

THE LAST HANDFUL

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drunk of the cup of sorrow. She was a widow, she was poor, and she had a little fatherless child dependent on her. She had even come to the uttermost straits and already had seen the bottom of the meal barrel. She was gathering just two little sticks with which to make a flash of fire to bake a few grains that still remained that she might taste once more with her little son the sweet taste of food, and then lie down and die of starvation.

It is this woman from whom God asks the last handful of meal and the uttermost sacrifice of which she was capable. The reason He asks such sacrifices is because He wants us first, and sacrifice is the only test of self-surrender. "Make first a cake for me," is the touchstone of all consecration. It is God first and last and all in all. Beloved, is this your consecration? This is the divine standard for all that will ever pass current in the world above. Abraham must give up his Isaac. Moses must give up his crown. Hannah must give up her boy. The widow must leave her life and her child's life at the mercy of Elijah's God and surrender the last link between them and every human possibility of escape from death.

Why does a loving father call for such sacrifices? Simply because His own love has made a greater sacrifice, and He knows that we ever can be partners in that kingdom of which love is the keynote and the fundamental law unless we, too, have learned the same great secret of love. The Kingdom of Christ is the kingdom of love, just as the kingdoms of earth are realms of selfishness and ruled by self-love. Men live for what they can get out of one another, and a good many Christians seem to think the business of religion is to get all they can out of God. But we do not belong to the kingdom of heaven until we become partakers of the divine nature, and that is love. The sacrifice of Calvary was never offered to purchase at such tremendous cost for selfish, ease-loving men and women, a cheap reprieve from punishment, a reprieve from punishment, a release from all sacrifice, and a divine indulgence to go on living for self-gratification. We have not truly come into Christ's atonement until the spirit of that cross has been repeated in our lives and we have learned to say, "We thus judge that if One died for all then all died, and He died for all that they which live, should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him that died for them and rose again."

Beloved, is there any such cross as that in your life? I do not mean the cross where He died for you, but where you have died with Him; some hour of self-renunciation; some conflict with the flesh and the heart that almost crushed you; some place where you laid down an idol, or gave up an ambition, or renounced a bright and alluring future and went forth with Him, saying:

"Jesus, I my cross have taken
All to leave and follow Thee."

And a sweet undertone seemed to whisper in your heart for many a day,
"Now I know thou lovest me."

IV. True Secret of every Sacrifice and Service is Faith. Not without a promise from the prophet could she have ventured on this surrender. God did not ask her to give up one world without offering to her another. He is too faithful to demand of us a blind surrender. Even Abraham's mighty sacrifice was not made in blank despair, but in living faith. He gave up Isaac, "accounting that God was able to raise him up even from the dead." A sister once told me that she had been trying desperately for months to be so surrendered to the Lord that she was willing to be lost for Christ's sake. No wonder she failed. God asks us to give ourselves up, not to an executioner, but to a father's arms, because He has much more to give us in return.

When Richard Cecil wished to teach his little daughter the meaning of consecration and faith, he took her on his knee in his library one day and asked her if she loved him well enough to give up a little necklace of glass beads which she greatly prized. She looked up with tears in her face, and sobbed, "Yes, papa." "Well," said he, "you take them off and throw them into the grate." With heaving bosom and hesitating steps, she made the great renunciation and then flew back to his arms and sobbed herself to rest, while he patted the little golden head and gently said, "Now papa knows you love him." Nothing more was said for several days, but on her birthday her father called her to him, and, opening a little casket, handed to her a chain of real pearls and asked her to put them on her neck as the gift of his love to her. She looked him full in the face, and then a great light broke upon her countenance, and again throwing herself on his bosom, she cried, "Oh, papa, forgive me; I did not understand, but now I do."

That is the consecration God loves and loves to recompense. Our sacrifices are real investments that will bring us infinite returns in that day when He shall give us diadems for tears, cities for pounds, and ten thousand per cent. compound interest on all we have laid down for His sake. The poor widow made no mistake in investing a little handful of meal for thrice three hundred and sixty-five good meals. The farmer who throws away a lot of good grain in the furrowed field may seem to his thoughtless child to be a great waster; but when the golden harvest comes and gives him back some sixty and some hundredfold, then the little one will understand.

We shall give to God just in proportion to our confidence in Him. We shall put our money into His cause just so far as we believe it is the best cause in the world. We are doing this already or failing to do it, and our lives are telling the story of our faith. Shall we hear Him calling to us and saying, "Bring ye all the tithes to my storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house and prove me now herewith, if I will not open unto you the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing until there shall not be room to receive it?"

The story is told of a selfish and stingy elder in the church of God who had refused to give anything in the offering for missions and had told the collector that he

would be much obliged if she would not call upon him again. That night he had a dream, and in his dream the Lord seemed to be discussing this matter with him. "John," the voice seemed to say, "have you ever asked me for anything?" Oh, yes," he answered, "I have asked you for something every day and I could not get on without continually asking for needed blessings." How is it, then," said the voice, "that I asked you today for something and you refused Me? Now," the Lord continued, "what have you got from Me in all these years? Do you remember asking Me once to forgive your sins and save your soul, and I gave you what you asked?" "Yes," was the answer. "Do you remember asking Me a great many times to forgive your faults and later sins and restore you to My peace and favor, and did I not always answer you?" "Yes," was the reply. "Did you not ask Me to prosper you in your business and I gave you good crops and a splendid farm, and enabled you to lay up a lot of money in the bank?" "Yes," still came the answer. "Do you remember once when you were ill and given up to die and you pleaded with me for your life and I gave it back to you and raised you up again and have kept you in health until this day?" "Yes," sobbed out the farmer. "Did you not ask Me to bless your home and I gave you a loving wife and sons and daughters and have kept them from going astray and have made them a joy and comfort to you?" "Oh, yes," groaned out the farmer. "Well, now," said the Lord, "all this must be changed from this day, and we shall simply understand each other. I am never to ask you again for anything." "Oh, no, Lord," cried out the farmer; "forgive me, I cannot do without Thee and I gladly acknowledge that I and all I have are Thine and shall give to Thee as Thou hast given to me."

V. The Blessing that came through this Act of Faith and Sacrifice. First, her own supplies were multiplied, her own needs were met, her life was saved, her child was fed, and all her future was guarded and blessed by Him whom she had obeyed and trusted.

In the next place she was used to perform a great and noble service. She became the instrument of God in keeping His prophet. She actually supported a missionary for twelve months out of a single handful of meal, and thus was made a fellow-worker with the greatest of the prophets and her name enrolled in the annals of eternity among the witnesses of faith and the servants of the Lord. What a glorious return for one little act of faith and love. In this connection God continually reminds us in His Word that we may expect His rich temporal blessing when we deal bountifully with Him. It is with reference to giving of our means to God that He says, "God is able to make all grace abound toward you, so that ye always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound unto every good work." "Honor the Lord with thy substance and with the first fruits of all thine increase, so shall thy barns be filled with plenty and thy presses burst with new wine."

VI. This woman's Act of Faith and
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