

The King's Highway

An Advocate of Scriptural Business

VOL. XXXVIII.

MONCTON, N. B., DECEMBER 31ST, 1942

No. 82

DENVER, N. S.
DIGBY CO.
Mrs Lloyd Fulton, Dec 42

JESUS HAD A HABIT

Rev. Paul S. Rees, D. D.

"He entered as his custom was into the synagogue on the Sabbath day."—(Luke 4:16).

The place of worship in Nazareth was almost as familiar to Jesus as his home. Through the years of his boyhood and early manhood he had gone there as regularly as he had gone to the toil off the carpenter's bench during the other six days of the week. Now he has been away four more than a year. He has been in Judea. Great experiences have come to him. He has been baptized at the hand of John the Baptist. He has emerged victoriously from the temptation in the wilderness. He is again in the home town. Comes the first Sabbath after his return, and where do you find him? You find him making his way, true to habit, toward the synagogue, there to participate in the service, there to worship God.

FAMILIAR EXCUSES

I think I know most of the excuses that people give for staying away from church. There is scarcely one of them that Jesus could not have offered to justify his staying away from that sanctuary in Nazareth. Suppose he had said, "The place is pretty formal and lifeless, especially when compared with the big meeting that I attended where John was preaching." There would have been much truth in his words, but not enough to keep him from going to that synagogue.

Suppose he had said, "The rabbi and those who attend there are more interested in mumbling over old traditions of the elders than they are in taking the Scriptures themselves and vigorously applying them to practical life." There would have been no little truth in that, but not enough to keep him from the place of worship.

Or suppose he had said, "The heights of Nazareth afford as good a place for worship as the synagogue." There would have been a measure of truth in that—but not enough, by a wide margin, to keep him from joining the devout citizenry of Nazareth in the appointed place for the study of the Scriptures and the nourishment of the faith.

Or suppose he had said, "I am done with the synagogue. Every time I go I see a man who won't pay his bills. We have done work for him at the shop, but the man is a rascal who refuses to meet his obligations." It is easy to believe that such a case could have been found in ancient Nazareth. There would have been truth in Jesus' complaint, but it did not keep him from the sanctuary. He went just the same, "as his custom was."

Someone has said that we may look upon the church either as an institution or as an inspiration. If we take the former view, we shall see faults and imperfections aplenty. The organization and administration of the affairs of the church require human hands. At best those hands are frail; at the worst, those hands are foul. There have been crooks who hid behind the cleric's cloth. There have been hypocrites who sat in bishops' seats. There have been rogues who rated high on church rolls. And all of it is tragic enough, I grant.

HAIL THE CHURCH

But that is not the only view of the church which one may take. For every betraying Judas there have been a hundred loyal, loving Johns. And if you were to ask them—these loyal ones—they would tell you that much of the inspiration of their loyalty was derived from their fellowship with other like-minded souls who regularly assemble to study the pure Word of God, blend their hearts and voices in the hymns of praise, and pour out their longings and aspirations into the ears of him who turns no sincere suppliant away.

They will tell you that the noblest hours of their lives were spent in church. They will tell you that the finest and most creative emotions they ever experienced came to them in church. They will tell you that the clearest visions of God and of the meaning of life and of the glory of the world eternal, were given them in church. They will tell you that the deepest sympathies that ever stirred in their breasts, over the physical and spiritual hunger and poverty of their fellow beings everywhere, were born within them in church.

When William Gladstone was asked why he was so careful about church attendance in the midst of so many pressing public duties, his answer was, "I go to church because I love England." On closer questioning the great Christian statesman would have acknowledged that this was not the highest reason he could give, since the supreme thing is to be able to say, "I go to church because I love Christ, the Head of the Church." At the same time, Gladstone's frank answer is highly significant. Full well did he know that there was a vital connection between the best things in Britain's national life and the testimony and influence of the Christian Church.

In the spirit and in the wisdom of Gladstone, I should like to say to my fellow Americans: "If you love America, go to church. Go to church regularly. Make it your habit. Your going to church will not save you—only Christ can do that for you—but it will give the Holy Spirit a chance at your soul. And when you do make the personal

surrender to Christ, and his life comes into you, naturally, you will want the church and all its ministries in order that your life in Christ may be nurtured, strengthened and made fruitful to his glory."

Jesus had a Habit of Prayer: "He came out, and went, as he was wont, to the mount of Olives." And what followed? Gethsemane—a scene of prayer at which the angels must have stood in awe. It is true that there was never another prayer experience in the life of the Master that was like Gethsemane, but, for our present purpose the important thing is to see that this was a spot made sacred to him by his repeated seasons of communion with the Father. It was his custom to pray there!

NOT GETHSEMANE ONLY

That of course was not the only place where he prayed. In fact, more important than his praying in this place or that is the fact that prayer itself was his habit. Some people never think of prayer except in circumstances of dire need: it must be an emergency setting. When Jesus came to the crises, he too prayed, but it was with a naturalness and an intimacy with the Father made possible by long practice.

Because prayer was his habit, we are not surprised that before he chose his apostles he spent a night alone in waiting upon the Father. Because prayer was his habit, we are not surprised that, when the storm of opposition was beginning to gather darkly, "He went up into a mountain to pray." Nor should we be surprised to read that "as he prayed the fashion of his countenance, as altered." He was transfigured before them. Put it down as one of the doubtless things: we never truly pray without being somehow transfigured. The grace of God soaks in and the glory of God shines out!

Because prayer was Jesus' habit, we are not surprised when we read, "And he healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils . . . and he departed into a solitary place and there prayed." Can the outflow exceed the inflow? Of course not. And Jesus knew it. His ministry of good works took something out of him. "Virtue is gone out of me," as he expressed it on one occasion. Then there must be renewal and replenishment—through prayer. In that quiet earnest communion with the Father nerves were calmed, thinking was cleared, the exhaustless resources of the Eternal were opened up and appropriated.

'O Thou by Whom we come to God,
The Life, the Truth, the Way,
The path of prayer Thyself hast trod,
Lord, teach us how to pray!"

Prayerful Good Wishes to All For 1943