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Living By the Well

An address, given on January 2, 1899

"And it came to pass after the death of Abraham, that God blessed his son Isaac: and Isaac dwelt by the well Lahai-roi".

Genesis 25:11

Isaac, on the one hand, is indeed the type of the Son of God Himself, but on the other hand, according to the Apostle Paul's testimony in Galatians, he is the representative of the people of God now; those who are called by grace to the adoption of sons, and who are the children, not of the bondwoman, as Ishmael was, but the children of the free woman. See Galatians 4:22-31. What is striking here is that the child of the free woman, Isaac, dwells by the well. This well Lahai-roi, at which he dwells (at least, at this time it was his permanent abode) is the well where Hagar met the angel of the Lord, where the angel of the Lord found her and ministered to her in her distress.

A very striking picture that is. Let us recall it for a moment. The spring of water, well of water, "springing well," is the type to us of the Spirit of God, but of the Spirit of God as ministering the Word of God. Those two things, I would like to emphasize, go continually together in Scripture--the Spirit of God and the Word of God. He who does not honor the Word of God does not honor the Spirit of God. He who does not honor the Spirit of God does not honor the Word of God. God has joined the two, you remember, in the Gospel of John, in that beautiful fourth chapter we know so well, and again in the seventh chapter. In the third chapter, on the other hand, you have the living water given to us in its component parts, as I may say. In the third chapter the Lord is speaking to Nicodemus of new birth, and He speaks of water and the Spirit. You remember that He says, explaining what He had said before about the necessity of man being born again: "Except a

man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God" (John 3:5).

That type of water is explained for us very distinctly in the fifth chapter of Ephesians, where it is said that "Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word" (vv. 25,26). Thus we have the interpretation in the most definite way. The washing of water is by the Word. That is the cleansing which Christ effects in His Church. Thus we can have the most perfect confidence as to the interpretation of the type there. And a most beautiful illustration it is, "water," the figure of that which is for refreshment and sustenance on the one hand, and for cleansing on the other. That is what the Word of God implies for us, but that Word, we are distinctly told is that by which we are begotten again. The Apostle Peter tells us that we are "born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth forever" (1 Peter 1:23). Thus, if we are born of water and of the Spirit, the water interpreted for us also in Ephesians must of necessity stand for this Word of God. Then, as I have said, in the fourth chapter of John, when the Lord speaks to the woman by the well, He speaks of living water; that is the water and the Spirit again, but now the two are one. The Spirit is the life, so to speak, of the water, that which makes it living (that which makes the Word living). The two are bound together in one indissoluble figure; the Spirit and the water are here the *living water*, water with the life.

Let us remember, beloved, when we think of it, how God has joined these two together. Take the Word of God alone; what is it for our need? Nothing. If the Spirit of God is not in it, if the Spirit of God does not use it, it is absolutely nothing; it has no power. On the other hand, where do you find the Spirit without the water, without the Word? Nowhere! The Word is the direct instrument of the Spirit. The Word is that which the Spirit of God has given us through His instruments, and it is that by which He works. *The Spirit without the Word is mere fanaticism*; that is, there is no such thing, really. *The Word without the Spirit is mere rationalism*; it is as vain and ineffectual as it can possibly be. The living water is God's thought for us--the living water, such as we find in the well here.

Notice how beautiful this name Lahai-roi is, which means "the well of Him that liveth and seeth me." That was Hagar's term, as she realized the wonderful care of the Lord for her, how He had met her in her need when she was fleeing from her mistress, Sarah, to bring her back. He ministers to her by the springing well which He discovers for her. But Isaac dwells there. Isaac, the child of the free woman, Isaac, our representative--the one who is the true child of God according to the type, the one who has really the spirit of adoption, the one who has the full title,

as it were, to the inheritance. He is the one who gets the well, the one who controls it.

Beloved, I want to ask us, before we go any further, how much are we dwelling by this well, Lahai-roi? If we were to interpret it as the Old Testament, for instance, I fear we should find sad failure. We don't dwell much in the Old Testament, do we? It is our glory, you say, that we dwell in the New Testament. Yes, but the well is one, and we cannot separate it from the way in which God has given it, in such a marked way, for us. God expects us to dwell by that Old Testament which is now illuminated for us. These wonderful Scriptures are those that, illuminated by the New Testament (brought into the full, blessed reality of what they are), Isaac dwells by, and God has given them to us.

We are talking out of these Scriptures tonight, and, beloved, I ask again, how much do we really have them? I want to speak of the value of the Word of God, of that which I believe God is pressing upon us at this time. I feel that we ought, therefore, to ask ourselves what is the value that we attach to the well of God's Word? If I may speak freely, I find that still, in spite of all that has been taught, the Old Testament has very much of a seal upon it. People don't care, as a rule, to take it up much. They are not familiar with it so as to be able to handle its precious types. They are not up to it. They don't dwell by it. They don't realize the power of it. It is not for them "the well of Him that liveth and seeth." It has not for them the divine meaning which it certainly ought to have.

Beloved, I think it is a very striking thing that at the present time these are especially the parts of the Word, of which Satan is saying, "I will take them away." What is it that the so-called higher criticism has laid its deadly hand upon today? Moses and the prophets. Treating the New Testament respectfully for a while (and only for a while), this awful rationalism which has invaded the heart of Christendom, and which speaks to us now, not only by learned professors, but by the clergy and others throughout the land--is simply taking what men think so little of, and saying, "You don't value that much do you? You won't miss it if it is gone, will you?" I see devilish subtlety in such rationale. What does the Lord Himself say? Ah, He says: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead" (Luke 16:31). That is the power of Moses and the prophets. And then, again Jesus said, "If ye believe not [Moses'] writings, how shall ye believe My words?" (John 5:47). Thus Satan knows what he is doing. Let him remove the foundation in these books of Moses, and he is really removing the very Word, or part of the Word, which we do prize; he is removing the New Testament itself.

Alas, don't you think it would do us good, if we as Christians dwelt more by Lahai-roi? if we knew a little better what our God has given us? and thus knew better the blessing in it? Hagar called it "the well of Him that liveth and seeth"! That is what it is. It is the "well of Him that liveth and seeth" us, the well of God, the living water.

I believe when you turn to Revelation 3:7-13, the point of the Lord's words to Philadelphia is a commendation: "Thou hast kept My Word." If the Lord says to any, "Thou hast kept My Word"--if He could say that to any--what would it first imply? Most evidently it would imply that such must be a people who search the Word of God, who want to know it. Could you imagine, for instance, a people "keeping" a word which they did not search? which they read at their leisure to be sure, but did not like anything very deep about it, and were satisfied with very little? Could you expect that the Lord could commend people of that character by saying, "You have kept My word?" I don't think so.

You say, "We all have different capacities." Well, I agree with that in some measure, but I don't believe that the measure of a person's natural capacity is the measure for the children of God. Are we to leave out the Spirit of God? Did you ever notice, when the Word of God becomes a living thing to a man, how he grows? Have you ever seen the light come into his eyes, and the hearing into his ears, the power of observation, the power of realizing things, how he wakes up as if he were a new being? Not merely his mind, but the conscience, and all the man in full reality of manhood is awakened.

God has written that Book, hasn't He? For whom has He written it? Some wise and clever people who may naturally expect to know it by their own intelligence? God's people are, for the most part, the poor. The Apostle Paul said: "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty" (1 Corinthians 1:26,27). Then did God write His Word for these? Yes, I suppose so. Did He write His Word for you, beloved Christians? Individualize it, and ask yourself, "Did He write all this for me?" Would He then keep you from understanding it by the narrow capacity you have? Oh, let me tell you that Christ enlarges every heart He dwells in, and the heart which is large enough to hold Christ will of necessity grow larger and larger. You can only be limited by your unbelief, and not in any other way. I don't know any other way of limiting the capacity of a man taught by the Spirit of God, except by his unbelief. But alas, we can do that.

Beloved, do you value the Word of God? Do you value it so much that you absolutely must search it diligently, that it will be to you what it was to some of the saints of old?

Oh, think of it! Not only "sweeter than honey and the honeycomb" but a thing that can make one wiser than one's teachers, of more value than your necessary food, in fact, "the food of the mighty," as God calls the manna with which He fed the people. This is manna, is it not? The Bread from heaven--Christ of course; but is not this all Christ? What other theme has God to write about than Christ? People often talk of the deep things, and they don't want the deep things. Where will you go where Christ is not in the Word of God? Do you mean that you don't want to know the deep things of Christ?

Ah, beloved, how the devil cheats us! In how many ways, alas, he can deceive the children of God! How zealous he is in doing his work! How thoroughly he is at issue with God in all this, and, you can be sure, wherever God is saying to a people or desiring to say to a people: "Thou hast kept My Word," there you will find the devil has one hundred good arguments why you should not keep it. Do you notice what a day of reading it is, and do you notice the kind of things that occupy so many today--all the latest trash? The newspaper is thrust directly under your nose wherever you go. [Editor's Note: Today in the twenty-first century, the devil has many more things to distract the believer from reading the Word of God than ever before] Do you see nothing in all that stir? Why, the devil will stir the whole world to accomplish his purposes, and his purpose is to crowd out what he fears and hates--the Word of God.

Keep it! Of course, not merely learn it, not as you would learn as I have often said, the geography of a country into which you never go. It is the Book of a people who are on the way to their land, of pilgrims who are making progress. It is all a pilgrim's progress, a Book which will lead you on to the land, give you more and more possession of it now, and lead you on to the full and final enjoyment of it.

Will it make no difference in eternity itself? Will you have then suddenly all the knowledge of God's Word which you have lost by your carelessness on earth? If that be the case, what a mistake God made in giving us all of that Book! Why then did He give us all of this great Book? People often say He did that because He wanted to save people. But did He have to write all of that Book just because He wanted to save souls? Do you actually mean to say that all of this Book is necessary to save our souls? I am afraid there will not be many souls saved if a person has to read and enter into all of the Word of God for salvation. Why, a little child can be saved just by a few blessed words whispered into the Saviour's

ear and believed by the heart. Yes, it will make a vast difference in eternity, not only that one is saved, but that he reads and studies and grows in the Word now so that he will have the spiritual capacity to enter into and enjoy the surpassing riches of the grace and truth of Christ in the eternal ages yet to come.

But, you say, it is a bigger world than it used to be, there are a great many things in it that we need to know, and we must not be less informed than others. Very well then; go

on, and at the end of your life sit down and count your losses. Will you be more fit for heaven by all your earthly knowledge?

Oh, beloved, I would like to arouse you--I would like to arouse all Christians as to this in the present day. It is the broadest, deepest question you must face. It is not merely a point about this doctrine or that doctrine, but about the whole Word of God.

What are you going to do, Christians? I believe God is saying to us today (it is the very thing He is saying in that letter to Philadelphia), "I have opened to you the Word of God; I want to know if you value it." Isn't it a fact that in these latter days God has given us truth without which we never could have unlocked the Old Testament really? Isn't it a fact that until you know the blessed New Testament truths of being in Christ, a new creation, dead with Christ, seated in Christ in the heavenly places--that until you know such things as these you do not have the key to the Scriptures? Do you know those things? The majority of Christians do not know them today. When you know these truths, then you have the key to the whole Word of God.

Do you know that you have the Spirit of God? Many Christians don't even know what it is to have the Spirit of God in them. They talk about the baptism of the Spirit, but know not the living Person who has come to abide in them and make their body His temple. Do you have the knowledge of that? Do you really have the knowledge of the Holy Spirit of God, the Revealer of all these things, as One who has come to abide in you, to be with you forever? Do you know that? Do you believe that? "He will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13), the Lord says. That is wonderful, isn't it? "He will guide you into ALL truth." Do you believe that? To whom is He speaking? To just a few people who are teachers or preachers or religious leaders, who have to know more than the rest? Is the Spirit of God confined to the teachers and preachers? We will have nothing but clericalism if that be the case! Are you going to give up your title to the Spirit of God, or, perhaps to the effects of the Spirit of God dwelling within you? Or, are you going to have all that that implies?

Beloved, you have in the Spirit the power which will open Scripture to you from cover to cover. But there is always a test that goes with every privilege. God is saying, "I am going to see now how you value it." Do you value an open Word? Do you value a Bible really open? Oh, if you do, believe that God has given it into your hand, and say, "Let this Book be mine, and the whole world may go." I tell you, you will find, through God's infinite grace, not only that you will be superior to the power of evil that is rapidly coming in, but that you are, through God's mercy, really on a road which leads to heaven and gives you more of heaven every step of the way. That is what it is. God's Word is something that leads on; it is the Word of a living Leader.

And now, how is this Book written? Let me turn to a passage that ought to be familiar to many of us. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect" (2 Timothy 3:16,17). That word for "perfect" there is a striking word. It means "fitted all together," in complete harmony, every part in proper and regular development; so that the man is not a deformed creature, with his head bigger than his body, or one with some parts crippled and deformed, and other parts developed at their expense, but spiritually a full, developed man.

"That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." How do you get that? From the Scriptures, you say; yes, that is true in a way; through the Scriptures, supposing that you are a man of God. That is in some sense a very individual kind of title; a title, which, as you take up the history of the Scriptures, you find very few had. For instance, in the Old Testament you find as to Elijah that he was distinctly a man of God. So with Elisha, Moses and David. Men of God we must be. What does that mean? Scripture will not furnish any but men of God to all good works.

Men of God are people who know how to stand for Him, people who have His ear, people who have intelligence in His ways, people who, as being near Him, can stand for Him, speak for Him, and walk with Him. That is what all Scripture is written for--for these men of God. If you say, "Then few have it," I say, you can be one of them if that is your heart's desire.

Look at it again. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine"; that is the first thing. "All Scripture is profitable for doctrine," "Adam, Seth, Enos," and so on. Did you ever try to read the first book of Chronicles? How strange--"profitable for doctrine"! To my shame I must say I have not gotten the understanding of the doctrine of this passage yet, but I know it is there, though

the higher critic does not want you to think of it much today. He says: "Why, nonsense, man; how can that be profitable for doctrine? Suppose we snipped that piece out of the Scriptures; would you ever have missed it, and couldn't you have gotten along without it--all those names--which have never practically been in our Bibles at all?" We may not have learned it yet, and we may not know what the "doctrine" is yet, but yet it is there, and is profitable for doctrine. You have to look deeper than the surface, don't you? Yes, I believe so; but, beloved, I tell you it will pay. If you want to be men of sinews, men of muscle, athletes spiritually, if you want to be the people who can meet the world in arms, who can meet the devil in all his ranks, learned men and all, you must believe that all Scripture is profitable for doctrine, and live as though you believe it.

But, then, it is not only profitable for "doctrine." Next is "for conviction"; that is what the word "reproof" should be. Ah, that is the thing. The very first thing that it has to do is to bring conviction to me, conviction as to this or that. Conviction puts the stamp of nothingness upon something that I love, or the stamp of corruption upon something that I thought was pure, which I must cast away as a defiling thing. Ah, beloved, we don't quite like that kind of thing, do we? But that is the next thing. Scripture is all for practical application. If you want to learn from it, you must learn to apply it first of all to yourself.

Then, notice, comes "correction." What a lot of mending God has got to do, mending manners which are amiss, and with which He cannot agree. How much it costs, the world says! Yes, it costs a good deal of the world's paper money, a good deal of this kind of rag money, which many value so much, but it gives in return a good lot of real gold and silver. It will snip, and snip, and snip, and snip a lot of the finery off which people nowadays think so valuable, until you are very poor, and left in very bad shape in the eyes of the world. But notice how it all ends: "Profitable for doctrine, for conviction, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." Do you value that? Do you want that?

But, you ask, do you have to learn about types and all these pictures of the Old Testament? Will it help you to dwell by that well of Lahai-roi and look into that well and see the face of God meeting you there? Are you really going into all that about the prophets and all? Ah, beloved, I don't know whether you are, but I know that it is worth all that the world counts good. It is worth the sacrifice of all else to get what God has for you in this magnificent Word of His. I tell you, it is going to be the burning question of the day, for the devil says, "I am looking for a people who don't want that, and I am going to take it from them." You can't hold it unless you believe it. The Word is open to us. I don't expect to live long enough

to learn all that is there in this wonderful Book; but, I tell you, how we will grow, and what men we will be, if we earnestly set to work upon it!

If we are going to talk about Philadelphia, this has much to do with the Philadelphian character. It connects with all that movement in which God has been moving for a long time past, the movement to discover and bring together again, as far as possible, His Church out of all mixtures and associations and unequal yokes--things which disfigure and dishonor God on every side. You would expect, when we come to read the Lord's word to Philadelphia, a great deal being said about gathering the children of God together. But no; what He has to say to us is, "Thou hast kept My Word"; not a little bit of it--not even a good deal of it; but "My Word"--whatever can authenticate itself to the soul as that.

There are many Christians who do not dare to look into the Word of God very closely, lest it should show them more than they are prepared to follow. They may read the Bible regularly. They may be entirely orthodox, too, and believe that it is all the Word of God, from Genesis to Revelation. They would not say God did not write Chronicles or the "fable" of Jonah and the fish; no, they would say He wrote it all. But that does not give them any absorbing desire to possess themselves of it. They are afraid it will make too many demands upon them; too definite a creed will narrow them, and cut them off from much that they desire.

On the other hand, there are many more for whom the Word of God is simply crowded out. They believe that the Bible is very plain, and all you need to know about it is very easily acquired. There are a great many other things that require your time; the world has grown very big, and there are many things you must know, or you will fall sadly behind. They are not preachers, but those who are can be trusted to keep them informed of what is needful to be known from the Scriptures. Any way, they will not take the time needed for these things, and do not see the good of so much Scripture study. Could the Lord say to any of these two classes, "Thou hast kept My Word"? I think not.

He could not say that to those who, outside of what would keep them out of hell, had no real particular interest in it. To keep His Word means a great deal: it means all that He has given, from Genesis to Revelation. Will He be content to have you interpret that instead as all that you care to find there?

But now see what comes next: "And hast not denied My Name" (Revelation 3:8). See how immediately, as connected with His Word, Christ's Name comes in. This is, one may say, the very revelation itself. You have to realize the way in which, as you go on with Scripture, the Name of Christ, the fullness that is in Him, enlarges

for you more and more. Isn't it Christ of whom God is writing everywhere in Scripture? Why, yes it is.

Then, how much of Christ will you be content to do without?

Now we have gotten to the central point of gathering. As I have said, you do not find, in the Lord's address to Philadelphia, anything said of the actual gathering of the people of God together. Proselytizing is certainly not encouraged. No, it is the Name, the Name, that is to do all that can be done in this way. We are to go on with the Word, live in it, grow in it, let Christ thus grow in us, and get to be the people that God would have us to be--men of God. Let us have Christ in His glory the Companion of our way, and then this glorious Christ will gather His own together. This is the only possible way for these things to come to pass; it is the only way of being really Philadelphian. The only communion that is worth having is a communion with Christ and in His things.

Laodicea has its door shut upon Christ. Philadelphia gives us the last word for those fully faithful. This is the one thing that will content Him, the thing that is on His heart. But here rings out the word, "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown" (Revelation 3:11). Ah, beloved, sorrowful as it is, one must not wonder if we find in the smallest company of faithful believers, one and another dropping off and gone. The stream runs strong against all that is of God. Yet the mere force of it can carry away none, except as one is traitor to himself, and the hand of faith loosens its hold of Christ. To retain hold is not only to stand fast; it is to make sure and steady progress. Christ is a living Leader, and the path with Him leads ever on.

There is no room, no time for discouragement. God has amply provided for us for the little time we shall be left here. Already by faith we may enter into the things unseen by eye, unknown except as the Spirit of God reveals them to us. Into this the Word of God is the means of access, and of forming in us the mind of Christ.

More and more, assuredly, the Word of God is opening to those who desire such insight. They are few perhaps who do, and these make no great show in the world, it is certain. People may ask, "After all, how much is accomplished by holding fast to the truth of God's Word?" To this I respond, eternity will reveal more than time. To some it may seem that something is accomplished that Christ should have at least a few--nonetheless dear to Him in spite of the smallness of their number--of whom He can say, with all His heart breaking out while saying it, "They have kept My Word, and not denied My Name."

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