

# Missing The Mark

James Buckingham

Mark 8:34-37

SEVERAL years ago I attended one of the Army-Navy football classics in Philadelphia. It was a cold, brisk day—a perfect day for football. There were more than 101,000 people present and we had the choicest of seats.

It was one of the most thrilling games I've ever watched. From the opening kickoff until the final gun sounded there was always some doubt about who would win. Army was a heavy favorite, but in games like these you always throw away the record book anyway. But every known thrill in football was packed into this game. There was a touchdown on a kickoff return, quick-kicks that rolled dead on the one yard line, goal line stands, long passes, spectacular running plays, downfield blocking that allowed runners to score, and then a touchdown by Navy in the last 30 seconds of play and kicking the extra point with only 10 seconds to go to tie the score at 20-20, where it remained as the final gun sounded. It was, without doubt, one of the most exciting games of the century.

All this, but the fellow sitting in front of me felt that this excitement was too common place and had therefore brought his own excitement along with him—in a bottle. By the end of the first half he was drunk. By the end of the third quarter he was asleep. We left him after the game was over, wedged be-

tween the bench and the stadium floor in a drunken stupor.

All this, and he had to settle for that. But isn't this symptomatic of a problem that bothers many people. All around us we have the wonderful benefit of the very finest things in life, and yet we try to satisfy our lives on something inferior.

The other day my wife fixed an excellent dinner. During the middle of the meal I looked up and there was one of our little girls sitting there with her plate piled high with delicious food—eating her paper napkin.

I said, "Robin, what on earth are you doing with that paper napkin in your mouth?" And she gave me a perfectly logical answer for a five year old when she said, "But, Daddy, it tastes good. I like paper napkins."

I started into a long speech about the fact that paper napkins have absolutely no nutritional value, that they would clog up her digestive system, but when I noticed her still sitting there staring at me chewing on that napkin I did what any other father would do and I shouted, "Take that paper napkin out of your mouth and eat your beans."

But you know, I know a lot of people who are like that spiritually. Here they are, sitting at God's table which is piled high with wonderful blessings, and they content themselves with eating that which has no value whatsoever.

The long procession of people that come into my study, or that I visit in their homes, or in the hospitals, or in places of business—all tell me the same story. “What a fool I was. I grew dissatisfied with what I had and turned away.” They go on to say, “How I wish I could warn others, especially young people, of my mistakes and tell them to stay with what they know is best, not to try to satisfy their hunger on something that is poison.”

One of the classical definitions of “sin” as given in the Bible is to “Miss the mark.” And all this is just that.—Missing the mark. What is it that causes us to miss the mark? Why do we take our eyes off the goal? Why do we turn aside from something we know to be best to something that can kill us or make us miserable?

#### WE MISS THE MARK WHEN WE GROW DISSATISFIED WITH OURSELVES.

The great psychologist, William James, quotes a woman as saying: “The happiest day in my life was the day that I admitted the fact that I was not physically beautiful and stopped worrying about it.”

It used to give me an inferiority feeling to attend family reunions. All my brothers are blessed with a bountiful head of hair. All of them have more hair on their heads than they know what to do with. And I always felt that they were looking at me and saying, “Well, little brother, what’s become of all your hair?”

It used to worry me until I talked with a sensible physician who told me this: “Jamie, all your life you’ve had a

receding forehead. Your father is bald and chances are pretty good that when you reach his age you’ll be bald too. Besides, there’s pretty good medical evidence that worrying will cause your hair to come out even faster.” I accepted his advice and even though my hair is still dropping out—hair at a time—now I’m content to let it drop. I don’t worry about it any more anyway. You see, it’s when we become dissatisfied with ourselves, with the way God made us, that we miss the mark in life. Perhaps you’ve been born with a deformity, perhaps there’s something about you that makes you different from others. So what? It’s only when you become dissatisfied with yourself the way you are and develop a bitter attitude about it that the thing can get you down. Just accept yourself as you are and be happy about it.

In that wonderful play, “Green Pastures,” God came down and talked to Noah. He told Noah that he had a big job for him and that he was depending upon him to get it done. He then asked Noah this question, “Noah, do you think you can do it?” And Noah replied with a classic answer, “Well, Lawd, I ain’t much, but I’s all I got.” When one accepts this fact in life, then life takes on new meaning and power.

I see people every day who have abilities that I don’t have. They are doing things that I can’t do. They excel in areas where I cannot excel. But it would be silly for me to be envious of them. For when I realize that God made me as I am for a special purpose, then why should I resent the fact that God also made others as they are for different purposes.



Charles Allen tells the story of Evelyn Harrala who was born without either hands or feet. She decided one day, however, that nothing could be done about her handicaps, so she would do all she could in spite of them. She graduated from college with honors, she became an accomplished organist, and eventually a valuable member of the staff of a large church.

How many of us, though, are missing the mark. We become dissatisfied with ourselves; and when this happens, we often turn away from God, turn away from self-confidence, and seek satisfaction elsewhere. We look for it in a bottle. We look for it in immorality. We look for it in worldly pleasures. And we miss the mark entirely.

### WE MISS THE MARK WHEN WE GROW DISSATISFIED WITH OUR POSSESSIONS

How many of you have had direct experience with this? How many of you have been caught in this very trap?

I'm reminded of a young man in another state who had a beautiful wife and a wonderful little boy. But he grew tired of her companionship, he grew thoughtless of his little child, and he turned to another woman. He was not satisfied with his fine home. He was not satisfied with the love his wife offered him. He felt he needed a change—some "variety." But what havoc he caused by his foolish action. Over and over those words of Jesus have come to him since that time: "For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange

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for his soul?" He had turned to something other than what God had planned for him, and even tonight he is reaping the wages of his sin.

Have you ever tried to count your blessings. You could start tomorrow morning at the break of day and count till midnight and still not be able to name them all. Yet, in the midst of all these blessings, you can have just one big setback, get crosswise with just one person, make just one mistake—and immediately you take your eyes off the mark and become dissatisfied with all you have. How silly! How stupid! That we should let just one unfortunate circumstance spoil all of life for us. We miss the mark when we become dissatisfied with our possessions.

WE MISS THE MARK WHEN WE

## GROW DISSATISFIED WITH OUR FAITH.

I know countless people who were raised in the church, trained by their parents to attend all of the services, were faithful in Sunday School and Training Union, but as they grew up they decided to look around. They felt that their religious life was not "satisfying enough." They wanted more than what their church had to offer. And so they wandered away from the training of their childhood and looked elsewhere for satisfaction. And like the little girl eating her napkin—it didn't taste good, but they said, "Perhaps we can train ourselves to like it." And today—they are dying from spiritual undernourishment.

Or perhaps they are like a member of this church. Several years ago, after a family squabble, he felt that he needed his church. He began to come with some regularity. He even began to contribute a little bit of his money. But then, after a few months he slacked off and said he wasn't getting as much out of his church as he had hoped he would. That the church wasn't meeting his needs. And tonight, he is home with his family, instead of in God's House, and no doubt, he is fighting with his wife—right back where he started from.

The person who isn't getting anything out of his church is the one who isn't putting much into it. And instead of trying to satisfy his spiritual appetite, wants to satisfy his carnal appetite. The church is not intended to take the place of worldly entertainment, nor was it established to substitute for the theater or the dance hall. The church has a far more important func-

tion—to redeem the souls of men. And if the church is failing to satisfy your hunger, then you had better re-examine what you are hungry for. Perhaps it isn't your church that needs to be changed as much as it is your appetite.

Perhaps you are hungry for the wrong things! Too many are sitting at tables full of God's blessings, but have turned aside to eat paper napkins.

Back in the 18th century two young men went through the Royal Naval Academy in Great Britain together. They both graduated near the top of their class and the King gave both of them direct appointments into the British Navy. One of the young men accepted his commission, the other turned it down. The man who turned it down took a job with his father working on a shrimp boat up and down the Thames River—thinking that there was more money here than in the Navy. The other became one of the most famous sea captains on the pages of world history. He won fame in defeating Napoleon's Navy in the French Revolution and later by commanding the fleet at the battle of Trafalgar. His name was Horatio Nelson.

It was years later, after he had returned from a trip around the world, that Lord Nelson again came in contact with his old classmate. And standing on a dirty, smelly dock that extended out into the dark, oily Thames River where his classmate now fished for shrimp, Nelson was agast. With tears in his eyes he waved his hand across the broad expanse of the blue Atlantic Ocean and cried—"All this, and you settled for this."

What are you settling for this eve-



ning? Don't be satisfied with munching on paper napkins—or getting your thrills out of a bottle—or stooping to the low and the dirty when the pure and the clean is available. Don't be satisfied with worldly pleasures when the abundant life of God lies untouched at your feet. There is more, don't settle for less.

There is a beer advertisement that jangles along saying: "Know the real

joy of good living—move up to quality. . . ." Tonight let me urge you to "know the real joy of good living." Let me urge you to "move up to quality." But don't be deceived—its not found in a bottle—it's found in a Person—Jesus Christ. Everything else is counterfeit—only Christ is real. So step out on faith and perhaps for the first time—"move up to quality," accept Christ, anything else is missing the mark.