

A Larger Outlook (Isaiah Liv. 2)

by Seth Rees

The sermon emphasizes the necessity of spiritual growth and the importance of expanding one's faith and generosity in order to fulfill God's calling.

Scripture: Psalm 139:23, Proverbs 11:24, Isaiah 54:2, Philippians 3:13, 2 Timothy 1:7

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Faith Development"

Description

Seth Rees preaches on the importance of enlarging our spiritual tent, using the analogy of stretching forth the curtains of our habitation from Isaiah 54:2. He warns against the dangers of being too literal or too spiritual in interpreting Scriptures, emphasizing the need for a balanced approach. Rees highlights the symmetrical enlargement of the Christian life, urging believers to break forth and grow in faith, love, and expression of God's work in their lives. He encourages continuous growth, progression, and full surrender to God, rejecting stagnation and decay in the spiritual journey.

Transcript

Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations"(Isaiah liv, 2).

Many Scriptures have divers meanings and applications. They apply, for example, to the life of State, Church or Home; and they are also of times adapted to a spiritual interpretation, fitting most exquisitely into the inner life and character of the individual Christian. There are Scriptures also which refer primarily to the experience of the individual, and then secondarily to that of the community or church or state.

There are two shoals which we must avoid, and they are on opposite sides of the channel.

The one is the shoal of Literalization, the other is the shoal of Spiritualization. Now and then we meet a man who is so literal and absolute in his understanding of the Scriptures that he gets no soul food from them; there are other readers of the Bible who go to such extreme lengths in spiritualizing and mystifying it as to utterly destroy its original force and meaning. In the passage under consideration we have one which can with impunity be applied first to the Christian himself, then to the church of which he is only one of the members.

The prophet here, by way of felicitous and effective illustration, makes use of the primitive tent. It is the simplest of human habitations. Wherever a pole, some cords or splints, a little bark or canvas or skin are to be found, there a tent can be made. It is as easily struck as pitched, and almost as readily enlarged.

When the growing necessities of the family demand larger quarters, all that is required is a little longer pole, a trifle more string, and some additional bark or canvas, and lo, you can at once stretch forth the curtains of your habitation.

We have said that the tent type is applicable to the church and individual. We wish to notice first that the enlargement is a symmetrical enlargement: "Thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left hand." Hebrew scholars tell us that the word translated "break forth" has the meaning of "burst out." This would suggest very high internal pressure. Larger quarters must be had at any cost. That illiterate man who was converted in the slums and who said, "If I can't speak, I'll bust," had precisely the right idea. Salvation can not live in a human soul without expression. It must break forth in prayer, testimony, song and shouts of praise. The soul filled with God is a spiritual Vesuvius in action. The law of growth is a fundamental principle of both nature and redemption. Progression is an inexorable law of divine life; when either a plant or a soul stops growing it begins to die. Stagnation means corruption and putrefaction. The corpse belongs to the worm. When a spring ceases to flow it becomes a pool, a stagnant, malaria breeding swamp.

The Christian has his choice between growth and decay, progress and stagnation. "Forward," is the watchword of full salvation, and it is either to go forward or to go backward. You are either greatly in advance of your experience when converted or you are a backslider. If there has ever been a time when you had more salvation than you have now you are a proper candidate for "the mourner's bench." You may be unwilling to admit your fall, you may be going on with as loud or louder profession than ever and with a great bustle and rush of church work, but if there was ever a time when you had more faith, more love and more joy than you have today then you are "fallen from grace" and in danger of the wrath of God.

It is refreshing to find those who have enough salvation to want more. The only way you can retain what you have is to weight it down with more. These are the days of tornadoes and cyclones, and unless your conversion is capped with full salvation it will blow away. The great plan of salvation is one which provides for no halts and no furloughs. There is no snail pace gradualism getting nowhere in particular, but a double quick step up across mighty and distinct epochs in the history of the soul.

There must be a point from which to advance. We must be in a designated place before we can take a rational step. Mere movement is not always progress. The children of Israel "moved and pitched" all over the country, but they did not advance as long as they stayed east of Jordan. Multitudes are tacking and jibing and veering and backing until they have lost all reckoning, and may be, for all they know, in the region of icebergs or rounding Gibraltar.

The point from which we make the most rapid progress is Mount Zion. While there is some growth between Calvary and the Upper Room, not much progress is made until the train sweeps through the station at Mt. Zion and begins to climb the grade of "Holiness Heights." The lack of satisfactory growth prior to Pentecost is due to the presence of carnality. It hinders and chokes and throttles the growing principle. This is removed by the baptism with the Holy Ghost and fire. Then God Himself is the propelling force of our life, and, planted in clean and wholesome soil, we spread and enlarge and flourish. The enlargement must be of the entire man. A one-sided tent is a disgrace to the tenter, and a lopsided Christian is an abnormality. An enlargement of love at the expense of righteousness and justice would be unnatural and distressing. Some have dwelt upon the love side of salvation until they have lost sight of the eternal truth that the gospel is arrayed against every unholy and unclean thing. On the other hand, a few have dwelt upon justice and equity until they have become harsh and censorious. We frequently meet

those who so constantly emphasize the graces of patience and meekness that they neglect the proper discipline of their children. Now and then there is a man who makes so much of law and order as to become sort of a family constable or a household boss. This enlargement is of the heart rather than of the head. There is, then, an "enlargement of the heart" which is not only harmless, but beneficial. We are not to have new intellects nor new brains, although after heart enlargement we make better use of what we have than we did before. And no matter how great the capacity of any genius or thinker, his usefulness will be greatly enhanced by an abundance of the grace of God.

Let us notice some of the other characteristics of the enlargement spoken of in the text. We are commanded to "spare not," or rather, more accurately, "grudge not." This strikes a mortal blow at human selfishness. God's thought is to transform the selfish soul into self-sacrifice and self-forgetfulness. "Grudge not;" give liberally of all you have. A stingy soul can never be enlarged; it will grow smaller and smaller every day. Small, base souls are an irritation and a nuisance, both in the home and in the church; large souls always bless and help us. "There is that scattereth and yet increaseth, and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty." "God loveth a cheerful giver." Dr. Gordon says that that word "cheerful" means "hilarious."

Most men look very serious when the collection is taken, but God's thought is that a man ought to give largely, then shout over it. Just think of a man tossing a bill into the basket instead of the customary copper cent, and then just chuckling and laughing over the privilege. As a matter of experience, the collection will take the shout out of an average congregation. Imagine a day coming when men will be so full of glory and of God that when they see the collectors coming down.

The trouble is we are too thoughtful, too calculating. When an appeal is made the first impression is to give a dollar, but we begin to calculate, and before we get the pocket book open it is fifty cents, and by the time the basket reaches us it is a quarter, and we feel sad over that for the rest of the service.

We have all seen the arrival of bad weather in a church. The sky is clear and the congregation sings lustily until the pastor says, "Your offering will now be taken," and at once a dark cloud, like a Newfoundland fog, settles down upon the whole audience. The way an offering is often taken reminds one of a funeral. Six able bodied young men march up the aisles and stand in front of the pulpit to receive the plates from the pastor. There is about them an air of responsibility and solemnity as profound as if they were receiving a charge from the Bishop. When the coppers have been gathered, the aforesaid young men organize the line of march back by the door, and slowly, sedately, majestically stride down the center aisle, bearing the yellow ore with the care usually bestowed upon a corpse.

To "spare not" or "grudge not" means to give liberally of our testimonies, our sermons, our tears and our prayers. All that we give away is a good investment, returning with compound interest; all that we hoard up and save will perish forever. The sermon held over from a rainy Sunday until a more auspicious time and a larger audience, will take the dry rot meanwhile and be worthless when sunlight and the people arrive.

"Fear not." If you wish to be enlarged, you must not be afraid. The fearful and unbelieving, you remember, are classed together in God's Word. Why should we fear what man can do unto us? Thousands are so afraid of what people will say and think that they seldom have a right royal goodtime in their souls. Many a presiding elder never gets free from fear of the Bishop, hundreds of pastors live in dread of the elder, and myriads of church members tremble at the voice of the pastor. What a chain of nonsensical bondage. Held and clamped by each other, these poor souls shrink and dwindle each day. We should not be afraid of

fanaticism. Fanaticism is the scarecrow with which Satan frightens the Christian from what God wants him to have. As a matter of fact, there is but very little fanaticism in the world. There is a vast deal of formalism, however, and that is most alarming. There are ten thousand icebergs to one fanatic. There are ten thousand brakemen to one fireman. God send us Holy Ghost stokers! If you want to be enlarged do not close all the dampers of your soul, but open the direct draft, throw the throttle wide open and proceed to shoveling coal.

Do not get nervous over sidetracks. You can never enjoy a ride if you are always afraid of leaving the main line and wrecking your train on a switch. Trust the Holy Ghost, read your Bible assiduously, and let your engine fairly fly. This monotonous cry about "sidetracks" has become what the gaming world call "a chestnut."

We all remember the thrilling incident in the reader about the boy who tended sheep and cried "Wolf!" We have been listening to the "wolf" cry for some time, and we never hear it now but a smile is provoked. But the laughable part, after all, is the fact that divine healing and Jesus' return are designated as "sidetracks." One can not refrain from amusement when he observes the vociferous bellowings of these well-meaning people, for one recalls that for three years Jesus was "sidetracked," as they would call it, for He healed everywhere; and the apostles left the main line, for they healed the sick folk; and the illustrious saints of all ages have landed in the ditch, for they have believed in and experienced healing.

Paul was looking for Jesus, notwithstanding the falsifications of his detractors, and the early church looked for Christ's return every day. O that we may believe God! Send us, O Lord! a race of moral heroes who will dare to preach a full and rounded out gospel. Lengthen the cords." Launch out into the deep. Stop paddling around shore with one oar. "One-oared" people go round in a circle. Many people do just that. Years ago they were sanctified and they have been dancing up and down in a peck measure ever since. Sanctification as an experience is not the end but the beginning. There are leagues and leagues beyond the Jordan crossing. Take the Lord for your circumstances, for your difficulties, for your business, for your burdens, for your trials, for your sicknesses, for your temptations, for all your needs. Attempt some exploration expeditions to the interior of the land of Canaan. "Stir up the gift of God that is in thee." Walk in all the light God gives you. Throw yourself into the service of God without reserve. They are rescuing men from a burning building. The ladder is just a little short and the daring fireman stands on the topmost round, thus adding his own height to the length of the ladder. The men climb down over his body and are saved. We must be willing that men shall climb over us, walk over us or ride roughshod over us, if by such action we can manifest the spirit of Christ. David said, "Thou hast caused men to ride over our heads, thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place."

"Strengthen the stakes." How? Drive them home on your knees. Make them secure in closet prayer. John Elliott said that when he had an excess of work and a multiplicity of trials he used an engine of which the world knew nothing. It was the engine of prayer. Put down a peg and pray until it holds.

We ought to strengthen our stakes by confirming and solidifying our faith in the Bible, for it is the Word of God. When we believe it with all our souls we hang our life and salvation upon our certainty of its veracity.

One great hindrance to spiritual enlargement is our conservatism. We are wedded to our old wheel ruts, and find it difficult to leave them even for a better road. Your chariot has rolled along the old track with unchanging monotony until the law of habit makes enlargement almost impossible. Our love of what we call "propriety," "regularity" and "system," must go, for the Holy Ghost will not operate by our rules and

regulations. It is time we were beyond the conventionalities of culture and the observation of what "they say". All great movements begin in great ideas. There is no progress without fresh, vital thought. China is the same for three thousand years because her teacher is dead. If China should listen to the voice of America calling across the Pacific, she would be rejuvenated and revolutionized in a few years. We, too, must have larger conceptions of God's promises and a larger appreciation of the magnitude of our inheritance. The tendency of the age is toward ease and quiet and rest. But God wants to push us out of our drowsy nest into the great beyond, into a larger place.

We need a larger love. The world is dying today for pure, holy, sweet, humble love. Men need flowers and sunshine and kind words while they live. Bouquets and wreaths and crosses from the florist's on the casket or grave are worthless; smiles and cheer and encouragement during life are invaluable.

We need a larger faith; a faith that will grasp the fullness of God's great promises, a faith that will rise to the level of every emergency. A larger joy is needed; a joy that will not only rejoice in the gifts of God, but will rejoice in God Himself, and find in Him our portion and boundless, everlasting delight. Can we not "count it all joy " when in divers temptations, as saith the Scripture? Can we not "rejoice evermore"?

We need a larger work. We are too narrow in our interests and in our prayers. We may not be able to devote ourselves to but one thing, but we should feel interest in and sympathy for every good work. In this way we can "abound toward every good work." By way of the throne we should be in touch with all lands and all Christian enterprises. We must not reject or complain at God's method of enlarging us or our work. The disciples were literally pushed out of Jerusalem and sent flying into all the world. God saw that a "dispersion" would be beneficial. "As an eagle stirreth up her nest." Thus God often stirs us up and makes our field larger and more productive. We come into most blessed places which we would never have seen but for the persecution which served to crack the shell and let us out.

We ought to have a larger hope. The best men of all churches are on tiptoe with an upturned gaze. Our Lord is coming again; let us look for Him. "Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly." In conclusion, let us notice that no weapon formed against us shall prosper. There is no weapon more cutting than the tongue -- lying tongues, deceptive tongues, slanderous tongues. But God will paralyze every tongue and wither every hand that is uplifted against "the Lord's anointed." "Not any man shall be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life." "The battle is not yours, but God's!" Glory ! Hallelujah, and Amen!

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