

## FALL QUARTER

### INTRODUCTION

In this introduction I want to continue to talk about the subject of illustrations. Last introduction was about the value of illustrations, in this one I want to talk about the types of illustrations. There are several types of illustrations. I will list them in order of their importance.

1. Biblical illustrations--These are the best type available to the speaker. They include biography, historical incident, figures of speech, etc.
2. Home-spun illustrations—These are incidents from life having a Widespread interest, because they deal with things common in the human experience.
3. Personal experience—When properly used, the personal experiences of the speaker are very powerful as sermon illustrations. John Booth said, “The authority of a minister is similarly increased whose sources are demonstrably not second-hand.”
4. Figure of speech—These include metaphor, simile, Synecdoche, personification, apostrophe, hyperbole, irony, parable, allegory, type, symbol, fable, riddle, and enigma. (I will touch on the meaning of each of these in a later introduction.)
5. Biographical or autobiographical.
6. Historical incident—These historical events may be taken from sacred or secular history.
7. Story or anecdote—There are many of these including, but not exclusive to, hymn stories.
8. Current events—Jesus made reference to current events quite often in His preaching and teaching.
9. Linguistic—These can be done by references of special meanings of words in Hebrew, Greek or other languages. Also, linguistic illustrations can be made by the use of picturesque words in one’s own language. Brown, Clinard and Northcutt quote examples of illustrations through the use of picturesque language from the Reader’s Digest column entitled “Towards a More Picturesque Speech”: “The day snailed by,” “The wrinkled half of my life,” “As abrupt as a slammed door,” “As irrevocable as a haircut,” “As involved as spaghetti.”

10. Quotations—These may include quotations from literature, a letter, a bit of conversation. These can be a page (even more but with caution), a paragraph or a single line quotation.
11. Audio and visual aids.
12. Dramas.
13. Poems, hymns and art.
14. Proverbs, maxims and wit.
15. Nature—The possibilities of this type are as numerous and vast as creation.
16. Imaginary—This is a hypothetical or invented incident or example which is prefaced by. “Let us suppose...” or “Let us picture...” or “can you conceive...” or “let us imagine...”

As you can see the many types of illustrations are limitless. I don't have space to talk about them in depth. I have only identified them. I do teach seminars on all aspects of preaching including illustrating. I will try to keep you informed as to where and when these are held and you can attend. If you would like one in your area contact me. A seminar is really the best forum for learning the art of using just the right illustration at just the right time.

I hope you have enjoyed the first year of Bible Preaching Resource and will subscribe again. I offer this service, from a minister for ministers, to help in the week to week preparation of messages and to help you in your ministry.

God Bless,

Rick Wyser

## 1. THE INIQUITY OF INGRATITUDE!

(A Thanksgiving message)

TEXT: Judges 8:34-35

The story of Gideon is one of the great Bible stories. It is so familiar we won't retell it except to say that through his leadership and dedication victory and blessing came to Israel. Realizing this it is remarkable that after his death Israel forgot him and all that he had done and God took note of this. God is saying that Israel's ingratitude is iniquity in my sight.

Though Gideon had delivered the children of Israel out of the hands of the Midianites, the Israelites were thankless. *"Neither shewed they kindness to the house of Jerubbaal, namely, Gideon, according to all the goodness which he had shewed unto Isreal"* (Judg. 8:35).

In *The Birdman of Alcatraz*, Thomas Gaddis tells the true story of twice convicted murderer Robert Stroud. He was a hardened and bitter man who spent most of his seventy years in prison, much of that in solitary confinement. One day when he was in the exercise yard, he found an injured sparrow which he took back to his cell. There he nursed it back to health. Stroud began to read books about birds, and other prisoners brought sick canaries and parakeets to him. If he couldn't find a way to heal the birds, he would improvise and research. He became an authority on the subject of birds.

Healing and wholeness began to creep into his life during a sixty-second encounter with a prison guard. The guard was sitting on an orange crate that Stroud wanted to make a birdcage. He asked the guard for it, who responded, "You haven't said a word to me in twenty years, and now you want my crate. You have never given me the time of day, why should I?" Stroud responded with deep felt emotion, "Please." The guard sat there for a few minutes, then opened the cell door and gave Stroud the crate. Stroud responded with words he had not spoken in years, "Thank you."

Our well being, our wholeness, our completeness as human beings depends upon our willingness to recognize that all of life is gift. To be mature is to recognize that we are not solitary creatures, but that we depend on those beyond ourselves. The first things we teach a child to say is "please" and "thank you." No baby is ever born grateful. No matter how much one does for the little self-centered person, he is unable to appreciate it. But we do not blame him. He is a baby. Sadly, some never grow to maturity and learn to be grateful. Gratitude is a grace and must be learned and developed.

Ambrose, the highly regarded bishop of Milan said, "Gratitude is the greatest of all virtues and is the parent of all the others. Gratitude is a fruit of great civilization; you do not find it among coarse people. Gratitude is the interest we pay the Father for the lives he has loaned us."

Gratitude is from the same root word as "grace," which signifies the free and boundless mercy of God. Thanksgiving is from the same root word as "grace", which signifies the full and boundless mercy of God. Thanksgiving is from the same root word as "think," so that to think is to thank.

"The instant we are born, we already owe someone for nine months of room and board...and we never really pay that debt." This quote from John Maxwell reminds us that we all carry a debt of gratitude that cannot be repaid but can be passed on to others.

Dr. Bob Jones, Sr., said, "The loveliest flower that blooms in the garden of the heart is the flower of gratitude; and when gratitude dies on the altar of a man's heart, he is well nigh gone." What a tremendous statement! You think about it: "When gratitude dies on the altar of a man's heart, he is well nigh gone." In fact, gratitude is the memory of the heart.

A grateful spirit can help us through every circumstance.

In Ogden Nash's poem, *The Outcome of Mr. MacLeod's Gratitude*, he tells of a wife who was always complaining and a husband who managed to be grateful for everything. The last stanza runs:

So she tired of her husband's cheery note  
And she stuffed a tea-tray down his throat.  
He remarked from the floor,  
where they found him reclining,  
"I'm just a MacLeod with a silver lining!"

Gratitude is not a part of our nature. Let me illustrate. Anything you have to be taught to do is not a part of your nature, and anything you do without being taught is a part of your nature.

For instance, it is a duck's nature to swim. When you throw him into the water, he swims automatically. He doesn't have to have a swimming lesson. But it is not a cat's nature to swim. If you throw a cat in the water, she will drown. It is not a baby's nature to swim. If you throw an infant in the water, he will drown. An infant can be taught to swim, but it is not a part of his nature. Anything you have to be taught to do is not a part of your nature.

Remember when your child was small, and you began to try to teach him gratitude? When someone would give him something, you would say, "Now, Billy, what do you say?"

Billy would drop his head. "M-m-m-m. . . ."

"Come on, Billy. Now you know what to say."

"M-m-m-m. . . ."

"Ah, Billy, come on now. If you don't say it, I'm going to make you give it back." Reluctantly Billy said, "Thank you." But there was no real gratitude. He just said it because Mother made him say it. He wasn't born with gratitude. You have to say it over and over and over again until finally he learns how to say 'laps you."

One of the characteristics of the Godly is the ability to say thank you. And one of the chief characteristics of the ungodly is ingratitude.

Paul said about the ungodly: We read in Romans 1:21-28: “. . . *when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations. . . .and even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things where were not convenient.*”

It all started when they were not thankful. Because they were not thankful, God gave them up. A lot of sins you see committed today are a result of a lack of genuine gratitude in the heart.

## I. GRATITUDE IS THE WILL OF GOD FOR YOU

That's what the Apostle Paul said in 1 Thessaloonians 5 :18: *In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*”

Thanksgiving should be Thanksliving.

David exclaimed: *“Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!”* (Psalm 107:8)

And again it was David who vowed: *“While I live will I praise the Lord: I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being.”* (Psalm 146 :2)

And it was this same David who shouted: *“Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases”* (Psalm 103:1-3).

Many people today have forgotten God and His benefits. God is no longer in their consciousness. Jesus is no longer in the picture. Eternity is no longer in their thought life. Church is a place they go for weddings and funerals and bingo. It is lightly regarded as a "necessary evil." We are not by and large a thankful people.

In Notes from Underground, Dostoevsky says of man, "If he is not stupid, he is monstrously ungrateful! Phenomenally ungrateful. In fact, I believe that the best definition of man is: the ungrateful biped."

Ingratitude is a lifestyle with so many. Ingratitude is a sin.

Do you know what is the worst sin a person can commit? Someone might speculate that it would be the sin of unbelief. Someone else might say it is the unpardonable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Someone else might say it is some sin of the flesh. As bad as any of these are, there is a sin that is worse. In my opinion, the worst sin is the sin of ingratitude.

Ingratitude? Yes, because it is the most basic of sins. Ingratitude preceded even rebellion in Adam and Eve. Had they been grateful for all of God's provisions and gifts, they would not have rebelled against the giver of life.

Ingratitude is a serious shortcoming. In his *Inferno*, Dante penetratingly placed in the center of his hell, not those guilty of fleshly sins, but morose, ungrateful men. Shakespeare wrote, "Ingratitude; thou marble-hearted fiend." In *As You Like It* he penned,

Blow, blow, thou winter wind,  
Thou art not so unkind  
As man's ingratitude;  
Thy tooth is not so keen,  
Because thou art not seen,  
Although thy breath be rude.

The wind may chill the body, but ingratitude chills the soul. Ancient proverbs speak of thanklessness: "As soon as you have drunk you turn your back on the spring." "Gratitude is the least of virtues, ingratitude the worst of vices." Luther said, "Unthankfulness is theft." Milton described thanklessness as "besotted base ingratitude." Wordsworth in "Simon Lee, the Old Huntsman" lamented,

I've heard of hearts unkind, kind deeds  
With coldness still returning;  
Alas! the gratitude of men  
Hath oftener left me mourning.

Deterioration of language unconsciously betrays how easily ingratitude creeps into human nature. The word "resent" two centuries ago meant to pay back benefits for favors done. A man would say, "Do me a good deed and I will resent it." To be called a good "resenter" was a compliment. But our memory of benefits fades more quickly than that of injuries, so "resent" has come to mean reflective displeasure for evil done rather than for good done. If we spoke of resenting kindness we would be misunderstood.

Sir Walter Scott judged that "ingratitude comprehendeth every vice." The apostle Paul, listing the stages in man's descent from true knowledge of God to vile wickedness, placed thanklessness as the fountainhead of other sins. He wrote, "*Because that, when they [the heathen] knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became. . .*" (Romans 1:21).

Then follows an account of man's downward progress from thanklessness through idolatry to immorality of unspeakable types. Failure to thank God led to God-forgetfulness in every area of life. One traveler who discovered a remote tribe with no word for thanks also observed that this tribe practiced a low morality.

Our culture does possess clauses of appreciation, but how easily they become abbreviated. In earlier years it was, "I thank you." Later a faster tempo of life, presuming the "I" would be understood, said, "Thank you." Still later the form was shortened to just a "thanks," dangling in mid-air without beginning or end. Too often every prestige of gratitude is completely omitted. No wonder a prominent preacher spoke on "The Lost Art of Thanksgiving."

Sometimes the expression of gratitude comes as a surprise, even a shock. A lady boarded a crowded streetcar. A man rose to give her his seat. She fainted. When she came to, she thanked him for the seat. Then he fainted.

An old poem tells of the return of two angels dispatched from heaven to earth, the one to collect requests and the other to collect thanksgivings.

The Angel of Petitions bore a sack  
Cram full, and tied uncouthly on his back;  
Yet even then it seemed that he had lack  
Of bag or basket.

The Angel of Thanksgivings blushed to feel  
The empty lightness of his mighty creel;  
"But three!" he muttered, turning on his heel  
To hide his basket.

Then spoke St. Peter: "When again you go  
On prayer-gathering, you will better know  
That men's petitions in the world below  
Fill a big basket.

"But when you go to gather up their thanks  
For prayer well-answered and forgiven pranks  
For health restored and disentangled thanks,  
Your smallest basket."

## ANONYMOUS

Ingratitude kept Joseph in prison two years longer. Two important servants of Pharaoh, thrust into the same prison with Joseph for offending their master, had disturbing dreams, which Joseph interpreted. Though the baker would be hanged within three days, the butler would be restored to his position. Joseph begged the butler, *"Think on me when it shall be well with thee, and shew kindness, I pray thee, unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house"* (Genesis 40:14).

Events turned out exactly as Joseph had predicted. The baker was hanged and the butler reinstated. *"Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him"* (v. 23). The butler later rectified his sin of ingratitude. Two years after his release, when Pharaoh had a dream that troubled him for which the wise men could give no interpretation, the butler remembered Joseph - after twenty-four months of forgetting. The outcome of the butler's belated thankfulness was Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dream and his consequent elevation to second-in-authority in the kingdom. God's will for us is thanksgiving, even belated.

## II. INGRATITUDE IS INIQUITY AND WILL ALWAYS LEAD TO HEARTACHE.

It is obvious that our thanks for blessings received should be just as fervent as our requests for blessings sought.

Centuries ago, Cicero called gratitude the mother of virtues, the most capital of all duties, and uses the words "grateful" and "good" as synonymous terms, inseparably united in the same character.

Some people today seem to feel the world owes them a living. In fact, they are so busy grabbing gain with both hands that these "spiritual Scrooges" have forgotten how it feels to say "thank you."

In some parts of Mexico, natural hot springs and cold springs well up side by side. The Mexicans often boil their clothes in the hot springs then rinse them in the cold springs. A tourist watching this procedure remarked to his Mexican companion, "I suppose they think Mother Nature is pretty generous."

"Well, yes, señor," replied his friend, "but there is still much grumbling because she provides no soap."

On a sadder and more serious note., a lifeguard recently reported that he had rescued 223 people from drowning - Three of them thanked him.

Churchill used to tell about a man who saved a little boy's life. His mother asked, "where is my little boy's hat?" There is a famine of appreciation.

So often people put little value on what is done for them.

A farmer was showing a man around his farm one day when they came to a pigsty-and there was a magnificent pig with a wooden leg. Not surprisingly, the visitor asked about the wooden leg.

The farmer replied, "Arr - now that's a very special Pig. One night when we were all in bed, the farm caught fire. But that pig saw it, broke out of the sty, called the fire brigade, threw buckets of water on the fire, then rushed into the farmhouse and rescued me, my wife and the children. Yes, that's a very special pig!"

"And did he lose his leg trying to fight the fire?" inquired the visitor.

"Oh, no. But a very special pig like that - you don't eat it all at once!"

Appreciation is a little thing and yet, it's not a little thing at all, because it warms the heart, sensitizes the soul, and transforms weariness into joy.

William L. Stidger of the School of Theology in Boston, MA., began to think of the blessings he had in life one Thanksgiving season. He remembered the woman who had taught him in school, and of whom he had not heard for many years. Although it was years ago, he still recalled that she had gone out of her way to put a love of verse in him, and Stidger has loved verse all his life. So he wrote a letter of thanks to the old lady. This is the reply he had. It was written in the feeble scrawl of the old, and it began, "My dear Willie." He was thrilled about that. Stidger was over 50 at the time, bald, a professor, and he didn't think there was anyone left in the world who would call him "Willie." It made him feel years younger right off. Here is the letter. I'll give it to you word for word:

“My dear Willie, I cannot tell you how much your note meant to me. I am in my eighties, living alone in a small room, cooking my own meals, lonely and, like the last leaf of autumn, lingering behind. You will be interested to know that I taught school for 50 years and yours is the first note of appreciation I ever received. It came on a blue-cold morning and it cheered me as nothing has in many years.”

Stidger is not sentimental, but he wept over that note.

Stidger thought of other people who had been kind to him. He remembered one of his old bishops who had been most helpful at the beginning of his ministry. The bishop was in retirement and had recently lost his wife. Stidger wrote a belated letter of thanks to the bishop. This was the reply:

“My dear Will,

Your letter was so beautiful, so real, that as I sat reading it in my study, tears fell from my eyes; tears of gratitude. Then, before I realized what I was doing, I rose from my chair and called her name to show it to her - forgetting for a moment that she was gone. You will never know how much your letter has warmed my spirit. I have been walking about in the glow of it all day long.”

Oh how beautiful a thing is appreciation!

I believe that the iniquity that leads to heartache is the sin of ingratitude. There are more sad people in the world because they feel unappreciated than for any other reason.

- 1) There are wives that are in despair because they do not feel their husbands appreciate them.
- 2) There are husbands who feel unappreciated for what they do.
- 3) There are parents who feel unappreciated.
- 4) There are children who feel unappreciated.
- 5) There are church members who feel unappreciated.
- 6) There are ministers who feel unappreciated.

The poet said:

It's so easy to say "thank you,"

Such a simple way to show  
Just some small appreciation  
As along through life you go.

It's so easy to say "thank you,"  
For a worthy helpful deed  
When someone stops along the way  
To be a friend in need.

When you remember "thank you,"  
You will learn it plays a part  
In giving gratitude a place  
To dwell within your heart.

When we face the facts squarely, we find that many peevish ingrates are whimpering on the sunny side of the street, while many people, far less fortunate in some ways are singing in the shadows.

We need to express our thanks to our God.

*"O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good: for his mercy endureth forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy. Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! Let them exalt him also in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the assembly of the elders"* (Psalms 107: 1, 2, 31, 32).

The Psalmist also said:

*"O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good: for his mercy endureth forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so."*

There is value in confession, and there is obligation to confess. If you have been redeemed of the Lord, say so. If you realize that the Lord is good, say so. If you have felt his mercy, say so.

How often has your life been cheered by an appreciative friend who took the pains to say so! On the other hand, how often have you been in doubt as to the success of your efforts because no appreciative friend took the pains to say so! I have known men that I am sure loved their wives, but they didn't say so.

Not only should we make confession individually, but when we are collectively blessed we should collectively say so. A Thanksgiving day is fitting.

*"O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men. Let them exalt him also in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the assembly of the elders."*

One of the sins charged against the false profession of the last days is that of unthankfulness.

*"For men shall be. . . covetous, . . . blasphemers, . . . unthankful unholy, . . . fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors"* (2 Timothy 3:2-4) Unthankful listed with covetousness and blasphemy!

In Luke, God puts ingratitude along with evil. *"For he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil"* (Luke 6:35).

An ungrateful person is sour and peevish, they would make you believe that all good folk are dead, youth corrupt, times out of joint like a windmill twisted by a cyclone, and God a merciless tyrant.

Shakespeare wrote in *King Lear*:

I hate ingratitude more in man  
Than lying, vainness, babbling, drunkenness,  
Or any taint of vice whose strong corruption  
Inhabits our frail blood.

How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is  
To have a thankless child

Another has said:

He that's ungrateful, has no guilt but one;  
All other crimes may pass for virtues in him.

The thief may have in him streaks of honesty, the dead beat spots of honor, the liar occasional impulses to tell the truth, the libertine some desires to be pure. But there is nothing redemptive in the ingrate. Trust the ungrateful soul with money, he will steal it; with honor, he will betray it; with virtue, he will violate it. Trust the ingrate with love, he will transform it into lust.

Trust the ingrate with your good name-and he will besmirch it. We condemn the nine lepers who came not back to thank Jesus for their healing, and yet put ourselves in their company of cold and unfeeling ingratitude. Ingratitude is a great evil--a most common disease of humanity. Many fail more often in gratitude than in any other Christian graces.

Milton brands ingratitude as besotted and base. Swift says. "He that calls a man ungrateful sums all the evil of which one can be guilty."

Expressing thanks is often looked upon as merely a matter of etiquette. It is the polite and proper thing to do. A moments thought, however, reveals that it is more than that. We are hurt when people have forgotten to thank us. We cannot just dismiss it as an innocent mistake. We feel as though we have been personally insulted.

Our feelings here are legitimate. Ingratitude is a kind of personal affront to the giver. He or she has acted in love. They have attempted to give something of what they are and have to someone else. No obligation compelled them to give; they did it out of kindness and good will. But the ungrateful receiver throws the good will back at them with coldness. This hurts. It hurts all the more because usually only the good will is refused, not the gift itself. The gift is grasped, but the giver is spurned. In effect, that says, I count your gift as valuable, but I count you as of little or no value. Ingratitude judges persons as less valuable than things. That is not an easy judgment for any of us to accept about ourselves. It is no wonder we are insulted.

Colton said, "Brutes leave ingratitude to man."

Ingratitude is a bane of this hour,  
Ingratitude  
lifts no load,  
shoulders no cross,  
bears no burdens,  
brings no joy,  
brushes no tears from weeping eyes.

You might as well try to grow lovely flowers in the darkness of a dungeon as to grow gratitude in a heart that never gives it expression

It is especially offensive when we are thankless to God. The Psalmist states that it is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord. The other side of that coin is that it is an evil thing not to give thanks unto the Lord.

And God is sensitive to gratitude that makes His heart glad and ingratitude that makes His heart aches.

There is not a person in the world that does not like to hear the music of the words, "thank you." Even our Lord felt the need for those who had been blessed by His hand to reciprocate by outwardly expressing their gratitude. We have no way of knowing what was in the minds of those nine lepers who had been cleansed by the touch of the master. Perhaps they felt that since Jesus was such a famous healer that an expression of thanks or gratitude would be trite and ludicrous. Perhaps they were so intent on public acceptance that their only thought was of the temple, there to be pronounced clean. But one came running and fell at the feet of Jesus. It is good that you came but with almost a sob, "where are the other nine? "Were there not ten cleansed?" The Lord took their ingratitude very personally.

Jennifer Johnson banged her hands on the steering wheel. "I can't believe it," she screamed out loud. She had put off getting gas, and now she had run out. She was angry, and she silently cursed her carelessness as she tried to start the car. The engine wouldn't start, and she stopped trying only when she realized that the battery was getting weak.

Jennifer looked around. It was dark, and she was scared. She was in a part of town where there had been riots and National Guard troops only weeks before. She made sure her doors were locked. She could barely see outlines of large warehouses, railroad tracks, and chain link fences. She looked in all directions for a telephone, or a service station, or restaurant, or anything. There was nothing. She had not really prayed in years, but she tried as best as she could.

Her panic began to ease a bit, and she decided that the best thing was to just wait in her car. Sooner or later someone would surely drive by. Hopefully, a taxi or a police car would come along.

Then she saw him; the hair stood up on her neck. Her heart raced. In the middle of the street, coming straight at her, she could make out the form of a man approaching. "Maybe, he won't see me," she half thought and half prayed. "Maybe, he'll just walk by." She slid deeply down into her seat and held her breath. Just as she began to think, "Perhaps he passed by," she looked up and saw him at her window. He tapped on the glass. She was instantly hysterical. She screamed at the top of lungs, "Get away. Leave me alone. Don't bother me."

He continued tapping on the window and said something, but she could hear only her own screaming. He began to yell at her, and the intensity of his knocking on her window increased. He raced around the car and tried all the doors. She began to blow

the horn and continued to scream. Then he was gone. She looked in all directions, but could not see him. Her heart was racing, and she was perspiring heavily.

In a minute, to her horror, he returned. He was carrying a long thick board. He tried to say something to her, but she screamed, drowning out his voice. He took the board and began to batter the driver's side window. Soon it broke in a shower of glass. In an instant, he reached inside, unlocked the door, and opened it. She slid to the other side of the car and began to kick at him. He tried repeatedly to grab her, but each time she fought back furiously. Her eyes had become accustomed to the darkness and through her tears she could see that blood ran from his nose and mouth. Yet still he grabbed at her. Finally he got a grip on her legs and began to pull her from the car. She hit him with her fists and screamed. He managed to get his arms around her waist and began to drag her away from the car.

About forty feet from the car he suddenly dropped her and stood up. He said, "Don't be afraid," but she was terrified. She scooted on the ground away from him until she backed into a fence. He had not moved. She had managed to get about ten feet from him. He held his hand on his bleeding face and tried to speak to her, but she resumed screaming again, "Leave me alone. Go away." He stood there for a second and then walked slowly down the street.

She sat there trembling. She was afraid that she might pass out. Then a strange noise caught her attention, and lights began to flash in the dark night. The ground began to shake. The noise kept getting louder, and it was coming closer. Then in an instant she saw it. A train roared past a few feet from where she sat, crashed into her car, and dragged it scraping and banging into the darkness.

Then she realized: The man knew about the approaching train. He understood the life threatening situation she was in. He was not trying to hurt her, he was trying to save her.

Man kicks at God and screams, "Leave me alone." What man rejects is not a threat, but the very source of life and meaning and purpose. The very worst thing that could possibly happen to someone is that the Rescuer, the Savior, should not attempt to rescue him. Man bloodied, and in deed, killed the Rescuer, but the Good News is that He keeps trying.

That was years ago, but often Jennifer awakens in the middle of the night and, in fear, wonders, "What would have happened if I had successfully repelled the man who dragged me to safety?" The worst thing that anyone can do is continually reject the only One who has the words of life. *"Since you rejected me when I called and would not*

*listen when I stretched out my hand, . . . calamity will overtake you like a storm."*  
(Proverbs 1:24-27, cf Psalm 81:11-12)

Oh how ungrateful we are. God in Christ went to the Cross. God, by His Spirit is reaching to us. How ungrateful we are. God knows the judgement that is hurtling toward us. He knows all that awaits us. He saved us, and He takes our ingratitude very personally.

The phone rang late one evening in a home in California. "Mrs. Otto," a voice asked, "did you give a pint of blood to the Red Cross last December fourteenth?" Hesitating a moment, Mrs. Otto recalled the occasion. The speaker identified himself as a public-relations officer of a nearby military hospital. "I'm sorry to call so late, but a patient has just arrived who wants to meet you." Mrs. Otto learned that her pint of blood, flown as whole blood to an island in the Pacific, had saved this soldier's life. Said the voice, "He wants to thank you, but he leaves early in the morning for the East Coast."

A stunned Mrs. Otto made her way to the hospital. She learned that rarely did a soldier ever meet the person whose blood saved his life on the battlefield. Most blood donations were mixed plasma, but her particular pint of blood had gone into an individual container labeled with the donor's name.

Just before the bottle of her blood had reached the island, the sergeant had been fighting for his life against terrific odds. He was covering the withdrawal of his group when fifteen slugs hit him in the left leg. Medical corpsmen carried him to a makeshift field hospital where the leg was amputated. When he regained consciousness a doctor handed him the tag from a blood container, "It was this woman's blood which saved your life, sergeant!" Clutching the tag, the soldier muttered through clenched teeth, "Maybe-someday-I can thank her-for saving my life!"

As he told her the story he wept unashamedly. Mrs. Otto wept too.

I want to tell you that it is the blood of Jesus that was shed to save your soul from a burning hell. You can thank Him by coming and kneeling in the blood stream of Calvary and letting His blood cleanse you. If you refuse you will spurn His sacrifice, mock His mercy, show loathing for His love. Oh how ungrateful!

God takes your ingratitude personally.

What if God couldn't take the time to bless us today because we couldn't take the time to thank Him yesterday?

What if God decided to stop leading us tomorrow because we did not follow Him today?

What if we never saw another flower bloom because we grumbled when God sent the rain?

What if God didn't walk with us today because we failed to recognize it as His day?

What if God took away the Bible tomorrow because we would not read it today?

What if God took away His message because we failed to listen to His messenger?

What if the door of the church was closed because we did not open the door of our heart?

What if God stopped loving and caring for us because we failed to love and care for others?

What if God would not hear us today because we would not listen to Him yesterday?

What if God answered our prayers the way we answer His call for service?

What if God met our needs the way we give Him our lives?

O Lord, help us to be thankful that you *have "not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities"* (Psalm 103:10).

## 2. CLOSING THE ACCOUNT

TEXT: ROMANS 14:12

### INTRODUCTION

I believe that in order for the church to be successful she must define her purpose and then put them in order of priorities. The question must be asked, “what is the highest priority?” I believe that the highest priority of the church, the first purpose, is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. That through this gospel the Spirit of God may awaken in the hearts of people a holy urge to become true disciples and, accepting the consequences of this discipleship, to live in the service of the Lord today and forever.

I have known many people who have given no consideration whatever to what it means to be a follower of Christ. The disappointing result is that they miss the joy and purpose of Christian discipleship. To judge by their witness both within and without the church you would think that God was dead or at best He is optional.

There is an ever-present danger for any individual to grow up in the church in the false security of a borrowed faith. We pay our respects to God because our parents did or someone else that we respect did. We do so because it is the decent thing to do. We place our tithe and offering in the plate with less appreciation for what God has done for us than the bellman who carries our luggage up to our hotel room. The trouble with borrowed faith is that it creates more problems than it overcomes. Surely it is not the faith Paul spoke of when he proclaimed that through faith in the Lord we can “do all things.” The longer I am in the ministry of the Lord and the church the more convinced I am that too many people are trying to cope with sin and all the problems and sorrow and suffering that it creates with a second-hand faith. A faith based on hearsay rather than personal experience. Paul, in our text, deals with this basic principal of faith, “everyone of us shall give an account of himself to God.” Paul mentions no exceptions—“everyone”—certainly it is wonderful to be blessed with a mother and father that serve God—to know that when they stand before God that they will hear well done. But regardless of well they lived their lives, or anyone else for that matter, they will be in no position to answer for us. As Paul tells us, “it is everyone for themselves.

We need to ponder this because until we can say for ourselves, “I know whom I have believed—I know that I have passed from death to life—I know that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation”—we are not right with God.

The church is greatly concerned that you come face to face with the Lord in His gospel. What the eyes of the first apostles saw you must see too. You must see Jesus Christ high and lifted up. You must experience salvation for yourself. This is the

greatest moment in human experience. When we become aware of the love of God for us our entire attitude toward the church is changed. We don't mind the things we are called upon to do. We do not shrink from our responsibilities toward the church. But we go on our knees to pray and search the scriptures for God's will in our lives and the strength to do His will. No longer so we live by the spirit of the world, which has gone crazy insisting that man has the right to do as he pleases. As Paul says, "It is no longer I that live—but Christ lives in me---for me to live is Christ."

To be a disciple of Jesus includes the total commitment of all of life to His lordship. This includes our intellect, our emotion, our body, our possessions and our will. It is quite apparent then that to be a follower of the Lord involves more than just mental assent to the probable existence of a God. We must dedicate all we are and possess to His lordship. How many are willing to shout hallelujah in their agreement of the love of God for them but they will frown when the same Bible declares that God's love is bestowed upon us that through forgiveness in Christ we might be His own to serve Him! How many will sing, "I will bless the Lord—for He has done great things,; but when the minister says now we will read from one of the portions (and there are many) that states that our possessions belong to the Lord and that we are to invest the first fruits of all that we have (at least a tenth) they wring their hands in anger and disgust.

The difficulty is that we want to enjoy all of God's blessing on earth and in heaven too but we selfishly seek to shirk any responsibility, which our redemption involves. But such attempts are of the devil and therefore utterly futile. The gospel story is that Jesus died for our sins in order that we might be His own to live for Him and serve Him and proclaim His kingdom until He comes.

## **I.) WHAT IS YOUR ATTITUDE TOWARD THE CHURCH?**

The attitude that you have toward the church is very important in this life. Paul concerning our attitude toward the church, "Despise ye the church of God," asks one of the arresting questions asked in the Bible? Paul asks this question in connection with the Lord's Supper. The question goes beyond the supper. It can be applied to all ways we relate to the church. It can particularly be true about finance.

I am going to say something that might sound foolish God does not want your money. That might sound foolish but God does not want your money.

During our childhood we all became acquainted with a young man of rime. This fellow was on his way to a fair when he came upon a vender selling the most attractive pies. Simple Simon was delighted with the display and wanted to see more of the wares of the pie man. Now I've forgotten most of the details of this nursery rime but I do remember this, the pie man's reply was, "Show me first your Penny." It wasn't enough that Simon that Simon was enticed by the aroma of

freshly baked pies, nor were the cravings of his stomach strong enough to earn him a pie. The baker was wise to the fact that wishing long enough and strong enough would not make it. If Simon wanted pie let him produce the money.

There in another man not of nursery rime who also asked to see a coin. He was surrounded by a group of men who were deliberately attempting to trick or trap Him. One of them ventured the question: "Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar?" And the unasked question was, "Or does God want the Money?"

Now Jesus was in a position between two factions. If He said simply, "pay your taxes like good citizens" then the whole Jewish nation would reply that He was a traitor. If He said, "no God is your king, bring all your money to Him" then He would have been seized by the Romans as a rebel. The words of Jesus were well chosen and powerful. He asked for a coin. Showing the image on the coin he said, "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's." He dismissed quickly the questions of taxes or tribute to Caesar but He raised a whole new question when He said, Render Unto God...." What things are God's? And it is when we fail the things that are God's that we despise the church of God. For God does not want our money he wants all that is His. We can despise his church; under value it, disparage it, pervert it, neglect it. Can you imagine that I am talking about the church? The only institution that has ever been founded by the Lord. The gates of hell shall not prevail against it. The church has endured. "Oh where are those empires now, of those that went and came? But Lord, Thy church is praying yet a thousand years the same."

How can we despise the church?

1. By not attending the services. We should attend the church. The Bible says, "Not forsaking the assembling of our selves together....."
2. By not making preparation for worship. We say the preacher should prepare and rightly so, but so should the people. There is all the difference in the world in congregations. Some prepare for worship and are warm. Some don't and they are cold. Jesus said, "We should take heed what we hear and how we hear."
3. By our lax beliefs.
4. By wrong and inconsistent lives. When you as a member of the church go out and live beneath the standard of the church then the banner of the church droops.
5. By unworthy giving in it's support.

What is your attitude toward money?

The vain man says get gold and wear it. The miser says get gold and hoard it. The usurer says get gold and lend it. The prodigal says get gold and waste it. The spendthrift says get gold and spend it. The thrifty says get gold and save it. The wise man says get gold and use it. And how it is used it what God is concerned about.

## II.) WE SHOULD GIVE.

We often hear this statement, “I wish that the pastor would stop preaching on giving and get back to preaching the Gospel.” I want to tell you that it is impossible to preach the Gospel without preaching on giving. The Gospel is giving--“God so loved the world that He gave.” The glorious Christian message is, “The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ.” Jesus said to His followers, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” Many people love to hear a sermon on the grace of God, the glories of the Christian life, the joys of heaven. But the Bible says more about giving than it does about these subjects. The preaching of any pastor is lacking if it does not contain the clear note of the gospel of giving.

Receiving without giving does harm to a person. The Dead Sea illustrates this, which is dead, because it has no outlet only inlet. It only receives it does not give.

I looked upon a sea and lo ‘twas dead  
Altho by Hermon’s snow and Jordan fed.  
How came a fate so dire? The tales soon told.  
All that it got it kept and fast did hold.  
All tributary streams found there their grave  
Because this sea received but never gave.  
O Lord help me my best myself to give  
That I may others bless and like them live.

I looked upon a sea ‘twas bright and blue.  
Around its shore were life and verdant hue.  
“Twas fed by many rills with fountain source  
on Hermon’s snowy peak whence Jordan’s course.  
But Galilee’s blue sea lives not alone  
Altho it gets these streams as all its own.  
It lives because it gives its water blue  
To other shores: and then it fills anew.

Our best nature dies when we receive all and give nothing. Giving causes a person to grow in grace. God delights when we give. “The Lord loveth a cheerful giver.”

We should give but so often we steadfastly refuse to under any circumstance.

A man was approached about giving \$50,000.00 to a certain cause. He said, “I understand why you think I can give the money. I own my own business. I have all the signs of affluence. But there are some things that you don’t know. Did you know that my mother is in an expensive nursing home?” “Well, know we didn’t know that.” Did you know that my son is deeply religious and gone into social work and makes less than the national poverty level?” “Well , no we didn’t know that.” Did you know that my brother died and left a family of five and almost no insurance?” “No we didn’t know that either.” “Well, if I didn’t give any of them a Penney what makes you think I will give it to you?” And sometimes it seems that church people feel that way.

But if a church is to survive it must have money. Money is a medium of exchange. We are not paid in goods we are paid in money instead that we may exchange for goods as we see fit. When we put money in the plate at church we are putting a bit of ourselves in the plate. We can't g' and preach everywhere so we are hiring someone else to do it. We are making it possible. Therefore the money we put in the plate represents the work that we want done for the Lord in this world and in this church.

Someone will take the verse, “It is more blessed to give than receive” and say, “well maybe so but receiving is good enough for me.” Let me ask you; is receiving good enough for you? Would you rather be a beggar than a benefactor, a panhandler than a philanthropist, a blight than a blessing, a parasite than a producer, a getter than a giver?

Only a live church needs money. A dead church needs very little money. A father was telling how that when his wife had twins it was so expensive. Every expense was double. But then they died and the father sobbed, “since then they haven’t cost us a thing. Only living babies cost money. Dead ones don’t cost at all. Only live churches need money. When a church dies there is very little need for money but oh how tragic.

You need to give and in the right way. I want to give you a how to in giving. I want to tell you how to give your money away.

1. Give hilariously—not grudgingly. Paul said that God loves a cheerful (or hilarious) giver.
2. Give purposefully—“every man according as he purposeth in his heart so let him give.”
3. Give proportionately—the size is not as important as the proportion of the income that it represents—“As the Lord has prospered.”
4. Give systematically—“so let him give.” We start and stop and then start

and stop. It is not right for the church to be treated as a side issue or an afterthought. The church suffers from Nickels and Dimes and Dollars that we throw at it whenever we feel like it. The church deserves more respect and sounder support than it gets from casual, haphazard, now and then giving. To belong to the church and enjoy its benefits, personally and in the community, carries the obligation of regular, systematic giving according to a self-determined plan.

A man was told by his pastor that God should come first in everything including finance. The man replied, “Pastor I have too many bills to pay to tithe.” To this the Pastor said, “yes but God should be first.” “But Pastor,” the man replied, “God is not pressing me.” God may not send bills but God expects us to support His church.

## 5. Give Prayerfully.

What is the level of your giving? There are several levels. Let’s look at them:

1. The “Tip” level. There are those who give a Dollar or two to the Lord in the same way they tip a waitress or porter. It is just a matter of appreciation for the Lord.
2. The “Entertainment” level. There are those who give only when they come to church. They give just like they give to the theater or the ball game—they give when they go.
3. The “Emotional level” level. There are those who give only when they are emotionally stirred. This may be once or twice a year, according to feelings.
4. The “Promise” level. They promise the Lord they will pay but they don’t.
5. The “Bible” level. There are those who give their tithes and offerings as the Bible teaches.

What is your motive for giving? Again, there are several:

1. The bribe. Perhaps the lowest motive for stewardship is the kind of giving that attempts to bribe the unseen spirits or a fickle God. The worshiper brings his sacrifice and gifts with the hope that the giving of something which is precious to him may induce the unseen spirits, spiritual forces, or God to treat him favorably or to refrain from harming him.

2. The motive of obligation. This motive is prompted by such feeling as David must have had when he cried in Psalm 116:12: “What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me?” This puts stewardship on the basis of a kind of commercial exchange.
3. The motive of sympathy. Today many are moved by the sight of suffering to give. The appeal is that, “if one Dollar could feed you child wouldn’t you want to give it? Well one dollar can feed a starving child for a day.” So we visualize the countless millions starving and we give. There is some merit to this giving.
4. The motive of evangelism. The appeal of world-wide evangelism is a motive that causes many to give.
5. The spiritual self-expression motive. The strongest motive for giving is when born-again Christians give and keep giving simply because it is in keeping with his new nature. Again David said in Psalm 103:1: “Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name.”

Do you know what the purpose of the tithe is? There are two:

1. Remembrance—That God owns all and the tithe is just an acknowledgement of that ownership.
2. Worship—We are saying that God is supreme in my life and I will worship Him with my whole life (including finance).

There are something’s that tithing wont do:

1. It will not put you in a position to bargain with God.
2. It will not substitute for true Christian character.
3. It will not replace the commitment of your life to God.

But God wants us to tithe; in fact He demands it. But oh the excuses!

“And they all with one consent began to make excuse.” Like the song, “Excuses! Excuses! You here them every day!” Yes, every day and every where. I sometimes think that the church has to receive the award for making and receiving excuses. People very seldom stop to consider what Jesus said, “Where your treasure is there will your heart be also.” The man who puts his money in fishing tackle loves fishing. The man who puts his money into golf loves golf. The man who puts his money into guns loves

guns. The man who puts his money into cars loves cars. It could be houses or whatever but the principal remains the same. And the person who puts a decent, respectable portion of his money into the nail pierced hands of the Lord loves the Lord. The man who never puts money into fishing doesn't love fishing etc. And the man who doesn't regularly and faithfully bring a fair portion of his money to the only institution Jesus died for doesn't care much about Jesus. Now, that is the truth without a doubt but there are so many who don't bring a portion of their money to the church and oh the excuses.

It's like asking the question, "Why are fire trucks red?" And receiving an answer like this: "Well, fire trucks have four wheels and eight men, four and eight are twelve. There are twelve inches in a foot. A foot is a ruler. Queen Elizabeth is a ruler and the Queen Elizabeth is the largest ship on the seven seas. Seas have fish. Fish have fins. The Finns fought the Russians. The Russians are reds. Fire trucks are always rushin'. Therefore, fire trucks are always red! If you think this is wild, just listen to some people trying to explain, in the light of the Bible, why they do not tithe.

Some might ask, "Can I be excused from giving." The answer is, yes, if you believe that:

1. People are not lost in sin and in need of a savior.
2. Jesus made a mistake when He said to His followers: "Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."
3. The gospel is not the power of God, and cannot save.
4. It is every man for himself in this world, and with Cain, ask: "Am I my brother's keeper?"
5. You have no desire to share in the final victory of Christ.
6. You are prepared to accept the final judgement of Christ: "Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me."

Let me ask you, "If the tithe belongs to the Lord as the Bible says it does then:

*What right do you and I have to borrow it?*

*What right do you and I have to steal it?*

*What right do you and I have to use it?*

*What right do you and I have to fix interest rates for God?"*

God wants us to see where our real interests ought to lie. When a traveler goes to another country the first thing that he does is to change his money into the currency of

that land. God knows that we cannot take any of earth's money with us, but we can change it into heavenly currency by giving our money to God. That is what we do when we tithe and give offerings, we change our earthly currency into heavenly currency. We are laying up for ourselves treasures in heaven.

This truth can be illustrated by the following story. There was a young girl who came to God in a certain church as a result of the faithful life and witness of her aunt. This girl really got in and was a blessing to all that knew her.

After she had been in church only a short time she became critically ill with an infection and all the drugs prescribed on her behalf failed. She died very suddenly. Her death was a terrible shock to her family and to the whole church.

A few days following her funeral the pastor received a letter from the parents. In this letter they wrote that their daughter had a small savings account and that they were closing out her entire account "in favor of the church." Would the pastor please accept this last gift from their daughter to help the ministry of the church she loved so dearly? The pastor said she loved the church because she loved the Lord.

Yes, this wonderful, young Christian closed her life's account in favor of the Lord's church. So may it be said of us that, when our brief stay on earth is done, every moment we have lived, every offering we have given, and every deed we have done will be credited to our account with our Lord. For when we stand before God on that great day, "to which there is no sunset and no dawn," then it will be required that every one of us will have to give an account of themselves before Almighty God. If we are saved it will be before the judgement seat of Christ and if lost it will be before the White Throne. But we will all give an account to God for our lives. Let us make sure our life's account is in God's favor so when we close our life's account it will be to God's glory and benefit.

**3. THE QUALIFICATION FOR SAVIORHOOD (Part one)**  
(Christmas message)  
TEXT: REVELATION 5:1-5

INTRODUCTION

All of us have had the experience of looking for a job. We all know the feeling of going through a job interview. We dress up nice, put on our best manners and go with hope in our hearts. But beyond the appearance and the manners there is a bottom line that cannot be circumvented qualifications! We must be qualified for the job.

A student of the Torah came to his teacher and announced that, in his opinion, he was qualified for ordination as a rabbi. "What are your qualifications?" asked the sage. The student replied, "I have disciplined my body so that I can sleep on the ground, eat the grass of the field, and allow myself to be whipped three times a day."

"See that yonder white donkey," said the teacher, "and be mindful that it sleeps on the ground, eats the grass of the field, and is flogged no less than three times daily. Up to the present you may qualify to be a donkey, but certainly not a rabbi".

A qualification is something within a person's possession some accomplishment, some quality, some knowledge, some necessary skill, some credential--that fits that person for some function, office, or title. It is, for instance, that which makes someone qualify for a job, something that makes that person competent for a position.

In Revelation 5, there is a search for one and only one who is qualified to open the book and look thereon. The search is made and there was no one qualified. No one above, on, or under the earth qualified. Then there is found one who meets the qualifications of saviorhood. The need was for a savior.

If our greatest need had been for information  
God would have sent us an educator.

If our greatest need had been for technology  
God would have sent us a Scientist.

If our greatest need had been for money  
God would have sent us an Economist.

If our greatest need had been for pleasure  
God would have sent us an Entertainer.

But our greatest need was for forgiveness  
So God sent a savior.

“Saved” implies that men needed to be saved from something. What?  
We needed a savior who would come and save us. Jesus was the only One qualified.

1. He came to save us from a messed up past.
2. He came to save us from a meaningless present.
3. He came to save us from a miserable future.

Jesus was qualified because He had the:

## **I. RIGHT FAMILY**

**The prophets said that the Savior was to be a Jew born from the family tree of David.**

1. This is known as :”Davidic covenant”:  
A covenant is a contract, agreement or promise. The Testaments, Old and New, are covenants.
2. In II Samuel 7:5, God told Nathan to talk to David and tell him this in Verses 11-17 that Jesus would be born from the family of David.
3. The Bible reveals this to have happened: That Jesus would be born in the family of David.
  - a. Luke 2:4, “And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazereth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethleham; (because he was of the house and lineage of David)”
  - b. Luke 3 tells the family tree through Mary. Verse 31, “Which was the son of Melea, which was the son of Menan, which was the son of Mattatha, which was the son of Nathan, which was the son of David.”

## **II. RIGHT MOTHER**

Let us consider the great miracle of the birth of Christ—the miracle of how He was born.

One of the fundamental tenets of the Christian faith is that Christ was born of Mary without natural generation--He had a human mother, but did not have a human father. His conception by Mary took place by the act of the Holy Spirit, and before she had ever lived with a man. She was a chaste virgin, engaged to be married to Joseph of Nazareth when this miracle occurred. No teaching in the Bible is more explicit than this, and no doctrine is more important to our Christian faith.

This precious doctrine needs an increasingly clear emphasis. We are living in a day of rationalism and skepticism. We hear men say, "It doesn't matter whether you believe Jesus was virgin born or not, the fact that you believe Him and follow His teachings is what matters most." That kind of philosophy I brand as more than heresy--it is infidelity.

Now, to the prophecy in Isaiah. 7:14:

It was at a time of great discouragement in the little kingdom of Judah that God spoke to king Ahaz with words of promise and hope for a glorious future. He said, "Ask of Me, and I will give you a sign, either in the depth, or in the height above." Any kind of a sign, God promised to give him, as a token of assurance, but Ahaz did not know what kind of a sign to ask for; therefore the Lord said, "Hear ye now, O house of David . . . the Lord Himself shall give you a sign: Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel." The sign of the virgin birth.

How tremendously important is this sign. God said, in substance: "I am going to give a sign to the house of David that will forever be unchallenged; I will do a thing which has never been done before and will never be done again. It will be a miracle so great that no one can ever doubt its supernatural character: behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bring forth a son."

The good news of this extraordinary event was told out and circulated among the distraught people of Judah, and they accepted it with joy, and believed it, and although they were surrounded by hostile nations and the outlook for their future, humanly speaking, was hopeless, yet this divine promise brought them comfort and assurance, and it formed the basis of a hope in their hearts which was unshakable for the next seven hundred years. Their Messiah was to come. He was to be none other than the eternal God in flesh, and He was to become a man, through the miraculous conception in the womb of a virgin by the Holy Ghost.

And it is important that we note, in passing, that God preserved the words of this prophecy in all their purity, right up to the time of its fulfillment when He gave assurance to Joseph concerning Mary, his espoused wife, that Mary's pregnancy was the result of the divine act, and then quoted to Joseph this identical prophecy, word for

word. The mother of Jesus is called a virgin in both places.

### III. RIGHT TIME

At the time when the angel announced the birth of Christ, nothing could have been more unlikely from every conceivable human standpoint than that He would be born at Bethlehem of Judea.

Mary lived far, far to the north, at Nazareth, in Galilee. Long distances in travel those days were exceedingly rare. Particularly was it unusual for a woman to travel across the country when she was near the time of childbirth. And yet it was at that time that Mary made the long and difficult trip from Nazareth of Galilee to Bethlehem of Judea.

God had decreed that Mary should marry Joseph, and that Joseph was to be the foster parent, the custodian of this sacred trust, the Child, Jesus. And it was because of her marriage to Joseph that it became necessary for Mary to make with him that trip, at that particular time, to Bethlehem. Joseph was compelled under the stern decree of Augustus Caesar to make that trip to Bethlehem, the town of his nativity where, under that royal decree, he must register for the tax as a subject of Caesar.

What if Joseph had not been a Bethlehemite?

What if Mary had married a native of Galilee?

What if Joseph had been mindful to disannul the engagement to Mary upon receiving the knowledge that Mary was to become the mother of a child which was not his own? Or, what if he had discredited the announcement by the angel? Or, what if he had been too much concerned about the gossip of a skeptical community?

What if the strange decree by the emperor that every citizen of the Roman world should be taxed in the very town and province where they had been born had not been made? Such a decree was unprecedented!

What if the time element with reference to that decree had been shifted one way or the other? If the time for that registration had been later, Mary would not have been in Bethlehem. If earlier, they would have had time to return to Nazareth.

What if either Joseph or Mary had been in such condition of health that they could not have made the trip to Bethlehem? What if? What if? What if?

But there are no "what ifs" in God's plan, and in God's time table. That which was, from every conceivable human consideration, an impossibility, became through the foreordination and divine appointment, and the providence of God, a reality, a solid, incontestable, historical fact!

Our Redeemer came into this world at God's appointed time. He fulfilled God's appointments during His short sojourn on this earth. Every prophecy concerning His ministry and life was fulfilled. And when He had completed His sacrificial mediation for our sins, His earthly life expired on the cross, at God's appointed time--no sooner, no later. He arose from the grave at God's appointed time. He continued on the earth for the forty days of His appointed time; and, at God's appointed time, He ascended up into Heaven. And, some day, thank God, His time-table will be consummated when He returns in power and glory.

Our God is punctual. He has perfect timing. He never misses a beat. Not by a fraction of a second does He miscalculate.

The world needed a Savior. That Savior had been picked personally by God before the worlds were made. Man's sin did not take the Creator by surprise. Yet God waited for His masterpiece of redemption. He waited for the fullness of time. And for a specific Roman emperor--Augustus.

In the small village of Galilee a man and his young fiancée faced the rigors of a difficult journey south to Bethlehem in order to appease the requirements of a Caesar who did not know they even existed. Their names were Joseph and Mary. (See Luke 2:15.)

Centuries earlier, when Rome was just beginning to contend for global recognition, a Jewish prophet named Micah had made a startling prediction: "But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting" (Micah 5:2).

God was working His plan to perfection. For "when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son" (Galatians 4:4). Why didn't Christ come sooner? Why did the divine Father wait so long for the certain season? No other time in human history was so perfect for the birth of our Lord.

God was working upon the world with a distinct goal of preparing it for the gospel. He knew what He was doing, for Roman power had spread itself over most of the nations. Those small petty states that would have been in normal existence, whose jostling and opposing interests might have withstood the spread of the good news, were

now swallowed up in one grand empire. There was nothing to oppose the progress of the messengers of the gospel. The world was ready for their productive labors.

## EVERYTHING HAS A TIME!

The first two chapters of Ecclesiastes deal with everything in it's own place. The third chapter deals with everything in it's own time.

When a parachutist jumps from an airplane it is of critical importance as to when the ripcord should be pulled to open the chute. If pulled too soon, the chute can get fouled. In the early days of parachuting, the jumpers were instructed to say the word "Geronimo"--and then yank on the ripcord. Of late, we are told, parachutists are instructed to say: not now but now! By the time that phrase is said, maybe a second and a half, the parachutist is safely free of the airplane.

Time is important in the scriptures. There is a time for this and a time for that, the Old Testament writer of Ecclesiastes wrote. "A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted, etc." (Ecclesiastes 3:1-9).

The principle of time is so important to life that the New Testament employs two words to describe the basic categories of time. One is *chronos* measurable time the kind recorded by clocks and calendars. The other time word is *kairos*, which means roughly the "right time," the proper time for an event to take place... "not now but now." It is this use of time that two of the readings for this week refer. "And when the time came," Luke writes in recording the dedication of the infant Jesus at the temple, "they (Mary and Joseph) brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord." There was a "right time" a *kairos* for this important event. The same use of the word and the same meaning is used by Paul in writing to the Galatians: "But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son..." (Gal. 4:4). Again, it means the proper time, the right time.

Timing is crucial in just about everything. A car won't perform right if the timing is off. When a baseball player's timing is off, he'll swing late at the ball or foul it off. Jokes fall flat without good timing, and a drama loses its punch if the lines aren't timed right. If each of us had a dollar for every time we spoke too soon or too late we'd all be rich.

"The fullness of time" means the right time, the best time for something to be effective. God's universe runs on "the fullness of time." Our little universe operates best on "the fullness of time," as well. The question we must ask at this turning point of *chronos* time, when we take down old calendars and put up new ones, is whether or not we are operating on *kairos* time, the right time. "Not now, but now!" In other words, do

you have the correct time?

Time usually calls for response. "It's now or never," a song puts it. Time has a "fullness" a correct moment.

Solomon chronicles 28 things that he has dealt in and found vanity. The evil of these activities is not always within the activity itself but in the timing of the activity. This is why Solomon gives us the third chapter. This is an old age repentance and Solomon says that I have learned that God's time is best. He had learned that something is only good as it relates to God. So it is everything good in it's place and everything good in it's time.

We would say that it is wrong to hate and right to love. But it is not wrong to hate sin and it is wrong to love the world.

We would say that it is wrong to make war and right to make peace. But the day is coming when we will participate in the greatest war that the world has ever seen and it will be right. It is wrong now to try to make peace with evil. The carnal mind is enmity (at war) with God.

The Bible says that when a man is in sorrow that is not a time to rejoice. But the Bible does say to rejoice. It is all a matter of timing.

When we look at something, we must ask; how does this relate to God's will and God's time.

Notice that in David's day the need was for a warrior and so there was David, a warrior king. But then the need was for peace and Solomon came, a man of peace. Solomon would not have worked in David's day and David could not have done the things that Solomon did. It is important that we know what God is doing right now. We cannot live in the past.

When I started out evangelizing I became so tired of hearing about the good old days. Boy, God really moved then. Well, I thought, God wants to move right now as well. Do we have to construct brush arbors in order for God to move? No! Maybe in your personal life you say boy I used to pray, or praise, or attend, or believe, or live. That is gone. What about right now? You can pray now, and praise now, and believe now, and live holy now.

1 Chronicles 12:32 records the account of the Tribe of Issacar who sent men of the times who knew what Israel ought to be doing right then. That is what is needed.

We need to be careful not to allow any one of God's blessings to become habit forming. Each service has a divine theme. It is not shouting all the time, or singing, or even the teaching and preaching. It is what God wants at that particular time.

Solomon says that God has placed eternity in our hearts. We need a vision to see even a part of this. A vision is a slice of eternity. Joshua first saw the vision (you'll notice that this is true of many of God's men and women Abraham, Jacob, etc.) We need a vision before we can see where our part of eternity fits in the whole. We must depend on God for an overview or perspective. We need to know God's timing so we know when to do what

A twelve-year-old boy attended a symphony concert with his parents. He was a bit bored by the music, the instruments, and the movements of the conductor and artists, but (since boys will be noise) he was interested in the guy in the back of the orchestra who wielded the two mammoth metal cymbals strapped to his wrists. The boy waited anxiously for the moments when the man would rise and slam the metal together, producing a resounding noise. After the concert the boy insisted he be taken backstage, where he located the man who played the fascinating cymbals. "What do you have to know to play those?" the boy inquired. The cymbals player responded thoughtfully "Nothing... except when!"

Acts 15:18 "Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world."

God knows it all and if we are going to find anything out we must get it from God. We must do nothing in our own understanding lest we find ourselves at cross-purposes with God.

One of our biggest struggles in understanding the ways of God is that we see it through the prism of time and time distorts all things. Jesus is the same Yesterday . . . There is no change in eternity because there is no time. God centered change brings us into the image of God. Man centered change mars the divine image that is in our souls.

There are two realms: the eternal and the temporal. It is a sticky theological problem but it is true that there is; God's sovereignty, our responsibility. Heavenly and eternal promises and practically living them out.

God is as much in the future as He is in the past. What is willed in heaven is carried out down here. This is God's purpose and must be done in God's time. If we are not on God's time clock we are also outside of His purposes. We can miss God and all that He has for us.

**DELAYS ARE NOT INDIFFERENCE.**

Valuable things take time.

The apple grows for many months before it can be eaten.

And there is the peach, which hangs around a long time just to sweeten.

When a piece of cheese has aged, they say it's at its best.

And wine must sit for many years before it stands the test.

Nearly everything takes time to reach the best that it can be, so don't think of yourself as older, you're just getting better, you see.

In the town of Hanover, in Germany, I am told that there is buried a German countess who denied the existence of God and ridiculed the idea of the resurrection. To show her contempt for Christianity, she ordered that on her death the grave should be built of solid masonry and covered by large stones bound together by iron clamps. On this tomb was engraved her defiant challenge that through eternity this tomb shall never be disturbed.

One day a seed from some tree, either blown by the wind or carried by a bird, became lodged in a small crevice of the tomb, where soon it sprouted and began to grow. And then, as if Nature mocked the haughty infidel, she quietly extended the delicate roots of that seedling under the massive blocks of stone and slowly raised them from their place. Although scarce four generations are passed since that tomb was sealed, that most insignificant seedling has accomplished what God Himself was challenged to accomplish. It may seem that nothing is happening but God is working but waiting is hard.

Life is composed of waiting periods: The child must wait until he is old enough to have a bicycle; the young man until he is old enough to drive a car, the medical student must wait for his diploma; the husband for his promotion; the young couple for savings to buy a new home. The art of waiting is not learned at once.

Waiting imprisons us. Waiting makes us feel powerless. Sometimes waiting angers us. We feel like that we are in suspended animation. We feel like we are losing the most precious resources we have: the very hours and minutes of our lives.

But Jesus teaches us in this chapter that divine delays do not mean divine indifference. That when we have to wait, it's because He wants to manifest His glory in the maximum way in our life. In His sense of timing.

Jesus is our example. God wants us on His time clock and He will deal with us according to how we have been in step with His purpose both for His kingdom and for our lives.

A few years ago, Russian zoologists discovered some wild geese in the Baraba Steppe region of western Siberia that were behaving as if they had lost their minds. The birds have their summer nesting grounds on the steppe; each fall they travel south to their winter quarters on the Ganges River, about 2,200 miles away. Apart from the mystery of bird migration itself, this whole situation appears entirely normal. The remarkable thing about these geese, however, is that they always travel the first 100 miles on foot.

Each August the birds become increasingly restless. One day they all suddenly start heading south a gigantic army of geese (100,000 at the very least) slowly and painfully marching across the steppe like columns of weary soldiers in an army several miles wide. They manage to travel only nine or ten miles a day; and day by day they grow weaker. Soon foxes and other predators move in. After about ten days the remnants of the army arrive at a lake-filled area some 100 miles south of the nesting grounds. The exhausted geese swiftly recover in the water, their natural habitat. A few days later they continue their journey. But now they fly like any other migratory birds. After all they have been through, the remaining 2,100 miles across China and the Himalayas probably seem like child's play.

These birds have fallen victim to the precision of their own internal clocks. The restlessness which causes birds to migrate in the fall is triggered by their internal timepieces. The biological clock measures the length of days and decrees the exact time when the birds must leave for the south. Under normal conditions this mechanism works with remarkable efficiency, but something has gone wrong in Siberia. Perhaps the effects of industry developing in the cities invaded their territory in some form; or perhaps some change occurred in the climate. In any case, the geese were prompted to move south about ten days before they have completed their yearly molting: they have not yet acquired their full growth of feathers. Thus they are still unable to fly when the biological clock gives them the order to head south. They cannot simply disobey the order. Therefore the whole army sets off on foot, aiming unerringly for its goal 2,200 miles away. Ten days later, when their feathers have grown back sufficiently, they are able to fly.

There are proper times, spiritual timepieces, if you please, within humans that call for response. Sometimes they are ignored and not acted upon at all; at other times they are acted upon too early, before one has developed to the point to properly act. Either way, timing is all important.

Often, conditions make us jump ahead of God--and we make it hard on ourselves. But God, in his own time, comes through.

## OUR GOD IS THE GOD OF THE DEADLINE

"They are at their wit's end. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and He bringeth them out of their distresses" (Psalm 107:27-28).

This Psalm is written in four great refrains, each one of which describes a severe crisis through which men have passed. In each instance the utter hopelessness of men is set forth; and in the midst of each such experience we read these significant words: "Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and He saved them out of their distresses." In each case, it is revealed that God met the deadline.

It is wonderful to know that in all the thousands of years of human history, God has never let one of His children down. He has allowed them to go through testings many, but each time when they have come to the end of their resources, and have reached their wit's end, and have called on God for help, He has been there to meet the deadline!

I think of the children of Israel, standing yonder on the western bank of the Red Sea. Pharaoh's hosts are fast approaching. What a crisis! Shall they become the victims of these murderous warriors, or shall they drown themselves in the waters of the sea? They are God's people will He now let them down! No, no. Listen to the reassuring voice of Moses: "STAND STILL, AND SEE THE SALVATION OF THE LORD." Their faith is challenged, and new hope fills their hearts. At that extremity, God's voice is heard: "SPEAK UNTO THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL, THAT THEY GO FORWARD." And forward they went, as the waters of the Red Sea parted, and they crossed over "dry shod", and watched their enemies perish in the waters behind them. God had met their deadline!

How vivid in our minds is the crisis through which Samuel and the Israelites passed, when their dreaded enemies, the Philistines, pressed sore upon them. They were utterly powerless to meet the savage attack of the onrushing armies. It was at a moment of dire extremity that the prophet Samuel spoke to them, counseling them, and warning them to put away the strange gods from among them, repent of their sins, and return unto the Lord. They did, and there at Mizpah there was much praying and confessing of sins. Then we see that while they were praying and fasting, the Philistines came upon them in great force. Had their God failed them? Would He now let them down? Never! It is so very interesting that God shook the clouds in the skies, and caused a great

thunder which terrified the Philistines, and they fled for their lives. God had met the deadline!

There was Hezekiah with the people of Judah facing complete annihilation by the warlord Sennacherib and the Syrians. Sennacherib sent word that he would ruthlessly trample underfoot the small armies of Judah. From every human standpoint the situation was completely hopeless. But in that extremity, King Hezekiah held a prayer meeting; and after he had a talk with God, he came forth to address his distressed people, with these words, "Fear not, for the Lord will fight our battles." And He did. And the record tells us that that night the angel of the Lord smote the camp of the Assyrians, and the next morning they counted 185,000 corpses on the battlefield. God had met their deadline!

I think of Paul and Silas, far away from home, there in the pagan city of Phillipi. They had been arrested, imprisoned, and their feet fastened in the stocks. But their extremity was God's opportunity. "At midnight they prayed and sang praises". And then we read that God came down, and shook by a mighty earthquake the prison, and the doors were opened. God had met the deadline for them!

God met the deadline for Daniel in the lion's den.

God met the deadline for the three Hebrew children in the fiery furnace.

God met the deadline for Elijah on Mt. Carmel. And for Abraham on Mt. Moriah.

God met the deadline for the disciples in the storm at sea; and for Paul and his 276 seafaring companions in their stormy voyage to Rome.

Yes, God has met a million deadlines for His children down through all generations. When they have come to their wit's end; and when they have exhausted all earthly resources; when all hope has fled, and when perplexity and confusion fills the atmosphere always, whenever God's people have prayed, confessed their sins, and sincerely waited upon God to act, He has met their deadline.

He has met deadlines for you, and you can doubtless recall some of those crises through which you have passed, and you can testify, "He has never failed me yet".

There comes to me on the wings of memory, the time of my most hopeless plight. For thirty days I had lingered with typhoid fever, my life hanging in the balances. I grew weaker and weaker. Everything was done for me that could be done. The doctors gave me up to die. I was burning up with fever. There was nothing to be done but to wait for the end. My loved ones were standing over my bed. I was barely breathing. My pulse,

they said, had stopped beating. The pallor of death was on my face. I heard someone say, "He is gone". I heard them praying, crying. I did not have the strength to move my lips in prayer. But from my inmost soul, from the very depths of my heart, I did pray: "God, please let me live; my life is in Your hands." For a time I was in a coma. I was suddenly awakened by what seemed to be a kiss on the forehead; but as I opened my eyes, no one was there at the moment, and no one had kissed me, or touched me on the forehead. My fever left me completely. For the first time in many days I was ready to take nourishment. The gnawing misery of that awful sickness was gone. The angel of the Lord had stooped down and kissed away my fever, and I was healed. God had met the deadline for me!

Since that hour my blessed Lord has met many deadlines for me deadlines in deliverances, in provision of our needs, both physical and spiritual, and in manifold victories. And I am here to assure you today, beloved, that He is able, and willing, and ready to meet your deadline, whatever it may be.

"They are at their wit's end. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and He bringeth them out of their distresses."

He came when the world was at its wit's end - the fulfillment of time. He will come to you in the fullness of time. If you are here without God, he is here for you now.

## 4. THE QUALIFICATIONS FOR SAVIORHOOD (Part two) (Christmas message)

TEXT: REVELATION 5:1-5

### INTRODUCTION

Review the previous message.

#### IV. THE RIGHT WAY

The Incarnation.

"But made himself of no reputation, and took upon himself the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2: 7).

"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1:14).

A little child was left in the darkness after his mother had put him to bed and turned out the light. "Am I going to be left alone in the dark?" he anxiously cried. "Yes, my dear," his mother replied, "but you have God with you all the time." Quickly the child answered, "Yes, I know God is here, but I want someone who has a face."

God has given us Christ to reveal his face to us! He has revealed himself in Christ.

1. It is illustrated by Jacob's vision of the ladder reaching from heaven to earth with angels descending and ascending; Christ is the divine ladder connecting heaven and earth and making communication possible (John 1:51).
2. The Tabernacle, Ex. 25-40, was the place where Jehovah dwelt and met His people. Jesus Christ pitched His tent in the flesh and dwelt among us. In Him God and man meet (John 1:14-18).
3. The Temple of Solomon, I Kings 5-6, which God honored with His Shekinah presence, typifies the incarnation in the same way as did the Tabernacle (John 2:18-22).
4. The historic, final and permanent incarnation was demonstrated in Jesus Christ (John 1:14-18).

To some, Christmas is gift day. To others it Santa Claus day. To merchants it means profits. (Someone said that on Christmas morning some businessmen join hands and sing, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus.")

It's easy to lose sight of the true significance of the holiday. The Bible account

will help us. Except for Mary, Joseph was the first to know the meaning of the approaching birth. Learning his virgin wife to be pregnant, the confused man wondered what to do. In a dream, a heavenly messenger allayed Joseph's doubts and fears by reminding him of Isaiah's prophecy seven centuries earlier.

Like a jigsaw puzzle, the prophetic pieces fit together for Joseph: A virgin would conceive; she would bear a son; He would be named Jesus and be a Savior. Then the angel explained: "They shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us" (Matthew 1:23). God was providing a way to be with His people.

## 1. 'God with us' yesterday

In the past, God had been with people in different ways. In the Garden of Eden He walked with the first couple "in the cool of the day" (Genesis 3:8), until sin destroyed that relationship.

God walked with Enoch for 300 years. Someone has imagined that one day He said, "You are nearer to My home than yours; why don't you come to My home and stay with Me?" And Enoch was in eternity. He never knew death.

God designed an ark to save Noah and his family. He helped Joseph keep his poise when the young man was serving an unjust prison sentence. For Moses He worked miracles (some lasting 40 years).

God planned a tabernacle (and later a temple) where people could meet with Him. He helped David when the teenager was facing the struggle of his life and for his life. For Daniel, He controlled the appetites of lions. He cooled the fiery furnace for three young Hebrews.

## 2. 'God with us' at Bethlehem

But now God had a better way to be with men--Bethlehem. God would walk on earth and face all the struggles mankind endures. God would truly be with man, by becoming man. Emmanuel.

The Man Jesus is our Savior, Redeemer, Rock, Master, Teacher, Husband, Shepherd, Judge King of Glory, Captain, Potentate, Ancient of Days, The Most High, Creator, I am that I am, I am He, Alpha, Omega, First and Last. Only the Man Jesus is called, Holy One, Just One, Lofty One, Great One, the eternal One, and the mighty One. He is our Hope, Helper, Healer, Physician, Refuge, Ransom, Rewarder. He is God with us. All in all, Word, Christ and Messiah. No other Man in heaven or on earth is called

Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace, Prince of princess, High Priest, Mediator, Door, Way, Truth, Life, Light, Lamb, Lion, and many other titles. He has 72 titles but His name is JESUS. Literally, Jehovah has become our salvation.

Why did Jesus become Emmanuel? To redeem mankind and to reveal the Father. No longer need anyone ask, "What is God like?" In the Upper Room Jesus told His disciples, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). Hebrews 1:3 explains Jesus' statement by declaring Him to be the "express image," the exact replica of God's nature and character.

However, God took the design further and solved a problem for Jesus' disciples. They wondered what they would do when He left the earth. The new birth was God's answer. By the Holy Spirit, He would be more than with us, He would dwell in us. Paul could say, "Christ liveth in me" (Galatians 2:20). In the new birth and by the Holy Spirit, Christ takes up His residence in our lives.

### 3. 'God with us' today

Why is Jesus Emmanuel to us? He's here to forgive, solve problems, heal, and guide. We don't have to travel to some distant shrine. He has already made the journey all the way, from heaven.

Everything God has been in the past He will be to His children today. Emmanuel is the "same yesterday, and today, and for ever" (Hebrews 13:8). You can enjoy fellowship with God as Enoch did. When you suffer unjustly as Joseph did, He is there. He will protect you from physical dangers as He did Daniel. When your life feels like a fiery furnace, He will cool the situation as He did for the young men in Babylon.

Whatever your situation, always remember Emmanuel. He's with you everywhere always.

The infant dependant on His mother's care is the God who gave the power to draw water from the sea and from the moon derived it's power over the tides.

The lad toddling about the carpenter shop of Nazereth & playing in the sawdust on the floor is the God who stood at the head of creation.

That Child among the curling wood shaves created the trees from which the wood came.

That child learning to talk spoke the world into existence.

The child who increased in wisdom etc. was the God who knows all.

He who was hungry was the living bread.

He who was thirsty was the living water

The amazing mystery of the INCARNATION of Jesus Christ is that there were two total and complete natures within this One called the Son of God. There was the total and complete nature of man as well as the total and complete nature of God. As a child, Jesus grew and matured in respect to His human nature. But when He began His holy ministry, He often assumed the role of deity.

Lewis Sperry Chafer has said:

“The Bible presents many contrasts, but none more striking than that one person should be at the same time very God and very man. Illustrations . . . of these contrasts are many: he was weary, yet he called the weary to himself for rest. He was hungry, yet he was "the bread of life." He was thirsty, yet he was "the water of life." He was in agony, yet he healed all manner of disease and soothed every pain. He "grew, and waxed strong in spirit," yet he was from all eternity. He was tempted, yet he, as God, could not be tempted. He became self-limited in knowledge, yet he was the wisdom of God . . . .He prayed, yet he answered prayer. He wept at the tomb, yet he called the dead to arise. . . .He died, yet he is eternal life. He was God's ideal man, and man's ideal God.”

He is God in the flesh coming to us.

The story is told of Shah Abbas, a Persian monarch who loved his people very much. To know and understand them better, he would mingle with his subjects in various disguises. One day he went as a poor man to the public baths and in a tiny cellar sat beside the fireman who tended the furnace. When it was mealtime the monarch shared his coarse food and talked to his lonely subject as a friend. Again and again he visited and the man grew to love him. One day the Shah told him he was the monarch, expecting the man to ask some gift from him. But the fireman sat gazing at his ruler with love and wonder and at last spoke, "You left your palace and your glory to sit with me in this dark place, to eat of my coarse food, to care whether my heart is glad or sorry. On others you may bestow rich presents, but to me you have given yourself, and it only remains for me to pray that you never withdraw the gift of your friendship."

This beautiful story reminds us that Christ, whose birth we celebrate at Christmas, left the glories of heaven in order to share himself with us. That gift of his love and friendship will never be withdrawn from us. He chose to be your friend and mine forever.

A man was shown a red glass bottle and asked what he thought was in the bottle. He replied in succession, "Wine? Brandy? Whiskey?" When told it was full of milk, he could not believe it until he saw the milk poured out. What he hadn't known, of course, was that the bottle was made of red glass, and its redness hid the color of the milk it contained.

So it was and is with the Lord's humanity. Men saw him tired, hungry, suffering, weeping, and thought he was only man. He was made in the likeness of men, yet he ever is God over all, blessed forever. 128

It's incredible, but God's eternal purpose fulfilled in a baby. Incredible as it sounds, that is the staggering import of Christmas. The total eternal program and purpose of almighty God was all wrapped up in an infant, born in a manger in Bethlehem twenty centuries ago. One of the facts about the Christian way that commends it to thoughtful men is its uninventibility. This is a big word to say that Christianity, rightly understood, is utterly unlike religion that man invents. It is so completely contrary to the way man does things, that it must have come from God. Take Christmas, for example; only God could have thought of that: When man invents a super being, he comes up with a Superman, or a Captain Marvel. God gives the world a baby. And in that baby is tied up the whole destiny of the world and mankind and history.

Benjamin B. Warfield said, "The glory of the incarnation is that it presents to our adoring gaze not a humanized God or a deified man, but a true God-man one who is all that God is and at the same time all that man is: one on whose almighty arm we can rest, and to whose human sympathy we can appeal."

Infinite, and an infant. Eternal, and yet born of a woman. Almighty, and yet hanging on a woman's breast. Supporting a universe, and yet needing to be carried in a mother's arms. King of angels, and yet the reputed son of Joseph. Heir of all things, and yet the carpenter's despised son. He that made man was made man.

At this time of year we often hear, "Christ came to the fallen world to learn what it meant to be human, and that it was his experience on earth that lets him understand our situation." Nothing could be further from the truth. If, in fact, Christ is God, then he is omniscient and "knows everything." Thus, He did not need to come so that he would know. He came so that we would know that he knew.

Years ago an Eskimo guided an American expedition through the great expanse of the great white North. He spent many months with the men, and saved the lives of two of them. When it came time for the expedition to return home, they invited him to go along. They served as his "guide" on his brief visit to the US. They took him to a typical American home, to a "picture show," a farmers market with acres of fruit and vegetables. He was most impressed with a fresh, fish market. He rode in an elevator, and on a streetcar, which he called a house that moved. When he returned to his native village and began to tell of electric lights, airplanes, and the other things he had seen, the villagers began to shun him. His, family and former friends treated him with contempt. They gave him a new name Sadgluk which meant "Liar." He was never called by his former name again even though he seldom talked of his adventure to America.

Suppose that instead of Christ coming to earth, God had chosen a human being to visit with Him for a time and then given him the task of returning and telling humankind about God. Who would have believed what he said? They'd call him a liar. When they asked Jesus to tell them about God, he said, "If you have seen me, you have seen the Father." The Incarnation is God's revelation of Himself in such a way that we could believe it. If we will. It is God coming to us in our need.

In 1943, Thomas Mott Osborne became chairman of the New York State Commission for Prison Reform. Before he entered upon his official duties, he arranged to be imprisoned for a week in Auburn State Prison. There he took the name Tom Brown. He lived in a cell and endured the privation of a typical convict. By the fellowship of suffering this future warden of Sing Sing Prison earned the respect of inmates, and thus he was able to help them to reform.

A chaplain who served in Auburn Prison related that after Tom Brown had assumed his official duties, a hardened criminal was assigned the cell in which Osborne had "served his time." When the criminal heard what Osborne had done, his heart was touched by the living example of unselfishness and sacrifice. Later the prisoner prayed to be saved and became a model prisoner.

In Christ, God left the joy and freedom that was rightly his and entered the prison of this world to "set the captive free" (John 8:31).

An educated Hindu one day stopped to examine a hill of ants. As he stooped, his shadow frightened them into all directions. When he lifted himself up, the ants resumed their usual activities. When he bent down a second time, they again scurried in all directions. The Hindu thought, "I wish I could talk to those tiny creatures and let them know I wouldn't hurt them." His mind toyed with the experience. "Even if I could talk to

those creatures, and even if they had intelligence, and if I could learn their language, I probably couldn't communicate with them because my thoughts are not their thoughts. My terms of expression would not be understandable to them." His imagination kept working. "But if I could become one of them, somehow retaining my personality and my self-consciousness, I could then really tell them something of my thoughts."

Then suddenly it dawned on him, "That's exactly what these Christian teachers have been telling us all the time, that God has become man in order to reveal himself to us, and rescue us." According to this story, this educated Hindu became a Christian through his own illustration.

At dinner one evening Tommy misbehaved. His father, always a strict disciplinarian, reprimanded him saying, "Tommy, if you do not behave you will be sent to your room!" Tommy did not listen. Ordered from the room he heard his father's last words, "And there will be no more food for you tonight!"

Later in bed Tommy's thoughts of his 'behavior' began to bother him. He was hungry. He couldn't remember ever having felt more alone or alienated. He began to cry. Then he heard a noise on the stairs. Footsteps came closer to his room. His door opened and his father came in. Closing the door he came over to Tommy's bed and said, "I love you; son, and I've come to spend the night with you." When the Lord came to earth that was what He was doing. He was saying, "'in spite of the fall in Eden that has plunged this world into the night it deserves, I have come to spend the night with you.'"

Joseph Damien was a nineteenth century missionary who ministered to people with leprosy on the island of Molokai, Hawaii. Those suffering grew to love him and revered the sacrificial life he lived out before them.

One morning before Damien was to lead daily worship, he was pouring some hot water into a cup when the water swirled out and fell onto his bare foot. It took him a moment to realize that he had not felt any sensation. Gripped by the sudden fear of what this could mean, he poured more hot water on the same spot. No feeling whatsoever.

Damien immediately knew what had happened. As he walked tearfully to deliver his sermon, no one at first noticed the difference in his opening line. He normally began every sermon with, "My fellow believers." But this morning he began with, "My fellow lepers."

In a greater measure, Jesus came into this world knowing what it would cost him. He bore in his pure being the marks of evil, that we might be made pure. "For this I came into the world," (John 18:37).

Dr. John Rosen pioneered a new treatment for some people who were severely mentally ill. These were catatonic patients, curled up in the fetal position on their beds, refusing to acknowledge that anyone else even existed. They would neither move nor speak.

Dr. Rosen moved in on the ward. He put up a cot there. Every day he saw those patients. Sometimes he would stop by a bed, take off his jacket, and climb into bed with the patient. He would put his arms around patients and gently embrace them. Some returned to the world of the living because of that wordless expression of concern. In Christ Jesus, God moved in on the ward.

There are four facts relative to this doctrine which we shall notice here: the pledge, the proof, the perpetuity, and the purposes of the incarnation. Before we develop these thoughts in detail, however, we offer Dr. P. B. Fitzwater's concise definition of the incarnation:

By the incarnation is meant that in the person of Jesus Christ the eternal God embodied himself and tabernacled among men; the divine and human natures interpenetrating, thereby becoming one. It was not the divine nature filling the human, as an empty vessel is filled, but the divine Person taking up within himself the human nature, thus becoming the God-man.

## I. THE PLEDGE OF THE INCARNATION

### 1. The Old Testament recounts the pledge.

Isaiah predicted, "Therefore, the Lord himself shall give you a sign; behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14). Again he gives us that immortal prophecy in the ninth chapter: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6). Micah also prophesies concerning Christ's coming: "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting" (Micah 5:2).

These men, inspired by God, here foretell the coming of Christ in the flesh some eight hundred years before he appeared.

Old Testament characters, in many instances, typify the coming and ministry of the God-man:

Moses, as a prophet, is a type of Christ. Both were sent by God; both spoke God's word; both wrought miracles in evidence; and both were rejected by Israel.

Jonah is a type of Christ in his resurrection.

Adam is a "figure of him which was to come" (Romans 5:14).

Samson, Joshua and David, in their victories, typify Christ as the great Victor.

Joseph is the great character type of the Lord Jesus. Each was beloved by his father (Genesis 37:3; Matthew 3:17); each was sent to his brethren (Genesis 37:12-13; John 1:11); each was hated by his brethren (Genesis 37:4, 8, 18; John 7:7; Matthew 12:14); each was rejected by his brethren (Genesis 37:8; John 19:15); each was delivered to death (Genesis 37:18, 23 24; Acts 2:22-23); each was raised from the grave (Genesis 37:28; Acts 2:23 24, 27); each took a Gentle bride (Genesis 41:45; Acts 15:14; Ephesians 5:25); each delivered Israel (Genesis 45:3, 7; Romans 11:25-26).

Abel and his sacrifice is another Old Testament picture of Jesus. Abel offered a divinely appointed sacrifice; Christ was a divinely appointed sacrifice. Abel offered a flawless sacrifice; Christ was a perfect sacrifice. Abel offered a sacrifice of blood; Christ gave his own blood in sacrifice. Abel offered an acceptable sacrifice; Christ was an acceptable sacrifice. Abel offered a temporarily effective sacrifice; Christ was an eternally sufficient sacrifice.

The Old Testament tabernacle and Noah's ark are further types of Christ. These and others illustrate God's pledge that Christ would tabernacle among men.

## 2. The New Testament records his incarnation.

"God was manifest in the flesh . . ." (I Timothy 3:16).

". . . Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him: the form of a servant, and was made is the likeness of men" (Philippians 2: 5-7).

A group of missionaries, whose compound was near the royal palace, heard a loud noise over the wall in the palace grounds. Investigating, they found that the young prince, to whom they had earlier given a song book after singing him Christmas hymns, had his fat gentlemen-in-waiting lined up in a pavilion demanding that they sing. "The joyful noise is in that book, and you've got to get it out!" he commanded.

The joyful news is that God in Christ came into the world and identified himself with man--miraculously, conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of a virgin!

The New Testament declares that angels announced His birth.,,

"And she shall bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1: 21). ". . . Thou shalt . . . bring forth a Son, and shalt call his name Jesus" (Luke 1:31). "And the angel of the Lord . . . said unto them, Fear not, for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy . . . . For unto you is born . . . a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:9-1).

The New Testament discloses that shepherds acknowledged him at his birth. "And they came with haste and found . . . the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad . . . concerning this child. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God" (Luke 2:16-17, 20).

The New Testament describes how the wise men adored him at his birth. ". . . there came wise men . . . saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east and have come to worship him" (Matthew 2:1-2).

The New Testament divulges that Herod was annoyed because of his birth. "When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled" (Matthew 2:3).

The New Testament discusses how wise men today may accept him. "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (Romans 10:9).

While walking in his garden one day with a friend, Alfred Lord Tennyson was asked, "What do you think of Jesus Christ?" Tennyson pointed to a beautiful flower and said, "As the sun is to that flower, so Jesus Christ is to me."

God kept his pledge: Christ came in the fullness of time; and because of his supernatural birth, his sinless life, his sacrificial death on the cross, and his significant resurrection from the dead, his salvation is offered to every man

### III. THE PROOFS OF THE INCARNATION

#### 1. The works of Christ prove that he is God incarnate.

". . . for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me" (John 5:36). "And many other signs truly did Jesus . . . which are not written in this book; but these are written, that ye

might believe that Jesus is the Son of God" (John 20:30-31).

Great works have been performed by great men, but none can compare with the miraculous works of Jesus Christ! His mighty works include his miraculous birth, his sinless life, and his willing death, as well as the miracles which he performed during his public ministry. He healed the sick; He raised the dead; He changed the very laws of nature.

He stands forth upon the highest pinnacle of heavenly glory, proclaimed of God, acknowledged by angels, adored by saints, and feared by devils, as the living, personal Christ, our Lord and Savior.

Several years ago the king of England visited America, and while returning to Britain his ship encountered one of the worst storms ever recorded on the Atlantic Ocean. It is told that the king walked the decks of the British man-of-war during that storm, for he had been trained in the ways of seamanship. But even though he was considered the greatest king on earth, he could not still the raging waves of the tempest. Only Jesus could do that! (Luke 8:22-24). Such are the mighty works of Jesus!

2. The words of Christ Prove that he is God incarnate.

"Never man spake like this man" (John 7:46). ". . . The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself; but the Father that dwelleth in me" (John 14:10) . His pertinent illustrations, his unusual metaphors, and the deep meaning of such discourses as the Sermon on the Mount are unexcelled by the combined writings of all great literary men. He himself never wrote a book, yet his teachings have endured for almost 2,000 years.

William Edward Biederwolf has said of Christ's preaching:

“Take the teachings of Jesus Christ about the fundamental ethical conceptions, such as love and truth and purity and duty, and where in any non-Christian religion or when on the lips of any non-Christian teacher did the world ever see or hear moral philosophy so profound, so radiant with divine glory and so God-like as that which came from the heart and mind of this marvelous Man of Galilee.

3. The resurrection of Christ proves that He is God incarnate.

Jesus Christ is “declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead” (Romans 1:3-4). He laid down His life knowing that “I have the power to lay id down, and I have the power to take it again” (John 10:17-18).

Most of the religions of the world claim special virtues for their leaders or their gods; but only Christianity can ever lay claim to the resurrection. It is said that a young man once decided to found a new religion and went to a philosopher for advice. “What claims do you have as a great religious leader?” the wise man inquired. When the young man declared that he had none, the older man said: “If you will die, and after several days rise from the dead, you will be able to claim many followers; for this is what Jesus Christ did.”

#### **IV. THE PERPETUITY OF THE INCARNATION**

The incarnation is not a single even; it is continuing testimony of God’s power and grace:

Romans 6:9 indicates that Christ will retain His human body forever.

I Timothy 2:5, referring to the mediatorship of Jesus Christ in heaven at present, declares that He is “the man Christ Jesus.”

Hebrews 13:8 reveals “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever.”

During His time on earth until His death on the cross, He permitted certain human limitations in His body; for He was hungry (Matthew 4:2; 21:18), and He was thirsty (John 19:28); He was weary (John 4:6), and He slept (Matthew 8:24); He was subject to His parents (Luke 2:51), and He was subject to men’s laws (Matthew 17:24-27); and He suffered.

After His resurrection, however, He possessed a glorified body, and it is in this body that He is now present in heaven (Acts 1:9; Ephesians 4:9-10).

#### **V. THE PURPOSE OF THE INCARNATION**

1. The purpose of His incarnation is to reveal the essence of God.

Jesus declared that, “he that hath seen me hath seen the father” (John 14:9). Hebrews 1:3 tells us that Christ is the express image of God.

If we would learn the holiness of God, we look to Jesus, of whom it was said that there was no sin in Him.

If we would learn the love of God we look to Jesus, of whom it was said that He died for us while we were His enemies (Romans 5:10).

If we would learn of the compassion of God, we look to Jesus, who wept over an indifferent city filled with sinners; and who was moved with compassion as He looked upon the multitude as sheep without a shepherd.

If we would know the forgiving spirit of God, we look to Jesus who cried, "Father, forgive them" (Luke 23:34).

If we would know something of the judgment of God which must eventually come upon all sin and every form of wickedness, we look to Jesus, into whose hands will be entrusted this judgment (Psalm 2:6-9).

2.) The purpose of His incarnation is to reckon what man should be.

His life was an example of perfect manhood, and we are told to walk as He walked. "For even hereunto were ye called; because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps" (I Peter 2:21). "He that saith he abideth in him ought himself so to walk, even as he walked" (I John 2:6). Jesus says in John 13:15, "For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you."

Since Jesus is all things to the believer, it is not only possible for the believer to walk in Christ, but God expects him to do so.

Christ is the source of our life (Ephesians 2:1; Galatians 2:20).

Christ is the sustenance of our life (John 6:51).

He is the solace of our life (Hebrews 13:5).

He is the sphere of our life (Philippians 1:21).

He is the standard of our life (Philippians 2:5).

He is the satisfaction of our life (I John 3 : 2).

2. The purpose of His incarnation is to redeem us by his death.

". . . we are sanctified by the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Hebrews 10:10). "He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy, the

works of the devil" (I John 3:8). "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Hebrews 2:14-15).

"The fear of death was ours; the power of death was Satan's; the taste and suffering of death were Christ's. Through the medium of death Christ destroyed not only death itself, but also him that had the power of death."

Through the redeeming power of Christ J. W. Jowett's words bear real significance: "Death is not the end; it is only the beginning. Death is not the master of the house; he is only the porter at the King's lodge, appointed to open the gate and let the King's guests into the realm of eternal day. And so shall we ever be with the Lord."

When Christ redeems us he makes an eternal claim upon us. In a small village a cottage caught on fire, and since there was no fire engine, the house was soon enveloped in flames. Realizing that the occupants of the house were still inside a young man rushed into the flames and soon returned with two small children. But before he could reenter the cottage to rescue the parents, the roof caved in and they were trapped in the flames. The young man was severely burned in the rescue, and it was some time before he was able to be about again. Soon the town council met in order to decide what was to be done with the children. There were two who claimed them and offered them a home. One was the squire of the village, a man of wealth and position. The other was the young man who had saved them. When asked what right he had to the little ones, he held up his hands, which had been burned and scarred for them. Christ suffered in the flesh to redeem and claim us.

3. The purpose of his incarnation is to represent us as our High Priest.

". . . it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people" (Hebrews 2 :17) . "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15).

Christ becomes our mediator, our go between, before God. D. L. Moody asked a lad to bring his umbrella to him, and in doing so the boy fell and broke the umbrella. He was afraid, and he prevailed upon his parents to break the news to D. L. Moody, which they did. The preacher then said to the boy:

"When you broke my umbrella, you became frightened and ashamed" didn't you?

Then you thought, if I tell mother or father, they can go between me and Mr. Moody and straighten things up. Now that your father has straightened things up, you can come to me. Now, my lad, that is the way it is with all of us; we are sinners afraid of God. But God has provided a Mediator--someone to go between us and him--Jesus."

We could not go where He was so He came to where we are and bridged the gap. We have free access to God. You can come boldly and claim what you want.

## 5. A HOUSE PREPARED FOR STORMS

TEXT: MATTHEW 7:24-27; JOHN 11:25-26

### INTRODUCTION

Jesus had just concluded what we have come to call the Sermon on the Mount. The people who listened to Him, accustomed their own scribes who quoted the Old Testament, paid particular attention to this new voice and were amazed at what He said and the spirit in which He said it. They saw that, “He did not speak as the scribes but as one having authority Himself.” This was refreshing.

What had Jesus been talking about? He had covered just about every subject in which religious people would be interested. Jesus, realizing that man’s supreme concern was his quest for happiness opened up the discourse with an exhaustive discussion of what it took to be happy. He followed this by talking about the responsibility of the ones who have found this happiness. Then He gave His views on fulfilling the Law, giving alms praying (And He gave a model prayer), fasting, values, treasures, anxiety, passing judgement one one’s fellows, incentives to pray, the golden rule, the two gates, and ended by saying that life will be judged by it’s fruit.

I have always been interested in the “therefores” of Jesus. He uses the word twelve times in this sermon alone. In every case except the one in our text it is to drive home the point being discussed. He used it once to magnify the importance of the law, then to emphasize the spoirit of giving. He used it twice to condemn show or display in public religious services and twice to stress the value of following the light. He used it three times to warn. He used it once to sum up the argument for the golden rule. The last “therefore” seems to sum up all of the other “therefores” and give us the conclusion of the whole matter. A good title for the Sermon on the Mount is, “A life and how to build it.”

The insurance industry is a giant industry in our society. And why not? There is insurance for everything; car, teeth, health, life, home and many more. Dancers can have their legs insured. Singers can have their vocal chords insured. Pitchers can have their arms insured. But the greatest insurance is insurance that cannot be bought. The greatest insurance is a life prepared for storms. Look at the two houses in Jesus’ discourse. The rains came, the floods came, the winds blew and the house with the sand foundation fell and great was the fall thereof. But the house with the rock foundation stood.

Let us look at these two houses. There were similarities. Both houses (a place of refuge) were built. Both houses were exposed to the storms. Both builders rested in the

security of the building they had built. The only difference was foundation. One house was built on the sand and the other house was built on a rock.

Foundation in almost any thing is very important. The outline is the foundation of the picture in art and it is the foundation in speaking and writing also. Even children building a card house know the importance of foundation. And foundation is so important in building a life. And we need make no mistake about it we are building a life. A child sitting quietly is not inactive it is building a life. Sometimes lives are like mills and warehouses. Sometimes they are like lighthouses. Some are more like ships but we build our lives. Whatever our lives are at this point we have built them.

## **I. BUILDING A LIFE**

The Bible is full of questions.

There is the question God asked in Eden's garden when and where, because of the sins of our first parents, despair had pitched its black pavilion on man's sterile and blasted estate: "Adam, where art thou?"

There are the questions asked by God and Cain when, in the presence of the crimson spots of the blood shed in the first murder on earth: "Where is Abel thy brother? And he said I know not: Am I my brother's keeper?" (Genesis 4:9).

There is the question asked by Abraham when "there was a strife between the herdsmen of Abraham's cattle and the herdsmen of Lot's cattle" (Genesis 13:7-9). "Is not the whole land before thee?"

There is the question that God Himself asked when in His purpose to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah because of their wickedness, He said, "Shall I hide from Abraham that which I do; seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?" (Genesis 18:17-18).

There is the question "What is thy name?" (Genesis 32:27)—asked by the man who wrestled with Jacob in the night time "until the breaking of the day," at which time Jacob, supplanter became Israel, "a prince with God."

There is the question—"What is that in thine hand?" (Exodus 4:2)—asked of Moses by the Lord when Moses was raising objections as to the commission God gave him, in the words: "Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt" (Exodus 3:10).

There is the question—"Have not I commanded thee?" (Joshua 1:9)—asked of Joshua by the Lord after the death of Moses, a question followed by words of

encouragement: “Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest” (Joshua 1:9).

There is the question—“Why abodest thou among the sheepfolds, to hear the bleating of the flocks?” (Judges 5:16)—asked by Deborah of the Reubenites who remained in the quiet and protection of the sheepfolds, who did nothing while on the battlefields others risked their lives even unto death.

There is the question—“Wherewith shall I save Israel?” (Judges 6:15)—asked of the Lord by Gideon to whom the Lord made answer: “Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man” (Judges 6:16).

There are the questions—“Whom have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed? Or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith?” (I Samuel 12:3)—asked by Samuel of Israel when, disparaged and discarded by the people whom he had led so devotedly and served so faithfully, he began to rehearse to the people the deliverance of Jehovah.

There is the question—“Died Abner as the fool dieth?” (II Samuel 3:33)—when King David, after following the bier of Abner, after standing by the grave of Abner, lifted up his voice and wept.

There is the question—“How long halt ye between two opinions?” (I Kings 18:21)—asked by Elijah, God’s prophet of fire, on Mount Carmel in the great challenge to and conquest of the prophets of Baal.

There is the question—“What manner of man was he which came up to meet you and told you these words?” (II Kings 1:7)—asked about Elijah by King Ahaziah of the messengers who returned from going to, “inquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron” if the King would recover from his disease.

There is the question—“Why is thy countenance fallen seeing thou art not sick?”—asked when Nehemiah was grieving because the city that contained his father’s sepulchres, was in waste and was consumed with fire.

There is the question—“Doth Job fear God for naught?” (Job 1:9)—asked sneeringly by Satan of God at a time when God asked, “Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a perfect and an upright man that feareth God and escheweth evil?” (Job 1:8).

There is the question—“Where is he that is born King of the Jews?” (Matthew 2:2)—asked by the wise men who came from the east to Jerusalem.

There is the question—“What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ?” (Matthew 27:22)—asked by Pilate who had a cotton string where he should have had a backbone.

There is the question—“Lord is it I?” (Matthew 26:22)—asked by the bewildered and grieving disciples the night when, as they did eat, Jesus said: “Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me” (Matthew 26:21).

There is the question—“Who shall roll us away the stone at the door of the sepulchre?” (Mark 16:3)—asked by some women when they had brought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint the bruised and battered dead body of Jesus (Mark 16:1).

There is the question—“What shall we do?” (Acts 2:37) asked by the people after Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost.

The Bible is truly a book of questions. But the greatest question, asked in the Bible, is asked by James, “For what is your life?” (James 4:14). That is the greatest question!

The making of a life is so important. The first question in life is not how to make a living but how to make a life. Making a living is only one incident in life. Life is so much more than that. Think about the impact that a life can have. Think about one life, Savonrola, and how he alone fought the ungodly influences of his generation and won. One life, Aristides, influenced the Greek society of his day. The Bible says that Sodom could have been saved if there would have been ten righteous lives. The Bible says, “David served his own generation by the will of God.” A life is so much more than just a living.

Each person builds a house. The process starts as soon as we are able to think for ourselves. A person takes ideas, impulses, emotions and experiences and fashions them into a life. Every thought is like a piece of timber in the house of life. Every habit is like a beam. Every imagination is like a window. We have a guiding principal that makes you choose the kind of material that we do. Every successful sermon has to have a dominating theme. Every successful life must also have a dominating theme. To this theme we add the things that make up our life. Every thing we choose adds to our dominating theme. We can put in heroism or cowardice, common sense or folly, kindness or harshness, honesty or crookedness, gentleness or brutality. We may ruthlessly scramble for money and notoriety. We may yield to lust and commit murder, or meander through a life that is as “a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.” So we build our lives. The house of our lives may be beautiful, strong and durable, or frail, ugly and destructible. This is the life we have built.

## **II. AN UNPREPARED LIFE**

So many are living unprepared lives; lives that are unprepared for the storms that come because they are built on the wrong foundation. Knowledge does not make a life. Wealth does not make a life. Genius does not make a life. Clothes do not make a life. These are only foundations of sand that will not endure.

When the inevitable storm comes to the unprepared life it is a great disaster. Oh, the tragedy of the fall of a soul!

Several years ago the railroad offered a \$2500.00 reward for a slogan that would increase safety at railroad crossings. The slogan that won was only three words long. That came to \$833.00 a word. The three words were; stop, look, listen. But to what avail is it to put stop on a sign if people do not stop. Or to what avail is it to put look if they don't look. Or to what avail is it to put listen if they don't listen. The point of the sign is you must be prepared before you proceed. This is true of life, before you can face the inevitable storms that come you must be prepared.

It is very important to decide on your architect, remembering that you are not building for time but for eternity. Is selfishness your architect? Is greed your architect like it was for the rich man of Luke 15? What is the thing that is designing your life?

The tower of Babel was a building project that was supposed to keep them from the judgement of God. It failed because they left God out and put themselves in. The result was tragedy.

Samson's life is another tragedy. He was like a bulldozer I once saw pulling a wagon containing two bricks. This seemed so futile that something so powerful was doing something so silly. So it was with Samson. He had so many advantages as far as strength was concerned. But what did he do with his strength. He tore a threatening lion to shreds. He propounded a silly riddle at a Philistine wedding feast, and killed thirty men to pay his gambling debt. He fitted three hundred foxes with fire, and turned them loose on Philistine farms. He went on a homicidal rampage with the jaw bone of a donkey, slaughtering a thousand men. He attracted women of questionable character. And, finally he pulled a building down on himself and his enemies. What a waste of a life! His was truly the unprepared life.

## **III. A PREPARED LIFE**

There are storms that come into our lives that we cannot pray away. Our lives had better be prepared. Are you ready for the hour of test and trial that is coming? Only the prepared life can stand through the storm and by standing have an impact on this world.

Jesus taking His three inner circle disciples Peter, James, and John, to the Mount of Transfiguration is one of the most thrilling Biblical scenes. The fortunate disciples saw the Lord talking to Moses and Elijah and He was transfigured before them. They left this glorious scene and the next thing that happened was a meeting with a demon possessed boy. They came down from the mountain—from the top to the tormented. They were not to live in that high mountain in that glorious atmosphere. But they could take the mountain down into the valley where this boy was tormented and where the father was tormented in heart and soul because of the tormented boy—and where many others were tormented with heartaches and burdens and soul agonies and needed prompting in their perplexities, help in their hazards, direction in their doubts, guidance in their gloom, comfort in their sorrows. If anyone can go to the mountain and have a glorious experience and comeback without bringing some of the mountain with them they have gone there and been there in vain. But when we can bring the mountain experience back with us we can use the mountain top experience to minister to others in their misery and need.

Does an orchestra ever meet for rehearsal for the purpose of hanging their instruments on the wall? No, but for the building of rhythmic palaces of melody before the eyes of the souls of people that they may be blessed and strengthened. How long will it take us to learn that God grants us white and shining revelations of Himself and of His purpose that we may go down the mountain and heal the tormented one who is raving at its base—a misery to himself, a wretchedness and joy-quencher to others? We cannot look spiritually from Hermon without looking by the way of the cross, and, through its crimson lenses, seeing the multitudes in the valley.

Let us learn that tabernacles at the top when there are forgotten torments in the valley are so incongruous. Let us know assuredly that sweet singing at the top without concern for those in sorrow in the valley loses its sweetest melodies. Let us remember ever that seeming sincere sayings about Him on the mountaintop without scar service for Him in the valley is so unlike what He asks of us. Let us never that worship on the mountain that is not followed by work in the valley is a strange worship. Let us allow the mountain top to be a part of our preparation for the valley. It is the life prepared for the storms that can make a difference.

After our mountain meetings and high times of rapture and our supreme hours of joy, let us go down the mountain to re-affirm and to heal. You cannot encounter a multitude without finding afflictions. It is the prepared life that can make a difference. Jesus came down to the people—to heal them, and soothe their pain, and to comfort their unutterable distresses. Surely the mountain top experiences of the disciples at the Transfiguration and the multitudes in the valley were not far from the thought of one who wrote and prayed:

“Lord, let me not stay at the top of the ladder  
Though the top be heaven.  
Send me down to days of danger.  
Send me down to nights of sorrow,  
Send me down to souls that are sad,  
Send me down to places where the shadows are,  
Send me down to people bound with burdens,  
Send me down with a breath of paradise,  
Send me down with a flower from Eden,  
Send me down with a cluster of the grapes of Canaan.”

Send me down to hearts that are homeless, and to homes that are heartless, to lives that are loveless, to loves that are lifeless, to crowds without a compass, to ranks without a refuge, to prodigals at the hog trough, to churches that are drifting like sepulchers manned by frozen crews, to multitudes unled and misled. Send me down to be a blessing. Send me down from the top to the torment. Send me down from the peaks to the perishing. Send me down from the summits to the sinning. Send me down from the spiritual peaks to a participation in the affairs of men, helping them to bear life's burdens with greater strength and to face life's perilous situations with braver hearts. Send me down from the starlight to the storm. Let my mountains be a preparation for the valleys. Let me be prepared for the storms so I can go through and help others. So that my life will not be swept away. It is the foundation that makes the difference. There are only two foundations for a life; sand or rock. We need to have our lives prepared for the storm by building on the rock. And we need to help others prepare for the storm by helping them to build their lives on the right foundation.

## **6. FIRST THE VISION AND THEN THE TASK**

TEXT: ACTS 10:9-17

### INTRODUCTION

I don't remember the first time I heard, "First things first," but I have heard it, it seems all of my life in one form or another. "Don't count your chickens before they are hatched." "Don't start your mouth before your brain is in gear." "Look before you leap." As Davey Crockett is supposed to have said, "Be sure you're right and then go ahead." Or like Lincoln said, "One war at a time."

This philosophy confronts us at every turn of life. It is the most universally given philosophy in the world.

This principal was at work in Peter's life. God wanted him to do something but he could never do what he was needed to do without first a vision. There was first the vision and then the task.

This is also God's way with the church and every person in the church. We all must get the vision and then we can perform the task.

There first must a vision. Visions produce hope in the face of despair. Visions are inspiring. Visions motivate. Visions give the people something to unite behind, therefore a vision create unity. Visions call people to prayer and faith. The faithless and the skeptic will question visions. Vision requires faithfulness and patience. A true vision consumes you!

### **I. THE VISION PREPARES US FOR THE FUTURE.**

One of the most inescapable lessons of life is the necessity of being prepared. Practically everything that is done requires preparation beforehand. It is true of reading, writing, and arithmetic; of buying and selling; of sowing and reaping; of winning and keeping friends. There are certain things in life, which if done at all, cannot be done at the last moment.

The future is something that must be prepared for by training, teaching, structure, prayer and fasting.

### **II. THE VISION NEEDS TO BE BIG ENOUGH FOR US!**

A group of pilgrims landed on the shores of America more than 350 years ago. With great vision and courage they had come to settle in the new land. In the first year

they established a town. In the second, they elected a town council. In the third, the government proposed building a road 5 miles westward into the wilderness. But in the fourth year the people tried to impeach the town council because they thought such a road into the forest was a waste of public funds. Somehow these forward-looking people had lost their vision. Once able to see across oceans, they now could only look 5 miles into the wilderness. Their vision wasn't big enough.

We so often are in a rut, as far as vision goes, and our lives are, as a result, very circumscribed.

Gladys was a little girl of about seven. One day at the county fair, she won a goldfish. She took it home in its little round bowl. Day by day, she fed and cared for the goldfish as it swam round and round and round.

The family decided to take a vacation at a near-by lake. Gladys naturally took her goldfish. When she saw all that beautiful blue water, she decided she wanted to set her goldfish free. Very carefully, she took the little round bowl to the dock and lowered it into the shallow water. The goldfish still swam round and round and round and round.

Gladys was called away for lunch. When she came back to get the bowl, the goldfish was still swimming in the little round bowl, round and round and round. Wading into the water, Gladys slowly turned the bowl over and set the goldfish free. Still the goldfish swam round and round and round. All afternoon, that evening, and even the next morning when she checked one last time, the goldfish swam round and round and round and round the same small circle that had become its life....and its prison. We really shouldn't be like this goldfish but I fear we so often are. We just, so often, do not have the ability to see very far or very much.

The great question is what do you see?

Edgar Cayce (pronounced Casey) died in January, 1945, but the memory of him is alive among many people who believed that he was the world's greatest seer. Known as the "seer of Virginia Beach," Cayce did seem to have unusual powers of mind that enabled him to envision things while in a "sleeping state." The strange powers appeared early in his life. As a young school boy, he could not learn to spell. One evening, his father was trying to help him with the next day's spelling lesson, but Edgar could not spell the word correctly. He was tired, and asked his father to let him sleep for a few minutes. His father agreed, and Edgar placed the spelling book under his head as a pillow and dozed off. After five minutes, his father awoke him by pulling the book from under his head. Edgar then spelled every word in the lesson correctly. But he didn't stop there. He also described the illustrations on every page of the book. He knew the book from cover to cover. Both Edgar and his father were amazed at this experience, the first of many subsequent phenomenal ones.

In his early twenties, Edgar Cayce began to give “readings” after he was hypnotized. Although he was not trained in medicine, he would surprise doctors by the way he spoke of the human body when he was in a trance. He predicted correctly the sex of nine children before they were born. He foresaw the Depression as well as the recovery that began in the mid-1930’s as well as events that led to World War II. But some of his visions were clouded. He saw the destruction of Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York and said he could see China as a Christian democratic nation before 1968.

Regardless of how we view Edgar Cayce and others of mystical temperament we must recognize their capacity to “see” with the mind, is present in all humans to varying extent, and has played a large and significant role in history. In like manner, God has put the ability for spiritual vision in all of us. The potential is there but what do we see?

A little girl discovered when she was trying to button her dress in the back, “How can I mother?” She cried. “I’m in front of myself...” We move into each new day as a man rows a boat. His face is toward the wake rather than the prow. Hence we cannot depend wholly on our physical vision.

The so-called practical person says, “I’ll believe it when I see it,” or “Seeing is believing.” Suppose all our ancestors had taken that attitude. There would then be no electric light whereby we could see to read these lines, because the electric light came into being through a man convinced in his mind before he saw with his eyes. Further more, if one had to see before he believed, there would have been no great inventor named Thomas Edison, for young Tom was so slow that teachers suggested taking him out of school. But he had a mother whose heart had eyes to see what others missed. The world says see and you shall believe. The Lord says believe and you shall see—believing is seeing.

A pastor told of an all-night meeting on a retreat with his church young people. In the flood of words coming from the teenagers he realized something in their view of life was missing. Not one of those teenagers had a life vision—that picture, the imagination screen of their minds, of those things that might be and would become. Visions are the stuff out of which real life at its best is made. This is where art, books, buildings, and businesses begin. The pastor asked them about this. He said, “they were uncharacteristically quiet. As they struggled with this, one boy quietly shared that in his past, his hopes had been so shattered he did not want to risk. The rest in their own way, admitted they had never learned to put this very essential element into their lives.”

The pastor informed his youth that “everything from Watt’s steam engine, which turned in his mind long before it ever powered a wheel, to the space flights, began with that essential quality of the human mind—a vision. Remove the visions from history and there is nothing left to talk about. Columbus had a vision and a new world was

discovered. Edison envisioned the night darkness being pushed back. As you look about your town, remember there was a vision and that was what put those schools and churches on the various corners, as well as the park on the vacant land and most important, the homes in the houses.”

For those who care only about chess, it doesn't matter who wins. The thrill is to witness the struggle between the best chess players. Most people don't understand that what distinguishes champion chess players from the billions of others on the planet is not some superior combinative ability, it is their vision, the ability to see 12 or more moves ahead where most of us can see one two or three at most. When Bobby Fisher won the world championship in Iceland in 1972, one observer said: “To study some of Fisher's game is to catch a glimpse of the awesome visions he had of the board.”

If we were to watch two men begin to chip away at two large blocks of granite, not knowing that one of the men was a sculptor, it might seem for quite a while that they were doing the same thing. But the sculptor will have formed a clear vision—a mental model—of the object he “sees” in the stone, and will be chipping away that which hides it from view. The other man will chip away with perhaps no clear idea of what might be “inside” the granite or with a model in mind that changes as the granite reacts to his uncertain chiseling. (How many of us have started to carve out of soap or wood a horse and ended up with a duck!)

To be a visionary believer is to take on a job requiring at least as much skill as a first class sculptor. We must be able to form a clear mental concept of the real person that God wants, and love it enough to spend our lives chipping away at the vision. God is wanting us to see spiritually--that is what a vision is.

## **1. We Need A Big Vision of Life.**

The trouble with us is that we can't see for looking. We are too near the forest to see the trees. We lack perspective. When Lincoln Steffens was a boy, he watched an artist paint a picture of a muddy river. He criticized the picture because there was so much mud in it, to which the artist replied: “You see the mud in the picture my boy. All right, there is mud, and lots of it. But I see the beautiful colors and contrasts, the beautiful harmonies, and the light against the dark.”

What do we look for as we journey through life? If we look for mud and ugliness, we find just that. If we look for beauty, character, and nobility, we find them, too. Just as the artist found beauty in the muddy river, we will find in the stream of life those things, which we desire to see. To look for the best and see the beautiful in the way to get the most out of life.

Napoleon saw Italy, but not the Alps. He had an objective and knew where he was going. Washington saw the Hessians at Trenton. A man of smaller stature would have seen the Delaware choked with ice.

The majority sees the obstacles: the few see the objectives: history records the success of the former while oblivion is the reward of the latter.

A man told of buying a telescope and of all the wonders he beheld with it. He said, “I thought it was a pretty fair telescope for one that wasn’t very big.” “I rigged it up in the attic by the north window and had it fixed so it would swing around easily. I took a great deal of satisfaction in looking through it—the sky seemed so wide and full of wonders; so I decided to give my wife the pleasure too. She stayed a long time upstairs, and seemed to be enjoying it. When she came down, I asked her if when had discovered anything new. Yes, she said, why it made everybody’s house so near that I seemed to be right beside them, and I found out what our neighbors are doing in their out-kitchen. I have wondered what they had a light there for night after night and I just turned the glass on their windows and found out. They are cutting apples to dry—folks as rich as they cutting apples!” And actually that was all the woman had seen! With the whole heavens before her to study, she had spent her time looking into the affairs of her neighbors! And there are many like her—with and without telescopes.

A former president, in the first half of the twentieth century, was known for lacking political vision beyond what was immediately before him. By way of illustration, one of his aides told this story: “We were riding on a train looking out the window, I remarked, ‘Those sheep have been sheared.’ The president replied, ‘Well, on this side, certainly.’”

A man once saw five dollars on the sidewalk and never lifted his eyes again. The rest of his life he only looked down.

Perhaps sometime in your life you’ve taken a shot at solving Rubik’s Cube. Rubik’s Cube, invented by Hungarian Erno Rubik and marketed by Ideal Toys, is a six-sided block, made up of 27 individual colored blocks. The subcubes turn on vertical and horizontal axes and the trick is to get all the colors matching on each of the six sides. There are some 43 billion variations. Many have spent hours fiddling with the cube, in spite of the warning in the instructions that trying to solve it, “can be harmful to your disposition.”

If you have tried and failed to master Rubik’s Cube, it might be disheartening for you to know that there was a 13-year-old, a smart aleck by the name of Patrick Bossert, who could work it in 53 seconds. He wrote a book explaining how easy it is and the

book (*You can do the Cube*) was a best-seller. If you have read the book and are still confounded by the Cube, perhaps he will eventually put out a sequel that simplifies the process.

Obviously, those who can unscramble the puzzle, like that 13-year-old., “see” something the rest of us don’t. Perhaps, in our consternation, we have even muttered, “I don’t see how to do it,” or “I can’t see how it can be done.” It boils down to getting a visual image in our mind of how to proceed, a vision of the steps to be taken in order to get the colors matched up.

There is a lesson in life here. Some people “see” more than others. To extend the puzzle metaphor, it can be said they solve the riddle of life because they have been able to “see” how it is supposed to be and what moves are necessary to work out a grand design. Some people are blessed with more vision than others, it seems. They are privileged to see what others are unable to see. It is important that you not curse your life but that you get a vision—a big vision of life.

## **2. We Need A Big Vision of People.**

It is a great source of comfort to know Jesus always sees the possibilities. The smoking flax He would not quench. The bruised reed He would not break. He saw the son in the prodigal; the woman in the harlot; the solid rock in the sifting sands of Cephas. He was able to see the possibilities and not the debilities. What do we see when we look at people?

When Michelangelo was a boy, one of his father’s friends gave him a small Greek sculpture of a young man half chiseled out of Marble. The base of the statue was a square block of stone with the marks of the chisel still upon it just as it had been cut from the quarry. About half the way up from the base, the form emerged to take human shape. Michelangelo kept that little statue beside his bed. It was the last thing he saw when he went to sleep at night and the first thing he saw upon awakening. For him it spoke of beauty’s anguished effort to be liberated from the ugly and plain. Michelangelo devoted his life to freeing figures from stone.

A certain painter is reputed to have always painted with two canvases before him—one above the other. On the upper one, which was always white, the artist imagined he saw the painting. It was his vision of what was to be. On the lower canvas he reproduced for others the picture which he already saw in his mind’s eye. This is how God sees people. Not for what they are but for what they can be. This is how He wants us to see people.

I remember seeing a girl with a brand-new diamond ring on the third finger of her left hand. Although unconscious of anybody or anything except her own happiness, she sat quietly looking at it. Now, I know what a diamond is in prosaic, scientific terms because I looked it up. A diamond is a form of crystallized carbon in which every carbon atom in “symmetrically surrounded by four other carbon atoms, arranged at the corners of a tetrahedron in such manner that the whole crystal is one continuous molecule.” ” That is a diamond. But I should not consider it particularly worth while to disturb that young girl by telling her that. She was seeing in that diamond something that all the scientists who ever drew diagrams of carbon atoms had never seen—for she was seeing through the eyes of love. We need to see people through the eyes of love. We need to see them, not for what they are, but for what they can be.

### **3. We Need A Big Vision of The Church.**

Sunday School teacher, what do you see when you look at your class? Is it a place to show off your talents? Do you say to yourself, “This is my only chance to be up front.” What do you see when you look at the children? What do you see when you look at the young people? What do you see when you look at your work in the church?

When you look at your church what do you see? So you see something to criticize?

People outside of the church like to criticize the church.

The traveler had been napping, and when the train came to a stop he awakened. “Where are we porter?” was his question. “We have just crossed the state line, and are now in Maine.” It happened that in this emergency stop, his Pullman car was right beside an old automobile junk yard. Piled up and scattered everywhere were pieces of rusty iron and broken cars. “So this is Maine!” said the traveler. Yes that was Maine, but a very small piece of it. Look up beyond the junk heaps and see the rugged hillsides in the background, and on this side well-kept farmhouses and peaceful cattle grazing. “So this is Christianity!” cries the cynic, surveying the junk heap of broken plans and lives. Oh, no, this is not Christianity! Look beyond and see the mountains of Transfiguration and beatitude and Calvary. Look and see the building that housed the upper room. See the beauty, and peace and victory that come from truly living for God.

And even people that are in the church don’t really see all they should see in the church.

Its like A mid western family in the early days of the depression that was struggling to make ends meet. They were unable to afford any of the so-called luxuries of life. The father simply made enough to keep bread on the table and pay the rent on his house. One day the news came to the community that a circus was coming to town and the entry fee would be \$1.00. The little boy came running home from school excited and

eager to get them money from his dad. His father, unable to provide that luxury, regretfully told his son that it would be impossible for him to attend the circus. However, he told the boy, if he went out and worked odd jobs he might make enough money so he could purchase a ticket on his own. His father agreed that for every nickel he earned he would match it with a nickel. Having never been to a circus before, the little boy worked feverishly and hard to earn the money to but a ticket.

A few days before the circus came to town the boy emptied his bank and found that he had raised enough money to pay half of the admission price. His father gave him the other \$.50 and the boy ran off downtown to buy his ticket to the circus. Excitedly, he waited the couple of days until the circus came to town and eagerly clutching his ticket in his hand, he rushed down to the main street and stood on the curb as the circus parade went by. The clowns, the elephants, all of the performers in the circus thrilled him as he watched them go by. A clown came dancing over to him and the boy put the ticket in the clown's hand. He eagerly stood there on the curb as the rest of the parade went on its way into the circus tent. The boy rushed home after the parade was over and told his father that he had been to the circus and how much fun it was. The father, surprised that he was home already, asked the boy to describe the circus to him and the boy told of the parade that went by the main street of the town. The father pitifully took his son in his arms and said, "Son, you didn't see the circus, all you saw was the parade." I think some people in the church are like this boy. God intends them to see the whole circus they only watch the parade. God intends for us to be involved and not just stand on the sidelines.

What do you see when you look at the church? Do you See only the dollars and cents? Do you only see the building?

There are three elements that go into a vision best illustrated by this story.

There was a film being produced by the Church Growth Movement entitled, "Circus." One youth of the cast pointed to the high trapeze and said to the producer of the film, "Why don't you try it?" The other performers heard the challenge and joined the growing chant, "Try it! Try it!" Eyeing the large safety net under the paraphernalia, he cautiously replied, "Well....why not?" Very slowly he began to climb the small rope ladder. Twenty feet,...thirty feet,...forty feet,...finally at what seemed like forty thousand feet he crawled out on a miniscule platform which seemed miles above the crowd. He looked down. The once large safety net had shrunk to unbelievably small proportions.

"Go ahead, you can do it!" the performers encouraged. Taking the trapeze bar in his perspiring hands and steadying his shaking knees, he prepared to jump. Across from his platform a youth was ready to send forth the empty trapeze. Mustering up all his

courage he cried, Go!” and went swinging into space. The producer made three observations:

1. The first thing you need is faith.

It takes faith to do anything for God.

Some years ago a shoe salesman went to a tribe in Africa. To his amazement, he discovered that all members of the tribe went barefooted. He sent a cablegram to his company, which read:

CANCEL ORDER FOR SHOES. THERE IS NO MARKET FOR SHOES IN THIS TRIBE.

Later another shoe salesman went to the same tribe. He immediately sent a cablegram to his company, which read:

DOUBLE ORDER FOR SHOES! THERE IS A LIMITLESS MARKET FOR SHOES IN THIS TRIBE!

One salesman was destitute of vision; the other envisioned each member of the tribe shod with shoes—wearing footgear.

The Bible warns, “Where there is no vision, the people perish” (Proverbs 29:18)

2. The second thing is that it is frightening and threatening to let go of your security—the second element of vision is courage.

Courage to undertake difficult tasks—courage to encounter obstacles, but more than anything else, the courage to begin. You must let go even though it is frightening. We must do all things to build the church no matter what it takes.

Once I visited with a man who operated a grain farm. I asked him how he planted his seed? In answer he didn’t pull out an ear of corn and pop off the kernels, one by one as he walked along. No! That is not what he did. He showed me a distributor that was some thirty feet wide. “We take that double tandem truck, fill it with certified seed and back it up to the distributor and open the slots and pour in the seed.” He went on to say, “If you’re ever going to be cheap, DON’T BE CHEAP WITH THE SEED.” One bushel of seed invested, yields thirty bushels of grain harvested in a good year. Thirty-to-one; not a bad return, if you are ready to believe and willing to invest.

Jehovah says, “Believe me, trust Me, try My plan, prove My ways, and see the kind of harvest I give.” Paul guarantees this principal of truth in the scripture with the promise, “And God is able to make all grace abound toward you: that ye always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.”

All grace, all ways, all sufficiency, all things! There are four promises in one breath. Knowing it is one thing, believing it is quite another.

3. You don't have forever to make up your mind. Urgency is the third element.

“Jump...go ahead...jump!” on the third arc he did. Flying through the air, he reached out and grasped the bar with his fingertips and went swinging to the other side and was pulled to safety. He had taken a leap of faith.

Spain once held both sides of the Mediterranean at the straits of Gibralta. So highly did she value her possessions that she stamped on her coin the two pillars of Hercules (as the promontories of rock were called); and on a scroll thrown over these were the words, “ne plus ultra,”—“no more beyond.”

But one day a bold adventurer sailed far beyond these pillars, and found a new world of beauty. Then Spain, wisely convinced of ignorance, struck the word “ne” from the coin, and left “plus ultra,”—“more beyond.” That needs to be our vision. No matter how far we have come there is more beyond.

Those who are privileged to minister and teach in the church, particularly those who teach young people or little children, should feel constrained to plant something like this in impressionable minds:

“Nay, come up hither. From this wave-washed mound  
Unto the farthest flood-brim look with me;  
Then reach on with thy thought till it be drown'd.  
Miles and miles distant though the last line be,  
And though my soul sail leagues and leagues beyond,--  
Still, leagues beyond these leagues, there is more sea.”

Woodrow Wilson once said, “We grow great by dreams. All big men are dreamers. They see things in the soft haze of a spring day, or in the red fire on a long winter's evening. Some of us let these great dreams die, but others nourish and protect them; nourish them through bad days till they bring them to the sunshine and light which comes always to those who sincerely hope that their dreams will come true.”

Don't let anyone steal your dreams.

When Arthur Rubinstein, the famous concert pianist, was in New York, someone invited him to attend church. His answer; "Take me to a church that will challenge me to attempt the impossible." Great people are attracted to great challenges, and that is why we as Pastors need to dream great dreams.

A cartoon once showed two Eskimos fishing through holes in the ice. One of the Eskimos had made a hole like you might expect to see. About the size of a manhole cover. The other had dropped his line in immense hole that seemed to reach the edge of the horizon in the shape of a whale. This is the vision you need of your church. A big vision!

### **III. THE VISION NEEDS TO FAR ENOUGH FOR US**

A number of years ago a noted artist was working on a great mural. This was to be a great work of art, which he intended to be the masterpiece of his life. He had erected a scaffold and was standing upon it, putting in the background of the picture. A friend suddenly came into the studio and stood quietly in the rear of the room, looking at the work. The artist was slapping on the gray tones and deep blues all across the canvas for the background. Then he wished to view his work from a better perspective so he descended the ladder and stepping back with his eyes on the canvas, he backed right into his friend without seeing him. Enthusiastically he said, "This is going to be the masterpiece of my life! What do you think of it? Isn't it great?" His friend replied, "All I see is a great dull daub." Then said the artist, "Oh, I forgot. When you look at the picture you see only what is there. Now, whenever I look at it, I see what is going to be there. We need to be able to see like that artist.

Someone has well said, "The problems of the world cannot possibly be solved skeptics or cynics whose horizons are limited by the obvious realities. We need men who can dream of things that never were...and ask why not?"

In 1886 the United States commissioner of labor made some pessimistic predictions in his annual report. Surveying conditions in the United State, this official said that all the necessary railroads and canals had been built. That a sufficient network of international communications had been established, and that as adequate merchant marine had been developed. Then he added that in his judgement society should settle down and enjoy what had been accomplished, since the next fifty years could not possibly see and advance comparable to that of the preceding half century. Now, notice that at the time this prediction was made Thomas A. Edison was thirty-nine. Henry Ford was twenty-three. Charles P. Steinmetz was twenty-one. Madame Curie was

nineteen. Robert A Millikan was eighteen. Orville Wright was fifteen. Marconi was twelve. Einstein was seven—and the Compton brothers had not yet been born!

The vision of the commissioner of labor was too near. I want to look beyond me. I want to be a part of something bigger than I am.

#### **IV. EVERY VISION MUST INCLUDE THE PRESENCE OF GOD.**

The vision must be followed by the venture. It is not enough to stare up the steps—we must step up the stairs. After the vision then must come the task. But He is with us. With Him by our side there is no fear (Psalm 23).

No fear! “Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for thou art with me” (Psalm 23). We need to note in Psalm 23:

1. We see how fearful we can be. In verse four we see the places in which we can be afraid and in verse five we see the forces.
  - a. Places in which we can be afraid! We read of the “Valley of the shadow of death.” The NEB speaks of “Valleys as dark as death!” This could be the valley of suffering, of ill-health, of loneliness, of old age or even death itself.
  - b. Forces of which we can be afraid. We read, “Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.” There are forces that are dangerous, spiritual forces, human forces. They are dangerous because they: 1. They could *deceive*. Our Lord, in John 8:44, calls the devil the father of lies, a liar! He is called the one who deceives the whole world. In any war we are told that truth is the first casualty and in the spiritual warfare it is true also! 2. They would *destroy*. Our Lord calls the devil a murderer. Peter in his first epistle speaks of the devil as being like a roaring lion. Of course he can’t destroy all but he can destroy a great deal. He can destroy our peace, our joy, our usefulness, and our witness.
2. Notice how faithful He will prove. “I will fear no evil for Thou art with me;” The great fact that still our fears is the fact we are never alone. I love that old song:

“Fear not I am with thee, blessed golden ray,  
Like a star of glory, lighting up my way.  
Through the clouds of midnight, this bright promise shone,  
I will never leave thee, never will leave thee alone.  
No, never alone, no never alone,  
He promised never to leave me, never to leave me alone.”

The presence of God is with us so as we go into the future we need not fear. God has given us a task with many places and forces that can cause us to fear. But we don’t fear because He has given us the power to do anything. He is with us.

## 7. THE WITNESS OF CONSCIENCE

TEXT: ROMANS 2:15

### I. CONSCIENCE DEFINED

Someone has said that one definition of a friend is one who never gets in your way until you are on your way down. In other words a friend is one who approves when we do right and accuses when we do wrong, God has placed a friend in our hearts.

Something within the heart of every person approves when we do right and accuses when we do wrong, and that something is conscience.

The word "conscience" is found 32 times in the New Testament (King James Version) and was used 21 times by the Apostle Paul. If we are going to be successful in our Christian lives, we must understand what conscience is and how it functions.

I want to discuss two topics related to conscience. First, the definition: What is conscience? Second, the description: How is conscience pictured in the Word of God? If we understand what conscience is and how it functions, it can change our lives.

You cannot escape conscience. You have to live with your conscience. You can argue with your conscience. You can defile your conscience. You can harden your conscience. But you will never get rid of your conscience. It may malfunction because you force it to malfunction, but it will always be there. Sad is the life where conscience does not work the way God wants it to work!

All knowledge begins with definition.

What is conscience? The word "conscience" in our English language comes from two Latin words. Com means "with" or "together," and scio means "I know." From the Latin, our English word "conscience" means "to know with" or "to know together." To know with what? To know with ourselves and to know within ourselves. Conscience is that inner knowledge that helps me to know myself.

The Greek word used in the New Testament, suneidesis, means exactly the same thing. It comes from two Greek words, sun and oida, that mean "to know with."

In New Testament days the word "conscience" was not a strange word. It was used by the Greek people in their everyday conversation. It meant "the pain that you feel when you do wrong." That's a good definition, isn't it?

An American Indian who was a Christian said, "In my heart there is an arrowhead with three points to it. If I do wrong, the arrowhead turns, and it cuts me. If I do wrong too much, I wear out the points and it doesn't hurt me quite so much." But when the pain is gone, watch out!

In his column on Better Living, Malcolm Nygren said, "To feel no pain would be very dangerous. You could cut off a finger or char your flesh without noticing it. It is just as dangerous to feel no pain in your conscience. That kind of pain is a warning, too. A tender conscience is as vital as a fire alarm, and you need it a lot more often."

How imperiled is the individual who has sinned so long against his conscience that it no longer disturbs him. And how wise are those who so live as "to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men" (Acts 24:16).

An Oriental story of a ring that a great magician presented to his prince set forth beautifully the manner in which conscience works. The gift was of inestimable value, not only for the diamonds and rubies and pearls that gemmed it, but for a rare and mystic property in the metal. It sat easily enough on the finger in ordinary circumstances; but as soon as its wearer formed a bad thought, designed or committed a bad action, the ring became a monitor. Suddenly contracting, it pressed painfully on his finger, warning him of sin.

Such a ring, thank God, is not the peculiar property of kings. The poorest of us, those that wear none other, may possess and wear this inestimable jewel; for the ring of the fable is just that conscience which is the voice of God within us, that is, His law, engravers by the finger of God, not on Sinai's graven table, but on the fleshly tablets of the heart, which enthroned as a sovereign in our bosom, commends us when we do right, and condemns us when we do wrong. Therefore, exhorted the psalmist, "harden not your heart, as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness," but rather allow Christ to enter today.

The conscience is like a sharp square peg in our hearts. If we are confronted by a questionable situation, that square begins to turn, and its corners cut into our hearts, warning us with an inward sensation against doing whatever confronts us. If the conscience is ignored time after time, the corners of the square are gradually worn down, and it virtually becomes a circle. When that circle turns within our hearts, there is no inner sensation of warning, and we are left without a conscience.

Conscience is that inner faculty that indicates to us whether our actions are right or wrong, according to the standards within our hearts. Oswald Chambers gave a good definition of conscience: "The conscience is that innate faculty in a man's spirit that attaches itself to the highest that the man knows." Conscience is not the law; conscience

bears witness to the law. Conscience is not the standard; conscience bears witness to the standard. In different parts of the world there are different standards.

Let me illustrate this. When the British took over India as part of their empire, they found some practices that simply had to be abolished. One of these practices was to burn the widow of a deceased man on the funeral pyre. The British issued a law abolishing this practice.

One of the religious leaders among the Indian people came to a British leader and said, "Our conscience tells us that the widow must be burned." And he responded, "And our conscience tells us that if you do it, we'll hang you!" That gives the difference, doesn't it?

Conscience can guide us aright if we have the right standard. Everyone has experienced this. If you cheat on an examination, tell a lie or do something you simply should not do, your conscience bothers you. Something down inside keeps reminding you that you should not have done that. That's conscience. Of course, some people have so abused their conscience that it doesn't bother them anymore; for these people we can only feel pity.

When Adam and Eve sinned against God, they hid. Do you know why? Their consciences were bothering them. They were afraid.

When David cut off part of Saul's skirt while Saul was asleep, David's heart smote him (see I Sam. 24:1-6). That's conscience. He knew that he should not have done this to the king of Israel. Even though Saul was not a godly man, he was the king. David could not respect the man, but he had to respect the office. His conscience bothered him when he treated the king that way.

Proverbs 28:1 says, "The wicked flee when no man pursueth." That's conscience. We read that Herod, when he heard about the miracles Jesus was doing, thought that John the Baptist had come back to life again. His conscience was bothering him. "John, whom I have beheaded; he is raised from the dead" (Mark 6:16). That's conscience.

## Two Descriptions of Conscience

Let's look at two beautiful descriptions of conscience in the Bible. The Apostle Paul gave us one of them in Romans 2:14,15, and the Lord Jesus gave us another in Matthew 6:22,23. Paul compared conscience to an inner witness, an inner judge.

### Paul's Description

"For when the Gentiles, who have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves; who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another" (Rom. 2:14,15).

The Gentiles were never given the Law. The Law was given to the Jews. But the Gentiles have the work of the Law written in their hearts. Notice that Paul did not say they have the Law written in their hearts. That doesn't happen until you're saved. When you're saved, then the Holy Spirit begins to write God's law in your heart and you know right from wrong. But even unsaved people can know right from wrong because their conscience bears witness.

In the inner man is a courtroom. A judge sits at the bench, and that judge is also the witness and the jury! That whole "group" in the courtroom is known as conscience. The judge does not make the law, he applies the law. When you and I do something right, then our conscience says, "That's good! That's good!" It does not accuse, it approves. When we do something wrong, that inner judge, that inner witness, says to us, "You are wrong! You are wrong!" And it hurts.

Conscience, you see, is judicial. Conscience does not pass the law. Conscience does not make the law. Conscience bears witness to the law.

Richard Sibbes pictured the conscience as a court in the council of the human heart. In Sibbes's imagery, the conscience itself assumes every role in the courtroom drama. It is a register to record what we have done in exact detail (Jer. 17:1). It is the accuser that lodges a complaint against us when we are guilty, and a defender to side with us in our innocence (Rom. 2:15). It acts as a witness, giving testimony for or against us (2 Cor. 1:12). It is the judge, condemning or vindicating us (1 John 3:20-21). And it is the executioner, smiting us with grief when our guilt is discovered (1 Sam. 24:5). Sibbes compared the chastisement of a violated conscience to "a flash of hell."

The conscience is privy to all our secret thoughts and motives. It is therefore a more accurate and more formidable witness in the soul's courtroom than any external observer. Those who gloss over an accusing conscience in favor of a human counselor's reassurances are playing a deadly game. Ill thoughts and motives may escape the eye of a human counselor, but they will not escape the eye of conscience. Nor will they escape the eye of an all-knowing God. When such people are summoned to final judgment, their own conscience will be full informed of every violation and will step forward as an eternal tormenting witness against them.

That, Sibbes wrote, ought to discourage us from secret sins: We should not sin in

hope of concealment. What if you conceal it from others, can you conceal it from your own conscience? As one said well, What good is it for you that no one knows what is done, when you know it yourself? What profit is it for him that has a conscience that will accuse him, that he has no man to accuse him but himself? He is a thousand witnesses to himself. Conscience is not a private witness. It is a thousand witnesses. Therefore, never sin in hope to have it concealed. It would be better that all men should know it than you be the only one who knows it. All will one day be written in your forehead. Conscience will talk. If it cannot speak the truth now, though it be bribed in this life, it will have power and efficacy in the life to come.... We have the witness in us; and; as Isaiah said, "Our sins witness against us." It is vain to look for secrecy. Conscience will discover all.

You and I can remember when we were little children, even before we understood all that was involved in ethics and morals, that when we did something wrong, something would bother us down inside. That was conscience.

Paul told us that conscience is an inner witness that indicates whether we have done right or wrong. "Their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another" (Romans 2:15). Paul told us that everyone has this faculty. This is not something we have to develop. It is there. God has given every person a conscience.

Let me remind you once again, conscience is not the law. Conscience functions according to the law we have. If we are given a standard and if that standard is not right, conscience will still work according to that standard. The important thing is to have the right standards so that our conscience can work the way God wants it to work.

1. It is an eternal law in man's nature. It is the same in all whether we are enlightened or heathen.
2. Every person is endowed with this faculty. It is an essential part of our being.
3. It is the power or faculty in man by which he distinguishes between right and wrong. An intuitive moral impulse. An inward conviction of right and wrong.

What is conscience? God put within each one of us something that cries aloud against us, whenever we do that which we know to be wrong. Conscience is the detective that watches the direction of our steps and decries every conscience transgression. Conscience is a vigilant eye before each imagination, thought, and act is held up for either censure or approval. I believe there is no greater argument for the existence of God in the world today than conscience. There is no greater proof of the existence of a moral law and lawgiver in the universe than this little light of the soul. It is God's voice to the inner man. Conscience is our wisest counselor and teacher, our most faithful and most patient friend.

## II. THE OFFICE OF CONSCIENCE.

1. Condemns evil and vindicates the right.

“Herein do I exercise myself, to have **always** a conscience void of offense towards God and towards man,” said Paul.

“I have lived in **all** good conscience before God until this day.”

2. Moral victors are the world’s greatest heroes.
3. The greatest battles are unseen, the mightiest conquests are not bloody. They are fought in the souls of men.

Dr. James Burrell told this story to illustrate conscience: An Indian had bought a package of supplies at a trading post and on opening it found a silver coin inside. Something troubled him. He came back to the trading post and handed the coin to the trader. The trader laughed at his scruples, but the Indian insisted, saying: I got a good man and a bad man in my heart. The good man say, “it is not yours; the bad man say, nobody will know; the good man say take it back; the bad man say, never mind;” so I think I go asleep, but the good man and the bad man talk all night and trouble me. The distressed Indian had developed a conscience. Someone had taught him the ideal of honesty, and his conscience sensitized his ideal so that he was compelled to return the coin in order to have peace of mind. This is what conscience accomplishes; it brings peace of mind.

4. An accusing conscience is an inward trumpeter. It is a sign of life. A tender conscience can be pricked. Oh how we need to keep a tender conscience.

Samuel Johnson noted that shame arises from the fear of men but conscience from the fear of God. So live where you can hear its voice. The closer you live to God the more sensitive will be your conscience, the more feeling of it you will experience.

Here is a Chinese proverb on maintaining a sensitive conscience: “He who sacrifices his conscience to ambition, burns a picture to obtain the ashes.”

Ogden Nash said, “There is only one way to achieve happiness on the terrestrial ball. And that is to have either a clear conscience or none at all.”

Only a consecrated conscience is a guide. Of course the matter of prime importance is to do what is right. But how is one to determine what is right? Conscience is not a sufficient guide. Conscience is to a man what a compass is to a mariner; it gives him a sense of moral direction. Yet men cannot navigate the waters of life steering by conscience alone any more than any mariner can navigate the Atlantic equipped only with a compass. Seamen must have a chart on which are marked some

soundings, some routes of travel, some harbors to be made. We need a chart in life also. We need to do what is right according to God and the Bible. Conscience can only say something is wrong. God and His word will tell you what it is and how to remedy it.

The conscience is the sentinel which guards the soul; the granite column which supports the fabric of self and society; the chamber of justice; God's voice in the soul; God' monitor which approves right and condemns wrong.

Scientists have long known that the body's immune system relies on the intimately choreographed work of B and T cells. B cells from the bone marrow and T cells produced in the thymus gland work together to destroy viral and bacterial enemies within our bodies. The T cells, like cops of patrol, monitor the blood and trigger an alarm when they spot something suspicious. The B cell burst into action, dividing into a host of cells that attack the invader. Science cannot explain what sensitivity enables the T cells to recognize danger or how proliferation of receptors in the B cells allows them to respond to the multitude of germs that assault the body.

God gave our bodies the capability to protect us from the common cold, a tiny scratch, or a deadly disease. He has structured that some protection inside our minds, building an inner sentinel to warn us when we are heeding false, immoral, and dangerous ideas. To sin, to use self unwisely and destructively, we have to ignore the sentinel's warning. It can save us if we listen to it and obey. But the sentinel—call it conscience—cannot overcome our will. All it can do is warn us away from the path we have taken, the idea we are embracing, or the behavior we are practicing. Unlike the immune system, which works even without our awareness of its complexity, the inner sentinel will work only in subjection to our will.

A person; conscience, like a warning line on the highway, tells him what he shouldn't do—but it does not keep him from doing it.

The conscience can be likened to a sundial that is made for the sun, even as the conscience, rightly directed, reflects God's will. Suppose a sundial is consulted by moonlight—the dial may read ten o'clock, but it may be only two. By a candle or some other light, the dial may be made to tell any hour, at the whim of the one who holds the light.

Conscience can be a safe guide only if it is turned toward God for His illumination. Once a man turns away his conscience from God and lets some other light shine upon it, his conscience is no longer reliable.

5. You yourself can sear it "as with a hot iron." You can get past feeling.

A seared conscience is one whose warning voice has been suppressed and perverted habitually, so that eventually instead of serving as a guide, it only confirms the person in his premeditatedly evil course.

Your conscience can become seared. These words from Paul to Timothy: “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron” (I Timothy 4:1-2).

6. If you will not heed its voice, you will become hardened. I saw a man with the biggest alarm clock I had ever seen. He said that he had been through several. You can become hardened to conscience like a person can become used to an alarm clock.
7. Satan chloroforms and puts it to sleep.
8. Stifling conviction, staying away from church, will put conscience to sleep.
9. It may be awakened from slumber by the word.

### **III. THE WITNESS OF CONSCIENCE.**

1. Paul’s testimony to this point—“The joy and rejoicing of my heart is testimony of my conscience.”
2. What kind of witness is conscience?
  - a. An inward witness. ‘If our heart condemn us, God is greater...’
  - b. A knowing witness. It keeps a minute record of every thought, word and act of your life, and the motive back of all this.
  - c. A true witness. It will tell the truth whether we like it or not.

In focus on the Family, Rolf Zettersten writes: A good friend in North Carolina bought a new car with a voice warning system...At first Edwin was amused by the soft female voice gently reminding him that his seat belt wasn’t fastened...Edwin affectionately called this voice the “little woman.”

He soon discovered his little woman was programmed to warn him about gasoline. “Your fuel level is low,” she said one time in her sweet voice. Edwin nodded his head and thanked her. He figured he still had enough to go another fifty miles, so he kept driving. But a few minutes later, her voice interrupted again with the same warning. And so it went over and over. Although he knew it was the same recording, Edwin thought her voice sounded harsher each time.

Finally, he stopped the car and crawled under the dash board. After a quick search, he found the appropriate wires and gave them a good yank. So much for the little woman.

He was still smiling to himself a few miles later when his car began to sputter and cough. He ran out of gas. Somewhere inside the dashboard Edwin was sure he could hear the little woman laughing.

People like Edwin learn before long that the little voice inside, although ignored or even disconnected, often tells them exactly what they need to know.

d. A faithful witness.

It will not be bribed. It is no respecter of persons. Is as true to the king as the beggar. It thunders in the soul of the rich as well as the poor.

e. A loud witness.

The deaf can hear its voice. Its voice is terrible. It made Felix tremble. It made Joseph's brothers quake. When Cain fled from Abel's grave, conscience cried louder than his brother's blood from the ground. Cain said—"My punishment is greater than I can bear." It made Judas Iscariot throw down the thirty pieces of silver, then hang himself. It has made many a person confess.

f. In conscience the worst savage carries God with him. There are many that try to drown the voice of conscience in drink, drugs, business, and even suicide, but there is no refuting its testimony, or setting aside its verdict.

g. Conscience is an eternal witness.

Other witnesses may die, conscience never will. "Their worm dieth not..." Its voice after death rings down through the corridors of hell—"Son Remember..." You may stab, wound, smother, try to close your ears to, and endeavor to run away from its awful voice, but it will ever follow you, haunt you, and like a pack of blood hounds bark and howl after you with these terrible words—I will meet you at the judgment.

The only remedy is the blood of Jesus. It will purge your conscience.

There is the other description I mentioned.

Jesus' Description.

This leads us to what our Lord Jesus said in Matthew 6:22-23: “The lamp of the body is the eye; if, therefore, thine eye be healthy, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If, therefore, the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!”

Paul compared conscience to a witness; Jesus compares conscience to a window. The window does not manufacture the light—the window lets the light in. You and I have this inner window through which God wants to shine His light. If that window gets dirty, less light can come in. Imagine the judge sitting in the courtroom at his desk. On the desk is the Law of God. Through the window comes the light, and that light shines upon the Law. Now as that window gets dirtier, less light shines upon that Law, and that Law is less visible. If the window gets completely covered with dirt, it’s impossible to see the Law. This is how conscience functions. That is why we say conscience witnesses to the highest standard we have. The highest standard, of course, is the Word of God.

Jesus said conscience is like your eye. The eye does not manufacture light—the eye lets light in. When the light comes into our lives, it gives us guidance. But suppose that every time we do something wrong, the window gets dirtier until finally we have sinned so much that the window is completely covered with dirt. The light cannot come through, and so we are left in the darkness.

It is a terrible thing when light turns into darkness. Our Lord did not say that the light disappears but that the light turns into darkness! What should lead us in the right path leads us in the wrong path. The Bible calls this an evil conscience.

Some people, if they do good, are bothered by it; but if they do evil, they are happy. That is an evil conscience. There are those who call evil good and good evil. That is an evil conscience. Your conscience is like a window, and the window lets in the light. Don’t let the light become darkness!

Your conscience is a marvelous servant. It was designed to work for you and with you. It was designed to be help in godly living. Treat it right. Take it to church. Read the Bible to it and it will serve you well.

## 8. ONLY SPEAK THE WORD

TEXT: NUMBERS 20:7-13

### INTRODUCTION

What an unlikely leader was this Moses. He resisted being a leader several times. As a matter of fact, the Lord had a hard time calling him. Moses spent 40 years in Egypt and had to leave there suddenly. He sees a Hebrew mistreated by an Egyptian so he kills the Egyptian. The next day he sees two Hebrews fighting and so in typical fashion he steps in to break up the fight. One of the Hebrews asks, “are you going to kill me like you did that Egyptian?” Moses must have answered, “Oh, you know about that?” “Yeah I know.” “Well I better get out of town.” This was very good thinking. He fled all the way through Sinai. We find him much later down at the well, and there is Zipporah with another girl. The girls were trying to water their flocks. All of a sudden some other shepherds come and chase the girls away. So Moses, typically, steps in again. He said, “these girls were here first.” He must have been able to back up his words because the shepherds stood on the side. The girls went home and their father asked, “Why are you home early?” They said, “Dad you wouldn’t believe it. There was this Egyptian there and he helped us.” Their father said, “Where is your hospitality? Ask them home.” So he came home and there he stayed and for 40 years he was schooled in Midian.

Some parents wonder when their children are going to finally make it in the world. If a person gets to be 40 years old and they are not established yet the parents begin to wonder. Can you imagine what the parents of Moses thought. Here he was 80 years old and he still hadn’t started his life work yet. But God was giving him training for the job that he had to do and we find him here now, 120 years old, and the people are saying, “Why did you bring this congregation of the Lord into the wilderness?” The whole thing has come to a head. Moses and Aaron go from the presence of the assembly and fall on their faces before God in their tent. The Lord says take the rod. When we read that and realize the rest of the story we are inclined to say, “Moses you better leave that thing at home. It is going to get you in trouble. You are surely going to hit someone with it. But the Lord says, “take the rod.” This rod became a tool to open the Sea and then close it. It became a serpent and then a rod again. But now God says, “take this symbol of My authority and My power and assemble the congregation. Then I want you to speak to the rock in front of their eyes to yield up water.” Moses took the staff from before the Lord as commanded and Moses and Aaron gathered the people. But how foolish Moses must have felt! “Lord do you know that Aaron and I are not too popular. The latest polls show that we have a very low approval rating. The Lord said, “speak to the rock.” But when you look at the story he didn’t say to the rock he says to the people. He said it to them. He had had it. He says in effect, “hey you rebels, you make me sick. This job is not all it’s cracked up to be. Listen now you rebels

must.....what? We! It's in that little pronoun. "Must we!" "What does a fellow have to do around here? You are killing my soul. This has been tough leading people through the wilderness. I didn't want to lead you in the first place. And you keep asking all kinds of questions for which I don't have an answer. Do we have to bring water out of the rock before you will finally believe in us? Must we?"

I have always preached that Moses broke type in this incident. There were two rock incidents, you remember. In the first one God told Moses to smite the rock to bring water. In the instance that we have been studying, he is to only speak to the rock. But He smites the rock a second time. We know that the rock is a type of Christ. Christ was only to be smitten once and after that we need only to speak to Him. I have always preached that this is the reason for God's anger and this may be partly true. But the Bible says that something else was the reason for God's anger with Moses.

In Psalm 106, you will find an inspired commentary, to be trusted more than ours. And this text, Psalm 106:32-33 says:

"They (that is Israel) angered Moses at the waters of Meribah. And it went ill with Moses on their account. For they made his spirit bitter."

They teed him off, you could almost say. They made his spirit bitter, for he spoke words ill-advisedly, words that were brash. The Bible puts the problem with his speech. It was his words, not altogether what he did. And what did he say? "Must we? Must we bring forth water for you out of this rock?" Therein was the great problem. Isaiah 42:8 says, "My glory I will not give to another." What the people lacked at that particular moment was not so much water—that was only an indication of a greater lack—they needed confidence in God's word.

In Ezekiel chapter 37 we have the story of the raising of the dry bones. Ezekiel was given a quiz on that occasion: "Can these bones live?" He said, "You know." He was told to prophecy and say, "thus saith the word of the Lord." And the key to the whole thing is the phrase "the word of the Lord." Ezekiel said, "so I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone" (Ezekiel 37:7).

He spoke the word and that brought results. And it was the same with the next step.

Remember in Matthew 8, the nobleman came for his servant to secure healing. He told the Lord, "only speak the word." Oh, the power of the word of God.

## **I. THE POWER OF THE WORD OF GOD**

## A. The Word of God is Gives Sufficient Evidence

Many years ago the *New Yorker* magazine carried a brief vignette about the late philosopher-mathematician Bertrand Russell. At a banquet celebrating his ninetieth birthday, the out spoken atheist was asked what he would say to God, if after death he found out that his atheism had misled him. Without hesitation the old man responded: “I would tell God He gave us insufficient evidence.”

Russell’s answer may have wounded shrewd to some, but actually it was seriously misguided. In effect, he was doing what many people, great and small, educated and ignorant do: he was blaming God for what was really his own mistake. During his lifetime Bertrand Russell thought that God had given him insufficient evidence for a vital faith because he was looking in the wrong places.

And that is not hard to do. Science, for instance, can’t really give us the evidence we need. It deals in the finite, the measurable; it depends on carefully controlled, easily duplicated experiments for its knowledge. It tries to observe what happens and to predict what will happen under similar circumstances. Elaborate compounds, minute particles, remote galaxies—all of these yield their secrets to various types of measurement and analysis. But the tools and methods of science cannot give us incontestable proof of God’s existence. Nor can they be used to argue that He does not exist.

Human reason, likewise, falls short when it comes to discovering God. We can’t reach beyond the framework of our own thought. Images or ideas we conjure up about religion are just projections of our own needs and longings. They have no correspondence to divine reality. They make no significant contribution to the puzzling questions about God’s existence.

W. H. Auden, the English poet, wryly remarked in his poem “Friday’s Child” about our human attempts to gather evidence for or against the existence of God:

All proofs or disproofs that we tender  
Of His existence are returned  
Unopened to the sender.

Neither scientific investigation not philosophical speculation can settle the question either way. The Bible warns us about this:

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord, For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

Our reasoning are no match for His thoughts, and our researches cannot discover His tracks.

The loftiness, the majesty, the holiness, the otherness of God means that He is on a different wave length than us. Just as we cannot listen to FM music on an AM radio, our finite methods and our limited minds cannot of and by themselves gain true knowledge of God.

But all of this does not mean that God has given us insufficient evidence to believe in Him. It means that we have searched for this evidence the wrong way.

The same scripture that reminds us of the marvel of God's thoughts and the wonder of God's ways encourages us by describing the way in which God's thoughts come into human experience with striking power and remarkable vitality. It says that God breaks through to us in His Word. We do not reach Him through our thinking or investigation. Like rain and snow on parched earth, His Word soaks into our lives and produces its fruitfulness, "giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater," as Isaiah puts it.

As God's Word, inspired by Him and profitable for us, the Bible has power to get God's thoughts through to us, and this is not easy. Our "creatureliness," (I know this is not a word but it says what I want) our finitude, is one problem. We are limited in our thinking in a way that God is not. We can no more successfully grapple with His thoughts than a five-year-old child can understand Einstein's theory of relativity.

But we have an even more serious problem than the limitations of our human abilities. If our creatureliness makes it hard for us to find God, our sinfulness makes it hard for us to face God. The thoughts and ways of God not only baffle us; they condemn us. Granted, they remind us of our frailty; but worse yet, they point up our failure.

Deadness of spirit, hardness of heart, blindness of vision—these are some of the ways in which the Bible describes our moral and spiritual condition. Only the Word of God can cope with the problems of this magnitude. The fact that it gets through at all is a tremendous testimony to its power.

When God speaks, astounding things happen. At the beginning He spoke, and the world in all its order and beauty sprang into being. The great phrase of creation in Genesis 1 is "and God said." And the Psalmist summarizes the creative power of God's Word in a single verse:

"By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth."

Think what time and effort it takes for us to make anything. Knit a sweater, cut out a dress, saw and fit the pieces of a bookcase, pour a cement walkway, bake a pie (even a frozen one)—all these take effort. There's no way for us to speak and then simply watch things happen. But that is how God created heaven and earth in the beginning.

And at the end He will speak again and all the harmful effects of man's rebellion will be wiped away. "And he who sat upon the throne said, 'Behold, I make all things new.'" And in the next verse God announces, "It is done!" No sooner said than done. That is how powerful God's Word is. No blueprints, budgets, or building permits. God speaks, and that's it.

Between the beginning and the end God has continued to speak. The great prophets signed their messages with "Thus says the Lord" as a guarantee not only of their truth but of their sure fulfillment. Jesus was God's Word in human flesh, revealing with power and clarity the ways and thoughts of God. And God speaks with conviction in the Scriptures. In them the Spirit of God drives home to human hearts the message of the love and grace of God.

"So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it."

What an amazing thing this is. To minds that otherwise could not grasp His thoughts and to hearts that otherwise would not yield to His will, God speaks; and minds understand, and hearts obey. That's a powerful Word!

Not only are we puzzled by God's thoughts; we are baffled by our own. We need help here, too.

Modern psychology has only confirmed what we already knew: pure hearts are rare indeed; motives are usually mixed; and other people's faults are more apparent to us than our own. Or to put it another way, self-understanding is not an innate human skill. "Wad some power the giftie gie us to see ourselves as others see us" was the way that Robert Burns expressed this frustration.

Not that other people can see us all that clearly. They have their own biases and blind spots. They cannot accurately read our hearts and should not even try.

But someone has to help us if we are to deal with the dilemmas of motive and intent, of ambition and desire. And who can do this better than God?

"And before him no creature is hidden, but all are open and laid bare to the eye of him whom we have to do."

But what is striking is that God exercises this penetrating insight through His Word. He does not conduct interviews like a counselor or psychologist. He does not ask us to fill out questionnaires or undergo examinations. His Word reads our hearts.

“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

The Bible has the power to dig deeply into our lives and lay bare what we think and are. It does this in a number of ways. Its subtle and succinct analyses of human conduct and human experience are like mirrors for us. We see ourselves in the lives of biblical characters. We identify with their longings and aspirations, with their fears and anxieties, with their foolishness and failure.

The straightforward teachings are also a help. The Proverbs, for instance, or the places where Paul discusses sound Christian conduct are indispensable.

But most important, the Bible brings us the life and words of Jesus Christ. Thus, it has the power, as God’s own Spirit speaks through it, to show us how far short we fall of what the Lord is, how fouled up we are within ourselves, and how heedless and hurtful we can be to others. But it also has the power to show us how much God loves us and what we can be as we let His love work in us.

Does the Bible really work? The evidence in the lives of millions through the centuries and around the world is overwhelming. God’s thoughts and ways have gotten through to them, and their own thoughts and ways have come into focus as they have listened to the Bible.

There is no clearer example of this than the witness of Augustine, the great preacher and theologian who lived about A. D. 400. For years he had given all his energies to carousing and debauchery—a life as wild as that of any villain in a modern novel. Then weeping and in bitter contrition, he began to seek cleansing and peace. Suddenly he heard from a nearby house a child’s voice saying, “Take and read; take and read.” He received this as a command from God and immediately took the Scripture and began to read. His eyes fell on these words: “But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.”

Augustine’s experience was overwhelming. He needed to read no further. Instantly, at the end of that sentence, by a light of peace infused into his heart all darkness of doubt vanished.

What Bertrand Russell said he could not find—sufficient evidence of God’s presence in the world—Augustine dramatically found. “Take and read”—that is the answer and a dramatic one at that.

## B. The Word of God is Able

The person who has only a superficial knowledge of the Scriptures knows that there has always been power in the Word of God. This was evident in the creation of the material universe,

“And God said, Let there be light: and there was light” (Genesis 1:3) When Jehovah spoke, when He decreed, it was done! Where there formerly had been darkness, at the Word of God light came to be. But that was only the beginning. One cannot read the creation account in the first chapter of Genesis without being impressed with that recurring statement, “And God said.” And each time He spoke there was a marvelous change in the order. Each time He spoke something existed that had not previously existed.

“For he spoke and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast” (Psalm 33:9).

Yes, we see the power of Jehovah’s word in creation.

But the demonstration of the power of God’s Word did not end with creation. It is by the power of His Word that all things continue to exist and function.

“Upholding all things by the word of his power” (Hebrews 1:3). God did not withdraw Himself from His creation; He continues to uphold it. The rotations of the heavenly bodies, the changing of the seasons, the regularity of day and night, and the operation of the other innumerable laws of nature reveal the power of God’s Word fully as much as it was revealed in the original creation.

Furthermore, God’s intervention by miracle in the ordinary workings of His creations shows the power of His Word. To the tempestuous sea Jesus said, “Peace, be still,” and nature obediently responded. No wonder the disciples marveled and asked: “Who then is this, that even the wind and sea obey him?” (Mark 4:39-41). And when Jesus stood before the tomb wherein a body was lying which had been dead for four days and commanded, “Lazerous, come forth,” Lazerous responded and came forth (John 11:43-44). And the writer, John, who recorded this unusual incident for us, tells us that our Lord promised that “the hour cometh, in which all that are in the tombs shall hear his voice, and shall come forth” (John 5:28-29). His Word was powerful when He walked among men in the flesh; His word shall be powerful when He comes with His angels in His glory.

But what about the power of the Word of God today? Here we come to the area which is most practical for us. Of course, we know that God's Word today is in written form and that is why we refer to it as "Scripture." "What thou seest, write in a book" was the bidding John received on Patmos (Revelation 1:11). Paul claimed that he wrote in order that others might read and understand what he had received by divine revelation (Ephesians 3:3-4). Yes, the Scriptures are the written Word of Jehovah. The fact that they are written does not render them any less powerful than was His word when verbally spoken.

Some have referred to the Scriptures as the "mere word" or as a "dead letter." In human affairs we do not consider the word of a man less powerful when written; in fact, we give greater weight to written documents. Why should we think God's written Word is any less powerful than His spoken Word? God's Word, whether spoken or written, has always resident within it the power to accomplish that for which it was given. God's promise through the prophet was that the word which went forth out of his mouth would not return void, "but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it" (Isaiah 55:11).

#### 1. The Word of God is Able to Make Us Wise Unto Salvation

Timothy was a young man who was well acquainted with the Scriptures. Paul reminded him of the fact "that from a babe thou hast known the sacred writings which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15). Note the expression, "Which are able." The Scriptures are able—they have power.

Of course, the Scriptures which Timothy had known "from a babe" were the Old Testament Scriptures. This passage makes it abundantly clear the real purpose of the Old Testament: it is for the purpose of making one wise unto salvation, which comes begins with faith in the Lord. The design of the law is to lead men to Christ. "So that the law is become our schoolmaster (tutor) to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster (tutor)" (Galatians 3:24-25). The one who reads the law and is not thereby led to Christ is not using the law properly.

"For if ye believed Moses, ye would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?" (John 5:46-47).

These words indicate very clearly how Jesus expected the people to use the Old Testament writings. And Paul declared: "For Christ is the end of the law unto righteousness to everyone that believeth" (Romans 10:4). The law cannot save. "For if

righteousness is through the law, then Christ died for naught” (Galatians 2:21). “Ye are severed from Christ, ye who would be justified by the law; ye are fallen away from grace” (Galatians 5:4). Christ is the world’s only savior and only He can save. God designed the law as a tutor to lead to Christ; He designed it to make wise unto that salvation which is found only in Christ. This fact stresses the importance of our avoiding the wrong use of the Old Testament and of our giving diligence to use it properly.

After His resurrection Jesus said to His disciples: “These are my words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must needs be fulfilled, which are written in the law of Moses, and the prophets, and the Psalms, concerning me” (Luke 24:44). Luke tells us that Jesus then opened their mind “that they might understand the scriptures,” and He went ahead to tell them of His suffering, His resurrection, and of the preaching which they were to do (Luke 24:45-47). In the first sermon under the Great Commission, Peter referred to the writings of Joel and of David and showed the fulfillment of these prophecies in Christ and in the happenings of Pentecost (Acts 2). When Philip met the Ethiopian officer, he preached Jesus to him and the beginning place of his preaching was the book of Isaiah (Acts 8:32-35). At Thessalonica Paul “reasoned with them from the scriptures” (Acts 17:2), and this has reference to the Scriptures of the Old Testament. Yes, here is the proper beginning place in preaching Christ. But it is at once evident that Paul and these other inspired preachers, after pointing out from the Old Testament the prophecies pertaining to Christ, would come to declare the historical fulfillment of these wonderful predictions. They pointed to Jesus Christ as the Savior and used the law as an instrument to make wise unto salvation which, starts with faith in that savior.

## 2. The Word of God is Able to Save

We are not saved by law; we are saved by the gospel. “He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. By which will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Hebrews 10:9-10). James admonished in these words: “Wherefore putting away all filthiness and overflowing of wickedness, receive with meekness the implanted word, *which is able to save your souls*” (James 1:21). Notice again the expression, “Which is able,” the word able. It, the Word, the gospel, is able to save. This is why Paul could say: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” (Romans 1:16).

In giving the Great Commission Jesus showed His confidence in the power of the Word. “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation,” He said

to His apostles (Mark 16:15). He had earlier stated in a most emphatic way that those who come to Him are those who have been taught, who have heard, and who have learned (John 6:45). Yes, Jesus believed in the power of the Word to save. In explaining the meaning of the wayside soil in His famous parable, Jesus said that it represents those who have heard but who have the Word taken out of their hearts by the devil. Jesus said that the devil removes the Word from human hearts “that they may not believe and be saved” (Luke 8:12).

The preaching of inspired men, which is recorded in the book of Acts show the important place of the word in the salvation of men. In the second chapter of Acts we see an audience of thousands of unbelievers; we hear the apostle Peter preach the first sermon under the Great Commission; we see a group of believers who are praising God. Incidents of this kind are quite numerous in the book of Acts. They all show how indispensable is the Word in man’s salvation. Another incident in which the apostle Peter did the preaching is the conversion of Cornelius and his house. An angel appeared to Cornelius and told him to send for Simon Peter “who shall speak unto thee words, whereby thou shalt be saved, thou and all thy house” (Acts 11:13-14). Observe carefully: Cornelius was to be saved by the words which, would be spoken by the inspired apostle. There is power in the Word. It is able to save.

### 3. The Word of God is Able to Develop to Maturity

In his farewell message to the elders from Ephesus, Paul said: “And now I commend you to God, and to the work of his grace, *which is able* to build you up, and to give you the inheritance among all them that are sanctified (Acts 20:32). The Word of God is not only able to save the soul in the sense of delivering from the guilt of sin, it is also able to develop the soul, build it up, bring it to a state of maturity, and prepare it for an inheritance in the heavenly habitations. Note the statement, “which is able.” The Word is powerful.

When one is saved by the gospel in the sense that he is forgiven of all his past sins and translated into the kingdom of Christ, he is a babe in Christ. He needs to grow and develop. The Word of God is food for the soul. At first the child of God is in need of the milk of the Word; as he grows and is able to understand the deeper truths he is said to be able to partake of stronger food (1 Corinthians 3:1-2; Hebrews 5:12-14). At every point of his growth the food he needs is found in the scriptures. “Every scripture is inspired of God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness; that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

There is power in the Word: power to make wise unto salvation, power to save, power to develop to maturity and prepare the soul for an eternal inheritance. Let us take God's word into our hearts. Let us meditate on it day and night. Let us teach it to those who don't know it. Let us say with the Psalmist: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psalm 119:105). Let us also say with him: "Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Psalm 119:11).

The Word of God stands by itself!

How well I remember sitting in my library with my Bible open before me, I looked up at the books surrounding me on the wall and said to myself: "Books, some of you have been my companions for many years...I value you for what you are and for what you have meant to me. As I look at you, arranged on the shelves, I think of each one of you as a bottle of pure spring water. Thirsty, I reach up to drink from your pages." And then, taking in my hand my open Bible, I continued, "But, books, this is more than a bottle of spring water! This is the spring itself, and if you have anything of truth in your pages, that truth was first in embryo here."

Other books are planets shining with reflected luster; the Bible is like the sun it shines with its own source. Other books, even the best of them, have sprung from the earth, the Bible is inspired by heaven. Other books appeal to understanding or fancy, but the Bible appeals to conscience and faith. Other books solicit our attention, the Bible demands it--it speaks with authority. Other books guide gracefully along the earth, or onward to the mountain summits of the ideal; the Bible, and the Bible alone, guides us out of the awful abyss and onto to heaven. Other books after shining their season, may perish in flames fiercer than those that consumed the Alexandrian library; the Bible, in essence, must remain pure as gold, and as unconsumable as asbestos, amidst the fires of hatred and cynicism. Other books are eventually gone and forgotten, but the Bible will live on beyond this earth forever and ever.

## **II. PREACH THE WORD**

Paul admonished Timothy, "Preach the word." Timothy, just speak the Word.

I remember one day that I had a time of reflection about preaching. I asked myself, "Why do I preach?" "Why do I prepare these sermons?" I decided that I do it for three reasons:

1. First of all because it is commanded—"preach the Word" and "Woe unto me if I preach not the gospel."

2. Next because of the condition of the people that are in the congregation. When I think of the horror of hell and the people going there unless they change and then I think of this book and the answers it has I must preach.
3. But most of all out of love for the people. Because I really care and I love to preach to speak the Word and see lives changed not by my words but by the Word.

### III. DESIRE THE WORD

Notice in 1 Peter 2:1-2, “Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as newborn babes, *desire* (earnestly desire, long for) the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.”

Have you ever stopped to consider that those who listen to the preaching of the Word have an important task, an important duty, and a very vital share in the ministry of the gospel? Somebody said once, “You know what I like about Sundays? You can go to church and relax for a while and not think about a thing.” There are a great many people who come to church like that and then they wonder why the minister is so dry, why hasn’t he prepared his sermon, why he obviously hasn’t studied. No! You haven’t listened.

We ought to ask ourselves the question when we are in church, why am I here? Let’s face it some people go to church just out of habit. It is a good habit, but if a person only goes out of habit it is a very poor reason. Another reason sometimes given is that many people feel that going to church is a good work. It will give us points with God. Morning service is one point, evening service two points and Bible study night you get a “go directly to heaven card.” What does the Bible say? The Bible says when you have done all these things, “We are nothing but unprofitable servants. We have done that which was our duty.”

Why, then, should we go to church? We should go to church because we feel a desperate need for God; because there is a void in my soul that needs to be filled and only He can fill it; because we should long to be with God’s people. But most of all because we need the Word of God for our sustenance and strength.

This Word is alive. It is powerful. It will change your life. The greatest compliment to preaching is a changed life. Oh, the power of God’s Word.

9. THE TRAGEDY OF MISSED BLESSING!  
TEXT: MARK 6:5

Jesus performed many miracles when He was on the earth. He healed the sick, He gave sight to the blind, He made lepers whole again, He cast out demons, He raised the dead. In fact, the Apostle John said of the miraculous works of the Lord, "If they should be written the world itself could not contain the books that should be written."

Here is a list of the many miracles that Jesus did. Miracles of all kinds.

Two blind men healed Matt. 9:27-31.

A dumb demoniac healed Matt. 9:32-35.

Money in the mouth of the fish Matt. 17:24-27.

A deaf and dumb man healed Mark 7:32-37.

A blind man healed Mark 8:22-26.

The large catch of fish Luke 5:1-11.

Raising the widow's son Luke 7:11-18.

Healing the crippled woman Luke 13:11-17.

Healing the man with dropsy Luke 14:1-6.

Healing the ten lepers Luke 17:11-19.

Restoring a man's ear Luke 22:50-51.

Turning water into wine John 2:1-11.

Healing the nobleman's son John 4:46-54.

Healing the man at Bethesda John 5:1-16.

Healing the man born blind John 9:1-34.

Raising Lazarus from the dead John 11:1-44.

Large catch of fish John 21:1-11.

Demoniac in the synagogue cured Mark 1:21-28; Luke 4:33-37.

Healing a centurion's servant Matt. 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10.

Healing the blind and dumb demoniac Matt. 12:22; Luke 11:14.

Healing the Syrophenician's daughter Matt. 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30.

Feeding the four thousand Matt. 15:32-39; Mark 8:1-9.

Cursing the fig tree Matt. 21:18-22; Mark 11:12-14.

Healing the leper Matt. 8:2-4; Mark 1:40-45; Luke 5:12.

Healing Peter's mother Matt. 8:14-15; Mark 1:30-31; Luke 4:38-39.

Stilling the storm on the Sea of Galilee Matt. 8:23-27; Mark 4:35-41; Luke 8:22-25.

Healing demoniac (s) Matt. 8:28-32; Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-35.

Healing the man of palsy Matt. 9:1-8; Mark 2:3-12; Luke 5:18.

Healing the woman with an issue of blood Matt. 9:20-22; Mark 5:25-34; Luke 8:43-48.

Raising Jairus' daughter Matt. 9:23-26; Mark 5:38-43; Luke 8:49-56.

Healing man with withered hand Matt. 12:10-13; Mark 3:1-5; Luke 6:6-10.

Walking on the water Matt. 14:22-33; Mark 6:45-52; John 6:15-21.

Healing a demoniac child Matt. 17:14-21; Mark 9:14-29; Luke 9:37-42.

Healing a blind man Matt. 20:30-34; Mark 10:46-52; Luke 18:35-43.

Feeding the five thousand Matt. 14:19-21; Mark 6:32-44; Luke 9:12-17; John 6:1-14.

(This is the only miracle found in all four gospels.)

The miracles of Jesus were not an end in themselves, they were to reveal the great fact that God had come to live with men. They were credentials that proved without question Christ's claim to be God. Unbelievers might refuse to accept Christ's words but they could not deny Christ's works. His works proved His words so there was no question about it. Jesus was God.

As we think about the miracles that Jesus performed let us also look at the miracles Jesus did not perform. On numerous occasions during His public ministry on earth, our Lord was hindered from performing miracles. For example, visualize the Lord with His disciples in the desert place with a large crowd that had gathered in response to His ministry. As evening drew near the needy people lingered. No provision had been made for their food. What could be done? The emergency provided no problem for the disciples. Their solution was very simple: send them away. Tell them to go home. Contrary to the desires of the disciples, our Lord asked that food be provided. While putting this possibility before them He asked Philip, "Where can we get food so the people could eat?" We are told that He said this to prove Philip for He Himself knew what Philip would do. You know the rest of the story about the little boy and the loaves and the fishes. I cannot help but feel that Jesus had other plans to supply the food for this multitude of people. I think the case of the little boy with the loaves and fishes might have been God's second best. What do you think would have happened had Phillip and the other disciples come to Jesus with implicit faith saying we have no food Lord but we know you can provide. We know that you are the God of all and nothing is impossible with You. It is very probable that He who once refused to turn stones into bread for the relief of His own hunger would have done it on this occasion if the disciples would have exercised greater faith. He might even have summoned manna from heaven or called for a flock of Ravens to bring the needed supplies. What He did, of course, was an unprecedented thing. As great as that miracle was performed in the quietness of that hillside, it probably was not as wonderful as the miracle He might have performed had He not been restrained by unbelief.

Now look at another incident recorded in the 6th chapter of Mark's gospel. Jesus had returned to His home town of Nazereth after preaching and demonstrating His mighty power in other parts of the country. Doubtless, Nazereth, was like other needy communities. It was marked by sick bodies, broken hearts, distressed minds, and restless souls. Surely the pressing need moved the Lord to pity and concern.

"And He could do there no mighty works save that He laid His hands on a few sick folk and healed them" (Mark 6:5).

In the next verse we read, "And He marveled because of their unbelief."

The inhabitants of that Galilean town were not without their traditional religion, the Synagogue and its conventional worship. It is probable that the people knew the Old Testament Scriptures and were familiar with the prophecies foretelling Christ's coming and the nature of His mission. The people were acquainted with Joseph and Mary and the brothers and sisters of our Lord. They had lived with Him and watched Him grow as a boy and knew when He embarked on His public ministry. They were aware of the fact that He had miraculous powers. But when He came to that city as God in flesh the windows of their hearts were closed to the light of His truth. For this reason He did not perform any miracles there. What might have been done had not the obstacle of unbelief stemmed the tide of God's flow of love and power. As the result of men and women of that community continued to be just as selfish, proud, contentious, and money loving as they had been before Jesus came. There was but one short step between them and great blessing but they were unwilling to take the step and as a consequence they missed a blessing.

Let's look at one more missed blessing which took place toward the end of Jesus' ministry. The shadow the cross was already cast upon the Lord. His final rejection was only hours away. Looking down upon the historic city of Jerusalem from a mountain Jesus could clearly see what was hiding under the brilliant and glamorous exterior of that city. Thus, He was heard to cry out, "Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killeth the prophets and stoneth them that are sent unto you, how often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen doth gather her brood under her wing but you would not." Who can begin to imagine what miracles Jesus could have performed in Jerusalem had the attitude of the multitude been gracious and receptive. Think what Jesus could have done in that vast city. He could have dried the tears of the sorrowing, brought peace to the troubled, and delivered the schemers and the ungodly from their sin. He could have easily corrected every evil had the people of Jerusalem bowed at His feet. They could have averted the destruction and the overthrow that later came on the city. The Lord earnestly desired to alleviate the misery of the people of Jerusalem but their unbelief kept them from doing so.

What does this mean to us? What do the might have beens of Jesus day mean to our present day generation? Just this! If both believers and unbelievers miss God's best in Jesus' day it is very possible that many of us are missing it now. If our Lord's intentions were being thwarted then it is obvious that they are also being thwarted now. For this reason it is very important that we search out our own hearts with an earnest desire to detect any unbelief that might be hindering a mighty display of the power of

God in our lives.

## I.) THE URGENCY OF OPPORTUNITY!

In the days before modern harbors, a ship had to wait for the flood tide before it could make it to the port. The term for this situation in Latin was *ob portu*, that is, a ship standing over against a port, waiting for the moment when it could ride the turn of the tide to harbor.

The English word opportunity is derived from this original meaning. The captain and the crew were ready and waiting for it, that one moment, for they knew that if they missed it, they would have to wait for another tide to come in.

According to an Arab proverb there are four things don't come back the spoken word, the sped arrow, the past life, and the neglected opportunity.

" Miss not the occasion : by the forelock take  
That subtle power, the never halting time,  
"Lest a mere moment's putting off should make  
Mischance almost as heavy as a crime."

Opportunity calls for awareness; the capacity to see it.

When Ishmael seemed to be dying of there was a spring near, but the eyes of Hagar were blind with tears; she never saw it till the Lord opened them. The thing most needed and desired may be close to us. Sir John Murray, the famous oceanographer says that " in the equatorial regions of each ocean there is a band of comparatively fresh water, and fresh zones surround the melting, ice in the Arctic and Antarctic regions. Where rivers enter the ocean the lighter river water tends to float on the surface, and its freshening influence may be detected at great distances from the land "

A vessel in old sailing days once ran short of water. It was hailed by another, and request was made by it for water. The answer was, " Do you not know where you are? You are in the Amazon." They were sailing in fresh water and did not know it. Some slight matter can hide from sickness the cure it needs. What seems a trifle stands between results that are only, interesting, and an invention that is a triumph. " If thou knewest . . ." When diamonds were discovered by white men in Brazil in 1727, they had been used for a long time by negroes as counters in card play. The discovery of the South African diamond mines arose from the examination of a bright stone which a Boer farmer's children had been playing with. At the battle of Granson, Charles the Bold lost the Florentine diamond: the Swiss soldier who found it sold it for a few pence thinking it to be a piece of rock crystal. Another now supposed to be part of the same stone as that from which the Koh Noor of the British crown comes, was for long used by a peasant as a flint for string fire. These simple men were close to wealth and

knew it not. Occasion was not taken by the hand. It is not always better in the highest things. There is unconsciousness of the Divine; obliviousness, to opportunity. Moments can be, are, gifts of God.

The power to avail oneself of opportunities goes; and the opportunities go. It is not always equally easy to avail oneself of opportunities, to undertake a new task or to enter upon a new course, in trade or learning or to ascend in spiritual experience. The inner conditions are not the same, or the outer. The circumstances of the miraculous with Christ could not all be produced again; it was a day of merciful visitation. The Bible emphasizes the value of such days: days when the " Lord may be found," days of salvation. God is not capricious; He does not change; but a whole world of influence is playing upon lives in certain situations, which cannot be summoned up at will

- King C. Gillette had been looking for a throwaway product ever since having a conversation with the inventor of pop bottle caps. When he found his razor dull, he thought of the safety razor with disposable blades.
- Ole Evinrude got angry when the ice cream in his rowboat melted before he got to his island picnic spot, so he invented the outboard motor.
- Ralph Schneider decided to form Diners Club one night after he lost his wallet.
- Charles Strite was fuming at the burnt toast in the factory lunchroom where he worked and thought up the automatic toaster.

This applies obviously to business, but what are the needs in your community that your church could address in a new and better way.

There was a very cautious man  
Who never laughed or played  
He never risked, he never tried  
He never sang or prayed  
And when he one day passed away  
His insurance was denied  
For since he never really lived  
They claimed he never died.

Opportunity is a small word with a great meaning: Lost is a smaller word with as great a meaning. Put the two together, and they spell tragedy. Opportunity is not a tangible thing something that can be lost and found again. Once lost, it is gone forever! Another opportunity may present itself, but what if it should not? And if it should have we learned the lesson well enough in the school of experience to take advantage of it when comes?

- Leo Gerstenzang thought of "Q Tips" when he saw his wife trying to clean their baby's ears with toothpicks and cotton.

\*Otto Diffenbach came up with the cellophane soda straws when he twisted the wrapper from a cigarette pack and saw he had created a tube.

The ancient Greeks had a statue called Opportunity. It stood on its toes to show how quickly it might pass by. It had wavy hair in the front that people might grasp it by the forelock. But it was bald in back to show that, when it had once passed it could not be caught.

## IL) THE UGLINESS OF DOUBT!

Doubt never preached a sermon, sang a hymn, spread a ray of sunshine, inspired a hope, bound up a broken heart, soothed a sorrow, broke one shackle from the limbs of slavery, wrote a constitution, appeased a hungry soul or showed a mercy.

## II.) THE UNLIMITED POWER OF FAITH!

Doubt and faith are opposites. Doubt destroys; faith constructs. Doubt creates uncertainties; faith establishes us.

Doubt leads to fear and distrust; faith leads to courage and confidence. Doubt robs and faith rewards. Doubt defeats; faith is the victory that overcomes the world.

Doubt sees the obstacles,  
Faith sees the way  
Doubt sees the darkest night,  
Faith sees the day!  
Doubt dreads to take a step, \_  
Faith soars on high! \_  
Doubt questions, "Who believes?"  
Faith answers, "I !"

Faith is 'dead to doubts, dumb to disappointments  
Blind to impossibilities, knows nothing but success.  
Faith lifts its hands up through the threatening  
Clouds, and lays hold of Him who has all power in heaven and on earth.

Faith, makes the uplook good, the outlook bright, the inlook favorable, and the future glorious.

Jesus had walked across the water of the little sea of Galilee to where the little boat was being tossed by the storm. As He was seen approaching, y Peter asked for permission to go to Him. As he started on that miraculous trip he took his eyes off from the source of his power an only to receive this rebuke, "Oh, thou of little faith wherefore

didst thou

doubt?" LITTLE faith walks on the water. LITTLE faith removes mountains. What, then, can great faith accomplish?

Faith is a reality. Faith is a necessity. Faith is an essential. Faith is the safe valve in business, the abiding principle of patriotism, the cementing power in love, the greatest unifying force in society. But above all, faith reaches up and lays hold of God and makes man an eternal being, fitted to rule and reign with the Creator Himself throughout the endless eternity.

Faith does not operate in the realm of the possible. There is no glory for God in that which is humanly possible. Faith begins where man's power ends.

Now, what is faith? A little crippled boy had some alphabetical blocks; he called his grandfather into his playroom one morning and silently pointed to a sentence he had written out as follows, "Please, grandpa, bring me some candy." That night when grandfather came home he was called into the playroom where he was silently greeted by the same blocks, "Thank you, grandpa, for the candy." That little fellow was revealing the nature of real faith, which, according to Hebrews 11:1, is, "the substance (assurance)

Of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Jesus revealed the nature of real faith when He said at the grave of Lazarus, "Father, I thank thee that thou, hast heard me."

A little book, long out of print, called Expectation Corner, tells of a king who prepared a city for some of his poor subjects. Not far away he constructed a large storehouse where everything they needed would be supplied if they would only send him their requests. There was one condition, however: they should constantly be on the lookout for his messengers so that when they came with the gifts in answer to their urgent pleas, the petitioners would always be found waiting and ready to receive them. One faithless subject, not actually expecting to get what he asked for, never did wait for their delivery. One day he was taken to the king's storehouse; and there, to his amazement, he saw scores of packages that had originally been made ready for him. The messengers had come to his door, but because he was not looking for them, the king's gifts never satisfied his needs.

Sometimes God makes us wait for things, simply because we are so unbelieving and insipid in the way we ask for His heavenly favors. Many miss out on desired blessings because they closet themselves in the gloomy chambers of doubt. How much better to be stationed in the faith expecting God to answer.

We need:

A faith that will believe without encouragement from others like Abraham (Gen. 18 :9-15 ; Rom. 4 :19, 20) .

A faith that will believe without encouragement from God like The Syrophoenecian woman (Matt. 15:22-28).

A faith that will believe without previous experience like Noah (Heb. 11:7).

A faith that will believe without hurrying to prove like

God is our great I Am. Listen to what God says to Israel. God does not say I am their light, their guide, or tower, but only I AM . . . . . He puts a blank that His people may write after it what is good for them. In effect He says, Are they weak? I AM strength. Are they in trouble? I AM comfort. Are they poor? I AM riches. Are they sick? I AM health. Have they lost all? I AM all things." God is saying, I AM whatever man needs. I AM grace; love, holiness, perfection, power, wisdom, and on and on.

When crossing a bridge you will notice there is usually a sign stating the load limit. This sign says in effect that the bridge is safe only up to a certain weight. It will not carry over the stated amount. Christ said, "I am the way," and we might well add there is no limit to the load of our problems and frustrations He will bear.

"When faith in God goes, man the thinker loses his greatest thought.  
When faith in God goes, man the worker loses his greatest motive.  
When faith in God goes, man the sinner loses his greatest help.  
When faith in God goes, man the sufferer loses his greatest refuge.  
When faith in God goes, man the lover loses his fairest vision.  
When faith in God goes, man the mortal loses his only hope."

"Some lives are minus,  
Some are plus;  
Negative, positive  
o'er this earthly sod  
And you either walk with the negative `Fear'  
Or the positive `Faith' in God.  
Some might say I don't believe in faith, belief, trust or whatever you may call it, it doesn't mean very much to me. It is what a man does that counts. I don't go a very much on creeds, or statements of faith. I am a practical man and want to make my Christianity a practical religion."

All right, Mr. I'm for you as far as you go, but may I say that what, you do does not establish our belief but what you believe does establish your actions. Jesus said, "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, lieing, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man." But again

God says in Romans 10:10, "for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness."

Let me illustrate the fact that what you believe determines your course of action. Suppose you were seated here as you are today with the building on fire. As long as you did not know it, you would have no concern about it, but if I should yell, "FIRE! ", there would be a concerted movement toward the exits. What you know and believe determines your course of action. I believe that fire burns, so I keep my fingers out of it. I believe that carbon monoxide gas kills. I have never seen that gas, I have never felt any ill effects from that gas, and yet I always open the garage door before starting my car due to the fact that I believe the warnings that I have heard against it. I believe a certain political party will give this nation the best government, so I vote for that party. I do not go into the voting booth and accidentally put a cross after a certain name and then come out endorsing the one whom; I ignorantly voted for. I will admit that many times I could have done better if I had voted first and thought about it afterward, but that is beside the point.

In like manner men do not accidentally live a life of holiness. We live holy because God expects it. We live our life by faith. We have learned that "WITHOUT FAITH IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO PLEASE HIM." So by faith we live holy to please Him.

Faith is the essential force of life within a person. P.T. Forsyth stated that "faith is the moral act which assigns the whole being as a living person."It is the life blood of the civilized world. There should be a modern form of the great eleventh chapter of Hebrews; . . .`By faith Abel... By, .faith Enoch... By faith Abraham...," showing what the force of faith has done for every one of us in civilized society:

Christopher Columbus did not launch out upon and unknown sea because of his disgust with the limitations of personal liberty in the then known world. He and his men did not sail into the darkness of doubt and then suddenly find a new world waiting for them on the other side of the earth. NO! But a strong, constructive belief in, a conviction that was willing to face death to prove its reality was the moving power.

The Wright Brothers did not pile a lot of undesirable remnants together, and then! pushing the whole mess overboard, find to their amazement that they had concocted a successful flying machine

NO! Things do not happen by chance.' There has to be a great conviction of constructive belief before worse conditions can be changed into better conditions.

Faith!

Faith is trust, it is belief and assurance. It is confidence and dependence, it is reliance and hope. Faith is security and expectation; it is optimism, aspiration and certainty. Faith is assent of the mind to the gospel truth without other evidence, it is open profession of religious truth. Faith is belief in God, it is conviction and avowal of

confession.

Faith needs to be fed. You need to feed your faith.

Faith lives by and on the word of God, it walks and talks by God's word, it has found God's word to be sure and pure, and God's word never fails. Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

Faith feeds on prayer and communion with God. When you become engrossed with prayer and communion with God until you do not want anything physical to eat, when you have that meat that the world know not of, you are really living.

Faith also feeds on obeying the will of God. Jesus said: "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me." The righteous shall live by faith. When faith is gained we can sing.

This is Faith's Food!

Faith is the capacity of the soul to perceive the abiding in the transitory, faith can see the invisible in the visible. We reach the pinnacle of faith when we will have learned to transform tragedy into energy. The dynamite of power is useful in wrecking old buildings; but to build new structures we must have the dynamics of faith. A brilliant mind with faith is like a beautiful face with eyes.

Faith's Force!

I believe in the sun even when it is not shining. I believe in love even when I am not feeling it. I believe in God even when He is silent. Faith is that something that starts where reason stops, faith is devotion to God. Faith forces us to obtain forgiveness of sin, and then it forces us to forgive those that have sinned against us. Faith adopts us into the royal and Holy family of God. It makes us receive the fullness of the spirit, it assures us resurrection from the dead.

Faith is the source through which we receive the grace of God in our hearts, we are saved by grace through faith. That is why we must have faith to please Him, the only avenue to our souls is faith.

We need that faith that was once delivered to the saints; that faith that will make us treat everybody right whether they treat us right or not. We need that faith that will make us not forsake the assembling of ourselves together; we need that faith that carpenters can't build; that faith that congress can't legislate; that faith that the president

can't veto; that faith that the farmers can't grow; that faith that the undertakers can't bury; that faith that water can't drown; that faith that fire can't burn; that faith that death can't destroy; that faith that will rock us in the cradle of God's everlasting love.

We need the faith that will allow us to never miss the miracle God has for our life. We need to always come into His presence expectantly.

## 10. THE FOLD

TEXT John 10:1-16

### INTRODUCTION

What is a sheepfold? It is an enclosure opened to the wind. It is an enclosure open to the scrutiny of the owner. It is an enclosure not covered in, roofed over, or shielded from the eye of the shepherd. It is not a barn, shed, or a structure closed in on all sides. Its walls, open to the sun, the sky, the stars, the rain, and the wind, may be made of rough-laid stones, sun-dried bricks, timber, mud and wattle, or even tightly packed thorn brush. A fold is called a corral in some places, a kraal in others, and a boma in parts of Africa.

It is this enclosure that Jesus has in mind as He talks about the fold in this great passage of Scripture.

We need to identify the principals in this passage:

1. First the shepherd. The Lord was, of course, talking about Himself but He has given to Pastors the job of under shepherd. Peter says that Pastors are not only to feed the flock but also to tend it and exercise oversight (1 Peter 5:1-2).
2. Next there are the sheep. Paul on the road to Damascus asked two questions: “Who art thou Lord?” and “Lord, what would you have me to do?” These are the same question that every believer must ask. Every believer must have an experience where they can say: “Lord, I am thine. Other lord beside You have had dominion over me but from now on I will call on Your name alone. Lord, to You I dedicate myself; my understanding is Yours to know You; my will to choose You; my heart to love You; my conscience to fear You; my memory to retain You; my eyes to behold Your glory; my ears to hear Your voice; my tongue to praise You; my feet to walk in your ways. Lord, to you belongs my time, my substance, my influence, and if I had more to give I would give it. If I had the innocence of Adam in paradise, the meekness of Moses, the patience of Job, the fervor of Paul, the perfection of the angels I would give all of that to you also. Thus we become sheep. We answer the question in our own lives “who art thou Lord?” And we make Jesus Lord. Then we follow Him where ever He leads.
3. Finally, there was the fold. And this was strategic in the thinking of Christ. The fold, in this passage, as far as we are concerned is the local church.

## I. MY CHURCH

When I say that the church is my church I am not saying that it is something that I possess but something that possess me. Just as I say my country. I do not own the country but in a sense the country owns me. There are some things that are said to be ours that we neither own nor do they own us such as a radio station. I remember listening to the radio when the station I was listening to went into a station break which ended with the words, this is your radio station.” I thought to myself, “no you are not mine or there would be some changes.” The radio station saying the radio station was mine did not make it so. In this case, I neither owned it nor did it own me. So it is with many things all around us. The store can be called “our4 store.” The newspaper could be called “our paper.” The magazine could be called “our magazine.” But the ties that bind us to these things are founded on nothing more than convenience and passing interest. We are not dedicated to them. But I was born in to the church and it is mine as nothing else is.

We are inseparably and eternally bound to Christ and His church. There is no dividing Christ from His body, the Groom from His bride. I will make no apology in constantly constraining church members to bring the best of their possessions, time, talents, everything to the church. Business deals are not as important as the church. Some people say the love Jesus but can’t stand His church. That is like saying, “I love swimming but can’t stand water.” That is like saying “I love eating but can’t stand food.” That is like saying, “I love flying but can’t stand the sky.” This is impossible. The church is to be our passion and our priority.

Jesus said that He would build His church (Matthew 16:18). What did the church mean to Him and His followers and to us?

Soon after Jesus began His ministry He gathered around Him an inner circle of friends. He called the disciples. The word disciple means a learner. These were the pupils in the school of Jesus. They believed Him to be the master teacher. They learned by what He said and what He was. Jesus saw their lack and He saw their possibilities. We are disciples also. We are learners in the school of Christ. If someone tells us that we are not like Jesus we confess it. If some cynic points out imperfections we say that is right. We make no claim to perfection. In fact it is for these reasons that we enrolled in the school of Christ. We have seen the “altogether Lovely” and we long to be like Him. The church is a company of learners in the school of Christ.

As Members of the church we are a brotherhood. This does not mean that we are a perfect brotherhood. The brotherhood is imperfect because it is made up of imperfect people. Just after Pentecost we read there “arose a murmuring.” There are always people who have a fighting interest in the church. You never hear from them when

things are running smoothly but just let a fight get started and they are ready to put their two-cents in. The brotherhood has never been perfect but it is the nearest to perfection that this world has ever known. There was no word for brotherly love in the Greek language until they saw how one Christian treated the other. They coined a new word, which meant brotherly love. I wonder what kind of word they would coin today after seeing how one Christian treats another.

The church is the body of Christ. This is figurative language but easy to understand. This body is not me it is only the instrument through which my personality, my real life finds expression. The church is the body through which the living Christ finds expression. That is His way of reaching men and women. He is speaking through our lips. He is ministering through our hands. He walks on errands of mercy with our feet. If a person is a great artist and becomes paralyzed although he is still a true artist in his mind his thoughts can never find expression because the body is paralyzed. We are the body through which the great Lord of life carries out His plans on this earth. We make that possible.

What is the purpose of the church? Some folks think that the church is the place to retreat from the world. They think of it not as the army of God but as a nursing home. How many come to church without ever thinking of contributing to it financially or otherwise. Their only thought is what they are going to get out of it. Their concept of the pastor is not as a leader in a hard fought campaign, but someone that hitches himself to a huge cart and seeks to pull all the saints up to glory. Or he is a kind nurse, dishing out syrup to a bunch of colicky weaklings who have nothing to do but to look at their own tongues and feel their pulses. This is all wrong. Jesus said that the church was “the salt of the earth.” What is salt good for? For one thing, salt adds zest to life. Salt is also a great preventive. It stands in the way of invading rot. In the same way if it were not for the church society would rot. The church stems the tide of drug use, alcohol abuse, loose morals and many other things that rot society.

What is your attitude toward the church? There are some that are antagonistic toward it. Some are indifferent toward it. Some are lukewarm toward it. But, thank God, there are some who love and will be a part of it. It is to this group I am happy to belong. All that I have I owe the church. I knelt in her altars when I was still a teenager. It was the church that sanctified and consecrated my marriage. It was in the church that my two daughters were both dedicated. It was the church that ministered to me when I had to lay my dead to rest. It is the church that keeps this hope of glory alive in my soul.

As members of the church we earnestly desire to help build it. Paul said, “Let everything be done with a view to building.” The Lord builds His church through us. We are the material and co-builders. If there is ever anything done toward building a stronger and more victorious church in your place of labor it will be up to you. Our

Lord builds His church in spite of opposition. He said, “The gates of hell wont prevail against my church.” But hell will fight. Building is always hard and costly.

Someone asked a successful owner of a corporation how much it cost to build it and he said, it cost one man’s life.” The cost to build usually cost someone there all. Jesus certainly gave His all to build the church and He expects the same from us. Passengers ride in great comfort across the Isthmus of Panama by rail today but the railroad was built at a great price. Every crosstie is said to represent a human life given to build the railroad. Building is costly. It’s cheap to tear down. A monkey with a match can destroy more in an hour than a thousand wisemen can build in a year. In fact to destroy you don’t need a match or a hammer. All you need is to do nothing and destruction will be accomplished.

I have a dear friend who lives In Winnsboro Louisiana. His name is Floyd Hawthorne. We have been friends for too many years to count. He pointed a house out to me in that town that was started but never finished. Someone had dreamed of a nice home to live in but they never finished and now it is totally useless. What might have been a poem tuned out to be a wreck! What might have been a song turned out to be a shriek! What might have been a serenade turned out to be a scream! The man did not use dynamite to destroy the home he just stopped building and the gnawing tooth of time destroyed the house as effectively as any demolition crew could have.

## II. THE FOLD

We must never allow the church to be destroyed fort he great shepherd has provided it for us as a fold—the church—your local church is your fold.

The fold was there for three purposes:

1. **Separation**—It was an enclosure for the sheep. There are three Scriptural ways that we are referred to and they all speak of separation.

First, we are God’s people. God has brought us together out of the word to love and to help one another. We are not qualified to judge one another. We lost that right when we knelt at the cross to accept God’s forgiveness. We have no cause for pride but every cause for rejoicing and thanks giving.

Second, we are God’s priests. We are “a royal priesthood.” The word priest literally means a bridge builder. We, as members of the church, build bridges of love over which truth can flow.

Third, we are God’s pilgrims. A pilgrim is a temporary resident, a transient, someone passing through. A pilgrim is not a tramp. A tramp does not know where is going but a pilgrim is someone with a purpose and a destination. We are not citizens of this

world going to heaven we are citizens of heaven going through his world. And our state down here and our standing up there, our condition down here and our position up there ought to correspond.

Once there were two young men who went off to war. One of the young men had every advantage that wealth and privilege could give including a great family name. The other did not have any of those advantages. The young man with the great family wealth, position and name was mortally wounded and knew that he would die. He said to the other young man, "Take my name and live your life with a new name. Please always bring honor to my name and it will take you through." This is what Jesus did for me. He said, in effect, "Here take my name. Always bring honor to it and it will take you through."

2. **Supervision.** The fold was for folding and unfolding the sheep bringing them under management and direct control. When we go to church we ought to see some things. We ought to see the true Holiness of God. We ought to see the true nature of ourselves. We ought to see the necessity and the availability of cleansing. We ought to see our true level of commitment. How do you see this? You see this with the help of your shepherd. It is God's will that you have a shepherd. In Matthew nine, we are told, that Jesus went to all the villages and cities. He went all over Israel, to Galilee, to Judea, to the wilderness, to the coast. When He came back someone might have asked Him, "Lord what is your main impression of the situation in Israel. He could have said, "I have performed healings. I have done miracles. I have seen interest in the people. I believe that there is an awakening in the land." Oh if only He could have said that. But He said, with a sorrowful heart; "They don't have shepherds." He didn't say they didn't have meetings. There is a difference between going to a meeting and having a shepherd.

Many years ago there was great revival sweeping the land. In tent meetings and in brush arbors many came to God. But they drifted away because there were no shepherds to gather them and look after them and many drifted away from the church because there was no shepherd.

There is a difference between being joined to a church and being joined to a shepherd. Many churches are shallow because they display a great lack of loyalty to the shepherd. We must break free from the idea that a shepherd is only a person who stands in the pulpit and preaches for about 20-30 minutes that has little or nothing to do with a shepherd. Ezekiel 34 was written during captivity. We read that Israel went into captivity for the lack of shepherds, not rabbis, or scribes, or schools, or synagogues, but shepherds. God has ordained that you have a shepherd in your life. God wants to use that shepherd to feed you, protect you, gather you, help you when you go astray, heal you when you are broken hearted, bring you to maturity. Your shepherd is the door to

the fold. All that pertains to the sheep must go through the door of the fold and the shepherd is the door.

It will cost you something to have a shepherd. In a sense, it will cost you your own free will. You will have to deny yourself of your own ability to lead yourself. As some people say, "Well Jesus is my shepherd and I won't have another." Then there will be problems. Of course Jesus is the great shepherd but we must all have an under shepherd. We need a shepherd and we need to know who it is.

We don't say when someone asks us who is your wife or husband, "well I don't know there are several possibilities." No, we know who our wife or husband is. We need to know who our shepherd is. We need to be definite. We are definite about other things. We are definite about plane reservations. We are definite about how much insurance we have. We are definite about what kind of merchandise we want to buy. We need to be definite about our shepherd. The shepherd needs the security of knowing that you are his sheep. The shepherd has that kind of security with their family and this is the family of God and he needs to know.

3. **Safety.** Sin has created an unfriendly environment in this world. You need a place of safety. Outside of the fold you will be picked off. You must never say I'm going to go it alone you will be devoured by the wolves. You need to stay in the fold. You need to commit yourself to it. You need not fear. The church is right on its foundation. It is right in its membership. It is right on its message. We need to line up with the church. We need to pray for the church. We need to be faithful to the church. We need to support the church. We need to invite others to share the blessings of the church

## 11. OUR GREATEST FRINGE BENEFIT

TEXT: MATTHEW 11:28-30

In March of 1989, the Harvard Medical School health letter carried an article entitled, “Chronic fatigue, what is it?” It was speaking to a phenomenon that is increasingly evident all over the nation and that is tiredness—continuing and continuous fatigue and listlessness. It is estimated that over 10,000,000 people will go to the physicians office this year complaining of fatigue—of chronic tiredness—of weariness that cannot be alleviated by any means they can find.

Study after study, in recent years, underscore this. At the Brook Army Medical Center at San Antonio, Texas, it was decided to take at random the first one thousand people who came into that center to see what their complaint was. One-fourth of them said, “I am tired. I am weary. I can’t get rested.” And of that it was found that only 28% of those got any better on their own.

At the University of Connecticut Medical School there was set up a fatigue center. Of the first one hundred that came it was found that on the average they had suffered from chronic fatigue for thirteen years.

From these studies and others like them it has been deducted that if a person comes complaining of fatigue and there are no other medical symptoms present it is unlikely that there will be found a medical solution if fatigue is thus present.

Even those times we used to use for recovery in American culture are no longer used for such. Was it not the intention that a weekend—a Friday night, Saturday and Sunday—would be for physical and emotional recovery and repair and yet now no longer is that the case!

It is estimated that the average American spends thirteen hours across the weekend cooking, shopping, cleaning house, paying bills, doing repair work, or doing take home work. So the case is many of us end up on Sunday night just as fatigued and as weary as we were on Friday when the weekend began.

Popular magazines tell horror stories of people who hit the wall with chronic fatigue and tiredness.

People magazine told the story of a 37 year-old Los Angeles model. She was at the peak of her career, writing a screenplay, opening a restaurant, opening a country and western store. She was busy and active until suddenly she hit the wall of fatigue. She couldn’t even get up to address the writing and the business opportunities that were

hers. In fact, she was so tired she could not even finish a sentence once she began that sentence. She had what sixteen doctors came to name “Chronic Fatigue Syndrome.”

In June of 1987 Time magazine featured an article about this and called it, “A stealthy epidemic in fading American culture.”

Well, what are the remedies for this? You can read the remedies that are in popular literature. Those remedies say that we ought to set limits—take better care of ourselves—accept responsibility for rest and our own health—be good to ourselves. Or join self-help groups run by people who are just as tired as we are.

I smile recently when I read about an angry church member who blustered p to his minister, saying, “ I phoned you Monday, but I couldn’t get you.” The preacher explained that it was his day off. “What? A day off? The devil never takes a day off!” exclaimed the member with holier-than-thou indignation. “That’s right,” said them minister, “and if I didn’t take any time out, I would be just like him!”

Yes, we do need res. As Vance Havner has said: “if we don’t come apart, we’ll come apart!”

And even though the remedies we read about may be valuable, most of us sense that there must be a deeper and more profound answer corresponding to the fatigue and the weariness that assaults us so much of the time. And in that regard the Lord Jesus is our great contemporary.

We heard the text read a few minutes ago. This is called the great invitation. It is found in only three verses but they are the verses that contain the solution that we need. They are the verses where the Lord talks about the greatest fringe benefits that come from serving Him.

We all know what fringe benefits are. These are the benefits that come with a job. It might be an unlimited expense account. It might be a car. It might be a sizable bonus. These are the benefits that come with the job.

Jesus is not only speaking to His contemporaries on the hillside but He is speaking to all people of all times.

28. Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.
29. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly of heart: and ye shall find rest for your souls.
30. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

In this great invitation the Lord is offering what so many of us are seeking so desperately—“rest.” And He does not offer it on the superficial level of physical rest. He says I offer you rest for your soul, the center of the center of who you are.

Can you imagine the challenge of this? Here is One who stands before all people of all times and of all places and makes that kind of invitation. That is why you cannot separate the teaching of Jesus from the person of Jesus. To say that His teaching is true and His person is not divine can never be. For only the Almighty God could make this promise to these twenty-one centuries, “everyone, everywhere may come to Me all at once, and like some great river flowing from a highland source that never diminishes and never abates, I will give you rest. And as often as you come just as often I will have to give to you.” Only a Lordly, majestic King like Jesus could dare to make that promise.

What kind of rest is He promising? He is promising an initial rest and a continual rest. This rest takes care of the guilt of the past through His cross. It deals with our present alienation from God because His righteousness is attributed to us and God sees us through the blood. And in the future, it takes care of the bondage and the tyranny of sin that would make us its slave. It is the initial rest of salvation. It is also continual rest.

In verse 29, Jesus moves from the rest of salvation to the rest of submission, The rest that comes from being a life-long disciple of the Lord and going further in and deeper down into the rest that He gives.

Would you come with me as we look at this greatest fringe benefit, rest. The initial rest in salvation and then the continual rest in submission to Him as disciples.

## **I. THE INITIAL REST OF SALVATION**

Every religion and philosophy and psychology promises rest.

Philosophy offers rest from our mental dilemmas—from the intellectual contradictions that create tensions in our minds

Psychology offers rest in our psyche—in the very center of us. Whatever the psychology may be as it explains our id and our ego and our super-ego or whatever language he chooses the question is, “how do I rest inside of me?” This is the question psychology tries to answer.

But towering over every philosophy and every psychology is Jesus who gives this simple invitation, “Come to me and I will give you rest.” “Come,” say the Lord, “and I will give you rest.” I will not *show* you rest, not barely *tell* you of rest, but I will *give* you rest. I am faithfulness itself, and cannot lie, I will give you rest. I that have the greatest power to give it, the greatest will to give it, the greatest right to give it, say, “come, heavy laden sinners, and I will give you rest.” Rest is the most desirable good thing, and the most suitable good thing, and to us the greatest good thing we can have. “Come,” says the Lord, and “I will give you rest; I will give you peace with God, and peace with conscience; I will turn your storm into an everlasting calm; I will give you such rest, that the world can neither give to you nor take away from you.”

Let’s notice:

A. First of all this is given out of His sovereignty.

Look at the words. They are a mandate. They are an imperative. “Come unto me and I will give you rest.” This One assumes the right, the prerogative—the Kingly, Lordly, imperial, majestically prerogative of speaking to all people, of all ages, and saying, “Come unto Me.” It is His command. It is His mandate.

The uniqueness of these words can be seen when you consider how absurd they would be on the lips of anyone else who ever walked on earth. Put these words on the lips of any scientist, or nay statesman, or any king, or any governor, or any president and immediately these words sound absurd.

If you put these words on the lips of an Einstein of science, or a Columbus or Magellon of exploration—if you put them on the lips of a statesman—a Disraeli or Gladstone or Churchill—these words sound absurd on the lips of anyone else. We would only permit Jesus to say this, “come.”

It is an imperative but it is a loving imperative. It is a fatherly Imperative, as if a father looked at a poor tired child and said, “come to me now—sit on my lap and rest.”

Yet it is an enabling imperative for if Jesus did not give us this command we would never be roused out of our paralysis; our listlessness; our spiritual zombie-like state; our inertia. We would never get out of the sloth unless it is His enabling word that says, “come.”

It is just as He stood at the tomb of Lazarus and cried out with a loud voice and said, “Lazarus come forth.” So He call to you and me and to all humanity, “come to Me and I will give you rest.”



B. It is given in urgency.

One translator translated this, “Hither to me now.”

It is His recognition that those of who are asleep spiritually—who are so fatigued and bogged down in sloth and the inaction of life, paralyzed by our inability to move. It is His understanding that there is an urgency. Jesus Christ crisply calls to us “come to Me now and I will give you rest.” If He did not call us like that we could not get up and go.

The call comes very loud in childhood. We can hear His voice persistently. Oh, how the Lord speaks to little children! Directly and immediately they hear His voice. That cry can begin to grow faint in youth with its pleasures. In the early years of life of young adulthood it grows fainter still. By the tome of midlife it can be just an echo. It resonates somewhere in our memory and we can grow deaf to it.

That is why these words of Jesus need to have about them a timeliness and an urgency. It is as if they almost slap us in the face and shake us and say, “come to me now and I will give you rest—hither to me now.”

They are words of sovereignty and words of urgency and they are spoken;

C. Personally.

Jesus does not call you to an institution. He does not call you to a program. He does not call you to some religious ritual or ceremony or rite or sacrament. He does not even at first call you to some body of doctrine or system of theology. It is so personal. He says, “come to *Me* and I will give you rest.” Look at the pronouns—me, I, my—over and over it is an invitation to a personal God. How unique the words of Jesus sound across the religious history of human kind

Buddha was supposed to be the enlightened one. He said you will find rest if you follow the eight fold path of right living. Buddha didn't invite anyone to come to him. In and of himself Buddha would have been considered somewhat of an atheist. He said come to the eight-fold path. If you have the right view, with the right intention, and the right speech, and the right action, and the right livelihood, and the right effort, and the right understanding, and the right concentration—if you find the eight fold right path you will find rest. But he didn't say come to me and I will give you rest.

The same is true of the founder of Islam, the fastest growing religion in the world today. Mohammed never said come to me and I will give you rest. His life will not bear that kind of scrutiny. Mohammed said, “if you give alms, if you make confession that Allah is God and Mohammed is His prophet, if you give to the poor, if you will pray five times a day and make a pilgrimage you will find rest.” But he didn’t call you to himself. Only the resurrected, ascended, reigning over all time Lord says to this very day, “Come to Me and I will give you rest.”

Who are those invited:

1. Weary.
2. Those who labor.
3. Those who are heavy laden.

Those two words taken together speak to the active and passive sides of human nature. Labor means active toil to the point of exhaustion. Those who are heavy laden are those who have the passive result of the toil—as if one thousand pounds in on their backs. They are weighed down with the weights of life. Jesus said, “all you who labor and are heavy laden come to me.” Unless we live at a merely animal level we recognize that in our lives our work can become labor and our labor toil.

The very word Jesus for labor is enlightening. It comes from a Greek word that means that which cuts or lacerates. IT is used of a ship that shattered when it hit a reef. It is speaking of the cutting, lacerating, shattering quality of labor apart from the kind of refreshment to our mind and soul that comes from the Lord.

On the lowest level this can become work-a-holism. Or a condition in which our lives are literally all work and no play and no rest—nothing we do, or anyone does is good enough for us. We have a one-tracked mind, which drives everyone around us to distraction. We would work and work everyone else. It becomes a weight upon us.

The Japanese have invented a word for it—Koroshi. The *U.S. News and World Report* says, the medical authority who coined the word defines it as “a condition in which psychologically unsound work processes are allowed to continue in a way which disrupts the workers normal life rhythm and a chronic condition of overwork accompanied by preexistent high blood pressure, hardening of the arteries, and finally, a fatal breakdown occurs.” Translating that simple it means that all work and no play can really wreck one's health. But that is not restricted to just Japan. When all of our worth comes only from labor and more and more labor we need to hear the words of Jesus, “Come unto me and I will give your rest.”

But He was not just speaking of physical labor. He had something more significant in mind. That was the exhaustion that comes from a legalistic religious routine in which we think we please God in religious labor alone. Jesus said,

“For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers” (Matthew 23:4).

He was speaking of the religious expectations of the legalists.

The Apostle Peter, in one of his finest hours, in the Jerusalem council, made a confession of the same thing of himself and the other Jews of his generation.

“Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?” (Acts 15:10).

Peter made an honest confession. He said Judaism of that day has become a yoke so heavy that neither our forebears nor us can bear it.

In some senses this gets to the very heart of what Jesus was saying. He said, “I come to give you rest from the attempt to please God by drivenness in even religious activity.”

Jesus’ generation had become very adroit at defining and over defining religious activity. For example: The Pharisees had come to say that a person could travel only a thousand yard on the Sabbath—sundown Friday to sundown Saturday you could only walk a thousand yards unless you put a roper across the end of the street where you lived then you could go one thousand yards from the rope unless you sent a servant ahead of you one thousand yards with enough food for two meals. This establishes a new residence and you could walk from there. And this became religious life.

The book of Leviticus and Numbers are filled with religious washings—symbolic ceremonies. It was physically good and spiritually instructive but they thought, “if some was good more is better.” So they moved from the revealed word of God to the imagined word of God. They said you should wash ritually before each meal. Then pages were devoted to how much water, who should pour the water, how it should be stored and how you should wash your hands. And religious life became that kind of burdening trivia. They had to put side gallons of water in that dry land. They could only use as much as could be held in 1 ½ egg shells. You had to wash your hands holding them down in a certain position. Then holding them way so that the water would run from the wrist. And all of it became a weariness and a weight and a tediousness and a burden of remembering thousands of rules and religious obligations.

And to that generation that had been distanced from the living God by that kind of legalism, the Lord said, “come unto Me and I will give your rest.”

We can make our lists that will weight people down but the Lord says whether you are physically weary, or psychologically weary, or religiously weary with rut and routine—“Come unto me.”

What kind of rest was it? The very word “rest” in the Greek means revitalization and recuperation. It was used of an agricultural field that was allowed to lay fallow. That is not done as much as it was in ancient times. For years a field would be cultivated. It would bear the burden of a crop which would draw out the nutrients of the soil and then suddenly the field would lie fallow. It would be left alone and would restore itself. Our Lord says, “Come unto Me and I will allow you the opportunity to lie fallow. You will be renewed in My presence.” We find this principal in the law of the Sabbath. God says you must rest in my presence at least one day a week.

Two French psychologists, Andre Virel and Roger Fretigny talk about four states of human consciousness; imaginative, active, reflexive and contemplative. The two middle states (activity and reflexive response) characterize our automated society; the other two (imagination and contemplation) are the redeeming features which make life livable. These are the qualities to which the Sabbath addresses itself, for imagination is a form of freedom, and contemplation is rest from unrest.

Every person needs rest from unrest, needs surcease from goal-lessness and endless competition, and in the face of automation needs to sanctify free time as freedom time. In the process, work and leisure will have to get themselves new vestments so that the increasing quantities of free time which society will have in the years to come may become true freedom time for many.

Several years ago country singer Johnny Cash recorded a popular song entitled, “Sunday Morning Coming Down.” The melancholy song tells the tale of someone who has lost his way and is far from home. After a Saturday night of beer, song, and women one must face a Sunday. He goes on to sing that “there is something about a Sunday which makes a body feel alone.” As our hero (or anti-hero) travels the streets, old sounds and images speak of a happier past: children playing in the park, the smell of Sunday fried chicken, and the call of a church bell. All of this is too much so Cash sings, “I am wishing Lord I was stone. There is something about a Sunday which makes a body feel alone.” The song goes on to even vocalize a wish for death as a way out.

The popularity of the song says much about how we experience time and the significance we attach to certain days in our work-week. Our highly technological society is divided into a five-two scheme: five days of work and two days of leisure. Hence, the favorite cry of the worker is “Thank God it’s Friday!” Why? Because now

we are ready to have rest and relax, and become fully human. The weekend is that sacred time when we are reintroduced to family and leisure. Unfortunately, we don't seem to know how to enjoy our increased rest time. We compulsively work at having fun. Depression has become a regular part of the Sunday (weekend) experience. And we find it impossible to enter into the Lord's rest.

Did you ever hear the story of the beggar who wasn't satisfied when a very generous man gave him six of the seven dollars he had in his pocket? Do you know what he did? He attacked his benefactor and tried to take that last dollar away from him. So he had nothing.

That is the way it is with the Sabbath breaker, too. God gave us six days out of seven, and kept one for Himself. If we try to take His day away from Him, He will take our six away from us, in one way or another, and leave us with nothing. What else can we expect? When beggars, who receive six days of grace as gifts of God, become thieves, who try to steal the day that belongs to their benefactor, they end up with nothing—no rest, no blessing. They may think they get away with it, and for awhile it may appear that they are getting away with it, but in the end the law of the Lord will catch up with them.

Jesus said to His disciples once, “come apart with me to a desert place and rest awhile.”

Secular science speaks of rest on four levels:

1. Physical rest when we rest our bodies.
2. Sensory rest when we rest our eyes.
3. Emotional rest when we disengage from the ups and downs of emotional life.
4. Mental rest that comes from not agitating or using our minds.

“That is not enough,” says the Lord. If we want rest indeed we have to Him. “This is *the* rest,” He says. His is the rest that deals with the guilt of the past. You may think you have avoided what your guilt does, but if you don't deal with your guilt it will deal with you. It will reach its icy fingers from the past and tap you on the back and turn you around and say, “I am still here.” And if you ever know rest it is because you deal with your guilt, fully and finally at the cross. In the present alienation from God and in the future bondage of sin you don't rest until you know the rest of salvation.

Our soul, says Augustine, was created *by* and exists *for* God and therefore never quiet until it rests *in* God. It is with a person's soul as with Noah's dove in the Deluge. The dove, after it left the ark, found no rest for the sole of its foot in the world until it

returned to the place from which it had come. So there is no sure rest for the fallen soul in the world until it returns to Him from whom it came.

The Psalmist wrote, “He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty” (Psalm 91:9). We cannot rest in God until we nest in God. To nest is to settle, to abide.

Do not tell me that there is no rest for us until we get to heaven. We who know the Lord have entered into rest now. And why not? Our salvation is complete. The robe of righteousness in which we are clad is finished. The atonement for our sins is fully made. We are reconciled to God, Beloved of the Father, preserved by His grace, and supplied by His providence with all we need. We carry all our burdens to Him and leave them at His feet. We spend our lives in His service, and we find His ways to ways of pleasantness, and His paths to be paths of peace. Oh, yes, we have found rest unto our souls.

## **II. THE CONTINUAL REST OF SUBMISSION**

But our Lord continues. He not only offers the initial rest of salvation but He offers the continual rest of submission to Him. As a disciple, initially we can rest because we are saved but continually we find new dimensions of rest because we take His yoke upon us and we learn of Him.

I am thinking of the liberty there is in Christ. In these days of light and loose thinking on all subjects, we are likely to forget that freedom comes through submission.

1. Liberty in Christ comes through submission to Him.
2. “If ye continue in my word, then ye are my disciples indeed” “Ye shall know the truth and he truth shall make you free.”
3. “Study to show thyself approved unto God.”..... “A workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”
4. “Take my yoke upon you and learn of me.”..... “And ye shall find rest for your souls.”
5. “I am the door.”.... “By me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out and find pasture.”

6. “Humble yourself therefore under the mighty hand of God.”..... “That he may exalt you in due time.”

Men hate submission today and in their rebellion against God they submit to the worst slavery of all, bondage to sin and to self and to Satan.

They tell us there are four stages of physical sleep. They happen across about twenty minutes. The first is the twilight stage in which we drift in and out of consciousness. Then there is a second and a third and a fourth. And in the fourth we are only one step away from a coma and two steps away from death.

If there are stages of physical rest there are also stages of spiritual rest and the Lord says come further in and deeper down and as you take My yoke upon you will find new dimensions of rest for your soul

You will notice that in Jesus’ message there are three exchanges:

1. The exchange of yokes.
2. The exchange of burdens.
3. The exchange of teaching.

It all begins with an exchange of yokes. We exchange the yoke of the world to wear the yoke of Christ. There is the necessity of wearing a yoke. This is language of another age and another world. “Take my yoke upon you.” I have seen a few yokes. They were heavy made of wood. They were made to place on a team of oxen like a harness. It chaffed and weighed down the oxen. It had already become a figure of speech by Jesus’ day.

If a student followed a Rabbi it was said that He had taken the Rabbi’s yoke upon him. It meant to become a student, a pupil--a learner. Jesus said, “take My yoke upon you and learn of me.” Here is the paradox—He often spoke in paradoxes—He said “you live by dying; find your life by losing it; hold on by letting go; go up by going down; if you press down on your life My yoke it will lift you up.

It was Augustine who said, “Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in thee.” His statement came out of his own long restlessness and struggle with God’s will before he finally stopped depending upon himself and turned to God.

Life is often like the struggle of a person learning how to swim. He makes frantic efforts to keep himself afloat. Arms and legs thrash wildly about, and he succeeds only in sinking when he would swim. Then comes the moment when he discovers that the

very buoyancy of water keeps him afloat, not his struggle. He lets himself go, and, with the natural motions that are intended to make the most of buoyancy, he floats with ease, and all of his fear is gone.

So do we struggle with life and our world, as if our efforts were the deciding factor, but “There’s a wideness in God’s mercy like the wideness of the sea,” and there is a buoyancy in his love that supports us now and always if we will let it. Only when we discover this, do we find the peace that is not freedom from all of life’s problems, but assurance and confidence in the face of all circumstances.

Some say I’m not going to have a yoke. My intent is to be free. Yes you will have a yoke. Everyone has a yoke.

If you go to school you are under the yoke of learning. If you play an instrument you will be under the yoke of practice. If you are an athlete you are under the yoke of training. If you are a craftsman you are under the yoke of becoming and artisan. If you are a preacher you are under the yoke of constant preparation. It is not whether you will have a yoke it is a question of whose yoke will you have. You’ll have a yoke of self absorption and self obsession or you will take the yoke of the Lord that lifts you up and gives you rest rather than tears you down.

We must take His yoke. That sounds strange, but we see it all the time.

The deep-sea diver has a heavy tank, which must be a burden but it contains oxygen that gives life. A paratrooper folding up his parachute puts it in a pack and puts the pack on his back.

Let me insert something I heard on Paul Harvey’s for what it’s worth department. Paul Harvey said, “he couldn’t decide whether this is a bargain. I have it right in front of me—an ad under for sale in the Marshfield, Wisconsin, newspaper: FOR SALE. PARACHUTE. ONCE USED. NEVER OPENED. 555-9923.”

The truth is a parachute is a life saving device and even though it may seem like a burden while on the back it is a burden which spares a life.

Here is a mountain climber with a heavy rope around his shoulders. That rope is looped around the guide up above him and it is heavy to carry until his feet slip and he starts to fall and he finds the rope save his life.

The superiority of that yoke rests in its simplicity. Learn of me. Here He is in the gospels. He is presented a living person. He comes off these 4 pages and He walks around. For many of us He is more alive and better known than anyone else! His life

takes wings. He walks off these pages. He says, “come learn of me and from me. And in doing that you will find rest for your souls.”

He says, “I am not another Moses giving laws or a Pharisee multiplying demands.” He says, “look at my method and look at my manner.”

My method is simply one of learning.

My manner is that of meekness and lowliness. Come to em! How simple can it be?

Look at His spirit. He says, “I am meek and lowly. Come to me I am approachable. You won’t find me haughty. I won’t upbraid you or patronize you. I will not take a condescending attitude toward you.” How marvelous to have a teacher like Jesus!

I have had teachers who scarred me. They were unapproachable and condescending but not Jesus. You can walk and talk with Hem and say, ‘Lord, teach me.’ He is lowly, meek, and approachable. He is at the same time, King of kings and Lord of Lords.

He said, “Take My yoke and learn of me and I will give you rest.”

Calmness comes ever from within. It is the peace and restfulness of the depths of our nature. The fury of storm and of wind agitate only the surface of the sea; they can penetrate only two or three hundred feet; below that is the calm unruffled deep. To be ready for the great crises of life we must learn serenity in our daily living. Calmness is the crown of self-control. Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit.

When the worries and cares of the day fret you, and begin to wear upon you, and you chafe under the friction—rest.

When the tongues of malice and slander, the persecution of inferiority, tempts you for just a moment to retaliate, when for an instant you forget yourself so far as to hunger for revenge—rest. When the grey heron is pursued by its enemy, the eagle, it does not run to escape; it remains calm, takes a dignified stand, and waits quietly facing the enemy unmoved. With the terrific force with which the eagle makes its attack, the boasted king of birds is often impaled and run through on the quiet, lance-like bill of the heron. The means that man takes to kill another’s character becomes the suicide of his own.

No man in the world ever attempted to wrong another without being injured in return—some way, somehow, sometime. The weapon of offence that Nature seems to recognize is the boomerang. Nature keeps her books admirably; she puts down every item, she closes all accounts finally, but she does not always balance them at the end of

the month. To the man who is calm and resting, revenge is so far beneath him that he cannot reach it—even by stooping. When injured, he does not retaliate; he wraps around him the royal robes of calmness, and he goes quietly on his way.

When the hand of death touches the one we hold dearest, paralyzes our energy, and eclipses the sun of our life, the calmness that has been accumulating in long years becomes in a moment our refuge, our reserve strength and we can rest.

He didn't say all about that rest in Matthew because he had not yet bee to the cross and they were not yet able to receive it. We know something about it on this side of the cross.

We know:

“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:” (Romans 5:1).

We Know:

“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit” (Romans 8:1).

When He spoke to them in Matthew He told them what, but in Romans He tells how.

Now He says come, My yoke is easy—kind. My burden is light.

Sylvia Ratcliffe Lockwood wrote:

“I heard the voice of Jesus say,  
“Come unto Me and rest:  
Oh, weary one, bowed down with care,  
Come, lean upon My breast.  
There is no load I cannot bear;  
Nor burden that I will not share,  
So cast on me thine every care;  
Come unto me and rest.

“All ye that labor come to Me  
And I will give you rest.  
Though heavy laden you may be,

Come lean upon My breast.”  
He spoke to me tenderly,  
“Come, take my yoke and learn of ME:  
My burden shall rest light on thee  
And I will give you rest.”

Heavy laden, tired with care,  
I came to Him for rest:  
There I laid my burden down  
And leaned upon His breast.  
He gave me strength from day to day;  
He guided me along life’s way’  
And now my soul must ever say,  
“Praise God! He gave me rest!”

## 12. LISTENING--A SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

*"It shall be, if he call thee, that thou shall say; Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth."*  
(1 Sam. 3:9b)

If you were asked to name the most essential spiritual disciplines, how would you respond? Chances are that you would speak about prayer, meditation, Bible study, worship, and various forms of ministry. Most likely, few people, if any, would include listening on their list. Yet, from a biblical perspective and in actual experience listening is a profoundly important spiritual discipline that needs constant nurturing.

Repeatedly, God has addressed His people with the imperative "Listen!" Consider the preface to the most basic text in all of Judaism - *"Hear, O Israel"* (Deuteronomy 6:4) - in the Old Testament and a directive integral to the teaching of Jesus - *"Hear and understand"* (Matthew 15:10) -- in the New Testament. Through the years, prophets and apostles, priests and preachers, have relayed the divine counsel regarding listening. According to Paul, people do not come to redemptive faith without hearing (Romans 10:14, 17). According to James, persons with a mature faith are "quick to hear" and "slow to speak" (James 1:19). Apart from strict adherence to this recurrent biblical admonition to listen, holy commandments and divine promises go unheeded and life is fragmented.

Who can dispute the priority of listening? Shakespeare dubbed not listening a disturbing disease. Oliver Wendell Holmes labeled listening the privilege of wisdom. But, quite honestly, listening is as much a difficulty as it is a necessity, a spiritual priority. We have a propensity to speak. Usually our first reaction to almost any situation is "What can I say?" or "What should I say?" We view as highly unusual those occasions on which we are speechless. So much time and attention are devoted to talking that little consideration is left for listening.

Of course, almost anyone can understand our preoccupation with speaking and near aversion to listening. When we are talking we are in charge, somewhat in control of things; we are calling the shots. When we are listening, we are vulnerable. The one speaking can direct our attention, affect our emotions, and call us to action. When we listen carefully we run the risk of confronting new ideas, considering unwelcome subjects, and coping with criticisms. Frankly, it is much safer as well as easier to speak than to listen. No one ever promised that any spiritual discipline would be easy, only that all are essential. Listening is no exception. Consider the importance of listening as a spiritual discipline.

Hearing that is truly listening is hard work. Perhaps it is even an art - a developed or cultivated skill. But it also has its benefits and rewards. Benefits of understanding,

rewards of good relationships. Everyday life runs smoother through good listening. A University of Minnesota study reports that, in the business world, 60% of misunderstanding can be traced to poor listening. That's probably true in the home, too, as well as school, church, and other places. Good listening habits can overcome such misunderstandings. Listen to others as you would have them listen to you.

For five years, the adult education department of Minneapolis Public Schools offered two courses in speech and one course in listening each term. The speech courses were always filled. The listening courses were never held because in the five years it was offered only two students wanted to take the course! Everyone wanted to learn how to speak and no one wanted to learn how to listen!

President Franklin D, Roosevelt got tired of smiling that big smile and saying the usual things at all those White House receptions. So, one evening he decided to find out whether anybody was paying attention to what he was saying. As each person came up to him with extended hand, he flashed that big smile and said, "I murdered my grandmother this morning." People would automatically respond with comments such as "How lovely!" or "Just continue with your great work!" Nobody listened to what he was saying, except one foreign diplomat. When the president said, "I murdered my grandmother this morning," the diplomat responded softly, "I'm sure she had it coming to her."

To illustrate the high cost of poor listening, Diana Bonet, listening consultant and author of *The Business of Listening*, offers this example: A \$100,000 error was caused by a dispatcher who routed a fleet of drivers to deliver building materials to the wrong state. The dispatcher heard the city (Portland), but quit listening before he heard the state (Maine). The result: eight trucks, 3,000 miles away in Portland, Oregon.

"Music can only be really alive when there are listeners who are really alive," Aaron Copland, the composer, wrote. True of music, yes. But what about listening to each other? Suppose we did not just hear our friend, our neighbor, our spouse, our Lord - but listened intently, consciously, with our whole intelligence. What unsuspected glories we might share.

Franklin H. Ernst, M.D. said, "To be listening is to be engaged, involved, attentive. Listening is to be cortically stimulated and responsive. EEG tracings show a different pattern when a person is listening ("Low Voltage Fast") compared to the tracings obtained when the person is hearing, when his "head-is-in-neutral" (withdrawal and fantasy). A way you can tell if a person is listening is to watch their eye blinks. The legitimate listener is blinking at least once every 3 or 4 seconds. If you're talking to someone and they blink every ten seconds or longer, they are really listening to you."

The old McGuffey Reader taught us in rhyme the superiority of listening over speaking:

The wise old owl sat in an oak.  
The more he saw, the less he spoke.  
The less he spoke, the more he heard.  
Why can't we be like that old bird.

Carl Rogers, the psychologist, says that people will pay upwards of \$100 an hour or more for no other reason than to have someone listen to them. "A person's real need, a most terrible need, is for someone to listen to him, not as a 'patient' but as a human soul," Rogers states.

Big corporations are catching on to this human yearning. The Ford Motor Company slogan is "We listen better." The 3M Company says "We hear you." Sperry Corporation has launched a multi-million dollar advertising campaign to alert the public and educate its 87,000 employees worldwide through courses and audio cassettes. Their full-page newspaper ads in huge bold, black letters, carry the theme: IT'S ABOUT TIME WE LEARNED HOW TO LISTEN. One such ad carried these words: "Talk can arouse, but of itself it cannot heal. To listen truly listen-- is to begin the healing process a wounded nation needs. Listen to the wind, listen to the birds, listen to the trees. Be still and listen to your God."

Our customer defines quality: Sometimes the difference between success and failure in your organization isn't based on what you know. It is simply an issue of the way you listen --and the way you question your customers. Consider this true story about a very successful grocery store in Connecticut. Stu Leonards' grocery store grossed over \$100 million last year. The average grocery store makes \$300 per square foot. Stu's preparation generates an amazing \$3,000 per square foot. The average grocery store stocks 15,000 items; Stu stocks only 700. Stu has profited immensely from the art of listening and asking the right questions. Recently, Stu was walking around his store when he asked a lady how she likes his fresh fish. She responded, "I don't think it's fresh." Stu tells her how the fish is brought in from the Boston pier every morning and that it is the freshest fish money can buy. Again, she comments, "I don't think it's fresh."

Now Stu is frustrated. He calls over Nick, the head of the seafood department, to get the customer's input. Stu asks Nick if their fish is fresh. Nick goes through a major speech about bringing in the fish from the Boston pier every morning. Then, they both look at this lady and ask her: "What do you think of our fresh fish?" She says, "I still don't think that the fish is fresh."

Now depending on the time of the day, day of the week, or the kind of person you ask, most of us would either think or say something like this to the lady: "Look, bozo, we will put you on the truck, drive you to the Boston pier, and prove to you that we are right and that you are wrong!" Stu Leonard didn't do that; instead, he asked two questions: ( 1. ) "What do you mean our fish is not fresh?" She said, "Look at it. It just doesn't look fresh to me. You have that filet sitting on a green cardboard container. You have plastic wrap over the filet -- and it's wrinkled. Finally, you have a price sticker over half of the filet." She said, "I can't even see half of the filet." At this point Stu didn't try to get her back on the truck to Boston. He asked her a second question: (2) "What would fresh fish look like to you?" "I go to Boston all the time," she said. "I like to see the fish on ice." Stu walked across the aisle and laid the fish flat on the ice. Fish sales soared from 15,000 lbs. a week to 30,000 lbs. a week and stayed at that level. Listening and asking the right questions holds tremendous opportunity for all of us. There's one final point here that we all would be well-advised to remember: Quality is always defined by the customer, not by us.

Carl Michalson said, "I discovered how important listening is when I was at a pastors' school in Ocean Grove, New Jersey. My whole family had been invited and we were together in one little hotel room. In the shuffle of things, I lost my watch. Now, I have to have my watch to tell me when I am through speaking. It was buried under all the debris. It was mayhem! One room; whole family; two quite active children. But I needed my watch. The more we looked, the harder it was to find. At last I had what was one of the few brilliant ideas of my career. I said, Stop. Don't look; listen. And in a matter of instants our son found my watch. Or should say, the watch found him. That is the importance of listening. We never know what is there that will find us."

In his book *Stress Fractures*, Charles Swindoll writes: "I vividly remember some time back being caught in the undertow of too many commitments in too few days. It wasn't long before I was snapping at my wife and our children, choking down my food at mealtimes, and feeling irritated at those unexpected interruptions through the day. Before long, things around our home started reflecting the pattern of my hurry up style. It was becoming unbearable.

I distinctly recall after supper one evening the words of our younger daughter, Colleen. She wanted to tell me about something important that had happened to her at school that day. She hurriedly began, 'Daddy-I-wanna-tell-you-somethin'-and-I'll-tell-you-really-fast.'

Suddenly realizing her frustration, I answered, 'Honey, you can tell me . . . and you don't have to tell me really fast. Say it slowly.'

I'll never forget her answer: 'Then listen slowly.' "

At President Reagan's inauguration, Juanita Booker captured the hearts of millions across the nation with her soulful rendition of the "Star Spangled Banner." It was a dream come true for an unknown Paso Robles, California, housewife and mother of five. Moved to tears during his election campaign when he heard Mrs. Booker sing, President Reagan told her that he wanted her to sing at his inaugural if he was elected.

When questioned about her talent and what her family thought of her notoriety, Mrs. Booker stated that until recently her family had never paid much attention to her singing. She said she sings around the house all the time, but when she was invited to the Inaugural her oldest child commented, "Mom, we've always heard you sing, but this is the first time we've really listened."

A group of applicants were waiting at a steamship office to be interviewed for the job of wireless operator. They spoke so loudly they failed to hear the dots and dashes, which began coming over the loudspeaker. About then another man entered the room and sat down quietly by himself. Suddenly, he snapped to attention, stood to his feet, then walked into the private office. A few minutes later he came out smiling. One of the group called out, "How did you get in ahead of us? We were here first."

The man answered, "One of you could have gotten the job, if you had listened to the message from the loudspeaker."

"What message?" they asked in surprise.

"Why--the code! It said, 'The man I hire must always be on the alert. The first man who gets this message and comes directly into my private office will be given the operator's job now open.'"

His thoughts were slow,  
His words were few  
And never formed to glisten.  
But he was a joy to all his friends,  
You should have heard him listen!

I made real progress only when I gave the most diligent heed to the "practically lost art of listening," which, as William Butler Yeats maintained, "is the nearest of all arts to Eternity."

A man with his eyes swollen and his face bandaged, was asked by a friend what the trouble was. He said, "Nothing, except that at a party last night I was standing up talking when I ought to have been sitting down listening."

Man lost spiritual life and communion with his maker by listening to the voice of the tempter, instead of the voice of God. We get life again by listening to the voice of God. The Word of God gives life. "The words that I speak unto you," says Christ, "they are spirit, and they are life." So, what people need is to incline their ear, and hear. It is a great thing when the preacher gets the ear of a congregation-- mean the inner spiritual ear, for a man has not only two ears in his head; he has what we may call the outer ear and the inner ear of the soul. You may speak to the outward ear, and not reach the ear of the soul at all. Many in these days are like the "foolish people" to whom the prophet Jeremiah spoke: "Which have eyes, and see not; which have ears, and hear not." "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

The most important voice we need to hear is the Lord's ...

Note:

Jesus speaks to the wind and the storm-nature listens.

Jesus speaks to death at the tomb of Lazerus -- death listens Jesus speaks to demons (legion)-demons listen. The Lord speaks to the devil (Job)--devil listens. God speaks to man and he so often ignores God because listening even to God is a learned discipline.

Let us look at Samuel who at a very young age learned to listen to God.

Life is a book of three volumes. A vast number never get past the first volume. A yet larger number go beyond the second volume. Only to a few is it permitted to live through the third and final volume, and when they do so their life is either a great blessing or a great misfortune. In the life of Samuel, none of the three volumes is wanting. We begin with Samuel as a child in his mother's arms, and we follow him through his long life down to the hour of his death. Indeed, we commence with Samuel before he was born, and we hear him speak out of his grave

Moral greatness requires a preparation and a background, for men do not gather grapes of thorns. To understand the character of Samuel we must commence before he was born. Back of every great life lies the mysterious purpose of God. When the world needs its great man, God has him ready, and there is a man sent from God whose name is Elijah, or Moses, or Samuel, or John the Baptist. But in sending these men into the world, it has often pleased God to send them through channels and instrumentalities of which it is possible for us to judge. This is true in the case of Samuel, for we begin with the prayers of his godly mother, and her consecration of him to the service of God's house. When we read the life of Nero, we are not surprised that his mother was a

murderess; when we read the life of Byron, we are not surprised that his mother was violent, vain, and passionate; when we read the life of St. Augustine, we are not surprised that his mother was a woman of great prayer and when we what John Wesley did, it is no surprise to learn that he had a great mother who brought him and her children constantly before the Throne of Grace.

Samuel, a man of prayer, was himself an answer to prayer. His mother called him Samuel, "I have asked him of the Lord." And when she took him up to the holy house at Shiloh and left him there, it was with this benediction, "I have lent him to the Lord."

Samuel was put to the test when the Lord spoke to him as he slept in the house at Shiloh. Three times he ran to the old priest, and said, "Here am I, for thou didst call me." The third time, Eli recognized that God, who often hides his secrets from the wise and prudent and reveals them unto babes, was speaking to the child, and told him to answer the next time, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant hearest." Ever after that was the watchword of Samuel's life

In a vacation church school some years ago, a group of little children were dramatizing the story of God's call to the boy Samuel. The little fellow who was taking the part of Samuel was told the Bible story and was given the reply which he was to make. All went well with the performance for a while. The lad lay down to sleep and at the call of the Lord he went over to the aged Eli. Three times he did this, and again lay down to sleep. Then came the call: "Samuel, Samuel." The boy sat up, rubbed his eyes, hesitated and then, in the simplicity that only childhood has, improvised, "Go on, God, I'm listening."

The little fellow's free rendering of this beautiful Bible verse war a sermon in itself. Too much our prayers are admonitions for God to be quiet while we do the talking. Too much we are prone to tell him what he already knows. True prayer includes listening to God as well as asking of God; it calls for reverent stillness as well as active petition. Often in the quiet listening to the still small Voice we find our spoken prayers answered.

We cannot do better today than, learning from the little child, say simply, "Go on, God, I'm listening."

The ability to communicate occurs in all forms of animal life. A solitary ant discovers the strawberry ice cream a child drops on the sidewalk and in a short time there is on the spot a caravan of ants transporting the sweet stuff to headquarters.

Somehow the exciting news is transmitted from one ant to another. Bees are reported to be even more phenomenal in relaying messages. But we humans excel all

other forms of life in the ability to communicate, for we can transmit to others not only hard fact but also abstract thought and feeling. Since this ability is exceedingly limited in single-celled animal life, we can conclude that the ability to communicate is one of the marks of the full person God is creating. Therefore, communication at its highest reaches has a moral and spiritual significance apart from its good or bad effects.

The Bible has God as a communicator, too. The OT; especially, is a chronicle of communications between God and Israel. The Book of Isaiah carries quite a number of these heaven to earth conversations and this week's reading has a dialogue between the Lord and Zion. *"Thus says the Lord . . . I have answered (communicated with) you"* (Isaiah 49:8), and when Zion responds by not recognizing that communication, *"But Zion said, 'The Lord has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me,'"* (vs. 14) the answer comes back, *"Can a woman forget her . . . child . . . I will not forget you"* (vs. 15). Evidences of God's communication with creation are sprinkled through the reading as well as throughout the whole book.

How we need to have ears that are yielded to God as instruments of righteousness - ears opened by the Lord (Ps. 40:6), ears that incline themselves to the words of God's mouth (Ps. 78 :1), ears that bow themselves to the understanding of wisdom, ears that are the ears of the wise that seek knowledge, ears that turn not away from hearing God's law, ears that, when gospel sermons are preached, find not these sermons "as tedious as a twice told tale, vexing the ears of a drowsy man," ears that "listen to the voice of God, no matter how or when or where it comes."

Dr. Cordon asks, speaking of hearing: "Are your ears keen - the ears of your mind, your heart, your spirit? Do you not know that our actions and lives take on the quality of our hearing? God has five voices with which He speaks to us: the outer voice of nature, the inner voice of conscience, the intimate voice of circumstances, the tender voice of the babe when you are in its presence, the plain and unmistakable voice in the Bible. How keen and responsive is our hearing?"

*"They have ears to hear, and hear not"* (Ezek. 12:2). *"Bring forth . . . the deaf that have ears"* (Is. 43:8). *"Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your ears"* (Deut. 5 :1). *"Hear . . . my declaration with your ears"* (Job 13:17). *"Blessed are . . . your ears for they hear"* (Matt. 13:16). Listen to the voice of God's Word. *"He that bath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."*

Do you have ears to hear when the Bible speaks and when saved men speak and when people who love God speak of what the grace of God can do for the lost? Not what environment, not what psychology, not what philosophy, not what political schemes, not what sociology, not what science can do, but what the grace of God can

do. How God is glorified through our ears and how the Devil is shamed through our ears when we incline our ears to listen to God and turn deaf ears to Satan.

O for men with ears deaf to the voice of the Devil. O for men with ears open to the voice of God. Let him that hath ears, hear what God saith. And do what God commandeth. And go the direction that God pointeth. And hate the things God hates. And love the things God loves.

What an evil thing it is to have, when spiritual matters are in the balance, what the Bible calls "dull ears" or "itching ears" or "uncircumcised ears" or "rebellious ears"-and to be found among those of whom Paul speaks who "turn away their ears from the truth" (II Tim. 4:4).

Isn't that a beautiful way to answer God, "Speak, for Your servant hears." Eli taught Samuel how to listen to God, and if we are going to be men and women of God today, we must learn how we can hear what God is saying to us. We do so in a number of ways that I will discuss briefly here. We must learn the spiritual discipline of listening. The spiritual discipline of listening requires that we listen.

## EXPECTANTLY

If we are going to listen to God, we must come to Him expectantly. We must anticipate His speaking to us. Jeremiah 33:3 exemplifies this eagerness when it quotes God, "Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know."

Throughout Scripture we have the promise that God will indeed speak to us, but if we come to Him doubting His ability to speak, we will have a difficult time listening. Expectantly believing the promises of God is expressing faith, without which "it is impossible to please Him" (see Heb. 11:6). We should all have great expectations when it comes to hearing Jehovah speak.

Expectancy is based on reliability. When Elijah confronted the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of the Asherah, he did so with a boldness that seemed to border on downright insolence. After mocking the false prophets who were unable to call down fire from heaven to consume the prepared sacrifice of oxen, Elijah took his turn. You can almost imagine the smug grin on his face as he readied himself to call upon the God of Israel.

Before he did so, however, he had someone pour four large pitchers of water on the wood and oxen. For good measure, he had them drench the wood with four more pitchers, and just in case anyone thought it wasn't wet enough, he added another four, so

that the *"water ran all around the altar; and he also filled the trench with water"* (1 Kings 18:35) . Was he expecting God to answer?

You know he was. He knew who the living, true God was because he had already seen God predict and execute drought. He had already witnessed His power at work in bringing the widow of Zarephath's son back to life. He had seen God's provision for her in supernaturally replenishing the bowl of flour and the jar of oil.

Elijah expected God to answer because He had faithfully responded in the past. Elijah's God is also our God, and His reliability hasn't altered one iota.

## QUIETLY

The psalmist said, "Be still, and know that I am God" (Ps. 46:10). If we are to listen to God, we must be quiet and let Him do the talking. Too many of us, when we pray, simply read off a list of requests, get up, and walk off. Instead of listening to God, we only report our requests to Him. How can God speak to us if we don't take time to listen? Quietness is essential to listening. If we are too busy to listen, we won't hear. If we spend night after night watching television, and then try to listen, we will find our minds jammed with carnal interference. It takes time and quietness to prepare to listen to God. *"My soul, wait silently for God alone, For my expectation is from Him"* (Ps. 62:5).

For some years I lived in the heart of London almost within sight of Big Ben, the huge clock at the top of the tower surmounting the Houses of Parliament which tolls out the hours with its iron tongue. Through the day, because of the noise of the traffic, I could not hear from my home the booming of the bell, but at night in the hush of the dark, it could be heard distinctly. Midnight is the time to listen.

## PATIENTLY

God will not tell us some things instantaneously. We will hear some special revelations only after having waited a season of time. One of the reasons is simply that we're not always ready. Because of that, God will sometimes withhold information until we are prepared to listen.

We must be willing to listen to Him patiently, because these times may draw out and stretch our faith. He has promised to speak to our hearts, so we can expect Him to, but He is not compelled to tell us everything we want to know the moment we desire the information.

We'd like to say, "Lord, here's my order today. Please give me an answer before I get up off my knees." It may be weeks later before God speaks to us about this, not because He has forgotten, but because in the process of waiting, He is changing and preparing us to hear His message, which we may not have received had He spoken instantaneously.

## ACTIVELY

To hear God we must actively wait and meditate upon His Word. Colossians 3:16 declares, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."

If we only know the Word selectively and dwell on one particular favorite subject, we fail to seek the whole counsel of God. The way we become wealthy and overflowing with the truth of the Word is to meditate upon Scripture, search it out, digest it, and apply it to our hearts.

## CONFIDENTLY

We must be confident that when we listen to God, we will hear what we need to hear. It may not always be what we wish to hear, but God communicates to us what is essential in our walk with Him.

Would we withhold information from our children that they would need to possess in order to be obedient to our instructions? Would we tell them, "Here's what I want you to do," and then not provide them with information? Certainly not. The Lord Jesus said, *"If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!"* (Matt. 7:11).

## DEPENDENTLY

As we come to God, we must come in recognition that we are totally dependent upon the Holy Spirit to teach us truth. If we come to Him with a prideful attitude, it will be difficult for the Holy Spirit to instruct us. In 1 Corinthians 2:7-11 Paul wrote:

“But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him."

But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.

There's no way for us to hear from God apart from the ministry of the Holy Spirit. When God speaks through others or through circumstances, it is the work of the Spirit.

## OPENLY

We must come to God openly. Second Timothy 3:16 is a familiar passage in which Paul wrote, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."

To listen openly means to be willing to hear God correct us as well as comfort us, to hear God convict us as well as assure us. We may be looking for a word of comfort from God when He may have a word of correction. If we come to Him only for comfort and prosperity, only for what is soothing to the ear, then we will not always hear what God has to say.

If we are unwilling to hear the correction, before long our need for correction will dramatically increase. As we listen to Him, humbly depending upon the Holy Spirit, God will bring to our minds areas that need to be corrected. We must accept both the positive and the negative.

## ATTENTIVELY

Listening to God demands our full attention. If He speaks through His Word (through His Spirit, through others, and through circumstances), then we must live every day attentively and alertly.

## CAREFULLY

Hebrews 4:12 tells us about the power of the Word. It says, *"For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart"*

In this verse, God informs us that everything we hear is to be sifted through the Word. Before we accept anything into our lives, we should filter it through Scripture and eliminate anything that contradicts Scripture. If it is contrary to the Word of God, it should be purged. That is why we must listen to Him carefully, because the Word of God reveals the innermost intentions and motivations of our lives. The Word of God pulls back the veil so that we can see the reality of all that is about us. The light of the Word illuminates everything enabling us to discern the truth from error. Whatever we hear we must thoroughly check out against the absolute standard of His truth.

## SUBMISSIVELY

We need to listen to God submissively, because sometimes when He speaks to our hearts, we will not like what we hear. When the Lord tells us something we don't want to hear, we may not react in total obedience. But God doesn't get hostile over our rebellious spirits, that's not His response. He knew us before we ever came to listen to Him, and He knew exactly how we would respond. He may be grieved by our negative reaction, but He doesn't send down a squadron of angry angels to destroy us. He knows we will struggle with certain things.

## GRATEFULLY

When we come to the Father, we should have a grateful attitude. We should be grateful the Father would love us enough to send His only begotten Son to the cross; grateful for the crucifixion; grateful for our salvation; grateful that God has plucked us out of the kingdom of darkness and put us into the kingdom of light. As Paul explained in Philippians 4:6 and 7, *"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."*

Out of the billions of people who make up this universe, God is interested in you. He possesses intimate knowledge of you in His incomparable, indescribable mind. When you come to Him, you should draw near with a thankful heart, because you do not come in contact with a heavenly Father who speaks to the masses, but one who speaks to individuals. That should invoke your unlimited gratitude.

## REVERENTLY

A reverent heart should be the foundation of hearing God. We should be in awe that we can speak to the God who hung the sun and world on nothing, the God who created all the intricacies of human life.

We should be humble that this same omnipotent God is quietly willing to listen to us, while simultaneously giving direction to the vastness of the universe. His total, concentrated and undisturbed attention is focused upon us individually. That ought to humble us and create within us a reverence that acknowledges God for the mighty Creator He is.

Listening is SO important.

(Altar call or invitation)

A man sitting in a diner eating. Hears the clanging of the warning signal of a coming train across the street from the diner. He looks out and sees the guardrail coming down and then he hears the rumbling of the freight train on the track. Then he sees a car coming down the road at a high rate of speed and heads strait for the crossing. The train sounds the loud horn over and over but he car crashes through the guardrail and into the train. The man rushes out of the diner and pulls a young man out of the twisted wreck. The young man takes a few more breaths and then dies. The man from the diner wraps him in his own coat as the rail road engineer who has stopped the train rushes up and says with tears in his eyes, Why didn't he listen? Why didn't he listen? Our eternal destiny hinges on how we listen. First in coming to God and then in living for God. Will God ask you why didn't you listen?

### **13. THE KIND OF PERSON GOD USES**

(A message or study in leadership)

TEXT Nehemiah 1:1-11

Two of the greatest personal problems in our country are these:

1. Chronic loneliness. It is estimated that seventy-percent of the people in the U.S. every year experience chronic loneliness.
2. Poor self-esteem.

Let me ask you a question. What are you worth? Not what are the chemicals worth that make up your physical body, about \$5.00 with inflation. But what are you worth as a person? Let me ask you another question. Are you glad about who you are? Are you? Can you go home and look in the mirror and say “I’m glad I am who I am?” We all have opinions about ourselves. Whether you spend time thinking about it or not. And that opinion will pretty well determine your actions.

As the Bible says, “As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.” For most, a part of what we do in life is not dependent on who or what we are but on who or what we think we are. A good healthy self-image is to see ourselves as God sees us—no more, no less.

A healthy self-esteem is seeing ourselves as God sees us. If we don’t accept ourselves the way we are, it is very difficult to accept anyone else the way they are. If we can’t unconditionally accept ourselves, it is hard to believe that somebody else can unconditionally accept us. If we see ourselves as cheap we will live that out in relationships, in actions and thoughts.

Most people in our society base their self-image on one or two of these five areas:

1. Perception—How do I look? I don’t know how women do it reading those glamour magazines. I look at the glamour magazines and I am not even a woman and I get depressed. Those magazines are saying you really need to look like this to be anything at all.
2. Performance—How do I do? Usually it is how do I do in relationships with other people.
3. Possessions—What do I have?
4. Positions—How important am I?

## 5. Power—What can I do?

And anyone that builds their self-perception, their self-image, on one of these five, or two or three of these five areas are going to become very frustrated with life.

The great question should be, Am I what God wants? Do I look the way God wants? Am I handling my possessions the way that pleases God?

We are all familiar with Hans Christian Andersen's charming story of the Ugly Duckling. How well we remember that the scrawny, disappointed duckling developed into an enviable swan!

While a fledgling, he was the object of ridicule and jesting. But what he did not know was his innate difference from his swimming companions. At long last his true nature emerged; he was one of the most graceful of birds, a swan!

This is precisely the teaching of the well-known parable of the talents. In it no one was left empty-handed. Everybody had something wonderful. Even the man with one talent was made to see that he, too, could serve God with honor and gratitude. This is most comforting, for there are far more one-talented people in the world than five-talented.

As Christians we must learn again and again to appreciate the importance of a single thing: "A cup of cold water," said Jesus. Not a sparrow falls but what he knows. (See Matthew 10:42.)

One link in a chain means much in a chain whether that chain is short or long, small or great. One brick in a wall is of value, whether the wall be high or low. One shingle in a roof is of great worth, even though not one shingle but many shingles make a roof. One wheel is of immeasurable value on a railroad, even though the wheel may be smaller and weigh less than other wheels. One soldier counts in an army, even though not one soldier but many soldiers make an army. One letter is essential to a complete alphabet and alphabet can not function adequately without all the letters. If the letter A or S were missing from the alphabet—how greatly would writers be handicapped! One figure is necessary in the multiplication table—if that table is not working it will be havoc among mathematicians. If one digit were missing forever—what would men do? One note counts on a sheet of music. Ask musicians--they know. One key on an organ is indispensable. Ask the organist what trouble and confusion they

meet when one key is awry. If a young man comes to marry and one girl—just one, the one he loves—refuses to be present, the same young man will learn in bitterness the value of one. If, when it is a young woman who stands at the altar for marriage vows, one man—just one, **the** one—does not marry her there, her joy will turn to sorrow.

Did you know that Governor Morton of Massachusetts was elected to office in 1839 by one vote? Have you forgotten that in 1876 Rutherford B. Hayes won over Samuel Jones Tilden by one electoral vote for the presidency of the U. S.? Did you know that California came into the union by a single vote? Oliver Cromwell went to Parliament on a one-vote majority. One vote sent Charles I of England to the scaffold.

Talents, be they many or few, are not museum pieces but gifts of God. He expects the able man to perform exceedingly well. He expects the average man to be equally as faithful; and He condemns the man, whatever his capacity, who becomes afraid, withdraws, and buries his talent in the ground.

You see, the very core of the parable is not success but faithfulness. Jesus did not say, “Well done, good and successful servant.” He said, “Well done good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master” (Matthew 25:21).

He expects us to be faithful!

The parable is a challenge to faith, to adventure. The Christian life is a hazardous one. If you play it safe, you die on base. Here the individual is challenged to walk untried paths, to be courageously alert and venturesome for God.

Dr. John L. Slaughter reminds us that when Admiral Richard E. Byrd went to the South Pole, the Columbia Broadcasting System had a contract to carry all of his reports from that expedition. There was considerable excitement accompanying the initial broadcast. One of the New York engineers went home for lunch. While he was eating, his phone rang. He answered it hurriedly and, in his haste, forgot to hang up the receiver.

Mr. Byrd came on, but something was wrong with the reception. This particular engineer was needed. The studio phoned him but, of course, his phone did not ring, only the busy signal sounded. Then CBS, realizing the problem, radioed Admiral Byrd to tell George to hang up his receiver. This he did. The engineer was reached and he returned to the studio immediately to correct the difficulty.

Not only was the shortest route from the studio to George's home by way of the South Pole, but the skilled man was very much needed. He had the know-how. The lack of his talent was telling!

In the realm of physical adventure, Byrd was a five-talented man. CBS's engineer, a less renowned man, was needed desperately for this important broadcast to be successful. Byrd needed him, and CBS was frantic for him. He knew how to correct the faulty connection. He had something wonderful!

You, too, have something wonderful! This is the lingering lesson from the parable of the talents. In the challenge of the Great Commission every Christian in all the world is needed to extend the voice and the vision of the Lord Jesus. The broadcast of good news depends on all of us.

Indeed, you have a talent—something that is distinctive, something that was given you by God, which He expects you to use in His service. If you are brilliant, then God expects you to use your mind to advance His kingdom. If you have been blessed with material things, God expects you to pay more than a person that is eking out a living. If you have some aptitude in art or some mechanical skill, God expects you to glorify His kingdom through that gift.

Whatever the talent, it is needed. And when you faithfully spend yourself in the service of God, you may be assured of the continuing commendation, "Well done!"

Remember the value of one. One plus God is always a majority. We see this in so many Bible characters.

There was Noah—refusing "to accept the position of the world as final." He built an ark and saved the world but it was Noah plus God.

There was Abraham Who came out of his own country into one that God showed him and he claimed it for God but only with God's help

There was Jacob who became a prince who had power with God. From him came the twelve tribes and the mighty Savior of the world. But it was Jacob plus God.

There was Joseph. He became a power in Egypt although his brothers meant to destroy him. He saved his family and the chosen people of God but it was Joseph plus God. As we read:

“Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall: the archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him, but his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob” (Genesis 49:22-24).

There was Moses who took Pharaoh in one hand and God in the other and shook that kingdom to its very foundation. But it was Moses plus God.

There was Job who has become a beacon to sufferers everywhere and at all times with his, “Though He slay me, yet will I serve Him.” But it was Job plus God.

It was Samuel plus God.

It was David plus God.

It was Elijah plus God. And on and on. We could speak of Jonah, and Isaiah, and Amos, and Ezekiel and Jeremiah—all accomplished great things for God but only with His divine help. It was each of them plus God.

And, of course, there was Paul, who was stoned by the Jews, beaten by the Romans, mistrusted by his own yet he preached with power as he compassed the earth with the truths of redemption. He was “more than a conqueror through Christ for whom he counted all things but loss.” But it was Paul plus God.

In all cases, it was one man plus God—the human plus the divine—men and women plus God. “The sword of the Lord and Gideon.”

If God used them He can use you. Always remember that God wants to use you.

In the book of Nehemiah there is revealed the kind of person God uses. If you are interested in leadership, you will like the book of Nehemiah. Nehemiah is a story of an ordinary man with an extraordinary vision who was able to overcome tremendous obstacles and initiate thousands of people to make that vision a reality.

Here is a 90-second synopsis of the history of Israel up to the time of Nehemiah. The Jewish race began with God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:2: “I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you.” The nation of Israel was small and obscure until the time of David. Through his leadership Israel became strong and prosperous. David’s son, Solomon, inherited the throne, but Solomon didn’t remain faithful to God. God had promised Israel that if they lived and obeyed Him, He would bless their nation,

but if they turned away, He would judge them. Israel did turn away from God—and they were judged by God. This is what happened....

The army of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, raided Israel. Buildings and homes were destroyed, Jerusalem was devastated, the Temple was demolished, and the great wall around the city was burned to the ground. Thousands of Jews were killed; the rest were made to walk 800 miles to Babylon and were forced into slavery. About 70-years later Babylon was conquered by the Persians. The new king was kind, and he allowed a group of Jews, led by a man name Zerubbable, to make the trip back to Jerusalem. When they arrived, they began to rebuild the Temple.

About 60-years later, a second generation of slaves, led by Ezra, returned to Jerusalem. Nehemiah picks up the story about 14 years after that, around the time he received a visit from one of his brothers, who had been in Jerusalem with Ezra's group. He writes:

“In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa, Hanani, one of my brothers came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnants that survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem” (Nehemiah 1:1-2).

Nehemiah asked about **Jerusalem** and he didn't like the answer he was given. They told him the wall of Jerusalem had been broken down and the gates had been burned. This new upset him, so he decided to do something about it: Nehemiah decided to rebuild the wall. And he did.

The first question that needs to be asked in the message is, “What was it about Nehemiah that made him the kind of person God could use? The first chapter of Nehemiah shows us four characteristics of the kind of person God uses.

## **I. GOD USES PEOPLE HE CAN TRUST**

“I was a cupbearer to the king” (Nehemiah 1:11).

What does being a cupbearer have to do with being trustworthy? The title may not sound impressive—it sounds like being a dishwasher or a waiter—but it was much more than that. The cup bearer was the one who tasted the king's wine before he drank it and tasted the king's food before he ate it—so if someone attempted to poison the king, it would be known by the death of the cup bearer.

A strong friendship often developed between the king and his cupbearer. The king knew he could trust Nehemiah; Nehemiah was a loyal slave.

When God needs someone to do a job for Him, this is the kind of person He looks for. Some people want to be used by God, but they are not trustworthy. We make the mistake of thinking that when the big opportunity comes up we'll jump in and serve God with all we've got. But the fact is, if we can't be trusted to do the little things with a spirit of excellence, we won't get the chance to do the big things. Jesus said, "You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things" (Matthew 25:23).

A good example of this is David. God made David King Of Israel because he had proven himself to be faithful. It was David's responsibility to watch his father's sheep—and he did it well. In fact, on several occasions he risked his own life to protect his sheep (I Samuel 17:34). God knew He could trust David to be King of Israel, because David was a responsible shepherd boy. God knew He could trust Nehemiah to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem because Nehemiah had served with loyalty as a slave. God looks for people He can trust.

## **II. GOD USES PEOPLE WITH COMPASSION**

"They said to me, 'Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.' When I heard these things I sat down and wept" (Nehemiah 1:3-4).

Nehemiah was genuinely moved by what he heard. Jerusalem, the city of God, had been stripped of its glory. The once great and beautiful city was now in shambles, and this grieved Nehemiah. He hurt for his ancestors; he felt the pain of his countrymen.

A man was flying back from Europe and began talking to the lady sitting next to him. Her name was Paulina; she was from Poland. As they began talking about families, Paulina mentioned that she had a son in Boston and a daughter in Israel. The man made a comment about Paulina being Jewish, and Paulina replied, "I am not Jewish, but my daughter is." Then she told this story, "When the Nazis came to Paulina's village in Poland to round up the Jews for transport to the camps, no one knew what was happening but everyone sensed something dreadful; the smell of death was in the air. Paulina was doing her weekly shopping near the train station on the day the Nazis arrived. Gestapo officers were pushing the Jewish villagers onto the train.

Paulina watched as one officer shoved a woman who had a little girl with her. The officer grabbed the Jewish woman and asked roughly, “Is this your child?” The woman stopped, and looking strait at Paulina, said, “No, the child is hers.” Paulina took that little girl by the hand, and together they watched the soldiers force the Jewish woman onto the train. The man sitting next to her on the plane said to Paulina, “You mean you took this little girl to be your own?” Paulina said, “Yes, What else could I have done?”

God put Paulina in that train station on that day because He knew she had compassion to what needed to be done.

One of the greatest ministries being done in churches today is discipleship training—where one person spends time (on a regular basis) with a new Christian, in order to help them grow. This is how Jesus went about His ministry; it’s the most effective way of building people into strong disciples.

If your heart is not moved with compassion over the needs of other people, you are simply not leadership material. But, if seeing what needs to be done compels you to get involved, then you have what it takes to be used by God.

### **III. GOD USES PEOPLE COMMITTED TO PRAYER**

“For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven “ (Nehemiah 1:4).

Gladstone said, “Talk about the questions of the time: there is but one question, and that is how to get the truths of the Bible into contact with the hearts and minds of the people?”

That is such an important question that I am making a sincere and desperate effort to tell you what the Bible says about the vital problems of life. If we gave more time to some of these things and learned the laws of life found in the Bible, we would be better and happier people.

One of the most important truths our minds need to contact and to practice is prayer.

We are living in an age of the colossal and the super-colossal; an age when nothing seems impossible. Man can span bays and canyons with his bridges; he can fly swiftly in the air even to other planets and can build his buildings toward the sky. The

Christian should be the first person to believe the impossible as long as he can exercise himself in prayer.

Jesus presents our most striking example of practical praying. Of Him it was said, “As he was praying, the fashion of his countenance was altered” (Luke 9:29 R.V.). Prayer has a transforming effect, not only on our conditions, but our character; not only on what we face, but on our faces. If we had communion with God as real and genuine as Jesus did, the fashion of our countenance would be altered. It would transform us from within until the very lines of our face would be like God.

Prayer would have its effect upon our lives by lifting us above our cares, by giving mastery over our weaknesses, by refining our natures with divine purgatives.

The Bible says some very definite things about prayer. And what it says about prayer is—not to offer prayer for us to say, but to lay bare the spiritual secrets that produce results in prayer. These are real causes that produce practical effects.

I noticed one day in reading I John 3:22 that it said, “And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, **because** we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.” It was the word “because.” The cause of real success in prayer is a “because.” It is a spiritual or moral condition that we have to fulfill.

Let me list some of these “because” of prayer and remind you in doing so that they are the practical secrets of a new and greater experience in prayer.

1. The because of asking.  
“Ye have not, because you ask not” (James 4:2).

Asking is essential to praying, not in the sense of giving God information, but in putting ourselves in touch with God through the bond and avenue of prayer. God does not need to be informed, but we need to be conformed to all the spiritual conditions that make an answer to our prayer possible. This can only be done by asking.

Ask Him and then trust Him.

Ask Him and then obey Him.

Ask Him and then follow Him.

Ask Him and then expect Him.

## 2. The because of the promise.

Of Abraham, that great man of prayer and faith, and consequently of such large performance and wide success, it was said: “And being fully persuaded that, what he (God) had promised, He (God) was able to perform.”

Abraham prayed according to God’s promise. The Bible is full of promises. Pray on the basis of these promises and you stand at the threshold of new things.

According to Abraham’s experience, God’s performance is based upon God’s promises and His promises are ratified by our prayers.

The prayer for wisdom should be based on James 1:5-8.

The prayer for daily needs should be based on Philippians 4:19.

The prayer for peace of mind should be based on Isaiah 26:3.

The prayer for salvation should be based on Acts 16:31.

The prayer for forgiveness should be based on I John 1:9.

The prayer for comfort should be based on II Corinthians 1:3-4.

## 3. The because of living.

“And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments and do those things that are pleasing in his sight” (I John 3:22).

This is not a system or religious order. It is not if we do that, God will do this. It is rather an adjustment of our standard of living to God’s standard of life.

The average person’s attitude toward prayer is not fair. They ignore God and God’s laws and God’s Book and God’s day; then when they get into trouble and prays without effect, they complain about a hard-hearted God and a cruel deity. But what has their life revealed that they cared even a little bit about God?

It is “because we keep His commandments” that “we receive of Him.” And this is simply the adjustment of life to divine law, the law of righteousness, holiness and faith.

4. The because of faith.

“And all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive” (Matthew 21:22).

It is not the form of our prayers that counts nearly so much as the faith of our prayers.

But the question constantly arises in inexperienced minds—what is faith? Faith is intelligent conviction that in prayer we are dealing with a God who is capable of doing the impossible, of abiding with us in our predicament, and of directing us in our ordinary life. And it is also the sincere commitment of the matter in question to Him, so that after we have told God all about it we trust Him with it.

5. The because of importunity.

“I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of him importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you” (Luke 11:8-9).

This refers to both time and intensity elements in prayer. God has a way of winnowing our prayers to separate the “want” prayers from the “need” prayers; the foolish from the wise; the expedient from the necessary. Most prayers are fleeting fancies. But the persistent, importunate prayers are intensified by the process of waiting.

Dr. A. J. Gordon said, “You can do more than pray after you have prayed, but you cannot do more than pray until you have prayed.”

Some one wrote, “I KNOW HE HEARS.”

“I may not always know the way  
Wherein God leads my feet;  
But this I know, that round my path  
His love and wisdom meet

And so I rest content to know  
He guides my feet where'er I go.

Sometimes above the path I tread  
The clouds hang dark and low;  
But thro' the gloom or thro' the night  
My heart no fear can know,  
For close beside me walks a Friend  
Who whispers low 'Until the end'

I may not always understand  
Just why He sends to me  
Some bitter grief, some heavy loss,  
But though I cannot see—  
I kneel and whisper thro' my tears,  
A prayer for help, and know He hears.”