

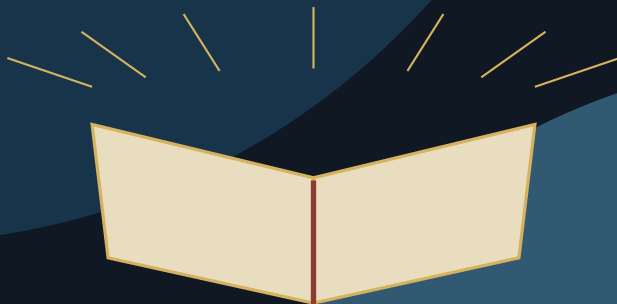
MESSAGES FOR WORSHIP, WITNESS, AND THE CHURCH YEAR

UNCOMMON SERMONS

FOR

UNUSUAL DAYS

Biblical messages for special seasons and enduring needs



PREACH THE WORD

W. A. DILLARD

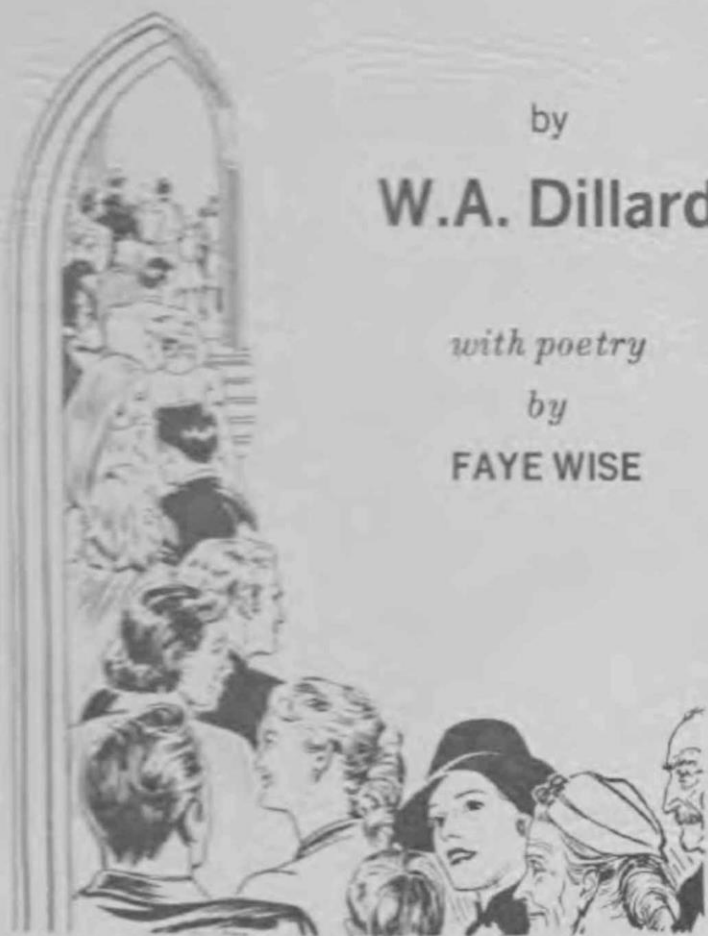
WITH POEMS BY FAYE WISE

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UNCOMMON SERMONS

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by

W.A. Dillard

with poetry

by

FAYE WISE



UNCOMMON SERMONS
FOR
UNUSUAL DAYS

By
W. A. Dillard, D.B.L.
and
Poems by Faye Wise

Published by:
Fellowhelpers To The Truth, Inc.
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Benton, Arkansas 72015

Faye Boyette Wise, the first of six children of the late W.O. and Donnie Camp Boyette, was born July 4, 1928, in Thornburg, Arkansas (PerryCounty). She is a devoted Christian lady, wife, mother, and grandmother who first learned to love God's Word from her grandfather, David J. Boyette, who taught the Beginners Sunday School Class on his knees in order to be face-level with the children.

Faye "Grew up" in Harmony Baptist Church on Highway 10 in Perry County. She graduated from Joe T. Robinson High School in 1946 and in that same year married Walter Wise.

God blessed their union with three sons: Walt, Joe, and Mark, and one daughter, Cheryl. There are also nine grandchildren.

Faye's career has been that of wife, mother, and homemaker. She loves writing, sewing, gardening and she uses her talents to reach out to the sick, shut-ins, and those oppressed. She is a valuable member of Spring Creek Baptist Church. To further her talents, she holds membership in several poetry societies including the Saline County Chapter of Poet's Roundtable in which she serves as Official Historian; The National Federation of State Poetry Societies; Poet's Study Club, Terre Haute, Indiana.

Faye's poems have appeared in several Arkansas newspapers, religious publications and some books. She has received numerous awards from her peers in professional societies and from Arkansas publishing firms. This author is most happy to have her work as the capstone thought" of each of these messages. He expresses heartfelt thanks for her gracious and unselfish spirit and her willingness to share her God-given talent in this way.



CONTENTS

Preface		5
Introduction		7
Mental Fitness In A Decade Of Spiritual Decadence		11
Jonah And His Gourd - The Epitome of Unconscionable		
Egotism	(Evangelism)	19
Paths To Rest The Soul	(Dedication)	27
Ponderings From Pisgah	(Consecration)	33
The Vastitude of Stewardship	(Stewardship)	39
Entering The New Year Hungry	(New Year)	45
Where The Risen Christ Isn't	(Easter)	51
A Tribute To Mother	(Mother's Day)	55
A Memorial Day Prayer	(Memorial Day)	60
God's Memorials	(Memorial Day)	61
Fathers In Fellowship With God	(Father's Day)	67
Something Beautiful	(Independence Day)	73
Thankfulness For Life's Blessings	(Thanksgiving Day)	77
The Materializing of Mystery	(Christmas)	81

Dr. W. A. Dillard, pastor of Spring Creek Baptist Church in Benton, Arkansas, is the son of C.H. and Eiethel Wilson Dillard of Greenwood, Arkansas. Born February 24, 1939, in Jenny Lind, Arkansas, he graduated from Ft. Smith High School in 1957. While a member of Cavanaugh Baptist Church in Ft. Smith, he surrendered to preach. He entered the Missionary Baptist Seminary in Little Rock where he graduated with the Doctor in Bible Languages degree in 1965.



He was married to Laura Ann Forbess in 1961 and is the father of three children, Andrea, Alan, and Annette. His pastorates include Hickory Grove Baptist Church near Newport, Arkansas; Landmark Baptist Church, Vilonia, Arkansas; First Missionary Baptist Church, Midwest City, Oklahoma; Calvary Baptist Church, Duncan, Oklahoma; Spring Creek Baptist Church, Benton, Arkansas.

Widely used as an evangelist and lecturer, Pastor Dillard has traveled to ten nations and four continents in the interest of missions and has been honored with several service positions including ten years as a faculty member of Oklahoma Missionary Baptist College and Seminary; Moderator of State and local associations; and leading roles in youth work. Presently, he serves as a member of the Board of Trustees of Texarkana Baptist Orphanage; President of Fellowhelpers To The Truth; Editor of a quarterly newspaper, "The Fellowhelper"; President of the American Baptist Association.

This third publication from the pen of Pastor Dillard is sent forth in humble thankfulness for the opportunity and in the prayerful hope it will be a blessing to those who read it.

PREFACE

UNIQUE is an appropriate word to describe Dr. W. A. Dillard and messages I have heard him preach. He proclaims old truths in a unique manner. Having had the privilege of reading the sermons in this book prior to its publication, I have found that the contents are no exception to Brother Dillard's unique style.

For several reasons I consider it an honor to write these prefatory words. I was W.A. Dillard's pastor when he announced his call to the ministry. I have had the privilege of working with him in revivals where he was pastor and where I was pastor, in Bible conferences, in special assignments and committees, and in administrative-faculty relationships in Oklahoma Missionary Baptist College, Institute and Seminary, Marlow, Oklahoma. We have also been associated together in business relationships. Not always have we found ourselves in complete agreement but always close associates and friends with minimum disagreements in an agreeable manner. In the most crucial period of my life, really a time of crisis, W.A. Dillard was my closest counselor. I am thankful to God for the man, his personal friendship, and his ministry to others and to me.

I have been thrilled to see the splendid spiritual growth of W.A. Dillard, a man of God. Not only is he tall physically but also 'tall' spiritually. Scholarly but practical, he is an exceptionally good pastor, moderator, preacher, teacher and writer. Because of my personal acquaintance with him and his family, I can also add that he is an exceptionally good family man.

With much pleasure I recommend this pastor of Spring Creek Baptist Church, Benton, Arkansas, and president of the American Baptist Association and this book which he has written.

R. T. Perritt

Marlow, Oklahoma

INTRODUCTION

This book of sermons is produced as a result of the request of the messengers of American Baptist Association Churches in their 1981 annual meeting in Phoenix, Arizona. It was the privilege of the author to deliver the annual message at that meeting. Afterward, the messengers requested it to be put into printed form by Bogard Press in Texarkana. That message is the first one in this book entitled, "Mental Fitness In a Decade of Spiritual Decadence." It was deemed feasible and appropriate to add other messages to constitute a small book.

Consequently, in these pages are presented some uncommon sermons for unusual days. It is hoped they will be a blessing to the reader and usable as is, or in modified form, by the teacher and preacher. The first message is easily adaptable to a graduation service. Then, there follows messages for evangelism, dedication, consecration, and several holidays.

Additionally, all of these messages are original with the author although no claim of originality is made for illustrations, cliches, or even sermon ideas. Some have been used only once, others several times, and still others, such as the sermon from Jonah, have been proven in over fifty revival usages.

Moreover, it is appropriate to offer some acknowledgements and apologies. The author feels most inadequate to present the precious Word of God in either written or spoken form. The reader's readiness to overlook his human limitations in order to rejoice in that which is high, holy and infallible is deeply appreciated. Furthermore, without the aid of countless individuals this work could not be produced. Though each one could not be mentioned, the author especially acknowledges wonderful Christian parents; patient, spiritual churches, teachers who instilled in him great spiritual truths; a patient, kind family who relinquishes time of their husband and father; a marvelous church who makes little demand of their pastor; an efficient secretary whose work is indispensable, and the churches of the American Baptist Association who have given him an excellent education and many opportunities to serve in various capacities. May God richly bless each one.

W. A. Dillard
Benton, Arkansas

February, 1982

"Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life, "Acts 5:20.

"MENTAL FITNESS IN A DECADE OF SPIRITUAL DECADENCE"

Text: I Peter 1:13

"Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

1. INTRODUCTION

The trail of modern history has led to volatile, violent, iniquitous, precarious times. Upon retirement as Prime Minister of England, Winston Churchill said, "I am an old man. I have lived a long time. I have never seen days like these. I am tired of it all. I see no hope for the future. Our problems are beyond us." Though his statement is not yet old enough to be assigned to the vaults of antiquity, the escalatory rate of global problems makes his world of woes now appear as kindergarten puzzles.

Moreover, national problems have been patterned and summarized in programs of presidents and slogans of the decades. "Normalcy" is the word coined to describe the theme of the Harding Presidency. America's relationship to the world was of foremost concern. Under Coolidge the theme was prosperity, and it did indeed abound. Hoover proclaimed, "No more poverty," yet the height of prosperity gave way to the deepest valley of national depression. Roosevelt ushered in the "New Deal." Truman gave us containment in Post-World War II, the Truman Doctrine, European Recovery Plan, the Atlantic Pact, and NATO. The 1950's gave rise to national and international problems shifting the focus of impetus away from the presidency, casting it into the role of reactor as much as actor. Civil rights entered the spotlight of attention as the U.S. Supreme Court laid the foundation of social revolution in America. The 1960's was the decade of anarchy as cities burned and looting became rampant. The 1970's began with exalted technology. Our nation's 1969 moon landing heralded a new era in man's dependence upon his own abilities and capabilities. Then, long demands fell on short supplies. Inflation ran rampant with ever-rising government bureaucracy encroaching upon and strangling free enterprise. Presently, the world-wide spirit of ecumenism is avalanching in the fields of politics, economics, and religion. Its course is pell-mell to a finish line named global unification. Every island of individualism is imperiled: individuals, families, churches, nations. One characterization of latter times attributes to antichrist the power to make war with the saints and to wear them out. Daniel 7:25, Revelation

13:7. The spiritual battle against darkness, wickedness in high places is intensifying, taking on new dimensions. Brethren, in the 1980's the battle for the mind of men is shifting to full-scale proportions.

Consequently, understanding the problems dominating this decade and the Bible instructions custom made for us who face them is the crying need of the hour. Personal well-being, even survival of your Christian life depends upon it. Furthermore, a gratifying conclusion to life may be achieved through it and there are certainly unusual opportunities of service to be seized because of it. These are all suggested in the Biblical theme, "Gird up the loins of your mind." Now, consider this:

I. THE EXEGETICAL CONNOTATIONS OF THE TEXT TEACH IT.

"Gird up the loins of your mind" is the apostolic exhortation. It is a dependent conclusive phrase introduced by the conjunction, "wherefore". "Wherefore", a resultant conjunction, points two ways, to the text and to the context. It specifically indicates what is about to be said is intricately related to and dependent upon what has been said. The context speaks of things the angels desire to look into. It concerns the prophetic writings and work of men of God in antiquity. It pointedly deals with the salvation of the soul (life) of modern man by adherence to the New Testament faith of grace. Additionally, "Gird up the loins of your mind" is an admonitory phrase to the receiving of the fullness of that salvation.

Moreover, the text provokes recall of many references to the mind employed by the New Testament. Interestingly, the first reference, Matthew 22:37, alludes to the first great commandment, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God . . . with all thy mind." A brief concordant survey reveals important and diverse exhortations about the mind. Luke 12:29, ". . . neither be ye of doubtful mind." Acts 20:19, "Serving the Lord with all humility of mind . . ." Romans 8:7, "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God.. ." Romans 12:2, "Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind. . ." Romans 12:16, "Be of the same mind one toward another. . ." I Corinthians 1:10, ". . . be perfectly joined together in the same mind.. ." II Corinthians 13:11, ". . . be of one mind . . ." Ephesians 4:23, "And be renewed in the spirit of your mind." Philippians 2:3, ". . . in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves." Philippians 2:5, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus," Colossians 3:12, "Put on therefore, humbleness of mind." II Thessalonians 2:2, "That ye be not soon shaken in mind...." II Timothy 1:7, "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." Titus 3:1, "put them in mind . . ." I Peter 1:13, "Gird up the

loins of your mindI Peter 5:2, "Feed the flock of God . . . of a ready mind."

Furthermore, "Gird up the loins of your mind" is an obvious parallel to the loins of the body, that physical portion with the greatest tendency to bulge out of shape, especially among preachers. . . and beer drinkers. All manner of methods and devices are prescribed to correct that problem including girdles, exercise programs, diets, etc. Health, beauty and a general sense of well-being are associated with trimness of the mid-section. Additionally, it is that bodily portion most vulnerable in hand-to-hand combat. As a result, specially built protective armor was worn in battle. It would be unthinkable to go to war without it.

In like manner, one's mind is prone to bulge in weak spots; hang out in places it doesn't belong. It is so easy for it to consume "junk food" and deteriorate out of shape. As with the bodily loins, good spiritual health is associated with trimness of mind. While only a majority of us should be concerned with physical well-being, one hundred percent of us need to do something to protect the areas of our soft-headedness - that is, "Gird up the loins of your mind."

II. THE STATE OF MODERN TIMES DEMANDS IT.

To this end the entire ^{sixty-six} books of Scripture are written. In as much as it will not be feasible to cover that much material in this message, consider the following as areas most receptive of the application of this text.

Gird up your mind doctrinally. Many cunningly devised false doctrines permeate the modern religious world. Some of these bear the appearance of scriptural plausibility and seek acceptance in your life, in your church. Yet, they are as different to true Bible doctrine as finished lumber is different to growing trees. They contain Bible approaches but are the product of cutting and hewing to meet the fancies of men. Let it be noted, as someone once said, "A text without a context is nothing more than a pretext." Still, there is a sense in which God is to be thanked for the existence of falsehood. It is the same sense in which we are thankful for lost people, that is, they are the only ones who can be saved. Falsehood has the opportunity to dispel in the light of truth. Also, such provides a trial for one's faith, spoken of by Peter as "much more precious than of gold that perisheth" To this end the modern believer must gird up the loins of his mind with the proper doctrines of God.

Of course, the non-doctrinarian will belittle the emphasis placed upon doctrine, but one need only casually observe the writings of Paul to be impressed with its importance. Consider these testimonies of the apostle before downrating the importance of doctrine. I Timothy 4:13, ". . . give attendance to doctrine." 4:16, ". . . take heed . . . unto the doctrine; continue in them . . ." 6:3-5, here he encourages withdrawal from any man who teaches contrary to Christ and the doctrine. II Timothy 4:2, "Preach the Word . . . exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine." Titus 1:9, "Exhort by sound doctrine." Titus 2:1, "But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine." I Timothy 5:17, ". . . be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in word and in doctrine."

II Timothy 3:10, Paul asserts that he was known first of all by his doctrine.

Moreover, the lateness of the age calls upon you to gird up your mind eschatologically. Paul told the Corinthians, "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." I Corinthians 10:11. One uncontested generalization which could be made in this meeting is that the end of the church age is very near. As a consequence, much speculation as to the eschatological role of the church is set forth. That there are differences of opinion on the Bible information in this area should not diminish appreciation for the fact that the most exciting time of near six thousand years of human history looms before us.

Accordingly, it is totally inappropriate that our people should enter this time period unprepared. To this end Paul wrote his instructions in II Thessalonians 2:2. Will the rapture indeed be the next supernatural event? Will it occur at the beginning, middle, or end of Daniel's seventieth week of years? Most of the Protestant world and much of the Neo-protestant religions say, "The first of the week." This alone alerts me to the grave possibility of error. They have not gotten the doctrine of salvation right yet. How then should they understand doctrines of eschatology? Furthermore, it is easy to take positions on Revelation, on eschatology if you **don't** study. Suppose then that the church is not to be denied what would be its finest hour of witness in the coming perilous times. Great scholars before this generation have reached such conclusions with no little study and prayer. Should that be the case, what will happen to your people, to you, when the dogmatism of your singular preachments are finally realized as falsehood? Don't cop out here! Gird up the

soft spots in your head! Study the possibilities, open up! Preach the possibilities. Prepare yourself and your people eschatologically.

Additionally, the record of human actions verifies the need to gird up your mind egotistically. The testimony of Paul is, "For I say through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly . . ." Sober thinking does not lend itself to self-exaltation. To consider oneself God's proverbial gift to the world is at best a slight exaggeration of reality and makes the possibility of personal shipwreck a high probability. The exodus of men from the ministry in the past decade is a case in point. Some begin to feel they are beyond the mundane tasks of the ministry. Others become so heavenly-minded that they are no earthly good. Still others feel their talents are largely unrecognized nor appreciated and that the material world is passing them by. Then, there are those who come to think every woman on earth is madly in love with them, little noting or caring that that door of the ministerial life is definitely marked "Exit". But these are not the original egotists. They have long gone before. Consider Nebuchadnezzar who went about saying, "Is not this great Babylon that I have built?" God gave him his portion with the beasts of the field. Also, there was that rich man of the gospel who, rejoicing in his work, said, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years." God called him a fool!

But, it should be recognized that any such failure of men is a possibility to every man. It is in this frame of thought that Paul says, "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." I Corinthians 9:27. Ancient Alexander could conquer the legions of Persia; but he could not conquer his passions. Caesar triumphed in a hundred battles; but he fell victim to the desire of being a king. Bonaparte vanquished the whole of Europe; but he could not vanquish his own ambition. And in humbler life, closer to home, in our own everyday affairs, most of us are drawn aside from the path of duty and discretion, because we do not resist some temptation, or overcome some prejudice. O, Man of God, care not so much how ill it goes with you so long as the cause of Christ prospers. Mephibosheth said to David, "Yea, let him take all inasmuch as my lord the king is come again in peace unto his house." That it might go well with the name and reputation of God, Moses cared not that his own name be blotted out of the book of life. And John said, "He must increase; but I must decrease: this my joy, therefore, is fulfilled."

Furthermore, the advancement of the powers of darkness make it imperative that you gird up your mind philosophically. Consider the testimony of Peter in II Peter 3:1-7. There are a lot of people who want their emotions stirred up, but it is infinitely more appropriate that we have our minds stirred. The sum of these Scriptures is the Biblical prophecy of modern uniformitarian evolutionism which has given the world the present dominating doctrine of humanism. "Humanism" is not to be confused with "humanistic", nor "humanities". Humanism is a philosophy that asserts the dignity and worth of man and his capacity for self-realization through reason apart from any supernaturalism. The rejection of God naturally leads to the rejection of the moral values and laws of God. Such is the beginning of the end of Christian civilization. Such so-called science is really pseudo-science which reads nature as some of my Hebrew students have done; rightly syllabing the sentences but utterly ignorant of the meaning.

Moreover, men may glory in the conquests of modern science, but to make it anything more than an agent is to greatly err. Science may be a botanist, but it is God who programmed the vital fluids in the veins of herb and flower and causes the still mysterious process of photosynthesis to work. Science may be a geologist, but it may only read the rock-covered page of another's hieroglyphics. Science may indeed be an astronomer, but it is God who built the world and projected the comets whose path it traces. Science may be an agriculturist. It may plant the seed in the bosom of the earth, but if the fountains of dew be stayed, science itself will die of thirst. Furthermore, Spurgeon once said the most excellent of sciences is the science of Jesu Stone with the name engraven thereon, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it. Would you study history? Here is the most ancient of all records of the history of the human race. Whatever your science is, come and bend over this book: your science is here." In these modern perilous times when pseudoscience is ascending over fact and truth, you must gird up your mind philosophically.

III. THE PRACTICAL MEANS OF ACCOMPLISHING THIS TASK ARE GIVEN.

To know what we ought to do and be is one thing, to accomplish the same is another. But, the Word of God has not left us to wonder or grope experimentally. The answer to the "How to" question is here.

Employ sobriety. This term does not simply mean abstinence from alcohol or drugs which would affect the mind. It definitely implies

circumspection of deportment, moral alertness, seriousness and gravity in the affairs of life.

Hope to the end. Hope is the product of faith. Faith is dependent upon promise; hence, to hope implies ingestion of God's Word and a continued dependence upon the same.

Live obediently. The Holy Word calls upon every believer to make a clear difference between your life as an informed Christian and that of an ignorant, lustful sinner. Such difference as would clearly manifest itself in holiness in all conversation and lifestyle.

IV. IMPORTANT REASONS WHY THIS TASK SHOULD BE ACCOMPLISHED ARE OBVIOUS.

We face a formidable enemy. Not one who is unknowledgeable, but one who is willfully ignorant, II Peter 3:5. It is not that they do not know better, or cannot know better, they walk in spiritual darkness and wickedness by clear willful choice.

Also, girding up your mind is essential to the continuance of Christianity. Suppose ours is not the last generation? Then, for the sake of those who have gone before us as well as for the sake of those who must follow, gird up the loins of your mind. Individually, there can be no gratifying conclusion to life without doing so.

Moreover, it should be noted that the commands and expectations of God upon your life will permit no less than that you should gird up the loins of your mind. Couple this reason to the unique opportunities afforded the modern believer by virtue of the whiteness and abundance in the harvest field and it will be seen that every aspect of Providence demands it.

CONCLUSION

Mental fitness in a decade of spiritual decadence is an essential of our day embodied in the Biblical injunction, "Gird up the loins of your mind." The connotations of the text teach it; the state of modern times demand it; the practical means of doing so are given in God's Word; important reasons why it should be done are obvious.

Finally, Jesus posed a provocative question in Luke 18:8, "Nevertheless, when the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?" In light of the predetermined nature of the church, etc. most theologians would answer "Yes." But, to the extent that God chooses to use human instrumentality, the amount and the quality may very well be affected by you as you "gird up the loins of your

mind," and show yourself to be strong and mentally fit in this decade of spiritual decadence.

**"MENTAL FITNESS IN A DECADE
OF SPIRITUAL DECADENCE"**

*Lord.. . free my mind of impure thoughts,
Sweep it clean of evil debris;
Create a growing hunger
Within the heart of me.
And then refill the vacuum
With wisdom from your word
That I be kept until your coming
With hope and faith to undergird.*

Faye Wise

JONAH AND HIS GOURD - THE EPITOME OF UNCONSCIONABLE EGOTISM"

Text: Jonah 4:1-11

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. And he prayed unto the Lord, and said, I pray thee, O Lord, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore, I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil. Therefore, now, O Lord, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live. Then said the Lord, Doest thou well to be angry? So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city. And the Lord God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd. But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered. And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live. And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death. Then said the Lord, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou has not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever studied the Bible with the pointed purpose of comparing its characters with modern ones you know? How very interesting this becomes! Some people I know are as Peter was - impetuous. Appropriate or not, speak or "bust," they must. Others are zealous like Paul, some turn aside as John Mark, others remind me of David, the sweet Psalmist of old. There is great profit in such studies for truly, God would have us all live vicariously in the place of Bible characters, identifying with the failures as well as the victors. It enriches life and insures great Christian success to the wise and prudent.

Accordingly, I invite you to identify with Jonah, especially if the points mentioned are, or have been, realities in your life. Imagination is a wonderful gift. It greatly aids the pleasures of Bible studies when kept in Biblical check. Use yours with me now for a mental tour of some seven hundred miles or more in antiquity, the time being approximately 860 B.C. Leaving the cares and problems of today, we see ourselves on a beautiful, green, sloping hillside overlooking the quaint seaport town of Joppa. Before us is the vastness of the blue Mediterranean Sea. The warm, brilliant, morning sun feels good on our backs; salty air penetrates our nostrils; white foamy waves break upon sandy beaches and, in the distance, a seagull cries. The appeal of such a peaceful, serene environment is magnetic, provoking serious thoughts of staying here forever. But, this is not our destination, it is our starting point.

Consequently, turning our backs to the sea, we take up our journey to the east and to the north. Inland we go to Samaria, that ancient city where Jacob's Well is located. Then, northward to the Sea of Galilee, past Capernaum into Syria setting course for the ancient most city, Damascus. Now, traveling eastward to the north of the great Arabian Desert we come into Mesopotamia, the native land of Abraham. Crossing the historic Euphrates River, we press on to the northeast. At last, in the distance, a huge city looms. It is Nineveh.

Continuing to wind through its narrow, cobblestone streets, we are suddenly confronted by a great wall, one hundred feet high and over seven miles long enclosing the heart of the city. At the main entrance are two gigantic statues having the body of a great bull, the head of a man, and great wings as eagles. They are gods of the Ninevites. Entering the inner city, we pass splendid palaces and breath-taking temples, libraries and municipal buildings. At last, passing through the eastern side of the city and climbing a low hill overlooking the metropolitan city-state, we are confronted with an unusual site which arrests our attention. Here, all alone in the hot sun is a man. His skin is scabs and he sits in the dirt with a scanty, makeshift shelter over his head. On the shelter is a dried-up gourd vine. Here is Jonah. Here is the very epitome of unconscionable egotism, a prime example of unremorseful selfishness. We must know the experiences of this man who has learned much from, and about, God.

1. A MAN TOUCHED BY THE LORD.

Jonah was a man divinely touched by the righteous God of heaven and earth. He had been born-again. He was a prophet of God. He

knew, and could tell others about God. He could share with men everywhere the secret of eternal life and how to walk uprightly in proper covenant relationship with God. Can you identify with him? Moreover, Jonah had a great, unique distinction in that he alone of all the prophets was the one, only one, commissioned to preach to gentile peoples. He should have been glad about it, but the opposite was true. Can you identify with him?

II. A MAN WHO HAD EARNED AND DISCERNED THE CHASTENING HAND OF GOD.

Jonah willfully disobeyed the Lord. Instead of carrying out God's command to go to Nineveh, he arose to flee to Tarshish. Now, doesn't that just grab you! Tarshish Why Tarshish? Had I been running from God on that day, I might have gone to Athens. That's where the action was. Or, I might have gone to Rome, or Carthage, or to Alexandria, that great center of education, but Tarshish? Why? Whoever heard of it? A quick geography lesson enlightens us. Nineveh lay to the extreme east of Israel while Tarshish lay to the extreme west. In fact, Tarshish, located near the straits of Gibraltar, was as far west as maritime service would take him. No one ventured into the open Atlantic, possibly for fear of falling off the earth.

Anyway, who would care what happened to the Ninevites? They were a heathen nation. They were powerful militarily and, as such, posed a threat to Israel's national security. They were paganistic and their destruction would please Jonah, indeed, even many in Israel. Can you identify with him? Have you desired evil to fall upon enemy nations?

However, God intervened in Jonah's plans with a heavy, chastening hand. You know the story. Jonah boarded the ship at Joppa. God threatened the ship with disaster at sea. But, give Jonah his due. He was cool as a cucumber, asleep in a raging storm. Give him his due again. He openly confessed to being the cause of it all and freely enunciated the remedy. He told the seamen if they would throw him overboard, the storm would immediately calm. So, they did and it did. And a great fish which God had prepared swallowed the prophet. Now, listen carefully. Can you hear it? It is the laughter of agnostics and skeptics reverberating through the centuries of time. "Haw, haw, haw. Tell me, preacher, do you really believe that story about a whale swallowing Jonah?" "Yes, sir, I do!" As a matter of fact, I would believe it if it said Jonah

swallowed a whale; but it doesn't, so I don't. But, the Word of God is true. It happened just as the Book records it. So, Jonah became the first recorded submariner for three ^{days} and three nights. There in the "belly of hell" Jonah cried out unto God who directed the fish to a shallow, sandy regurgitation station. Surely the up-chucked prophet is living proof that even a fish can't stomach a backslidden man of God. Do you suppose Jonah then made a beeline to Joppa to renew his ticket to Tarshish? Hardly. But from here the story becomes more interesting but also more uncomfortable.

III. A MAN WHO GRUDGINGLY FULFILLED THE BIDDING OF GOD.

Jonah repented of his failure to obey God, but his attitude toward Nineveh did not change. He still longed for their destruction, but would preach to them because he had to do so. Can you identify with him? I know a lot of Christians who serve God because they feel they have to. Some attend church because they have to. After all, they have a reputation to maintain and a leading place in the church. Others are watching and they can't afford to "lose face." They have to. Some teach because they have to. Others participate in choir because they have to. For these, privilege has deteriorated into duty, sweetness has become sour, worship is ritual and "miserable" has become their first, middle, and last name.

Obviously, what Jonah needed and what many modern saints need is a good measure of godly enthusiasm. Why this Greek word is not in the New Testament is one question I have for Jesus. It is a wonderful word. It literally means the "state of being in God." Gladness, excitement, activity are always associated with enthusiasm. It is truly the need of the hour for many individuals and many churches. What a joy it is to see people actively serving God faithfully, excitedly, because they WANT to, not because they have to. Why is it that some churches argue, bicker, disagree so strongly over non-essential issues that they split? Then, they call themselves, Unity, or Harmony, or Fellowship with no issues resolved, nothing changed. It is often nothing more than a contented soaking in undisturbed egotism, doing what must be done because they have to. My departed friend, Louis Loe, told the story of two women cleaning the church house. Their performance was out of obligation and their tolerance of each other's personality low. Upon completing the job one said, "I'm putting the broom in this corner." The other retorted, "You know good and well the

broom does not belong in that corner, it belongs in THIS corner." To this, the first replied, "I don't care if it does belong in THAT corner, I'm putting it in THIS corner." At this time someone fortunately appeared and aptly stated, "Ladies, why don't both of you get on the broom and ride off." Jonah was like this. He served God out of obligation and rank fear, but he had no love for his work or God's intentions. Can you identify with him?

Furthermore, Jonah's message has to be the most unclear one ever preached. The text was only eight words, "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown." How the Ninevites understood this message is unclear. Perhaps it was through the process of deduction. Surely the question was asked, "Who is this man walking our streets saying, 'Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown?'" Maybe someone replied, "Listen to his accent. He is a Jew." "Oh, a Jew. He serves Jehovah. Maybe Jehovah is angry with us. Maybe He will turn away His anger if we repent." Well, anyway, they did and He did and Jonah got mad. Yes sir, this man of God became angry because a lot of folk were saved. Can you comprehend it? Can you identify with him?

Additionally, there are several folk today who are unmoved, unchanged, unconcerned over the salvation of others. The story is told of a woman who professed to be a Christian, but would not attend or join the church in her community. Her husband, a lost man, would mow the yard each Sunday morning while she sat on the front porch sipping tea and proclaiming, 'Boy, if it wasn't for you, I could really be a Christian.' Later, through the efforts of concerned friends, the man was saved. On the first Sunday afterwards he was determined to seek baptism and church membership. So, at the invitation he stepped out. Now the pressure reverted to his boasting wife. What would she do? She stepped out with him. The whole church was thrilled to gain a new family. After services several rushed up to her and said, "We're so glad to have you with us! Won't you join us in the choir?" She said, "I'd love to, but. . ." Someone else broke in, "Will you teach a class?" She said, "I'd love to, but. . ." Someone else spoke up, "Will you join us in auxiliary?" She replied, "I'd love to, but . . ." And, that's all she ever said or did, "I'd love to, but . . ." The joy of her husband, the delight of the church, the prospect of laboring with the Master meant nothing. Jonah was like this. Can you identify with him? In his egotistical fit of anger and humiliation he asked God to take his own life.

IV. A MAN SHAMED BY THE LORD.

"Are you doing well to be angry?" God asked the childish prophet. "Shame on you!" This corrective pronouncement constituted the most devastating blow that could possibly be heaped upon my human pride as a child. To be shamed by parents, friends, loved ones is humiliating enough. What must it be like to be shamed by the lovely, righteous God of heaven and earth? So, God gave Jonah a gourd vine. True to its nature, the gourd vine grew rapidly covering Jonah's booth and creating a most desirable shady relief from the hot Syrian sun. Of course, Jonah was probably glad to be out of the sun for another reason. He may have had many large gastric acid burns from being in the belly of the fish. If so, the sun and salty sweat it drew from his body would make him miserable indeed. On the other hand, that may not have been the case. The Bible says God prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. God could have built a Holiday Inn in the fish for Jonah, but from the description in chapter two I would choose the former probability over the latter. Consequently, Jonah was jubilant over the gourd vine. Like many modern saints, he may have said, "Oh, boy, look at this! God is smiling on me. Yes sir, God takes care of his own." But, the next day God gave Jonah a cutworm which promptly did a splendid job of severing the gourd vine. And, as quickly as a gourd vine grows, so quickly does it wither when severed in the hot sun. As a result of no shade, a scorching sun and a hot, dry east wind, Jonah lamented the loss of the vine.

Moreover, it was in this prepared setting that God forcefully drove home the inescapable point for the prophet and for all who read or hear of this book. 'Are you doing right to be angry over your own little problems?' God, in essence said. "O, yes," says Jonah, "It is right for me to be so angry I could die." To this childish response comes the hot, shameful words of God, "You had compassion on the gourd vine (it was for yourself), but you did not work for it. You did not plow the ground, plant the seed, water and cultivate it. It wildly and voluntarily came up in a night and perished in a night. And while you lament the gourd you have no compassion at all for human beings, little children, cattle, etc. of the city of Nineveh." Oh, the shame of the prophet! Can you identify with him?

Furthermore, I would rather not make this obvious application, but it would be less than honest of me to ignore it. Today's average Christian is a highly self-centered person. We spend our years in labor to provide needless things which pass away. Often one does not know the name of his neighbor, much less his spiritual

condition. Additionally, no effort is made to rectify this sad situation, but should the tube blow out on the family TV set, that saint's moans can be heard all over town until a repairman restores it to working order. It is a sad commentary on modern Christianity. This was the condition of Jonah. Can you identify with him?

CONCLUSION

God's ways are the best ways. They are the right ways. Too often we are guilty of putting God's will for our lives a long way behind our own selfish desires. That is a sure recipe for misery, childishness, defeat. It is when we are in the will of God that we experience joy, maturity, victory. Great things happen in the lives of those who put Him and His will first. If you have identified with Jonah in this message, some changes need to be made in your life. You are letting a lot of good things go by.

As a result, I plead with you to surrender to God's will this day. You may say, "Oh, I wish I knew what the will and work of God is for me." Well, there were those who asked Jesus this very question. Jesus replied in John 6:29, "This is the work of God that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." Believe on Jesus to the saving of your never-dying spirit. He will come into your heart. He will become your Savior when you receive Him in repentance and faith.

In addition to this, believe on Him as a born-again Christian. I mean that you should believe His teachings, His Word. Manifest that true belief by following Him in baptism, by uniting with, and fellowshiping in, His church. Believe Him Whom God hath sent by dedicating your life in discipleship. Life can be marvelously different in Him.

"JONAH AND HIS GOURD"

*Father... when Jam unwilling
to follow the path you choose
for me,
and my stubbornness brings
the punishment I deserve,
I pray... that you not only forgive
and deliver me out of the shadow
Of your anger,
but give me understanding.
Don't allow me to "sulk"
under "a gourd vine"
resenting your mercy to others.
Help me to feel the same compassion
for them that you extend to me.*

Amen

Faye Wise

"PATHS TO REST THE SOUL"

Text: Jeremiah 6:16

"Thus saith the Lord stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein."

INTRODUCTION

What is this admirable, desirable quality of composure marking a mature believer? Some refer to it as "nerves of steel." Others call it "being cool." However, the Bible refers to it as self-possession. Jesus said, "In your patience possess ye your souls," Luke 21:19. The text refers to it as "rest for the soul."

You need to know, others need reminding, that God's Word provides a way of life vastly different to the world. It is so different that when compared it is as a rescue worker calmly picking his way through a burning building while others panic, shout, lump, and die. It is as a native woodsman picking his way through a swamp of quicksand, confident each step is on solid ground while others would inevitably fall victim of the odds of chance. It is as a skilled surgeon binding up the deadly wounds of another while others pace the floor in anxiety and fear.

Moreover, this way of life is not reserved for an exclusive few. No one has a franchise on it. Conversely, God wills that all men understand and embrace this marvelous way of life. He wills it for you! Now, consider this Bible presentation in contrast to the common, modern scene.

I. THE WORLD WOBBLES WILDLY ON A PRECARIOUS PERCH.

Common, casual observation verifies that men arise daily to stand on the precipice of disaster. Economic instability and inflation have men on tranquilizers by day and sleeping pills at night. Political powder kegs around the globe keep medical indigestive companies humming. The national moral decline in situation ethics overturns old, right, time-honored principles. In short, ours is a world of woe seeking peace, but finding none. Well does Jude thirteen describe it as "Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame." Of such, Peter declares they are "wresting the Scriptures to their own damnation," II Peter 3:16. Their ceaseless, but perennially

frustrated quest for peace will one day result in the greatest destruction the world has ever known, that of antichrist, I Thessalonians 5:3.

II. THERE ARE PATHS PROVIDING GENUINE REST TO THE SOUL.

Such paths constitute the good way, the way of personal peace. They are designed by Almighty God who wills that all men should walk therein. They are called "old paths." This name is especially meaningful and picturesque to those of farming background. As a youngster living in the country, many of my favorite places to play, swim, fish, hunt necessitated travel through pasture, thicket and forest. The way could be very difficult to travel, endowed liberally with thorns, briar, stick-tights and stone. But, the cattle would have a path they consistently followed. It was well worn and smooth. It was unthinkable to cut across rough territory when a worn, smooth path was readily available. These paths were easiest to walk in, saving time and many cuts and bruises. It was the maker of new paths who was bloodied and bruised at the end of the way. The Lord Jesus has gone before us, cutting the trail, creating the path. He calls upon us to enjoy the smoother, more peaceable path of life He has made for us.

III. SOME OLD PATHS OF PEACE AND REST.

The call of God is good. He would not call for us to walk in the old paths without giving ample explanation and instruction as to what the old paths are. The Bible is a book of old paths, tried and true. Consider these specific old paths you should be walking in today.

First is the old path of genuine conversion. I mean walking in a personally experienced, know-so salvation. This is not profession, but possession. It is not accommodation, but reconciliation. It is not hope-so, but know-so salvation predicated upon the truth of man's natural condition proclaimed by Paul in Romans 5:12, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." Solidification in the know-so salvation is dependent upon one realizing the lostness of his condition naturally. It further entails receiving Jesus Christ as personal Savior as Peter described Him in I Peter 1:18, 19, "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as

of a lamb without blemish and without spot." What a great old path! What rest to the soul. But a lot of saved people are not enjoying this path, not being reconciled to God that they might have a more complete and sure knowledge of it. Notice what Paul says in II Corinthians 5:18-21.

Secondly, is the old path of accepting the whole Bible as the inerrant, infallible Word of God. I Peter 1:19-21 boldly declares, "We have a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." The Bible is "God-breathed." It does not contain the Word of God, it IS the Word of God. Paul forthrightly announced, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God. . ." II Timothy 3:16. To accept part of the Bible and reject other parts makes man the judge of what is right and wrong. I know of no man worthy of such distinction. Settle it in your mind. The Bible is either all true or not true at all. Take it all or take none of it. Anything less is to torment one's life in uncertainty, anxiety, doubt. Pity the person who rejects the Word. His fate is horrible, but not uncertain. The old path, tried and true that brings rest to the soul is receiving all the Bible as God's infallible Word.

Thirdly, there is the old path of godly living in righteous principles. Wholesale attempts to blend right and wrong, to be a Christian and still take one's fill of the world has wrought its woes on the households of faith. "Everybody is doing it" is not quite true and still remains the poorest excuse for any action. Not only has this error of life brought great unhappiness and the piercing of many sorrows as Paul describes in II Timothy 6:10, but it has been of inestimable value to a clandestine clergy determined to palm off a counterfeit kingdom of God on an unregenerate and unsuspecting society. Those who would know the inner personal peace of daily life walk in the old path of godly living in righteous principles. Consider what David said describing the blessed man in Psalm One.

Fourthly, consider the old path of keeping God's commandments. How convicting are Jesus' words, "Why call ye me Lord, Lord and do not the things I say?" Of course, the very mention of God's commandments evokes recall of the Ten Commandments to most hearers. These great commandments, recorded in Exodus 20:1-17 are the foundation of all righteous living. The New Testament is amplified upon these principles. But, we are no longer under the law of Moses. We are under the grace of Christ Jesus. Nevertheless, the

commandments of Jesus are based upon the unchanging principles of the Ten Commandments and they number many more than ten. In fact, they merit a lifetime of study and are made a test of genuine love for the Master. Jesus said, 'If ye love me, keep my commandments,' John 14:15. It is an old path and it brings great rest to the soul.

Fifthly, there is the great old path of fully embracing God's service. The world is too full of those who have reservations about serving God. Half-hearted embracement of God's service makes half-hearted Christians. And, this is not without Biblical precedent. Several instances could be mentioned, but Peter stands out as an example in Luke 22:54 as he followed our Lord 'afar off.' Those attempting to follow that example find the way to be rough and harmful. How much happier, how much better off are they who upon trusting Jesus readily follow Him in baptism, uniting and fellowshiping in His church, learning of Him, understanding and appreciating what it is to be in a covenant relationship with Jesus. The worth-whileness of the ministry, of missionary service, of the Christian life should be settled once-for-all, and surrendered to, without reservation. Then, and only then, will God's child know the profound happiness of those who walk in that grand old path of fully embracing God's service.

Sixthly, think about the old path of family devotion. It makes little sense that we should compass the globe to win someone to Christ and in the process neglect, ignore, and lose our own families. Does your family display devotion for God of their own initiative? Perhaps it is time to build, or to rekindle, spiritual fires in our homes through family devotions and prayers. It is an old path and it brings rest to the soul.

Finally, I would mention the old path of making God first and final in all things of life. That is, giving Him pre-eminence. Moses forsook Egypt and chose to suffer affliction with God's people rather than enjoy the pleasures of sin and the treasures of Egypt. He endured as seeing Him who is invisible. He made God first and final in his life.

Similarly, Daniel refused the king's diet because it conflicted with God's dietary laws for His people. Moreover, he defied the king's ban on prayer and triumphed in the lion's den because he made God to be first and final in his life.

Furthermore, Stephen knew the earthly joy of looking into heaven, beholding Jesus on the right hand of God, Acts 7:54-60. This blessing was his because he gave God preeminence in his life.

Additionally, Paul was stoned, left for dead, and shipwrecked, but he persevered. He conversed with an angel, and he finished his

course in an admirable, honorable way. He could do this only because Christ Jesus was pre-eminent in his life. It is a splendid old path and it brings rest to the soul.

CONCLUSION

What is this admirable, desirable quality of composure marking a mature believer? Some refer to it as "nerves of steel." Others call it "being cool." But, the Bible calls it self-possession and "old paths" that bring rest to the soul. In times of antiquity and in modern times as well, the advice of the all-knowing God is offered for the temporary and eternal good of the human soul. The text in Jeremiah contains that offer to Israel. It also contains their sad rejection. They said, "We will not walk therein." Surely the fallacy, the utter error of their decision is obvious. Oh, I hope it is plain and clear to you because this great advice of the omniscient God is offered also to you. There are cuts, bruises, destruction in those worldly paths of sin. Jesus is saying, "Come, follow me." Oh, it's infinitely smoother following Him. He walks in old paths that bring rest to the human soul.

PATHS TO REST THE SOUL"

I longed for inner peace

*Yet peace eluded me...
Until I found the meaning
Of "My peace, I give to thee."
Our Lord walked on the water,
Commanded storms to cease.
He can calm a troubled soul
With patience that brings peace.*

*Even in these fearful times
God's way provides release.
"He whose mind is stayed on thee
Shall be kept in perfect peace."
Let us hold fast his word
And proclaim it everywhere.
The peace that passeth understanding,
As his children we will share.*

Faye Wise

"PONDERINGS FROM PISGAH"

Text: Deuteronomy 3.4:1-5

"And Moses went up from the plains of Moab unto the mountain of Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, that is over against Jericho. And the Lord shewed him all the land of Gilead, unto Dan, and all Naphtali, and the land of Ephraim, and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah unto the utmost sea, and the south, and the plain of the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, unto Zoar. And the Lord said unto him, This is the land which I sware unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, saying, I will give it unto thy seed: I have caused thee to see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither. So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the Word of the Lord."

INTRODUCTION

Earth looks different from thousands of feet in the air. Having a brother who is a private pilot, I sometimes have the opportunity to ride as a passenger with him. It offers a relaxing change of pace for a little while and my, how different, how beautiful earth appears from that vantage point. A different viewpoint of terrain and the usefulness of the land is clearly revealed. Sometimes, this also helps in other areas of life as it underscores the need for a little different viewpoint, a need to consider more clearly.

To be sure, everyone needs to remove himself from the din and noise of this world to consider things from God's viewpoint. Jesus called His disciples aside for this purpose. Paul spent three years in the Arabian Desert for this purpose. And, God gave Moses this viewpoint from Pisgah. What did Pisgah mean to Moses? More to the point, what should it mean to us? Let us consider that.

I. THE DEFINITION OF TERMS.

"Nebo" means heights, and designates a mountain range in modern Jordan, east of the Dead Sea.

"Pisgah" designates a pinnacle of Nebo. It literally means, to divide, hence to distinguish, view, consider. Hence, the appropriateness of this message theme, "Ponderings From Pisgah."

II. THE PRESENCE OF GOD'S PEOPLE

From Pisgah's lofty height a great panorama unfolded before Moses. Not the least to command attention was the great throng of millions of Israelites stretched out in the valley below. Who are these people? Where did such a multitude come from? They are the covenant seed of Abraham. In Genesis 12 - 17 the great Abrahamic Covenant is stated and restated. God promised to make a mighty nation of him and that all the families of the earth should be blessed in him. The full context of this covenant is staggering even to the modern mind and has not been fully realized as yet. The covenant was passed on to Isaac, the son of Abraham and Sarah, then to Jacob, the younger son of Isaac. Jacob's name was changed to "Israel" and his twelve sons and their offspring are the twelve tribes of Israel, the people in the valley below Pisgah.

Indeed, "Ponderings From Pisgah" emphasize that God has a covenant people whom He has raised up and they exist by His power and for His good pleasure. Moreover, it should be noted that this is still true as is emphasized in Galatians 3:16, 29, "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ... And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

Additionally, these were redeemed people. The Egyptian bondage is a type of sin. Israel was redeemed from that bondage by the blood of the Passover lamb. Following redemption, the entire nation was baptized unto Moses, their mediator, in the sea and in the cloud, I Corinthians 10:2. As Hebrews chapter 10 explains, these were shadows of our reality. Being born-again by the blood of Jesus Christ our Passover, we are to follow Him in baptism, Acts 2:38, 41, Romans 6:1-6, and fellowship in His church, Acts 2:42, Ephesians 3:21, Matthew 28:18-20, 5:15, Revelation 1:20.

Moreover, these people were brought to Pisgah by the Lord. He led them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. He provided their food, water, every necessity of life, and gave them victory in battle. Even so, God has given His New Testament churches special comfort and leadership of the Holy Spirit since Pentecost. He promises and fulfills His promise to supply our every need, Matthew 6:33, and gives us victory after victory so that today we stand a mighty people on the earth.

II. THE PRICE OF PERVERSE PERSUASION.

"Ponderings From Pisgah" evoke the question of just how sinful is sin? May wrong be done unnoticed and without payment? Full well did Moses and the children of Israel know the awful price of perverse persuasions. That lesson was impressively initiated at the sad scenario at Sinai, recorded in Exodus 32. Three thousand men died as a result of idolatry, revelry, and rebellion to God's Word. The price of embracing perverse persuasions was high.

Furthermore, Numbers chapter 11 records another price exacted from the nation as they quibbled for quail. Disdaining the provisions of the heavenly Father, they loquaciously lusted for leeks and the fleshpots of Egypt. God gave them quail, but while the flesh was between their teeth the anger and wrath of God fell upon them. There they buried those who lusted. The price of a perverse persuasion was high.

Moreover, Numbers chapter 16 records the commandeering of Korah. Not satisfied with their share of special duties in tabernacle service, a large group of Levites under the influence of Korah rose up against Moses and Aaron and attempted to commandeer their areas of service as well. Consequently, the earth opened to swallow all the souls and goods which pertained to them. The fire of God consumed Korah and two hundred fifty princes with him. Also, fourteen thousand seven hundred died as a resultant plague among the people. Oh, yes the price of perverse persuasion was high.

Additionally, Numbers chapter 21 relates the unforgettable incident of sin and the serpent. Again, the verbosity of the Hebrews railed against God and against Moses. As a result, God sent fiery serpents among them and many people died. The Bible does not say how many, but obviously, the price of perverse persuasion was very high.

But, at the top of the list as far as consequential extent is concerned, is the catastrophe at Kadesh, listed in Numbers chapter 13. When ten of the twelve spies brought an evil report the nation refused to follow God into the land of promise. So significant was this faithless act of rebellion that it is used as a repeated warning in God's Word in Psalm 95:7-8, I Corinthians 10 and Hebrews 3:15-19. Israel's failure doomed approximately 600,000 men above twenty years of age ^{to} die over a forty-year period of wandering in the wilderness. The cost of perverse persuasions was high.

III. THE POSSIBILITY OF PROGRESS.

Nevertheless, "Ponderings From Pisgah" undeniably testifies that in spite of sin, chastisement, trial, tribulation, and war the nation survived the forty years of wandering and had arrived again at the border of Canaan in full strength. Their progress and presence at this point in time constituted a monument, a living Ebenezer as Samuel later said, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us," I Samuel 7:12. What was evidenced from the lofty view of Pisgah was a human impossibility to say the least. God kept them alive and in good health in a barren land for forty years. Surely, He is the possibility and hope for all progress.

Moreover, "progress" seems to demand some amplification as it is too often wrongly defined. Israel's progress was not to be counted in numbers of people although they were as strong or stronger as when they left Egypt. Today, preachers and churches have fallen into the "numbers" trap. If the numbers are up in services, they are "spiritual," they are making progress. If they are down, the Spirit has deserted them. It is a miserable situation, unbecoming to the covenant people of God. True progress is to be measured in terms of spiritual growth, in the salvation of spirits, in the converting of souls to a readiness to know and do God's will by faith. Israel failed at Kadesh. Now, forty years later, they were ready to follow God by faith against overwhelming human obstacles. That's progress.

Additionally, the possibility of their progress lay in the secret of their power. Simply stated, it was God. Far beyond human energy, their resource was that which created, sustains, and maintains the universe. It was as the word to Zechariah 4:6. Psalm 127:1 says, "They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth forever." Men often become powerless and afraid in the face of obstacles, especially when their attention is on themselves instead of God's promises. To the first generation of the Exodus, their problem was seeing the inhabitants of Canaan as giants and themselves as grasshoppers. On the other hand, consider Elisha in II Kings 7. When all were starving and the situation appeared utterly hopeless, he looked to God and walked in the power of God. By this, he prophesied of food in abundance the very next day. Although laughed to scorn, his prophecy became true. The power was of God. As Israel of old, the covenant people of God, His churches, should boldly take the initiative in carrying out His commands. He gives us the power, His power, and plainly promised in Matthew 16:18, ". . . the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (His church.)"

Finally, let it be stated that progress is measured or gauged as reaching a target, a stated goal. To Israel that goal was primarily to have a right relationship with God, then to conquer Canaan under the leadership of God, and finally to righteously inhabit the land. To His people today, the goal, similarly, is to establish a right relationship with God, to continue to live righteously before Him in New Covenant relationship, and to proceed to carry out the terms of the great commission with all due speed and diligence.

IV. THE PRIORITY FROM PISGAH.

Many ponderings from Pisgah flood the mind of one who would vicariously stop here for a while, but there is one too obvious, too great to overlook. It is the priority of God. He must be first' God's great blessings are reserved for those who unreservedly commit themselves to Him. From Pisgah they could see the promised land, but they could possess it only if they were willing to follow God. This reminds one of how often he may easily see what he would like to accomplish for God. Still, failure is often reality because he is not willing to follow God to the winning of the prize. Let it be understood, nothing could stop them; nothing can stop us from hitting the target of our progress if the priority list is stacked up properly - God first.

CONCLUSION

The ponderings from Pisgah's lofty height are precious because they are didactic in nature. Forged in the furnace of experience, they gleam as metal freshly removed from the press of a die. God's people are present because of Him! The price of perverse persuasions is too high! They must be shunned at all costs. The possibility of progress is in the might of the Lord! The importance of a proper priority with God at the top! All of these impress us from Pisgah, but like Israel of old, we are a moving people. We are journeying on to our promised land. It is as Samuel Stennet wrote in 1787,

"When shall I reach that happy place,
And be forever blest?
When shall I see my Father's face,
And in His bosom rest?
I am bound for the promised land,
I am bound for the promised land,
O, who will come and go with me?
I am bound for the promised land.

But, as surely as these lines are written, many shall know the pain and eternal loss of seeing but not possessing. Even the rich man in Luke 16 could see Paradise, but not have it. Furthermore, many who enter will know and experience loss at the judgment seat of Christ because they would not take a proper stand for Him here and now. One of the saddest notes from Pisgah is that Moses, that great servant of God, could not go over into the land. His sin had prevented his having that privilege. Consequently, I say to you, consecrate yourselves unto the Lord this day. Having pondered great realities from Pisgah, let us keep on keeping on until God bids us drop this robe of flesh and enter that blessed state which He has promised and in which we have hoped and vicariously lived for so long.

A Glimpse Is Not Enough

*Father... when I try to measure
My progress toward my goal,
It is not counting earth-treasure
But how well it is with my soul,
To trust you one day at a time
Just seeking your will for me,
Knowing all power is thine
And helping others to "see"
If you are "first" there's no reason
To be afraid any longer.
Trials may come for a season;
Your faithful promise is stronger.
And Heaven is nearer each day,
I need to cling to your hand.
Don't allow me to lose my way
This close to the promised land.*

Faye Wise

"THE VASTITUDE OF STEWARDSHIP"

Text: John 1:16

"And of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace."

INTRODUCTION

The human mind is fascinated and awed by things really big. From the fish one catches to the mountain he climbs, its big. Whether its the game one kills or the airplane he rides in, it has to be big. Most people are so caught up in the "Big is better" syndrome that they don't want to be associated with anything small. Whatever happened to the old cliché, "The best gifts come in small packages?" Big has come to mean good, great, worthwhile. Of course, this general assessment is far from being always true, but bigness is definitely associated with stewardship as is evidenced by the text.

Therefore, this message is especially designed to stimulate your thinking about the vastness of your stewardship. It should make you aware of virtually endless possibilities in your life. It is aimed at provoking you to action in areas of your stewardship which may be wanting. It purposes to increase your personal wealth both here and hereafter by alerting you to productive opportunities for the glory of God, assuming, of course, that you are willing to take advantage of such opportunities.

I. DEFINITION OF TERMS.

"Vastitude," according to Webster means, "very great in size, amount, degree, intensity, and is a synonym to huge." Of course, size is relative. To the pioneers in wagons, America was a vast continent. That vastitude is greatly lessened by the modern automobile and all but negated by modern jet airplane travel. Some years ago this author traveled by jet to Australia. Having never crossed the ocean any other way, I thought the ten-hour flight from Honolulu to Sydney constituted a huge ocean beneath, but how vast it must appear to those who take weeks to cross it by ship. Now, we speak of rocket ships to the moon and beyond. What does this mean to you as a creation of God? Life is multi-faceted and teeming with talent. With every personal conquest there looms yet another vast horizon of potential, of opportunity to challenge your abilities

"Stewardship," according to Webster means, "The

office, duties, and obligations of a steward; also, the individual's responsibility to manage his life and property with proper regard to the rights of others." In the New Testament, the term is a translation of "oikonomos," "manager or administrator; esp. that which belongs to another." - Thayer. Stewardship does not exist until one is entrusted with something to use beneficially for another. "Steward is the person and "ship" is how one handles the entrustment. The best illustration of this is Eleazar, the steward of Abraham, the first person to be called such in the Bible. His personal deportment and faithfulness to his master's word and with his goods in the journey to secure a bride for Isaac is exemplary of excellent stewardship for all time. But, let no one think stewardship is reserved for ministers or any other select group. All who know anything at all about God and His plan for man is a steward of that knowledge. Paul said, "Let a man so account of us, as the ministers of God, and stewards of the mysteries of God," I Corinthians 4:1. New Testament mysteries do not denote knowledge withheld, but knowledge revealed.

II. THE VASTITUDE OF YOUR STEWARDSHIP.

The text says, "And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace." The initial assessment of this verse is that it is obscure. Dr. A.T. Roberson in his **Word Pictures In The New Testament** says that the preposition "for" is, in the Greek, a disappearing word used especially in exchange in sale or trade. It is thus "grace taking the place of grace like the fresh manna each morning, new grace for the new day and the new service." Others translate this phrase, "Grace upon grace." Little wonder then that Peter calls us,

"Stewards of the manifold grace of God," I Peter 4:10. Additionally, James 1:17 announces that every good and perfect gift comes to us from God. This makes us a steward of every good thing in our knowledge and/or possession. A few moments of serious thought about this reveals something of the great vastness of every individual's stewardship.

Furthermore, that vastness often lies largely hidden until some act of providence forcibly uncovers it. Consider the man who applied for the janitor's job during the depression at First Baptist Church. He was uneducated and was turned down because he couldn't write. It would be an insult to First Baptist to have such in its employment. Dejected and broke the poor man walked down the street flipping his last nickel. He came upon a vendor selling apples. Upon inquiring, he learned the apples were five cents each. He bought one and continued down the road flipping the apple. When asked by a bystander how much he would sell it for, he replied, "Ten cents." He

sold it and promptly returned to the vendor and bought two apples. His latent talents came alive and in a matter of time he owned several produce stores. One day he came into the bank with sacks filled with money, desiring the banker to help him take care of it. The banker was aghast. Learning of the man's lack of education, he asked, "What in the world could you have been if you had an education?" To which the man promptly replied, "The janitor at First Baptist Church."

Moreover, I know a man who used to punch a clock in a factory until in an accident he severed one of his fingers. Laid-off from work many days, he began to look for something he could do. Odd jobs seemed to be plentiful and soon he was making more at those than he was at his factory job. Later, he went into contracting on a full-time basis and became a millionaire.

III. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF YOUR STEWARDSHIP.

The vastitude of your stewardship solemnly emphasizes the great responsibility you have. It is truly awesome. The NAACP has a current commercial on television stations which concludes, "A human mind is a terrible thing to waste." Life and its potential is a terrible thing to abuse, misuse, waste.

Moreover, this fact is comprehended in greater sobriety in the realization that you must give account of all this to God. This truth is graphically illustrated in the parable of the talents, Matthew 25:4-30. Add to that the testimony of Paul in II Corinthians 5:10, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." Doubtless, it was in comprehension of this fact that the following words were penned:

"Because I Have Been Given Much"

Because I have been given much, I too must give;
Because of thy great bounty, Lord, each day I live,
I shall divide my gifts from thee with ev'ry
brother that I see
Who has the need of help from me.
Because I have been sheltered, fed, By thy good care,
I cannot see another's lack and I not share
My glowing fire, my loaf of bread, my roof's safe
shelter overhead,

That he too may be comforted.
Because love has been lavished so upon me, Lord,
A wealth I know that was not meant for me to hoard,
I shall give love to those in need,
Shall show that love by word and deed:
Thus shall my thanks be thanks indeed.

Grace Noll Crowell, 1936

Conclusion

I challenge you to discover and enjoy the greater joys of abundant living; that is, to use and to enlarge your stewardship. I once knew a pastor's secretary who felt incapable of serving in any worthwhile capacity in her church. Encouraged to do so by pastor and friends, she used effective, valuable talents, which she had judged to be practically useless, to become one of the greatest assets the church had. It made her very happy. I also knew a man who was very backward and shy. The thought of working personally with people to win them to Christ horrified him. However, others could see in him exceptional, winsome ways. They encouraged him and in his own unique way, he became the greatest soul-winner in that church. He enlarged his stewardship, and it made him very happy.

Furthermore, to aid and encourage you, I challenge you to re-think yourself as made in the image of God. What does it mean to you that you are the crowning act of the creation of God? Dr. Donald Barnhouse reasoned that since man, a spiritual being was created last, but was in the plan of God from the beginning, all things were made with him in mind and are intended to teach him spiritual lessons. Having reached this conclusion, he went on to become one of the very best original illustrators of all time. God is your author. By Him you move and breathe and have being. He has placed great ability, potential, stewardship in the hands of each of His people. Their purpose is to be used for the glory of God and great is the reward to the faithful steward who does so.

Finally, commitment to God is the starting place. Just as those who are lost should readily receive Him as personal Savior, those who are saved should follow Him in service. Let each of us seek out and commit ourselves to Him in acceptable service whether it is in established or new ministries. The vastitude of your stewardship in conjunction with the fleeting element of time demands your attention and action, now!

"THE VASTITUDE OF STEWARDSHIP"

*We have no right withholding
The gifts that God bestowed
On us, to ease a brother's pain
Or lighten the stranger's load.
If we are given "much"..
"Much" is required, too.
"The fields are ripe to harvest
And truly the workers are few."
Now may our eyes be opened
In keen awareness of
The need to be good stewards
As channels of his love.*

Faye Wise

“Entering The New Year Hungry”

Text: Matthew 5:6

"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteous-ness: for they shall be filled."

INTRODUCTION

Thank God for the ability to become hungry! This statement sounds strange to the ears of the young, the inexperienced in life. In many cases, hunger is a great blessing indeed. I have sat by the bedside of many men and women dying of cancer and other diseases. So often they reach a state where they cannot become hungry. More than one has said, "If only I could become hungry!" But, hunger was denied them.

Essentially, hunger is the great, primary motivating factor of life. Webster defines the terms as "a need for food," but he continues to define the word as meaning "a strong desire or craving." In this latter sense, hunger is what makes the world go 'round. Also, the manner with which it is dealt tells the story of an individual's life. It is the specific purpose of this message to underscore the fact that there is heavenly help for handling hunger.

I. THE WORLD IS A HUNGRY WORLD.

Every generation since Adam has been a hungry generation. The world is hungry. It is driven on by its strong desires and cravings. There is genuine hunger for peace among nations. The formulation of leagues of nations, world alliances, treaties, the United Nations and World Court are all designed to satisfy to some degree the world hunger for peace. The expenditure of billions of dollars on weaponry and defense tactics are meant to satisfy the human hunger for peace. None of these things has been successful for any length of time, and the world is driven on, still hungry. Furthermore, the world is hungry for economic recovery and prosperity. Inflation, deflation, recession are common terms to the average man. Fortunes are amassed and lost overnight in the maddening turbulence of modern economics. Gold and silver plunge from extreme lows to extreme highs and back again. Money is as plentiful as at the heights of great

prosperity, but commerce and industry are stifled as in times of depression. Many fields of endeavor cry for help while the national unemployment figure skyrockets. The world is truly hungry for economic stability.

Moreover, the world is hungry for technological advancement. The technology which put men and machines on the moon and a digital watch on every arm has quickly been digested. It is now history, commonplace, old hat. The centers of higher learning and research press on, ever standing on the threshold of something new, a breakthrough, perhaps something to free man's time a little more so he can increase his tempo of life ever more in a never-ending drive to satisfy an insatiable hunger.

Additionally, the world is hungry for victory over disease. I do not speak disparagingly of the medical advancement available to us today. Nor, do I belittle the research teams that may bring us new comforts of life. Still, disease and death shall never be conquered under the present dominating laws of sin. In fact, with all the vaunted progress of this twentieth century, the two chief killers of mankind, heart attacks and cancer, still run unchecked over the human race. The work will continue because the world is a hungry world.

II. HUNGER IMPELS THE INDIVIDUAL TO HIS ZENITH.

Envisioning some mystical "top of the ladder," one is driven ever onward, forward in the pursuit of life's offerings. Whatever the vocational selection one has chosen, hunger causes him to press on to the top, to be the best. It's the American dream and surely that of the rest of the world as well.

In addition to that, the personal loneliness and sense of emptiness one feels is called "insecurity." "Security" is money or its equivalent. So, the life-long quest for security begins and is ever fueled by financial hunger.

Also, a large number of people, hungry for a sense of well-being, become workaholics in the deceived notion that satisfaction may be procured through personal achievement. The hunger drives them on and on.

However, there are other things which create hunger in the individual, not the least of which is love. One of the primary needs, hunger, of every person is to be loved. Often the pursuer of love is tragically misguided and finds himself upon the shoals of disaster instead of basking in the blissful haven of love. But, whether

successful or not, one is driven on by his hunger for love. Those finding it know the meaning of zenith in life.

III. MISGUIDED HUNGER, A PERSONAL TRAGEDY.

Hunger must be properly treated. If not, it will lead to personal tragedy. Could you imagine a starving man falling upon a pile of sawdust and eating in hopes of keeping body and soul together? Could you imagine a hard-working man spending his day's wages on cotton candy to supply himself with the needed calories and protein to do another day's work? How inappropriate, how misguided, how great a disaster this would be. So treated is the hunger, craving, desire of many in the world today. Misguidance always cheats one out of fulfillment. It is the devil's tool. Its more common name is sin.

Therefore, to train one's hunger for peace, goodness, well-being, security upon the world and its offerings is so silly as to admit that all which glitters is gold. The stories of tragedy never end. Wasted drunks, dope addicts, suicides ever mount from what was thought to be successful men and women. They climbed success ladder and found nothing at the top. A typical example appeared in a newspaper column some time ago. A woman wrote of her happiness in a home with two children, a loving husband who made a very modest income and few of the luxuries of life. Later, another wrote in response saying she envied that woman. Their family life had been similar until her husband had risen to experience large annual sums of money. Since then they joined country clubs, cocktail parties, bought clothes and property. They had to keep up their status. They had no time together and the money was ruining them. Their hunger was misguided and it was bringing tragedy. Israel fell into the same misguidance. Through the prophet Haggai, God said to them, "Now therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts; consider your ways. Ye have sown much and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes. Thus saith the Lord of hosts; consider your ways." Haggai 1:5-7. To this the thunderous words of Isaiah 55:2 resound upon our ear, "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? And your labor for that which satisfieth not? Harken diligently unto me, and eat that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness."

IV. HUNGER THAT BLESSES THE SOUL.

As surely as misguided hunger is tragic; as surely as water runs downhill instead of up; as surely as the sun rises in the east and sets in the west, so surely is there hunger that blesses the soul. This is the hunger of life properly guided toward God. That God experiences hunger is a shocking revelation to some, but the truth is a boundless blessing. Certainly, our Lord Jesus experienced hunger on earth a number of times. After the forty days of wilderness temptations, he was hungry. Matthew 21:18 also states, "Now in the morning as he returned into the city, he hungered." Jesus knew the physical pangs of hunger, but these were not and are not His greatest pangs of hunger. Jesus is hungry for human souls to trust Him. He paid the supreme price on Golgotha's ghastly brow that men, women, young people might be saved with an everlasting salvation. He has a great desire, hunger, to see those for whom He died come to possess that great salvation by trusting in Him.

However, there is more involved here. It is true that you have a unique opportunity to satisfy the hunger of Jesus by trusting in Him. But, it is also true that when you trust in the Lord Jesus, He will satisfy your hunger. Oh, how much hunger is satisfied in a right relationship with the Lord! That insatiable hunger you have known for identification, well-being, security, peace is wonderfully fulfilled in Jesus. No wonder Isaiah cried, "Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price," Isaiah 55:1.

But, since hunger is a main motivating factor of life, it is not appropriate that we should cease to be hungry in this life. Peter says, "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby," I Peter 2:2. How grand it is to hunger after the Word. The pastor who challenges his people to read, study, memorize the Word will do them no greater favor. Dr. Paul Goodwin has compiled a small booklet of Scriptures entitled, "The Memory Path To Blessings." I challenged our church to memorize a lesson each week and to quote it each Wednesday evening. Many started and fell away, but some stayed with the challenge throughout the book. What a blessing is theirs hiding the Word of God in their heart

CONCLUSION

As we stand upon the dawning of a new year, let us thank God for the ability to become hungry. Entering the new year hungry is an exciting prospect. Only the hungry may know the joy of being filled. Satisfying hunger is the specialty of the Lord Jesus.

Moreover, those who hunger after righteousness are those who will know a double blessing. Jesus said, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled," Matthew 5:6. The double blessing is in being filled and at the same time satisfying the hunger of God who lovingly craves the souls of men.

TO DOUBLE THE BLESSING

*With compassion for the hungry
Christ fed the multitude;
To spirit-hunger he applied
The fourth BEATITUDE.
"Blessed are those which do
hunger and thirst after
righteousness; for they
shall be filled."
He longs to meet our every need
As only the Saviour can.
"Vintage "of earth can never quench
The deep soul-thirst of man.
"...early will I seek thee,
my soul thirsteth for thee,
my flesh longeth for thee,
in a dry and thirsty land
where no water is."
Living water and bread of life
Shall nourish and keep us untroubled,
He needs our trust - we need to abide,
Therein the blessing is doubled.*

Faye Wise

*Matthew 5-6
Psalm 68-1*

"WHERE THE RISEN CHRIST ISN'T"

Text: Matthew 28:1-6

"In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from

heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: and for fear of him the keepers did quake, and became as dead men. And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay."

INTRODUCTION

On the north wall of the city of Jerusalem there is a gate. It is called Herod's gate. A short distance from that gate is an ugly hill called "Golgotha" in the Hebrew tongue (the place of the skull). Upon the crest of this hill our Lord was crucified between two thieves to pay the sin debt of every man from Adam to the present time, and onward till time shall be no more. About one-half block west of the ugly hill is a garden and in the north garden wall a tomb is positioned in the hillside. Near the tomb is a memorial stone with Scripture inscribed in English, Greek, and Hebrew. This is the place where the body of Jesus lay.

Now, we have come to the day the Christian world calls Easter. Today, the thought will cross many minds that Christ arose. This is not the precise anniversary as Easter is arbitrarily set according to the moon. To the knowledgeable Christian, Easter is the first day of every week. The resurrection of Christ is commemorated by our church meeting on the first day of the week.

Nevertheless, tradition almost always finds a wider reception than Bible truth. Consequently, some feel this day is one of two or three days each year that they should take time out to honor God by attending church. How strange this is in light of such forceful Bible exhortations as Hebrews 10:25 or the stated example of the first churches, I Corinthians 16:2. The modern reality is typified by a personal experience. I used to drive by a black church named "Bethel African Methodist-Episcopal Church." However, it was abbreviated

on the sign to simply "Bethel A.M.E. Church." Since a black co-worker attended there I asked what A.M.E. meant. He replied, "Armistice Day, Mother's Day, and Easter, because that's when we fills her up."

Therefore, the need to know and practice Bible truth is everywhere evidenced as the need of the hour. Let us hear again the angelic announcement, "Come see the place where the Lord lay," and understand that there are some places where the risen Lord isn't.

I. THE RISEN CHRIST IS NOT IN EVERYTHING CALLED CHRISTIAN.

The term 'Christian' was first applied derogatorily to the disciples in Antioch, Acts 11, because they imitated, taught, and walked in the ways of Christ. What a compliment! That is what one should be today if he is to be known as a Christian. However, that term now applies to almost everyone and everything even faintly religious. Our nation is now inundated with new formulations, new approaches to gain disciples from the spiritually dead and ritualistically bored churches of human origin. These are called Non-denominationalism and/or Inter-denominationalism. It is nothing short of a satanic novelty in the never-ending charade, the rampant counterfeiting of God's work on earth. It proposes to bring diversity into unity, not in doctrinal unity, but organizational unity. A doctrinal hodge-podge is nothing less than a lie in action. The risen Christ is not in the lie. He ascribes it to Satan and those who practice it as the children of Satan, John 8:44. Jesus said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." The Word through Jude three is that we are to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints. May one contend without being contentious?

Moreover, inter-denominational crusades tend toward "Christian nicety," meaning forget your convictions and be one of the crowd which has agreed to stand for nothing, especially not the Scriptures, no matter how plain they may be. Who then sets the doctrinal, worship of such? A man or a group of men are responsible. "Shall we follow men or God?" becomes the overriding question. Inter and non-denominationalism would destroy the church of Christ Jesus, the pillar and ground of the truth. Its advocacy of the universal brotherhood of man and individual admission to the "universal" church by mere profession of faith are two of the most popular falsehoods in America today. But,

insomuch as neither are Biblically sanctioned, the risen Christ isn't in them.

Furthermore, pity that soul who is locked into such denominational dependence. For instance, some will say, 'I am what I am and there is nothing I can do about it.' Others may say, 'I know what I believe regardless of what the Bible says.' Such may know our Lord in the new birth experience but have been drawn so far away from God's truth and solidified so greatly in error that they shall be like unto the poor souls in Matthew 7:21-23 who allude to their great "Christian" activity to gain rewards from our Lord. Like them, they shall go away empty. The risen Christ is not in all "Christian" activity.

II. THE RISEN CHRIST IS NOT IN EVERYTHING SPIRITUAL.

According to our beloved brother John, I John 4:1, there are many spirits in the world; religious spirits which must be tried to determine if they are true or false. Chief among the traditional misconceptions fostered by false spirits are stressed emotionalism, substituting the preaching of the Word by protracted singings, and substitution of the Word in favor of entertainment in the pulpit. Practitioners of such perversions normally assume a plastic piety stretching far enough to cover every possible post supporting their perishable path. And, change they will not, no matter what the Scriptures declare. Folk, the risen Christ simply isn't there.

III. THE RISEN CHRIST IS NOT IN THE TOMB.

The best news of millennia is "He is not here, He is risen." His tomb is empty. The tomb of no other is so. Buddha is dead, Mohammed is dead, Confucius is dead. Dr. J. Sidlow Baxter tells of a report that swept through Asia a few years ago. Reportedly, the bones of Buddha had been discovered and were subsequently paraded through the streets in great fanfare with millions paying homage. A Christian witnessing the event, said to a friend, 'If they could find one bone of Jesus, Christianity would fall apart.' He is not in the tomb!

But, where is He? Where is the risen Christ? He is seated on the right hand of the heavenly Father. He is present in repentant hearts. He is present in Bible-believing, Christ-centered gatherings. He is present in His great mission work. He is present in His church, Ephesians 3:21, Matthew 28:20. It is easy for us to see in Old Testament times that God was not present with the Egyptians, the

Jebusites, Canaanites, Moabites, Amalekites, etc. He was present with Israel, His covenant people. It is His New Testament church. He is with that church and that church is a far cry from a Roman, protestant or neo-protestant congregation.

Here is the joy of Easter. To be where the risen Christ is, in His church, with His people. This presence with the risen Christ is to become one of great realization in time to come. This is His own word to us in John 14:1-3, ". . . that where I am, there ye may be also." No matter what happens to me, to you, God will keep this promise. I am told that Spain wanted to honor one of its greatest poets long since dead and the whereabouts of his grave unknown. So, they gathered particles of dust from every place he was known to have visited and placed it in an expensive vault. They hoped the particles might contain some miniscule particle of his body. Oh, what better hope Jesus offers those who trust in Him. He will gather us complete from the dust into a new, incorruptible form. The victory over sin, death, hell, and the grave is ours. Jesus said, "I have overcome the world. And, we shall overcome in Him.

CONCLUSION

From the Word of God it is clear that there are some places where the risen Christ isn't. He is not in everything called spiritual. He is not in everything called Christian. He is not in the tomb. Jesus is alive! He is alive to forgive sin. He is alive to open wide heaven's gate to every penitent sinner. He is alive to lead His people, to guide His church to a predetermined conclusion. He is alive to enter into human hearts and live with His believers. He is alive and waiting to enter your heart today. John said, "He came unto his own and His own received Him not. But as many that received Him, to them gave He power to become the Sons of God, even to them that believe on His name." John 1:11-12

“WHERE THE RISEN CHRIST ISN’T”

*My Lord was shamed and beaten,
Crowned with thorns and tried,
Branded "guilty" by the mob,
Yet innocent. .. He died.*

*But my Lord is not imprisoned
Despite the plans they made,
Nor is he bound in burial clothes
Behind a stone-barricade.*

*You will not find Him on the cross
Or lifeless in the grave;
My Lord lives... within the
hearts Of those He came to save.*

Faye Wise

"A TRIBUTE TO MOTHER"

Text: Genesis 3:20

"And Adam called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living."

INTRODUCTION

Teenagers are not the only people with identity problems. The question "Who am I?" often plagues mothers, too. Accordingly, psychiatrists have explored mothers, polls have surveyed their attitudes, sociologists have written many learned reports about them, and foundations have funded investigations of them. More recently, a President of the United States set up a commission on the status of women with chief emphasis placed on mothers.

However, it is not these august professionals who give the best data on motherhood. Those desiring the best information, descriptions, will ask the experts - children. A poll of a large group of children on motherhood produced the following answers:

1. Who is a mother? She knows what is important. That is why God asked them to be a mother.
2. A mother is the only one if she sings your favorite song, it stops thundering.
3. A mommy is a wife. A mommy looks after children and she yells.
4. A mother doesn't do anything except she wants to. Nobody makes her take baths and naps or takes away her frog.
5. A mother is one who will never forget you even if you get married and move to another town.
6. If I forget to tell my mother I need my shepherd costume tomorrow morning, she finds one in the night. That is a mother.
7. Mother gets mad if you use your brother's toothbrush, but she doesn't care.
8. Mothers are wonderful! She spends all her time on you. A mother is just like God except God is better.
9. It is lucky that we have a mother because if we did not have a mother, everything would be in a big mess.
10. Mother is an inside houseworker.

11. Mothers are people with X-ray eyes. They always know where you are, what you are doing, how you are doing it, who you are doing it with, and where you are doing it. They are the first ones to find out what you don't want anyone to know.
12. Mothers say "No-no" before the child can ever tell her what she wants, but I think mothers should let them finish.
13. A mother is a very dear person who has given up her life with her parents to be by herself with her husband. Also to raise a few children herself.
14. What is a mother? When I have something to tell somebody, I can tell my mother sometimes, but not all the time.
15. A mother is a person, too.

Billy Sunday once said, "I don't think there are enough devils in hell to take a young person from the arms of a godly mother." Abraham Lincoln said, "All that I am or hope to be, I owe to my angel mother."

Accordingly, motherhood is to be appreciated as occupying a very fundamental and exalted position in the order of life. Condensing motherhood to a dissertation would be the same as doing that to life itself. To appreciate motherhood best requires thorough consideration of the position it is afforded in the Holy Word of God.

I. SHE IS THE BOND OF THE FAMILY UNIT.

It is highly interesting to note that the first usage of the term "mother" in the Bible, Genesis 2:24, is used before there was a mother. Surely this fact strongly undergirds God's obvious intention for single family units. In that unit, mother is a very strong bond. Someone once said it this way:

"With toys that won't run and noses that won't stop,
She's sweeping and dusting and slinging a mop.
Amidst cookings and sewings and children that shout,
Meetings and management is what she's about.
With pots and pans and dishwater hands,
Her worth is incalculable in every great land.

She's loving and understanding and works to make ends meet. She's a person mature, adorable and sweet.

Indisposable to husbands, loved by children, respected by merchants, the foundation of the home - thus society - thus nation - thus civilization rests upon her soft, gentle frame."

II. SHE IS THE FOUNTAIN OF LIFE.

The text verse, Genesis 3:20, gives the name of the first mother. It is Eve. "Eve" is given here because it is an English name meaning "life." The Hebrew name of the first mother is "Havvah." The term is mimetic of the sound of one breathing. If you inhale and exhale rather heavily, especially through the mouth, you will hear this name "Hay. . . vah, Hay. . . vah, Hay. . . vah." Hence, the Hebrew name meaning "breathing one, life, the fountain, mother of all who breathe, live. The application to all mothers is obvious.

III. SHE IS CONSIDERED EQUAL TO HER HUSBAND IN HONOR AND AS AN INSTRUCTOR.

Though obviously elevated by our Lord Jesus, motherhood has always enjoyed great respect among God-fearing men, even from earliest times. It is said of Jacob that he obeyed the instruction of his father and his mother. Solomon boldly declared, "My son, hear the instruction of thy father and forsake not the law of thy mother," Proverbs 1:8.

Moreover, the Mosaic Law imposed the death penalty upon those who smite, or curse their mother as readily and forcefully as if it were done to their father, Exodus 21:15, 17. Some of Jesus' most scathingly denunciatory words were heaped upon the scribes and Pharisees for ill treatment of father and mother. He said, "For God commanded, saying Honour thy father and mother: and, he that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; And honour not his father, or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition," Matthew 15:4-6.

Furthermore, the great value and exaltation of motherhood has been recognized and lauded down through the ages. Francis Keyes said, "Of all the men I have known, I cannot recall one whose mother did her level best for him when he was little, who did not turn out well when he grew up." Leviticus 19:3 declares, "Ye shall fear every man his father and his mother . . ." Peter emphasized that the husband and wife are heirs of the grace of life together, I Peter 3:7.

Finally, no greater evidence could be called upon to verify this point than that of woman's creation. She was not taken from any other part of man's anatomy than one - his side.

IV. SHE IS PRAISED FOR DEVOUTNESS.

Some things have never been clearly understood by me. Man was made for the honor and glory of God. Woman was made for the glory of man. Yet, in most churches today there are more women serving God than there are men. It is strange, but thank God for devout mothers. Though it was an honest mistake conceived by Sarah and received by Abraham to use a surrogate mother to produce an heir, God would not approve. He honored Sarah with the production of the child, Isaac. So blessed was she for her devoutness. Sarah said, "God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me," Genesis 21:6.

Additionally, Hannah, that devout mother of Samuel, is praised to this day for her relationship with the Lord and the part she played in the dedication of her son. Consider also the praise heaped upon Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, for her devoutness. Think of the praise paid Lois and Eunice, the grandmother and mother of Timothy for their devoutness,

II Timothy 1:5. Add to this the glorious praise of the handmaiden of the Lord, Mary. There simply is no way to properly evaluate a devout mother. Her price is far above rubies.

V. SHE IS RENOWNED FOR HER UNPARALLELED LOVE.

An old cliché says, "A dog is man's best friend." That's pure and simple "Hogwash." A man's best friend is his mother. Whose love is as mother's love in all the earth? Consider some examples: Hagar loved Ishmael so greatly she wept and cried unto the Lord for his sake when she thought death was near, Genesis 21:16.

Jochebed loved Moses so much she defied the edict of Pharaoh and committed him to an ark in the river as an absolute last resort, Exodus 2:3.

Hannah loved Samuel so intently she gave him up to study the ways of God. But, she also kept him supplied in clothing, year by year, I Samuel 2:19.

Rizpah loved her sons to such a degree that she protected their dead bodies from barley harvest until the rainy season, II Samuel 21:9-10.

The Shunammite mother loved her son. She held him on her knees until he died and then in faith sought the prophet who restored his life, II Kings 4:20.

The Canaanite woman loved her daughter with such great love that she would not be insulted nor deterred in any way from receiving her health from the Lord Jesus, Matthew 15:22-28.

The proverbial and renowned love of mothers is used as one of the highest comparisons of the love of God. Isaiah said, "Can a woman forget her suckling child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee," Isaiah 49:15.

CONCLUSION

"Mother", she is the bond of the family, fountain of life, instructor of children, praised for her devoutness, renowned for her love. It's all a part of being a mother. The poet said it well in these impressive lines:

She could not paint, nor write, nor rhyme
Her footsteps on the sands of time,
As some distinguished women do;
Just simple little things of life she knew
Like tucking little folks in bed,
Or soothing someone's aching head.

She was no singer, neither blessed
With any special loveliness

To win applause and passing fame;
No headlines ever blazed her name.
But, oh, she was a shining light
To all her loved ones, day and night!

Her home her kingdom, she its queen,
Her reign was faithful, honest, clean,
Impartial, loving, just, to each

And every one she sought to teach.
Her name? of course, there is no other
In all the world so sweet - just Mother!

—May Allread Baker

The highest exaltation of motherhood is by our Lord Himself. When He was ready to visit the world incarnate in human flesh, He chose a young virgin so fair. And by the power of the Holy Spirit, she became His earthly mother.

Mother. Is there anyone better than Mother? Yes! Unequivocally yes! There is one better than mother. He is the God who made mothers. Everyone in the whole world needs to identify with the God of mothers. In Matthew 13:46-50 it is written, "While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him. Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee. But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, "Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother." Brother, you may be His brother today. Sister, you may be His sister today. Mother, you may be His mother this day. Do the will of the heavenly Father - believe on Him whom He hath sent.

A MOTHER'S PILGRIMAGE

*Prepared by Angel Gabriel,
In faith, she traveled far,
Brought forth her first born son
Beneath a shining star,
Laid Him gently in a manger
Knowing He was CHRIST the KING
Welcomed shepherds and the wise men
And heard the angels sing.
All these things, kept in her heart,
In God's favor watched Him grow,
Followed Him to Calvary,
Soul-pierced by the sword also.
In deep anguish, watched Him die
Bearing the sins of man
In her acceptance and belief,
Took her place in God's own plan.*

Faye Wise

(Poet Laureate Award) National Poetry Day, 1980

"A MEMORIAL DAY PRAYER"

"Almighty, kind, and gracious Father, Exalted Sovereign of the universe, we look to you today on this most solemn occasion as we pause to remember and to pay tribute to the honored dead, who have given the supreme sacrifice for the "Land of the free and the home of the brave." Thank you for every man who has proudly worn the uniform of the armed services of the United States of America in times of war as well as in times of peace. Thank you especially for those who have fallen on fields of battle and those living who wear in their bodies and minds the scars of the unforgettable price of freedom. We humbly ask your great blessings, according to your riches in mercy and in grace, for those who have known and continue to know the pain of loss of sons, fathers, husbands, brothers in the wars our nation has experienced. Surely, theirs is the greater share in the goodness and freedom in which we bask this day.

Heavenly Father, help us to understand that it is not enough to remember on this one day alone the bravery of our fallen comrades. Cause us to be deeply convicted that it is not enough to simply decorate a grave and forget until another year is past, but that the responsibility of ensuring that these have not fallen in vain rests upon us constantly.

Moreover, as the fresh, verdant evergreens of this Memorial Park commemorates those who have fallen among us, so may the cause for which they died ever be freshly impressed upon our minds and souls. May the constant vigil for peace be ours. May the courage to stand for what is right and true be ours. May the moral and religious fiber of strength be ours by faith in thee and thee alone, our Saviour and our God. Give us this day a renewed spirit of dedication to the principles of faith and of freedom. Help us to instill these into the hearts of our youth that the cause of our honored dead may not be lost and that freedom and liberty shall not perish from this land we love.

Furthermore, grant us, O God, the will to protect this nation as fiercely and as faithfully on the inside as those whom we honor today have done on the outside. We ask this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen."

W. A. Dillard

"GOD'S MEMORIALS"

Text: Psalm 135:13, 143:5

"Thy name, O Lord, endureth forever, and thy memorial, O Lord, throughout all generations. I Remember the days of old..."

INTRODUCTION

"Tomorrow is Memorial Day. It is a day observed nationally in remembrance of those who have gone on into eternity, especially those who gave their lives in service to this great country. Thank God for those in this "Home of the brave" who have sacrificed so greatly to keep this country the "Land of the free." This day is their memorial. Memorials, whether they are days, statuary, portraits, buildings or whatever, have a singular purpose - to cause us to remember. Our great God has instituted some memorials through the centuries of time.

Accordingly, it is fitting that we renew our acquaintance with God's memorials today. To remember the dead without remembering the living God of all hope is to be the most miserable of all creatures. We know God and remember His greatness and goodness by His memorials which are a source of strength and encouragement to us. Also, the knowledge attainable in these memorials brings great Christian joy to our hearts. Consider then the following memorials:

I. A MEMORIAL FOR GOD, HIMSELF.

In Genesis 9:12-26, a memorial is instituted which is well known to all. It is the rainbow. It is a memorial of historical value and blessing to all earth's creatures. It immediately reminds us of the Noachic Hood, but more importantly, that it won't happen again. Yet, it is principally a memorial of a covenant made between God and the earth and is intended as a continual reminder of that covenant to God, Himself. God said when the bow appears in the cloud, "I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh," Genesis 9:15. Thank God for this perpetual memorial which teaches us much about God and about a civilization long since destroyed.

II.

III. MEMORIALS FOR GOD'S PEOPLE.

A. A Memorial of Redemption. One of the first great memorials God instituted for His people is the memorial of redemption. Exodus 12:14 puts it this way, "And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the Lord throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance forever." Therefore, the annual Passover Feast was observed by Israel from that day until the last supper observed by our Lord before His crucifixion. It was to call to remembrance the fact of Israel's bondage, their liberation by the blood of the passover lamb. It was to point forward to the Passover Lamb of God, even Jesus, sacrifice liberates from the bondage of sin.

B. A Memorial of Provision. God is in the business of providing for Himself. He provides for His own. It is a lesson skeptics will never learn and God's people often forget. The other day I rejected a Bible book because the author repeatedly called the Scriptures into question. In one instance he labeled the Bible number of Israelites in the Exodus a mistake. He said there simply would be no way to sustain that number of people in the desert. Surely God knew there would be people such as he among succeeding generations of Israel, too. Consequently, God commanded them in Exodus 16:32 to fill an omer with manna to be placed in the Ark of the Covenant for future generations to see how God sustained them in the barren desert. It was a memorial of His provision to succeeding generations.

C. A Memorial of Spiritual Victory. Exodus 17:8-16 records a desert battle between the Amalekites and the Israelites after the former struck the weak and straggling then openly arrayed themselves for war. Joshua and a select group of men won that war as Moses held the rod of God over the war-raged valley. Part of the significance of this battle is that the Amalekites were related to the Israelites through Esau, a type of the flesh. Israel, the spiritual, triumphed over Amalek, the fleshly, as the rod was raised signifying it was the Lord's battle. The opposite occurred when the rod was lowered. Of this event, God told Moses, "Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua: For I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven." Yet, verse 16 states it is to be a perpetual war from generation to generation giving it both a literal and spiritual significance. From that historical event they learned, and we are reminded, that spiritual victory may only be achieved as the Lord is exalted.

D. A Memorial of God's Laws. The laws of God were not without meaning or consequence to the offender. As a result, it was most important that they not be forgotten. To accomplish this a memorial of cloth was created. Israel was to make blue ribbands as fringes to their garments. This command is given in Numbers 15:38-41. It was for the specific purpose of causing the Israelites to remember the laws of God, to practice them that they might be holy unto the Lord their God. It is interesting to note that this memorial was created immediately after a man was stoned to death for picking up sticks on the Sabbath. To further insure a thorough remembrance of God's laws, Moses commanded that they wear them as bindings upon their hands and as frontlets between their eyes; that they should also write them upon the posts of their houses and upon their gates, Deuteronomy 6:8-9.

E. A Memorial Of God's Judgment Upon Unauthorized Service. Numbers 16:40 tells of two hundred and fifty brass censers which were made into broad plates, a covering for the altar. The brass censers belonged to a company of two hundred fifty princes of Israel who followed the rebellion of Korah in offering unauthorized service to God. After all that pertained to them were swallowed by the earth, they were consumed by fire from the Lord. The censers remained as hallowed vessels and were so used to be, "a memorial unto the children of Israel, that no stranger, which is not of the seed of Aaron, come near to offer incense before the Lord. . ." In keeping with the pattern of all God's judgments, it is safe to say the service and life of all unauthorized persons and agencies will come to an end of similar loss.

F. A Memorial To The Mighty Help Received of God. The last obstacle between Israel and the Promised Land was the rolling Jordan River. As they prepared to cross it, God stopped the waters and created a dry path to pass through. He also commanded Joshua to select twelve men, one from each tribe to carry a stone out of the river bed. These were set up as a memorial by which it could be rehearsed in the ears of future generations how God had been the Mighty Helper of Israel in performing His promises to His covenant people, Joshua 4:1-9.

G. A Memorial To The Blessedness of Serving Christ. Matthew 26:6-13 tells of an incident in Jesus' life which, when told, would be a memorial for a woman who is not even named in that gospel. It is because her name is unimportant, but what she did is very

important. Using a very expensive box of ointment, she anointed Jesus' body unto its burial. Jesus highly commended her work even in the face of apostolic opposition and set the story as a memorial to the woman and to relate to us all the importance of using our best for the Master. Such service will not be forgotten in heaven. But, while we do not have the body of Jesus to anoint, He has made it clear in the latter part of Matthew 25 that we may render such service to Him by rendering it to His people.

III. MEMORIALS TO WHOMSOEVER.

The Perpetual Memorial to His Name. When Moses asked God for a name by which God would be identified to the children of Israel, he was told it was "I AM," Exodus 3:14. Moreover, the Lord said, ". . . this is my name forever, and this is my memorial unto all generations." To understand and appreciate that statement, some study of the name is necessary. "I AM" is in Hebrew, "Yeheyah." A "Y" may be transliterated as a "J." Without detailed technicalities, it is easy enough to see the similarity between "Yeheyah" and "Jehovah" which is the transliteration of that name. However, the English idea of "I AM" should not be equated with the name "Jehovah" singularly. Lack of tense in Hebrew allows this term to be translated "I was, I am, or I shall become." That God is, or that He always has been, is theologically sound and perhaps comforting to the Jews in bondage, but the greatest significance is in the idea of "I shall become." He is the God who progressively reveals Himself. Israel was about to behold some of these greatest revelations. But, these were overshadowed in His revelation as Jesus our Savior. Still, the greatest is yet to be. Our faith remains in the "Coming Lord." It is His name and it is His memorial to all generations.

Finally, from dawn's creation to this day; yea, from this day forward while eternal eons roll, there shall never be a greater, more blessed memorial to all men everywhere than that perpetual memorial of God's love. It is the old rugged cross. In the familiar words of the beloved apostle, that love is expressed, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life," John 3:16. Symbolic of help, love, peace, Christianity the world over, it is a fitting

memorial of the greatest love in the universe and the heavenly help extended to every son of Adam.

CONCLUSION

Arbitrarily, the memorials of God have been placed in three classes: (1.) The Memorial for God, Himself, (2.) Memorials for His people, and (3.) Memorials for whomsoever. God's memorials must never be forgotten. They speak of the nature of the wonderful God of our salvation. They tell of His great and precious promises to us such as that one embodied in the church ordinance of the Lord's Supper. It is the promise of His coming, "For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come." Are God's memorials personally meaningful to you?

Tomorrow is Memorial Day. We remember brave, gallant men. Let us also remember the great memorials of God's love and promises. Let each one apply their meaning to his personal life and be ready for Him at His coming.

AMERICA THANKS YOU...

*The place you sleep
In deep contrast
To the place in which you fell,
Is one reserved
For honored dead
Who served their country well.
A color-trio,
Freedom's symbol,
In gentle breezes wave,
Whisper, "Thank you
Fallen comrade,"
Above each sacred grave.*

Faye Wise

LET US REMEMBER THESE...

*God's rainbow-covenant in the sky
Reminds his own each fearful day
His people shall not perish,.
His word shall not be washed away.
That word prevailed in bondage-days,
Blood-sacrifice the token,
Passover-promise to his chosen,
To his faithful still unbroken.
God fed the murmuring Israelites,
Rained "manna" at their feet
Taste of wafers made with honey,
His provision still as sweet.
The battle of Amalek was won
With the Rod of God held high,
Spiritual war still rages
But his word will never die.
Blue fringes on Israel's garments
Were reminders not to depart
From the word of his law.. and we
Must hide his word in our heart.
The service we offer the Father
Must stem from humble desire
To serve His Way... not ours
Lest our work be consumed with fire.
God held back the waters of Jordan,
Controlled its rolling wrath;
Twelve stones were set by the river;
Twelve tribes crossed a dry path.
Another memorial is given
To a nameless woman of old,
Who anointed the Master's feet
With ointment as precious as gold.
"IAM" is his name forever
From the cross to heavenly throne,
His love a living memorial
LOVE offered by God alone.*

Faye Wise

"FATHERS IN FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD"

Text: I John 2:13-14

"I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning.. I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning..."

INTRODUCTION

It's Father's Day! I think of Dad, and count myself as being among the most fortunate people on earth; those who have reflections of a dedicated Christian father to draw upon, as a vast, invaluable reservoir of goodness, strength, and direction. The poet said it well, whose hand penned these lines which seem to come from the very heart of many:

"My heart becomes so tender
As many things I do remember,
Of those years that lie behind
And thoughts of Dad come to mind.
There were times of grief and joy
When I was just a little boy.
Many experiences we had,
Sometimes happy, sometimes sad.
Dear Dad spent many hours at work,
Although sometimes danger lurked;
And sometimes til the sun grew dim He
labored hard - I do love him!
Now his hair has silver strands,
Now there are wrinkles on his hands,
The burdens he bore were not a few,
But with God's help, Dad has come through.
I hold these memories so dear
Even now they are so clear.
Dad, all my life I can ne'er repay
But, this is my tribute, on "Father's Day."

—Harry Brotzman, Jr.

Fathers are made to be in fellowship with God. This is essential not only for their own well-being, but for the fulfillment of their role in life as fathers.

I. A SURVEY OF BIBLICAL FATHERS.

The universal, abiding presence of sin has robbed most fathers of the great joys of fatherhood at one time or another. The tragedy and sorrow of children being backslidden, wayward, criminal, or prematurely dying have escaped too few. Such began as early as with the first parents, Adam and Eve. What sorrow and grief they must have known when Cain killed his brother, Abel. Furthermore, how could Noah escape frustration as a father when a black man, a Scandanavian, and a Jew were his offspring. It was his sad lot to pronounce a curse on Canaan because of the sinful, disappointing actions on Ham. Lot lost daughters in Sodom and wound up in incestuous relationship with his other daughters, a victim of their evil plotting. Eli, the priest in Samuel's day knew the heartbreak of evil sons who were finally killed in battle; the news of which brought his own death.

However, some, by more fully dedicating themselves to God and His Word, have escaped such sorrow. Abraham is a good example. Though, far from being without sin, Abraham loved God. He obeyed God and it was counted to him for righteousness. To him were given the joys of fatherhood in old age and the years to see his son fully established and walking in right relationship with the Lord. Consider Jacob, also. Of course, the very idea of having twelve sons without trouble and sorrow seems absurd. Jacob knew his days of sorrow, but in the end, God gave him a unified family and a great sense of fulfillment and goodness. Moses was a great father, and who could overlook Joshua who said, "Choose you this day whom ye will serve; . . . but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord," Joshua 24:15.

II. THE MEANING OF FATHER.

As the term, "mother," the term "father" also first appears in Genesis 2:24 before there was a mother or father. The meaning and significance of "father" would not arise out of human experience, but is set forth from the designing mind of God. The earliest terms for "father," "Av," or "Ab" in Hebrew and "Abba" in Chaldee, carry with them not only the idea of progenitor, but that of "former or creator, benefactor or guardian." He is the

fountainhead of offspring, inventions, ideas, authority, disciplines. We are taught to think of God in terms of "Father" and "Son. " Even the Son who is not offspring is called, "The Everlasting Father." Moreover, when one considers the Divine order of creation, that man is made for God and woman is made for man, the importance of fathers being in fellowship with God is heavily underscored. It is the way God has chosen to be instilled in young hearts and minds that He is kind, loving, strong, wise, a teacher of good, provider of blessings, protector, authoritarian, chastiser of evil and rewarder of that which is right. Such fathers who represent these things well to their children give them an immeasurable boost down the paths of life upon which God smiles. They will know Him early. Those who do otherwise will surely know the tragedy of heartbreak in their children of generations to come. Fathers, it's so very important for you to be in fellowship with God! To be otherwise is to mis-represent the idea and character of the Heavenly Father to your children. George Turner once wrote,

'My little boy came to me one day,
Placed his tiny hand in mine and said:
'Daddy, what is God like?'
And I said, "God is like love and sunshine;
All the good things you know."
He smiled into my eyes and said:
'Then, Daddy, God must be just like you!'
I remember how Jesus said
That God is like a father;
And I had to bow my head in shame
That I, a father, was so unlike God!"

III. NEW TESTAMENT EXAMPLES.

Now, let us notice a case or two from the pages of the New Testament. Although children are not specifically mentioned with reference to such men as Cornelius or the Philippian jailor, their actions and experiences spiritually affected their entire household. Therefore, it is safe to assume that they were fathers.

In Acts chapter 10 the case of Cornelius is related. It is noted he was a Centurion (captain in the army). He was a family man, a Gentile. He gave alms to the poor. He was a praying man. He did what was morally right, no doubt. In short, Cornelius was a man concerned about himself in the right way. It is not hard to find

fathers who are concerned about themselves, especially in the areas of economics, business or politics. But, few are concerned about themselves in the right way spiritually. It is the right concern for self which leads to proper, covenant relationship with God.

Moreover, God, in His graciousness and goodness, initiates the action to bring right concern and its fruits to fathers. Many ignore or override God's convicting power, but thank God for others who are sensitive to God's dealings as was Adam, Cornelius and countless others. Paul said, "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure," Philippians 2:13. God convicted Cornelius. He received his alms giving. He heard his prayers and sent an angel to tell him where, or by whom, he could get New Testament instruction for right living before God.

Additionally, the importance of fathers being in fellowship with God is emphasized by God's use of human instrumentality. God sent an angel to Cornelius, but the angel did not preach the message Cornelius needed to hear. That was the business of the church. Of course, this is not to say God could not or even might not use some other means to preach to people. He used a donkey to preach to Balaam. He used a rooster to preach to Peter. Once, while under conviction, some of the neighbor's Guineas preached to me. Their normal sound was 'Pet-track, pet-track," but that day all they could say was 'Repent, repent." Seriously, inasmuch as God has chosen to use human instrumentality in winning others, He will use you, father, if you will let Him. Notice the influence of Cornelius. He was "A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house...Acts 10:2. His manner of life guided his entire household in godliness. Accordingly, as Peter preached, the Holy Spirit fell upon all them which heard the Word, Acts 10:44. Cornelius did not know much about New Testament Christianity, but he was busy about the Master's business according to his limited knowledge. Because he was not careless about his life, God led him into the more blessed way.

As a result, Cornelius was baptized and fellowshipped in the New Testament Church. The same was true of the Philippian jailor. Notice in Acts 16:30-31 how he believed in Jesus, then he and all his household were baptized and made a part of church fellowship. In the New Covenant plan of God they would have additional help from the Holy Spirit to grow as from a sapling into a mighty tree, a pursuit for which Paul forsook all, Philippians 3:10. It is a pursuit worthy of the lifetime of modern fathers.

CONCLUSION

There is an endless line of trinkets, people and things perennially vying for the time and attention of fathers. In a maze of confusion, men set off to deal with as many of them as possible, seeking here and there for their purpose and ultimate fulfillment in life. It is a satanic trick. The father's purpose and most satisfying fulfillment is to be gained or lost at home where he left it. It is his family. Man's primary function, through procreation, is to instill in offspring godly principles by which God's work will be perpetuated and the world better off because he lived. I am convinced more each year that truly important things are those which will follow us after we are gone. There is no other facet of life by which this is so gravely affected as the influence of our children. An unknown poet put it this way:

"The Soul Of A Child"

The soul of a child is the loveliest flower
That grows in the garden of God.
Its climb is from weakness to knowledge and power,
To the sky from the clay and the clod.
To beauty and sweetness it grows under care,
Neglected, 'tis ragged and wild.
'Tis a plant that is tender, but wondrously rare,
The sweet, wistful soul of a child.
Be tender, O gardener, and give it its share
Of moisture, of warmth, and of light,
And let it not lack for the painstaking care,
To protect it from frost and from blight.
A glad day will come when its bloom shall unfold,
It will seem that an angel has smiled,
Reflecting a beauty and sweetness untold
In the sensitive soul of a child.

Accordingly, it is so very important for fathers to be in fellowship with God. The meaning of fatherhood emphasizes it. A survey of Biblical fathers teaches it. New Testament examples underscore it. It is wonderful when children are saved and embark upon a life of discipleship. It is a season of rejoicing when mothers find Jesus and begin to live for I-urn, but the gap is great, the circle broken when father has no time for God, for church, for the spiritual welfare of his own family. Fathers, you are urged to claim your rightful place as the spiritual head of your family. Invite Jesus into your heart, follow Him in discipleship, know the ultimate in

fulfillment by what you'll leave behind after walking through this life in fellowship with God.

TO MY BIBLE-READING DADDY

*I thought that you were perfect.
How was a child to know
That you were seeking answers
By hickory-ember glow.
I thought you had the answers,
That you were in control.
I didn't dream that book you read
Held "balm "for a troubled soul.
I knew that you were ten feet tall
....Or so it seemed to me,
And I felt quite secure
Just leaning on your knee.
Now that I am old enough
To know what life's about,
I realize you had problems
Of failure, fear and doubt.
But you sought out the answers
That made you truly wise
And even more respected now
Than in my childhood eyes.
Nowadays, Dad, when I'm confused,
I'm certain where to look
I learned by watching you
To search that timeless book.*

Faye Wise

"SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL"

Text: Isaiah 52:7

"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, thy God reigneth!"

INTRODUCTION

Following a trip to the summit of Pikes' Peak, Katharine Lee Bates penned these words in 1893:

O beautiful for spacious skies,
For amber waves of grain,
For purple mountain majesties
above the fruited plain;
America! America!
God shed His grace on thee,
And crown thy good with brotherhood
from sea to shining sea!

From that mountain vantage point, the mighty Rockies stretched northward, southward, and westward in majestic purple hue. To the east lay the great plains, the swaying wheat fields of America's breadbasket states. Only minor encouragement was needed to envision this great nation in a panorama from struggling, hearty pilgrims to robust, determined pioneers, to a modern nation basking in the greatest national goodness on earth. As our minds are turned to America and its history on this national birthday celebration, we realize that now, as then, America is something beautiful. But, I am reminded that the great beauty of America is not to be compared with the beauty mentioned in the text.

Therefore, we need to know about the true beauty mentioned in the Word of God. A beauty greater than that of America because it is greater in scope. It is more personal in benefit, and it bears eternal fruit.

I. SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL.

There is exceedingly great beauty to behold in the works of nature. What can compare with a brilliant sunrise over verdant mountain peaks dispelling the lingering mist in the valleys below? Or, to what shall one liken a late summer sunset over fiery clouds which glow as though they were blacksmith coals blown by the bellows? I have stood in awe of great waterfalls of shouting purity pushed by clear rushing streams; walked among fruited fields of amber grain, and ascended lofty, majestic mountain heights. I have rejoiced in the fragile beauty of a single flower, stood in captivated silence at the inimitable song of a bird, and wondered at the stunning beauty of mineral deposits in caves far beneath earth's surface. Truly, nature produces exceedingly great beauty.

Furthermore, there is great beauty in the works of man. Mighty bridges of architectural wonder spanning chasm and bay; towering skyscrapers, the landmarks of huge cities, which may be seen a dozen miles away are beautiful. Magnificent ships and sleek aircraft spanning the globe daily are beautiful. Astounding feats of technology which cause men to stand in awe and applaud as in the launching of rocket ships are beautiful. Wonderful accomplishments in music and art thrill the souls of generations. The compassion of philanthropic foundations greatly helps to ease the burdens of men. These are beautiful.

II. JESUS CHRIST IS BEAUTIFUL.

The works of men are destined to know ruin and decay. Though enduring as the pyramids of Egypt, still the forces of the second law of thermodynamics will eventually see it in the dust. Likewise, physical beauty fades away and is no more, though it be diligently sought with money, knowledge and tears.

However, there is a true beauty which endures, and never fades away. It is the beauty of the Lord Jesus Christ. But, how can this be? He is in fact prophesied to be physically unattractive. "For he will proceed to grow up before him as a suckersprout; but as the root from the land of drought, there shall be no beauty nor splendor to him; consequently, we shall see him, but we shall not desire him from appearance," Isaiah 53:2, (personal, distinctive translation). Moreover, He would be made even more unattractive by sorrows and grief, Isaiah 53:5-6. He would be made repulsive at the hands of wicked men. Isaiah 52:14 states, ". . . His visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men." But that which was unattractive, marred, repulsive, was made to be

extremely beautiful to fallen and redeemed mankind. Jesus is beautiful with a beauty unexcelled in the universe because He is love personified. He is beautiful because He paid redemption's terrible price for our sin-stained, never-dying souls. He is beautiful because He reaches out to us with nail-scarred hands filled with life, love, and eternal benefits.

III. GOSPEL WITNESSES ARE BEAUTIFUL.

Romans 10:15 uses the text verse to apply to those who go with the gospel of our blessed Lord. Truly, gospel witnesses are beautiful. Accordingly, let us consider two types of men. One is a great architect and builder. He designs great structures and oversees workmen bringing them into reality. He may be wealthy as men pay much for his talents. Still, for all his great skill and care, his monuments crumble into the dust after him. The other is a Christian missionary, preacher, or teacher. He shows and tells of Christ's love for every person. His work is long and visible results perhaps few. He is often in or near poverty because men pay little for his love, concern and spiritual help. To disseminate the gospel, he has given up worldly claims and wealth. No physical monument testifies to his existence, but who is the more beautiful of the two? Though the pyramids still remain, who really cares who planned or built them? But, millions of redeemed souls sing the praises of those who helped them find forgiveness of sin and eternal life in Christ Jesus.

Consequently, gospel witnesses are more beautiful than governments (mountains). They are more beautiful because of their feet (way). They, according to the text verse, are those who share with the world the good tidings. They publish peace. They bring forth good tidings of good (things). They publish salvation. They testify unto Zion. Yea, they testify to a lost and dying world of the living, reigning God.

IV. TRUE BEAUTY NEVER FADES AWAY.

The apostle Peter said, "For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth forever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you," I Peter 1:24-25. Earthly assets are so ephemeral. How often have you become acquainted with someone in their later years of life and wondered how they looked when they were young? Then, by chance, be shown a photograph of him/her in their youth and

failed to recognize them? What time does to most folk shouldn't happen to anyone, but it is the law of life under sin and death.

On the other hand, how often have you reflected upon a good deed someone lovingly bestowed upon you. It is viewed with ever growing fondness and appreciation. It is truly beauty that refuses to fade away, becomes more beautiful and valuable with the passage of time. Salvation is like that. It was beautiful when first received, but with time, the acquisition of knowledge and understanding, it grows ever more beautiful as does the Savior who provided and freely gave it.

Moreover, when we think of kings, we think of Him as King of kings. When we think of lords, we think of Him as Lord of lords. When we consider what is fair, we think of Him as the Fairest of the fair. When we think of tenderness and beauty, we consider Him, the Lily of the Valley. When we think of light and stability, we think of Him as the Bright and Morning Star. Thus, in joyful anticipation we eagerly await that notable day when we shall indeed see Him, "The King in His Beauty," the "Sun of righteousness" who shall arise with healing in His wings", Malachi 4:2, the "one wounded" in the house of his friends, Zechariah 13:6.

CONCLUSION

In this world, there are so many things that are beautiful to man. But rising above them all is the Author, Distributor, Sustainer of our salvation. Those who take up His blessed Word; who learn of Him and follow Him in His way; who share with others His Word and way, are radiant with that eternal beauty which emanates from Him. Their beauty is true. It will never fade away.

In like manner, America is beautiful on her birthday. It is not because of the works of man. It is not because of fruited fields. But, it is because redeemed people meet openly here to worship Him and depart in peace to publish good tidings of Him without fear. It is because in this great country we enjoy the freedom to openly take hold of God's outstretched hand and in turn reach out to others, joining hands and hearts to exalt that matchless name and that matchless person Who is the Savior of the world. He is here today to receive broken hearts, wasted lives, shattered pieces. He picks up, puts together, mends and adds purpose to life. In short, He makes all those who trust in Him to become "Something Beautiful."

IN GOD'S HANDS

*God can use such humble things
To produce "a work of art."
He can touch with tenderness
And melt the coldest heart.
"Most" isn't always greatest,
Your gift may be quite small;
Freely offered it becomes
Most pleasing work of all.*

*God can use our empty hands,
Fill them with work to do.
Reach out your hands to others;
Did He not reach out to you?
Can we not share the living word?
There is no time to lose.
We'll be "SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL"
Someone God can use.*

Faye Wise

THANKFULNESS FOR LIFE'S BLESSINGS"

Text: Psalm 68:19

"Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation."

INTRODUCTION

Folk, today I am simply and completely loaded down! Every day it is there as great or greater than the day before. I cannot help but wonder if some of you would be so kind as to share this load with me. Will you do so? Now, do you want to know what my load is? It is a great load of daily blessings! Notice what the Psalmist said in the text. That's the load that is mine today.

It is so very appropriate that we express thankfulness for life's blessings at this season. However, the state of being thankful requires a pause to overview life. You need to see what is yours compared to what could have been, and compared to the actual lot of others. You need to understand that the larger portion of life is usually spent in pursuit of objects and ambitions which matter very little. In the main, they simply constitute ego trips. You need to arrive at an appreciation of the abundant life which is available to every child of God. These bring one into a state of being thankful.

I. THE NEGATIVE OUTLOOK.

For the practical purposes of dealing with them, the predominant characteristics or attitudes of life are said to be positive or negative, enthusiastic or apathetic, optimistic or pessimistic. Someone has said the only difference between an optimist and a pessimist is that an optimist will refer to a glass as half full while a pessimist will declare it half empty. Be that as it may, it is precisely the attitude under consideration because it will have a drastic net effect upon one's life. The pessimistic or negative outlook almost always centers around material things. Somebody coined a phrase, "Time is money," and both of these have become primary in the quests of men. The negative attitude arises out of greed for no one has enough of either. Thus, these are seen as the primary factors of achievement or hindrance, success or failure. Remember the old story of the man who was impressed that one day was with the Lord as a thousand years? After reasoning it out, he eagerly asked his pastor if it would

not be similarly true that one dollar would be to God as a billion. His pastor replied, "I suppose so." Excitedly, the man ran home and prayed, "O, God, will you please give me a billion dollars since it is so insignificant to you as one dollar." God replied, "Sure thing, ma minute."

But why are time and money so important? Common, casual observation will put one in tune with things apparently unaffected by either. Consider the hills, the "eternal" hills. The great rocks and mountains are not for a season or a century. They have stood since creation and will still be here when time is declared no longer to be. Think about the configurations of the heavenly bodies, the constellations of the stars. They shine so brightly today which unerringly guided sailors on their course a millennium ago and filled with starlight the nights of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Moreover, God set the sun in the heavens to rule the day and the moon to rule the night. Since then the moon has unfailingly gone through its monthly changes and the sun its cycles of days and seasons. How long! How timeless is their function! A moment's meditation on these things impress one with the timelessness of things. Still, they are precise. The sun rises and sets in predictable minutes, the moon cycles with unerring precision, the seasons change regularly. The essential elements of life have all been here from creation.

However, man set his hand to improve the quality of life on this planet. The subsequent inventions of calendars, timepieces, etc. have been heralded as magnificent "breakthroughs" in his "progress." Why then is it the universal longing to go away someplace where time is not kept and the pace of life is considerably slower and simpler? We have learned to be regulated by time, appointments, days. We hurry up even if it is only to wait. Consequently, the materialistic pressures leave one frustrated and empty. It easily generates pessimism, despair, uselessness, and negativism. And, life becomes miserable. The longing for simpler days is most often unrealistic and fanciful, however, and must be tempered with the opportunities for fulfillment and service which all around us abound. After all:

"The man who misses all the fun
Is he who says, "It can't be done."
In solemn pride, he stands aloof
And greets each venture with reproof.
Had he the power, he would efface

The history of the human race.
We'd have no radio, no cars,
No streets lit by electric stars;
No telegraph, no telephone;
We'd wander in the age of darkness alone.
The world would sleep if things were run
By folks who say, "It can't be done."

—Anon

II. THE OPTIMISTIC LIFE.

"I can't," is most unworthy of a Christian. Life is never negative, pessimistic, empty, meaningless or shallow to those who by faith in God's promises soar above the common obstacles of life. Pessimism says what's the use? All things remain the same and time is running out. Optimism says the effort is worthwhile. Change can be made and before time runs out, billions will run out of time.

Additionally, the very spirit of thanksgiving says we have something, even very much, to be thankful for. By faith in God's Word, encouraged by the Spirit of the living God, we have great confidence in our abilities and in things yet to come. Hitherto, God has helped us. Surely He will be our helper henceforth. The Christmas season will emphasize "Immanuel," God is with us. This is our age. The kingdom of God is present with men. His church fares well. And, what God has set His hand to do with His church, He will faithfully, fully perform according to Paul's testimony in Philippians 1:6. The promises of the Word are sealed in the blood of the lamb of God and one day the will of God shall be done on earth as it is done in heaven. No force in the universe may alter that fact.

Therefore, it logically remains that the best of life is to be enjoyed by complete trust in God and in His Word. To follow Him in covenant relationship is to know something of the coming kingdom here and now. It is to know the peace Paul spoke of as surpassing all understanding. It is to greet life enthusiastically, confidently, securely, and to be a blessing to fellowmen. That is optimism, positive-ness. It says, "I can," and does.

III. THE THANKFUL LIFE.

True optimism springs from and reflects upon Divine help. It acknowledges God as its source of blessings in life past and depends upon Him for present and future accomplishments. It creates a state of thankfulness within. Thankfulness says, "All of this is given of God: health, parents, family, friends, children, home, country,

church, job, education, inventions, wealth, salvation, peace, hope." It says the providence of God will also bring you to complete fulfillment in the future. Beyond mere expression of Thanksgiving, this is the state of being thankful in the heart and it is exceedingly good.

CONCLUSION

On this Thanksgiving season, all of us may truly say, "We are loaded down." But, the load is of benefits received of the Lord. Even the smallest amount of right thinking will surely dispel the tendencies of pessimism, negativism, and frustrations a materialistic and obstacle-prone world may lay upon you.

Optimism and thankfulness must dominate if we are indeed believers, disciples of Jesus.

Nevertheless, there is one question which naggingly lingers in view of our great load of benefits. It is the question of the Psalmist, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me," Psalm 116:12. In the next two verses, his answer included, "I will take the cup of salvation. I will call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all his people."

What will you do for God for all His blessings?

THANKFULNESS FOR LIFE'S BLESSINGS"

*Thank you for the gift of life, For every
answered prayer, For free and full
forgiveness And constant, tender care.
Thank you for peaceful rest, Our bread
and daily needs, Thank you for your
Holy Word On which my spirit feeds.
Thank you for the time to come When I
behold thy face, For Jam kept until that
day By perfect saving GRACE.*

Faye Wise

"THE MATERIALIZING OF MYSTERY"

"Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God made known to all nations for the obedience of faith: to God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen."

INTRODUCTION

Nothing matches a mystery in arresting attention and challenging intellect! It is magnetic and compelling as a threshold of the unknown. Likewise, nothing offers such joy and sense of accomplishment as a mystery made known. But, "mystery" in the Bible is peculiarly a New Testament word. This is not because mysteries did not exist in Old Testament times. On the contrary, that was a time of mysteries as we normally consider them. You see, a New Testament mystery is not what modern man considers a mystery at all. To us, a mystery is something hidden, but in the New Testament, a mystery is something revealed. Notice Luke 10:24. In old times those things hidden were mysteries. But, in New Testament times it is the revealing of those things that is called mysteries.

Now, in this season of Christmas, minds turn toward Bethlehem. They do not turn to its shops, scenic attractions, or political pomp, but to a stable and a manger wherein the Creator of the universe, the Savior of the world lay. What are some of the meanings reflected by this manger? It surely means the dispelling of darkness. It emphasizes the performance of promise. But, above these, the focal point of consideration today is its meaning: "The Materializing of Mystery."

I. DEFINITION OF TERMS.

"Materializing" is synonymous with "externalize, objectify, incarnate, embody, actualize, realize," according to **Webster's New Dictionary of Synonyms**. "It stresses emergence into the sphere of what is perceptible and usually presupposes prior vagueness, haziness or elusiveness. Illustrated, 'I had the glimmering of an idea, and endeavored to materialize it in words.'"

"Mystery" is in the Greek, "musterion," a derivative of "mueo," meaning, "to initiate into the mysteries, to teach fully, instruct; to accustom one to a thing; to give one an intimate acquaintance with a thing," **Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament**, W.E. Vine, in his book, **An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words**, says "mystery, musterion" is, "That which is known to the "mustes," the initiated, (cp Phil. 4:12). In the New Testament it denotes not the mysterious (as with the English word), but that which, being outside the range of unassisted natural apprehension, can be made known only by Divine revelation, and is made known in a manner and at a time appointed by God, and to those only who are illuminated by His Spirit. In the ordinary sense a mystery implies knowledge withheld; its scriptural significance is truth revealed." To the ancient Greeks, mysteries were religious rites, ceremonies practiced by the initiated. Those who desired, were initiated into the religion and through the practice of the mysteries were perfected. A good illustration of a mystery in the New Testament sense of the word happened years ago in Oklahoma. A young minister I know and a young lady of whom I only had a brief knowledge became engaged to be married. I did not know they even knew each other let alone were dating. One day someone came up to me and said, "Guess what, Curtis and Sandy are going to be married." Soon, another harbinger of the event brought the news, too. It was a mystery. It was good news revealed of things totally hidden in the past. It only became a mystery to me upon the revelation of that knowledge. Now, consider some true Bible mysteries as meanings of the manger.

II. THE MYSTERY OF THE PRESENT BLINDNESS OF ISRAEL.

Paul said, "For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits, that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in," Romans 11:25. Israel looked for a king. They expected Messiah to come, but they looked for Him to appear with power and great glory as in the Second Coming. They would have nothing to do with an insignificant babe in a manger. Their blindness led to their being cut-off as natural branches of a good olive tree and the Gentiles as wild branches being grafted in their stead. Thus, the church, the extension of the kingdom work of God in the world, is by far a Gentile church. It is a mystery to us in that this knowledge is revealed. It further teaches us that we have no more of a franchise on God than did the Jews of long ago.

But, it is a mystery that has to do with the manger, which holds the answer.

III. THE MYSTERY OF THE RAPTURE AND RESURRECTION.

In I Corinthians 15:51-52 it is written, 'Behold, I shew you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.' This mystery is further explained in I Thessalonians 4:13-17. It is the conversation and hope of the household of faith today, but the whole wonderful idea was most obscure until the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. We think of it as we view by faith the manger scene, the key to all mysteries.

IV. THE MYSTERY OF HOW GODLIKENESS IS PRESENT IN MEN.

To Timothy, Paul wrote, "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." The tenets of this mystery are the platform from which all godliness in men exists and they are to be manifest to the world through His church as indicated in the previous verse. And, it is all reflected from the manger.

V. THE MYSTERY OF THE INDWELLING CHRIST.

The manger symbolizes the mystery of the indwelling Christ. The paradox of living in a state of crucifixion which Paul mentioned in Galatians 2:20 is a reality due to the indwelling Christ. In Colossians 1:26-27 the indwelling Christ is spoken of as another of the great mysteries well known to the initiated and responsible for the present hope of glory in the saints. As God was pushed out, expressed, incarnated in human form, so does He dwell in and with His covenant people today. See it symbolized in the manger? Immanuel! God is with us.

VI. THE MANGER SPEAKS OF THAT WHICH IS NEW.

We have a New Testament. But, what is new about it? The ministry of Christ is new, but not His saving power. What's really new is the New Covenant (system of the faith) and its embodiment, the church. The kingdom of heaven is explained in parables, Matthew 13, because the initiated (disciples) were given

understanding of the mysteries thereof, but the uninitiated had no such understanding. In those parables the nature, work, growth, preciousness of the church are explained.

Furthermore, the mystery under consideration in Colossians 1:26, Ephesians 3:1-11, 2:11-22 is emphasized as hidden to men in ages past, but now revealed. It is something new. It is His church by which God will make of twain one new man, Ephesians 2:15. It is this idea that Paul expresses in the text and its context.

Moreover, the church is the revelation of other mysteries. Its relationship to Christ as His bride is a Bible mystery according to Ephesians 5:28-32. The nature of the church as the light giver or candlestick is mentioned in Revelation 1:20. All these marvelous mysteries are given to us in Christ and He was given to us in a manger.

CONCLUSION

As a consequence of the foregoing, it is obvious that of all the things one could say about manger meanings in this Christmas season, one of the greatest is the materializing of mystery. That which prophets and kings desired to see and know is freely revealed to those initiated in the New Covenant. Some of those mysteries are the present blindness of Israel, the rapture and resurrection, the manner of godliness in men, the indwelling Christ, the many marvelous aspects of His church.

Nevertheless, the revealed mysteries are not known and enjoyed by everyone, only the initiated. Paul emphasized that they are not received by natural man, but are spiritually discerned, I Corinthians 2:14. The good news is that you have the blessed opportunity of becoming an initiate in the kingdom of heaven. You may receive Christ Jesus personally. You may follow Him in a covenant relationship. You may enjoy the thrill of mystery upon mystery being revealed to you in an understanding you will have through His Word. That understanding will ever be enhanced as you continue in fellowship in His Spirit-baptized church. What an opportunity! What meanings from the manger.

HE WILL ILLUMINATE

*Let me come closer to the manger
Humble, willing to see
Past the unbelief of man
To a "miracle mystery"
Yet if I Had walked with Jesus
From Bethlehem to Calvary,
Following in his footprints
And listening earnestly,
Even then I couldn't know,
Unless God's word revealed,
His plan to save mankind,
The promise he fulfilled,
Nor understand the prophecy
Passed down through the ages
Without the blessed privilege
Of reading gospel pages.
There's more to be revealed
When I study prayerfully.
God will enhance my understanding,
Unveil more mystery.*

Faye Wise

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