



THE USEFULNESS OF THE ALL THINGS
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"THEN COMETH JESUS WITH THEM UNTO A PLACE CALLED GETHSEMANE, AND SAITH UNTO THE DISCIPLES, SIT YE HERE, WHILE I GO AND PRAY YONDER. AND HE TOOK WITH HIM PETER, AND THE TWO SONS OF ZEBEDEE, AND BEGAN TO BE SORROWFUL AND VERY HEAVY. THEN SAITH HE UNTO THEM, MY SOUL IS EXCEEDING SORROWFUL, EVEN UNTO DEATH: TARRY YE HERE, AND WATCH WITH ME. AND HE WENT A LITTLE FARTHER, AND FELL ON HIS FACE, AND PRAYED, SAYING, O MY FATHER, IF IT BE POSSIBLE, LET THIS CUP PASS FROM ME: NEVERTHELESS, NOT AS I WILL, BUT AS THOU WILL" Matthew 26:36-39

Here was one of the great crisis times in the life of Jesus. He overcame Satan in the wilderness, and He overcame Himself in the garden. He prayed that the cup of suffering for the sins of humanity would pass from Him ... if it were possible ... but there was no other way to redeem the fallen race. Then He said, "Not My will, but Thine be done." Immortal words! It was good for us that He prayed thus, or He might have had transit to heaven before the Cross.

Then He came and found His disciples sleeping. The very best of His followers failed Him in that crucial hour. He left them and went away and prayed the second time. Again, He came and found them sleeping. The third time He went away and came again, and said, "Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going." He was going to meet all that was coming to Him in His Father's will. That is the key to His words at this point ... "Rise, let us be going." He was going to meet the betrayal, the rejection, the accusation, the Cross. The will of God must be done. He went forth from the garden to meet it, calm and unruffled, taking hold of the whole miserable business of duplicity, disloyalty, and dishonor to His Holy Person ... turning the tragedy of the Cross into the triumph of the crown. Marvelous victory! Glorious Overcomer! Who can doubt that He was the Son of God, a Man, such as had never been found before upon the earth?

From that moment, He was Master of the situation. He assumed command. Those men were not directing Him. He was the Victor not the Victim. He healed the ear of the servant of the high priest who had come to arrest Him; and pronounced the doom of every kingdom founded on blood and force, saying, "They that take the sword shall perish with the sword." He had no words of condemnation for His enemies; for He was obeying the will of God, not their will. Except His Father's will had led Him to Golgotha, He had never gone. "Twelve legions of angels" were at His disposal, and He called them. His silence brought terror to Pilate. He made the king tremble on his throne. The judge was judged, as well as his kingdom, by the accused. He would not accept the tears of the weeping women, telling them to weep for themselves and for their children. "He had no tears for His own grief, but shed drops of blood for mine." He dispensed paradise to the dying thief who called upon Him, and He prayed for His murderers. At the end, crying -- "It is finished" and bowing His head, He died. He was Master of His life and Master of His death. The will of God had been done ... done inspite,of the hatred of men, yea, thru



that hatred, glory was brought to God and good to man.

Jesus shows us how to make all things serve us. He used every circumstance, providence and device even that of Satan ... to bring good to someone. He made heaven out of His direst trial. He taught that "whosoever will loose his life for My sake shall find it." We let go the self on earth, to find it again in heaven developed into a larger self. It is as we go on in the will of God, to a service which calls to all that is within us to serve others at our own expense, that we are stretched to our utmost capacity. We despair of life sometimes, and it is then that God is getting the best from us. It is the violin string that is stretched up to key that gives forth the sweetest music. We all need the hand of our Master to draw our heartstrings tighter, in order to get the best harmony from us. We must learn, as Jesus taught by word and example, to accept all trouble from the hand of God and use it. He realized His kinship with humanity (having taken on Himself the nature of man); and, while they were not free, He was not free. He gave Himself up to the death of the Cross to deliver them; and He calls us to the same service of love.

Let us observe the mastery of Jesus over the all things that were against Him. He turned all the evil into good ... using all the hatred, malice and venom of men to work out the purposes of God. In the sermon on the mount He told His disciples, "Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." This He did Himself. When men persecute you; take it from God and rejoice, He advised. When men compel you to go a mile, do more, go two, He added. He did all this and more. He gave the admonitions and rules for overcoming, then set the example of obedience Himself. He took His own medicine as men would say. Some folk can preach, but do not practice their own instructions.

To return to our subject. Jesus made use of everything. Nothing defeated Him. He knew that all things that befell Him were of His Father' s will; therefore, He yielded to them. Someone says, "Yes, but that was Jesus, the Son of God. Who can do as He did?" Turn with me to the book of Acts, and see the same victory in the record of these first disciples. It is a book of vital deeds. Life and gladness permeate its pages. Power, Divine and dynamic, makes it a striking witness that God was on the scene. Those apostles used everything, even as Jesus did, to serve them and enhance the Gospel with glory. Every need and evil deed brought blessing to others. Persecution was used as opportunity for witnessing. Prisons were made sanctuaries where worship and praise to God welled forth in volume and power. Let us notice some striking instances of this character in Acts of making all things useful.

"And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place" --- Acts 2:1. I love this chapter. It is so full of vitality and spirituality. It makes the thing today called "Christianity" look cheap and ordinary. The wonder of this chapter as well as the acts of the whole book are amazing. There were one hundred and twenty disciples gathered together in an upper room, waiting for the descent of the Holy Spirit ... and they were not disappointed. "Suddenly there came a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting." The Holy Ghost came swooping down upon that believing remnant from the Jewish nation. "And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance." The people who



witnessed the phenomena were amazed at the supernatural visitation. They heard them speaking in different dialects.

"And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine." They were so full of heavenly power and vitality so full of the Holy Ghost, that the people said they were drunk. So they were drunk on the wine of the kingdom. I wish we were all as drunk as they were. If we preach in the power of the Holy Ghost, we will either make men come to hear us or run away from us and criticize us. As it is, some think we are crazy. What would they think if we were as full of the Spirit as those disciples? They did not care what men said or thought of them. What are folk anyway? They will die and the worms will eat them. Those happy people did not hear their words of criticism and ridicule. I want you to see how those early disciples rose above everything. This book shows them rising above all things that were against them. They had the vision of Jesus Christ. They were looking up. As one said, their eyes were in front of their heads and not in the back. They were looking toward the living God. Praise God! What a God we have.

When I read the record of the early disciples I am ashamed of our victories, though we do have many outstanding hearings and answers to prayer. It is not only the miracles that astonish us. It is the fact that they used all things, took advantage of every need to enrich themselves and mount higher. I wish we had their faith today to make things work for us. They bubbled over with inward joy, because they had the inward consciousness that their resources were equal to any and every emergency. The cedar tree is a striking illustration of the above mentioned victory. It develops by dying, putting forth leaves and limbs; and as they die, others spring forth above them, higher and stronger than the former ones. The work continues. These die and others come out higher still. It dies to live and lives to die; hence, it is a striking symbol of the Christian life. As we die we live. As we go down, we come up. In the book of Acts we see this most wonderfully manifested to the discomfiture of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

The early disciples were compassed about with infirmity, poverty, and weakness; nevertheless, God was in their midst in power. Acts is surely a cheery book. Joy permeates its pages. Hilarity reigns. The saints are aware of the Presence of God and are happy ... not because of their circumstances, but in spite of them. That is the miracle manifested. The needs on every hand trials of poverty and every sort are used to bring God on the scene and see Him work. He is sufficient for all things, as is in evidence at all times. Let us notice some of these striking incidents.

"Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour. And a certain man lame from his mother' s womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple; who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms" Acts 3:1-3. They probably searched their pockets for a coin to give him but found none, a sad plight they were in no money. With most of us the incident would have closed right there, but not with those men of God. They were poor in the natural, having not a penny; but they used that very lack. They made it serve that lame man. He was enriched thereby. What blessing he would have missed if Peter and John had had money. They would have given some to him and passed on. Sometimes it is good that we are poor. It



makes us depend upon the Lord. I imagine they felt deeply the fact that they could not help that poor fellow; but immediately Peter remembered that he had something more than gold. He had God. He had faith. "Look on us," he cried. "We will do more for you than if we had a million dollars." That man looked up at Peter who repeated these magnificent words that have become a synonym of faith, "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the Name of Jesus, Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk." These men did not bemoan their poverty. They used it. The lame man, leaping and walking, went into the temple perfectly whole. That was a day of days for him. No more would he be necessitated to beg for his daily needs, as he had done for years. He could work for his living. He was healed and saved. These men through their poverty were rich. They were distributors of God' s riches. Paul described the matter thus: "Poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things."

Someone says, "Well, they were the apostles. They were chosen for the ministry. They had a great victory, for they had a great place." Let us look at an ordinary man then, at Stephen a waiter, a layman as the churchmen would say. We read of him in Acts six. The apostles laid their hands on him and set him apart to wait on tables. God laid His hand upon him and made him an evangelist and a worker of miracles. The unbelieving wisecracks disputed with him and, finally, they brought him before the Sanhedrin; but they could not resist the wisdom and grace with which he spoke. They hired men to lie about him and twist his words not an easy matter to bear. But Stephen did not bear it he used it. He took advantage of the opportunity given him to defend himself, and preached that marvelous message recorded in Acts seven.

The people saw his face, shining as "the face of an angel." He was happy. The more they persecuted him, the more his face shone with the glory of God. They could not stand to look upon that holy shining face of love. So they rushed upon him, cast him out of the council and stoned him to death but he had the last word. He prayed, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." That prayer struck home. It reached the heart of a young man, Saul, and convicted him and finally led him to Jesus and the light. On the road to Damascus he surrendered to the Lord. The greatest Christian of the centuries was won by the intrepid faith of Stephen and his tender heart of love in the face of death. He made use of his circumstances to bless those that cursed him. That is victory indeed! There is the overcomer!

"At that time there was a great persecution" of the disciples at Jerusalem. The church was scattered by the anger of the wicked rebellious Jews. Stephen' s sermon and death stirred them to fury but the results were wonderful. They used the persecution to scatter the Truth "Went everywhere preaching the Word." What can Satan do with such people who turn everything evil into good? He can do nothing that does not bring glory to God and good to mankind.

"Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them." Men were delivered of unclean spirits and all manner of sickness. A great revival was on the way. The Word of God ran and was glorified when the church was scattered and ran from Jerusalem. It is truly wonderful to see the manner in which they used their suffering to deliver others from sin and sorrow. Notice further.



Paul and Silas were frustrated when they attempted to go into Asia. But were they defeated because their plans were upset? No. That blocking of their way on one continent brought salvation to another. Europe got the Gospel. They turned that apparent denial of their own way to fruitfulness. They went to Philippi; and having delivered a demon-possessed girl they were arrested, backs scourged, and they were thrown into prison. It looked as if they had missed the mark somewhere to be so unjustly treated. Did they bemoan their sad fate and decide to quit preaching, saying that there is no justice in the world and even God did not seem to care? He apparently had let them down. We have heard others so talk, who have not been as hard hit as these faithful servants of the Lord. But we listen in vain for a murmur-rather otherwise. You may hear the echo of their wonderful song. "At midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God." The darkest night of their experience and the darkest hour of the night they rejoiced. That song went up and up. They reached such high notes that heaven was struck and God was moved to intervene for them. He struck the jail with an earthquake and, lo, the jailer was converted and the beginning of an overcoming Church was laid. Paul the man who was so unjustly and cruelly treated, used the shame and ignominy to bless others. He later wrote one of his greatest epistles to that church which today adorns the New Testament reckoned among the Scriptures. They did not try to escape the sufferings, nor merely bear them stoically, but they used them. And that was not the only time.

Later, Paul was taken before kings and governors as a prisoner, and he again took advantage of the opportunity to preach the Gospel. The book of Acts witnesses of this marvelous overcomer and his victories. Chained to soldiers he preached so effectively that they were converted and all through Caesar' s household and the Roman army the Good News of salvation was broadcasted. He used every affront and humiliation to lift up the exalted Christ ... made everything to work good and glorify God. Even his troublesome infirmity, the messenger of Satan, a continual thorn in the flesh rasping, sticking, jabbing and buffeting him was so used. Three times Paul requested deliverance of this thorn, but was refused. God appeared hard and cruel to allow him to suffer so deeply when He could allay the trouble by a word. This was the last straw.

To his first and second cries God turned a deaf ear. After the third He answered, saying, "No, I will not remove the thorn; nevertheless, I will do more than that for you. I will give you grace to use it for your own spiritual strength and development" "My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Paul, catching the rhythm of the glory of the proposition, rose to the occasion and shouted ... "most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me for when I am weak, then am I strong." He saw the possibility of mounting up to a higher level in Christ, getting above the thing that was torturing him, and arriving at greater efficiency. He was in some spiritual danger, from which the thorn delivered him when he took the right attitude toward it.

This is the essence of this sermon. Make everything serve you, even as the early disciples made servants of their trials. They are all means to an end, allowed by our loving Lord to bring us to the place that He has designed for us. Overcomers are known by the handicaps that burden but do not defeat them. God is a great Economist. He wants nothing wasted, not even our sorrows and pain, but He wants all things to work good; therefore let us



count with Him and let all things serve us for time and eternity.

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