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Lenten Meditation: The Christian - His Tomorrow: Psalms 31:5, 1937

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THE CHRISTIAN - HIS TOMORROW

Ps. 31:5: "My times are in Thy Hand."

Today it is my privilege to speak more directly to the young men and women who have come here. From one point of view that is not an easy thing to do. Humanly speaking we have so pitifully little to offer the rising generation - perhaps only the story of broken dreams and wrecked ambitions and blasted hopes - the story of a world setting itself once more against the counsels of God and the experiences of the ages - the story of a world in which the burden of the years lies sore and heavy upon all those who have eyes to see. Only a few months ago one of our journals of opinion carried a letter from one of its political observers journeying through the West. He wrote that he was driving through the Rockies west of Denver, through the passes between snow-stopped peaks of almost incredible grandeur, and the radio on his dashboard was bringing him the record of a sordid political investigation. As the sun set and its last rays turned the white snow to coral and then to deep blue, the radio spoke of cheap and greasy men, taking money where they could find it, fattening on tragedy and trampling on the blood drops of humanity - the end-products of a civilization which has run away from God. And as the shadows grew longer and longer and twilight darkened into night, he said that he distinctly saw a great old giant mountain, black against the drifting stars, remembering clean winds and honest Indians and noble pioneers, turn its head with the faintest possible suggestion of a sneer.

If I were not a servant of the Church of God that is about
all I could say to you today. Turn your heads from the shrill
voices sounding in the marketplaces of the world — from the
strange pathway, that the hearts of men go crying down — from
the pitiful mess men have made of things! But that is not enough.
If ever there was a time when we must tell youth more than that,
it is today. It is not enough to tell you to turn your eyes
away from the disaster of the world, and if there is to be hope and
strength and joy in your life. Those eyes of yours can turn
only one way. That way is up — up to the commanding figure of
Him Who holds your destiny in His hands — up to Him Who alone can
make all the days and years of your life beautiful and holy and
glad — up to Him Who alone can give you the power to say: "My
times are in Thy hand." What after all does it mean to be young?
For some of us today it may mean different things — some dark
and ugly, some beautiful and shining. But for all of us it means
one thing. The mercy of God will give us a longer time to live
than He will give to those who are already standing on the
hilltops of life. We may not have any money. We may not think
much of our ability. We may believe that we occupy a small place
in the counsels of men and in the economy of human life. But one
thing we all have — time! Time to work out the counsels of God in
our own brief day, time to carry on for God and life and human
destiny, time to say to Him Who has redeemed all the days of our
life from sin and shame and death: "My times are in Thy hand."

"My time" — let us look at it for a moment. Always as we
walk through Life we are face to face with what someone has called
the three great sanctities of human life — the past, the present,
and the future. There is no getting away from them. Humanly
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speaking, what a young man or woman is or will be is determined by his or her attitude over against these three great sanities. And how many do we find today who are so fearfully wrong about time. Let us begin with the past! Youth today seems to be singularly ashamed of the past. There is hardly a more damning adjective in our vocabulary than the word "old fashioned." The Church belongs to the past, our parents are of the past, our social order is old - and so we are ashamed of them. And when we turn to the present - to how many thousands of young people it is merely a time to live through to look forward to a day that may never come, or even to gamble it away by throwing it to the destroying power of sin. And then the future! Thousands upon thousands looking forward into it with no hope and no joy. Tomorrow will be like today, dull and drab and dreary, and all I can look forward to is to get out of it as much as I can, to gather the rosebuds while I may, and to hope against hope that somehow things will turn out all right. My dear young friend, you can't go on living like that. Let me say to you today that there is a view of life and time which came into the world with Him Who brought His knowledge down from the hidden places of God where there is no time and told the hearts of men that also our time in His nailtorn hands, redeemed by His blood, and now to be sanctified for the eternal purposes of God. My times are in Thy hands, O God - and there they must remain!

Have you ever noticed, my dear friend, how our Lord approaches the problem of time. Always, except once when there was no time left for the dying thief, when He is face to face with the problem of the human soul, He begins with the past. He sat one
day with a Samaritan woman by a well and step by step he unfolds the terrible past, chapter by chapter. He unfolds the cheap, sordid story she had been writing. Another day a crowd stood around a sobbing woman whom the Pharisees had hurled at his feet, and in one swift sentence he calls up the panorama of all the accusing years: "Let him who is without sin among you cast the first stone." Always He begins with the past - all the old shadows and the ancient sins and the clutching years. They must be called up before He can take life and time into His redeeming hands.

And then He proceeds to the present. Into His almighty hand He takes the past and cuts it off as with a knife. And always and forever, yesterday, today and tomorrow, it is with the same heavenly formulas of mercy and peace: "Thy sins are forgiven thee." You may not be able to forget the past, but God has forgiven it. All the clutching ghosts of the faithless years disappear and life and time are now in His hands. The wrongs you have done, the sorrows you have borne, the sins you remember today - all are now in His hands. The past is done. Matthew looks back on his greed, Peter thinks of his denial, Paul sees the days when he persecuted the Church, but all that is past and done, buried in the bottomless sea of the pity of God with one majestic sentence: "Thy sins are forgiven thee."

And now in Him and through Him the present becomes suddenly holy and glad. In His hands there is no age, no week, no day which is made only to live through. Every day, every hour, every moment is His. He makes it a time to live in. Always and forever His voice comes: Now! Today! It is yours, glorious and urgent, His redeeming hands give you the power to live in every day and not through it. You cannot walk with this Lord of life and time
and live in the past - you cannot walk with Him and live in the future. Now - now is the accepted time! Now is the day of salvation! This note runs through all the pages of Holy Writ and all the experience of the Christian life - Yesterday was His, Tomorrow is His. Today is ours to be used according to His holy will.

As the clock ticks now time is flowing down to us from the future, and this hour, this very moment where the hands now are on the face of the clock - this is what He has given us. All of eternity depends on our giving it back into His hands in faith and love.

And then He turns to tomorrow, so dark and hopeless for many of the children of men. My dear young friend, let us be perfectly honest. I haven't the slightest idea what He has in mind for you. Nor has anyone else. It may be that He has determined to fashion a life for you quite different from anything you happen to be thinking today. It may even be that at this moment you are looking to the future with doubt and misgiving. Perhaps there will be tears and broken hopes and bitter disappointment. But all that you can face with joy in your heart and a song in your lips.

Do you remember the hymn of our childhood? It is the hymn also of youth and old age:

Take Thou my hands and lead me
O'er life's rough way,
With heavenly manna feed me
From day to day.

Alone, my footsteps falter,
Or struggle wide;

Lord, who my life canst alter,

By Thou my Guide.

One more word: At this moment you and I are nearer to the
end of our time than when I began to say these few words to you today. The hands of the clock have moved ahead. Until God stops them forever, they always will. That does not matter. All that matters now in time and in eternity is that by His everlasting pity you and I will always be able to say — today, tomorrow, and forever: "My times are in Thy hand."