

C H R I S T O P H   B L U M H A R D T

"DIE, AND JESUS WILL LIVE"

Sermons and Devotions  
from the years 1888 - 1896

Numbers 31 through 44

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## 31.

Sermon, Sunday, 19 October 1890. Transcribed.

Luke 18:1-8: And He told them a parable, to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor regarded man; and there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Vindicate me against my adversary.' For a while he refused; but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will vindicate her, or she will wear me out by her continual coming.' And the Lord said, 'Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God vindicate His elect, who cry to Him day and night? Will He delay long over them? I tell you, He will vindicate them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of man comes will He find faith on earth?'"

We can pray, but how should we pray? This is what the Saviour wants to teach us here. Actually only the elect can pray in the way that is meant here.

The wretchedness on earth, life's cares and physical needs, the misery within families and among people, the pressures of society--all these things wring many prayers from the hearts of men. And God is gracious and kind; He allows the rain to fall upon the just and the unjust. He listens to the prayers of many according to the covenant made on earth with Noah, which is still in force. He said then, "I will not destroy mankind, and as a sign of this I set my bow in the clouds; seed time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease." This does not apply only to mankind in general. Because of God's promise, which is every man's right, help can also be given suddenly to individuals whose life seems to be going completely to rack and ruin. Of course there are

differences between men. It depends upon what a man is; he can be like a magnet, attracting God's goodness to himself. Therefore it is proverbial that a righteous man will get on in the world. If someone has what is right in his heart, it will attract what is right. But the world, of course, still remains what it is. It has existed for thousands of years already and remains unchanged.

The Saviour, however, wants something different--as did also the servants of God in the old covenant. He wants to turn the earth toward a radical cure. And there are people who pray for this, people whom the Saviour calls elect. Not everybody understands this kind of prayer. For other people, God is everywhere. They say that God is omnipotent and omnipresent; that whatever God does is good; and that, after all, everything comes from God. But the elect are different. No, they say, God is not present everywhere. To a certain extent He is, of course, present; but not as a matter of course. That is to say, at times God is here and at times He is gone. Today He is with me, perhaps tomorrow not.

These are the elect. They make a distinction. They are not content with God's good gifts left over from the creation, but they feel like widows. They certainly know God, but can scarcely reach Him. They are widows in three ways:

1. They have lost their husband.
2. Because of this, other powers have taken away their property and confiscated it.

3. They cannot approach their God, their judge. He does not hear them.

The elect think about this and consider what they should do. You will notice already that there is something extraordinary about the elect and that there are not many of them. Firstly, few people say, "The Saviour, my husband, has been taken from me." Secondly, there are very few who say, "I have been robbed of my strength, my property, the Holy Spirit." And thirdly, few say, "The greatest misfortune of all is that I cannot approach God, the judge. I am a poor wretch."

Yes, dear friends, if you look at the state of the present-day churches you could hardly call any of them elect. They tell you, "Of course we have the Saviour!" Widow?---they would never dream of it. "That does not refer to us!" If you go on to tell them that they do not have God's Spirit--"What!" they say, "I do not have the spirit of God? What are you talking about?" And if, to cap it all, you say, "You cannot even approach God!", they flare up and say, "Oh, you pagan! We can do all things; everyone can pray!" Thus they make a lot of just those things they do not have. And with this, naturally, the stand which distinguishes us as 'elect' is put into question, and as a consequence, also true prayer.

What, generally, do people actually wish for and ask? Firstly, they say to men: "Come, let us gather round the Saviour." Secondly, "Come, let us study; let us get to know the Bible; there is spirit, and we can awaken new



churches." Finally, they say to men, "Come, we will rise up in God's name and tell others what we think." The prayers that men have are really requests to men: "You people, gather round the Saviour!" "Men, let yourselves be taught and renewed in the Spirit!" "Come together and then you will have the Spirit!" "Men, let us do deeds with God!"

These are the things men ask for; although the Saviour is missing, the Spirit is not present, and the judge has gone and wants nothing to do with us. Such prayers are not those that the elect pray. The elect do not pray for so many things. They have quite a different approach. They were widows even in olden times, and are widows in the new time. They have the Saviour, and yet in a sense they do not have Him; just as the Saviour Himself accepted being on earth, but still spoke of His coming. Think about it: the Saviour, so to speak, sets no store by Himself until His return. He is there, but yet attaches no importance to this until He comes again. The Apostles do the same. None of the Apostles maintain that the Saviour is there, although He is there. They almost exhaust themselves crying "Oh, Lord, come!" With this cry they disappear into obscurity; nobody cares about them; we do not know what happened to them.

But now!--yes, it is good that these people who cried out are gone! Now we can do things our own way! Now we can build churches right and left. We can make ourselves as comfortable as possible and say, "We have enough, we have

everything! Everywhere--north, south, east, and west--they say, 'We have everything!' They shout for joy about their Christianity--and forget true prayer.

If you really want to know, that is what it means to "lose heart." It means to make out that everything is in order, when it is not; to allow things to deteriorate and be lost, and to try to make oneself believe that they are still there, that one still has them. How do we come to such empty rhetoric? Do we have to say the Saviour is here, when He is not? Must we say that we are ruled by God's Spirit, when it is not true? Must we say that God is judge on earth, when He is not? Is it an affront to God if we at last recognize that things are not as we imagine? Oh, if we would only realize this!

Now, you dear ones, however things may be, I don't want to say too much. I cannot make people "elect"; that is God's business. But if there is someone here who is touched in his heart to wonder how things really stand, or has perhaps felt this for a longer time, I would like to whisper in his ear, 'Be comforted, you grieving man, perhaps you are one of the elect!' If you feel that the Saviour is far away, that God's Spirit does not rule you, and that God is not the judge in you and around you, perhaps you belong to the elect! Just carry on in your poverty; sigh without ceasing. In Heaven they will not take it amiss!

Our parable describes a judge who cares neither for God nor for man. With this the Saviour tells us that

actually God wants nothing to do with us, just as little as a judge with a poor widow. God is sick of us. He does not want to think about us any more. He wants to say, "Leave me! I live in a different world from you! You are always ruining everything for me!" Therefore God remains distant. And then people let things slide. It is all the same to them if God is angry or not, as long as they have their dogmas to help them through outwardly. They can manage by themselves; why do they need God?

But there are some who cannot let things slide. They think about it and become 'widows.' They humble themselves and say, "Yes, we are guilty! It is no wonder that God turns away from us and finally says, 'Nothing I do on earth is any help! I made a beginning with Noah, but what good was that? I started something with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but what help was that? Again, with Moses, but what came of it? Then I began anew with David, but to what avail? Finally I even made a completely new start with the Saviour, but what did this help? I continued with the Apostles--to what end? And in the time after this I had many men who glorified the truth, but what good was all this? Generally speaking, nothing has changed. Sin, sorrow, and death remain the same in the world.'" This can really grieve God. Things may well become so serious that the elect say, "Now everything is lost; what will happen now?"

Well, in our parable the Saviour is saying, God be



praised that there still are such "elect." As long as you remain "elect" you should not lose courage. Just carry on in all simplicity and in humble faith. God is also patient when you feel that the world needs God, not just words; needs Jesus the Lord in truth, not just the cloak of Christianity; needs the Spirit in truth, not just the human bubbling over of your Christian spirit. We need truthfulness in the things of God, not just appearances. Whoever feels this belongs to the elect. And at last, at last, they will reach the goal, if for no other reason than that this sighing for truthfulness and justice is heard: Jesus will come.

This, then, is the goal of all prayer; for, as the text says, salvation is connected with the coming of the Son of man. Thus the presence of the Redeemer is still not salvation. The fact that the Redeemer was born, died, and rose again, is not yet salvation. Of course, that is something else that flies in the face of all we are usually taught. But there it is! You can snap my head off for saying it, but there it stands: salvation is not yet here. People may well cry out to the whole world, "Jesus saves me now," but that is a lying assertion. Salvation will only finally come when the Saviour is there--that is to say, when He returns. What has happened up to now is only a beginning; it is the foundation. The actual fulfillment will depend upon the coming of the Saviour--that is, that He appears and is revealed to the world, and that with

Him, God appears and the things of Heaven are revealed. Then we are saved.

Well, then, this time is coming for the elect. It would, of course, be wonderful if by then the whole world had become believers through the crying out of the elect. The Saviour says, "When the Son of man comes, will He find faith on earth?", and in the same context He speaks of God hearing the cries of the elect and vindicating them. With this He obviously wants to say, "Do you think that the cries of a handful of the elect will make the rest of mankind believers? Do you really think that when the times of crying are over, the crying will have aroused men to consider things so seriously that many of them will be ready to receive Jesus?"

I would almost say yes--if only there were a great number of the elect! You will never create faith by saying to people, "Be of good comfort! The Saviour is here. Just believe and everything will be all right!" Or, if you say, "What! The Holy Spirit is not here? But the church cannot possibly exist without the Holy Spirit! We only need to read the Bible, and then we have everything!" Or, "What? God is not able to do everything on earth? He is not the judge? But He says, 'The hairs on your head are counted'!"

Yes, go on preaching like that and everyone will walk away from you. They will not believe it, simply because it is not true.

Become "elect," dear friends, and then people will believe! Sigh for the Saviour and then people will say, "Praise God, he also feels the Saviour is not here; he also knows the misery I am in!" Then they will believe. And if someone preaches, "Ah, with the Holy Spirit it is another story--we have driven him away! We have so often grieved him and lived so very much according to the flesh. It is no wonder that we now often stand here perplexed, without knowing God's will for our lives!" If this happens, then the people will breathe a sigh of relief. They will say, "Thank God that he also feels as I do, feels that the Spirit of God has departed. If he had said that the Spirit is here, I would almost have despaired whether there was a Spirit of God at all."

And if someone preaches, "Yes, it is true. There is no judge here; the devout and the undevout suffer the same fate; we are all treated the same; everyone shares the same fate; God has withdrawn with His special deeds; He no longer intervenes!"--then the people are glad. They say, "Praise God, he also sees and recognizes it. I have felt for a long time that something is missing, something is wrong, not according to the Bible, that the promises have not all been fulfilled in us. God is real, of course, but He cannot be real with us. The Saviour is present, to be sure, but He cannot come to us. The Spirit of God certainly came, but He cannot manifest Himself among us. Thank God that this man also sees it!"



In brief, the elect bring about faith. The others will stir up disbelief, call forth criticism, bring resistance, and cause strife. They are not humble; not, in truth, poor and lowly. They boast about something that does not exist instead of modestly saying, "That is how God intended it to be; but it is not like that, and so we sigh for it." They want to have everything before its time, to appear great in the eyes of men; so there is strife, quarreling, vindictiveness, and covetousness. It is always said that covetousness, the root of all evil, lies only in material things. Oh, no! The worst coveting is in the churches. Who is more covetous of others than those arrogant churches which have developed in the course of time, each one believing that it alone brings salvation?

Oh, do not think it is easy for me to make such remarks, but I feel compelled to do so, whichever way you want to look at this parable.

Become "elect" if you can. Or if you are already, remain like that. And if you feel it inwardly, do not deny in your heart that you are poor people, widows; that we are earthly people, lacking in godliness. Believe it, and thank God that you see it! Hold out in your poverty--not in riches. Let yourself be found true before God, in your weakness, in your forsakenness, and your bereavement. Let it be known to God: remain constant! God is true, the Saviour is true, the Spirit of God is true! Poverty will not last forever if you are really poor. But your poverty

will last forever if you do not really want to be poor and make a pretense of riches. May God grant that we understand in this way what it means to seek first the Kingdom of God.

Amen

## 32.

Meditation published in the "Vertraulichen Blättern" (No. 7), in October 1890.

John 9:4-5: "We must work the works of Him who sent me, while it is day; night comes when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

These words speak of day and they speak of night. We all know the difference between day and night. We also know that when the sun rises and day comes, our hearts leap for joy and we come to life. There is something glorious about a beautiful day. Night, on the other hand, always has something alarming about it. Many people are afraid at night, and it is fortunate that we can spend the night sleeping and not awake. Otherwise, in spite of all the different kinds of lighting we have invented, night would be a torment for us. But still, this is not what the Saviour is talking about here. He is speaking of a day and night which have to do with the actual life of men and especially the mortal danger into which man is placed. Obviously the victory of life over the power of death is what He calls "day."

We also know something about this. Everyone has a feeling for the prolongation and preservation of life as opposed to the sudden cutting off or stunting of life. The basis of all man's progress--civilization, we would say--is his striving to improve and prolong life. We call people who have no inclination for this striving, uncivilized and barbaric. It is a barbaric regime in which a



human life, even that of a criminal, is destroyed lightly and without consideration. So, in many countries, night has come. Barbarity is the beginning of night, or ruin of the people, in spite of advanced civilization.

In this respect we can speak in our time of there being more day than there was formerly. Men have succeeded in bringing about better and happier conditions in their lives--if not everywhere, at least in many areas. We should not forget this. There is no sense in grumbling continually about our times. It makes an especially bad impression to hear this kind of talk from the mouths of Christians. Actually, to a certain extent, our times can be called very good. Often one would almost say that people grumble because they are too well-off.

It also belongs to God's rulership that in this way a little daylight comes in through human efforts. The glory of God is served in the human life He has created by our not wanting to be barbarians and when humanity, or compassion, which is so often boked down upon, breaks through more and more. For many people this "humanity" is the main incentive in devoting all their strength to helping suffering mankind in some way. Nowadays there are all kinds of ways, previously unkown, by which the body can be strengthened, life made easier, and a better existence provided for great masses of the population. Also inventions based on God's fixed order and powers in the world offer some enlightenment. Many people can become so enthusiastic

about this illumination that they believe--and I would almost say justifiably so--that dawn is breaking over mankind, and with just a little more progress we will have gained everything.

This is how it seems, and, truly, according to how man uses his common sense, things can become brighter around him. If you do not use your common sense you can practically extinguish the light and be completely surrounded by night. You can live in such a way that your short life is even shorter; that your poor health becomes even poorer; that you are surrounded by more misery and death than necessary. Some people live in a way that leads straight into night or to death. There they lie, moldering in their graves, and it is night.

And so your common sense is also something of light. Even through human understanding, some improvement of life can be attained under God's present natural laws. I think so highly of this, to the glory of God, that I would say to those who are unable to believe in anything higher, "If you do not believe that God can do even more, then at least use your intelligence. You know what life is. Take it as a gift, for it belongs to day. Don't spoil it through injustice and untruthfulness. At least work for God by truly keeping and preserving all that has been given in nature and in your life, and allow it to ripen."

If, however, we think that the day Jesus speaks about lies in these movements of the human spirit and in these

signs of progress and explanations of nature, we make a great mistake. These all simply give an appearance of being day; the most important questions about human life still remain unanswered. We comfort ourselves with all kinds of doctrines, but where do they show themselves as power? Where is the life which every human being longs for?

Who is not secretly tormented, just in thinking of the great achievements of the human spirit, with the thought that in everything there lies a worm which does not die, a fire that cannot be extinguished? Just when we imagine we have reached the summit, there we stand before an insurmountable wall and can go no farther. In spite of all the efforts of science, our burial grounds cannot be made any smaller yet; and the homes of the unfortunate are mostly, to a greater or less degree, reflections of night. And what touches us most of all is that even the best ideas and most brilliant inventions have their reverse sides which have an alarming effect, and in their turn produce a pressure which is of the night, not day.

As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." Although these words immediately attract our attention, what I have just said allows us to really understand what the Saviour means. To put it the other way round: "You can do whatever you like, but if I am not in the world, with all that I am, day will not come; all the works of man will collapse." There are no lasting



works of man; man only creates an apparent day. It is the Saviour who brings in the day of God, the day of everlasting life. Whatever flows from Him is eternal.

The Saviour spoke these words about His day in the presence of a man born blind. This condition is not of the day; it is completely dark. We stop and ask, "Why does this happen? Who sinned, this man or his parents?" Or perhaps you meet someone with tuberculosis. You stand there and do not know what to say. Maybe you can find the outward cause of his illness. Maybe he caught a cold, or his parents died of tuberculosis and so, of course, he dies of it too. But that is not light; that is not day. Perhaps you come across someone with cancer and can trace the whole course of the disease, medically speaking, or even arrest it in part. But that is not light. Or you may meet people who are mentally ill or epileptic. In short, wherever you look there is so much which is puzzling and which gnaws ceaselessly at mankind's tree of life that you cannot say: this is the day of Jesus Christ.

What, then, is man in need of? What do people need? What is it that scholars also need? What is it that we all need? Dear friends, we need what the Saviour has, which made it day in His time, when He lived on earth; namely, that the works of God become revealed. This is what brings day.

The works of God as they were originally revealed in nature are not clearly to be seen. Your life is a work of

God, but God's intention for it is not clearly to be seen. Or do you think it is a clear revelation of life when your death knell sounds and you rot in the ground? Yes, truly, death is nowadays the revelation of man's life; but it is not light. Because dying is something so very dark, many people force themselves to conclude that death is the end of everything for them. But that is complete, pitch-dark night. Therefore only the revelation of the works of God can be called day. Nowadays we cannot talk about this very much because, actually, people simply do not believe. But when the Saviour says, "Night comes when no one can work"--that is to say, when Jesus' disciples are not able to do the works of God--then we too stand before night, in spite of all our humanity and Christianity. There is simply nothing of the revelation of the works of God; there is nothing that can exist in the way it was originally created; everything, everywhere, is dying and decaying.

When today we still see the Saviour as a very great man who occupies the thoughts of all of us (quite apart from believing that He came from Heaven), this is certainly not because He brought us new religious laws or laid down mighty teachings, but because something of the creation emerged in Him, in reality and perfection. In Him we have manifestations of life, or revelations of the work of God. This was so powerful that we feel it right up to the present day. If we think of men now and ask what they

really look for in the Saviour, we would have to say that it is signs and deeds of life that they seek, more or less consciously. They sense a stunting of creation in nature as well as in themselves. But the name of Jesus works so mightily that even up to the present day it makes people believe that He can help them, that in Him the works of God are revealed. And when these works are revealed, the blind will see; for blindness is not a work of God. The lame will walk and the dead will rise. Right up till today everybody believes this as soon as he wants something from the Saviour. It is remarkable what faith people have, particularly when it seems that a little daylight is approaching and that it is possible that something can really happen. Granted, there is also a tedious sort of faith which just accepts everything dogmatically: "God is all-powerful; thus He can do everything, and so naturally He will help."

There is, however, a different kind of faith. People with this faith truly caught a whiff of day and wonder that there is so much night around them. Then they ask, "Is it not possible for the Lord Jesus to help?" They long for the day of the Lord Jesus, for manifestations of the works of God. Oh, dear friends, we should not be ashamed to have a secret longing that God might enlighten us about these things. It is all right if there are also other enlightenments; we can be glad if the world, even the heathen world, receives a little natural light. But if



someone has a longing for a revelation from God, a longing for day through Jesus, he need not be ashamed. He has found something, for his longing forms a ladder to God. This we may not take away from anyone. It is not right to say, 'Oh, no! Christianity is only meant as something spiritual, and when we die we shall go to Heaven.' No, no! The longing of men is for deeds of God. There can be no denying that, and we have a right to this in the day of Jesus Christ. The life of Jesus Christ ceases to be a light if God is just an idea for us, if the Lord Jesus does not finally stand before us in deeds and in manifestations of the works of God.

Now the question is whether we can help in any way to bring about day. It will not be through prayer alone, dear friends. I know quite well that people pray when they are ill; they cry out as an animal howls when it is in pain. But day does not come through this; in fact, such prayers often bring real night. An unthinking cry of 'Help me!' will not bring about day. How will day come, then? Can we help in any way? I say "yes!" I read here, 'As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.' So, if we look for day, we must seek how the Saviour can come into the world and in what way He is here. He has to be here; we cannot do without Him. As everything depends on Him, He must be here. But people take the little verse from the Bible, 'I am with you always, to the close of the age,' and believe that when

anyone rattles this off the Saviour is there. But that is not true. He can be away, and so far away that it really is night. Individuals, as also Christendom as a whole, can behave in such a way that the Saviour is not present, and then it is night. If we really want it to be day, we have to think how we can bring it about that Jesus is present as the resurrection and the life, if not yet visibly, then in a hidden way.

The Apostle Paul shows us the way to this. He says of himself, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). It is no wonder that something of the day of God was with the Apostle; for if the Saviour can live in a person, there must be day. Then there has to be a revelation of God's works. But we must keep in mind that whoever wants to help toward this day should not think it can be done with much preaching and praying, by reading lots of books and going to worship services, or with much knowledge about the nature of God and human probing into the holy things of God. If you know the Bible off by heart, this still does not make it day. It will only be day when Jesus Christ, the Man in whom the creation of God is represented, in whom the works of God are revealed, can be in us and we can be a light in the Lord--not in our own spirit. Only then will it be day.

But, you know, this is such a struggle for men. They can all throw the name of Jesus at men, ramming the Saviour's name down the throat of men, as it were. With the name of

Jesus they demonstrate their courage and become great Christians, but the Saviour is only driven away by this. This kills Jesus Christ, and then night comes. It will be night just as long as we are the sort of people who make ourselves great with Jesus instead of becoming small; the sort of people who want recognition for ourselves in Christ instead of bringing Christ to recognition by putting ourselves in the background. Whoever is able to learn something of this, let him stand back for Jesus and not be so domineering. You can rule in your own land. Let me say again: Use your intelligence in life, in your calling on earth. That is a serious request. But when it is a matter of the Kingdom of Heaven--please! You cannot do as you would on your own land. Here only Jesus may work. You must also be able to say, "It is not I, but Christ who lives in me!"

Whoever understands this can help to bring about day, and I would like to lay it on everybody's heart to have the courage to work for it. Do not cry out for day for your own sakes, because of your needs, because of the cross which weighs upon your flesh--that is something you have to bear. Cry out for day for the sake of God. And, who knows, when He comes perhaps you will still have to be judged so that your flesh might be destroyed, for the Saviour does not want to remain alongside of your flesh. Only in the same degree that you are prepared to humble yourselves and lie down in the dust for God's sake, will



the Lord Jesus live in us. And He will live in us if we are faithful; the works of God will be manifest and the glory of almighty God will shine upon all creation. God will not stay forever unjustified in His creation where everyone can pounce on Him as if He had made a poor job of it. No! He will reveal Himself in truth and justice, and the whole world will be amazed.

May God grant that your hearts will be ready to approach God in Christ in such a way that you can renounce the flesh and surrender yourselves to the whole Jesus.

Amen

## 33.

Meditation published October 1890 in the "Vertraulichen Blättern" (No. 7).

Matthew 14:13: "O man of little faith, why did you doubt?"

With this word the Saviour scolded a drenched Peter, who just before had been allowed to experience a kind of bodily transfiguration so that he too was able to walk on the water. There must have been a powerful breaking-in of God's presence into earthly nature through the Lord Jesus to make such a thing possible. We are no longer able to understand many of the things that the disciples of Jesus and whole masses of people experienced. Only a few reputable men are still able to regard as facts the happenings around Jesus which we are told about. Even for these few, the so-called miracles--which for the Saviour are works of the Father like other works too--have significance only as parables. Many people are horrified at the thought of possibly experiencing such things again, and they fight tooth and nail against "miracles." Men cannot reconcile miracles with God's natural order in the world. If something similar should happen to what Peter experienced, they would think everything was going to pieces. And yet, if we did once experience something, God's laws would still remain. They would probably only be brought closer again to their inner truth and essential meaning so that instances of strengthening and preservation of life would become more common. What is the final goal of the Kingdom of God on

earth? Certainly not the dissolution of creation and God-given nature. It is also said: "I have not come to abolish but to fulfill." Finally everything shall help to further life. Even today all forces and conditions of nature are directed toward this. We feel it as a disorder--we could even say as an injustice--of conditions in the world that these conditions so often kill and ruin us, and that the life of all creation constantly suffers need. Yet God's justice shall be revealed, and all the world shall see the salvation of our God. An enormous amount of blessing lies hidden in creation, which is intended for the whole living world. That is obvious to everyone, and therefore all men hope in it. To accomplish their aims they also hope for a favorable combination of conditions in all their undertakings. In fact, men already now experience wonderful blessings, although certainly also awful misfortunes. Both serve to increase the expectation of complete redemption. Therefore pessimism can never be implanted in seeking mankind. Pessimism collides against nature in the whole creation which still has in it enough of the divine element to suddenly break forth into visible deeds here and there, promising salvation. If we think of this happening constantly, in truth and justice, then the Kingdom of God is there and will encompass all creation with all its already existing forces and laws. It is our guilt that there still is so much evil in creation and that therefore God, and consequently



also the world, is not understood.

"O man of little faith, why did you doubt?" Again and again there have been times when the laws of nature collaborated to a certain extent to further the life of God's people. The most important such times were those of Moses and Jesus. They were real beginnings of God's Kingdom. The hopes of Israel in its prophets would never have been possible without such real expressions of divine blessings in nature. Not unnaturalness, but perfect naturalness and God in nature bring hope and the promise of redemption. Without experiences in this direction, the Apostles could never have thought of and proclaimed the end of the world, the coming of Christ, and the resurrection of the dead as being so near. The more naturally they accepted the wondrous deeds of life in the company of Jesus, the more naturally they saw the greatest and most wondrous events needed for the attainment of the goal, the fulfilling of the Kingdom of God.

In those times in which something of Heaven was revealed and proclaimed as a new order of God against evil, faith was always demanded. Now, what is faith? To have faith means nothing else than to remain in the reality of the moment. Peter felt a wonderful lifting up of his being on the water. He saw himself naturally carried without being able to understand it, but he could surrender in a childlike spirit to this fact and should have remained in it. Then the storm came and the memory of ordinary conditions

tore him out of the experience of that moment. He forsook the rock on which he was standing, so to say, plunged into the water and sank. Now he gets scolded. Jesus often scolded his disciples for not remaining in a given experience. They would think and talk themselves out of it and so thwart His intentions. Also at other times, men failed to hold on to the new, divine laws for life in Jesus, which should lead to eternal life. Then what had happened remained an isolated event. It had the appearance of a phenomenon, a sign of light and life that disappeared as suddenly as it came. This is what faithlessness does. Through this faithlessness Peter lost something, just as he would have gained something had he but brought this experience to its conclusion. Later he had to repent bitterly for this doubting, in that hour when he denied, when reflection upon the danger in which he found himself persuaded him to desert what he had experienced. He denied his heritage, for Jesus and the works of the Father in Heaven had been offered to the disciples as a permanent possession. In this they were meant to remain and not to forsake it, in spite of all temptation.

Men often think faith consists of forcing oneself to accept something which one does not and cannot understand. Often we call men believers if they only accept what others tell them. Men also seek faith by denying reason and forcing themselves into something that hasn't yet become a personal experience. God requires a different

faith, though. He is content if you believe what you can experience, what He allows you to experience. Be faithful and hold on to what you have, not on to what you do not have. Cornelius was righteous and God-fearing. He did not know Jesus yet, but he was faithful to what he had been given. And it was said: "You have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much" (Matt. 25:23).

Many people want to believe in the greatest miracles in the present time, and they work themselves up into expecting something which will change their situation like a flash of lightning and bring them happiness. At the same time, however, they doubt what they have and so forsake what has been given them. In nature everything grows from a tiny seed. The Kingdom of God works in the same way. Whoever throws away the seed, throws away the tree with its fruits as well. Whoever guards and plants the seed, will experience the miracle of the tree and will be nourished by its fruits. If God is a reality in your heart, like a small, maybe still unopened seed, hold to this and do not doubt. You don't have to think about the Trinity and goodness knows what right away, or believe in these things. If Jesus has come to mean something for you, if only as a powerful urge and germ of hope, or as an example of the truth of life, hold to this, if it is in you. It is not necessary that you right away be a man who thinks deeply about the nature of Jesus and His relationship to God with great faith and learning. What is required is



that you hold on to what you yourself have experienced. If you are faithful, God will entrust more to you; and in this way you will remain in the truth and will be led from grace to grace, from revelation to revelation. The man who always reaches out for the unattainable will lose that which is attainable. God is not served by speculations about faith but only by actual doing and living in what has been given. Will God reproach someone who cannot believe everything the apostles experienced? I don't think so. But God will demand an account of how each one has been faithful to what was given him. Enough happens from God in various ways to offer fear of God to one man, strength to act for God to another, recognition of God and Jesus Christ to a third, and even the experience of signs and miracles to a fourth person. But let each one believe, and be faithful, and not doubt in that which has been given him.

To believe does not mean to judge and condemn, though. If a man fears God and still does not understand the miracles of Jesus, can he then condemn the one who experiences miracles? And if someone has knowledge of the Kingdom of God and its mystery, can he condemn the man who does not yet have this but is faithful in the fear of God and in righteousness? We destroy the building of the Kingdom of God if we want to hew the stones in our own way and if every believer wants the other to be just like himself. Would to God that we could understand the meaning of faith! Then surely there would be progress in many ways and many a man would be allowed to

experience something in his own situation that would be for the glory of God. Forced faith and faith learned from books, which makes men hard and judging, will take the reins out of God's hands. This way will only lead to a human progress. The progress of eternal life will be so held up that even believers will no longer believe that fulfillment can still come which will then, indeed, bring experiences that now are still far from us. It will come though! Let us believe this and not doubt! The Saviour presses forward to victory and lives, until the glory of God will be revealed freely and openly in the whole of creation.

## 34.

Advent Meditation, published December 1890 in the  
"Vertraulichen Blättern" (No. 8)

Matthew 21:1-16: And when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Beth'phage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find an ass tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. If any one says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord has need of them' and he will send them immediately." This took place to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet, saying,

'Tell the daughter of Zion,  
Behold, your king is coming to you,  
humble, and mounted on an ass,  
and on a colt, the foal of an ass.'

The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the ass and the colt, and put their garments on them, and he sat thereon. Most of the crowd spread their garments on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. And the crowds that went before him and that followed him shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed be he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" And when he entered Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, "Who is this?" And the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee."

And Jesus entered the temple of God and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer'; but you make it a den of robbers."

And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they were indignant; and they said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read,

'Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings  
thou hast brought perfect praise'?"

At this time we want to turn our thoughts to the Kingdom of God again and remind ourselves that we are called to go to meet this Kingdom. Or you could also say go to meet the Saviour, who is coming to prepare the Kingdom



on earth for God the Father in Heaven. It is always of great significance when people gather together because of the promise of the Kingdom of God. Although we may feel poor, weak, and miserable about our ability to further the Kingdom of God, we should know that it can be of great significance to God when men come together to remember His Kingdom and His coming. And this is happening in many places, especially today. Many people try, at least, to prepare their hearts and dedicate them to Him who is, who was, and who will be. With many, this may happen in weakness, sometimes even in a wrong way. Perhaps here and there a contrary spirit arises, because there are many people who do not understand that one has to await God's Kingdom in a special way. But none of this is important. Opposition as well as joyful acclamation all help to make the time of Advent significant and to stamp it as a time in which an attempt is made, as it were, to establish something new in our hearts by which we can continue to walk in the light of our Lord. It is often hard for us to find the courage to believe that something of real value can be gained through the celebration of such times. If I were to look at men--myself or others--and at human strength, I would lose all courage; I would find it impossible to believe that it would really be of any significance to celebrate such times as Advent or Christmas. But I look to God's power, and I will not allow myself to be robbed of this; for the Kingdom of God

does not consist in human words but in the power of God. When we believe that a new time is beginning, we do so because we hope for the power of God. Not only do we hope, but we are certain of God's power which has already begun to bring about the Kingdom in Jesus Christ.

This power of God has not become less; on the contrary, with the passage of time it has increased around the earth and around mankind, and especially around the Church of Jesus Christ. Even though the latter is debased and has taken wrong paths, the power of God does not give way. It is just as if a fortress were being besieged by an enemy army. If, after a long time, the fortress does not surrender, the king who wants to take it gathers more and more troops together and arms himself with ever more powerful weapons, so that with one blow he can seize it and declare himself lord over it.

Thus it is with our earth. Truly, it stands like a fortress against God. Men are skillful in avoiding God again and again. They pay their respects to Him, of course, but then go right on doing as they please. And unfortunately we have to admit that we too, we who want to be God's children, find plenty of hindrances within us. We do not go to meet our beloved God with our whole being. We always have some reservation, and so we have to say that we are also among those who are besieged and attacked by God.

But just this is my greatest comfort, dear friends,

for if nothing else helps, ultimately the powers of God will bring men under His yoke. Our Lord will be victorious and will conquer the earth. This is our joy in these days of Advent, even if we have to confess that we are faint-hearted, listless people who cannot go joyfully to meet our conqueror because we have not yet been able to conquer ourselves enough to really submit to Him. Nevertheless, within the fortress we should be like lights, burning for the besieger. To be sure, we can only be this in quiet, carrying it on our hearts, since we are among enemies. We should be like friends of the conqueror in the city to be conquered, forgetting everything and waiting only for the cannons to thunder and the walls to fall, so to speak; waiting for the whole of mankind, which is accustomed to live in the flesh, to be subjected to Jesus the Lord, as it must be, according to God's will and to His greater glory.

This is our consolation; but at the same time, as you realize, it is our humiliation. Unfortunately we cannot stand together in such a way that we feel ourselves to be one joyous band, truly going to meet our Lord. We are, of course, people who are disposed to sing Hosanna; who, as one says, await in faith the coming of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God. We are people who often sigh, "O that the Lord would deliver His captured Zion!" We are such people; but that, dear friends, is not enough. In whatever situation we are placed, we



can get so used to this without really preparing ourselves while the Lord is approaching. And this is what I want to talk about today. I will talk about Advent and Christmas time having to become a real time of work, because it is only by actually standing up and fighting for the Lord that we can prepare ourselves for His coming.

We will not prepare ourselves to receive the Lord by casting longing eyes to Heaven, expecting something extraordinary to come from there which will catch the attention of the whole world. The story we have read should teach us that. But we will be prepared when we set ourselves, heart and soul, here on earth, to being true disciples at the right moment and to helping when the coming Spirit of the Lord wants even now to set something right in us. For human nature, which is hostile to Him, must be kept in check in accordance with God's truth and justice as it has already been revealed. Whenever this happens, we are prepared to receive the Lord. If we just let everything go on as it is and do not try to set things right in accordance with God's will as we know it, then everything becomes chaotic; we become demoralized and are even completely corrupted. Thus, at such festive times we should feel like workers standing before their master in working clothes, equipped with tools and ready to go to work immediately at his command. So beware of indulging in exalted spiritual feelings or in all kinds of speculations about the coming of Christ with the idea that this

is the way to meet the Lord. It is better to think of how you can go to meet Christ now, on earth, and how you can be at His service with things as they are now.

This story here shows us how simple this can be. Two disciples are sent to fetch an ass for Jesus to ride upon. They do this; and because they do it without thinking about it, they are servants in God's Kingdom. After the owner of the ass asks, "What are you doing? That ass is mine," and they answer him "Let us be, the Lord and Master has need of it," the owner does not stop to think about it, but out of respect for the Lord Jesus he surrenders the ass to the Master. With this he becomes a servant of God's Kingdom because he does what is asked of him at the moment, which can truly be of help to the Saviour on earth, to Him whom one felt to be the Man of God.

It is just the same with the crowds of people, at least those who had an impression of the Lord Jesus. On seeing Jesus they surrendered to this impression and fell in with the cry to sing Hosanna. They quickly spread out their garments and turned it into a festive occasion for the One who came, for the Saviour who came on earth humbly and meekly riding an ass. With this they performed a great service for God. They became of service to the Kingdom of God. All these people who responded in this way to the impression that Jesus is the man of truth, are surely written down in Heaven.

I do not agree with the usual expression, "Today they

cry out, 'Hosanna'; tomorrow, 'crucify him.'" I don't believe this. These people did not cry out, "Crucify him." It was the others who had been silent, and there were certainly more of them than of those who sang "Hosanna." And so I can quite definitely say that whoever can serve the Saviour on earth in this simple way will be able to come through the most dangerous times. No! He will not cry out, "Crucify him." The man who cries out, "Crucify him" will have held back at the beginning; for him it would have already been too much to go into the village and get an ass. He would already have thought, "Oh, I don't know if I can do that! What will so-and-so say about it!" The people who give themselves up to following and being obedient to the Saviour do not think like this, though. They do not cry out, "Crucify him." They come safely through all dangers, as we see with a man like Peter. Whatever mistakes he made, he still had given his heart to Jesus as the man of truth, and therefore this foundation of his heart cut through all doubts and storms. But a Judas does not come through, for from the beginning he has evil thoughts. When the Saviour wanted to bring about something on earth, Judas was always a little irritated. Of course he put on a pleasant face, but his anger showed itself in particular incidents. Afterwards it is he who cries out, 'Crucify him.'

We must write this deeply on our hearts, dear friends, and I ask you once more to keep away from all exalted



religious feelings. We must stand on the ground when the Saviour comes and not float up in the air. Nowadays, unfortunately, many things are done with the idea that the more spiritual and other-worldly we are, the better. But it is just the other way round. The more we know how to seek the truth and do it as far as possible in the situation God has placed us, even if it be the dirt of perverted mankind and institutions, the better it is. For the Saviour does not want to come as an idea but as a reality to men, wherever they live and struggle. It is here that we must make way for Him; and how can we do this except by acting in accordance with His nature and will? And His nature is simple, true, and genuine. Thus every person who is waiting for Jesus can receive an impression of something right and good. If he does it, he is preparing himself for the coming of Jesus Christ. Someone else may feel that one or the other habit he has cannot be pleasing to God. If he stops it and changes, then he is making way for the One who comes. When our hearts are set on this practical kind of waiting, God will surely send us all kinds of impressions like this. It could even go so far that all sincere followers of Jesus Christ will be given so much to do that--if you will permit me to say so--they will hardly have time for long devotions or for sitting in church, because of having to do all the things that must be done.

Do not be offended if I say that people always think

of the Kingdom of God as much too supernatural and as something completely foreign to human conditions. They think that some day something will come down from Heaven which will change everything all at once as if by magic, and in the meantime it is all right to let life go on as it is, provided we attend to our religious duties. Things go so far then that you can meet extremely religious people living in horribly untrue and unjust circumstances, and they don't move a finger to change anything. Their faith might one day have to be called a fraud. You know well that to such the Saviour comes like a thief. And, as I told you before, the Saviour also comes like a conqueror, for it is true that we shall not be able to manage everything by the time He comes; the flesh has become too powerful. But if, in all simplicity, we put right what we can in ourselves because Jesus lives in us, and work only for the good, then we prepare the way for Him. Even if much remains that only He can put right, we will show that we are people who can bestir themselves for their Lord and God; people who are not simply waiting for their salvation in a selfish, self-loving way, but who are rather consumed by eagerness to smooth the way for God, even if it is only in a very small way.

Yes, everything, I tell you everything, that is and comes from God's Kingdom must first be prepared on earth. And in the passage of time, this must become more and more certain so that in the end it can be tangibly grasped.

There where we live, where we work, with the proclamation that Jesus is Lord, we must be able to feel enthusiasm about making an effort for Him so that all we do is for the sake of God. Then we won't have to concern ourselves about whether the Saviour will return tomorrow or in a thousand years. We already live for His coming. The Kingdom of God has become our cause and will be revealed to us in life more and more clearly and surely, because with this attitude we will certainly be able to experience something. So let everyone consider: How can I show obedience in some way, because I love Jesus the Lord? There is always great joy in Heaven whenever someone does something. It can be quite a small thing, but it shows that he thinks only of being obedient at all times and everywhere, to any truth of God, obedient to any true word which strikes him in his heart. I would say that all Heaven is eager for such disciples. They have enough people who pray, who attend meetings or services. And more than enough people who argue about what they believe to be right or wrong. But of doers, Heaven has not enough! There are not enough people who grasp that in the first place it is not knowledge, or doctrine, or preaching, that is lacking. What is lacking is right living, and this will only come about when some, and increasingly more, people together take up a more truthful and genuine attitude, for the sake of God. That is why the Saviour had only a few real disciples. He had few people He could command--only eleven. Certainly He



had a number of other friends, but for the time being He had to set them aside. Such people could sometimes be of service without, as it were, being really aware of it--like the crowd who sang Hosanna here but who actually still stood at a distance. Only the eleven were real servants because, in spite of all their shortcomings and weaknesses, they did, after all, truly follow Christ again and again, even if it went against all reason. They had, of course, to go through very much which to human eyes seemed unreasonable, but they said to themselves, "If you look closely at it, whatever Jesus does is right and true, even if it sometimes seems strange. People may say what they like, but I will do whatever He commands. I can rely on Him!"

This must also be our attitude. An enthusiasm must burn in us, not merely to pick up some spiritual refreshment, but to do something for Christ, something that is right and true before Him and His judgment seat. Let us go to it, dear friends, enthusiastically. This is the way we will go to meet God's Kingdom. Oh, if I could only make that clear to all who read this! So much depends upon the disciples of Jesus being inwardly so disposed that a rich spring of living, active life flow from them through which their whole being, always under control, can flourish until the moment when they can belong wholly and completely to the Lord.

But unfortunately this matter of being disciples is a difficult thing, which is why Jesus had so few of them.

For the struggle begins in the disciples--the struggle which, more than anything else, leads to God's victory on earth. This is the battle against our own thinking, our own nature, our own human lives, or, in a word, against the flesh. Our flesh would like to make the Kingdom of God, but it doesn't work that way. We need a commander who will strike down our flesh. And if we do not want to accept the Lord Jesus as this commander, we will not come into the Kingdom of God, however pious we might be.

I have a lifetime of experience behind me now. Never once was it in my power to do something according to my own way of thinking. It was always a command that came to me, striking me down and bringing me to my senses. Anyone who cannot follow a command, one that comes to him in truth, will not find the Kingdom. You will not come into the Kingdom unless you obey! The most harmful thing to the Kingdom of God is that no man wants to be obedient. Instead, everyone cultivates his own special brand of piety. There are a thousand expressions of piety: high-flown thoughts, churchiness, laws and principles, in short, every kind of piety. But where is the man who will obey God's command when it comes to him in truth, and submit to it? Where is the man who will allow himself to be thrown into the gutter for God and Jesus and yet remain true, like Peter? Such a person knows in his heart: "Jesus is the man! I will follow Him for death or life! Even though this goes against all my thoughts and feelings,

Jesus is victor! I will stay with Him."

There are also many who think they must still struggle with the devil and become free of demons. But as I have often told you: forget the devil and all the demons; you don't have to concern yourselves with them now! Today it is a matter of your flesh. I tell you, Jesus will come as a conqueror and will strike you down without mercy unless you are obedient people, in spite of all your hopes for God's Kingdom! Even if you are awkward, it doesn't matter as long as your heart is ready to say, "I will follow! I will follow! I will follow! Wherever I see a truth, I will go straight to it and not pause to consider. I will serve the Lord Jesus for the sake of God!" Only in this way will there be a circle around Jesus upon whom He can depend. He doesn't need strong people, nor so-called confident, bold, and courageous people who push things ahead in the world. He needs people who are broken, who fear lest they become disobedient to His command. Those are the people He needs, for they are servants. All the others who have a manufactured piety and feel themselves so secure in it, are for the most part hardly usable as servants. But those who fear and tremble, those who are shaken and shocked by the word of truth, yet joyfully say "Yes" and take action--these are His Church.

And then, when He has people like this, dear friends, we will no longer fear the world. Who would fear any kind of human society when the Lord Jesus has His band, people



upon whom He can rely! With these, He could also attack the temple, the temple that had become false, and drive out the buyers and sellers. Because a moment came about in which the Saviour was carried by faithful disciples and the faithful crowds, He was able to find an opportunity to give some further help to the Kingdom of God by removing this evil from the temple. He exposed the enemies to the eyes of all, even though they had the appearance of piety, so that men could distinguish between right and wrong, between truth and hypocrisy. Jesus received the freedom to do this through the attitude of His disciples, who went out to Him at the right moment.

Just think, would the Saviour have had the power to drive out the buyers and sellers from the temple if the disciples had grumbled and said, "Oh dear, fetch an ass! I don't know if that will work!"? Or if the owner of the ass had started to make a fuss and said, "Why does your master need to ride? He can walk, as he has done up till now!"? Or if the crowds had thought, because He came riding on an ass, "That's a fine one! This is the one who is supposed to be king, and he comes in such a lowly manner!"? Would Jesus have been able to find the opportunity of doing such a deed before God?

See, the people had to prepare the way for Him! He had to be able to lean upon faithful hearts in order to exercise authority over the rest. And if we are not faithful to the Saviour, not enthusiastic for Him and His

truth, then He remains powerless. Things go on as they are, and we too will finally be among those who are called enemies, however well-intentioned we may be. The Saviour will just not receive the strength; there will be no breaking in of God's Kingdom. It was extremely significant that Jesus could say here, "My house shall be a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of robbers." Up to this present day this has been significant. The temple collapsed because men did not heed this word and this deed. They did not surrender. But God will also not yield. God yields to no man; and if man does not surrender, he will ultimately be shattered.

If the disciples had not surrendered, they too would have been shattered, for God does not yield. He will never yield to our flesh; He carries on in His own way. God is able to raise up children from the stones. And if the older ones do not offer their support, then the children must do it, just as here in the story the children cried out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David!", in spite of the indignation of the older people.

Dear friends, in this time we must grasp how important it is to surrender ourselves completely. I know quite well that nowadays it is somewhat of a strain to surrender oneself in a practical way, for first this has to be understood anew. The entire foundation of this kind of working for the Kingdom of God has been lost. There is so much Christianity in which hearts are not subjugated,

so much religiosity which leaves people just as they were before. The way to serve Jesus, to go to meet God, has not yet been understood. People think they do this with churches, sermons, and Holy Communion; but it is not done in this way. It has become so rooted in us that we can accomplish something through such forms that it costs a tremendous effort to turn around and find that which will really help the Kingdom of God. Therefore do not become tired if it is hard for you and if you are annoyed by what I say now or in the future. Be annoyed, and let your annoyance show you that you are not yet suitable for God's Kingdom. When you tread this ground, Jesus Himself will testify in your hearts to what is true. But you must surrender yourselves in a very simple, practical way, and go at it with zeal, thinking, "I will surrender myself; I will keep God's cause in my heart so that it may come to be on earth." And here, too, in our house, where we live and where perhaps we turn more to God than other people in expectation of His Kingdom, we want to live in such a way that here on this earthly ground something visible may happen that will bring honor to God.

Let this be our attitude when we celebrate Advent and Christmas. May God grant that we grasp this and are confident in it. It is so easy and simple and clear that any child can understand it: Let everyone, in his own place, become obedient. Listen, listen! Listen, children,



when something that is right is said to you, and be eager to do it. You, young men and young women, if you are told something that is right, do it! You older ones, men and women, if you are told something that is right, do it! And anyone else among us, sick or healthy, high or low, if you are told something that is right, then do it! Don't think too long about it. Just consider: is it right, or not? If it is right, go to it. Then you will find Christ, for where things are done right, there He is. God's Kingdom is there, and only there, wherever in your life you do what is right and renounce what is wrong; for God is a God of justice and truth. May He give us the power to go to meet Him in the love of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

### Conclusion

For me the religious festivals become more and more work-days, days in which we put on working clothes for God, in the grace that He has given into our hearts. I do not, of course, mean an outward business in which we spend money where there is no bread to be had, and waste our labor and effort where no water flows, as the prophet Isaiah says.\* I mean the work by which we can prepare ourselves for Jesus to live and rule in us more than before. There is still a very great deal for Him to say in the world, and He has much to set right in us before God's will can be done.

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\*See Isaiah 55:1,2

Certainly, most Christians think they know everything, and think that with what they know they will be able to reach the goal along the same old rut they have been accustomed to travel. But even if we do know something, it is in the doing that we fail; and in my opinion we also lack true knowledge and understanding, which is why we often fail to come to a true doing. Let us unite together as people who know nothing and can do nothing, as people who hunger and thirst for God's justice. In all quiet let us give everything of ourselves into death, that Jesus may live and come into His own. All the world is eagerly straining for Christianity to do something amid the roaring waves of human society. But what is Christianity? Christ should have a say! Let him who believes prepare himself for Christ. Jesus wants to lead us to a true life of deeds for God. He can kindle hearts for truth and justice, the hearts of those who see the world's salvation, not in human festivals and the pomp of Christianity, but in the Kingdom of God which is coming; not so that man may be all in all in his Christianity, but that God may be all in all in Christ.

35.

Devotional meeting, New Year's Eve, 1890. From a transcript.

Philippians 4:4-7: Delight yourselves in God, yes, find your joy in Him at all times. Have a reputation for gentleness, and never forget the nearness of your Lord. Don't worry over anything whatever; tell God every detail of your needs in earnest and thankful prayer, and the peace of God, which transcends human understanding, will keep constant guard over your hearts and minds as they rest in Christ Jesus.

(Phillips translation)

This is my greeting to you at the end of the old year and the beginning of the new. We cannot find a better watchword than these words which bind us in Heaven, as it were, and do not let go of us on earth. Thus we can do justice to both what is of Heaven and what is of earth. We do justice to what is of Heaven when we delight in the Lord and when the peace of God which transcends all human understanding can guard us so that our hearts and minds are made firm in Christ Jesus. This is absolutely essential for us. I would not want to live another hour without being thus firmly grounded in the Lord Jesus. I do not know whether you all know this Lord in such a way as to be able to delight in Him, really delight in Him, and whether you know Him in such a way that you can be firmly grounded in Him. If we do, then we have already made a big step forward. And if there is someone among us who does not have this relationship, my New Year's wish for him is: I wish for you that you may rejoice in the Lord Jesus and that you may find a firm grounding in this Man. That is my wish for you. This Man must mean something to



you, this Man who, as people say, died nearly two thousand years ago. He must mean more to you than kings or emperors, more than churches, or anything else that exists. This Man must really become your joy and your strength. I wish this for all who have not yet found it.

To have this is really a miracle. Isn't it truly a miracle--to delight in, to find a firm grounding in someone who lived two thousand years ago? I don't mean firmly grounded in a religion. The Mohammedans are religious and hold firmly to Mohammed. That is something quite different. For the Buddhists, it is the same with Buddha. But only their religion means anything to them, not Mohammed or Buddha. For us religion is nothing, and Jesus is everything. With Him we will conquer the world. That is how we stand. We are not interested in any doctrines about Jesus; we are interested in the Lord Jesus Himself. He is our doctrine--the Man who can take us by the ear when we misbehave, or give us a pat when we are good. No dogma, no doctrine, nor anything else--no, the Man Himself, it is He whom we want!

That's how it is with us, and if you don't have this, then for my part I can tell you boldly: I have it, and I would not want to live an hour without it. Therefore I have the right to say, wake up and at least seek for it in the year 1891. Light a lamp and search for it as for a pin so that you can delight in this Man and value Him higher than anything else. For this Man makes us so firm

that our minds and hearts are guarded against all that seeks to agitate and distract us. He is a rock; and if He is within us, this rock will shatter the whole world. But He must be there within us; we must have Him. You must all have this Man. Whoever does not have Him lives today and is dead tomorrow.

This actually makes the turn of the year a happy occasion, and we want to be happy together. Some people are often gloomy at the turn of the year and are almost depressed at the thought of what it might bring. Oh, let come what may; rejoice in the Lord, whatever happens! Our Man does not change except that He becomes stronger and mightier. Therefore we can truly rejoice and become enthusiastic about Him. I would be distrustful of any other kind of joy and enthusiasm we might engage in, and I would not join in. It's quite nice now and then to have a pint of beer, but it would never occur to me to rejoice in the beer. Or is there something else you would rejoice in, or seek strength in? The sun? The Emperor? Or anything else? I will have no part of that, for tomorrow there may be an earthquake, and that would be the end of it. I can also rejoice about these things, but I cannot have my joy in them. There is a difference between being delighted about something, and finding one's joy in it. There is but one Man from whom we can derive firmness and joy: Jesus. Therefore we will enter the New Year joyfully, because we simply do not depend upon these earthly things. God be

praised and thanked, I have never depended on these things and do not do so now. And so whatever happens, nothing shall deter us if this Man remains with us. And He will remain with us if we are watchful.

But watchfulness is required. It is quite possible to lose Him. Many people do lose their joy in the Lord and the sense of being securely upheld and kept by God; that is to say, they lose what is of Heaven because they forget what is of earth. That is why we must also be of the earth. The word, "the Lord is near," is meant for us here on earth. It can only be for us on earth. It is said to us. If I am always thinking of Heaven and do not make efforts to keep on the right way and do what is right here on earth, then, having already lost the earth, I now lose Heaven too and sit there in the middle with nothing. This is what has happened to most people. A lot of people have become too other-worldly. They want to have the Lord Jesus in such a way as to have nothing more to do with the earth. Then they lose what is of the earth, and since this is not God's will, they ultimately lose what is of Heaven as well and fall between two stools. Take care therefore! Your task and calling is here on earth. When we have found joy and a firm grounding in our Saviour, we must turn our eyes away from above and look down at the earth. What can I do there with what I have in my heart?

Now we must be careful! Firstly, be gentle and kind



to everybody. Bear this in mind, you who so often pass people by indifferently. We know that our Lord is gentle toward every man. He rejects none, and therefore we have no right to reject, or even to casually ignore, anyone. We should not make common cause with all men; but from a Christian standpoint, we should be gentle with all men. From Jesus' standpoint, you cannot be ruler. Remember this, and do not become a party man! We cannot be anything else than gentle in the name of Jesus, regardless of what people are; we must meet them with gentleness. But being gentle sometimes means saying a word to others. Gentleness toward my best friends is not just flattering them, but also speaking the truth to them. Gentleness does not mean that the truth should have to suffer. In our daily relationships we can be outspoken to everyone--but gentle; not separating ourselves and not feeling that this or the other one is completely outside. Even just having this in mind will keep us sober. Take note: Christians who are not able to deal gently with all men will not remain sober. They are often terribly pious, but they lose the foundation. Such superchristians who sit in their corner awaiting the Saviour, believing that their little band is the only cohort of the Saviour, are no longer gentle toward all men; they lose the foundation. We cannot expect all men to rejoice in the Lord and be as firmly grounded in the Lord as we are. But in the light that has been given us, we can show gentleness to all men, and do

this, bearing in mind that the Lord is near. Once we have taken Him quite personally into our hearts, He will always stand behind us and can be expected at any time to intervene in a special way to prepare His coming.

To someone who stands like this there will also be given, in the second place, freedom from care. It belongs to our standing right, here on earth, that we do not become involved in unnecessary cares and in all sorts of oppressive thoughts which prevent us from being free for God. Our hearts must be free. I have had to write many letters in recent days and weeks in regard to all kinds of troubles. In almost all of them I was moved to write: Free your heart! One person, suffering from the most dreadful illness, cried out that he could hardly stand it any more and that he had to spend the whole day praying and sighing. But I say, "Free your heart! Chase your illness out of your heart. See to it that God is in your heart. You can carry your sickness in a bundle on your back if you like, but it does not belong in your heart." Or there are other cases. One woman has a drunkard for a husband, and her life revolves completely around this miserable situation. "Free your heart," I say. "Cast out this misery from your heart, and bear your cross; do not let this into your heart, but be firm and stand fast."

There are many burdensome matters like this, although they are often quite small things. I tell you: Free your hearts! Let your head be concerned with these trifles, if

you like, but God and the Saviour must be in your heart.

Then there will be something different to be concerned about--namely, to stand on earth like a man. But when we are so hounded by trivialities, we are of no use any more. Scores of people are paralyzed because they allow so many things to enter their hearts. They should rather keep themselves free so that even in the deepest suffering, in the most unhappy circumstances, in short, in all situations, they are free for God and ready to serve Him. We must let nothing enter our hearts, and least of all ourselves, thinking and worrying about ourselves the whole time. For then we lose the foundation upon which we should represent something on earth, with prayer and supplication and in thanksgiving to God.

This is the way we can do something on earth. Often there is very little we can do for God on the surface, with our hands. There are times when all external work is more or less disagreeable and mixed up with much that is bad. But then we must at least be able to sacrifice ourselves to God in spirit, with prayer and thanksgiving. In this way God will be served on earth.

Someone wrote me today that he wanted to join a group of brethren in order to serve the work of the Lord too. I answered that I congratulate him on becoming a "brother," but that I do not think of the Lord's work as being only in a Brotherhood. I think of the Lord's work as being in every house, in every business. We can make a temple



anywhere, depending upon the person. The work of the Lord must once come out of the churches and institutions and into the houses, into hearts. The Lord's work must be there, not in buildings and clubs. It must come out into daily life. Then everyone will do the work of the Lord with prayer and thanksgiving to God. Our lives, our work, all our doings, will come before God and will be for God. We will be servants of God without having to buy a clerical collar. We can do the Lord's work with a pitch-fork in the hand. Nobody need feel excluded; for everyone, whoever he is and whatever he does, can share in the work of the Lord. This must happen to many, many people so that we really receive and have the gifts of God on earth.

This is how we shall become the right kind of people on earth, dear friends. Just as by having joy in the Lord and being firmly established in Him we take root in Heaven, so by doing God's work on earth we shall become the sort of people God wants on earth. Then God can take us by the hand; we shall be His servants, and whatever work we do is bound to become godly. It is our greatest wish for the New Year that it be given us, for the sake of God, that through men something of the earth may come into the hand of God. Think of it, at the moment there is nothing in God's hand, nothing at all. Man has seized hold of everything and holds it tightly in his greedy clutches. And if we say put it to work for God, that is not understood. But to whom does it belong? Naked you came into the world,

naked you will leave it. You could have had all this, even have had it for eternity, if you had wanted it for God. But if you have it for yourself, the thief will come; and you will stand there with nothing, for it does not belong to you.

So let us join together and strive to serve God by seeing that something comes into His hands, be it small or great, here or outside, in house and home, kitchen and cellar. We want to put something into God's hands so that He has something, and does not always have to be only bothered by us men. As it is now, He cannot even allow the rain to fall or the sun to shine without asking us. There is so much confusion, also in nature, because we want everything for ourselves alone.

Take my words seriously, and then we will soon see that God is gracious toward His creation and will allow it to flourish for us once again, because thus it will bring forth fruit for Him.

May God grant this in the New Year.

## 36.

Meditation at the beginning of the New Year. "Vertraulichen Blättern 1891," (No. 1).

At the Beginning of the New Year

What shall we say at the beginning of this New Year? We know of nothing else but the name of Jesus, since New Year's Day is also a reminder of the circumcision of Jesus, when the child born in Bethlehem was given the name of Jesus. In this Man, the fate of mankind will be decided in the years to come.

Petty family concerns are therefore not really in place on this day. New Year's Day, more than any other day, reminds us so very much of the whole of creation; and creation reminds us of the whole earth and its history; and the earth reminds us of mankind. Everybody must have some feeling of being a part of creation, of being a citizen of earth, a man. And at the beginning of a New Year, everyone who has thought about it at all feels a certain responsibility for what he or she is. We are not senseless animals, without knowledge of ourselves. God has given us a mind that we may know ourselves and may judge what we are in relation to the earth on which we live. But on such days as this a certain sadness always steals over us, for if we try with our own minds to consider what we are, we cannot sort it all out. We find a confusion of order and chaos, truth and lies, justice and injustice; I might almost say of being and not being. Therefore many people doubt the



reality of their existence; that is to say, they think of themselves as living a short time and then disappearing into nothingness. But it is even more difficult when we start thinking of ourselves in relationship to the earth on which we live. We are surrounded by a creation, of which the earth is a part, lying right under our feet; we walk upon it, live from it, have a certain dominion over it, feel a calling for it--and yet, nothing good really comes of it all. What are you doing in creation, O man? Of what significance are you for the earth? You feel you should have some significance in connection with creation and in your relationship to the earth, but there seems to be only confusion, only broken links, without any clear connection to be seen. That is why so many people feel detached from it all. They say, "I can do what I like," and the bond which should hold them within a true order to serve the creation and the earth is broken.

A heavy, almost uncanny weight lies upon men; a weight which cannot be removed by all the advantages which individual generations of men acquired for themselves through covetous striving. We do not feel included as worthwhile parts of life in the creation, working for the good of the whole. Instead, we feel that we are set aside as useless. But if a worker on an estate is not given a proper job to do and has to spend his time in idleness, never feeling that he is of any use, he will surely run away, for he will be so unhappy. We should also

feel something like this inwardly. It should be unbearable if we are worthless for the task for which we have been put on earth, or if we have to feel that we do more harm than good and that everything we do is detrimental. Even if we manage to fill our pockets, it is no comfort. Those who take comfort in full pockets, knowing they harm the task thereby, are a wretched people. No proper servant will stay with his master simply for the sake of his wage. If he notices he is only causing harm, he will leave and rather be poor. And no respectable maid-servant will remain because of her wage. She wants to be of service; and if she cannot serve any longer, she is unhappy. Even if given gold, she could not go on living as a servant.

Man, however, placed in the midst of creation, has lost the feeling that he is there for a purpose--not for himself, but for something else, far greater. This is what makes us feel sad, and it grieves us even more on a New Year's Day. People mostly sit in church thinking only about themselves. Each one bemoans his own lot and looks for something in himself and for himself, without really knowing what. One would like to cry out to them all: Good people, forget yourselves! Think of the cause of God! Start working for that! Or at least be sorry--not that things are going badly for you, but that you have nothing better to do than concern yourselves with your petty affairs.

The most terrible thing for us is that God cannot really use us. No wonder that we degenerate, in spite of all our

civilization. Every human being degenerates, even in temporal things, if he is not active as part of a whole, with higher goals. And everyone who works with love and joy for something greater than himself will thrive, even in earthly circumstances. All the values of the life of men, physical and spiritual, will be destroyed if we do not, as human beings, have work to do for the life of the earth, for creation, for God.

I wish I could hammer this into your hearts as well, dear friends, for much more will come out of such a moving occasion if we forget ourselves and think of that higher, more important cause for which we are here. And Jesus will help us in this. He is the brightness and radiance of God on earth. God shines again in this Man, and He is there for a purpose. He is of use to God in the creation among men. That is His significance, that is why He has eternal life and does not die, even if nailed to the Cross. Nothing, no circumstances, nothing you can imagine, not even the most unfavorable conditions, can destroy this Man, because He is there for a purpose. Any fly can destroy us, though, because we are here to no purpose. But Jesus has value. The Father of the creation shines through Him. And because this Man knows what it is to serve, creation feels a renewed hope that everything will be brought in order again for God and that the ruined earth, which has become a wilderness, will be restored again for God.



I tell you, this is the main thing for the Saviour. To be sure, Jesus is personally closely bound to mankind; but if we do not want to help Him, then He must, without grace or mercy, set us aside. In the first place, the Saviour is there for God, and only after that for you. Men have turned this completely around and have gradually come to represent that Jesus came only for us. They flatter themselves with having Jesus, but this could once turn out very badly. Therefore I tell you, the Lord will not care about us, or about the whole of humanity, if we do not want to help Him. If it came to that, He could put us all aside, for He works for God and not for our chaos. So we must honor Him as the representative of the Heavenly Father and take refuge in Him; otherwise it will go ill with us. Do not flatter yourselves any more with having Jesus. He has already begun to cut the threads, and who knows how it will be! Even Christians will have to stand alone, without the Saviour, when the time of patience is past--the time of patience which should show whether we want to comply with the wish of the Saviour to be something once more for our beloved God.

Right up to the present day God has shown patience with mankind, very great patience, because through the ages everything has become confused; people have been persuaded that the Saviour came only for their sakes. Thus the men of today are, in a manner of speaking, guiltless. Over the centuries people have only thought about how they could

profit most from the Saviour. But there will soon be little profit left in our pockets if the thought does not also come, "Now I want to serve! Now I want to be something for God! I will not be concerned about myself any longer!" That is why the sense of peace and grace leaves so many people. Thousands today have no peace and speak of being lost. The profit of grace is soon used up if we are here to no purpose; if we do not learn to see that we are what we are for God's sake; or if we do not learn to understand our relationship to the earth in the sense that we are called upon to work upon the earth for God. Therefore it is said that avarice is the root of all evil. It is idolatry, because greed works for itself and not for God. Then we are just like the heathen. I tell you, Christians today are just like the heathen; at bottom there is no difference. The attitude of Christians is not one whit better than that of the heathen. You know more about God, you know Jesus and have received the spirit by which you can recognize the work of God upon earth. But you are covetous and have kept everything for yourselves, not only spiritual things but material things, too, much more so than all the heathen. And so, with all your knowledge, you are in the end worse than the most ignorant heathen. Can't you see this?

Of what use to God is all our cleverness? What does He get out of it if we move heaven and earth to amass great wealth and provide ourselves with a pleasant life for a

short time? Everything we do that is not done for God is harmful. Whether it is your piety or your money you keep for yourself, it is all the same; it does nothing but harm; nothing good will come of it.

Because in Jesus all things are for God, we raise Him up so high; He is our consolation; we see in Him victory, even over death. And if we join with Him in this so that our self-seeking flesh dies, we shall have the faith that overcomes the world. If you believe in Jesus, but only in the sense of what you will gain, you will not overcome the world.

This is the brightness of God in Jesus on earth. Believe me, God will not let this Man fall. He will perhaps allow you to fall, but not Him. Jesus is of use to God. He is of great value because He forgets Himself for God and because He feels that man should once more be the servant of God and should find his joy in ~~this~~ service. Care for oneself will only be in second place, but of course it will also not be lacking if we live for God's purpose.

If we can understand this, dear friends, we can then consider the other side, too, which I mention with diffidence, however. This is that the Saviour is also our brightness in Heaven. He is the brightness of God upon earth, and is the brightness of men in Heaven. Just as God was done away with on earth, so also man was done away with in Heaven. Jesus comes as the one He is, and God lives on earth. Now He is with the Father in Heaven again, and mankind lives



once more in Him. A little brightness of once-dead mankind now shines before God; that is, there is a brightness of mankind in Heaven before God, through Jesus.

I say this diffidently because I know the incredible arrogance of men. As soon as one says something good about them, they fall upon it like sparrows on a field of oats and gobble it all up with never a thought about anything else. But still, it must also be said. For those of sincere heart it should be a comfort that they can now say, "In spite of man's uselessness until now, I must not lose heart! I can once again become a useful part of creation, even though it costs a painful struggle. I am not completely lost. The Lord is my light, the brightness of my humanity before God. Even if I am still far off, my existence is not forgotten. I am there before God because Jesus serves God as a man."

Now we can take another look at men and see if they are usable. Today is a time when God casts His eyes upon all men to see if they can be used. Used, that is, without distinction. Whatever clothes a man may wear on earth, Heaven is satisfied. Times are changing; it is no longer a question of who you are on earth, to whom you belong, the thoughts you have grasped, or what creed you hold to. The question is whether your heart is open for the glory and radiance of God upon earth. Then it does not matter what you are. I think that today the heathen, the Mohammedans, the Jews, just as much as all the different

kinds of Christians, of which there is a wide range, are all being looked at to see whether they have a heart which is able to stand up for God. If that is the case, then the time can quickly come for them to be called. Perhaps for now they do not know very much about heavenly matters; but if their heart is right, they can still be used a little in all quiet.

And so a time of mankind is approaching; yes, a time of mankind is coming. If you think a time of Christianity is coming, the Christianity we see around us today, then you are mistaken. A time of mankind is coming, for Jesus is the glory of mankind in Heaven, and God is no respecter of persons. Whoever fears God and does right, is pleasing to Him; outward differences no longer play a part in Heaven.

Does this depress you? Are you sad? Do you say, "But I have been a believer for so long and now the heathen are to be placed on an equal footing with me!"? Is that what you say? Look, many people say that! Why? They see in the Saviour only an advantage for themselves! Then it will be with them as it was with Jonah. When Jonah saw that Nineveh was released from the judgment of death and that the heathen were equally esteemed, he started to grumble: "I proclaimed the downfall of Nineveh but now it is to remain standing and even finds favor. I am made to look a fool!" Many people have such thoughts and thereby prevent themselves from having a true eye for God's Kingdom in the world. They are always looking for it somewhere else, in their own

particular corner. One looks for it with the Pope, another with Luther or Calvin, and yet another looks somewhere else. And they are all of the opinion that they, and they alone, have it.

But believe me, you Jews, you Catholics, you Evangelicals, you Mohammedans, believe me, all of you; today God's only concern is: Do you want to be of any use to Him, or not? Just say, "Yes!" No Jew and no Turk will then be excluded. Just say, "Yes," and everything else will be given too. Oh, dear friends, a New Year's Day like this should be a great day of affirmation before almighty God. It should be a day when thousands and thousands think not at all about themselves, and pledge themselves only to God: "We want to be your people once more! We want to belong to you again on earth! How shamefully has your creation been defiled! How shamefully have men dishonored your name! How shamefully men deal with everything on earth, following the lusts and greed of their hearts! But now our eyes are opening; the life of the world is being dissipated under our hands, and we will ruin it completely if we do not do something about it. Therefore we pledge you, almighty God, that we want to be here only for you, with all our heart and soul! Whatever happens to us, we want to sacrifice our bodies and our lives, just everything, so that once again there may at least be men who want to serve you with all their heart!"

Jesus now stands among you as the Man in whom you may sacrifice yourselves for God. You must give, not want to



receive. You must dispose of your person in the Lord Jesus for God. That means allowing yourselves to be crucified with Him and appearing before God with Him, in His blood. But you must surrender yourself and all that you have for the service of God. Man, if you do not want this, then do not let the name of Jesus cross your lips any more!

It is quite certain that this Man does not belong to you as long as you want only to receive something for yourself from Him. The times of the last judgment are coming in which everything will become clear. The man who will not surrender his life for God and become something for our beloved God on earth, will have no part in the Saviour. However pious he may appear to be, it will all be to no purpose. The severest times of God are coming over mankind, for the sighing of creation has ascended to Him. If we men continue standing in God's way, we will be nothing in His sight anymore.

Therefore I ask you--there are not many of you, and in any case I would not want to say this in a larger circle because they would not yet be able to understand it--but to you, I say: Make a start! The others will soon follow. Vow to God that you want to serve Him, however poor and insignificant you are. Forget yourselves! Have pity for your God! Have compassion with your God, who has been so miserably deceived by us men, for almost nobody is devoted completely and whole-heartedly to Him alone.

This is my request to you on this day. And even if you cannot translate this right away into an outward, visible

deed, nevertheless a grieving and crying out for God should stir your hearts even now. Or rather, it should cast you down, for we cannot so quickly expect to be given the opportunity of being able to do something for God. We are not so easily to be trusted. First of all we must abase ourselves in the dust with our whole being and feel deeply distressed that we have so little served our beloved God on earth. Then, you dear ones, the Saviour will stand there; and we will be able to come, in His blood, and sacrifice ourselves to God. Then something in us will change, renewing our whole person and making us fit to serve God, in a new life.

May the Lord make this plain to us. And not only to us, but to all people! For a day of mankind is coming, a day in which, for the last time, all men will receive the offer, regardless of color. Yes, a great day of mankind is coming in Christ Jesus. He is the radiance of God on earth among us, and the brightness of men in Heaven before the countenance of God.

Amen.

## 37.

Sermon, Good Friday, 1891. From a transcript.

The Crucifixion and Death of Jesus\*

What shall we say, dear friends? It is not easy to say something of the truth on a Good Friday. We are carried away by feelings of pity for the Saviour and remain caught up in these emotions, which actually have no value. Pity is, of course, a noble emotion; but it does not lead us very far. It passes by, and afterward we are the self-same people. We must tear ourselves firmly away from this more earthly feeling of softness in our nature, and we must look at things from a divine point of view in order to follow the Saviour. Pity could bring about a weakness within us, and it has already brought about a weakness in many people so that they have become fearful of doing what Jesus has done and of enduring what Jesus endured. And so it has come about that most people take refuge in feelings of horror about this suffering and remove themselves far away from the cross of Christ. With a sigh of relief they say, "God be thanked and praised that I do not have to hang there! How wonderful it is that the Saviour has taken this upon Himself; I could not do it! Praise and thanks to God that now it will nevermore be necessary for us to do this. God be praised and thanked that the Saviour has borne everything,

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\*Text taken from the sixth section of Christ's Passion as summarized in the Württemberg Hymn book.



and now I need bear nothing!" This is the reasoning of human pity with the suffering of Christ.

Two things should move us, though. Firstly, to be sure, a sorrow. This horrible murder will remain forever a disgrace before God and all the angels. This day is the anniversary of one of the most abominable of the bloody deeds of men. It is all the more awful when we think that this murder was carried out upon a righteous man. And it is even more serious when we have to say that the men who did this were actuated by the same emotions and impulses that we have every day. The only difference is perhaps that we are no longer as cruel--we haven't the nerve. Our nerve received a blow about a hundred years ago, but for fifteen hundred years before that we were just as horrible and were more accustomed to handling instruments of torture than any other tools. We received a divine blow, and thus this ultimate way of violent action has been taken from us to some extent; we may not use it any more. But hateful feelings because of some incident, often against righteous people; the lust for divisiveness and persecution; hard-heartedness toward innocent sufferers, as long as we are spared all this, is very great. We are quick to feel a certain pity, but then we retreat straightaway into our own shell again and are hard people in daily life. Among neighbors and even within families there are emotions which are exactly the same as in Jesus' time. In that respect this day is a blow to our conscience. It is a

shame that Good Friday is presented to us as a holiday in the way it is, and you will fare badly in Heaven with your sentimental feelings. I would say that this is a hard working day in which we must wallow in the dirt. It is a day in which we must stand in the filth of mankind up to the neck; a day in which the misery of the curse which has come upon the human race through this terrible deed of murder, goes to our heart. Men always look at it from the point of view that now we have gained life and salvation. Yes, this is true under certain conditions; but the fact confronting us is that Jesus said, "Do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. It is you who will say to the mountains, 'Fall on us'; and to the hills, 'Cover us.' I do not need to say this; I am finished. You do not need to have pity for me; it is you who have to be mourned." (See Luke 23:28-30).

This has been fulfilled in a terrible way. These tears of the women!--yes, they were tears of women--the Saviour felt something wrong in them, in this attachment which is founded upon human feelings. "Go away from me with all this; it doesn't belong here! If you want to cry, then cry over yourselves. It is for you a serious matter; you are the murderers, not I. You should mourn for yourselves and do it thinking of your God who, since days of old and now again through Me, has manifested Himself so mercifully and graciously among you. You should mourn because, in spite of this graciousness, a righteous man cannot exist among you.

This should strike you to the heart."

This is how we must celebrate Good Friday today. And not just celebrate, but go to work. We must roll up our sleeves like a workman, as it were; and even if we are afraid, we must close our eyes and go into this wilderness. We must be zealous to stand up for God; to tire ourselves out with sighing to God, so to speak, in the hope that when Heaven sees our eagerness to clear away this dirt, something divine will come to us and help us through. Mere pity must now stop. Now we cannot just wail and look on at how the Saviour is crucified every year and just have sentimental feelings about it. No! You must work! You must fight! Do something! Be zealous for God! It is a workday, a true workday in which we should come before God in sackcloth and ashes, or in working clothes, in order to show that now we want to set to work and not drift any more. A day spent like this will be of more use than a day in which we spinelessly surrender to an atmosphere brought about by feelings of pity.

Yes, you dear ones, we certainly can do a little work. I will just point out one thing we can work upon, as an example, although there is so very much more we can do besides. Today I speak with you in a workaday manner, not in an improving, edifying way. It is written here (Mark 15:23) that Jesus was offered wine mingled with myrrh, but He did not take it. That is to say, He had a sure instinct for the poison they wanted to give Him. With this He also



demonstrated that He was a genuine man of God in regard to His body, as the body is a temple that may not be violated. But we give absolutely no thought to this. We just do whatever we please, and thus in our whole conduct we become extremely unnatural people. Along with this we are very much up in the air, highly spiritual! We can be terribly pious, but incapable of yielding to true impulses. Even in this simple, natural sphere, nobody does anything for God. They allow the Saviour to die but do not follow Him. But, you know, Jesus took care of Himself; otherwise, He would not have risen from the dead. If we pay no attention to natural things and do not slowly learn to give up this terrible unnaturalness with which we ruin our bodies, how can we be entrusted with something for our souls? How will you be able to care for your soul if you cannot even care for your body?

We want to be more diligent in this, and as we have said already, today should be the beginning of a workday, a time of work. Jesus also shows His mastery over suffering, for example, when He says here to His disciple, "Behold your mother," and to His mother, "Behold your son." He is concerned to properly arrange how things shall continue on earth and has nothing else in mind. Also all His other words amount to something very simple, and He shows with this how naturally and rightly He thinks before God, without complications of any kind. And so He can also say, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." From this

you can also learn something of what you can do, and not give in to your anger and hate. Learn something, and do not be so excessively holy and pious! Do a little work! God gives nothing for all your chatter and sentiments unless you do something. And so I want to ask that you tear down the tremendous sanctimoniousness in which this day has been shrouded for us and become honest for God.

This brings us to a second thought. As He was dying there, Jesus felt a terrible pain for us, that we could treat Him in this way. But in one way it was a great joy to Him. It was a joy that it was granted to Him, as the righteous One, to sacrifice Himself, and through Himself, mankind to God; and in death to bring mankind before the righteous judgment seat of God. This is a joy for Him, and because of this He cannot stand our soft nonsense. In this joy His utterances from the cross stream down upon us like a light. This all comes from the peace of His heart. Only the one word, "Why hast Thou forsaken me?", is questioning; and this is not said in a complaining way. I think that then the angels departed whom He had been aware of until that moment. Darkness came over the land; even the sun lost its brightness for three hours, and it seemed that the angels, too, had gone. Now, after waiting for three hours, Jesus gives utterance to His feelings: "What is this?" And, recalling the 22nd Psalm, He cries out at last, "My God, what is this? How will this end?" This is also a word of light. It is not a word of doubt, or a

word of darkness, but a word of light through which He again broke through, so to speak, and lifted Himself up again to God. And so all He said sprang from a peacefulness of soul. It was a kind of comfort and consolation to Him that He, at least, could surrender and sacrifice Himself to God and become a sacrificial lamb for God. Until then men had cared only about themselves. God had to provide for men. But now there is One who can and does care about God. From earliest times God had made tremendous sacrifices for men. Now the Saviour turns the tables, and for once a sacrifice is made to God. Jesus does this by offering His own body, His whole being, His mission, everything, for He gives up absolutely everything and places it in God's hands. See! This makes the cross of Christ shine so brightly right up to the present day. This nature of Jesus radiates right down to us.

But what is now the consequence for us? Today we should also become joyful, dear friends. On Christmas Day we should weep; today we should laugh. On Christmas Day God sacrificed His Son for us. Today, following the Saviour, we can sacrifice ourselves for God, in His Son. The Father in Heaven feels pain on Christmas Day. Today we feel pain. Which would we rather have? I don't know if you understand me. What do you want, if you love someone else? Do you want the other person to always sacrifice himself for you? Do you want to always be full of the fruits of someone else's love for you? Or are you glad when you can also surrender



yourself for the loved one and sacrifice yourself? That is actually what you should want; otherwise, your love is a questionable one. If we do not have the love that can suffer pain for a beloved one, then our love is not worth much; it will soon break down. And so most men's love to God collapses at the first test; that is where it ends. Men shrink back when their own person is at stake, when it affects them, and when they have to suffer pain in the death of their own flesh. That gives them no joy. And yet, the love of God should be so poured out in our hearts that we burn with longing to be able to bring a sacrifice to God, after He has made such a tremendous sacrifice for us. Now we no longer want to sacrifice sheep or goats. We no longer want to sacrifice our business, as we do on such a holiday as this, for example, when with great self-denial we forego work and earn nothing. (This is all very well, but it is simply the Old Testament. There is no breakthrough if we sacrifice in this way.) We want to do what Jesus did; we want to surrender ourselves as sacrificial lambs on this day. We should all take part in this with heart and soul. "Come! Come! Your flesh will now be sacrificed if you surrender yourselves to me." Now we should be able to offer something to our beloved God, and this should be a joy for us. Good Friday should be the first day of a breaking to pieces. It is actually a day for dismantling, for tearing down beams, for breaking up all kinds of things belonging to our fleshly nature.

And we rejoice if we can give up something of ourselves until at last we have learned to follow after the Saviour as lambs prepared for the sacrifice, saying, "I want to follow you. God be praised that you have already paved the way! Now, following you, we can sacrifice ourselves to our beloved God just as you did. What a great grace that in your blood we can offer our sinful nature as a sacrifice to God."

Yes, in the blood of Jesus Christ, our sacrifice is acceptable to God because Jesus is the righteous one, and His sacrifice is valid. If the Saviour had not been righteous when He died for us, God would have said, "Away from me! This is a bad sacrifice!" Under the old covenant the sacrifice had to be without blemish, so one could not sacrifice oneself in those times. God abhorred human sacrifice. Nevertheless He had long indicated: "Actually I need human sacrifice. That is to say, I want you to surrender and sacrifice yourselves completely to me. I want you to give everything out of your hands so that I can make it new, for you have everything wrongly in hand. If you do not give it up, you will perish. So, give it over!" This was best demonstrated by Abraham. He had to give up his son, and it almost cost the son's life. If Abraham had not been completely willing to acquiesce, his son would have died; for God would not have wanted a false Isaac. But, of course, since Abraham was completely ready for the sacrifice, God said to him, "All right, that's enough! Your attitude is sufficient for me." With this God indicates

to us, "I must have your whole person; otherwise I can change nothing in you. You must stand with me completely." To be sure, because we are so sinful God could also have said, "Away with you, I cannot use such wicked people! You bring only guilt and evil things to me!" But in the Saviour this has been changed. In His blood we may also sacrifice ourselves as sinners, just as we are. In the blood of Christ you are allowed to bring yourself as a sacrifice, you poor, sinful man! How you should rejoice!--especially when your sins are revealed--when it is shown what wretched people we are, and when through this you feel urged to surrender yourself to God. Rejoice! On a day like this God gives you a reminder, saying: "Follow the example of Jesus. And have such a love for God that you can make yourself ready to be a sacrificial lamb."

Look, the purpose of this day is actually to implant a twofold task in us. On the one hand we should dig around in the filth, expose the happenings of daily life, and allow the wickedness in our lives to come out before God. We should also speak about the foolish things we do so that we can slowly come to something divine and natural and are not such fine, little people with paint and powder. On the other hand, after we have dug around a bit, we can hasten again and again to the altar, so to speak. When we have brought out something which has made us dirty, we can say, "No! No!--it can't go on like this. Come! Let us go to the altar; we want to sacrifice it!" Thus



we can hasten back and forth between the dirt and the altar, as it were, until everything has been cleaned up. Of course, one would often like to give up everything all at once, at one stroke; but this is not possible. We can only rid ourselves of everything gradually. Perhaps we suddenly become aware of what a wicked hand we have and that we have done foolish things with it here or there. Then we run courageously to the altar with our hand and sacrifice everything that we have done with it. Another time we perhaps realize through some experience that our foot offends us. We hurry again to the altar and sacrifice our foot. After that we may recognize spiritual things that are wrong--learned, human rubbish, in books and the sciences. It suddenly sickens us, and again we hasten to the altar with all our scholarly books and cry out, "Oh, burn up all that is wrong in these!"

In this way we can have a "business-day" every day--with joy, not with grumbling. We can always run to the altar, eagerly and with full trust, for the blood of Jesus Christ opens the door for us to the Father in Heaven. All the angels rejoice when a poor man comes along, full of recognition that he is foolish in one way or another, and brings his foolishness to the altar to sacrifice it. Thus there is work to do every day; and this can give us much joy if we understand it aright and are not touchy. For, of course, the cleaning up is not just smooth going; it is a little rough. And we are sensitive and pull a blanket over it because we do not want it to be seen. But it has to be.

Therefore, be joyful, even if you are exposed as a very stupid person. No matter! Out with it! Run to the altar and sacrifice yourself, following the Saviour!

When men come like this, God has joy; and then the end will also come. Dear friends, when this work continues, an end will come, the end experienced by the Saviour, who actually did not die. For here it is not a death such as we have to suffer which separates His soul and body. It is just that His soul goes away for a time. Jesus does not go into the grave, even though He is placed there. He does not really die; His body remains completely untouched by death. As He lies there, the glorification quietly takes place in Him. By the time He returns from what He has had to do in the other world, the body is there again and at hand, only glorified.

That is the conclusion of this Good Friday work, you dear ones, if we can understand it. The conclusion should not be that we now venerate and decorate graves. Decoration of graves is the greatest insult to God. Our urge should be: Away from the graves! Away from the rotting corpses! We must strive for something higher. We must work for glorification, for resurrection!

But who believes this? Everyone wants to weep over their graves instead of setting out on the road to eternal life. On this road we can experience a quite different power than that which comes from the smell of death and from caskets decked with flowers, which we follow after in black

mourning clothes because there is nothing but grief and pity in the heart. And I, too, am supposed to weep along with the rest. There you can see where pity leads to. But, man, when you see so many graves, who is guilty? There could long since have been an end to all this if we had sacrificed ourselves more, if we had really set out to surrender ourselves in the work of Good Friday. Good Friday tears us away from our feelings of softness and calls us to the fight. God needs fighters, hard people with callouses on their hands; people who are hard toward sin and the flesh; hard on themselves; intent only upon the blood of Christ to which they turn with their whole being. When everything is against us, we, at least, should rise up in defiance of the whole world and say, 'World, you too must enter into this death. Even if you do not want to, you will have to. God's judgments will come upon you so that you can no longer hold on to your evil life.'

That is Good Friday, and this should be our attitude to it. May God grant that we find it.

Amen.



38.

Sermon, Sunday, 9 August 1891. From a transcript.

Luke 18:9-14: He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others: 'Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank thee that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other."

Beloved in the Lord, it is not exactly easy to preach about this gospel. It should be a gospel, that is to say, a message from Heaven which proclaims the Kingdom of God. And when this message is fulfilled by those who hear it, God is given the right to reveal His justice and truth on earth. But precisely this message of repentance is in the greatest danger of being taken out of the hand of the messenger by those who listen, and they then proceed to make of it what they want. Repentance is a natural part of every man: he thirsts for it and seizes upon it wherever and however he wants to; and because of this, it often happens that this first step which man should take toward God only serves to alienate him from God. For of course it is possible for a man to repent only in a way which justifies him in his own eyes. Then repentance turns into arrogance, so that two kinds of arrogance spring up in the world instead of one. The world has one kind of arrogance, as long as things go well for it. Through its own works, it climbs up and sits down beside God. The other kind of arrogance arises in the

devout, in those who have justified themselves in repentance, or think they have, after having, in their own way, carried out their religious duties. And so a religious form comes into being which, like the worldly forms, is also able to set itself up beside God, actually against God. These religious forms of arrogance are more dangerous insofar as what is holy is mixed up with them. The human building is saturated with holiness, so to speak, and the whole world believes that there, at least, nothing is lacking. For where God is talked about so much, so many heavenly matters are pondered over, and also so many religious duties are devised which fill and occupy the whole person, everything must be wonderful. It must be the salvation of the world!

But this is just why it is so difficult, right up to the present day, to speak about the repentance which Christ preached. Both kinds of arrogance, the worldly and the religious, will not stand for the repentance preached by Christ. Religious arrogance, in particular, tolerates nothing; yet it stands there as the representative of God on earth. This humbles us very much today; and we want to ask God to give it that we again come into the position of being people who are truly broken, people who can completely let go of all that they call their own--whether worldly or spiritual possessions--so that God alone comes into His own. For everything depends upon it that the freedom which we take to ourselves as beings created with a certain spiritual power--that this freedom, this right, comes out of our hands and



into God's hands, into the hands of Christ for God. Whoever wants to reserve any rights for himself, materially or spiritually, undermines God; then what Christ actually is and wants to be does not come about.

We can see quite clearly from the life of the Saviour what trouble He had to achieve anything at all. There are only a few, very few, who care to surrender themselves to Him and in Him. Worldly arrogance, too, such as He encountered in a Herod and others, can also not surrender itself. People want to profit from the Saviour, want Him to do good to them, share with them; but they share nothing with Him and will not surrender themselves. And the others, the devout in the land, the Pharisees, do just the same. In them lay the real strength of the people of Israel; through them the Bible came to the people, and they were the moral guardians. They want a prophet, but when a prophet comes they will not surrender themselves to Him. They want to remain as they are, and God is supposed to serve them just as they are. That is how it was in those times, and this was what the Apostles had to fight against in the early Christian Church. Even at that time men already had fabricated a religion, with repentance and faith, which took away the ground from under the feet of God.

And what shall I say about conditions today? Oh dear friends, everything is in our tender hands, everything! So many dear, good people have God's cause in their hands; but they make of it whatever they want. The way they do



things has to be the right way. That is why I say it is hard to preach about this. There is nothing harder than to preach a gospel which affects everyone. A gospel which says to each one: "You!---whoever and whatever you are--you must surrender your concerns, your cause. Something human, actually ungodly, has invaded your sanctuary and made it unusable. There you have raised yourselves up; and because you are raised up, you are of no use in the Kingdom of God, no matter what good people you may be. And even if you are representatives of order within the state and church, if you are raised up in this, if you are not made low and God exalted, you are of no use as servants of God." When finally this subtle poison of self-glorification spreads through everything and even a simple man has a feeling of self-confidence about his devoutness, then the ground under the Kingdom of God is shattered. And the temple, in which we should worship in spirit and in truth, finds no hearts upon which it can be built up.

I have pondered a long while over how I should make this clear to you. But I can do practically nothing except ask God with tears: Oh, bring it about again! Give us once more open hearts that recognize the time we live in, that recognize this corruption which corrupts us more than anything else we see as corruption. We are often in fear of war and bloodshed; we are fearful of societies which express godless things; we are fearful of revolutionary movements and alarmed about anything that affects our

customary way of life. The times are such that we do not know what tomorrow will bring; the ground is always being pulled away from under our feet. Certain industries are going to ruin; trades and crafts, from which many people used to live, are being destroyed; farming is going to the dogs; alliances between nations change everything. We anxiously wonder how we are going to carry on with our lives. Then there are sometimes historical events which seem unsound to us. Mistakes are made by this person or that; and we criticize, as if we could do it better.

Yes, about all these things there is fear. But friends, I have never for a minute had fear of them. For as long as the world exists, there has always been this unsettled, uncertain state of human society. Altogether, these things have been of secondary importance for those who seek the Kingdom of God. I would even say: Of what consequence is it if our generation perishes? Are we any better than our fathers? What have we to distinguish us from the generations which are all as if blown away, unless we are people of God's Kingdom? What does God profit from us? Should we be soft on ourselves? I have more pity for the generations that have gone than for our own generation. Unless our generation wakes up and becomes a generation that lives single-mindedly for God, nothing--no statesmen, no institution--will be able to save us from destruction. We will only be rescued when the Kingdom of God is able to come.

Will the Kingdom of God come one day? That is the main

question. Yes, one day the Kingdom of God will surely come. But will there ever be a generation, and will it be our generation, which is able to get things moving for the Kingdom of God, creating a basis for the Kingdom of God? And here I have to say to you that what we have will create no basis for God's Kingdom. That is why it is difficult for me to preach, for people resent my saying this most of all. We think that the Kingdom of God has to come to us because we are Christians. But one can be a Christian and still pull away the foundation from under God. Our whole generation is a testimony that we lack what gives life to the Saviour and, as it were, prepares the way for His coming when He can freely and completely be what He wants to be. There seems to be no evidence of this happening among us in the power of the Gospel. That is why we must be silent among the so-called educated circles of men. That is why we are mocked. And the people go further and further away from all the things we experience together. There is no urge, no common urge, to possess what Jesus is and has. In my experience--and I have experience with thousands and tens of thousands--it is only where there is a quite desperate need that a real urge is to be seen, although even this is surrounded by a host of misconceptions about God and Christ. Then man cries out aloud; then the longing breaks through to have a Saviour who is a help to the people. If they are still in the prime of life and their muscles leave nothing



to be desired, then they do not need this help. It is also true that nowadays society on the whole has acquired a tremendous proficiency. It creates conditions and organizations for which one actually does not need God. In trade and traffic, which has now been advanced through all kinds of machinery, and in human work, as it has now been set up and moves forward, God is not needed. On the streets of man's life, one needs steam power and machines and that sort of thing. That is enough. God as a power is not needed.

This, above all, makes our age the age that it is. But just in this time, dear friends, when everything seems humanly to go forward so efficiently, just here there must finally be men who cry out, "Stop, stop! It cannot go on like this. God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" Our religion, our Christianity, our church, our best institutions, our cultural advancements, our social life--all of these things must teach us to cry out, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" That would be the right foundation for the Kingdom of God. But it takes courage to quieten down and think about these things a little and to extricate them from the hands of men, so to speak. Then one can believe again and stand before God just as a poor person. We can recognize in truth that all this often-glittering life is of no use to us in the main issue. In the end these things will lead us in a direction which can only be called destruction, unless new powers come into these things, powers of God, the government of God. Then Christ will be able to rule and be victorious;

then Christ can live and bring to us what God wills for the earth, not what man wills.

Will we be able to do this? I certainly hope so, you dear one! And so I bring back my old word again, and I will keep on repeating it until a few people really understand it: Die, and Jesus will live! Perhaps you now have some understanding of what I mean by "Die"--surrender! When you physically die, you have to give up your best, your body. That's hard for you, isn't it? And why must you give up your body? Because as it is, it cannot live; as it is, it will perish. as it is, it cannot be used forever. Every man finally comes to the point of feeling that he can no longer go on. And so, however painful, however unnatural it is to surrender the body, in the end one yearns for it. It is the same with the inward things of men. Therefore, the Saviour, when He walked among us, said, "Give me your best! Let the best in you die in me, for it is of no use as you have it now. You must give it out of your hands into mine." Then it will be cleaned and polished, so to speak, and we will receive it back again in the authority of God. But it will be quite different, quite new, so that the Kingdom of God can work and be active in it. Consequently, when we die, and want to die that Jesus may live, we must not think only of the things that torment us. Those we certainly gladly surrender right away! If someone is passionate, given to anger, sensual, he willingly surrenders those things. If misfortune

has overtaken someone through stupidity, he is glad to give this up; he wants to be smart. Someone who has a physical infirmity is happy to surrender it. But are you also gladly willing to surrender your false piety? Do you readily give up what is your own, what you have made for yourself? Can you surrender everything, sacrificing yourself completely to God as Christ sacrificed Himself to God on the cross and laid everything in God's hand?

Now, of course you could say to me, "That's all very well, but how is it that I must surrender this? God Himself gave it to me!" That is what the Pharisees could also say. Certainly God gave us these things. The name of Jesus Christ has been given to us by God, that is quite true. But we have ruined it by the way we have used it. The way we treat the name of Jesus does not further anything. A new way, a completely new way, must come from God. Man must no longer live and strive in his own way; he must live and strive in Christ so that everything, even everyday life, comes into the light for God, not for men. That is how it must be, whether you believe me or not. I am quite aware this is a rather bold statement, and you could well ask me, "Who gives you the right to say that everything we have today is completely corrupt?" But I stand before you simply as a poor sinner and can only say that I must declare this to you; I cannot do otherwise! In our day God wants us to humble ourselves and not stand above others anymore, but to be lowly, like this tax collector. We stand in need of



justification by God; we do not need this self-justification. All these books and sermons that praise us as social reformers are absolutely no help to us. But we can be justified if we stand there as poor sinners and say, "Father in Heaven, we have made a mess of things. We are at an end. Everything we have is so permeated with human thinking, it has gone in such false directions and has so much blasphemy in it, that we give everything, everything, back to you. Here we stand: God, be merciful to us sinners!"

My friends, I also was a zealot; I strained and strived for years. I believed that in the name of Jesus everything had to work out. I can also certainly say that I had much heavenly help. God had pity on me because I was so excited about the Saviour. I was of the opinion that what we had is sufficient. My eyes were blinded until God struck me down and said, "Listen, you can perhaps justify yourself before godless people with your sermons about Jesus, and even perhaps before the devil, but you cannot justify yourself before Me. If you keep coming to Me with what you men have built up for yourselves over the years and think this will be justified before Me, then you deceive yourself and are no better than anyone else." And so I say to you and bear witness, and ask you for the sake of God: Let us come before Him as if we were heathen, and drop everything we have. Let us again come before Him, naked and empty, and say, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" We want to bear our guilt; we want to accept responsibility

for what we have corrupted. We want to recognize that it is man who, as time went on and also today, has taken things too much into his own hands. It has all been a tremendous human activity, and the Saviour has had the greatest trouble in quietly managing to survive until today. As a power, however, as a ruler, He has not survived; He has been killed. This is one of the greatest crimes of men, greater than all the sins of the heathen, because through this the Holy of holies has been desecrated. It is to us that Jesus has to say, "It is because of you that I am slandered among men everywhere. The things you have are not what I brought. You have built your churches exactly in the way you wanted, and today God has to suit Himself to each man's way of thinking. God has to conform to each man's brand of piety. In every church He has to put on a different coat, so to speak, cut to your own particular pattern. This is what you must recognize as your sin. Then you will be sinners who can be justified."

Take it as well meant, dear friends, when I speak so strongly today. The time will perhaps come when you will need it. If there is someone who does not understand this now, let him just leave it. God, in His own time, will reveal in this person's heart the truth that lies in what I have said. This much is certain, however, that the ground upon which the Kingdom of God will come is: Die, and Jesus will live! Not: Make yourselves great, and then you will be able to proclaim the Saviour to the world. No, no, you

poor men! Die in the blood of Jesus Christ; be humble before all men, above all before God. Get rid of all arrogance; give up the hope that you will be victorious--you will not be victorious! The only conqueror in the world is called Jesus Christ. It is for Him that we must make room. In Him we must live and have our being. It is Jesus we must stand up for, with repentance and the crushing of our own natures, with the sacrifice of all that we have, including the best things. If we surrender ourselves to Him, body and soul, and have nothing of our own, this will help toward His victory. For truly, dear friends, He is the real conqueror. Praise God, we know this! He lives; we know it. The Kingdom of God is in His hand. We know that when we sacrifice ourselves in Him before God, He will be with us; and with Him, we will have no fear. But when we do something for ourselves, for our own person, then we are afraid. We cannot allow ourselves to be seen before God, and it will be with us as with all men in the world. We will go our way and die in our sins. May God protect us from such a calamity. And in these days when there is so much that is moving and stirring, may He again send forth the power of the Holy Spirit, the power of God's truth and justice, that it may grip the nations. Then at last the Word of God will come true in us and in all creation.



## 39.

Sermon, 30 August 1891. From a transcript.

Luke 17:11-19: On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance and lifted up their voices and said, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." When he saw them he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went they were cleansed. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. Then said Jesus, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" And he said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."

Dear friends, this story awakens both joyful and sad feelings in us. We can be joyful when we see that the Saviour is here on earth for all the wretched and distressed to come to Him. He has been given to us by God so that we can bring all our need to the Father in Heaven, in the name of Jesus. And our joy in Him is all the greater when we realize that we can bring Him not only the inward troubles and afflictions in which we frequently find ourselves, but also our outward, physical afflictions, in the hope that these too can be changed by Him. This is also right, for God wants to impress this upon us: "I will help you if you become my children. I will help you not only to feel and think better and more truthfully with your senses and emotions, but my purpose is also to pull you out of and free you from the confusions and riddles of your physical life. Then you will once more be able to delight in your lives in every respect." This is why the Saviour came.

There are a great many people who no longer really understand and grasp how such signs of divine order and truth can be revealed in the body through a simple word of God. We call it a miracle. Everywhere in the world when something happens, we see and know the power that brings it about, and because of this, men have slowly come to the point of view that only what men call physical or natural power is able to do something which affects our bodies. It is almost a sign of education nowadays to adopt this outlook: "Miracles? No--that's too uncivilized for me!" Yet I believe there is hardly anyone, perhaps no one at all, who at certain times and in certain situations would not only be exceedingly happy in his secret heart if a miracle were to happen to him, but would also be quite capable of accepting it. He would not reject it if he were suddenly to recover from an incurable illness, for example. It would not disturb him, even if he could not say that he had been helped by this medicine or that air, but had rather to say, "It is a miracle that I am well again." That is how men feel deep down. Actually they all thirst for a Saviour who does precisely those things which the so-called culture of men wants little to do with. Our whole lives and all that we experience actually point us to the fact that in certain situations we are completely powerless, and all the powers known to us in the world are of no help. We waste away into an uncertain doom, and there is nothing left for us but resignation, which often enough

takes the form of a kind of hopelessness, or even despair.

That is why faith cannot be rooted out of men. It does not matter how much water is poured upon the fire of faith; it still breaks out somewhere or other. It is just like steam let into a completely closed boiler casing; however strong the casing, it must eventually burst. Then, of course, the power of the steam will burst out in awful confusion. We see something quite similar in men: Faith bursts out if we do not make an opening for it--especially the faith which is a thirst for signs of God beyond our expectations and understanding. We see this now in various places, and notice it all around us. If this thirst for signs of God is not satisfied, it forces men out somewhere or other, with a remarkable and mysterious power. They rush here and there by the thousands and tens of thousands, not in hopes of experiencing a direct miracle from God, but just any kind of a miracle they can imagine for themselves. When I read this Gospel, I had to think of the many pilgrims who are traveling to Trier in these days to see the holy cloak, which is said to have wonderful powers. Thousands and thousands of people are streaming there now. Dear friends!--the impulse which moves thousands to go to Trier is basically the same impulse which moved these ten lepers to go to Jesus. But the goal to which these people allow themselves to be driven is a different one. The power which drives them, however, is the same. This is a thirst for something we cannot comprehend or see, but which we simply



need. If all the professors in the world wanted to try to talk this out of us, we might listen patiently in school; but we would go home sadly, for in thousands of cases this would not help us at all. Such human wisdom solves no riddles. It solves none of the world's troubles, nor the misery of death. Under the weight of this misery, the whole of creation groans for a God. And what would man be if he did not, consciously or unconsciously, sigh for a God--he would not belong to Creation at all in that case!

It is all the more distressing, however, if this sighing for a true God and helper does not result in finding the right way in which those who sigh are heard in a healing and truth-bringing way. In this respect it was certainly a remarkable time of great promise in Israel during the lifetime of Jesus Christ. We cannot appreciate it enough that once, at least, there was a time when it was possible for hundreds of thousands, in their thirst for God, for the living God, to come upon someone who did not deceive them.

There are also false miracles. There are certain powers connected with human inclinations and cravings, powers which lie within the soul of man, which can show themselves for a time and stimulate the appearance of strange phenomena. Hence there are many who seek to perform miracles with uncanny powers, whereby there is no lack of fraud. They gamble on man's thirst for a living God. There are often remarkable phenomena to be seen which really

give the impression of being of divine origin; and so whatever is taking place is being done in the name of God. This gives rise to swindles; people stream to them, sometimes in secret, according to how it looks, and also openly, as we have seen. But what a calamity it is when thousands and millions, even whole nations, as we know, seek to quench the thirst of faith for the living God in superstition, because the true, living God has become incomprehensible and lost to their view.

This is one of the greatest tragedies of mankind. All the questions of our time, which also affect us, culminate in the question: Do we have a true God, or not? Or let us say outright: Can miracles happen, or not? Not miracles by means of uncanny powers, but miracles through a true word of God; through powers which, by their effects, we see to be of Jesus, although we ourselves cannot discern them. Is there a possibility that the life which we see surging up in our own bodies and in all of creation can affect us poor, miserable men? Is it possible that we can be liberated from illness and death, and not only these, but also from the confusion inherent in our nature, from the sin and the follies of our hopes and ambitions? Is this possible? Or is it not possible? Is the life which is in creation and is of God a power which can touch us, a power which comes to us directly and anew from God--or is this nothing but a swindle?

If this power does not exist, then there is not a

single problem of mankind which can be resolved. Then the only progress we can make is that from time to time we bring up a new problem through which students can collect a doctorate--not, of course, by solving the problem but by discussing it.

At this time we are all more or less concerned with the question of what is going to happen about the social conditions and needs we see around us. There is a lot of talk about this, and I am often moved to tears when I think of how people dream of a future state in which there is nothing but happiness and peace. Then I think: Yes, you are right! But if God who made the world and has your life in His hand, is not acknowledged as the power we need for this, it is, and will remain, very much a question. Nothing will come of it. Our misery resists and wriggles like a snake. Set up ten states today according to the various opinions of outstanding men who believe they have the answer. Establish perhaps one state in which community of goods is carried out completely; or one state in which there is a supreme authority, perhaps in a religious framework; or a state in which only the poor, the workers, have anything to say--nobody else. Now make the laws as strong as you like and let the states continue for some ten years. Then you will see that the same misery we experience today, and have experienced for thousands of years, has reappeared. It has only changed its form a little. You will not be able to do away with the discord in the hearts of men and between men.



Dissoluteness in all its expressions of lust, and as its consequence, wantonly induced sickness and death; envy, quarreling, spite, and covetousness--all these you will not be able to get rid of. Sick in mind and body, man has no hope of creating a healthy state. Inwardly and outwardly unclear and confused, torn by emotions and passions, men cannot found a society of truth and justice. Every time we think about this nature of men we thirst for God, for the living God. And in doing so, man, you are justified! Even if you cannot or will not concern yourself with the great questions of mankind, they are all present within your own life. Nothing will be solved without the living God, including the problems of your own life.

My friend, would you feel ashamed if God said to you today, "Be cleansed!"--and you were cleansed from sin and shame and felt new life within you? Would you refuse if God were to say to you now, "Be healed from your suffering"--and you became well? Would you refuse it? And if I were to say such things to you, would you answer, "That's impossible, so I don't place any hope in these things!" Indeed, is it outside our experience? Are we really so far removed from God that we cannot experience anything? Don't you experience something everywhere, even if not so often, yet nevertheless now and then? Everywhere you can hear of someone's suddenly becoming a different person, someone who previously did not know which way to turn in the discord and folly of his life. Now he praises God and says, "What great things the Almighty

has done for me!" What would you think if I asked just you who are sitting here, that those who have experienced something similar should speak up and testify to what they have experienced? Do you think there is nobody here who would have to praise God for all kinds of experiences in which there was no visible power to be seen, but where the invisible, the Word of God, had helped?

This help is given more frequently than we care to admit. But all too often we belong to the nine Jews and are not the Samaritan who was able to praise God. We see things but do not give God the honor. We hear things and still do not fall on our knees. We are too sophisticated to say, "Lord, my God and Saviour, you alone can help us!"

And this is the second thing that must penetrate our hearts today. Why is it that of ten who experienced something, only one gave God the honor? Why are we always ashamed of God, even when we rejoice at experiencing something through His boundless grace? Ah, dear friends, that is perhaps the hardest thing we can think of--this untruthfulness of mankind, and also the untruthfulness of our religious training. For even so-called religious people who have great joy in their religion are embarrassed about truly giving honor to the living God and testifying in their hearts and lives that He is their strength--nothing else. They know they could no longer be considered "scientific" and, as such, could not appear among educated people. Thus it can happen that even a man like Jesus can

be among the people, and everything that is experienced is quietly pushed into a corner. A person experiences something inwardly, is joyful about it, puts it in his pockets, passes on, and thinks no more about it. Thus there always remains a human something which fancies itself to be great and wise. And we cravenly permit those things which we all actually long for to be struck out of our hands. You let fall just the thing you thirst for, out of fear of some human opinion. You think you might be laughed at, so you would rather not turn back in order to thank God. You accept the Saviour as the man who helps, but you never mention His name. About that, you are silent.

This is the greatest obstacle to the Kingdom of God, dear friends, and no doctrine and no church will be able to help us in this. None of these organizations, including Christian institutions or whatever else we can think up, will be able to raise mankind out of its confusion, to the glory of God; that is, unless we arrive at the point where we dispel the foggy atmosphere of human effort and humanly distorted concepts; unless we can look out clearly at the world and say, "God is, and will be what He has always been. Without Him, we men are nothing!" If you do not have the courage to confess this, you can go to church as much as you like; but your dogmas will not save you. They will become obstacles which will bring you to grief, poisonous plants which will cause you to die, just as the law of Moses became poison for the people of Israel, and brought their death.



In just the same way the Gospel will become a poison for us, too, of which we shall perish and die unless we praise God the Father in Heaven with it. Praising God means that the Gospel must bring Him into the world and that God's Word is reckoned as a power which accomplishes more than all electricity, all powers of nature, or whatever.

This is a serious matter. Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind." (John 9:39). Everything can become a poison to us, the very best things, even the Bible, unless there is a distinction made between flesh and spirit, between God and man, heaven and earth. God must be recognized, for it is all the more terrible when He is not recognized since, in reality, we need Him again and again. Even the man who does not reckon with God in his life, who mocks Him in the streets and in the taverns, will cry out to God when he is laid low and in need. Then he will really cry from his heart, "Oh, God, help me!" Moreover, in their need people run hither and thither and are not above going to someone they think might help them because he holds to God. That is the hardest thing we have to deal with now.

Yesterday I received a letter asking if it were true that I had become a pessimist! Ever since sickness hindered me from preaching for a time, they think I have become a pessimist. Well, there is something in this, for I now see some things as being black. Yes, indeed--but as one

whose eyes have been opened by God, to whom God has said, "You are always clamoring for the Kingdom of God to come! But think, O man, what you are doing!" That is what God said to me. Do people really want God? If so, they should prove it and give all the works of the flesh into death. Otherwise, I want to hear no more of them. God says, "Do you think I want to elevate your flesh into Heaven and bring your ungodliness and your vices into the Heavenly Kingdom? I have not the slightest intention of doing that!"

I have indeed thought more about this than many other people and have discovered this point. But even in the circle of many of my friends, I have been unable to get them to really accept it. They love themselves too much. They adorn themselves in a Christian cloak, envelop themselves in a churchy fog, and allow their erstwhile friend to go on crying out--and then say he has become a pessimist!

But, my dear friends, we have not become pessimists. We are people of hope, fighting people, and want only to begin this fight. I do not ask you to simply believe what I say. Think about it for yourselves! When our wisdom, our intelligence, our education, and our social customs and morals, do everything to kill God in Christ so that He counts for something only in the churches, and we are ashamed of Him in our daily lives--tell me yourselves, what is that? It is hypocrisy, nothing else! There are a great many people--wonderful people--who are not yet aware of this. I want to tear off the veil and clear the air a bit

so that we become honest and true before God. For truth is the first thing God demands of us; if we do not face the truth, all our religious humbug will not help us at all.

My friends, is it true what I say? Many people tell me, "You are always saying we can do something about this, but what can we men do? The Kingdom of God will come of itself." Here I must point to the word written in this text, which applies only to the Samaritan, not to those Jews: "Your faith has made you well." Your faith--yours, yours, yours. You have to do something. It is your business to defend your God and to put yourself and your concerns into the background before the living God. And if anyone should try to deprive me of this God, even if it were dignitaries of the church and religion, I would have no use for them. "Your faith has made you well"--it is this faith that has broken through; it is this faith we must find.

It is, of course, much easier to resort to faith as these ten did, as long as they were sick. That is what I said at the beginning: Everyone expects miracles to happen; that is easy. And faith: "I will get well again"; this I experience with thousands. You know very well that thousands come to me and ask me to make them well. For this everyone has faith, and no one is too surprised when it succeeds. But if we read, "He believed, with his whole house," this means that God now enters my house so that in matters of the Spirit there is a free atmosphere.



The faith that acknowledges God, you dear ones, brings with it a hard struggle against ourselves. You are well aware that it is easy to start a quarrel with a neighbor. Man!--pick a quarrel with yourself for once! That is hard. It is easy enough to attack someone with differing views, to become tough, go to court, and shoot off one's mouth so that the other person is beaten to death. But tackle yourself once! Take a look at your own flesh, at the harm you do. Look, for example, at the harm you do as a wife; you, as a husband; you, as a child, do in your own family! Attack that for once, man! Here you can apply faith. Go to it and see whether you can conquer yourself so that it may one day be said: "The honor belongs to God; I am nothing before Him." Then it will be true that your faith has made you well! Then it is not the Saviour who did it, but you. And it is an honoring of God that you come to Him of your own will.

It is not easy to express this in words which everyone can understand. While I am speaking I also pray to God that you understand what I am saying and do not make something foolish out of it. Therefore, let me say again: Christians have turned the Saviour into a comfortable pillow for themselves. "He does everything for me; my Saviour has done everything for me"--then they lie down and go to sleep. But it is not meant like that. Yes, indeed, the Saviour has done everything so that you can have faith, that you can have the faith which begins with yourself. But if you yourself do not add your own will, your own person,

actively to that which He has done for you, you are miles away from Him and He is nothing to you. Men can go on talking about the Saviour as long as they like, but what good does it do them? They die and perish in their sins because it cannot be said of them, "Your faith has made you well! You have been victorious in the true fight."

Of course there are, I am afraid, a great many people who in desperation come up with all kinds of invisible enemies. And up to a certain point they are right. They exhaust themselves fighting and striving with a satanic or devilish power, or whatever they call it. But I tell you, this is no longer the time for such things! If you think about it a bit you will soon realize this. Even though we are driven into misery and sin by all manner of powers which we do not understand, we nevertheless know that we are guilty. God has given us a time in which we can act freely, and we have only to conquer a certain inertia in our natures and in our flesh in order to begin a new fight. And this is not a fight against neighbors or religious societies, or against the devil or Satan--it is not the right time for that. This is not what is called for now in Heaven or on earth. What is called for now is that man sees himself as a man and becomes a man of God. In this it is all the same, whether you are a Catholic or an Evangelical. Remain what you are. Wherever and whatever you are, fight against the flesh, but give God the honor. "Your faith has made you well."

For decades we have sung, "Jesus is victorious King," and we still sing it today. But now we sing it in this new fight, and it is in this that we want to experience something. You know that we are not people who speak of things we have not seen; we are people who speak of what we have experienced. But in this fight I have not yet experienced anything. Today I want to say that I want to experience something once more! God has brought me to a point at which I must say that if something does not happen here, all that we have experienced in the past will be of no help to me. Even though the present time is a wonderful one in which gracious mercies of God shine upon us as never before, we must experience something new. If now there is no breakthrough and we do not achieve a victory over our own flesh, if the time passes by without bringing with it a victory of God in the name of Jesus Christ, if we do not take seriously what it means to honor God--then, oh, you dear ones, what a night could come over us! I shudder to think of it. But this shall not come. Oh, if only it could once be said of us: "Your faith, you Christians, you people of God in Christendom, your faith has helped you to the final victory, to that victory in which you are nothing and Jesus everything, to the glory of God, the Father in Heaven."

I can invite everyone to join in this fight. We have had fights to which I could invite nobody. I am glad that nobody has heard of many things we have experienced, nor will they hear of them. Today I can invite everyone to enter



into this fight. Everyone can join in. This is what Jesus actually demands of us: Fight against your own selves!

Do not fight with your own strength and understanding. No! Believe in God! Give God the glory and go boldly ahead! Let your heart be filled with a true earnestness in the complete certainty that God is still a power and your miserable life can still be changed. Jesus is Victor! This remains.

## 40.\*

Meditation published at the end of August 1891 in the  
 "Vertraulichen Blättern" (No. 6)

Exodus 20:2: I, Jehovah, am the Lord your God who brought  
 you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

These words stand at the beginning of what we call the  
 Ten Commandments. They stand at the head, like a rock; and  
 out of them flows all the rest of God's will, like a fresh,  
 living spring. If we have this rock, we also have the  
 spring, the source; and our relationship to God becomes a  
 true one. If we lose the rock, we do not have the source.  
 Even though we may approve of some of God's commandments,  
 they have no influence on our lives. Thus God's life is not  
 truly glorified in us. Nevertheless, together we want to  
 see to it that our whole being becomes more true.

Many people nowadays think little of the Old Testament  
 as compared to the New. But what strikes me deeply again  
 and again when I read the Old Testament is that the aim of  
 God's Spirit in the men of God who arose from time to time  
 in Israel was very clearly that every part of the people  
 of God was to become true and genuine. There was to be no  
 fictitious life, as in other nations; no fictitious honor  
 in politics and culture; no false religion of forms; no  
 forced, affected behavior. There was to be no hypocrisy  
 which, through lies, makes it appear as if the earth and

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\*A slightly different translation is printed in "Christoph  
 Blumhardt and His Message, (Page 129) under the title,  
 "Our Jehovah."

nature are perfect. Everything was to be genuine and honest, with all its faults and shortcomings. Then God would surely help those who were upright and sincere.

This is the tone of all God's speaking in the Scriptures. All the prophets struggle for truthfulness among the people so that nothing hidden and covered up may be lived before God. This truthfulness flows from the one rock, Jehovah, in reverence before the will of God. Nothing else shall influence the people of God; nothing else shall instill reverence in the people of God.

Who is this Jehovah, the name in which Israel shall see God? This Jehovah has now appeared on earth and, as God among men, visibly and tangibly proves His working and being. Therefore the words follow, "...who brought you out of the land of Egypt." We see Jehovah in this miracle, as also in the miracle of the pillar of cloud and fire, in the manna, the bread of the desert, and in the water gushing forth from the rock, in all things in which the working of God, though invisible, is seen and felt by men. "This is your God," the powerful voice cries out, "the God who has delivered you and will also deliver you in the future until you are delivered from all evil, if you hold to Him!" Thus the divine power in Israel also worked toward redemption and wanted to guide the people to redemption. It was the will of God, Jehovah, to dwell with His holy being amidst an earthly people. Not only did this justify the people in seeking redemption in the



liberation of men's souls from the bonds and fetters of inward lying and corruption, but it also justified their expectation that the earth around them, freed from the curse, might again become a fount of blessing. Then Jehovah would appear in the milk and honey of the earth and in all that lives thereon, just as He had appeared in the pillar of cloud and fire. Through Israel the earth was to become God's land, a heritage of the children, who would be able to take from it all the gifts of life.

This Jehovah, the creator of heaven and earth, was to be expected both from above and from below, from heaven and earth so to say. It is part of God's truth that man's life on earth must prove its divine origin in all directions. Our earthly life, our earthly toil and work, should be no less divinely true and justified than the inward movements of the spirit which rise to Heaven in praise of God. We, in our day, can say that the fulfillment of God's Kingdom lies in God's will being done on earth as it is in Heaven.

The invisible, great God, the holy and exalted One whose essence no man can grasp, unites with the earth in the name Jehovah. That means, in other words, "I am present and shall be wherever you are, and I am present in such a way that you can understand me." This brings about the blessed community with God which distinguishes a true people of God from all other peoples. On this earth, on which man is created and sustained, a clear communion with all the possible powers and gifts of God around man is given, in

nature and creation as well as in his spiritual life.

The other nations also had God and had many names by which they tried to express God in their midst. But with all their honest striving, they found only a partial truth. On the whole, these conceptions of God, which were born of their desires, led them, in this very desire, away from God into superstition and merely human passions. Neither their intellectual nor their physical conceptions of God led them to a true life with God. In Israel, for the first time, God was to become truth. From there He could become truth in other peoples too. Other nations had turned God into a lie, and their ruin revealed the lie of their gods. But in Israel the truth of God was to be revealed in life, in our increasingly glorified life.

This is very important for us, too, if we want to become a people of God. Above everything else we must find the rock--the rock from which the will of God flows forth in a natural way, determining our life and bringing true life with it. God appeared to us as the Jehovah in Christ. We were to have Him not only in the name Jehovah but in a person who became a man like us. And just as in Israel the most important thing was that Jehovah was honored as God, although that was merely His name, so with us the most important thing is that Jesus is honored as God, although He comes to us in human form, as one man to another. Whatever else we may think, Jesus is, in a two-fold way, the only expression of God on the earth: He

towers upward into the heavens for perceptions of truth in the Spirit; He leads downward into the earthly, human life for the understanding of life and growth on the earth, God's creation. Then the earth will shine through His creatures, just as the heavens shine.

What is God? However much we talk about God's nature, however many books we write about it, we shall never be able to understand it. Whenever we try to grasp God's nature, to make it our own, as it were, it flees before the doubts that rise up in us from another side, before the uncertainties that we cannot resolve. To simple people we can say quite simply, "Look to Jesus Christ. There is God. There God is within reach." In Jesus Christ we will find peace. His whole life and being has something soothing for us, because in Him we can dismiss all theories about God. In a simple, childlike way, we may sit at His feet like Mary, renewed and inspired by the genuine, divine life which flows out to us from Him. We want to immerse ourselves in this as quickly as possible, body and soul, in order that we may become like Him in truth and justice, in our relationship toward God, and in our relationship toward men.

Thus also Israel was to be soothed by the appearance of her Jehovah. All further questions and speculations about God and the world, about the mysteries of men's fate, which appears to be tossed to and fro between good and evil, were to stop before the loud cry, "Be still! for I, Jehovah am your Redeemer! And with redemption, with the experience



of the new life I bring to you, will come all the enlightenment that you need."

Thus we too find rest in Jesus. Faith is quiet contemplation of His life, filled with a heavenly expectation of redemption. Through Him who died and yet lives, this redemption should now go much deeper and lead to much more wonderful and sublime experiences than were possible for the people of Israel. For in Jesus we see that even death can be overcome. We are shown a life we had long ceased to hope for, although in the depths of our hearts we had longed for it. The watchword now is the life of the body, in spite of death.

A new heaven, a new earth, is the goal toward which God wants to lead us through Christ, on the way of redemption. We must become genuine in this and no longer go on our own ways, believing that God's goal can be reached with our religious institutions, traditions, and customs. Our redemption will come only through God who, in Christ, again and again reveals Himself in the living God and manifests Himself on earth. We must surrender ourselves to Him. For His sake we must count everything else as loss and give ourselves to be a tool of His revelation, in truth and justice.

This is faith, a faith that justifies us, placing us before God whose justice and truth can then be revealed in us. Christ gave Himself in the flesh and in the corruption of the flesh. His death became a sacrifice to God--and this, in order that we might find in Him the way to sacrifice

ourselves as He did; that dying with Him we might, on earth, become a people of life in uprightness, justice, and holiness.

This is not just a teaching, intended for our momentary edification. On the contrary, all that I have tried to say in my weakness should make practical people of us, people full of zeal to win this Jesus. We should strive to become people free of ourselves and of our traditions. Then we shall be able truly to serve God for the redemption. It is pathetic in our day to see all the many forms of Christianity to which men give themselves heart and soul. Yes, just as the heathen sacrificed to their false gods, so Christians today sacrifice to the false gods created by the Christian religion--but not by Christ. Even honest people find it hard to break away and to follow the words, "I, God, am your God in Jesus, in nothing else, whatever it is called." If we find this rock in these words of God, then the fountains of truth will flow for us. Then our lives will also become genuine. The lives of most Christians have become just as false in God's eyes as the lives of most Israelites who in ancient times practiced idolatry and later their own brand of piety. One's own piety can become just as false a god as the gods of the heathen.

More important and necessary than our own piety, if we want to fight for the kingdom of God, would be to do away with the nine tenths of Christian religion which has become false. Then we would come to the simple though perhaps bare-looking rock which is Christ alone, and the Saviour

Himself could live and rule more instead of the many man-made authorities which pretend to come from God. And so we should not worry too much about traditions, which are in any case no longer true. God will show Himself to those who are honest and sincere, even if they are unable to follow the grandiose spiritual leaders and theologians. We must become genuine toward God and toward men, just as Jesus was, and allow no other god to rule over us. Then we shall come upon the rock on which there will be fellowship which can be called blessed, because it is a fellowship with God and with one another. Such a fellowship no longer places any obstacles in the way of redemption.

Let us allow these things to ripen in us. Then we shall all experience in our lives that our Jehovah, Jesus, lives and rules and is praised and glorified in all eternity.



## 41.

Meditation published in the "Vertraulichen Blättern" (No. 7)  
October 1891

Exodus 20:3: "You must have no other gods beside me."

(American Translation)

This word presupposes that one knows who God is. It was spoken just when the people of Israel had seen who God is and had learned to call Him by the name Jehovah. Every man could point with his finger and say, "Do you see? This is he!" And in spirit the answer came back, "Yes, I am He."

This "I am He" demands your faithfulness. You have seen how your life has been formed by this, a life which is certainly different from that of other men. You cannot say that this is the result of your own calculations; that your intellect, your strength, your education, has brought about your present situation. What was destined for you has come upon you. You are now involved in a history in which the powers of the same God who came to you as Jehovah will constantly be at work. It is this God who demands faithfulness from you.

Many people ask, "Who is God?" They are perplexed about Him. I don't blame them for this. Nobody can understand our philosophical concept of God. God wants people to experience Him, to come to know Him. And until He has been experienced, God makes no claim upon the special faithfulness, with its specific goals, which He asks from His people who

have come to know Him. Then, however, God can demand that our hearts are filled only by what we experience of Him. This should now be our attitude. For us, God wants to allow Himself to be experienced in Christ. During the time of the Apostles when there was talk of faith, of faithfulness unto death, everyone who belonged to the Church of Christ knew in what way he had to be faithful unto death. Something came over them which nobody had imagined or could have thought of. Suddenly many people found themselves surrounded by events which swept them along and in which wonderful powers were felt to be at work. They had the feeling that these powers were stronger than all the world.

In Christ we have experienced Almighty God, the God who created heaven and earth, whom nothing can withstand. With the first dawning of a fellowship, the Apostles and their companions already felt that a power had gripped them which they could not withstand, a power which could bend the whole world. And everyone who later became a member of this fellowship was supported by and founded upon this power, which he also experienced. They had a very clear picture of what God is. It was not necessary to look up to heaven--the experiences took place on earth. They continued to call upon the name of Jesus, Jesus who lived on earth and was known by many, who then became invisible and in secret continued to prove in power and might that He was God and came from God. We should not

be at all hesitant about calling our Christ, God; for we can do nothing with abstract ideas about God. Our Christ has become Jehovah. He stands on the earth and calls out to us, "I am He," and without wasting much time we turn to Him, knowing that He is the living God, the Father in Heaven. When we have experienced Him, we know ourselves to be on firm ground. Out of this ground the springs of God's glory bubble forth, carrying us along with them. Finally they will sweep the whole world before them in a storm.

I am speaking here of us. Am I justified in saying this about us? Have we experienced Christ? Certainly we have to admit that very many have not experienced Christ, which is why they are so fainthearted and do not know what they should believe. There are countless numbers of Christians today who no longer know what God is. Many play around too much with the word of God. Others look at the world and see the unequal fortunes of men and think what a fine God that must be who has created men like that! Still others are annoyed by the Bible, in which we are directed to seek God and to find Him. They say it is a book full of contradictions. Well, let them fancy what they like, or be annoyed, or grumble--we are not offended. With all the confusion in Christianity and religion, it is no wonder that many do not know whether they are coming or going. But when the definite summons also comes to us, "You shall have no other gods before me," then we are entitled to expect the God who wants to be the only God. And when we see that the faith



of the Apostles was completely founded upon experiences, upon experiences of God in Christ, we have the right to think: If this God in Christ demands our fidelity, then we must be able to experience Him today; we can expect to have experiences of this Jehovah, this "I am He."

And we do not wait in vain. We in our circles are already beginning to understand slowly that it is not just talk when we praise our God, "I am He," as Christ, and as the living One, who is, who was, and who will come. Even though on the surface the religious life of many may be full of absurdities and religious conventions, some of these people nevertheless show that they have experienced Christ. And to these who have something of the truth in them, this word applies: "You must have no other gods beside me." These people have a firm idea of what God is. We must have patience with the others if, for the time being, they worship other gods. They must simply get to know the truth later. But those who know and have experienced Christ should be all the more zealous to stand up for Him and His Kingdom. The more we can await the reality of the life of Jesus, free of human idiosyncrasies and practices, the more can Christ be experienced by people who stand far away. If Christ is experienced, we need not demand of men that they puzzle their brains about our dogmas. Then each one has something firm and solid within him which of itself speaks what is right and true. We will also not need to worry about harmony among those who have

experienced God; the Spirit is one, and out of one Spirit we will experience one Lord; and in one Lord--Christ--we shall experience the one Father, the God of Heaven and earth.

This will not be possible, however, unless we have experiences. We can quite confidently say that revelation is still needed today. Revelation did not end with the Bible. I know full well that the word "revelation" annoys many people. God, often in a very wonderful way, works directly; but in their devoutness, these people even believe they have to deny and argue away everything. But I just cannot see why we should let ourselves be robbed of the highest and noblest because of "isms" and "ologies" taught in school. Christ lives, and because He lives there is also revelation. And revelation is necessary for hearts that are to be enlightened by God. Nobody can understand anything unless it is given to him from above. No one comes to the Father without the Son, and no one comes to the Son without the Father.

We should also not say that these things will come by themselves. If we consider what weak, half-hearted people we are, and that our religion is something very mechanical, we cannot expect that things happen by themselves. Joy in experiences of God must awaken joy in having further experiences. The Kingdom of God consists in a chain, a history of experiences; and with these, it will finally come about. With wonderful guidance and with great signs God delivered His people out of Egypt. He told them that

He would lead them to a land where milk and honey flowed, but He also expressly said that they would not take possession of it quickly. It would be a slow process, but in the end He would scatter all nations before them. And so for a long interval of time, the Israelites were dependent upon a word of God given to them again and again. This went on until the land was finally conquered; and then the people of Israel also became people of the revelation of the truth and reality of God. Praise God that they became such a people, for this history of Israel makes it so tremendously clear to us what God is.

It is the same with us now. The Saviour said to His disciples before He left them: "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel, and baptize the people." Then He added explicitly: "And I am with you to the end of the world. You must endure for a long time until the great change takes place in the world, which is called the end, and which leads to a new beginning." During this time we need His guidance, that is to say, a revelation of God in our hearts. We cannot of ourselves carry out the responsibility He has laid upon us. Times and circumstances change, and complexities and difficulties arise that we are quite unable to cope with. Ever anew a light from Heaven must flare up within us so that we do not perish in the darkness of the age. Thus we must expect a direct word from God, the Spirit of God speaking for Christ, our Jehovah; and by this and through particular experiences, we shall learn to know who God is.



Now comes the word: "You must have no other gods before me." For someone in whom religion has, so to say, been awakened, there is hardly any question of rejecting God altogether. Further, a person who has experienced Jehovah, experienced Christ, will not easily give up this experience. Whoever does abandon it is simply a heathen again; he does not belong here any more. Such a person will have to begin anew if anything is going to happen at all. But the danger which lies in our nature is that we have something else beside God. You should have nothing else that could make it appear to God that in your hearts you expect something from someone other than Him. When we have once sensed the truth in Christ, the remarkable thing is that we perceive Christ is the only one in every course. He is the fount of wisdom and knowledge, so we expect everything from Christ, and from God in Christ. Therefore we cannot expect something from Heaven, we cannot sigh and be prayerful, we cannot be hopeful and expectant, without reference to the "only one," this one God, in whom all powers lie hidden. Certainly if we are not careful and if we allow our enthusiasm to flag, this "only one" can be lost. Then there will be something else apart from God, which also has power; we will have to deal with Baal, who also wants to be recognized. But in this situation, faith must hold out; and there must be faithfulness unto death. Oh, how many Christians ruin what they have experienced, and how involved does the fate of many people become, because in their daily activities they

no longer have a relationship to the One God. They seek life where Christ is not present. They seek salvation from a different quarter.

Therefore we say: Hold only to Jesus, to no other persons or things besides Him. All other names lead us into confusion. They deceive us. If we have the Saviour and something else besides, we deceive ourselves. Christians by the thousand even superstitiously cultivate demonic practices because other powers apart from God in Christ are important for them, as if God would manifest Himself through other names and other powers. Ever since Jesus came into the world, God manifests Himself only in the name of Jehovah, and Jehovah is now Jesus.

Perhaps you wonder why I speak so earnestly about this. I simply find with most people I meet that their faith is not clear and pure. They think it is quite harmless to become enthusiastic about something, heart and soul, even to the point of expecting that it will save the world. But they only deceive themselves, for such things belong to perishable history. Today there is still a great temptation to have another god beside Jesus, beside God in Christ. Why, with all the veneration of Jesus and Jehovah, does this remain the greatest temptation? The answer is that with this Jesus-Jehovah we do not have anything tangible in our hands; everything is of the Spirit. Certainly, we can point to real evidence of our Jesus-Jehovah, but it allows absolutely no room for anything of a human physical nature

or power. The Spirit fights against the flesh. Our God-resisting human nature, which likes to seek its own desires, must die under this Jesus-Jehovah. There is always something we have to give into death, and that is difficult for men. It is especially difficult for men that they should continually regard the outward forms of human life as but a fragile shell which should not concern them too much. Yes, very many of them direct all their worship services, all their prayers, toward the preservation of fragile shells which they honor as God. Of course, a shell is often also important, but only until the kernel has matured. When the kernel has matured, it bursts the shell. The kernel is not there for the shell; it becomes separated, and as a ripe fruit falls into the hands of its Creator. And so it is no doubt necessary that the Church of God is also enclosed in a shell, as it were, until it has matured enough to be revealed. This shell, however, can undergo changes as time passes. In the end it will be necessary for it to become thinner and thinner and less and less significant so that the people learn to move and bestir themselves in spirit and in truth. Many people let themselves be confused by this, though, especially as it is often painful to be parted from something one has grown accustomed to. Of course it is painful when the child grows up and the moment arrives when he must leave the father's house to enter the world independently as a man of God, without the protective surroundings of the fatherly family. Yet, it



is necessary so that the man may become what he is meant to be. And so indeed it will be painful when times change and the outward situation of the people of God alters, and when the shells of the churches change and are finally burst open. But we must accept this. We must also accept that as time goes on, certain props that we have made for ourselves in theory and in life will become insufficient. We must prepare ourselves, free in spirit, to draw near to God and to serve the truth in Christ.

With this thought in mind, Stephen in his time judged the whole history of the people of Israel. He even spurned the Temple of Solomon. He comes as far as Solomon in his speech and says, "It was Solomon who built a house for Him." Then suddenly the Spirit of God laid hold of Stephen and he cried out, "Yet God does not dwell in a temple made with hands. What does He need with all your fuss?" Now it was necessary to abandon something which God had given as an outward support and to turn wholeheartedly to the new experience in Christ. For even Solomon's Temple had taken a place alongside God; it had been elevated to something which should never have been. With the house built of stone, men had worshiped idols. And so it can happen that a David was great in God without a temple--and a Solomon is a good-for-nothing with a temple.

Should this not be a lesson to us? We too must be careful. It is all right to have churches; but we must watch out that they do not become idols, for God does not

dwell in churches made with hands. Although they must shelter us for a time, these forms, which belong to a passing world, must not become an idol for us so that finally all our enthusiasm is turned toward making one or the other church great. Likewise, a people should not make an idol of itself. No congregation should develop itself in such a way that in the end there is more trust in its fellowship than there is in God. It is quite possible for an imperfect fellowship to do this in our disunited age, although true community of the Spirit is not to be found exclusively in any outward fellowship. The Jews were ruined because of this; they idolized themselves as Jews. The Saviour did indeed say that salvation will come from the Jews. But, we add: The Jews are not the salvation. It can be the same with us: Salvation will proceed from the forms of Christianity, but Christians, as they are, are not the salvation of the world. And so we should be careful in this direction that we do not in a subtle way acquire another god than the living God in Christ.

I do not need to speak further about how all the different spiritual directions among men become a temptation, and how we can be led astray by weighty human names. We must become wise enough to accept good and true things as from God, wherever they come from, without making idols of people or circumstances. Before we know it, the one Lord and the one God recedes into the background. We can no longer see Him for all the human names, for all the learning and

cleverness; and through this we lose the truth of the Kingdom of God.

What really matters is that our names remain written in Heaven; that the people who are united with God become the vessels of a more and more perfect grace and glory of God. In this way the Kingdom of God can advance. It is especially important today that we experience Jesus more and more. For, truly, He will still come forward as the Man above all men. And the progress for the world which we shall experience in Him will be greater than all the progress that men can achieve in their transitory areas of life and knowledge. The progress we hope to experience in Him is true life, eternal life, justice, and truth, which will vanquish all the corruption and perversity still surrounding men, in which thousands and thousands languish. Truly, if we listen to this word, "You must have no other gods beside me," we will learn that until justice breaks forth in splendor and His salvation burns like a torch, this God will not remain silent and inactive.



## 42.

Advent Meditation published December 1891 in the "Vertraulichen Blättern" (No. 8).

Luke 21:25-36: "And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth distress of nations in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, look up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

And He told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree, and all the trees; as soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the Kingdom of God is near. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away till all has taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

But take heed to yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a snare; for it will come upon all who dwell upon the face of the whole earth. But watch at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of man."

These words seem to lead us into a kind of holy place. It is as though someone gave an intimate friend insight into something he would not otherwise talk about. And remarkably, although these words are in the Bible and anybody can read them, they remain a mystery. Nobody can understand them unless the Spirit of God leads him into it. They are also said in a way that could make people smile; the Bible seems to have been mistaken when it says, "This generation will not pass away till all has taken place." This is simply not the case, and so everything is now more or less questionable.

It is just not given to every man to live in such a recognition of heart that he can quietly experience these words with his whole being. One can read it and not understand it at all. One can deliver interesting lectures about it, but the world still remains the world. One can write books about the coming of Christ as much as one likes--the world can be swamped with them--but nobody pays any serious attention to them, except those whom God leads into this mystery.

Dear friends, whom does God lead into His mystery?

The whole world awaits a sign. The whole world, at least insofar as it calls itself Christian, awaits the coming of Christ, in spite of the fact that they do not believe it. Men always expect something from God; they expect something to come down from above--"But nothing ever happens," they say. Yes, dear friends, whom is it that God leads into His mystery?

The powers of the heavens shake; men faint with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world, for they sense that something is coming. The nations gather together and seek for ways of living together. They conclude treaties with one another and arrange political alliances to maintain the status quo and to gain some security for themselves. Intoxicated by a remarkable world spirit, all are occupied in securing their own lives through grabbing hold of worldly goods which run through their fingers before they know it. Already signs shine



forth in heaven, and changes occur which announce God's nearness; but nobody notices them. Only those who have sensed it earlier hear the word, "Watch out! Arise! Your redemption comes!"

If somebody does not take the first step at the right time, ascend the first step, as it were, the opportunity will pass; the step is gone. Soon another time comes, and the call is heard: "Go to meet the Saviour. Take your mind off ordinary things and begin to think higher!" Now we come to another place where we have to take two steps at once. The first step has gone; we have missed it. Happy the man who now steps up! Time passes--and the second step also goes away. But another opportunity comes. Many tremble to hear, "The world is changing! I should go to meet the Lord!" If we want to do so, we must now ascend three steps at once. That will be quite hard. Many stand before it and go back. Now everything appears strange to them. They no longer understand those above who have taken the step. They are annoyed at all that happens. Again they could make an effort, because those who are above can reach down and pull up the ones who are sincere, even if it goes heavily. But a certain petty pride prevents those who remained behind from exhausting themselves in the attempt, so to speak, and making this last effort. They prefer to stay below amid the rumble and roar of the nations and try to bring about some order and reason. They also listen always to what other people say. In the end



even the best of people, virgins, called by the Lord, come to the point where they may never ascend anymore. Then the wise say, "I have no oil to spare. It is so late that I must tremble for myself; there is no question of giving any away."

And so it happens that even people who otherwise believe do not see the events happening in the world in the context of the coming of Christ. Innumerable things happen before their eyes, but they do not see them; they pay no attention to them. Gradually people get accustomed to seeing extraordinary phenomena. If it was something that happened suddenly, they might have sat up and taken notice. But since it comes slowly over decades, nobody is astonished any more. They do not notice when the storm rages and roars; when the heavens change; when the masses move around as never before; when generations of men stream hither and thither from one place to another; when men begin to explore the farthest regions for what they do not find at home; when men debate together; when everything is in uproar and confusion. The people notice nothing, think nothing, and everything passes them by. They wonder perhaps, but they themselves are not in harmony with God who is, who was, and now comes. At the same time they are always looking for a sign. They cry to heaven, "O, God, when will you come?" And so everything becomes more and more of a puzzle to them. In the end many throw away faith and say God is no longer to be understood. At the

most, they hope for a miracle. But what sort of miracle? For something more pleasant than what they have now--and that never happens! They cannot see; they stand too far below. If a man stands at the bottom of a valley in Switzerland, he can only see the slope that lies before him. If he does not make the effort to climb up higher, he will not see the splendors still ahead. Even if he is already high up, he must go still higher, always higher, until he is right at the top. Then he can see everything above and below.

My dear friend, if you want to be wise, do not wait for signs from heaven, but see to it that God detects signs in your heart. Let Him see that you wish to go up, and that you will also make the effort. This is the sign God wishes to see in us; then the time will come when you will see His signs. This is the change God wishes to see in us, and then He will also show you the changes in His Kingdom. A riddle must be solved in you--the riddle of your heart, which makes you so unwilling, so ill-humored, so plaintive, so hard of hearing, so lame, and so apathetic. He wishes to see the riddle solved in you. You must solve the riddle by surrendering everything that is in you and serving God alone, not yourself. Then also, the mystery of the Kingdom of God will be solved for you.

I often think when men rack their brains to solve the mystery of the coming of the Saviour that they would do better to drop this and work instead on the solving of

the mystery of man's heart. If they would only ask: Why are we men so unintelligible? Always good impulses, but no good deeds! Always pious activities, but no truly devout life. Always feeble when it is a matter of getting something done! Always sighing, but still to no effect. Yes, always struggling, but still no victory. Always shooting, but no enemy falls. These are the puzzles which occupy us; everything else is irrelevant. When we are concerned with this enigma, we shall become free of ourselves.

Ah, perhaps we can become zealous enough to truly abandon our own concerns in order that we may gain divine gifts, in order to allow room for God to work among us. Oh, let us solve this riddle!

Perhaps you look up to me, dear friends. Believe me, when I see so many people who look to me and wait for me, I could almost sweat blood with fear. They think I could do something for them. How often have I longed to take someone by the hand. But if I do so, and nothing is resolved in his heart, I have to let him go again. In the end I cannot even stretch out my hand. You should not believe that some man of God can help you; that a pastor, an institution, or any kind of an organization, can save souls. Each one must tackle it himself; each one must cut through his own nature; each one must get away from himself and partake of spiritual things. He must not wait, as though expecting spiritual things to enter him. Divine powers do come close, to a certain extent, so that he can



just reach them with his fingertips--but no farther. Godly powers do not enter the flesh. You must come out of your flesh; you must deny it! This is a step that you must make. No pastor, no brother or sister, can do this for you; you must do it yourself! God cannot do it for you, nor can the Saviour do it for you. You must set about it yourself! It comes near to you so that you can do it, but you must feel an agony. You must be able to take the agony of death upon yourself for the sake of your flesh, or you are not fit to stand among those who can see what is coming.

This means: Die with Christ. Then we shall have arrived at a new basis. Then we shall experience things. With the parable of the fig tree, the Saviour makes it so easy for us to understand His signs. That is how simply the Kingdom of God comes. How strange is the tortuous learning of men in contrast to this. I have fat books about the coming of Jesus Christ. I once intended to study them; from all sides, people told me to do so. But, oh, they make me so tired! I don't understand half of it; I am much too dense for this. They make calculations, yards long, and have quite peculiar ideas. One has to force oneself to find any feeling for these stories, or to be able to conceive of them at all. Then I have to think every time: "O, God, if this is your future, then it's beyond my comprehension!" Often enough I have looked at the fig tree and thought: Well, if it comes in this way, then I too can understand it. I can understand it, although it is more

wonderful than anything written in books. What is more miraculous than a tree which buds in springtime? What is more inexplicable than life beginning to flow, than leaves and flowers coming forth? Although it is the most miraculous thing, I can understand it quite well. Every child sees it, looks at it, waits for it. Already with the first bud we can see the coming fig, the coming apple or pear. We know when it will be, more or less; we don't have to worry or trouble ourselves.

And this is also how it is when the riddle of the heart is solved. Everything is then clear. From one experience to another we shall go toward God's time which promises us the end of the present situation.

Is it necessary that we have this experience?

I would like to speak to you secretly, as it were, for it is a great pain to me not to be able to speak openly any more. People are offended; they cannot believe that God wants to show by signs what He does. "We don't need that; we have the church," someone once told me. That is why I speak to you in secret and ask: Is it necessary that we notice these signs before His coming? Is it necessary? Read again the final words of the Saviour in this text. I would almost say that one feels something shaking in these words of the Saviour. Dear ones, "Take heed to yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and the day come upon you suddenly like a snare. Watch at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that

will take place." We must be ready and have the strength! Is it necessary to see the signs? In view of these words, I ask you: Is it necessary?

When the Saviour said at that time, "This generation will not pass away till all has taken place," what does He assume? Did they perhaps not feel it necessary in the midst of contemporary events to hold firmly and clearly to Jesus and His future coming? Did they perhaps say, "It has nothing to do with us; the Kingdom will come anyway"? Why have two thousand years passed by? How much men have labored for the coming of Christ! How frantic some became over the coming of Christ! When the year 999 ended and the year 1000 came, there were great stirrings, tumultuous stirrings. Everybody believed that at the end of a thousand years, Jesus Christ would come. Today, although we are still a long way from that date, people speak of the close of the year 2000. How much they write about this year 2000, although heaven knows what they expect to gain by it. Why two thousand years? Why do we always have to wait? Is it perhaps that people have not sufficiently solved the riddle of the heart? Haven't they perhaps become too religious? Did they want to have control over the coming of Jesus Christ before God had control of their hearts?

Why do you make such vain efforts? Why do you dig wells that are full of holes? Why do you climb up to heights you do not know how to hold on to? Only yesterday I experienced a case in which somebody who was on a tremendous height



wrote to me despairingly, "Help me! I have fallen into the depths." Why do you think yourself so high up, dear man? Keep your feet on the ground! God does not want us to fly. He simply says, "Let me come into your heart! Open your heart with prayer!" Come before your God openly, just as you are; do not be ashamed to do this! Yes, I implore you to endure shame--you who perhaps have many things in your heart you would like to conceal and which would shame you if it were to come out. Suffer the shame! Do not fear God in such a way that you hide yourself. Reveal yourself and make a genuine cut through your life. Be different! Leave all that you have and are. Even if you have to climb up two or three steps, strain yourself so that you can take them!

He who has ears to hear, let him hear!

I repeat: I cannot take this step for you; you must take it yourselves. May the Lord our God have mercy upon those He waits for so that they can be strong and do it, at last. One of these days it must happen, and a decision must be made; for the new beginning is already burning; the fires of God's Kingdom are blazing. It is as if the whole earth is surrounded by a besieging army; the fires of the living God come closer. What God has spoken must be fulfilled. God will glorify Himself. The creation is His, not ours. The earth is His, not ours. Life belongs to Him, also your life. It does not belong to you; it is His! It belongs to God! Consider this well.

Amen.

## 43.

Devotional Meeting--New Year's Eve, 1891. From a transcript.

Dear friends! Now we have gathered in great earnestness on the last evening of the year 1891. It is not as though we celebrate a day of Jesus Christ. We are observing a day of the world, a day which the world has made without actually knowing what it ought to mean.

It is a time of uneasy confusion. I could almost call it a sign that the storms and the blowing of the wind do not cease in spite of the bright sky. In nature at the present time everything is topsy-turvy: winter is like summer, summer almost like winter, and the storm is raging like mad. And this is just how it is on this day when we encounter the uneasiness and confusion of men. From almost everywhere comes the question: What will happen in the new Year? The wiser ones say: "We shall just resign ourselves to whatever comes." Others think little about it, even though they are somewhat anxious. They rush here and there, having a jolly time; and when midnight strikes, they have a good glass of wine. They are unable to go into the future with any understanding, or truth, or security. There is no day when men seem poorer than just on this day.

But, forgive me, I am also poor; nor have I anything to say about the world. I cannot celebrate for the world and the way it is going. I do not know a verse, a song, or a hymn to celebrate a new epoch in the world--nothing. My heart is spent and empty. I simply have to say how

empty my heart is, how perplexed and uncertain I am about the events which the year 1892 could bring. We have nothing in our hands; every idea eludes us. You can perhaps have fear of a war. Well, all right, be a little afraid; in the end there will not be any war. You can assert that peace will continue. Good! Maintain that! but perhaps there will be war. You can say to your neighbor: "A prosperous New Year!" "A happy New Year!" Good! But if misfortune comes, you must put up with it. Nothing is in our hands. It is actually foolish to wish each other happiness for the New Year. Forgive me; I am being rather crude, but I am drawing your attention to it because I want you to feel as I do in this situation of our times. Above all we must have a feeling for the poverty that we see in the conditions of our lives, in the lives of the nations, and in the whole world. Here we are faced with an enigma, a Gordian knot. Every man, in his heart, has the urge that the knot should be untied; but it still remains the same Gordian knot, which as everyone knows, does not come undone. In this, we so-called Christians are also poor. Regarding the world, we are as poor as heathens. Our dear Negroes--there is one of them sitting here--know just as much about the world and its fate as we do. Perhaps they are less inquisitive than we are, talk less than we do about it. I don't know if they chatter as much as we do!

So, we are poverty stricken and it is a great calamity; for you will all agree with me that this should not be. It



is understandable that an ox in the stall does not know if he will be taken to the butcher tomorrow and become sausage the day after. But it is a calamity if we men, who should be sparks of God, know nothing about our own existence. The calamity is not so very great for us, because we have become insensitive; most people do not worry about it. But it is a calamity in the eyes of God, the Creator of the world, who has bestowed a spark of Himself upon us in our lives. When the life of God--yes, God's life--can become so stagnant in men that we do not know where we come from or where we are going with our lives, that is a calamity that cries to Heaven, to the very throne of God. Today we must take this calamity to heart. Everything else in which we think we are wise only increases this misery in God's eyes. Do not believe that your knowledge of Christian matters can be any use to you if you do not get clear about yourself. You man, you society, you world of mankind everywhere, our thinking is worth nothing. If today an angel came and told us about the most wonderful things in Heaven, it would be of no use to us unless we saw some light concerning ourselves. And if we hear about Jesus Christ and remain a world that does not know where it comes from or where it is going, if we are just as unconcerned as everyone else, then the misery remains; even the name of Jesus can offer no consolation.

So unfortunately today I cannot celebrate with men their New Year. In any case, I am opposed to it because it

is not reasonable to take January 1st as a beginning. That was just a matter of chance. This is why we withdraw today.

But with one part of our being we are one with all men. We cannot alter it. We must celebrate at this time; everyone does it--we do it too. But we draw the substance for our attitude out of the Kingdom which God the Almighty has founded, and this Kingdom can represent itself in the festivals of the world and of men everywhere. So I say today: one festival against another--God has founded a Kingdom, and it is to this we belong. This Kingdom is opposed to the other Kingdoms from which we want to break loose. Get out from everything that is not of God and His Kingdom in Christ Jesus. Get out, I say.

The prophet Isaiah heard a voice calling: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory" (Is. 6:3). What else does this mean than: You servant of Jehovah, get out of the other Kingdoms! Be holy and do not mix yourselves up with unholy things. Take up a different attitude from the people who know nothing of the Kingdom of God and care less, who have their hearts set on other things. This is how we go into the New Year, proudly; yes, rightly understood, proudly. In the face of the whole world we do this in the name of God's Kingdom, in the name of God who says, "I am holy, that you might also be holy."

That is what I want to share with you, as far as you understand me. I don't know if you have the courage for it.

I find many cowards. They will fight a duel or take part when there is some bravado afoot, but they don't want to stand up for the holy things of God and surrender themselves to death so that they may find righteousness. But I tell you: Whoever wants to, let him do it! Everyone may do it; the doors are open to the poorest of men. You may not say, "I am a poor sinner. How can I put myself on the side of the Holy God?" You must not talk like that. When you, as a poor sinner, take your stand on God's side and say, "Woe betide me if I remain on the side of sin! I realize now that I belong to my God and Father!"--then, you, a sinner, make our God holy. Nor can you say, as people do say, "Circumstances are too much for me. I cannot escape from my situation; I am bound; I just can't do it." I tell you, you can! You must only want to! Everyone can give honor to God, the holy one. Each one can do this; for that you don't need anything special. But you must love to do it, and the question to you--to you, I say--is this: Do you care for the Kingdom of God?

This is a remarkable Kingdom. We can no longer let circumstances run their accustomed course; we must fling truth into the midst of it. Then to begin with, there is confusion, a muddle, for the moment perhaps misunderstandings of all kinds, because we are heading toward a goal where the other conditions of the world are overthrown. Then, too, it goes against our own person; therefore we are not so willing to be lovers of God's Kingdom. We would like to be



lovers of a flattering God--a dear God is much more pleasant than a holy God, a righteous God, a true God. But here we must and shall make up our minds. Let us look up to the God who has founded His Kingdom in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is a King of all kings and Lord of all lords. Let us love His Kingdom, His Justice, His Holy Name. Let us love His holiness above everything. Let us say to ourselves until we are used to it and it is part of our very flesh and blood: Holy, holy, holy is our God! We want no other. We will have no artificial God who regards unholy things as holy. We want the holy God, the true God, the just God.

Then, difficult as it seems, it will work out for us; we shall acquire a new way of looking at things. Whatever confusion may arise in the world, we can laugh at it. Maybe we ourselves will suffer the greatest afflictions. It does not matter; we do not trouble our heads about it. If other people shrink from it, are afraid and distressed, we remain at peace and laugh at the world. But we have to be in the Kingdom. Then we will also have a secret hope; otherwise why would we want to enter God's Kingdom? Do you think it is because we want to be better off than other people? We would not dream of such a thing. We feel sorry, yes, we grieve for the nations, for mankind; and when we are in God's Kingdom, we have a secret hope that God will not forsake the people. If we see mankind today as just a mass of flesh and almost despair of anything ever coming

out of them, let us close our eyes and look to God. He is the Light, and He has created them. He has given the name of Jesus, and the atonement in Jesus Christ. Even though we cannot imagine what could happen, nevertheless we know that men are in the almighty hand of God. When He shakes them so that their bones rattle and they seem about to be shaken to pieces, He still has them in His hand. When they are crushed in His hand and ground into sand, still He has them as sand in His hand. From this world, from these people, from these nations, God will know how to recreate His work. I know of no other consolation. But of this consolation I am quite certain. And so let us go rejoicing toward justice because we know that whatever pain there may be, it comes from God. In His hand we are shaken; and even you, a hard stone though you may be, I tell you: You will come into God's hand and will be crushed until you are yielding. Shall I grieve over this? Shall I cry out on your behalf and say: "O, spare the poor man; he cries so loudly I cannot listen to it any longer!" No, I will be hard. When I see how God takes him in hand, I will be as hard as stone, in spite of all the screaming. For I know God never gives up those He has in hand. He knows the way to solve the problem; He knows how to cut the Gordian knot, He alone. And therefore He says, "I alone tread the wine-press for I alone am holy, and I do that through the Man, Jesus Christ." Be prepared for it; it is going to happen.

So we enter into the New Year. It costs an effort for us, being what we are, to penetrate this swamp. It seems to me just like those people hundreds of years ago who made their lake dwellings in the swamps. They drove posts into the water and set their houses upon them. That is how it looks to me. To begin with, the Kingdom of God has to penetrate into the swamp of the world. Let us drive posts in and stand on them; let us lay boards across them, and then live there. Even though everything surges and roars around us and looks terrifying, we want to help build the Kingdom of God in the world-swamp. We want to work hard at it until, in spite of all our clamor, God makes the ground firm. Do you think that God would leave us in the lurch when we work eagerly for Him, not for ourselves? No! Never could anyone complain that God leaves him in the lurch when he is truly doing what God wants for His Kingdom. If you want something else instead, you will perhaps come to grief. But we shall not come to grief in the things in which we know ourselves to be united with the heart of God the Father.

So let us take courage, for every human being who takes up this position is a part of God's Kingdom. I wish I could say that you all now belong to the men who are called by Jesus Christ; that you were now all such men who are parts of God's Kingdom; that each one in his own circumstances would drive in a post. Then we would get something done in this swamp of mankind and the world, right



in the midst of this world, even if we plant it right over  
hell and death. It will be victorious, cost what it may.  
That would be our New Year celebration.

## 44.\*

New Year's Meditation. Published January 1892 in "Vertraulichen Blättern"

Isaiah 9:6: "For to us a child is born, to us a Son is given."

Let us rejoice about this once again at the beginning of this year. In this cry Isaiah lifted up the hope of Israel and ensured for all time the importance of God's people who are called Israel. It became the basis for the prophet's boundless hope for a glorious age of God because this Son who is born is no longer subject to the troubles of the times. In Him, His generation, His nation, and indeed all mankind have a Man who stands above the ages and goes through the ages saving what would be lost without such a Man. He is really a Son who can be called, "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." In other words, in this Son, God the Almighty Himself comes among men to take up the cause for which He created man.

We do not know what experience it was that caused Isaiah to cry out this joyful news. It must have been something that seemed to be like the birth of a divine person into human conditions. Although the prophet was unable to point directly to this person, absolute certainty was given to men that such a Son would appear. In a sense, the experience of Christ's birth was already there. And then He really was born.

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\*A slightly different translation is printed in When the Time Was Fulfilled, on page 188, under the title "Unto Us a Son Is Given."

Today we look back, as in those times the prophets looked forward. At the apex of our age stands the name of Jesus, the name of a Man who is wonderful, a counselor, a mighty one. And it is right for us now to call Him our God; for in His coming as a Man, He represents to men the living God, the Christ of God. It was not meant that only one generation should boast: To us men of death a Man of life is born. No! It is as the prophets already saw it: In Him the whole world shall taste the glory of God.

At the time of the prophets, God's cause for mankind was seen as a victorious cause, whatever the destiny of Israel. For it was certain that a Saviour of all the nations would be born who was to be a blessing to all who believe in Him. Thus we may look back with a deep certainty that mankind will be saved because this Son is born. After all, we have experienced fully the truth of the names given to this Son: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

The fact that the Son is born, however, is not sufficient. What is wonderful about Him in God must be passed on to mankind. Just as this Son was finally born amid great travail on the part of God's people, so also what is from God has to make its way through great pain on the part of men, until it finally appears as a new birth of mankind. Then not only will the jubilant cry ring forth: "Unto us a Son is born," but the triumphant cry will resound in Heaven: "A mankind is born in this Jesus, the Wonderful



Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace!"

There is, however, a great distance between the birth of Jesus Christ--that is to say, between the divine life on earth revealed in Him--and the birth of generations of human beings and their life. We men have to come to this God in Christ, and the obstacles to this seem insurmountable. If we survey the situation of mankind, as we usually do at the beginning of the year, it seems to us that while the call, "Christ is born," is remarkably well-known, basically we are as far removed as ever from the mighty life in God for which the divine powers were given.

Mankind sinks helpless into the dust before the mighty appearance of Christ. It has not the strength to rise up to what He is and what is proclaimed of Him each year. What are we to think? Was Isaiah mistaken? Were the apostles mistaken? Have we become the victims of a visionary ideal which, though it has admittedly benefited mankind's spiritual life, has accomplished nothing fundamental in regard to a new creation, in new, eternal life?

Here we can say, is also a "call for the endurance and faith of the saints."<sup>1</sup> This does not mean that we ought to ignore our shortcomings and consider our situation better than it really is. Nor should we forget that actually it can be said of us: "You have the name of being alive, and you are dead."<sup>2</sup> But we must show endurance and faith.

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1. Rev. 13:10

2. Rev. 3:1

For although close to two thousand years have gone by without mankind's having been able to experience all that was revealed in Christ, nevertheless Christ was born. The way that leads to Him can be traveled; the obstacles along this road can be overcome; the separation between Him and us can be overcome. Yes, the time will come when a new mankind, born of Him to true life and to eternal life, shall praise God on this earth.

This is the endurance and faith of the saints today. They defy impossibilities, looking in quiet obedience toward the words, "Unto us a Son is born." Yes, to you men this Son is born. He is here. Yet again, He is not here as long as you do not want Him. You, man--you must be set afire by the proclamation that He is here. You must open your door to Him.

We have heard that this Man has been born to us. Now we have to get busy. It is up to us; it is up to you to prepare the way for what Jesus stands for, without relaxing. We must open wide to Him the door into our situation without any consideration for our accustomed ways, even if we have to give up everything. One thought alone must possess us: Enter, you Man of the Most High, you Man of life, and take hold of us for the almighty God. Judge and winnow us miserable, lost people of death until the new life that you have brought us, until God in truth and justice, is born even in us; until we are one with you, to the glory of God in all eternity.

Sometimes those who are called to prove in their own lives that Christ is born to them are indifferent. When this happens, Christ's wonderful, life-giving power passes us by without making us part of it, in spite of His having been born. This is why mankind is constantly in danger of going about its business without Christ and of dying its old death.

This pains us. The nations continue in the old ways of life and do not allow God to enter their lives, their days and their affairs. If this pains us, then we should at least pay very serious heed to the fact that Jesus is now here. There should not be just a handful of people who believe in Him; the good news of this gospel must take hold of many. Then they will rattle at the door to throw it open to Him who is born to them. They should not rest until all obstacles are cleared out of the way of Him who is already born to us, and is to come. Christ must enter in! He must enter into all our affairs. Even if the whole world were to set itself against Him, saying, "No, we want to keep to ourselves," still we would cry: He has to enter, for He is born to us. Then He will come to meet us if we are in earnest about seeing Him Lord over all men.

So, you see, it will cost us a struggle to make sure that Jesus enters our lives, and lives on earth, not only in Heaven. This is the fight of the Church of Jesus Christ in the world. At the beginning of a new year, if we feel that we are placed in this world in the restlessness and the



anxiety of a time fraught with evil, then it should be a battle cry to our ears: To you a Son is born! Many people are frightened these days of what the future may bring; many are afraid of the next development of our generation. The hammer of hostile forces is battering at the door of the nations; their life is threatening to go to pieces. And in the face of all this, there is nothing but helplessness. What are we to do? Should we not be frightened, be anxious? Yes, we too are frightened; but we do not despair. Even in our fear we cry out mightily: Unto us a child is born!

One thing could make us still more fearful, however. Many people admit that Christ is born, but they do not feel assured in their hearts that help comes only from this Jesus. We could become very fearful indeed when the cry "To us a Son is born" is heard--and those people who should be depended upon simply yawn with indifference or begin to question how this is meant. They ought to be burning with an inward fire, causing a tempest to arise in the world for this Son.

It is as if people's blood had become sluggish, even that of believers, because of the long, drawn-out time. They can no longer feel enthusiasm for all that is in Christ--Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Because of this, people do not make a common effort to open doors for this very One. They enjoy hearing sermons and wonderful things told about Him; but when

something needs to be done for Him, they cannot find the strength to do it. In fact, with all that is happening in our time and in the alarming occurrences around us, many even forget that this Son is born to us, let alone open the door to Him.

People have forgotten the meaning of "Wonderful." Even if reminded of it, they hesitate to accept it. They prefer to set up religious or social institutions in the place of God. These institutions, stemming from certain times, seem, because they are old customs and usages, to form a dam against any new corruptions that try to break in. Men shovel all kinds of stones and pieces of wood onto this dam, trying to do everything possible to hold up the onrushing flood of events. But it will help very little in the end. No one can put a stop to corruption but the almighty God in Christ, and for Him we must open the door.

Let us do this very practically, as far as we know how. In the very smallest details of our life, let us get used to opening up for Him who knocks at our doors, the Son of men, the Son of the living God. We experience many things every day, sad and joyful things, whatever life brings us. But how little do we think of making a place for this Son in all we experience so that what is wrong may be corrected and what is right may be upheld. Time takes away all these experiences, and we stand there empty-handed. Even the good we experience bears no fruit. It refreshes us momentarily; but it is not enduring and eternal unless it comes from

the life-source that flows for us through Christ.

Often people are crushed by painful events in their lives. They bury themselves and their thoughts in these painful things instead of standing up and crying: "What does this matter to me! To me a Son is born; Christ lives!" They prefer to find fault with conditions around them and worry about the things that are unpleasant for them. They try to improve something here and work out something there. They rack their brains and wonder how they can arrange things, or even how they can hush something up. If something is embarrassing, they wonder how it can be made to look different so as not to appear so bad. All these things they do instead of opening the doors wide and calling out, "Why is all this noise and nonsense going on? Open the doors! A Son is born to us!"

We are also often alarmed about various spiritual fads and the fact that thousands are carried away by vain hopes. We call this a swindle. It happens again and again that hundreds and thousands are gripped by some swindle. They become enthusiastic about vain and empty things and dissipate their hopes, to their own ruin. And we just sigh and stand on the sidelines instead of pulling ourselves together and crying out: "Come, let us open the doors. Away with all deceit! Christ is born to us!" What have we to do with the raging of the nations, the clamor of society? What have we to do with the struggling between parties, with all the words and deeds of those who scheme idle things? It is



all futile! Open the doors! Christ is born to you!

When a year is beginning we ask many questions. What will happen? Will there be war or peace? Will business increase or not? Will the price of bread rise or fall? Will the struggle to find the right relationship between the different classes take a turn for better or for worse? Will the forces of rebellion win out, or the forces of order? Is the government on our side or not? We think about all this and make conjectures, and end up either fearing or hoping.

But is this how we want to spend our time, dear friends? If we are convinced that the Son has been born to us, why do we ask these questions? Open the door and acknowledge your Son, the Son of God! He has the command. When there is talk of war, believe in this Son; He also has something to say. If the nations prepare for war, He too will be prepared. Or is it just an illusion that a Son is given to us? War or not, it is of little concern to us. A Son is born to us, and He will carry out God's Will, come war or peace.

Oh, how I wish that this was uppermost in our hearts in the questions and troubles of our time, whether great or small! Why is it that these things which come from men take first place with us? Why do we allow these things to take possession of our heart and soul, our mind and spirit? Why do we turn them into gods and demons, which we fear? Shouldn't all this recede into the background in the face

of what has come from above and can be found in the world today? But with us, when real trouble breaks out (which is only natural if we do not open our door to God), when some calamity breaks loose, when some evil is unleashed and threatens thousands with ruin, we allow ourselves to be captured and swept away by it. God is pushed into the background. God, who is, who was, and who shall be, is not in the first place for us. If He were, we could open the door to Him in calmness and believing confidence.

But you do not believe in Him either, do you? You put more hope in the sword than in God. You expect more substantial things from human efforts than from God. You think you will have more from man's cleverness than from God. You rely on the flesh. There are many who struggle--but not in Christ. Storming and believing are two different things. When people storm, they leave Jesus behind. When they believe, He goes before them. They storm ahead and say, "God is with us." But the right thing would be to believe, and say, "Come, leave everything! We want to be on God's side. Everything we are and have must be for God."

Sensible people, when their country is in peril, do not rush upon the danger. They gather around their commander. And that is the way believers act. They let trouble be; they let the world rage; they rally around God. They know that if He has a people ready to sacrifice itself for Him, He will be among them as a Wonderful Counselor, a Mighty God,

an Everlasting Father, a Prince of Peace.

This will come to light if we maintain the right attitude. We experience this Son of ours in the simplest way. There is no excitement of worry and fear, no going all out in a human way, trying to convince the world of our own opinions. When Christ is our Son, things happen in a wonderful way. There is no lack of counsel; there is no defeat. He is always the mighty One, and we are secure in our Father in Heaven, and in God's peace. He is the victorious King and the Prince of all kings on earth.

Let us take this into the new year with us. Let each one consider himself worthy of opening the door for the Son. Don't think, I'm too weak for that! It is in the weak that God shows His strength. And don't think that it can only be done by great people, or educated people, or religious gentlemen. No! It is the little people, the lowly, those who groan under their many imperfections and sins, who are allowed to open the door. To them, above all others, it is said, "The Saviour is born for you."

You will have noticed many times what a concern I feel that you learn to open the door to Jesus. It is embarrassing to me to always be the only one among my people who is expected to do this. It has become customary to leave everything to the pastor. But it should not be that way with us. Take yourselves seriously. Even if each one is only a little drop of water, he should think of his importance for the whole. The great ocean itself consists of little drops of



water. Let each of us take himself seriously for God. Let us think, "I too must help; I too must deny myself; I too am allowed to push the door and open it." Then faith will be so strong that it will conquer the world.

When you rise in the morning, perhaps already weighed down with cares and worries; when you go to bed, tired and oppressed by the day's burdens; when you rejoice and are full of hope--in all you do, remember to stay with the Son who lifts and bears and illuminates everything when you open the door to Him. God's Throne should be higher than anything else in our hearts, above everything we experience; it should rule and speak in everything that happens to us. Let us be people eager for what God wants to do. How can we be afraid, if this is how we stand?

May this come true in the hearts of many! May it be truly said of them: To us a Son is born! And may this be a light for the whole year.

This is our wish for all of you.