

"Is it Well with Thee?" Asks Sunday of His Many Hearers

"Billy Sunday preached last night on the topic: 'Is it Well with Thee?' He said:

Text: Kings II, 17:26: "Is it well with thee? Is it well with thy husband? Is it well with thy child?"

Fifty-three miles north of Jerusalem, eight miles from Tabor and four miles from Nazareth, there once stood the famous and unfortunate city of Shunam, situated in one of the most beautiful spots on the globe, surrounded by olive orchards and fields of waving grain, with labelling springs and shaded groves, an ideal place for an ideal home, and in that city there was such a home, presided over by one of the famous women of antiquity.

Elisha, the prophet, used to pass this home on his way to Mount Carmel and back again to the schools of the prophets at Jericho, of which he was the head, and there was something in his actions that led this woman to conclude that he was a man of God, for she said one day to her husband:

"I perceive that a man of God is passing by us continually."

Women are of keener perception when it comes to things spiritually and morally than men.

It is probable her husband was too busy running the bank, or the farm, or "balled up" in politics. I perceive he had no time to think of bringing any influence beneath his roof that might be a moral or spiritual uplift to himself or his wife or his children.

Laid Dead Boy Upon Elisha's Bed. There was in that family an only child, and I can see him out in the field where his father was with the reapers, and the hot sun of the Oriental country beat down on his head and the boy threw his hands to his head and cried:

"My head! My head! My head!"

And the father said to the servant: "Carry the lad to his mother."

And they bore him to the house. And then, to my mind, occurs one of the saddest statements found upon the pages of the Old Testament. He sat upon his mother's knee until noon, and then he died.

Broken-hearted she carried him upstairs and laid him upon the bed of the man of God; then turning to the young man, her servant, she said to them:

"Saddle me a beast and drive on."

Down yonder at Mount Carmel was the man of God who, she believed, had power to bring to life the dead child.

But there on the highway was the mother with her heart breaking; down there in the home at Shunam was the boy lying on the bed of the man of God, dead—and you have the picture of a dead child and a mother who is weeping.

And they went on and Elisha looked down the road and saw them coming, and he said to Gehazi, who was sort of a private secretary:

"Yonder comes the Shunamite. I wish you would see what she wants and what brings her hither, and what she says."

And Gehazi ran down the road and met her and saluted her in the words of his text:

"Is it well with thee? Is it well with thy husband? Is it well with thy child?"

She answered after the manner of the Eastern salutation:

"It is well."

She drew near to the man of God, dismounted from the beast, fell upon her knees, threw her arms about him and wept.

Gehazi, possibly thinking her insane, caught, seized her by the shoulders and by sheer force was about to drag her away, when the prophet of God put out his hand and stopped him, and said:

"Do not so rudely use her. This poor woman's soul is vexed and troubled within her and God has not revealed to me the cause of her sorrow."

Sky-Pilot When Hearts Break. Then he turned to the woman and asked her why she had come and why she wept. She told him her boy had died and believed by what she had seen and learned of him as he had been a guest in her home, that he walked close with God, and if there was anybody in all the nation that she believed had power with God, it was that same man, and she made that trip to have him help her.

Yes, sir, when your heart is breaking the first man you want to get under your roof is the preacher, the man that walks close to God.

You don't want the dancing master, the man who keeps the dancing master, the man who keeps the card prize winner.

When your hearts are breaking you want somebody that keeps in touch with God. Then you will send for the sky pilot.

She said: "My boy is dead and I want you to go back and help me and bring him to life again."

And Elisha said to Gehazi: "Gehazi, here, you take my staff and go lay that on the dead child that he may live."

teach us importantly in prayer, determination to accomplish the thing upon which our heart is set no matter what difficulties may be in the way.

Years ago in Cincinnati a minister had preached as best human wisdom could depict the life of God to a sin-cursed world, and as he was drawing to the close of his sermon the Lord seemed to say:

"Make the application of your message personal. Ask if there is not one here that would like to be a Christian?"

And he did what he hadn't done in that rich and fashionable church for years. He said to the people:

"Let us bow our heads in prayer. If there is some one here that is sick and tired of sin and wants us to pray for you, lift your hand."

And as all were still, just then the door opened and a young man walked in, dropped in the rear seat, leaped to his feet, raised his hand and then cried out:

"Pray for me, sir, I am sick and tired of sin."

And the minister prayed. Then he hurried down the aisle and took the young man by the hand. He learned from him a sad story of profligacy and wandering. He learned that for eight years he had been a wanderer on earth; had heard nothing from home, knew not whether his parents were living or dead.

Typing Father Wouldn't Let God Go. The minister advised him to write home and tell his parents what he had done. He didn't expect a reply from Brooklyn for four days. The fourth day no answer came; the fifth day no answer, and he was worried.

The sixth day no answer and he was troubled. The seventh day no answer and he was in distress. The eighth day no answer and he was in agony.

The envelope was bordered with black. With tear-dimmed eyes and trembling hand he broke the seal and read something like this:

"My Dear Son: The joy which your letter brought to our home and hearts was only exceeded by the sadness which was there at the same time, for nearly as we can conclude, the same day and the same hour that you found Jesus Christ as your Saviour, your poor old father was going into the skies."

"All day long he rolled and tossed upon his bed; his mind wandered up and down the earth, he knew not where, and ever and anon he would cry out in misery: 'Oh, God, save my poor wandering drunken boy today.'"

"We would turn his mind from you and divert his attention from your profligacy and your sin, but ever and anon his mind would roam from place to place and he would cry out in sorrow: 'Oh, God, save my poor wayward, wandering, drunken boy today.'"

"And just as he passed into the skies he cried: 'Oh, God, save—'

"And he finished the prayer in the presence of Jesus."

Do you know the result? Down at the bottom of the letter the mother added this footnote. She said:

"You are a Christian tonight because your old father would not let God go."

Oh, for men and women that could pray like that, or mothers that would forget their mad, wild rush after money and go back and pay their clerks. Oh, for school teachers that would stop their miserable, good-for-nothing whining, snapping and fault-finding with my vocabulary and get on your knees and pray. If you could do better than I, come up and do it.

I am getting tired of some of our rattled-brained school teachers growling about my preaching. You quit card playing, dancing, wine and beer drinking and you won't have time to find fault with me.

I would like to make the application of my message tonight so personal that not a man, woman or child can go out of here and say:

"He didn't mean me, it didn't touch me, it didn't apply to me."

Now— "Is it well with thee?"

Women Better Than Men. I will answer that much of it for every unweaned man, woman and child in this building tonight.

I know, men, there are trials. I know

there are temptations. I have been privileged of God to lead more men than women to Christ, not that I preach especially for them—I do, too. I believe that if the womanhood of America was no better than the manhood God would have dumped the whole thing into hell long ago and shut up shop.

There is many a young man going to hell tonight, because he was influenced by the gang he trains with, and he goes with the wrong mob, and they will put any fellow into the penitentiary and hell if he stays by them long enough.

There is many a man influenced by the gang he goes with to do things which, after he has done them and when he is alone, he hates and repents himself for.

He condemns himself to think he didn't have manhood and decency enough to say: "No."

And he could not look his mother, nor his sister, or his wife, in the face without blushing to the roots of his hair, and when alone in the quiet of his room and he can review what he did, he despises himself to think he didn't have grit and manhood enough to refuse the gang.

There are men in heaven tonight because they had manhood enough to choose the right company, and there are men in hell because they were dragged there by the gang they went with.

Is it well with the man that will sit at the gaming table and run the risk of being a black-legged gambler?

Is it well with the man who will take even an occasional drink and run the risk of becoming a sputtering, vomiting, reeling, jabbering drunkard, staggering to the pit of hell?

Is it well with the man that is taking God's name in vain on his lips and pouring out his polluted oaths and blasphemy?

Is it well with the man that will hang on the walls of his memory vile, lewd pictures and approach in his thoughts the secrets of others?

Is it well with the man or woman that is careless of his or her associates, of the Sabbath day and the laws of God?

No! No! Ten thousand times no.

God pity you if you go out into eternity with the sin on your life that is there tonight as you sit and listen to me!

Same Devil Here. The same devil that damns in old sin-cursed, whisky-soaked, gambling, blasted, harlot-ridden, Sabbath-breaking Chicago is the same devil and the same sin that will damn you in Omaha, that will damn you in your home, and you cannot win without Jesus Christ.

You say: "Mr. Sunday, I had a bad start in life. I have come from bad stock. I have had blood in my veins. I was born with the devil in me and with evil inclinations."

You can be born again with the devil out of you if you want to be, if you will give yourself to Jesus Christ and turn from your sins.

Certainly! Don't blame your parents. They brought you into the world, that's true, but you yielded to its sin when you came in. Don't blame them.

If you lived in a palace with a bad heart in you you would turn the palace into a stum.

You can't get smallpox or scarlet fever, or diphtheria by crawling in between clean sheets.

If you turn a polecat loose in a parlor you know which will change Great, the polecat or the parlor.

Sin doesn't start in a stale beer joint or a brothel. Sin started in the Garden of Eden, so I say don't blame society; you are a part of it.

Society is what it is and you have helped to make it what it is, and if you wanted to be different why didn't you follow Christ and set the example? So don't blame the church. That's the place for you to go to learn to do what you ought to do.

Don't say, "We are only human."

Don't blame the devil; all he can do is to tempt you, and there are not devils enough in hell to make you a drunkard if you don't want to go one, and there are not angels enough in heaven to make you walk home sober if you don't want to.

So be fair and square. Look yourself square in the face and say: "I'm the duck."

Put it up square to yourself. Don't put it up to society, or your parents, or the church, or to Adam and Eve.

Put it to yourself and say: "I'm the lobster; this is the fellow." Be decent. "Is it well with thee?" "Is it well with thy husband?"

Get Religion from Strangers. There are boys and girls, young people, if they ever walk the streets of heaven instead of groaning in hell it will be because of the influence of some stranger. It will be because of what somebody, not related to them by ties of flesh and blood, has done for your children.

God pity a boy or girl who has to call a man like that father, and a woman like that mother.

God pity a boy or girl, when all the Christianity they hear is from the lips of strangers, not from their own parents.

What would you do? I would speak to them. I tell you I spend too much time in society, too much time in club life, too much time in your lodge, too much time in your auxiliaries. You have too little time with your children.

You spend too little time on your knees praying to God to keep the home right for Jesus Christ.

Speak to them. Live right before them. Set them an example that will inspire them.

Is it well with thy husband? A friend of mine was preaching in an eastern city. He had gone out to work among the audience to induce them to give their hearts to Christ, and a woman in the front row in the gallery cried out:

"Pray for my husband. He is sitting by my side. I believe he is listening to his last sermon. God is giving him his last chance."

And she sat down weeping.

God Gives You Chance Now. Some women said to my friend: "Go up on the platform and rebuke her for what we consider was a foolish thing to do."

He said: "If you want to take the platform and take the responsibility, do it. How do I know but that God told her to do it?"

The next afternoon, just before the beginning of the evening service, these same women came to my friend weeping and said:

"Forgive us for our lack of interest and sympathy, and won't you pray God to forgive us, as we have prayed? We heard that at 5 o'clock this afternoon that man sent a bullet crashing through his brain."

I believe God told that wife to say that that husband was listening to his funeral sermon. That was heaven or hell for him.

And I believe this series of meetings is the bell of God tolling out the destiny of human souls.

I believe as I breathe, that if men and women are not saved in these days eternal damnation will be their portion.

I believe God has let a lot of you men and women in this town live just to give you this last grand chance to see if you measure up to your pool room, mountebank, pliable, plastic, sort of celluloid, pantosies, japa-a-lic reputation, or whether you had manhood or womanhood enough to step out for Jesus Christ and do His commandments.

"Is it well with thy husband?" "Is it well with thy child?"

I have often tried to imagine Noah and his wife seated in the ark, contented, and the storm of God's brewing to burst on the world, and one would turn to the other and say:

"Where are the boys?" "Oh, they are out; they will be in late tonight. Leave the night lock as they can get in; they didn't take their key with them."

I can't imagine a father and mother tucking themselves in bed and letting their children gad the streets.

"Is it well with the child?" Hear me a minute. You are interested

in their education. You hire teachers, you tax the community, you build public schools and get the best money can buy.

You are concerned with their health. You will send for the doctor when they are ill. You work to give them three meals a day. You will buy them warm clothes for winter and cool clothes for summer. You are concerned for their health; but, great God, what about their souls?

I tell you, there are men in this town, there are fathers who are leading their boys as straight to hell as that two and two make four.

"Is it well with the child?" If I was not a Christian do you know what I would do? I would walk down the aisle tonight, give my heart to God, and if I had a child I would go home, and if I was asleep I would get it out of bed, wash its face to waken it, and I would say to it:

"You never heard your father pray. I want you to hear him pray."

I would get him on his knees and I would tell that child that bears my name hear my voice in prayer.

They have heard you curse, damn, blaspheme, mock and rail at the preacher and I'd like what I have been trying to do to keep you out of hell; I would let them hear me pray.

And I tell you, a mother's arms and a mother's heart are a safe anchorage, and there are not devils enough in hell to drag the children out of that harbor if they will only get in there.

"Is it well with the child?" Listen! In your home there are boys and girls destined to rule in church and state.

Public school teacher, don't simply think of the little paltry salary you draw from the school board at the end of the month.

You have the grandest, most noble, far-reaching work ever given to human beings, the shaping and molding of character, in your classes next week will be some boy or girl destined to rule in church or in state.

Upon which side of their life the influences are thrown will determine what they will be.

You Wait Too Long. It is Too Late. Hear me! Some Oliver Cromwells that will dissolve parliament; some Davids Brainers that will change the Indian war-whoop into a Sabbath school; some Bethovens who will touch the world's heart strings and make them sing; some M as Dix who will soothe the brain of the crazed; some Clara Barton that will bind up the battle wounds; some Frances E. Willard who will arouse the people to the ravages of the liquor traffic.

You, some one, I say, destined to rule in church and in state.

Some John Knox, who will make queens turn pale on their thrones; some Martin Luther who will start a reformation.

Yes, but you wait too long. You wait until he curses you to your faces before you teach him.

"Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain."

You wait until he staggers into your presence before you teach him: "Look not on the wine when it is red."

You wait until he steals and is off to the penitentiary before you teach him: "Thou shalt not steal."

You wait until he has robbed some girl of her virtue before you teach him: "Thou shalt not commit adultery."

You wait too long.

Lived in Memory of Boyhood. I want to say to you that one of the brightest pictures that hangs upon the walls of my memory is the recollection of the days when as a little boy out in the log cabin on the frontier of Iowa I knelt by mother's side.

I went back to the old farm some years ago to bury my brother. The first burying ground in that section of the state was on the old farm.

The scenes had changed about the place. Faces I had known and loved had long since turned to dust.

Fingers that used to turn the pages of the Bible were obliterated and the old trees beneath which we boys used to play and swing had been felled by the woodsman's axe.

I stood and thought. The man became

of the brightest pictures that hangs on memory's wall.

I tell it to you with shame; I stretched the elastic bands of my mother's love until I thought they would break. I went so far into the dark and the wrong until I ceased to hear her praying or her pleadings.

I forgot her face, and I went so far that it seemed to me that one more step and the elastic bands of her love would break and I would be lost.

But, thank God, friends, I never took that step. Little by little I yielded to the tender memories and recollections of my mother; little by little I was drawn away from the yawning abyss, and twenty-nine years ago, one dark and stormy night, I groped my way out of darkness into the arms of Jesus Christ, and I fell on my knees and said:

"God be merciful to me a sinner."

Thus I am here preaching to you to help you to Jesus Christ.

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