

FOLLOWING VISION WITH SERVICE.

Mark 9: 14-29.

On the Mount of Transfiguration Peter said, "Master, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias." Mark says the reason he said this, was, that he didn't know anything else to say. They were all sorely afraid. Even if Peter's words were spoken without due thought he gives expression to a universal desire of the human heart.

Peter did not know that at the foot of the mountain a father's heart was breaking. This father had a son who sorely afflicted. He had heard of the Great Physician, and had come in great hope that his son's health would be restored. But all his hopes had been dashed to the ground when the disciples failed to heal him. Of course Peter could not see the poor distracted father wringing his hands in despair while the disciples and pharisees wrangled over the best way to heal him. Could he have seen the anguish written on his face, the despair of a great hope crushed, surely he would have been willing to leave any safe and happy retreat to come to his rescue. On the Mount of Transfiguration, in the presence of a glorified Master, it was perfectly natural for him to feel that this glorified Master and the little group with Him were all that mattered. How easy to forget, then, that this glorified Master was the only hope of a

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troubled heart below, and that the great vision had been given them only to strengthen them to fight his battles. God has never yet singled out a man for some great blessing without expecting him to share it with suffering humanity. There was so much that Peter did not know and so little that he did.

Ever since God first shed His grace on men's hearts we have been trying to do what Peter proposed to do. Every man, every family, and every race that God ever took into His favor have soon found their earthly state greatly improved. When God takes a man into His favor he soon finds himself much better off materially, socially, and morally. Straightway then he says, "Let us build us a secluded house far away from the dirt and filth of common life, out of hearing of its clamor and strife, far away from its poverty and distress. Let us go far as we can from the hunger and pain of men, where we will not be shocked at the sight of their pale faces and gaunt limbs. From this sheltered secluded spot we can serve the Lord more perfectly. Here we will pray earnestly for the benighted souls of men. We will send material assistance to make their lives a little more tolerable. We will preach, from this sheltered secluded haven, the way of righteousness, peace and holiness. From this sheltered God-favored haven we will condemn the ignorance the strife and the discord of those unfortunate men who are without God's favor. We will tell them how displeasing to Him are all their evil ways. We will harshly condemn their uncleanness and immorality. Lord, we will do

great things for these people if you will just not ask us to live with them.

Thank God, there was one great religious Leader who was not afraid to live with poor raggedy men. He, too, could have lived on a mountain top, far away from the strife and discord of men. He might have picked out a God-favored haven and built a strong wall of special privilege around it, as so many of His followers have done. But He knew you could not save men that way.

"Where cross the crowded ways of life,
Where sound the cries of race and clan.
Above the noise of selfish strife,
We hear thy voice, O Son of Man."

Jesus Christ did not love men's souls. He loved men and women. He loved them just as they are. He loved them in their poverty and afflictions, He loved them in fetters and chains. He loved them in their misery and helplessness, He loved them when their faces were dirty and their clothes ragged and torn.

What does it matter to the poor benighted Hindoo what religion promises to the God-favored English, if the color of his skin and a strange speech forever shuts him out of all its benefits. The cry of his poor benighted soul is, "What has your religion to offer me?" What does it matter to the poor black man what religion promises to the lordly white race if a dusky face is to forever shut him out of its blessings? What does it matter to a little child, sweating his life away in a dark factory, robbed of an education, robbed of the God-given freedom of childhood, plundered and

spoiled by greed--- what does it matter to him what religion promises to the sons of the favored few? The cry that is bursting his heart is, "What has religion for me?" What has religion, our religion today, to offer to the millions facing life in dumb hopeless despair? The only religion that will ever appeal to them is one that promises to break their chains.

What a picture of religion today are our empty churches. Their tall spires, their stained-glass windows, their plush* seated pews, like their shadowy themes, their empty phrases, and their dead devotions, mean nothing to the hungry multitudes. How they miss the Man of Gallilee. When they come to us with their problems we either ignore them or we stand around like the pharisees and disciples and wrangle over the best way to help them. Notice how gladly the crowds ran to meet Him when they saw Him coming. They knew the poor boy would get help now. I think they would come running as gladly to meet Him today. They do not come running to meet us. Our hands are empty of gifts. Many disappointments have taught them they can expect no help from us.

Why is it we have nothing to offer the masses of men? It is because we have tried to help them from afar off. Even Jesus could not do that. He did not try. To save a man you must come very near him. You can love a man's soul with a wide social gulch between you. But to love the man you must cross the gulf and live on his side. The reason why Christ was heard so gladly by the masses was that He went where they were. He was not ashamed or afraid to eat

where they ate, to sit where they sat, and to walk with them through every sorrow.

It is sad to relate, but organized religion today is fast becoming the exclusive property of the great middle and professional classes. Where are the toiling suffering multitudes who heard the Prophet of Gallilee so gladly? Where are the spoiled and dispossessed masses whose dead hopes were revived by His gracious promises? Where are the twenty million forgotten and dispossess who claim rich America as their native land? They are not in the Christian church. Even the great labor unions--and they no longer represent the poor of our day. Even the labor unions are building strong walls of special privilege around their own that bars the path of hope to millions of the dispossessed. But even the labor unions no longer look upon the church as their best friend.

The great Methodist movement was once financed by men and women who paid a penny a week to its support. Now if a man does not give a dollar a week is counted a slacker. All this may sound well in financial statistics. But to the man who knows the history of religions it sounds like a death warrant. It may mean we are on our way out.

Has any man ever come into this world offering relief and hope to human suffering and been indifferently received? We wonder today at the indifference of men to the message of the church. We who have the message to offer are prone to ascribe this indifference to the blindness and cinicism of the masses. Why are the pews of our

churches empty? Why do the crowds turn away from us and seek other physicians? Is it because men have become so calloused and hardened in sin that no appeal to righteousness will move them? If this is true it is cause for great concern and even alarm. If the masses of men are more wicked now than they have ever been before civilization itself is in grave danger. If the wickedness of men is to be measured by their indifference to the message of the church the masses of our day are in a desperate plight. I hardly think there has been a day since the dark ages when men paid as little attention to what the leaders of the Christian church were saying as they do today.

But when we measure the wickedness of men today by other standards the picture does not look so dark. By the standards of justice and mercy men are no worse today than they were in other ages. In some respects I think the masses of men are more kind and merciful today than in any age of the world. There is more tolerance and more genuine sympathy even among the ignorant and non-christian than any age that is passed.

Wouldn't it be wiser if the church looked for the cause of man's indifference elsewhere? Could it be that the church has forgotten the masses instead of the masses forgetting Christianity? Is the organized church the champion of the poor man's cause? Even if it is in late years it has been so long yoked with special privilege and injustice that it will be hard to convince them now. When President Roosevelt was campaigning for the second term he made the statement that one third of the American people were under-fed,

poorly clothed and poorly housed. One of the Bishops of the Southern Methodist Church challenged his statement. He said he did not believe so many of our people were in such a sad plight. If he had spent more time living with the poor and less hobnobbing with millionaires he would have known better how they lived. If the church of God ever gains the ear of the masses it must offer them something besides beautiful platitudes and promises of riches in another world. When a man is hungry, ragged and in pain he cares but little for a message pitched on a plane far beyond his reach. If you interest him you must offer him a gospel of hope. You must show him away out of the darkness that surrounds him. That is the kind of a message that Jesus Christ brought men. It was GOOD NEWS INDEED.