every day?" As if the thought was, Is it not enough to die once for all with Jesus, in order to live the resurrection life? My brother, would that I could help you to see that the death of Christ is a thing for every day, as really as His life is! They are inseparable.

I cannot make it plainer than by pointing you to some splendid oak tree. Where was that oak born? In a grave. The acorn was pushed under the ground. It had its grave there, and in that grave it sprouted and sent its buds upwards. And that tree—I ask you, was it only one day that it stood in that grave? No. That oak for a hundred years had stood every day in that grave, in that place of death; and in that place of death it has found its life and its beauty. And so, let us learn the lesson that death and resurrection are inseparably combined. You cannot get the resurrection life anywhere, or live it, or enjoy it, except in the grave of Jesus. But as that oak tree spreads its dark roots under the cold, black soil every year, farther and farther, and lives in the grave, so the stem and the branches and the leaves come upward into the sunshine; and it is the reward of the roots down in the grave that the tree is so beautiful and so bright in God's creation. I pray you to learn that it is not a transaction once for all. No.

Bless God! there is a divine beginning, a glorious, sudden beginning, when God opens our eyes, and we have seen the cruel, fled One as our life, and counted ourselves dead, because we see we are dead in Christ. But let that be the disposition of every day—dead to the world, dead to sin, dead to all that is not God's. That is the grave, out of which the glorious life of resurrection joy and power shall grow. And I come with the question to-night, Can you be baptized—can you bear it, are you willing for it—with the baptism with which Jesus was baptized? There was for Him, as "the Apostle and High Priest of our profession," no gate to God or to heaven but through death; and there is no gate for us but in the crucified One and in fellowship with Him.

Now comes our next point. What was the answer of these disciples? There you have—The *consecration yielded*. They answered, "We can." Simple disciples! They little knew what these words meant. Yet, blessed be God! Jesus *accepted the consecration*. For what was His answer? Look at its fulness and tenderness. "Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall

ye be baptized." Oh, do you not love this tender Redeemer? There were those poor, foolish disciples saying to Him that they could drink that cup, and yet they knew nothing about what it was going to be; and that they could be baptized with His baptism, and yet they did not understand it.

And how did they carry out their vow? All the eleven in that last night "forsook Him and fled." And at the very supper table they were quarrelling again about who was to be chief. How they misunderstood, and grieved, and at last forsook Him! But, thank God, Jesus accepted that consecration.

But how could He do it if it was so untrue? At bottom it was true. The heart was right; they clung to Him. It just meant this, "Lord, we are ready for anything"; and in His loving heart He seemed to say, "I know you are." And, dear friends, if I come to you and plead that you should drink of the cup of Jesus, that you should drink it out to the very last dreg, can you say, "I give my will utterly to God, never to do my own will"? If I come to you with the question, "Can you be baptized with the baptism that He was baptized with?" can you say, "Jesus, I will live as a crucified one in Thee; Jesus, I will follow Thee to Calvary, I will not rest until my life is spent in the fellowship of Thy cross"? Are you ready to give the answer, "We can"?

I know you tremble, and it is right you should. In the light we have in this text, it is not wrong if we say, "Lord, I cannot, I am impotent"; but rather say, "Lord, in *Thy* strength I can, in *Thy* strength I will, drink Thy cup, and will be baptized with Thy baptism." Then, when you leave this meeting, or Keswick, for home, get with Jesus and sign your covenant: "Thy cup, O Lamb of God, is my cup; Thy baptism is my baptism." Jesus will carry you through it. His kind answer to those disciples meant more than this—"Oh yes, foolish children, you do not know what you say, but you mean it. I know how your vows will fail, but I will take it from you." That was not so much His meaning. He had another thought—"Yes, my disciples, you shall. I will carry you through it all, and lead you from Gethsemane and Calvary onward to Pentecost."

Beloved, come and make yourselves ready, prepare yourselves for that word, "We can." That is consecration. We can in *Thy* strength. Oh! what joy there would be in heaven if this great company were to fall down and say, when Jesus asks, "Can ye drink the cup, can ye be baptized into my death?"—"Yea, Lord, we can," Let our hearts even now say it.

And what comes next? Something very interesting. Our fourth point was the consecration yielded by them, and accepted by Christ: now comes—The *contention of the disciples about it*. Is it

not a terrible thing that every "higher life" movement awakens contention and division? Here are these two disciples, Their hearts are for Jesus, and their longings are for the glory, and it was not unnatural that they should say—for they had been His special friends—"Lord, give us a place on Thy throne." But there are the other disciples, and how quick they are to condemn the two! They do not know that in doing so they are revealing, by the jealousy of their hearts, that they are just as unfit for the throne as James and John.

And let me say, Keswick lifts up the standard of holiness; but if there is one thing that is heavy on my heart, during my stay in England, it is that God's children in England are not as near each other as they should be. Oh, brethren, is not it a terrible thing that this holiness banner is becoming a mark of separation, and that there are people who say, "Yes, this is right," and "That is right," and "This is wrong," and "That is wrong"; and unconsciously there comes a separation? I pray you, call upon God fervently and unitedly that He will pour out such a spirit of love on His people in England that they cannot help coming together. I do not want them to compromise truth or disguise their differences, but I want them to come together and say, "O God, we are one, and we want to show it to each other." In the spirit of love we want to say, "We shall bear with your differences, even when we think them wrong; but *one* we are." God grant that the power of holiness may come among us, and that the spirit of those disciples may pass away from us! God grant that the spirit of Jesus the crucified, His love, may fill us with devotion, not only to the heathen and the unconverted, but to our brethren who are near to us in Christ Jesus, though separated for a little while by earthly distinctions!

And then comes my next thought, and that leads us still deeper down. We read, "But Jesus called them to Him." The Lord Jesus cannot bear division; it grieves Him terribly. You know how He said, in effect, "This is to be a mark that ye are my disciples: that ye love one another as I have loved you." Jesus cannot bear division. Get that deeply into your heart, and every time you think of anybody that differs from you, do make it a point to love him intensely before you talk about it.

But we read, Jesus called them to Him, and saith unto them, ye know that they who are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them. . . . But so shall it not be among you." Now listen! "But whosoever will be great among you shall be your *minister* (or *servant*); and whosoever of you will be chiefest shall be the servant of all." What teaching! But then comes: "For even the Son of man came not to be ministered

unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many." Now just let us look at this.

Look first at its connection with the preceding test that Christ proposes—"Drink of my cup, and be baptized with my baptism": that is something spiritual *in their relation to Him*. But now He brings them down, in the path of their consecration, to their *relation with their fellow-men*. He says to them, in other words, "Not only like me must you give up your will in Gethsemane, and be baptized on Calvary, but, remember, your consecration must be proved in your intercourse with each other every day, and by one consent you must all be servants." Is that what He expects? Yes, it is. Humility is the test of discipleship, and humility is the only path to glory. God says, "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted." You cannot climb to the throne; but climb down, ever deeper down, and God will exalt you.

Let us take in this thought. Jesus came and "made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant." Every attribute of Jesus, and every circumstance of His life, and every feature of His character is preached upon, and you delight in Him; but have you studied this one—"The form of a servant"? Have you said in your heart, "What divine beauty! My God taking the place of a *servant*." Have you learned it? If not, may you learn it to-night! The path of consecration is the path of humility. Jesus says that he who wants to be chief must be the bondslave of all. The least will be the chief.

You talk of the "primacy" in the Church, of the "primate of all England." Christ says that the primate of all the churches is the very humblest. I wonder if we shall not have to be astonished in heaven at some poor, humble woman, who will there take the first place. Just ask God, for Christ's sake, that the primate in the Church may indeed be the very humblest in your circle. In your prayer meeting just ask God to make him the very humblest, and then you will not get the spirit displayed by those disciples.

William Law gives some earnest advice about praying every day for humility as one of the most essential things we need, and he uses this strong expression: "Pray to be delivered from every vestige of pride as though you were in torment." Oh, let us be afraid of pride, and let us live the life of humility. Jesus wants to bring us down.

"Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life." Oh, that wonderful word! "*Even as the Son of man*," that is our law, that is our rule to live by. How are we to live? He lived as a servant, entirely to help others and make them happy. That is the work of the honest servant. Shall we not say to Jesus, "In Thy name we take all God's

people, and become their servants, and ready we shall ever be to help them in any way"? Oh may that spirit come upon us!

Ah! His death can do it, and you will need the power of His death to do it; for if we are to serve our brother—some one who worries us, and with whom there is friction—if we are to serve him every day and to keep the place of a humble slave, nothing less than the power of Christ's death will enable us to do it. We must live in the grave of Jesus. God bring us there, and keep us there, even as the Son of man gave His life. And then you will be able to say increasingly, "Even as the Son, I drink the cup; and even as the Son, I am baptized into death; and even as the Son, I give my life. I do not leave all the work to the missionary in the foreign field, but I say, Here is my life, Lord; every hour is at Thy feet and at Thy disposal."

There we have the path to the higher life. It began with the prayer, "Nearness to Thee, likeness to Thee, power for Thee, O Jesus." Then came the words from Jesus, to this effect—"You do not know what you are asking." Next is proposed the test of consecration: Can ye drink of the cup? Can ye be baptized with the baptism? And then, after the disciples said they could, the loving answer came, the loving assurance, Yes, it shall be. Next followed that Sad picture of the sin of contention. But, praise God, even that has turned out for our good; for we have the blessed lesson coming out of it, that we must learn to be the very least of all.

If, therefore, you want the steps in the path of consecration, they are these: Fellowship with Jesus; absolute and entire surrender to His death; fellowship with one another in love; a humility which gives itself to be the servant of all. God make that the path of our consecration!

And now, I have yet to come to the very best part of my message. You will very naturally ask the question: The teaching of Christ, did it help much? Did it make Peter and James and John what they ought to be? I answer, Not a bit; they remained just as they were. That teaches me the solemn lesson that Christ's teaching, or convention teaching, cannot cast out the devil. The contention went on from this chapter down to the Last Supper. Pride and self-confidence were there, and in the hall of Caiaphas Peter denied his Lord. The teaching of Christ helped them very and yet, praise God! it did help them infinitely, for it prepared them, by the consciousness of failure, for something better. Did this ever come? It *did* come. At Pentecost everything was changed. Christ conquered sin and death, and rose to heaven, and sat on the right hand, and received from the Father—yes, from His God and Father—a new gift, a new inflowing of the

Holy Spirit; and by that Holy Spirit—though His teaching could not change them—came within them His own life, and then everything was changed. Where did they get the power to "drink the cup"? Why was it that Peter was ready now for anything? Where did they get the power not to be afraid of imprisonment, to count it a joy to suffer, and to give their lives even unto death—where did they get it? At Pentecost the living Christ, the power of Gethsemane, the power of Calvary, the love that had died, entered into their hearts. Christ dwelt there, and from that day and onward began a new life, a new era in the Church of Christ.

And, O friends, I say that that is the best part of the message, for what I have to tell you in conclusion *is—all this is a divine possibility*. The previous speaker spoke of a plan of life in the case of a man who is half-hearted; I speak of a plan of life for a man who is whole-hearted, and I say to you, take the life-plan of Jesus, and come to-night to Him and say, "Lord, I will accept it; I can be baptized with Thy baptism." Let us, ere we part, join in such an act of consecration.