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Instructive commentary on Judges 2:1-5 For our benefit

The issue at the beginning of the Book of Judges and throughout the book is whether Israel will be faithful to the covenant. The issue for the readers is similar: whether he or she will worship and serve God alone. God had stated clearly and repeatedly that His people were to destroy or drive out all the former inhabitants of the land (Exo 23:31-33; Exo 34:11-16; Num 33:51-56; Deu 7:1-5).

"The deplorable spiritual condition of the Israelites, not their lack of chariots, lay behind their failure to dispossess the Canaanites. To expose Israel's sinfulness, the 'angel of the Lord' appeared to them (Jdg 2:1)." [Note: Wolf, p. 392.]

This paragraph resumes the history of Israel at this point, where the Book of Joshua ended, and to contrast the era of Joshua with the era of the judges (cf. 2 Ch. 36:22-23 and Ez. 1:1-3). The key issue was whom the Israelites "served" (or "worshiped" NRSV). The Hebrew verb so translated ('abad) forms an envelope structure around this passage (Jdg. 2:7; Jdg. 3:6), as well as appearing in its middle (Jdg. 2:11; Jdg. 2:13; Jdg. 2:19).

"After a chapter that summarizes the incomplete wars of occupation, the reader is intro-

duced to the threatening wars of liberation that characterize the period of the judges. To explain how Israel fell prey to powerful oppressors, the author reviews events since the death of Joshua." [Note: Wolf, p. 393.]

"Here [Jdg. 2:10] we come to the heart of the **second-generation syndrome**. It is a lukewarmness, a complacency, an apathy about amazing biblical truths that we have heard from our childhood, or from our teachers. . . . It is a pattern which challenges churches and even nations, and nowhere does it work with more devastating effect than in Bible colleges and theological seminaries where, day after day, we come in contact with God's truth. . . . History tells us that not even the most vivid display of the life-transforming power of the Holy Spirit will prevent this problem.

"But why? Why did it happen then, and why does it happen to us? . . . We must realize two things about this kind of complacency. The first is something Erich Fromm once pointed out when he said, '**Hate is not the opposite of love. Apathy is.**' To be complacent in the face of Calvary is the greatest possible rejection of God. The second is that **complacency grows like a cancer**. . . Maybe part of the problem lay with the first [Joshua's] generation. Interestingly, however, the book of Judges puts none of the blame there. The second generation was held responsible for their failure, and God would not allow them to shift the blame." [Note: Inrig, pp. 26-27.]

"People cannot thrive on the spiritual power of their parents; each generation must personally experience the reality of God." [Note: Wolf, p. 393.]

One writer called the stages in each cycle: sin, slavery, supplication, salvation, and silence. [Note: Wolf, p. 394.] Others have labeled them: rebellion, retribution, repentance, and restoration.

"The greatest sin a human being can commit is not murder or rape or other despicable acts of atrocity. It is to turn his back on the

"Hate is not the opposite of love; Apathy is"

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is a monthly publication that is freely available on the Internet and is intended to be a help to believers who appreciate the timeless truths of God's Word and who recognize the unchanging principles of God's will for His people. It is primarily intended to strengthen those who enjoy fellowship in local assemblies of believers who are gathered to the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ alone.

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living God to serve man-made gods." [Note: Inrig, p. 37.]

"Sin produces servitude. That is the fact of Judges." [Note: Inrig, p. 40.]

"Few books portray so complete a picture of human depravity as does Judges." [Note: Wolf, p. 379.]

(from a commentary on Judges by Thomas Constable)

From Hopelessness to Hope

James Beattie

In the four chapters of the beautiful book of Ruth, the sparking gem of the Old Testament, we have a series of progressive unfoldings in both the events and the lives of the individuals recorded.

The picturesque cameos of each chapter are rare portraits and capture the eye and heart. Each person and the variety of unfolding events are heartwarming and full of lessons.

The dark days of chapter one, for example, are marked by the death of three men: a father and two sons. These are the only men in the chapter and they have been buried and all resources to sustain the widows are gone. So the three women start the journey to Bethlehem because the famine is over and Naomi "...had heard in the country of Moab how that the LORD had visited his people in giving them bread" (ch. 1:6).

But Naomi, returning without resources, sees no hope for her daughters-in-law. So she encourages them to return to Moab. As Orpah turns back to her people and to her gods, it is sad to hear Naomi encourage Ruth to take the same path. Her bitterness has caused her to lose sight of the true God and she seems to have little regret that Orpah is returning to Moab or that Ruth might do the same.

Naomi says she went out full and the Lord had brought her back empty. She is bitter and, on encountering the people of

the city, asks them to call her "bitter" (Marah). The Hebrew verb stem for the word "bitter" is a "Hiphil" and thus it could be translated: "The Almighty has caused me to be bitter" (verse 21). She blames the Lord for her bitterness. Somehow she has missed the fact that Elimelech took the family away from the inheritance of the Lord. The outcome of departure is always the same: "...the way of transgressors is hard" (Proverbs 13:15).

It is notable that there are no living men in chapter 1. Three men have died and there is no mention of any others in the chapter. Even in the entrance of Naomi and Ruth to Bethlehem there is an interesting observation made by Keil and Delitzsch in their Old Testament commentary. They state:

"When they arrived, the whole town was in commotion on their account...They said, 'Is this Naomi?' The subject [of the verbal expression: 'they said'] is the inhabitants of the town, but chiefly the female portion of the inhabitants, who were the most excited at Naomi's return. This is the simplest way of explaining the use of the feminine in the verbs."

As the commentary notes, both verbal expressions: "They said..." and Naomi's response: "Call me not..." are feminine plural. Thus, without overstating the observation, it would underscore that there is no evidence of any living man concerned about the well-being of the women in chapter 1. Thus this chapter ends with no man and no hope.

In chapter 2, however, it is clear that behind the scenes there was a man who was very interested in the welfare of the women. Speaking to Ruth, Boaz explains that he had received a full account of all that had taken place since the death of her husband. He states: "It hath fully been showed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother-in-law since the death of thine husband: and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of

thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore" (verse 11).

When Ruth returns to Naomi and discloses where she had gleaned, a glimmer of hope arises in the heart of Naomi. She states: "Blessed be he of the LORD, who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead" (ch. 2:20). And she explains to Ruth that he is a near relative and advises her not to go elsewhere, but to stay in his field.

At this point, Boaz is not Naomi's only hope. She tells Ruth: "The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen" (verse 20). Boaz is one of a number of possible solutions to their problem. But hope has arisen in the heart of Naomi through the manifestation of the grace and bountiful provision of Boaz.

In chapter 3, hope has grown to the point that now Naomi takes the lead and tells Ruth how their difficulties can be resolved. Through the Ruth's initiative in chapter 2 and the kindness of Boaz, hope is revived and Naomi sees a path forward and a future. Yet in this chapter, a problem arises. As Boaz explains to Ruth: "And now it is true that I am thy near kinsman: howbeit there is a kinsman nearer than I" (verse 12). So he instructs Ruth to lie down until the morning and he will take of everything.

Here again we now see the confidence and trust of Naomi in Boaz and in his resolving of their difficulties. She encourages Ruth to "Sit still, my daughter, until thou know how the matter will fall: for the man will not be in rest, until he have finished the thing this day" (verse 18). Hope has reached a new height. But we leave chapter 3 with two men in the picture.

In chapter 4 the nearer relative refuses to live up to the responsibility that was legislated in Deuteronomy 25:5. This leaves Boaz as the only one in the picture. Accordingly, this last chapter leaves only one man to meet the need.

Reviewing the four chapters, we see that the book of Ruth begins with no man and ends with one man. The four chapters underscore one of the most important lessons of the Christian life. It is only when the Lord is the only One in our lives, the Ultimate Priority, that we can have a life worth living. When we return to that condition and commitment we will have

real and worthwhile living and, in one sense, even as believers, have a truly new birth.

Chapter 1 is death, despair, bitterness, and hopelessness. Boaz had been in the lives of Elimelech's family before they left Bethlehem in chapter 1. The statement of Naomi to Ruth in chapter 2 makes that clear. She tells Ruth that Boaz "...hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead" (verse 20). The expression "left off" means he had not stopped doing what he had done in the past. Furthermore, it was not just in the present because, just as he was doing to "the living" (Naomi and Ruth), he had done to "the dead."

But apparently Elimelech and Naomi were not satisfied with the provision of Boaz so they left for Moab and the dark days begin.

Now in chapter 4, when Boaz is the only one they are looking to, there is life, joy, hope, and the promise of a future—not only for Naomi and Ruth, and for the nation of Israel in King David—but for the world kingdom of our blessed Lord for whom we presently wait with expectation.

Here is the lesson: The moment we lose sight of the Lord we are in trouble. Life without the Lord Jesus as the center and circumference of our lives is not worth living. As the apostle Paul said: "For to me, to live is Christ" (Philippians 1:21). Take the Lord out of my life and I have nothing to live for.

Since Boaz had been taking care of them, they had no reason to leave. But something else had caused them to be discontented and disappointed and had driven them away. Departure had taken place even before the writer of the book of Ruth had begun this narrative. A further study of the book of Ruth would make that clear.

Thus the question is: Are we in chapter 1 of the book of Ruth or in chapter 4?

What about the two chapters between? In chapter 2, Naomi tells Ruth that Boaz is one of a number of relatives. In chapter 3, Boaz tells Ruth, he is one of two. It is not until we come to chapter 4 where is the only one, life really begins.

The same is true with us. The Lord Jesus stated: "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the

other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24). James also reminds us that "A double minded man is unstable in all his ways" (James 1:8).

It is not enough that the Lord Jesus has a place in our lives. It is not enough even that He is our first priority. There must be no other priority; no rival to our heart's affection.

Of course, we have to live in this world and take care of our responsibilities. But all of them should be done in relation to the Lord's will and plan for us. This present world has a multitude of distractions that can exhaust us leaving us no energy for God and His interests. Only when we stand before the Lord Jesus in a future day will we more fully understand the true value of everything in this life. And at that time only one thing will matter. If we see His smile and hear His words: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:21), nothing else will matter then.

Why then should it matter now?

Living to God inwardly is the only possible means of living to Him outwardly.

Gideon:

Good Start — Poor Finish

Joel Portman

In the sequence of judges that are recorded in that book, Gideon is one who is prominent. Preceding him are Othniel, Ehu, Shamgar, and Deborah, and succeeding him are (Abimelech), Tola, Jair, Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, Abdon and Samson. Of these, only eight have any detail recorded of their activities to deliver Israel from her enemies. God's record of his exercise and activities forms the central block of narrative in the book, so that Gideon can be seen as a transitional judge, in the respect that prior to him there was a certain evenness of character seen in the judges, but the judges following his latter years display a continual deterioration. In

the case of Deborah and her call to Barak in ch. 4, her heroic character that ended in a song of triumph gives way to a very unheroic man in Gideon, who does all he can at the first to avoid God's call and then at the end, serves to lead Israel away from God. The deteriorating condition of Gideon's life is replicated in the lives of the judges that followed him.

This only illustrates the general tenor of many of God's people. Sometimes it is seen in the life of one individual who starts well with great zeal for God, but who ends his or her life having abandoned that exercise and yielding to the impulses of the flesh. It is *re-echoed* in the history of the church period in Rev. 2-3, where the interior condition of the heart in Ephesus resulted in lukewarmness of heart in Laodicea with the Lord outside the entire company. This is a deteriorating tendency against which all who desire to be faithful to the Lord must resist, but it is often so very difficult and results in failure. Each one must determine for themselves what will be the terminating result of their life and the present direction of their desires.

Gideon's Excellent Beginning

What we read of Gideon at the beginning of the record is most commendable. In the midst of famine and oppression because of the enemy's domination, he is threshing wheat "in" the winepress. The fact that he was doing so suggests that the joy that would be linked with the wine flowing from the press was lacking among them, but if there could be no joy in such a time, he was getting food for himself and his family. Times such as these are often the experience of the godly, but despite the lack of flowing joy, one can seek to feed the soul on the fullness of Christ and His riches provided for us.

His response to the angel's statement is also commendable. He expressed the deep distress of those who find a declaration of the Lord with us to be in contrast to the actual condition that one feels. Of course, the angel of the Lord didn't say that the Lord was with all of Israel, due to their departure from God, but the Lord was with an individual such as Gideon. Regardless of the condition of God's people in general, we need to remember that one can personally enjoy the reality of His presence to

give power to be used for personal victories as well as to lead the saints over enemy forces. It should be our own exercise to know the experiential reality of the Lord in our lives without regard for the general condition of the assembly or other believers. It is always possible to do so!

His desire to offer something to the angel (Jehovah Himself, I believe) was in the form of a food offering. Not sure if the angel (appearing as man) was truly a celestial being or not, he would ascertain it by offering the food as well as expressing his desire to honor Him. Simply eating it would leave doubt about the question, but the action of the Lord to convert it into a burnt offering revealed the true identity of the Man who appeared to him. What he offered in a mundane fashion was converted by the Lord when accepted into something far higher, given over to ascend to God in the miraculous flame from the rock. We can anticipate that a simple desire of a believer to honor the Lord and to give to Him will be lifted into something far higher and more valuable through His acceptance.

His first test was to stand publicly for the Lord and against the Baals, the gods of his father and neighbors. He had built an altar unto the Lord (6:24), but now he was called upon to destroy the altar to a false god (6:25). It was one thing for him to build the altar to the Lord, for there were likely many others in the nation of Israel. It was another to destroy the altar of Baal, especially since his father was evidently the leader of their community in this form of false worship. A positive response to honor God also calls for an action against all that is false that stands contrary to His Name. There are those who honor the Lord in their hearts and lives, but who timidly refuse to stand against evil or to speak against what is false. God is calling for boldness to do both!

Some have criticized Gideon because he did this by night instead of in the day. A moment's thought would make it clear that it would have been impossible for him to do it by day; he would have been opposed and prevented from doing it by all the townspeople. Even though performed at night, it wasn't hidden, because others had no difficulty identifying him as the one who had done it. The sad spiritual

state of his own people was revealed in that they called for him to be put to death, but evidently his stand influenced his father, so that he defended his actions and recognized the futility of supporting worship of a false god (6:31). Baal was the god who controlled the sun and was most powerful, they thought, in the day. Therefore Joash called for Baal to retaliate against Gideon in the daytime, if he could. We see in this that his actions for God influenced his father to reject his prior occupation with false worship, so that there was an early result to encourage him.

Gideon's Hesitating Usability

He was moved by the Spirit of the Lord to sound the trumpet to call Israel to join him to eradicate their foes, and those of Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali responded. But to make certain that his actions were directed by the Spirit, he asked God to give him the sign of the fleece, dry or wet, in the two ensuing nights. Without considering the typical significance of the dew on or off the fleece, let us not criticize Gideon too severely for doing this. Yes, it might represent his hesitant response, but remember that Moses was also reluctant to undertake the responsibility that the Lord gave him, and that the Lord convinced him by signs as well as command. Gideon was about to embark on a work that was hazardous and yet essential to deliver Israel from the enemy, and he needed to make certain that this was not simply his own zealous response but that it was the Lord's will. God never criticizes him for doing this, and we should hesitate to do so as well. It was effective to reinforce his conviction that the Lord was going to use him to save Israel, therefore he could move forward in the task.

The second step was to recognize that this battle would be the Lord's doing, not only of the Lord's leading. God called him to release from any obligation any of the men who were fearful or afraid from their participation. This was the pattern that God had established for Israel in Deut. 20:8, so he obeyed without question. That diminished his army from 32,000 men to 10,000 men. If the Midianites and their confederates outnumbered them before, then the difference was far greater now!

But the Lord was not finished culling out the men from his army. What seemed difficult with 32,000 men was even more unlikely with 10,000. But to the Lord, this was yet too many. One thing we must learn is that God will not share His glory with another. He was acting on His word in 7:2, "lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, 'Mine own hand hath saved me.'" As long as we want credit for a victory won or recognition for a work accomplished, the Lord is dishonored to that extent, since we are taking some of it for ourselves.

Barak had won a victory with 10,000 men (4:6,10), so that number seemed within the range of possibility. But the Lord tested each one of these by the brook and how they drank water, so that there were only 300 that remained of the original number. Notice that neither the men themselves, nor Gideon, knew how the relatively innocuous act of drinking water would determine whether they were fit for the battle or not. Neither one could influence the choice, it was the Lord's. How difficult it is for us to learn, also, that we can be tested for usability for God's service by small things that seem insignificant in our lives. How many say with regard to their pleasures, habits, or other activities that they have no effect on their spiritual state. Experience as well as Scripture proves this to be utterly false. If we want to be used as God wants to use us, we must consider how every part of our lives fits together to compose the whole, and each part will determine how much God can use us in our lives to serve Him.

The Lord mercifully again reinforced Gideon's confidence by the nocturnal penetration that he and his servant made into the Midianite camp. What he overheard from the lips of one of the enemy soldiers gave him final assurance of ultimate victory, so that by a very unorthodox method of warfare, using the pitchers and torches, God delivered the entire camp into his hand. Actually, it appears that like they didn't need to fight personally; the soldiers of the enemy camp destroyed one another! No question that this was a victory gained by the Lord's work, though Gideon and his men were instruments in the battle. Our victories are gained by the Lord's work through us, and the honor goes to His Name. The willingness of

Gideon's men to obey his strange command that likely seemed contrary to their normal expectations was essential to bring about the conquest that liberated Israel from enemy domination.

Gideon's Fleshly Failure

The Midianites represent one form of enemy attack that must be combated, but the enemy that often overcomes God's people isn't the external foe; it is the internal force that gains control. Gideon's latter failure in this way was different from Samson's, but both yielded to and were overcome by the flesh.

Do we realize that often following personal victories, possibly those in public, we are susceptible to failures from within? It was after Elijah's triumphant act to honor the Lord on Mt. Carmel that he fled through the threats of a Jezebel. Samson's greatest enemy wasn't the Philistine force; it was the evil tendencies that lurked within him. These were the ones that overcame him. We might gain a mighty victory in public, but the flesh works in private, and we fail.

Passing over his treatment of those who refused to help (likely retribution richly deserved, though expressed toward brethren and not enemies), we come to the latter years of his life. These were, sadly, years marked by definite decline. It was right in the sight of the Lord to refuse to rule over them and to decline the potential of continuing a dynasty in his sons. Sadly that was quickly followed by his request for the gold earrings of the prey, gold that had been used to decorate the flesh of the ungodly. The request for the gold was not an issue, but what he did with the gold was. He used it to make an ephod that he put in his city. An ephod likely formed part of the garments of the priesthood, particularly the high priest, that seems most connected with the Urim and Thummin, those stones that were used to discern the mind of the Lord (though some think it was an image in this case). Perhaps he had no evil purpose in doing so, but he failed to consider the influence that it would have on the less spiritual people, for they made it an object of adoration. It is as if he replaced the shrine to Baal that he had destroyed, with an image or likeness of something pertaining to the priest

office that became a stumbling block to Israel. The correct place for the ephod was only in the tabernacle (1 Sam. 21:9), not in Gideon's city. Even a good man can be used of Satan to introduce an element into the lives of believers that can be contrary to God's will for them and lead to further decline.

Then we see that he had many wives (Jud. 8:30), and he went further to have a concubine in Shechem (possibly a Canaanite), who gave him the 71st son, who caused so much destruction in that area of Israel afterward, killing his own brothers with the sword. After the victories, Gideon seems to have done as many others have, in that he settled down to "take it easy" and enjoy life. We read that the land had rest for the forty years of his life, but we do not read that he judged Israel. His influence for good was limited and he failed to preserve godly principles among the people.

We wish that the divine record would have ended with his victory to deliver Israel from their oppressive servitude. It would have been far better had he "gone home to glory" while his record was unblemished than to end it in such disgrace and bring a sad blot on his history. But do we take account that we may begin very well in early life, acting in dependence on God to do His will and accomplish great things, only to relax toward the end and result in a sad condition of life before the page has been ended? May God help us to preserve our exercise and faithfulness to Him until the end of life, so that we might be able to say like Paul in 2 Tim. 4:7, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith."

No Judgment . . .

No Condemnation

Walter Scott, "Fifty Years of Written Ministry"

No judgment and no condemnation for believers is expressly and distinctly affirmed in the New Testament. If this can be satisfactorily shown it may lift a cloud from many a weary heart. No judgment is the emphatic declaration of the Lord in John 5:24, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word

and believeth him that sent me hath eternal life, and cometh not into judgment but hath passed out of death into life: (R. V.). Who with such authority pronounces on the absolute security of believers, and divinely guarantees immunity from judgment to come? It is Christ, the Son of God and quickener of the dead, yea, Christ, the Son of Man and judge of living and dead. His right, therefore, to announce beforehand the ultimate destiny of "His own" is unquestionable. Instead of standing in the dock as criminals, we shall sit on the bench as judges; "Know ye not that the saints shall judge the world? Know he know that we shall judge angels?" (1 Cor. 6:2, 3). At the return of our Lord, the righteous dead are "raised in glory" (1 Cor. 15:43). Weigh for a moment the absurdity and grotesque character of the situation; believers in a glorified condition crowned and robed, and morally and physically like Christ, standing their trial to have it determined whether or not they are fit for heaven and glory! Why, Scripture in its teaching reverses, exactly reverses the position. The Judge was once God's victim for sin on the Cross. He bore our judgment—divine judgment justly due to us. Our trial and judgment are long since past. The Cross settled the question of judgment for all who believe. If, too, raised in glory, how put on trial to ascertain our fitness for it? But on this, Scripture utters no uncertain sound. We are as completely beyond judgment as the Judge Himself. It is a bold word to say, that the weakest and feeblest believers on earth is as safe from divine judgment as Christ Himself; it can no more overtake them than it can reach Him; for Christ and us, it is past and forever gone. Such is the glorious teaching of 1 John 4:17, "As he is, i.e., beyond judgment, even are we in this world." We are as the Judge. We dare not, and must not quote 2 Cor. 5:10 in opposition to John 5:24. The former affirms the manifestation of all at the judgment seat; the latter expressly exempts believers from future judgment. Manifestation and judgment are different words and convey different ideas. Paul wrote of the former; the Lord spake of the latter. We shall be manifested is Paul. We shall not be judged is the Lord. Before the judgment seat, we are manifested. On the judgment seat we judge. Carefully distinguish between manifesta-

tion and judgment.

But the testimony of the Holy Spirit is equally conclusive that for believers there is no condemnation. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. :1). If therefore believers shall not come into judgment, it is evident that there can be no condemnation. Oh, glorious position! Now no condemnation. For believers it does not exist. The testing of our works (1 Cor. 4:5) and consequent praise given or withheld, in no wise enfeebles the truth as to the absolute immunity of believers from judgment both as to their personas the sins. For us, judgment is a past thing. Glory, and not judgment, is our prospect.

Christians can never sin cheaply; they pay a heavy price for iniquity. Transgression destroys peace of mind, obscures fellowship with Jesus, hinders prayer, brings darkness over the soul; therefore be not the serf and bondman of sin.

C.H.Spurgeon

First Things in the Gospel of Matthew

Andrew Borland

Our Lord's commission to His apostles significantly contains the words—"Make disciples of all nations." For that very purpose He Himself appeared among men; and it is the privilege and duty of all who listen to their Master's voice today to cooperate with Him in the accomplishment of His object, and the furtherance of His cause. The call of the gospel is to discipleship; and the preaching of the Word throughout the world is to that end. A

message that aims no further than the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins is only half of the meaning of the work of Christ. Because the work of the Cross relates itself to the behavior of men there must be a constant adjustment of the declaration of a full salvation in Christ to the changing circumstances in which men live. The basic principles remain immutable—their application varies in details as centuries change. A study of the principles is a splendid qualification for the application of the truths.

A disciple is one who learns. In New Testament language the word has a double meaning. In the Acts of the Apostles it is a term interchangeable (although not exactly synonymous) with "believer," "saint," "Christian." There we read that the disciples were first called Christians at Antioch (11:26), and soon after the former designation falls out of use altogether. It is entirely absent from the epistles. This double meaning may be paralleled by that of our word "scholar." A boy is a scholar of such and such a school the day he enters it; he may never perhaps become a scholar in the deeper sense.

In the Gospels, however, the term has a more restricted connotation, and applies, not invariably, but very frequently, to those men who were willing to renounce worldly prospects and to follow the Lord. In Matthew's Gospel, illustrative texts are easily found, that a disciple is one who, first of all, learns to follow and thereafter follows to learn. A critical and revolutionary contact with Christ takes place, and then the process works itself out in a life of attachment to Him and His cause. The disciple is not so much devoted to a cause, as to a Person Who is the central Figure in the cause of God and righteousness. The passionate and volitional devotion to the Person must inevitably regulate the entire behavior of the disciple. Thus we read, in this Gospel of the Kingdom such expressions of discipleship: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross (i.e., learning to follow), and follow me," (following to learn). Or again; "He that taketh not his cross (learns to follow) and followeth not after me (following to learn), is not worthy of me" (10:38). or yet again; "Come unto me all ye that labor and are

heavy laden, and I will give you rest"—learning to follow) 11:28. "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me (following to learn) for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls." 11:29.

Emphasis is, therefore, laid upon the primary essentials of discipleship, an emphasis which indicates the importance of things that are first. The recurrence of that adjective "first" suggests a study of matters which the Master announced to be of prime importance in the concerns of His Kingdom.

First of all there is the consideration of causes which hinder men from undertaking discipleship in the greatest society in the world,—the society of Jesus Christ. "Suffer me first to go and bury my father" (8:21). Such a plea was one for indefinite postponement, for, in all probability, the father was not yet dead, and the prospective disciple was willing to wait till the performance of filial duties was over before his determination to follow Christ should become an actual fact. He said in words which meant almost the same, exactly what a Roman official later said, "Go thy way for this time, when I have a convenient season I will call for thee" (Acts 24:25).

The context is illuminating. Out of the multitude come two men, one uncalculating and impulsive, the other, too calculating and hesitant. The first, in his rash espousal of the cause of Christ, thinking nothing of the excessive demands which attachment to Him requires, has his ardor abated by the cold douche—"the foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head." The second, far-sighted enough to perceive the rigors of discipleship, and sensible enough to put a high assessment upon the rewards of the kingdom, endeavors to camouflage his moral cowardice, by seeking to enlist the sympathy of Christ as he retired to discharge a duty which general opinion regarded as of the utmost moment. Christ, senses with inerrant accuracy the subterfuge which was nothing short of a polite refusal to follow all the way and immediately, smashes through his excuse and reminds him (and us, too,) that the demands of discipleship are pressing and imperative, and no duty dare interfere with the expressions of loyalty to Him.

From this, several lessons may be drawn. And first we may learn that Christ's call implies a demand for complete renunciation of one's own will. He claims priority. Considerations of other concerns are secondary, and Christ must be first, and always first. He claims, as in the case of his very earliest disciples, Peter and Andrew, priority over lawful occupation, for He called them from their nets to His service. He claims priority over parental control, for He summoned James and John to join His company and leave the authority of their father. He claims, as in one of the cases we are considering, priority over one's personal comforts, and calls to a life of disciplining hardships and self-denying renunciation. And in this last, He claims priority over legitimate duties and natural affections. In short, He must be Lord of all or not Lord at all.

Another lesson is that this man's attitude was wrong because he gave a secondary duty precedence over one of primary importance. A man's first duty is his personal relationship to Christ, and this disciple's folly lay in the fact that he sought to postpone the issue by sidetracking himself to a lesser duty. His desire to be a disciple may have been sincere, it certainly was not intense enough. By multitudes today his action is being perpetuated, for his direct descendants in the moral world may be numbered by legion.

Again, to make excuse for his attitude towards Christ, he tried to deceive himself into a recognition of the urgency of the duty arising from natural affection, substituting something that affected merely the surface of his life, for an attachment that meant the captivating of his complete personality. But he could not deceive Christ. He knew what was in man, perceived that the hesitancy was due mainly to a moral disinclination which would ultimately and irreparably defeat the desire of the truer man. **Christ cannot abide temporizing:** He must have unhesitating trust and undeviating loyalty. Discipleship demands complete, irrevocable, uncomplaining surrender to the leadership of Christ—and because men know that the Kingdom of God is one of discipline and rigors, they are not prepared to waive consideration of less important details of life out of respect for the one great fundamental and controlling

factor, abandonment to the person of the King.

No man that knows his own heart in the light both of Scripture and experience will be rash to condemn another, for he knows, too, that the commonest mistake and tragedy of Christian communities today arises from the seducing whisper, "Suffer me first" But warned by past failures, and drawn out in acknowledgment of the renunciation Christ made for us, readers of this page will surely abandon themselves to the will of God and say concerning His Son, "In all things He shall have the preeminence."

"With Christ."

**Another link is broken,
Another soul at rest
"Within the veil," in glory
Now dwells among the blest;
Where weariness and weakness,
And death shall be no more,
Where only welcomes wait us,
From loved ones gone before.**

**Another link to bind us
To yonder shining land,
Our hearts are oft-times yearning
To join the ransomed band;
Where tears and sighs and sorrow
For aye shall flee away,
And night shall change to morning,
To pure and perfect day.**

**Another soul has finished
The Pilgrim path below,
No more to see but dimly,
Now "face to face" to know;
Where mysteries have vanished,
God's hidden dealings plain,
Where all earth's loss is over,
In heaven's eternal gain. – F.B**