

LIVING UP TO OUR PRIVILEGES

J.R. Miller:

"Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." Philippians 3:13-14

There is no doubt that we live below our privileges as Christians. Our privileges are glorious. No vision of life we can conceive of, can be so exalted, so noble, so divine—as is the actual life of one who is a child of God. It is impossible to paint its possibilities in colors too bright. Because the glories of the spiritual life are not earthly, and therefore do not appeal to our physical senses, it is not easy for us to realize their value and importance. But truly to be "partakers of the divine nature," to be "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ," is to have the highest honor possible to a human life.

It is not possible that we can fully know the value of our privileges in the present life. However much we may see of our inheritance, there are treasures in it yet undiscovered by us, and undiscoverable here on earth. However deep the joy which our hearts may experience, there must ever remain other depths unexplored, until we enter the larger life of heaven. However lofty our attainments may be, we can at best only begin in this world to reach the excellences of spirit which belong to our perfected character. Yet it is our duty to gather into our life, all that we can receive. At many points, therefore, we may reach after the better things that are ours.

For one thing, we do may find the best things there are in the Bible, and may press our quest ever farther. The finest gold lies deep, and has to be dug for. It is hidden in the rocks, and has to be quarried out. We can never get the best the Bible has to give us, until we learn to search through its chapters as the miner searches with pick and hammer, with shovel and lamp, in the dark mines, for the precious treasure that is concealed there. Another condition of finding the richest things in the Scriptures, is that we assimilate them into our life, as fast as we discover them. The words of God are meant to be eaten and assimilated as food. They are meant to be accepted for obedience, for guidance, for trust, for comfort. It is only when we thus receive them—that they open, and yield to us their treasures of blessing.

One of the secrets of a strong Christian life—is daily feeding upon the Word of God. The Bible contains God's bread for God's children. Bible-fed Christians are godlike men and women. It is great thinking that produces great character, and he who makes the Bible his daily meditation, learns to think over God's thoughts.

We are not getting the best we might get from our praying. It was the Master who said, "Enter into your closet," and "shut your door," and "pray to your Father who is in secret." It is in secret prayer, that we get our life renewals. There we may open our heart to God. We never can speak the things of our innermost life, in public prayer. Secret prayer is the communing of the individual soul with God. Here it is that godly men and women get their shining faces, the light that breaks through their tears, the strength that makes them victorious in temptation, the power that fits them for Christian work and Christlike serving. The closet of prayer is the holy of holies of each Christian life. The blessing we may receive there is simply immeasurable.

We do not get the best possible out of our church-life. The church brings heaven down to earth. It keeps alive in this world the love, the grace, the beauty, of God. Our Sundays are oases where we may drink of the pure water that flows from the heavenly mountains, and eat of the fruits that grow on the trees of God, and thus be prepared to go out into the world for a six days' journey over the hot sands.

Some years ago, a party of Americans were about to leave Cairo for a journey across the desert. Before setting out, they bought vessels in which to carry water. Each one chose the kind of vessel that pleased him. One found jars of brass, whose fine designs attracted him. Another purchased porcelain vessels of rare beauty. A third, however, took some plain earthenware bottles. The way across the desert was long and wearisome. The heat was intense. Every drop of water was of value. The brass vessels heated; and the water was made impure, and unfit for use. The costly porcelain jugs cracked in the heat, and the water was lost. But the plain earthenware bottles kept the water pure and sweet until the journey was ended.

We go out every morning to trudge over desert paths. We should be sure that on the Lord's day, we make preparation that shall not fail us on the journey. Mere idle rest will not give it to us. We cannot get it from the Sunday newspaper, from the latest novel, from mere literary books, or from studying works of art. But if we turn our face to God's house on God's day, and commune with him, filling our earthenware vessels of faith and love with the water of life, we shall not faint by the way.

The things we get from the church are the lasting things. Other things are but of the passing day, and have no reality in them. Nothing is emptier than the applause which men's worldly success wins on the streets or in the newspapers. The hurrahs of today may be changed to sneers tomorrow. But the blessing that comes to those who truly worship God, is lasting.

We need the help which we can get from the church. It is never easy to live in this world, even at the best. In the quietest day there are cares which tend to fret us and break our peace. Business has its temptations; and it is hard always to live out Christ's teachings in our shops, stores, and offices. Home life, with its household tasks and its cares and anxieties, wears heavily on the heart's sensitiveness. To many of us, every common day brings discouragements, disheartenments, and oftentimes sorrows.

But it is possible to get into our soul in God's house, such inspiring hopes, such uplifting joys, that all the week, in the dust and toil, heavenly songs shall sing in our bosom. We rob our life of blessings which belong to it by right, when we fail to use the privileges which the church brings within our reach. Too many of us fail to understand this. Some Christian people set such small store by their church that they are kept from its services for the lightest reasons. Others fail to get from its services and its fellowships the divine cheer, inspiration, and strength which they might get. The possible helpfulness in a true church relationship, is beyond estimate.

We do not make the most and the best possible of our life, in the work of Christ. The possibilities of Christian service are incalculable. For example, the influence which a true Christian home exerts on its inhabitants, is beyond measure. A Christian man who had long been engaged in useful service tells of a visit to his old childhood home. He was put to sleep in the spare room. He opened a closet door, and a scene was before him which brought a rush of tears to his eyes. An old chair stood there, and before it lay a cushion in which were deep knee-prints. Evidently this was someone's closet of prayer. Instantly the truth flashed upon him. He was looking into the secret sanctuary of his beloved mother, where she had prayed all her children into the kingdom of Christ. He saw now the place where the grace was invoked by intercession which had brought the power of Christ into his own heart. What a holy place it was!

What would be the result if every Christian home in the world had such a holy of holies, its old chair daily wet with tears of love, and its cushion deeply indented by suppliant knees?

There are countless opportunities for usefulness and helpfulness open to earnest Christians. Every day's life is full of occasions where good may be done by simple deeds, or words of kindness. The value of these unpurposed things is very great. We may live all day and every day—so that each step of our path shall be brightened by loving service. The world needs our love continually. We meet no one from morning until night—whom we may not help in some little way at least. It is possible for us to make a good deal more than most of us do, of these opportunities for the service of love.

Every individual Christian is the center of a circle whose hearts he may touch with a blessing of love. He is a custodian of blessing which he is to impart to others. The noblest life is the one that is given up most unselfishly to serving. "Serve one another in love." Galatians 5:13. "I am among you as the One who serves." Luke 22:27

It is interesting to think what kind of a Christian one would be who would realize all the possibilities of faith in Christ, and truly find the best things in all life's ways. It certainly is our privilege and our duty, to make all we can of the opportunities we have. Ever before us shines the ideal, always unreached, and ever calling us to better things. Though we may not hope to attain its full beauty—we should ever press toward it in faith and hope and love. Each day of such striving will bring us a little nearer to it, and at last, when we break through the wall into the life beyond, we shall realize it! "It does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."