

Mr. Bryan's Bible Talks

I HAVE KEPT THE FAITH

By WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN

BIBLE TEXT—LESSON FOR DEC. 18

(II. Timothy 4:6-18)

For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.

I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.

Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me: For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia.

Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.

And Tychicus have I sent to Ephesus. The cloke that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring with thee, and the books, but especially the parchments.

Alexander the copper smith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works:

Of whom be thou ware also; for he hath greatly withstood our words.

At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge.

Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.

And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly Kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

One of the noblest passages in the Bible is the fourth chapter of Second Timothy. Every verse in it is in itself a guide to Christian living.

There is enough in verses three and four for several Bible Talks. I hope that it will be appropriate at some future time to speak of those who cannot endure sound doctrine, but who, as Paul writes from the dungeon of his second imprisonment in Rome to his friend Timothy of Ephesus, in Asia Minor, "heap to themselves teachers having itching ears"—those who "turn away from the truth unto fables."

But for this week there is more than enough for our thought in the concluding words of a warrior as he faces death. No greater champion of the truth has ever lived than Paul; no one ever fought more bravely, contended more uncompromisingly, or faced death more calmly. He has given to every true Christian a model for a farewell address.

Forsaken by all at his first answer before his second trial before Caesar; knowing that death by martyrdom was only a question of time, even though his preliminary defense to the accusations brought against him had delivered him from being torn to pieces by lions; with no earthly hope or assistance for him anywhere, still he could pray that their desertion be not laid against those who had abandoned him to his fate; still he could think of others, as is seen in his messages of love sent through Timothy; yet he could say of himself as he looked back upon his life as a follower of Christ.

"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith."

WHAT IS A GOOD FIGHT?

"I have fought a good fight." What satisfaction has life that can compare with the consciousness of duty done?

The Christian life is a conflict from the day it is entered upon to the time of one's departure. It is a struggle against evil in every form—not the kinds of evil or the forms of combat that Paul had to meet, but evil in some form which must be overcome. Each life has its temptations; each individual has his "easily besetting sins." The foes within require constant watchfulness, even when for a time there may be a lull in the attacks of foes from without.

What kind of a fight may we call good? That which employs all the energy and utilizes all the opportunities to raise one's self to the maximum of efficiency and then uses the entire strength for the advancement of that which is highest and best.

When one looks back over life, it is usually easy to see where something less than all the energy has been employed, when some of the opportunities have been neglected, and times

when even an impaired efficiency has not been entirely consecrated to the work, or when the end fell something short of the highest idealism. The memory of shortcomings robs the hours of retrospect of some of the consolations that were crowded into the closing moments of the great Apostle's life. At such a time one must be impressed by the littleness of life's vanities—the size of one's accumulations whether in gold or fame. The "good fight" is the only one that counts in the final calculation.

"I AM READY"

"I have finished my course." It is everything to be ready when the end comes. Paul reviewed his career; events passed in panorama before him; he saw in memory faces that once beamed with love, glowed with enthusiasm and then turned away, "Demas hath forsaken me," he tells Timothy. Demas was one who "loved this present world"—his heart was like the stony places in which the seed sprang up quickly but soon withered.

All forsook him at his first defense and yet, though left alone, his heart, like the heart of the Saviour, laid it not to their account. If they did not rely upon the strength that the Lord gave to Paul, his gratitude to the Heavenly Father for his own strength restrained him from reproaching those who were weak in the hour of trial.

Paul did not quarrel with fate. He would not have shortened his life by a day as long as God had any work for him to do, and he would not lengthen it by an hour when his task was done.

There must be satisfaction in such an attitude. The mind cannot reason out a problem so intricate as that which death presents; the heart, with its keener perception cuts its way through mysteries of life and feels the truth that the reason cannot grasp. It is some recompense for life's struggles and trials if at the end one can stand in the presence of eternity and say, without a tremor of fear, "I am ready." THE SECRET OF STRENGTH AND COURAGE

"I have kept the faith." That explains it. As the heart forces the blood throughout the body and gives nourishment to every part, so "the faith" infused strength and courage into Paul's entire being.

As before Agrippa he vowed that he had not been "disobedient unto the heavenly vision," so as his eyes closed upon the scenes of earth he found pleasure in the conviction that he had kept all that was entrusted to him. He had never lowered the banner of the Cross since he received it from the hands of the Master Himself. With all the pride of an army's standard bearer he held it aloft, and now he was ready to return it without a stain upon it into the hands of Him whom he served. He kept the faith delivered to the saints.

Our banners vary in size, but they are alike in design and "The Faith" is inscribed upon them all.

We do not choose faith in proportion to the work we have to do; the work is rather proportionate to the faith that we have; we never know how big a work we can do until we have a faith big enough to undertake it. Opportunities come to those who are ready for them; in spiritual things it is our faith that determines the size of the task for which we are fitted.

Paul had a faith in "The Faith" that qualified him to play a gigantic part. God made him a chosen vessel to carry His name not only to the Gentiles, but to all the generations of men. We may well each ask ourselves, "What is my work. Oh Lord; what wouldst Thou have me to do?" and then pray, as Paul did, for a divine direction and for a strength equal to the needs of each hour.

Whether much or little is required of us; whether great opportunities or small ones are improved; whether the circle of our influence is extended or limited, one glorious epitaph will do for all who do their best—"I have kept the faith."

THE QUESTION OF REWARD FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

Paul was not ashamed to claim the reward that he earned.

"Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge shall give me at that day; and not to me only but unto all them also that love his appearing."

I received a letter from an atheist last spring

who said that he was willing to admit that no one could be happy without believing in God, but he insisted that he was not willing to believe in God merely to be happy, as if the expectation of a reward robs service of its virtue.

A reward for righteousness is not only legitimate and proper, but it is an indispensable part of God's plan. How could a righteous God penalize righteousness? If the Heavenly Father is more willing to give good gifts to His children than an earthly parent, how could He punish virtue and reward vice?

Even Satan cannot fail to see a connection between Job's prosperity and his righteousness, although he mistook cause for effect. He said, "Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast thou not made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land." Job was not upright because he was prosperous—he prospered because he was upright.

"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful." "And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season: his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper."

THOUGHT OF OTHERS

When did Paul think of himself only? He sent tender messages to those whom he had learned to love and who had justified his confidence, and he claimed the reward of righteousness for all those who shared his love for God and for His crucified Son.

When one reads such a Biblical passage as Paul's farewell message and calculates its inestimable value in strengthening the fibre of one's purpose and in infusing zeal into his life, he can scarcely estimate the importance of Bible reading and teaching and the services of those who week after week, in church and in Sunday School, set before us the Bread of Life. Few other passages are so full of nourishment for our spiritual bodies, but there is enough in each to reward us abundantly for the time which they require for reading and study.

CHRISTMAS

By WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN

BIBLE TEXT—LESSON FOR DEC. 25

(Matthew 2:1-12)

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, their came wise men from the east to Jerusalem.

Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.

When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born.

And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet.

And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.

Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.

And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.

When they had heard of the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood where the young child was.

When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.

And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

What thought is uppermost in your mind as Christmas approaches? With the child it is the thought of gifts that it will receive. Christmas raises a vision of good things hanging on a Christmas tree or filling the stocking at the mantel. The promise of things desired regulates the conduct for weeks before the happy day. "Just before Christmas I'm as good as I can be."

Volumes of harmless fiction have been written about the person of Santa Claus—his is the most familiar face the little ones know. The reindeer bulk large about this time and the snow is expected to fall accommodatingly not later than Christmas Eve.

"When I was a child, I thought as a child"; and who would have it otherwise? The ears that listen for the tinkling of the sleigh bells will hear things more important later, but sufficient unto the day are the problems that come