SITTING ON THE WINDOW SILLS OF HEAVEN


Text: "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon high places. To the chief singer on my stringed instruments" (Habakkuk 3:17-19).

The theme of the message of the prophet Habakkuk is one that has engaged the thinking of men through all the centuries. It was the favorite theme even of the great psalmist, and you will find it again and again in the writings of the ancient prophets of God. Reduced to its simplest terms, I think you might state it like this: that the prophet Habakkuk is trying to reconcile the fact of a good God and a bad world, and the struggle in the mind and heart of this prophet arose out of the thing that had happened, first of all, to his nation and then the thing that had happened in his own heart and life.

You remember that the Chaldean nation had risen up, a nation that had within itself an authoritarian and a dictorial ideology. A nation that was in the hands of great military leaders and under the guidance of one of the greatest tyrants of all time. A man that used his power in order to destroy freedom and to subdue the peoples of the nation. And yet God said to the prophet Habakkuk, "I have chosen this Chaldean nation as the instru-
ment in my hand, in order that I might bring judgment upon Judah." And so the prophet came to this protest to God. Why would a good and all-powerful God use a wicked and an evil nation like Chaldea in order to bring chastisement and judgment upon the righteous. In other words, this man was greatly disturbed about how evil men were using their power in the world. And that was a problem not only for Habakkuk and his time, but it is even a problem in our contemporary world. How men use their power.

Here was a nation that had a bad deal, and yet it is a nation that was trying to follow a good God. Not very long ago I had a very interesting conversation with a splendid man. He told me something of the earlier days of his life when he had more or less walked the primrose path of dalliance and had stepped outside the moral laws of God. He had gone down the trail until finally he found himself in the "far country away from God." In the course of his evil days he lost his possessions, he lost his family, and finally found himself right at the very pit of ruin. Then it was that God came passing by, and he heard a voice that resounded in the sacred corridors of his soul. That man decided that he would arise and go back to his Father's house, and he went back and received from God forgiveness and pardon for all of his wrong. The man has been trying to climb back up the hill and he is having a very difficult time. For the last few years he has lived the Christian life. He doesn't drink anymore; he doesn't gamble anymore; he doesn't break the great laws of God or man any longer, and yet he said, "Everyday of my life is a struggle in order that I might earn enough money to provide my daily bread,"and that if man said to me, "I wonder why it is that God is good and that God is a God of love, and if He has forgiven me of my sins, I wonder why it is that I am still having such a hard time in this life." Well, when I went away from that man
that day, I pondered that thing in my heart. I went to my study and I took down the book of Habakkuk because I realized that this man had faced the very same thing in the life of his nation and in his own life. After I had finished reading the book of Habakkuk, I reached up on my shelf and pulled down Emerson's *ESSAYS*, and I turned again to that essay on Compensation. You remember the thing that provoked that in the mind of that great thinker. He had been to church, and the preacher had stimulated his thinking and Emerson went home and wrote out that essay - one of the most remarkable of all times. Here was the thing the preacher had said, "Now don't you worry about all these things. Just know that the wicked and evil people, even though in this life they have everything they want: they have houses and food and clothing and lands, and they have a good time, don't worry about that. After all, someday there is going to be another world on the other side, and over in heaven you righteous people that are having such a hard time now are going to have a marvelous time in that world on the other side. Just be patient and endure, and someday on the other side the tables are all going to be changed." 

Well, the inference was, of course, that the righteous on the "other side" were going to get the things they didn't get over here on this side. The thing that Mr. Emerson didn't like, and the thing that I don't like is the inference, you know, that the supreme good of life is to be found in houses and lands, and food and shelter and clothing. In other words, here is the thing we need to remember: the evil man with his power and with his riches and with a way of life that he's living is not developing the kind of character that is worthy of eternity. That's one thing we need to always remember, and if that is so in this life then why should it be considered such a value in the
life to come. I am glad to believe in my theology that over yonder in the other world it isn't going to be primarily a matter of better housing and better food and better clothing, and this thing and that thing to satisfy the physical needs of man.

Well, what am I trying to say this morning? I am trying to get us all to see that, after all, we've got to lift this whole matter to a higher plane of reference. We must find some great spiritual or where we might find light for our pathway. We must realize that the thing that is going to meet the deepest longing of the soul of man is not in whether or not he has "things," but rather whether or not he has developed his spiritual capacity. Sometimes the best thing that can ever happen to any individual in this world is for that individual to lose everything material so that he shall be made to see that the supreme values are spiritual. Sometimes a disappointment; sometimes a

I was amazed not long ago to see a man who was in an automobile accident many years ago and had to have both legs removed. I sat for an hour by the side of that man, and then a little later on listened to that man speak. I do not believe that I have ever listened to a more dynamic, powerful faith than I heard come from the lips of that man. He said to me, "You know, my misfortune was the thing that brought about a revolution in my personality and a reorganization of all of the habit-patterns of my life for the better." Though sometimes adversity and trouble and the loss of health and the loss of money, and even the loss of friends, and sometimes the feeling that even you have lost God, is the thing that will pick a man up and set his feet on a new highway.

I believe it was Harold Bell Wright who said that in the hills of life
there are two trails, and one leads to those high, sunlit fields where the one who travels may see afar and where life still lingers long after the sun is set. The other leads along the lower ground where he who travels, as he goes looks back over his shoulder with the eye of dread and where the gloomy shadows gather long before the day is done. And so, my friend, God may sometime come to your life and mine and say, "I do not desire for you to be a garden flower. I am not interested in you developing in some protected place. I am not concerned about you being where you will have fertile soil and an abundance of sunshine, but I am interested in uprooting you out of those pleasant and comfortable surroundings and placing you out in the midst of an environment of turmoil and struggle and agony, in order that you might be a seed that will grow into something like a mighty pass and, oak where men for years to come might find rest and renewal."

The thing that Emerson said all the way through that great essay and the thing this prophet of God is saying is that you must somehow rise above the physical and the sensual and the temporal, and begin to see your life as an invincible spirit against a backdrop of an eternal world. That's the thing God is saying always to His people.

Answers like this do not come easily. Here was a prophet of God struggling with it and agonizing with it. You don't get this over the radio; you don't find answers like this down at the corner drugstore; you don't find it down in the pleasant conversation of social life. Answers like these come when men struggle and finally, like the prophet of God, withdraw into the watchtower where alone they might find the answer to this intellectual and spiritual problem.
If you look out today upon the so-called inequities of life, and when you feel that God sometimes gives your nation a "bad deal," and sometimes God gives you a "bad deal," what, after all, is to be the thing that is to keep you going with the light of the stars in your eyes? Where are you to find that? Well, the prophet went up into the tower and there alone he wrestled with God until he found the answer. There are two or three things that I want to say about that.

I think, first of all, there is the thrill of the climb. God has made us like we are in order that we might face these difficulties, problems, perplexities, and feel the challenge of them and say, "God and I have business with each other, and somehow we'll work together and find the answer to our difficulties." You were meant for climbing. I had one of the finest letters the other day I think I have ever received, and I took it as a complimentary letter. This individual said, "You know, I've been a Christian now for some forty years, and I am still growing. I feel like I'm standing on tiptoe every morning waiting for some fresh revelation of God." This party went on to say, "I am made to feel that often when I go away from worship at the House of God." I think one of the greatest compliments and one of the most sublime epitaphs that was ever placed on anyone's tombstone was that placed on the tombstone of an Alpine climber. It was simply these words: He Died Climbing - Still Trying to Get to the Heights. There is the thrill of the climb. There is the lure of the unknown. There is the challenge of finding the solution to the problem. God comes often to responsive souls and brings the challenge that throws us into the very heart of struggle and trial.

Not long ago I picked up a little book written by Dr. Glenn Clark, who perhaps is one of the greatest writers on prayer that we have in America
Dr. Clark had been trying to write a book for a long time, but he said somehow the Muse would not function, the fire wouldn't burn. He said, "I'd pick up my pen, but I couldn't get it to move." He said, "Finally, one day I went to Chicago on business for my university, and I heard that Marian Graw was going to give a review of one of her books. She had already written at that time a best-seller." He said, "I went around and got my place right on the front row, and I listened to this young woman as she came out and in a beautiful way told the story of her book. Then she said in closing, 'You know, I promised them this evening that I would tell you how I happened to write this book. For a long time I had difficulty, but one day I turned to a passage of Scripture. It was found in one of the Psalms." (We have the same one here in Habakkuk). "The Lord God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon high places." (Habakkuk 3:19a). She said, "You know, I turned to God and God somehow made my feet like hinds' feet, and made me to stand in my high places. The fire began to burn, and as fast as I could write it down the words came from my mind and heart, and that's the way I wrote the book."

Dr. Glenn Clark said maybe that's a secret for me. Maybe I can find a way to write my book, and he kept that verse in his heart. A little while later he was sent out West because of ill health, and he had to spend a few months on a ranch out there. One morning he started out with a group of the cowboys, and they were going up to Number Six Mesa. He got on a paint pony and rode along with them. They got up to Mesa Number Five and were about ready to start up to Number Six, and the cowboys said to Dr.
Clark, "You won't be able to go." Dr. Clark said, "Why, won't my pony make it up the heights?" They said, "No, that pony would never make it. That pony doesn't know how to track. These ponies we have are like deer, they are sure-footed, they know how to track; but your pony doesn't know how, and he can't make it up to Number Six Mesa." One of the cowboys got off his horse and said, "Now, you watch my horse." The horse moved around, and the cowboy said, "You notice that his back feet always fall right where his front feet were. That horse knows how to track, and he can climb into the heights. Your horse doesn't." The cowboy guided him around, and sure enough his tracks didn't coincide. This man of God said, "You fellows go on. I don't want to go up on Mesa Number Six. I'll stay right here because I have found the answer to a thing that I have been searching for all my life." Dr. Glenn Clark said he stayed there, and he got down on his knees and talked to God about it, and he said, "Oh, God, I see it now, that if my life is to have rhythm and harmony and power, my life, somehow, has got to track with You."

I have to go back to Emerson again when he talks about that inevitable dualism in life: the light and the darkness, the good and the evil, the beautiful and the ugly, the male and the female, the positive and the negative. Here is the thing that God calls to every man to do, and that is to ally himself with the constructive forces in the universe. If a man doesn't do that, there is going to come upon his life, I think, right here the forces of retribution. No, all of heaven isn't on the other side; and all of hell isn't on the other side either, my brother man. For when you make the wrong choices and ally yourself with the wrong forces in the universe, you are always going to face someday, for you, an Achilles' heel. You may feel that you have a sense of in-
vulnerability. Achilles had it all in every place except his heel, and Siegfried in the "Nibelungenlied" was bathed in the blood of a dragon but a leaf fell from a tree and covered one spot on his back, and there was the spot of his vulnerability. Oh, my brother-man, God is doing business with you right here in this world, and the way you and God do business together right here in this world is going to have a tremendous bearing on what happens to you out yonder in the eternal world. We had better learn how, as the days go by, to track with God every day.

Then there is something more in this wonderful thing. I have thought of the sweep of the revelation. Not only the thrill of the climb, but when he got into the watchtower, God showed him the answer. He said, "Habakkuk, you see those evil Chaldeans, and I want you to learn a great lesson on justice. I want you to see, Habakkuk, with the Eyes of God. You are a finite creature, but in a little while I am going to let you see with the Eyes of the infinite God. I want you to know this, Habakkuk, that the evil men have within themselves are the seeds of their own destruction, and the Godly men are planting seeds that shall bring a harvest of righteousness and peace. But be patient with God, for God is not in a hurry. Be patient with God; look at it through His eyes. The best way I know to illustrate it is to think of a man blowing up a balloon. He blows and blows, and the balloon gets larger and larger. Everybody can see it; it's a big thing. He keeps blowing, and after awhile he gets in that balloon the very thing that causes it to burst and destroy it.

God has got plenty of time to wait for a man to blow into the balloon all that he likes, but someday the balloon will burst and the ruin of that man's house will fall in about him, and great will be the ruin. That's what happened to Hitler, and that's what happened to Napoleon. Somebody said
he bothered? God, and so it was there came a time when God lost His patience with Napoleon and wiped him off the face of the earth. So that is the revelation that God has given to you and me.

The last thing that I see in it is the glory of the fellowship. I have the feeling that when Habakkuk came down from the watchtower that he faced life with the assurance that he was a victor. There wasn't anything that life could do to him that would overwhelm him or deter him or defeat him, because for a little while he had synchronized his mind and his heart and his soul with God. For that reason he was able to walk like a king.

A wonderful teacher and his daughter were out on a lake and a storm came. The boat turned over, and that girl and her father wrestled with the waves fighting the battle of survival. When it seemed as though all was lost, that father said to his daughter, "Listen, dear, the God that made this lake, and the God Who guides the path of this storm is big enough to take care of you and me." She became quiet as she watched the storm ride its way through and somehow in a miraculous fashion, she and her father came through. A few weeks later, one night in the library of their home, she and her father were talking over it a bit. She turned to her father and said, "You know, Dad, I'll never be afraid of anything anymore."

When you come down from the watchtower where you've been with God, in the joy of that fellowship you can go out and face whatever life brings and know that you will never be afraid anymore. I went to see a grand man one day. I don't know of anybody who's had to suffer any more than he has. I don't know of anybody ever had a worse deal in life than he's
had. He doesn’t have anything in this world - from the standpoint of the world, but he has something marvelous in his spirit. Just before I left him that day I asked him to tell me the secret of that wonderful, radiant glow that I always found in his heart. He opened up an old scrapbook that he kept there on a little table, and he said this is it and pulled out a poem that I want to read a verse or two of it to you in closing. He said, “This is where I find my strength.” These are the words of this wonderful poem, written by Shamos O’Shield:

He whom a dream hath possessed knoweth no more of doubting,
For mist and blowing of winds and the mouthing of words and scorn
Not the senuous he hears,
But a nightly shouting.
And never comes darkness down, yet he greeteth a million more.

He whom a dream hath possessed knoweth no more of roaming,
All roads, and the flowing of waves, and the speediest flight he knows
Wherever his feet are set his soul is forever homing,
And going he comes, and coming he heareth