

# A Word Fitly Spoken

There's a Time in Every Man's History When It Means Help and Encouragement.

Washington report—In this discourse Dr. Talmage shows an open door for any one who desires to be useful, and illustrates how a little thing may decide one's destiny. The text is Proverbs xxv, 11 (revised version): "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in baskets of silver."

A filigree basket loaded with fruit is put before us in the text. What is ordinarily translated "pictures" ought to be "baskets." Here is a silver network basket containing ripe and golden apples, pippins or rennets. You know how such apples glow through the openings of a basket of silver network. You have seen such a basket of fruit on many a table. It whets the appetite as well as regales the vision. Solomon was evidently fond of apples, because he so often speaks of them. While he writes in glowing terms of pomegranates and figs and grapes and mandrakes, he seems to find solace as well as lusciousness in apples, calling out for a supply of them when he says in another place, "Comfort me with apples." Now you see the meaning of my text, "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in baskets of silver."

You see the wise man eulogizes just one word. Plenty of recognition has been for great orations. Cicero's arraignment of Catiline, the philippic of Demosthenes, the five days' argument of Edmund Burke against Warren Hastings, Edward Irving's discourses on the Bible and libraries full of prolonged utterance, but my text extols the power of one word when it refers to "a word fitly spoken."

I tell you what is a great crisis in every man's history. It is the time when he is entering an occupation or profession. He is opposed by men in middle life, because they do not want any more rivals, and by some of the aged because they fear being crowded out and their places being taken by younger men. Hear the often severe and unfair examinations of young lawyers by old lawyers, of young doctors by old doctors, of young ministers by old ministers. Hear some of the old merchants talk about the young merchants. Trowels and hammers and scales often are jealous of new trowels and new hammers and new scales. Then it is difficult to get introduced. How long a time has many a physician had his sign put out before he got a call for his services and the attorney before he got a case? Who wants to risk the life of his family to a young physician who got his diploma only last spring and who may not know measles from scarlatina, or to risk the obtaining of a verdict for \$20,000 to an attorney who only three years ago read the first page of Blackstone?

How is the young merchant to compete with his next door bargain-maker who can afford to undersell something because he can more than make it up by the profit on other things, or has failed three times and had more money after each failure? How is that mechanic to make a livelihood when there are twice as many in that trade as can in hard times find occupation? There are this very moment thousands of men who are just starting life for themselves, and they need encouragement. Not long harangue, not quotation from profound book, not a page, not a paragraph, but a word, one word fitly spoken.

Why does not that old merchant, who has been 40 years in business, go into that young merchant's store and say "Courage!" He needs only that one word, although, of course, you will illustrate it by telling your own experience, and how long you waited for customers, and how the first two years you lost money, and how the next year, though you did better, illness in your household swamped the surplus with doctor's bills. Why does not that old lawyer go into that young lawyer's office just after he has broken down in making his first plea before a jury and say that word with only two syllables, "Courage!" He needs only that one word, although, of course, you will illustrate it by telling him how you broke down in one of your first cases and got laughed at by court and bar and jury, and how Disraeli broke down at the start, and how hundreds of the most successful lawyers at the start broke down. Why do not the successful men go right away and tell those who are starting what they went through, and how their notes got protested, and what unfortunate purchases they made, and how they were swindled, but kept right on until they reached the golden milestone? Even some who pretend to favor the new beginner and say they wish him well put obstacles in his way.

There are so many men who have all the elements of usefulness and power except one—courage. If you can only under God give them that you give them everything. In illustrating that one word show them that every man that ever amounted to anything had terrific struggle. Show him what ships Decatur had to fight, and what a mountain Hannibal had to climb, and what a lame foot Walter Scott had to walk on, and that the greatest poet who ever lived—Milton—was blind, that one of the grandest musicians of all the ages—Beethoven—was deaf, and that Stewart, in some respects the greatest merchant that America ever saw, began in his small store, dining on bread and cheese behind the counter in a smatched *interregnum* between customers, he opening the store and closing it, awaiting

it out with his own broom and being his own errand boy. Show them that within ten minutes' walk there are stores, shops and factories, and homes where as brave deeds have been done as those of Leonidas at Thermopylae, as that of Horatius at the bridge, as that of Colon Campbell at Balaklava. Tell them what Napoleon said to his staff officer when that officer declared a certain military attempt to be impossible. "Impossible!" said the great commander. "Impossible is the adjective of fools."

Show them also that what is true in worldly directions is more true in spiritual directions. Call the roll of prophets, apostles and martyrs and private Christians from the time the world began and ask them to mention one man or woman greatly good or useful who was not depreciated and flailed and made a laughing stock. Racks and prisons and whips and shipwrecks and axes of beheading did their worst, yet the heroes were more than conquerors. With such things you will illustrate that word "courage," and they will go out from your presence to start anew and right, challenging all earth and hell to the combat.

That word "courage" fitly spoken with compressed lips and stout grip of the hand and an intelligent flash of the eye—well, the finest apples that ever thumped on the ground in an autumnal orchard and were placed in the most beautiful basket of silver network before been appetites could not be more attractive.

Furthermore, a comforting word fitly spoken is a beautiful thing. No one but God could give the inventory of sick beds and bereft homes and broken hearts. We ought not to let a day pass without a visit or a letter or a message or a prayer consolatory. You could call five minutes on your way to the factory, you could leave a half hour earlier in the afternoon and fill a mission of solace. You could brighten a sick room with your chrysanthemum. You could send your carriage and give an afternoon airing to an invalid on a neighboring street. There are four or five words which, fitly spoken, might soothe and emancipate and rescue. Go to those from whose homes Christ has taken to himself a loved one and try the word "reunion"—not under wintry sky, but in everlasting springtime; not a land where they can be struck with disease, but where the inhabitant never says, "I am sick;" not a reunion that can be followed by separation, but in a place "from which they shall go no more out forever." For emaciation and sighing, immortal health. Reunion, or, if you like the word better, anticipation. There is nothing left for them in this world. Try them with heaven. With a chapter from the great book open one of the twelve gables. Give them one note of seraphic harp, one flash from the sea of glass, one clatter of the hoofs of the horses on which victors ride. That word reunion, or anticipation, fitly spoken—well, no fruit heaped up in silver baskets could equal it. Of the 2,000 kinds of apples that have blessed the world not one is so mellow or so rich or so aromatic, but we take the suggestion of the text and compare that word of comfort, fitly spoken, to apples of gold in baskets of silver.

So also is a word of warning. A ship may sail out of harbor when the sea has not so much as a ripple, but what a foolhardy ship company would they be that made no provision for high winds and wrathful seas. However smoothly the voyage of life may begin we will get rough weather before we harbor on the other side, and we need ever and anon to have some one uttering in most decided tones the word "beware." There are all the temptations to make this life everything and to forget that an inch of ground is larger as compared with the whole earth than this life as compared with our eternal existence. There are all the temptations of the wine cup and the demijohn, which have taken down as grand men as this or any other century has heard of. There are all the temptations of pride and avarice and base indulgence and unmovable temper. There is no word we all need oftener to hear than the word "beware."

The trouble is that the warning word is apt to come too late. We allow our friends to be overcome in a fight with some evil habit before we sound an alarm. After a man is all on fire with an evil habit your word of warning will have no more effect than would an address to a house on fire asking it to stop burning, no more use than a steam tug going out to help a ship after it has sunk to the bottom of the ocean. What use in word of warning to that inebriate whose wife was dying from wounds inflicted by his own hand? As he held the hand of his dying wife he made this vow: "Mary I will never take another glass of strong drink until I take it from this hand which I now hold." In an awful way he kept the vow, for when the wife was in her coffin he filled a glass with brandy, put the glass into the dead hand, then took the glass out of her hand and drank the liquid. Too late does any warning come to such a one. But many a man row high up in usefulness and honor was stopped on the wrong road by a kindly hand put upon the shoulder and a word fitly spoken. Ah, yes, fitly spoken—that is, at the right time, with the right accentuation,

with the right emphasis. A dictatorial way, a condemnatory manner, a fault finding tone of voice, a manner which seems to say, "Look at me, and do as I do," will only make matters worse. From such a reproval the inebriate will go out to take a drink sooner than he would have taken it, and the dissolute man a worse plunge into sin. The word of warning must be charged and surcharged with sympathy. You will practically say to the man, "I suppose you got into your present habit through overwork, and you took stimulus to keep up and do the work you must do;" or, "I suppose it was through illness, and you took an intoxicant first as a medicine;" or, "You are a hall fellow well met, and you took the liquid in sociability;" or, "You were the representative of a commercial house that expected you to treat customers. I understand it all. If I had been in the same circumstances, I would probably be fast in the same thraldom." By some such alleviating introduction prepare the way for a "Beware!" that will halt your friend on the wrong road as suddenly as any platoon of soldiers was ever halted. Swing the red lantern across the track, and stop that train before it reaches the chasm!

Besides that, you had better be merciful in your word of warning, for the day may come when you may need some one to be lenient and excusatory to you. There may be somewhere ahead of you a temptation so mighty that unless you have sympathetic treatment you may go under. "Oh, no," says some one, "I am too old for that." How old are you? "Oh, you say, 'I have been so long in active business life that I am clear past the latitude of danger.'" There is a man in Sing Sing penitentiary who was considered the soul of honor until he was 50 years of age and then committed a dishonesty that started the entire commercial world. I was on a ship crossing the Atlantic, and all went well from the time we left Liverpool until within a few hours of New York, when, because of some defect of compass or some lack of fidelity on the part of those responsible, the Nantucket Lighthouse suddenly warned us that we were driving straight for the rocks, and the vessel turned in time to save the ship and the hundreds of passengers and crew. And many a man has got nearly through the voyage of life in safety and then gone into the breakers. So you had better not hold your chin too high, as though you were forever independent of all moral disaster. Better, in the way you pronounce your word of warning to those astray, indicate that you yourself have weaknesses that may yet fling you down unless God help you and that you realize there may be temptations ahead with which you will find it as hard to grapple as the temptations with which that man is grappling.

The chief baker in prison in Pharaoh's time saw in a dream something quite different from apples of gold in baskets of silver, for he said to Joseph, "I also was in a dream, and behold, I had three white baskets on my head, and in the uppermost basket there was all manner of baked meats for Pharaoh, and the birds did eat them out of the baskets of my head." Joseph interpreted the dream and said it meant that the chief baker should be beheaded and the birds would eat his flesh. So many a man has in his own bad habits omens of evil that peck at him and foretell doom and death. But, oh, the power of that word "Come" when aright uttered! We do well when we send the young into schools and colleges and theological seminaries, and by nine years of instruction and drill hope to prepare them to sound aright that sweet and enrapturing and heaven descended word "Come." The gospel we believe in is a gospel of "Come." That word speak all the churches. That word is now building thrones for conquerors and burnished coronets for kings and queens. That word is to sound so clearly and impressively and divinely, that the day is advancing when all nations will respond, "We come! We come!" And while the upper steps toward God and heaven will be thronged with redeemed souls ascending there will not be one solitary traveler on the road of sin and death.

In the Kremlin at Moscow, Russia, is what is called the "king of bells," but it is a ruined bell, and it has rung no sound for nearly 200 years. It is 67 feet in circumference, and in height it is more than ten times the height of the average man, and it took a score of men to swing its brazen tongue. It weighs 200 tons. On June 19, 1706, in a great fire, it fell and broke. On it are figures in relief representing czar and empress and Christ and Mary and the evangelists. But it requires now no great strength to ring the bell. With this weak hand, yesterday formed and to-morrow turned to dust, I lay hold that gospel bell in invitation to all to whom these words shall come, on whatever land or whatever sea, in high places or low. I ring out the word, "Come, come!" Come and have your sorrows soothed. Come and have your wounds healed. Come and have your blindness illumined. Come and have your fatigues rested. Come and have your soul saved. Do you not hear the very last proclamation from the heavens which the seer of Patmos was commissioned to make: "The Spirit and the bride say come, and let him that heareth say come, and let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will let him take the water of life freely." Come and sit down at the King's banquet. Was there ever such a brilliant feast or so many royal guests? Here are the chalices filled out from the breweries of earth, but with the "new wine of the kingdom." And there are the ripe, purple clusters of Eschol, and pass them around to all the banqueters—"apples of gold in baskets of silver."

## SUNDAY SCHOOL

INTERNATIONAL LESSON NO. III.  
JANUARY 20, 1901.

Greeks Seeking Jesus.—John 12: 20-33.

Commentary—Connecting Links On Tuesday morning Jesus and His disciples again returned to Jerusalem from Bethany. On the way Peter called attention to the fig tree which had been cursed on the previous morning (Mark xi, 20-24), and Jesus took occasion to give them a lesson in faith. The day was a busy one and was put in teaching in the temple.

20. Certain Greeks.—The original word "Hellenes" means persons of Greek nationality, born Gentiles of the Greek race. They may have come from Greece, or from some of the Greek cities nearer by, of which there were several in Decapolis. Came up to worship.—These Greeks were proselytes to the Jewish religion. That they acknowledged the true God is evident, but it is not certain that they had been circumcised.

21. Came therefore to Philip.—It is not known why they should come to Philip first unless it was because they had had some slight acquaintance with him. Philip and Andrew are Greek names and the only ones of Greek origin among the disciples. It is supposed that these Greeks came either from Syro-Phoenicia or Decapolis. Bethsaida of Galilee.—The Bethsaida situated near Capernaum, in Galilee, was Philip's native town. Desired Him.—Jesus was in the court of the women, where He had just beheld the poor widow cast two mites into the treasury. The Greeks were not allowed to enter this court, hence the necessity of sending word to Christ and asking him to come out into the court of the heathen. We would see Jesus.—Not merely to see His face, but we would speak with Him and be taught by Him. It should be the desire of every heart to see Christ.

22. Andrew and Philip.—How pleasing to God is this union, when the ministers of the Gospel agree and unite together to bring souls to Christ. But where self-love prevails, and the honor that comes from God is not sought, this union never exists. Elgoty often ruins every generous sentiment among the different nominations of the people of God.

23. Jesus answered them.—Our Lord spoke primarily to the Greeks, and secondarily to His disciples, (1) of the meaning of His impending death, (2) of the necessity of faithfulness to Him in it, (3) of the blessing attached thereto.—Ederheim. The hour.—The time should be glorified. The time has come when the old prophecies are to be fulfilled, the Messiah's kingdom is to be set up in the whole earth, and Christ is to take His place on the right hand of God.

24. Verily, verily.—These words were used to emphasize some great and important truth. He now proceeds to show how the glorification of the Son of man would be accomplished. A corn.—A grain. Into the ground and die.—Jesus uses a very familiar illustration. The seed must die in order to liberate the life-germ within it, and allow it to become fruitful. If the seed is not put into the ground it "abideth alone." Much fruit.—The result of Christ's death is a great spiritual harvest—a glorious harvest of humanity rescued from death and the grave unto eternal life. The germ of life eternal enters into the hearts of those united to Him by faith.

25. Loveth his life.—The word translated life is often translated soul, as in verse 27. The meaning is that he who makes the pleasures, honors and rewards of this life his chief concern, and sacrifices righteousness and integrity in order to obtain them, shall lose it. Shall lose in most cases even the earthly rewards that he hoped to gain, and shall lose his soul eternally. That hateth his life.—On the other hand, he who sacrifices, when necessary, all worldly goods for Christ's sake and the gospel's (Mark viii, 35), shall keep it—shall gain eternal life. "The loss is temporal, the gain is eternal"; the loss is of outward things, the gain is the soul itself, which is of infinitely greater value than all earthly good.

26. Serve me.—Christ is a master in a two-fold sense; He instructs men, and appoints them their work. He who wishes to serve Christ must become a disciple to be taught, and a servant to obey.—Clarke. Let him follow me.—Let him act out the above principle, as Christ had done, and was about to do. This is Christ's answer to the request of the Greeks. Where I am.—Where I shall shortly take up mine abode, even in the eternal kingdom of my Father.—Benson. There shall also my servant be.—In the same state of happiness and glory. Will my Father honor.—He will be honored with his Master; made a partaker of the joys and rewards of the one he served.

27. My soul troubled.—Christ had various forebodings of his passion before He fully entered into it; already his soul was beginning to be exceeding sorrowful. What shall I say.—What shall my prayer be to my Father? Save me from this hour.—This should be read as a question, according to the Revised Version, margin.

28. Glorify thy name.—By the Name of God is understood himself in all his attributes; his wisdom, truth, justice, mercy, holiness, which are all abundantly glorified by Christ's death. The prayer is, Father, glorify thyself, at whatever cost to me. A voice from heaven.—This was the third time the Father had spoken from heaven. See Matt. iii, 17; Luke ix, 35. I have.... and will glorify it.—The Father had glorified his name by giving him power to accomplish his mission thus far, and he would continue to glorify it by giving him power to come to the cross, and by bringing him forth from the grave.

29. Not because of me.—Not to strengthen or confirm me, for I had no doubts about my course. For your sakes.—Probably as a proof to the Greeks who had desired to see him, that he was the Messiah.

31. Now.—At this very time, is the judgment.—Or, the crisis. Now it shall be determined who shall rule the world.—The prince of this world—Satan. Be cast out.—Cast out of his position; dethroned.

32. If I be lifted up.—On the cross as explained in the next verse. Will draw.—After I have died and risen again. Christ draws, but we must yield to the influence of the Spirit, repenting of and forsaking our sins, and turning to him with all our hearts.

Teachings.—Christ is attractive and by his own loveliness leads men to himself. If we desire the life of Christ in the soul we must die the death to sin and self. The one who forsakes all for Christ, will receive all from Christ. When Jesus was troubled he went to His Father; when we are troubled we should go to the Father, through Christ. If we lift up Christ by magnifying him in our lives, he will, through us, draw men to himself.

PRACTICAL SURVEY.  
We do not know what it was that animated these Greeks to ask to see Jesus; perhaps it was curiosity, or possibly a mixture of curiosity and real spiritual yearning. We do know that the world's great need is to see Jesus, and that curiosity has often resulted in the salvation of the soul. He is willing to be sought, He is always accessible, He never hides himself from the truly needy.

His sufferings and death are the prelude to His glory and exaltation. His passion and His glory are inseparably interwoven. If He shrinks and fails to consummate His sacrifice, all is lost as far as we are concerned. The shadow of the cross strikes terror to His humanity, and for a moment He seems perplexed; but only for a moment. He sees His mission and, thank His dear name, without wavering, pursues it to its consummation. The true servants of God are willing to be present with Him in adversity and persecution, and share His sufferings as well as His glory.

All men shall be drawn unto him, for he has been lifted up in the sense he referred to, but we are not to suppose all men will yield to that drawing and come to him. His words cannot mean that all will be saved, for as one has observed, many are lost already and there will be many at the last day of whom he will say, "Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity." We cannot emphasize too strongly the great necessity of improving our opportunities.

Signs and wonders do not usually convince where ordinary means fail; "They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them." It is one of the delusions of the race that if something out of the ordinary could be had to convince the people, they would believe. "Could not believe!" It would seem in the case of these Jews that they had inherited, through ages of rebellion and unbelief, a moral impossibility; misusing divine revelation and grace so long, they had become incapable of using them. We cannot, however, avoid our personal responsibility before God, or shift the burden of it from our shoulders to his.

Tea vs. Alcohol in Russia.  
The New York Sun of a recent date says:—Tea was first imported into Russia in 1638. To-day each inhabitant consumes, on the average, nearly one pound annually. The total consumption is 106,000,000 pounds, and the total cost about \$88,000,000. Tea and sugar together cost Russia about \$265,000,000 per year. For brandy, beer and wine, the country expends annually about \$550,000,000, so that something like a quarter of the whole revenues of the State are annually expended on tea, brandy, wine and beer, with sugar. Exact statistics are not forthcoming, but it appears that the use of tea is increasing rapidly relative to the alcoholic beverages—a consummation devoutly to be wished. It is a remarkable fact that this change has occurred since the introduction of the machine-made teas of Ceylon and India.

Sally Grew Humbler.  
In a farmhouse, where the mistress looked well after the general conduct of her servants, a new girl was engaged. Shortly after her arrival Mrs. M.—asked her if she said her prayers. "Oh! yes," Sally replied. "Every night." Hearing a murmuring in her room after she had retired, Mrs. M.—paused to listen. This was what she heard: "A husband, good Lord, and soon!" A husband, good Lord, and soon!" Some time afterwards the mistress again heard the whispered prayer—"A husband, good Lord, and soon! A husband, good Lord, and soon!" Time passed on, and the petition took another form. In a heart-breaking tone Sally cried—"A husband, good Lord, and soon!" A tallor, good Lord, and soon!"—Scottish American.

A dose of Miller's Worm Powders occasionally will keep the children healthy.

Earthquakes in Greece.  
It is with some surprise that one reads in a recent report of the director of the National Observatory at Athens that, taking area into account, earthquakes are about twice as frequent in Greece as they are in Japan. The latter country has usually been looked upon as par excellence the land of earthquakes. It would appear that its earthquakes are upon the whole, more severe than those in Greece, although the great architectural monuments of Greece have suffered much from seismic disturbances.

While variety is the spice of life, life need not be all spice.