

A.B. Simpson:

This passage gives us an inventory of God's favorite instruments—of the things that God likes best to use, and the people that God especially chooses; and some of you may be surprised to find yourselves not included in this inventory; some of you may feel that it would be a considerable humiliation to come within it. You have got your choice of five places: you can either be among the foolish things, or among the weak things, or among the base things, or among the despised things, or among the things that are not at all, and in one or the other of these classes you will have to muster if you are going to be one of God's favorite instruments and one of the things which God hath chosen to amount to anything and to bring to naught the things that are strong and wrong.

I. The foolish things. The Corinthians were terribly chagrined at the humiliation of having to give up their culture. It was a sort of modern Boston or Edinburgh and was very proud of its culture. And so when Apollos came among them and began to preach the philosophy of the Alexandrian school of which he was master, they were delighted with him, and turned away from the crude and barren style of old Paul and thought they had found something worthy to be compared with their wisdom. But Paul told them that God holds all this culture in great derision; that he thinks very little of it, indeed, that it is foolishness with Him, and that if any man will be wise, he must become a fool that he may be wise; that is, he must abandon his own natural and self-confident wisdom; he must be willing to esteem as of very little value the product of his own intellect and his education, and like a little child begin at the alphabet at the feet of Jesus, for God hath made foolish the wisdom of the wise and taketh the wise in their own craftiness.

There is a great deal of danger in our modern American life of this same thing. There is an affectation of culture, and perhaps a real culture, which is beginning to become a kind of God to the higher classes of American society. You noticed probably with alarm the other day the sums that were spent on a few special works of art in this city—hundreds of thousands of dollars at a single sale, enough to sustain the Gospel for half a century in the great mission fields. People ought to pause a little and remember, that natural culture has often been associated with the world's darkest ages. The man that built the first city, made the first musical instrument, and the first works of human industry and art was Cain, and since that day the world, when it goes away from God, tries to make the earth a paradise. The next great land of culture was Egypt, but God took His people right out of Egypt and He didn't preserve among them one single trace of Egyptian science, Egyptian art, Egyptian culture. Nay, He would not let them touch a work of art, lest it should be made subservient to idolatry. The next great period of culture was perhaps in Babylon, the cradle, I dare say, of Grecian culture; but what did that come to? "Is not this great Babylon that I built by the might of my hand for the honor of my majesty?" In that same hour there came a voice from Heaven: "The kingdom is departed from thee and thou shalt have thy dwelling with the beasts of the earth;" and Nebuchadnezzar went out under the strongest form of madness until he learned that every man's pride must be laid low at the feet of God. The next stage of culture we find in Greece, and perhaps the highest stage that has ever been attained in the history of man. And what was Grecian culture and art when Paul looked upon its most splendid monuments in Athens? You don't find a bit of enthusiasm such as modern travelers display, but his spirit was stirred within him when he saw the city given to idolatry; every particle of it was a minister of idolatry; every particle of it was the handmaid of sin, and it did not save Greece from the deepest moral degradation. The next and the most brilliant period of art and culture the world has ever seen was the modern Italian age when Raphael and Michael Angelo gave the world their triumphs of genius and you will remember that was the time when Caesar Borgia sat in the Papal chair, a monster of infamous iniquity, and when the Church was sunk in utter corruption; yet its temples were adorned with the most splendid paintings.

Now, I don't say that culture is necessarily wrong; I do not say that intellect and education may not go hand in hand with Christianity; I do not deny that the Reformation brought a revival of true literature; but I do say that to pursue culture for its own sake estranges one from God. To follow the sole guidance of the human mind and to depend upon it instead of God's holy Word and God's higher will as the basis of character and life is always fatal, both to morality and to religion. And I believe that today we are just hastening to that point when Daniel's vision will come true: "Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased but the wicked shall do wickedly," and then the Lord shall come. This is to be the last picture of the days before Christ's return; it is a picture of human smartness such as has never been known before, and human infamy, such as has never been dreamed of before.

Well, Paul therefore tells these Greeks that their wisdom, knowledge, skill, intelligence and philosophy will not make men wise; that "esteeming themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into that of corruptible man, and worshipped the creature more than the Creator;" and that

God is not going to save the world by brilliant intellects, or magnificent talent, but by the foolishness of preaching and the simplicity of the cross and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And if any man is going to be much used by God he must not depend upon his brain, he must not depend upon his social power, he must not depend upon his wealth, he must not depend upon his influence, but he must put all these aside and go forth armed with the simple power of Jesus Christ's own Word and Spirit, for God hath chosen the foolish things. That does not mean the silly, absurd things, but the things that have not the strength of human wisdom. God is not going to save the world today by the men of genius, God is not going to save the world today by the men of the largest talents, but He is going to take average minds, and very humble minds sometimes, and very crude and very illiterate minds sometimes, and enlighten them by His Holy Spirit, and give them His holy Word and glorify His own name by the very simplicity of the instruments, which He employs.

Now, we see this all through God's Word. How absurd it must have seemed to the people of Jericho, when an army of six hundred thousand men marched around their city, armed with rams horns, and amid the blare of these instruments issued a challenge for Jericho to surrender. It was a foolish instrument, but God used that foolishness to confound all their wisdom, and before a week ended, the echo of their shout was answered by the roar and crash of falling walls and the shrieks of a city doomed to destruction. It seemed a very foolish thing when Jesus Christ told His disciples to take a few loaves and fishes and feed a crowd of five thousand men and perhaps ten thousand women and children. It was foolishness in the sight of man. It was an inadequate supply for such an enormous number, and some old writers represent Peter and John in starting out as giving very small crumbs to the people until after a little while they saw that their loaf was growing bigger and found that the more they gave the more they had, until there was enough to spare. It was foolish in man's judgment, but God proved that the foolishness of God is wiser than man. It seemed absurd, when a few humble fishermen were sent to confront the pride and wisdom of the Jewish synagogue, but these humble fishermen and these plain men were not only able to withstand all the combined wisdom that defied them, but we are told that the highest teachers of their synagogues were not able to resist the wisdom or the spirit with which they spake; and the simple crude Gospel of Christ and Him crucified had proved mightier than all the powers of Greece and Rome, and before the first century had closed, had brought the wisdom of the world to the foot of the cross. And so in these last days God has raised up from time to time this simple class of instruments—men who have been despised perhaps for their lack of culture and yet since the days of the apostles there has not been such a deep and wide-spread and general awakening as God wrought by a simple American evangelist, who cannot always pronounce English words correctly, and who is not afraid to own it. I am always glad to bear witness to this dear servant of God. The very highest triumphs of Mr. Moody's evangelistic work have been in the centers of culture, and there was no place in all England where the multitudes gathered with such absolutely broken and open-hearted acceptance as in the very cities of Oxford and Cambridge, in the very face of learning, and scoffing pride. They had derided the idea of his coming and went to the meetings prepared to turn them into ridicule. But yet in these very places the simple, straightforward message of Jesus was greater than all their scorn and brought hundreds and hundreds of these proud men as humble penitents to His side, and today the most glorious examples of missionary zeal are some of these same young men, who are now preaching the Gospel in China. God did it to show that His foolishness was stronger than man's wisdom. If you are not ashamed of your simplicity and will obey God, He can use a very small brain and a very small stock of English words and phrases and a very small amount of English grammar to glorify His name.

II. Again, God uses the weak things of this world. If you don't like to take your place among the foolish things, the weak things come next in the scale of honor. There could not be anything weaker than Moses' rod, and yet when God sent him against the mightiest empire of the past, Moses asked Him what he was to take. He said: "What is this in your hand?" and Moses said: "A rod." That was enough and that rod broke the throne of Pharaoh, opened the rivers and the skies in judgment, divided the sea and opened a way for God's army to pass over, and brought the dark winged angel of death over every home in Egypt, and at last shattered Pharaoh and his army on the shores of the Egyptian sea. That little rod in Moses' hand had been one of the weak things and it confounded the mighty.

There could not be anything weaker than Gideon's band of three hundred armed with a few pitchers with a few torches in the centre, and a trumpet in the other hand; almost as foolish as -Joshua's ram's horns, and yet these three hundred men were stronger than thirty thousand, and God had to send back the multitudes, because there were too many for Him to use; they were not weak enough for victory, and when He got them so that they saw no strength but His, then power and victory came to them.

It seemed much wiser and much stronger for David to put on Saul's armor when he went against the gigantic Goliath. Saul himself tried to induce him to put on the armor, but he refused to touch them and armed with his little sling and his three stones from the valley, he went out weak enough for victory and for God to use him and

God did use him as the type of all those victories which he promised us, not by might nor by power, but by the Holy Ghost. All the army of Saul could not even attack the Philistines. Two helpless men put them to flight because they were weak enough to depend upon God and give Him all the glory. Even Sampson, with all his physical strength, could not be used of God until God put a weak and foolish instrument into his hand, the jaw bone of an ass, that God might be the more glorified. And the Lord sent out His apostles—sent them out in their weakness, a little band without any earthly influence, or power, or prestige, and He told them that their very weakness was their strength. And Paul says: "When I am weak, then I am strong and I glory in my very infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." He giveth power not to the strong, but to the faint, and to them that have no might He increaseth strength. The youths shall faint and be weary; the young men shall utterly fail; but they who wait upon the Lord shall be mighty through God. It is a strange paradox, I know, dear friends, but it certainly has been true for me, and I am certain that many of you have found it true for you. The man who received the judgment of retribution was the man that had only one talent. And so, the great danger, dear friends, if you and I shall fail is just the fear of our weakness. God is calling the average workers, the little ones. His army is made up of the rank and file, of such as you. And be very careful that you do not commit a sin through that very weakness, because to be unduly self-conscious of your weakness is to be just as selfish as if you were making a great deal of your strength. How often God has done through a little child what great and strong men could not do. How many a hard heart has been broken by the simple, tender words of a lisping infant, which all the wisdom of man, which all the arguments of science could not break! I think it was the predecessor of Dr. Tyng in Philadelphia—I know it was in the same church--and he was a very brilliant and useful minister of the Gospel, who in his early years was an ambitious politician. He was elected to Congress, served several terms, got into an ambitious life and had no interest in religion. He refused all the appeals of letters, and sermons, and urgencies of friends, and was going on in his high career of success and of almost infidelity, when one day, as he returned from Congress, his little three year old girl came up to him and said, "Papa, do you know I can read?" and he said, "Darling, can you read?" and she said, "Yes." "Let me hear you," said her father, and she took up a little Testament and read: "T-h-o-u s-h-a-l-t l-o-v-e t-h-e L-o-r-d w-i-t-h a-l-l t-h-y h-e-a-r-t" and she looked up in his face with tears and smiles dancing there together and she didn't understand why it was that the tears came into her father's eyes too, but he took her to his bosom and pressed her and kissed her over and over again, and he said, "Yes, darling, it is lovely; I am so glad you can read." and he went from that nursery and on his knees before God he took the wounded heart that that little arrow pierced, and he rested not until he could say, "Yes, Lord, I, too, love thee with all my heart." But O, that little word was the word that saved him.

A very learned minister preached a series of sermons on infidelity for the benefit of a very learned man in his church. There were some seven sermons, and he rendered them to his entire satisfaction and soon after he got through the infidel came to him and said that he was a Christian and accepted the Lord Jesus Christ. He was very much gratified. He took all the credit to himself. After it was all talked over he said, "Now, my dear friend, will you tell me which of my lectures it was that convinced you?" He said, "Sir, it was not any of your lectures. It was that poor hobbling colored woman, who, when she came out, would mutter among her tears, 'O, my precious Saviour, my precious Saviour; I could not live without You!' and I watched that woman and saw that it came right straight from her heart. I did not hear all that you said, but I was deeply attracted by what she said. It was that which convinced me." It was one of the weak things of the world that God uses to confound the mighty. Do not be ashamed to do a little for God. Remember that the vast fields of the summer are made by little blades of grass, the foliage of the forest is made by little leaves, the joys of life are made out of little tokens of love; and I would rather—O, yes, I would rather give away all the great things in life than lose the little ones. I could not get on without them. And so God wants the humble services, the little ones. And so, you little children, you hard working men and women, you who can speak a word in the workshop, you who can work for Christ in your home, you, who can be sweet and holy little children for Jesus Christ, you, who have just the one talent, it is precious to God and it is very precious for your reward, don't lose it, but be one of the things that God uses to confound the mighty.

III. Another of the category is the base things. Now, I think this means the things that are either humble in their human relationship or associated with sin and with shame in their moral character and antecedents. Now, God loves to take the things that men consider low and use them to confound the things that men consider high. How often has He placed men on the thrones of earth, who came from the very kitchens of their masters, and who were despised as menial servants. Moses was the son of a slave, and yet it was the slave's child that conquered the proud Pharaoh. As I look back on the men and women that have told on society and on Christian life and work, I think I can say that among my fellow students and acquaintances they have been the children of the poor; they have been the boys and girls that fought with toil and adversity and won by energy and courage the success that God has given. Someone in giving the biography of the past two centuries says, "Some have succeeded by wealth, some by genius, some by influence, but the most of them by beginning without a penny." God "takes the poor from the dunghill and sets him with kings and princes."

And so, young men and humble men, there is no rank of usefulness that God will withhold from you if you are not afraid, like the children of Joseph, to go forth and conquer the hard places. "Give us a double inheritance," they said to the Lord. "You shall have it," He said, "if you are willing to conquer it in the face of difficulties," and so God says to every one.

But among the things that God uses, are also the things that were sinful. They that are in the lowest scale of morality are the ones that God has chosen and cleansed and made His instruments of blessing. It has been to me so strange that all through the pedigree of the Son of God it has pleased the Father to link in the most ignoble and once unworthy names. So that as we read the ancestry of Jesus we find mixed up in it in the regular line the name of Tamar, the daughter of Judah, who had the bar sinister on her life, and the name Rahab, the abandoned woman of Jericho, who believed and was chosen to be a link in the motherhood of Christ, that one should glory in His presence. And then again, even Mary through whom He came, while pure and holy as Heaven itself, yet was lowly in her social standing, and ever bore the shame before the world of a strange misunderstanding. Yes, the Lord has been pleased to take these things, and you know today that He has taken His Bunyans from the cursing, swearing, sinful crowds. He has taken His Jerry McAuleys from the prisons, His Morehouses from the pickpockets, and His Richard Weavers from the lowest ranks of sin, and chosen them to be His ministers, that no one should glory in His presence, and to prove the power of the grace of God to use the most unworthy, if only surrendered to His hands. Dear friends, has there been sin in your life? Is everything naturally against you? Have you been one of these that the Lord would be glad to choose, just to show by the very extent to which He lifts you up, the power of His infinite grace?

IV. Again, the despised things. Now, God cannot use anybody very much without men persecuting him. "Woe unto you when all men speak well of you," is a strange and sadly true sentence of our tender Master. It was the despised Hebrews that God used to destroy the Egyptians. It was when their enemies were saying, "What do these feeble Jews?" that God built up the walls of Jerusalem. It was when the poor fellow was put out of the synagogue that Jesus found him and said, "Have they put you out? Well, I will take you in," and He sent him forth as the chosen instrument to put to confusion those proud men. And so it was that the Methodists in the days of Wesley got their nickname and the people that were ridiculed, that received this very name as a nickname, today have 25,000,000 of followers in every land beneath the face of the sun. And, O, today, when I hear men laughing, jeering and scorning, I say, "Laugh on for the Lord has another laugh, and He will always turn it on the other side; let them curse on, the Lord will requite me blessing for their cursing this day." Don't be afraid to stand among the poor, despised company of Jesus, if it is in the name of Jesus, for the work of God and for the salvation of men. God is just going to use such things. He hath chosen the despised ones to bring to naught the proud ones.

How very often have I seen some very feeble, simple-minded one come into our work that seemed almost to be lacking in something, and I have heard good and well-meaning people say; "Now, you need not expect anything of this person." And, do you know, I have never seen that yet but God has taken hold of that person and done some wondrous thing for them. Some of the most marked cases of divine healing I have ever seen were people that were so weak that people would say, "They haven't anything in them," and the Lord said, "I will vindicate them." I remember, a few weeks ago, getting almost impatient with two persons. It seemed they were so unreasonable that I could not expect anything, and I had no sooner made up my mind than God took up those people and made them the very monuments of His love and power; and I said, "Praise the Lord!" I am afraid to think little of anybody. I am afraid to let the faintest shadow of deprecation pass my lips about the humblest and the lowest of His dear children, for I am always expecting Him to come fast behind with horses and chariots of salvation, and lift them up and make them ride by His side.

There was a poor fellow that had been promoted from the ranks, and the officers were making fun of him. The colonel saw it, and he said; "Captain, I want you to come and lunch with me." He went and lunched with the colonel, and after lunch was over, the colonel took his arm, and they marched up and down in front of the other's tents, arm in arm. These foolish English officers had laughed and scorned, but the next time they met him their hats were off. The colonel had taken him by his side; and when the Lord takes people to ride or walk with Him, we can safely go along. Let us be careful lest we be found despising. The Lord knows a little about scorn as well as you. "Surely He scorneth the scorners but He giveth grace unto the lowly," and He hath chosen the things that are despised to confound the things that are proud. The banner of our calling is the cross of shame; and so the offense of that cross will last until He comes again. And out of the darkness and the blush of man's reproach will come the glory to our crown, and we shall not be sorry at one reproach, nor feel not the one blush of shame for which He said, "For your shame ye shall have double!" O, how often has He said that to me: "For your shame ye shall have double"—just twice as much as if you didn't have the shame—"and for confusion, ye shall rejoice in your portion."

V. Now, the things that are not. These are His last favored ones. God hath chosen the things that are not to bring to naught the things that are." That means that God cannot make anything out of you until you not only get lowly and weak, but until you get utterly dead, so that you are not at all. It is a good thing to be weak, and it is a good thing to lie down and it is a good thing to be willing to be despised, but it is better than all to be nothing at all, to cease to be, and to be able to say: "I live—no, I made a mistake; not I, but Christ liveth in me." That is the meaning of the things that are not. God could not use Abraham until Abraham was so yielded up that even his Isaac was given over to the Lord with such simple trust that he just believed that the Lord knew all about it, and would do better than he could understand. Joshua could not enter the land of Canaan until Joshua got out of the way. It was not enough that they had crossed the Jordan; it was not enough that Moses had died; it was not enough that they had been circumcised; but then the angel met Joshua and said: "Joshua down on your face and get out of the way." And Joshua said: "Who are you?" And He said: "I am captain." "Why, I thought I was captain," Joshua no doubt thought. "I thought you had told me to take the land?" "No, I am captain," said the Angel; and He said: "Take off your shoes and get down on your face." And Joshua got down on his face, and said: "What hath my Lord to say to His servant?" Joshua was dead. He was one of the things that are not, and God could use him to bring to naught the things that are.

Peter could not be used by the Lord until Peter killed himself by his denial, put his pride and confidence away, and got down in the dust, shamed and discouraged, and then the Lord came to him when Peter was gone, lifted him up, and gave him a new commission.

Paul was not used by God until he gave up his name Saul, and took the name Paul, "the little," and said: "Less than the least of all saints, not worthy to be called an apostle, the chief of sinners. Nay, not I at all, but Christ that liveth in me." Then the Lord lived, the Lord reigned, and the Lord used him.

These are the things that God uses. Are you willing to be one of them? If you are, then the blessed assurance is yours: "But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption that he that glorieth may glory in the Lord." If you are weak, if you are dead, if you are nothing, rise up now on your feet; put on the new life, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and he will be your wisdom and He will be your strength, and in His sufficiency you can do all things.

Let us not then be so occupied with the thought of what we are not, as what we are in Christ. His last thought, His last word, is the word of all-sufficiency. "Of Him are ye, of yourselves ye are not, but you are something, you are everything in Him." O, I know so many people who say, "I am nothing; I can do nothing." God wants you to go farther: "I am nothing; I can do all things in Him." May the Lord help us to take that place and standing today so that we shall know the full meaning of these two great words: MY INSUFFICIENCY, CHRIST'S ALL SUFFICIENCY.