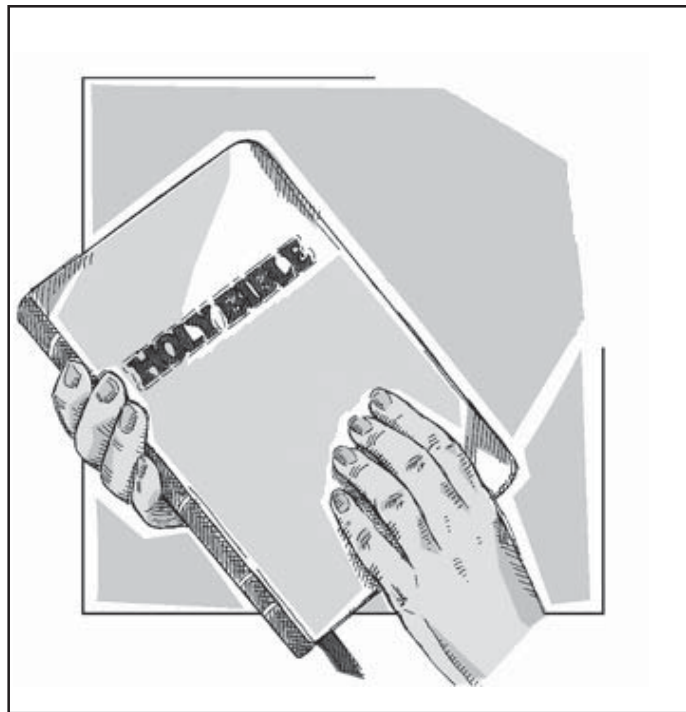


Sermon Thoughts

For

Funeral Occasions



Wayne Coats

This book was printed in the United States of America
by

Sain Publications

Pulaski, TN 38478
(931) 363-6905

PREFACE

I shall not forget the struggles which I faced as a young preacher when time would come for me to assist at a funeral. The first time I found myself in such a dilemma was when I was preaching one summer in Avon Park, Florida. As a seventeen year old lad, the occasion was completely new to me, and believe me, I struggled. What was there for me to depend upon? Somehow I managed to work through the experience, but I have often reflected upon the matter and reasoned that help was needed so very much.

As these lessons are sent forth, perhaps they will be of help to some young preacher when he is called upon to assist families in their darkest hour.

These are but mere seed thoughts, and however they may be used, it is hoped that good will be derived upon the part of any who may read this material. After my bouts with deathly sickness and pain, it can truly be said that I have been able so far to keep my faith and hope alive when darkness engulfed my way. If I can encourage someone to be faithful to the end, my labor will be rewarded.

Wayne Coats
705 Hillview
Mt. Juliet, TN 37122
WC/el

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Rebekah - A Pitcher On Her Shoulder	7
2. When Jesus Was On The Mountain	15
3. God, A Present Help	21
4. Song Of Saints On Higher Ground	27
5. We Are His Offspring	31
6. Desirous Of Being With Christ	39
7. My God, My God, Why?	45
8. I Can Go To Him	55
9. Jesus Loves Me, This I Know	61
10. But We Had Such Hopes	67
11. We'll Understand It Better	73
12. Troubles ~ Troubles ~ Troubles	81
13. When Jesus Faced Death	89
14. Children ~ Tragedies And God Who Is Able..	95
15. Fourscore And Ten	101
16. Not Fitten' To Pray?	109
17. A Final Farewell	113
18. No More Pain.....	119
19. Good Grief	127
20. A Time To Mourn	135

Chapter 1

Rebekah ~ A Pitcher On Her Shoulder

INTRODUCTION

There are countless thousands gathered each day in many places over the world to memorialize their beloved dead. This is most fitting. One of the blessings for which we can be most thankful is that we do not have to turn our loved ones over to the state when they die, as is true in some nations.

Today, we shall make some comparisons between a very gracious and lovely woman in the distant past, and the beautiful women who are being called from our homes and communities.

When Abraham was an old man and well stricken in years, he decided that a proper wife needed to be found for his son Isaac. Like any good father, he desired the purest and best for his son, but in order to locate the likely prospect, he knew that he would have to send for one from another territory, and so a dutiful servant was dispatched into the region beyond the Euphrates in search of a wife for Isaac.

There lived in far away Mesopotamia a kinsman of Abraham named Bethuel. Through the providence of Jehovah, the wandering servant eventually arrived in the area where Bethuel and his family lived. In the late afternoon, the servant stopped his ten camel caravan by a well of water, "...even the time that women go out to draw water" (Gen. 24:11). As the devout servant prayed to God,

...before he had done speaking, that, behold,
Rebekah came out...with her pitcher upon her
shoulder (Gen. 24:15).

As the servant conversed with Rebekah, "...she hastened, and let down her pitcher upon her hand, and gave him drink" (Gen. 24:18). This beautiful story continues, and tells us how Rebekah became the wife of Isaac.

REBEKAH HAD BEAUTY IN HER PITCHER

We realize that a pitcher is a valuable utensil often used to carry certain things from one place to another. One may carry that which is offensive and ugly, or like Rebekah of old, one may carry that which is altogether lovely. The Bible says that Rebekah was "...very fair to look upon" (Gen. 24:16). What a wonderful quality to possess if it is carefully guarded.

The church of our Lord, the family, and the neighborhood have been so wonderfully blessed by great and godly women who moved about in their respective spheres with pitchers on their shoulders filled to the brim with the "...beauty of holiness" (Psm. 29:2). A Christian wife or mother defies an apt description. No jewel or diadem can ever compare with such beauty as we behold the face of our dear, sweet mothers, wives, and daughters.

We are sure that our Father in heaven is interested in that which is lovely and beautiful. Heaven must be such a beautiful home for the redeemed. Down here on earth God has designed by His own Loving Hand so many beautiful things. Where could we walk if God removed all the space which He uses for His flower gardens? Even the water space is used to grow lilies and sweet-scented hyacinths. The beautiful flowers blossom and bloom, then they fade away and make room for other things of beauty.

A kind and benevolent Father allows a beautiful, elect lady to walk amidst the flowers in His earthly garden for a while, and as a faithful Christian, she adds a touch of grace and adornment wherever she may chance to tread.

Eventually, like the soon-faded rose, she moves on, obviously, that she might adorn the heavenly paradise of God.

When our precious daughters are young, vibrant, and vivacious with life, with cheeks tinted by the Master Artist Himself, we esteem them to be among the fairest of thousands. No pitcher is large enough to contain their fairness and beauty. The years sail on so swiftly, and those pretty faces and pink cheeks become faded and creased. The almond tree becomes quite noticeable, and a certain segment of our society can be heard as they deprecate "faded colors." How foolish! Like radiant gems and jewels rare, the beauty of our Christian mother, wife, or daughter never grows dull or dim.

As we mournfully and methodically march onward to the final resting place in the silent city of the dead, we can be thankful to our God that the grave will not eclipse the beautiful life of a loved one.

IN HER PITCHER REBEKAH CARRIED PROMPTNESS

Let us remember that when Rebekah came to the well, it would seem that she was the first maiden to arrive with her pitcher. We might ask if there were not many other things which she could have been doing? Were there no other places to go? Why did she not come to the well and stand in line behind all the other maidens?

There are some things which can be forever left undone. So much of the trivia within our lives could be cast aside, and we would have far more room for important matters. There are those who seemingly desire to go through life without any system, order, or purpose, never on schedule, always behind time, forever at the end of the line, always late and blaming the driver; but if we will

take a good look inside their pitchers we will usually find emptiness, dust, and dryness while the real issues of life are left unattended. It is heartening to consider that Rebekah did not wait until tomorrow to do today's work. She did not wait until someone else decided to go for water, and she certainly did not wait for others to draw water for her while she sat idle. Promptness demands that we attend to important duties today, for tomorrow may never come. The words of the preacher are wise as he counsels, "Whatever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might..." (Eccl. 9:10).

SHE HAD PREPAREDNESS IN HER PITCHER

There is no ingredient more important than preparedness, and when time came to draw water, Rebekah was **prepared**. We may not be prepared in many areas, but we certainly can be prepared for death and the judgment. Many times I have stood by the casket of some dear, sweet Christian woman and tried to bring comfort, and solace to the survivors. It is so much easier for all when our loved ones are prepared. In most instances, we have time to prepare for death and eternity. I never cease to thank God for those who have carried pitchers of preparedness. How dreadful when we must assemble by the deathbed of a mother or sister knowing that had only trash in her pitcher. What can we say to give comfort when only the dregs, staleness, and scraps are found in pitchers? Should we not live so as to be remembered with praise rather than with pain? Our beloved sisters in Christ know how important preparedness can be. The ancient prophet wrote, "...prepare to meet thy God" (Amos 4:12). No more important subject can ever command one's attention.

SHE HAD PITY IN HER PITCHER

When the worn and weary servant of Abraham asked

Rebekah for some refreshing water, this fair maiden took the pitcher from her shoulder and held it

...upon her hand, and gave him drink. And when she had done giving him drink, she said, I will draw water for thy camels also, until they have done drinking (Gen. 24:18-19).

It was a most noble gesture of hospitality to draw water and give it to a strange man. We could reason that he would be able to get his own water rather than take that which had been obtained by another, but Rebekah did not object to his request. Think of the added effort of drawing enough water to satisfy a herd of camels. Ah, but like many good Christian women, she carried the pitcher of pity, and this makes the difference in being fit to live and prepared to die. We could not live long if there were no good women who were willing to show pity and compassion. These are the kind of people who are missed so much after they are gone.

In a world which seethes with hostility, we need every corner brightened with hospitality. It was not easy for our beloved sisters of yesteryear to draw from the well of hospitality, yet so many of them would let their pitchers sink to the very bottom of the crystal clear and refreshing wells and then bring them forth that all around might be blessed. We have such precious memories of so many who used "...hospitality one to another without grudging" (I Peter 4:9).

IN HER PITCHER WAS PERFORMANCE

The scripture states that Rebekah "hasted." She "...ran again unto the well to draw water and drew for all his camels" (v. 20). With all dispatch, and with sprightly step she performed her work. She had energy in reserve. This was due to the fact that she had not dissipated and wasted

her strength in foolish details. At a time when Jehovah needed an outstanding woman, he found in Rebekah one who was available and ready to help in His providential plans. It is certain that indolent, slothful people never seem to accomplish anything of value. They are mere dead weight to themselves and society. How does one's life differ from an insect or animal when one always lives as a parasite off of someone else? There is such a great need for life giving water to be drawn, and we can rejoice when good women spend their time helping those who are thirsty. There are some things in life which are really worth rushing after, and all of us admire those like Rebekah who are willing to hasten for a little while in pursuit of that which shall not be taken away.

SHE HAD PURITY IN HER PITCHER

One of the reasons why Abraham sent his servant so very far away was because he desired to find a pure, chaste, young maiden for Isaac. When the servant found Rebekah she was "...a virgin, neither had any man known her" (v. 16). Most of us are deeply concerned about having clean, pure, uncontaminated water for our needs. This is certainly reasonable, but we also need to be concerned about having pure, clean, chaste, and virtuous young maidens to be the wives of our sons. What Christian wants a dirty, filthy, defiled woman to be the mother of a pure, innocent baby? We applaud those godly women who live and die with pitchers of purity in their hands. There is no greater threat which looms on the horizon than that great army of lewd, vulgar, immoral, lascivious women who tramp about in their efforts to destroy themselves and others. The enemy is desperately trying to empty every pitcher of its pure contents, and we must be capable of giving helpful counsel, lend a steady hand, and be supportive of our godly sisters in their struggles.

We should greatly rejoice to know that our dear mothers and sisters maintain their purity in the midst of an impure, wicked, and adulterous generation. There is no double standard. Death is not enshrouded with gloom for a good sister in Christ who has continually thought upon that which is pure (Phil. 4:8). We honor those whose lives have been kept pure (I Tim. 5:22). We will continue to be influenced by our sisters who have sought that wisdom which from above is pure (James 3:17). When we finally get to heaven we will be eternally pure (I John 3:3). The pure in heart shall see God (Matt. 5:8). Over on the other side we will be among the pure and the blest as we drink from the pure river of water of life (Rev. 21:21). These thoughts help us as we make our way yonder to the Garden of Memories. Surely we can have the right things in each of our pitchers when life ends upon this earth.

Chapter 2

When Jesus Was On The Mountain

In many respects, our lives can be compared to the mountains and valleys. It is impossible to have high mountains without valleys, and in our lives we often find that we are deep down in the darkest of valleys, but we are also privileged to tread ever so high on sunshine's mountain.

When our blessed Lord sojourned upon this earth, He spent considerable time upon the mountains in a very literal sense. Perhaps it will encourage us to reflect a while on some of these occasions when Jesus climbed those rugged mountains.

THE MOUNTAIN OF BLESSING

And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying...Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted (Matt. 5:1-2, 4).

It is significant that Jesus began His public ministry with a series of blessings. He has said in this sermon on the mountain what all the social psychologists are trying to say, but do not know how. Not only did our Lord pronounce a blessing in His initial sermon, but in the last words ever given to poor, sinful men He declared,

Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city (Rev. 22:14).

Every act and utterance of our Lord from that first pronouncement on the mountain to that which finally came from the throne of God, has been a blessing to mankind. As a result of these wonderful lessons, we can find the strength to help us in this old world of weariness and trouble.

THE MOUNTAIN OF TEMPTATION

No child of God desires to be taken to the treacherous mountain of trial and temptation, but this is inevitable. The Son of God was so pure and just, but "...the devil taketh Him up into an exceeding high mountain..." (Matt. 4:8). Christ was subjected to the most exacting of all trials. Had there been available more difficult trials for the Saviour, surely the devil would have used them. We rejoice that the Lord did not weaken in this crucial moment. After He refused to bow before Satan, the angels came and ministered to Him.

It hurts so deeply when we have sore trials come upon us. There are times when the high mountains of heartaches seem to reach beyond our endurance. How heartbreaking to bid farewell to a dear loved one with the realization that we will never meet again on this earth! Just as our Lord was able to endure the most piercing weapons which could be unleashed by the devil, so we too must continue regardless of the hardships. There are angels of mercy all around as can be seen in our friends, neighbors, brethren, and sisters who will surely minister to our needs.

THE MOUNTAIN OF PRAYER

"...He went up into a mountain apart to pray..." (Matt. 14:23). This is something that we can do regardless of how high our mountain might be. Jesus did not wait until He was on some rugged mountain to pray, but He did find

the circumstances conducive to prayer.

The mists and the fog may be so dense about us that we can hardly see how to walk, but when the density of sorrowful clouds engulf us we can pray to Him who lives beyond the clouds of disappointment and grief. We should all be willing to meet with our Master on the mountain of prayer.

THE MOUNTAIN OF DEATH

After our Lord was arrested down in the valley, He eventually was taken to Calvary's Mountain where He died. Jesus did not relish the thought of dying, but nonetheless, it was the will of God. We must be evermore ready to ascend the hill of Calvary either as we go alone, or as we follow when our loved ones are going there. Who among us can escape the place of the skull? We know perhaps better than anything else that we are approaching our own deaths, but we prefer to look in another direction. Just as the strong forces of Jesus' day led Him to the rugged mountain of death, so will we also be seized within the clutches of death, and the grip will not be terminated until we have given up the ghost.

THE MOUNTAIN OF TRANSFIGURATION

Our Lord took three of His trusted disciples and led them up into a high mountain, "...apart by themselves: and he was transfigured before them" (Mark 9:2). We cannot understand exactly the events as recorded, but Christ was changed. He changed to a different form, being altered through the power of God. Moses and Elias had been dead for centuries but appeared and talked with Jesus. This was such an unusual event that Peter "...wist not what to say..." (Mark 9:6). Almighty God knew what to say, for His voice came out of the cloud and said, "...This is My beloved Son; hear Him" (Mark 9:7). The circumstances of Christians

being changed will not be the same as that which occurred with our Master on the mountain. Jesus was changed but continued to work and talk among men.

We know that every one of us will be led to the mountain of alteration or change. We may reflect on this and be like Peter, in that we just do not know what to say. When close friends are overshadowed by the dark clouds of death we may be speechless.

We need to realize that the earthly house of this tabernacle will be dissolved.

For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven (II Cor. 5:2).

Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord (II Cor. 5:6).

Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption (I Cor. 15:50).

...we shall all be changed (I Cor. 15:51).

How soon the change will come to each of us we cannot know, but for some it will be "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump..." (I Cor. 15:52). The only thing which matters is that our God might be able to say of each one, "This is My beloved Son."

THE MOUNTAIN OF ASCENSION

After Jesus arose from the dead, He gave directions for the disciples to go to Galilee. They "...went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them" (Matt. 2:8-16). Jesus assembled with the eleven on this mountain where He gave them the age-lasting commission to,

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son,

and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen (Matt. 28:19-20).

The sweetest promise to be claimed by man is that given by Jesus when He said, "I will be with you all the days." When our eyes become blinded with tears, the blessed Lord will be with us. When our burden becomes unbearable, the Man of Sorrows will help us. When grief shatters our lives, we can remember that our Redeemer was acquainted with grief.

The committal of our earthly remains into the bosom of mother earth is not the final chapter. We will eventually stand on the mountain of ascension from which we will arise to meet the Lord in the air and so shall we ever be with the Lord (I Thess. 4:16-18). This is the promise given to faithful children of God.

Chapter 3

God, A Present Help

INTRODUCTION

One can never fully understand the need for help and strength during the loss of a close relative, unless one has experienced such a loss. It is true that we can receive help in our time of trials, and such is promised by the Psalmist in the beautiful forty-sixth division.

GOD

It is the proper thing for sad and sorrowful man to begin with God. There is no other with which to begin. It is still true that, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Gen. 1:1).

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God (John 1:1-2).

When we are faced with the end of our earthly pilgrimage, it is right and normal for the believer to go to Him who was in the beginning. We need to call upon God because He wants us to come to Him.

HE IS OUR REFUGE

A number of years ago, a violent and death-dealing tornado swept through a community, leaving chaos, confusion and grief in its wake. A close and personal friend was caught up within the forces of fury, and several hours thereafter, he was found broken, crushed, and lacerated, a great distance from where his house had stood. Four family members were able to escape death because they fled for refuge into a storm cellar. The cellar had been prepared before the storm clouds and billows began to rage.

Since we know that a canopy of turmoil and trouble

will surely overshadow us some day, it is wise to think and prepare for such times. We should not wait until a tornado visits us with death before we plan for refuge therefrom.

God is eternal, and He has always been a refuge for His people (Deut. 33:27). When Israel conquered Canaan, cities of refuge were set aside on either side of Jordan where one could flee for safety (Joshua 20:2). The child of God has refuge on this side of Jordan's stormy banks, and there is a place of refuge over on the other side.

We do not expect the skies to be tinted with azure blue every day, nor do we think that the seas will be calm and serene. There will be seasons of storms and turbulence.

In exalting God, Isaiah said,

For thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall (Isa. 25:4).

God will be our refuge if we will permit.

The Psalmist wrote extensively pertaining to that refuge one can have in God. He said, "The Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble" (Psm. 9:9). Concerning the poor, we read, "...the Lord is his refuge" (Psm. 14:6). Again we are reminded, "The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge, Selah" (Psm. 46:7, 11). "God is known in His palaces for a refuge" (Psm. 48:3).

We should notice especially how the writer claims God as his refuge. He wrote,

Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me: for my soul trusteth in thee: yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast (Psm. 57:1).

But I will sing of thy power; yea, I will sing aloud of thy mercy in the morning: for thou hast been my defence and refuge in the day of my trouble (Psm. 59:16).

In God is my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God (Psm. 62:7).

Trust in him at all times...God is a refuge for us. Selah (Psm. 62:8).

I am as a wonder unto many; but thou art my strong refuge (Psm. 71:7).

I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust (Psm. 91:2).

But the Lord is my defence; and my God is the rock of my refuge (Psm. 94:22).

I cried unto thee, O Lord: I said, Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living (Psm. 142:5).

The concept of refuge denotes danger, and of course when there is danger, we must exercise care and caution. This is why God's faithful children have "...fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us" (Heb. 6:18).

GOD IS OUR STRENGTH

Death can be interpreted in part as a common leveler. Regardless of how strong we may have been, death is always strong enough eventually to win the battle. It hurts to see close friends and relatives begin to weaken and become emaciated by disease. We work and pray for continual strength upon their part as well as ours, but slowly our physical strength ebbs away to such an extent that we cannot emerge from death's valley. For one who realizes the approaching day of death, emotional and spiritual strength is greatly needed. It is for such a time as

this that man has ever turned to God for strength.

When Paul wrote his last letter to Timothy from the prison in Rome, he said,

At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion (II Tim. 4:16-17).

It was a blessing that the old apostle did not depend upon the brethren for strength. In a crucial time, God provided the strength. Isaiah wrote, "Trust ye in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength" (Isa. 26:4). He also said,

Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation (Isa. 12:2).

Just as the Psalmist made God his refuge, in like manner he relied upon God for strength. He said, "I will love thee, O Lord, my strength" (Psm. 18:1). He prayed,

Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer (Psm. 19:14).

A question is asked,

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid (Psm. 27:1)?

In affirmation again, the writer declared,

The Lord will give strength unto his people; the Lord will bless his people with peace (Psm. 29:11).

But the salvation of the righteous is of the Lord:
he is their strength in the time of trouble (Psm.
37:39).

Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; in
whose heart are the ways of them (Psm. 84:5).

What a blessing for weak, frail children to look unto God
for help and strength! For one to refuse the help of God is
to be destroyed, taken away, plucked up, and rooted out.

Lo, this is the man that made not God his
strength; but trusted in the abundance of his
riches, and strengthened himself in his
wickedness (Psm. 52:7).

There is no comfort for anyone who spurns the strength of
Jehovah.

GOD IS A PRESENT HELP

When God created man and placed him in Eden, there
was a need for someone to be a helper (Gen. 2:18). Eve
was given to man, but with all her assistance and care, it
was obvious that man needed to look to Jehovah for help.

During the reign of Jehoshaphat, several armies joined
together to fight against Judah,

And Judah gathered themselves together, to ask
help of the Lord: even out of all the cities of
Judah they came to seek the Lord (II Chron. 20:4).

When Amaziah reigned in Judah, he hired one hundred
thousand men of Israel to help in battle, but a man of God
came to the king and said,

...let not the army of Israel go with thee...for God
hath power to help, and to cast down....The Lord
is able to give thee much more than this (II
Chron. 25:7-9).

Later when Hezekiah reigned, Sennacherib and the
Assyrians besieged Judah. Hezekiah said,

God, A Present Help

With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the Lord our God to help us, and to fight our battles... (II Chron. 32:8).

Hezekiah knew the futility of trusting in the strength of man. He believed as the Psalmist who said, "Give us help from trouble: for vain is the help of man" (Psm. 108:12). We need to remember the centuries old psalm which states,

I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth (Psm. 121:1-2).

Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God (Psm. 146:5).

When the peerless apostle gave his answer before Agrippa and Festus, he stated, "Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day..." (Acts 26:22). We can find mercy and grace to help in time of need if we will be submissive to the will of God (Heb. 4:16). The trials and troubles may mount up about us, but we must continue to be strong in the Lord and the strength of His might (Eph. 6:10).

So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me (Heb. 13:6).

Chapter 4

Song Of Saints On Higher Ground

TEXT: REVELATION 14:3

INTRODUCTION

There comes to each person a day when the heart is aglow, and songs flow readily from within. We remember such glad days, especially when we become aged and infirmed. Also, there are times when the sunshine is covered with the clouds, and we experience a feeling of psychic numbness when a song just cannot seem to be uttered without great and painful effort.

WE ALL HAVE MOURNFUL SONGS TO SING

This was true of Israel when they were captives over in the land of Babylon. They had been conquered by the wicked enemy, and marched as animals all the way to Babylon. The cruel and inhuman treatment they experienced is not detailed in the Bible. After they arrived in the land of Babylon, their captors made fun of them and said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion" (Psm. 137:3). The weeping prophet of Israel surely sang a sad song as he reflected upon the doom of his people. His cry was,

Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered (Jer. 8:22)?

When Jonathan and Saul died, young David composed a very mournful song in which he said,

How are the mighty fallen! The beauty of Israel is slain! But tell it not in Gath, nor publish it in the streets of Askelon, lest the daughters of the

Song Of Saints On Higher Ground

Philistines rejoice and the uncircumcised triumph. From the blood of the slain and the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan turned not back and the sword of Saul returned not empty. Saul and Jonathan were lonely in their lives and in their deaths they were not divided; they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions (II Sam. 1:19-21).

The song of Paul and Silas was flowing forth from two humble saints who were bowing beneath the burden of a heavy beating, and who were fastened in the prison stocks. How could they possibly sing while in such horrible circumstances? The content of their song consisted of giving praise to God. The Christian can have strength in reserve, while wrestling with agony and anxiety.

There is not a thing which knocks us to our knees as quickly as the death of a dear, precious loved one. Physical stripes would gladly be accepted as a substitute if such were possible, but we know that the song of death must be sung eventually. Happy is he who can sing while mourning and receive comfort from God (Matt. 5:4). No person can possibly know the billions of sorrowful souls who have had to sing the wailing song of death from the time of righteous Abel until present.

Our kinsmen are called upon to cross over Jordan, and the sad farewell is unbearable for a moment, but in more reflective moments, we can burst forth with a song of triumph like Moses when Israel had crossed over the sea. Moses said,

...I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation... (Exod. 15:1-2).

The pale horse and its rider races forth to conquer, but thankfully such will be swallowed up in complete victory after awhile.

Because of our love for a relative, a friend or a fellow Christian, our cup runs over with grief when death claims one of them. Often times there is a dark pall of gloom which hovers about us, but we should try hard to realize that for the sainted dead, it is truly a day of triumph. We can sing for others as well as for ourselves the songs of triumph.

As we sit in a funeral chapel, church building, or stand beside a new made grave, there is only one song that can assuage our grief, make our burden lighter and give us renewed strength for tomorrow. This is to be able to sing the sweet song of the Lamb which is indeed the song of redemption. Zacharias could sing, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people" (Luke 1:68). Such was a wonderful song of gratitude. Mary could pour her heart out in rejoicing as she sang, "My soul doth magnify the Lord..." (Luke 1:46).

The song of all songs is the song of redemption which even the angels cannot sing. It will be only for those who have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. Even now the children of God can join together and sing redemption's glad song. The poverty stricken, infirmed, discouraged and distraught can sing a song of delight. There are thousands and thousands of things about us which should forever remind us to keep singing unto Him who is worthy of more praise than any can ever give.

Who can bask in the warm sunshine, and not be mindful of the Sun of righteousness? When the sable curtain of night has been drawn about us and we behold the mystery of a million twinkling stars, do we not sing about the Beautiful Star of Bethlehem? While walking amidst the

flowers in the meadow, are we not enjoined to sing about the Lily of the Valley and the Rose of Sharon? All creatures great and small serve to remind us of Jesus the Lamb who was slain to purchase man from the clutches of sin. What a song of delight will we be able to sing forever. The rivulets and rivers help us to be reminded of the fountain of living waters.

Oh, that we had ten thousand tongues with which to praise our blessed Saviour who is Lord of Life and Victor over the grave. Our days on earth are limited by time, but eternity has no limitations. What will it be like to join with the ransomed throng and sing the song of salvation? Of course, in our mortal bodies, we grow weary of work, and even singing, but in heaven the angels of God never grow weary of serving Jehovah. Just so, faithful saints will come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads. Then let us brush aside our tears to see more clearly how wonderful it will be for father, mother, son, or daughter, sister or brother to be a part of the heavenly chorus.

O sing unto the Lord a new song; for he hath done marvellous things: his right hand, and his holy arm, hath gotten him the victory. Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all the earth: make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise. Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills be joyful together. Serve the Lord with gladness: come before his presence with singing. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise (Psalm 100:4).

Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen (I Tim. 6:16).

Chapter 5

We Are Also His Offspring

The first baby born into the world was named Cain. Although there is no information given regarding his childhood, we know his parents were Adam and Eve, and his arrival was attributed to the Lord (Gen. 4:1). Of course some people sneer at this account, and declare rather freely that such could not have happened. They do not believe that Adam and Eve came from the hand of God, and thus they reject the idea of Cain being given by the Lord.

One thing is certain, and cannot be denied, man is not an illusion but is indeed a person made in the image of God. If this is not so, then how did we come to be here as human beings? Did the mother or the baby come first? If we sneer at the Biblical account, then we cannot continue to sneer at some very pertinent questions, unless we want to appear extremely foolish to rational people and perhaps even to self.

If God did not create Eve, then woman managed to get here somehow. At least we are here, and our ancestors got started some way. The usual copout is to say that the human family just evolved. This does not answer any of my questions. Preceding the first woman or human being, evolutionists try to explain that there were only animals or sub-human beings. How they really "know" this is anyone's guess. Any book written by an evolutionist is completely filled with such expressions as, "if," "perhaps," "maybe," "probably," "likely," "plausible," "presumably," "perchance," and other such terms which are not in the realm of certainty. It would be very interesting for those

who may doubt this, to go purchase a brand new pen which uses red ink. Read a book written by an evolutionist and see that each uncertain term is underscored in red. When one has finished, it will be obvious why a new pen was suggested. Obvious why a new pen was suggested? The book will be very red, if the ink holds out. A very simple question might be asked,

If a sub-human gave birth to a human being,
was it born as a fully developed, grown, human
mother? If it was not a fully developed mother
at birth, then was it born a fully developed baby?

No human being has ever been conceived and subsequently born by sub-humans or animals; moreover, no human has ever been transformed from a mere animal. The process which God gave after he made Adam and Eve has been in existence throughout the centuries and will continue until time shall end.

We must not allow ourselves to be deluded by the unfounded theories of those who deny the existence of God and reject men having been made by and in the image of God. When Paul stood on Mars Hill in Athens, he boldly declared,

For in him we live, and move, and have our
being; as certain also of your own poets have
said, For we are also his offspring. Forasmuch
then as we are the offspring of God, we ought
not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold,
or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device
(Acts 17:28-29).

We seem to be unable to extricate ourselves from the devices of men as we face some of the great questions of life and death. Paul could maintain his belief in God when he was surrounded by unbelievers.

After the fall of Adam and Eve, God said to the woman,

...I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children... (Gen. 3:16).

Delitzsch comments,

That the woman should bear children was the original will of God; but it was a punishment that henceforth she was to bear them in sorrow, i.e. with pains that threatened her own life as well as that of the child.

We realize that there are sometimes complications attendant at childbirth which results in the baby, the mother, or even both of them dying.

The beloved Rachel who was the wife of Jacob was unable to bear a child. She was so perplexed that she said to Jacob, "...Give me children, or else I die" (Gen. 30:1). The desire to have children was exceedingly great among the women of old times. Eventually Rachel was able to bear a son, and she called his name Joseph. After some time had passed, Rachel was able to conceive again, and when she and Jacob came to Ephrath,

...Rachel travailed, and she had hard labour....And it came to pass, as her soul was in departing, (for she died) that she called his name Benoni: but his father called him Benjamin (Gen. 35:16, 18).

We are not able to know why Rachel had to die and leave a tiny infant to be cared for by others. The scripture is silent about this, but we do know that Rachel was not the last to die in the process of giving birth to a child. This still occurs, and we often times have no valid answers.

There is another Biblical account of a very faithful person desiring to be able to have a child born to him and his wife. We read where the Lord said,

...Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward. And Abram said, Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless... (Gen. 15:1-2)?

Abraham is wondering of what value his wealth and possessions were, if he had no child. Then it was that Jehovah took Abram outside where he could see the stars in the heavens. God promised that Abram's seed would be numberless like the stars.

One of the persons who desired very much to have a child was Hannah. She was so troubled because of her barrenness that she wept and refused to eat.

And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore. And she vowed a vow, and said, O Lord of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head (I Sam. 1:10-11).

Hannah said, "...I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit..." (v. 15). Further she declared, "...for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto" (v. 16). Eventually Hannah was able to bear a son, and she called his name Samuel saying, "...Because I have asked him of the Lord" (v. 20).

The New Testament reveals the account of a little baby being born as an answer to fervent prayer. Zacharias and Elizabeth were elderly, but had never been blessed with children. Zacharias prayed to God about the matter. An angel appeared to Zacharias and said,

...Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John (Luke 1:13).

We realize that this promise was kept when John, the forerunner of Jesus, was born.

We know that the Bible teaches Christians to pray, but we certainly do not expect God to perform miracles for us. For example, a wife might have a complete hysterectomy and be thereafter unable to conceive. No amount of wishing and praying for a child will circumvent the law of nature in this matter.

At all times we are to pray for the will of God to be done in our lives. We certainly cannot see what is best for us, but having done all we can, we leave the rest with God.

There are many situations where medication and corrective surgery can alleviate problems which have prevented young couples from having children. Even so, in these cases the laws of nature are simply altered, reshaped, or assisted in functioning properly. When we are granted the strength to have children, we should be grateful. "Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward" (Psm. 127:3).

This principle of attributing children to be the gift of God was very prominent in the Old Testament period, and in fact, there were special miracles wrought by the beneficent hand of God, enabling couples to bear children.

When Leah, the wife of Jacob conceived, she

...called his name Reuben: for she said, Surely the Lord hath looked upon my affliction; now therefore my husband will love me (Gen. 29:32).

After Jacob and Esau had been separated for several years, they eventually were able to be reunited in a very heart-warming scene. When Esau asked his brother,

...Who are those with thee? And he said, The children which God hath graciously given thy servant (Gen. 33:5).

Many years afterward, the little book of Ruth was written, and therein we learn of the marriage of Boaz and Ruth. The record states,

So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife: and when he went in unto her, the Lord gave her conception, and she bare a son (Ruth 4:13).

It was because of this profound belief in children coming from God's hand and being the offspring of God that caused parents of piety to dedicate their children unto God. There was a man named Manoah whose wife was barren.

And the angel of the Lord appeared unto the woman, and said unto her, Behold now, thou art barren, and bearest not: but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son (Judges 13:3).

The wife told her husband, and Manoah prayed to God saying, "...teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born" (v. 8).

And Manoah said, Now let thy words come to pass. How shall we order the child, and how shall we do unto him (v. 12).

The desire of these parents was to see that God's will might be followed.

Likewise, Hannah purposed that Samuel would belong to God when she declared, "...I will bring him, that he may appear before the Lord, and there abide for ever" (I Sam. 1:22).

A mother goose will instinctively watch over her goslings and be prepared to defend them at any approach of danger, but of course, a godly mother's love for her child does not derive from instinct. There is altogether a difference. We cannot really define the concept of love, but we can see the expressions of love. Even the most cruel

and wicked people usually have some love for their offspring.

One of the most wicked men mentioned in the Old Testament was "Jeroboam, the son of Nebat who made Israel to sin." He had a son who became very sick. In this time of trouble, Jeroboam remembered the prophet Ahijah who resided in Shiloh. It is very interesting that Jeroboam decided to send his wife to inquire of the prophet. Several years had passed since Jeroboam had spoken with Ahijah. He must have reasoned that since he had palaces in Shechem, Tirza and Penuel the advice of an aged prophet would not be needed. But the grave illness of his son changed his attitude in some respects.

"There is no God," the foolish saith
But none, "there is no sorrow;"
And nature oft, in time of need,
The cry of faith will borrow.

Eyes that the preacher could not school.
By wayside graves are raised
And lips say, "God be pitiful,"
Which ne'er said, "God be praised."

~ Unknown

The above description is very fitting for Jeroboam, but why does he not send to Dan or Bethel where his idol calves and altars were erected? We recall Isaiah stating,

Lord, in trouble have they visited thee, they
poured out a prayer when thy chastening was
upon them (Isa. 26:16).

Jehovah wants us to come before Him and pour out our prayers, but it is hardly befitting to have one knee bent before an image of a calf and the other knee twisted in an effort to bow before Almighty God. This was what Jeroboam was trying to do.

The wife of Jeroboam disguised herself in an attempt to keep the prophet of God from knowing her true identity. Even though he was blind, the prophet was able to discern the true identity of the disguised woman.

...the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart (I Sam. 16:7).

“He taketh the wise in their own craftiness...” (Job 5:13).

Ahijah the prophet proclaimed the news that the son would die. The mother made the heart-breaking journey from Shiloh to Tirza, and as soon as she crossed the palace threshold, the son died. It matters not whether one is the son of a slave or of a sovereign ruler, death will often pay a visit, and the wicked can mourn as well as the righteous.

As we read of the calamities which befell Jeroboam and Israel within a short time, we can learn about the horrible and tremendous suffering which Jeroboam’s child did not have to experience. Death can become a blessing in disguise to those who have their hearts set upon Jehovah.

Chapter 6

Desirous Of Being With Christ

INTRODUCTION

Man is so made that he can have what we call desires. Some of these are innate at birth. I suppose all would admit that when a little baby is born, there is the desire to have nourishment. The audible sounds of crying are expressions of not having some need or desire fulfilled. Of course, so many of our desires are learned from others. Undoubtedly, as we grow older our desires increase, and some of them may be good, whereas some can be exceedingly bad. As our desires increase, we must learn to control some of them and to fulfill others.

The saintly apostle Paul had lived a faithful and devoted life, but in his old age he had been placed in a Roman prison. From that dark and dismal jail the aged preacher wrote,

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain...For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a **desire** to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better (Phil. 1:21, 23).

The word used by the apostle would denote a craving, or longing after. This was an intensive, inward desire which had been a part of the very being of Paul since his conversion in Damascus. It certainly was not a sudden outburst or a bargaining proposition to exchange a prison for a palace.

Paul had **lived** for Christ, and if his life was spared, he would continue to do so. If called upon, he would die for Christ. If he should die in prison, for him it would be

gain or victory. He would not be the loser, but the winner.

Believing that the results of all his faith and labors would be a better life and a better place, Paul could say, "I have a desire to depart and be with Christ which is far better." Paul did not express a selfish wish by saying, "**I have a desire to depart.**" We hear of untold numbers who have such desires, and some go so far as to fulfill the desire in a premature fashion.

There is not anything wrong with a person desiring to enter into eternal rest with God, and that is what Paul desired. Judas Iscariot had a desire to depart, but Paul had a desire to be with Christ, and there is a difference.

We can try to understand the feelings of that aged person who becomes worn and weary with disease, helplessness, loneliness, pain and suffering, misery, agony, crying, and sighing, while waiting until the pale horse and his rider slowly but surely creeps along at a snail's pace. We scream for him to hurry. We yell, "Move, move, move," but he takes his time. Waiting, waiting, and waiting longer, until our consciousness fades away. The old earthly tabernacle continues to decay, as the days and weeks drag by. In our desperation, we try to join those of whom John wrote when he said,

And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them (Rev. 9:6).

To be with Christ! Oh, that the Romans might come and break our bones before sundown. But no, we cannot interfere or rush matters. It does not resolve the situation for a thousand voices to echo, "WHY?" All we can do is remain in the middle. We may not like being "betwixt two," but nonetheless, this is where we happen to be as death approaches, and "betwixt two," is where we must remain.

Indeed, let us desire with the apostle to be with Christ

because it is “far better.” Than what? A prison where he was? YES! An earthly palace with all the furnishings of Solomon? Indeed so! To be with Christ is far better than anything we can imagine. For some of us, we may have to go by the way of sufferings of the cross here in order to reach the eternal crown. Whenever we find ourselves in the middle, (betwixt two) let us cling to the Master. This is exactly what the apostle did. We can exchange the worse for the better.

When he wrote to the brethren in Corinth, Paul said,

For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life (II Cor. 5:1-4).

What a priceless desire!

Paul speaks of, “our earthly house” and “our house which is from heaven.” What a difference! Our earthly house will be dissolved, but the house not made with hands is eternal. Paul also makes another contrast, in that there is an earthly and also the heavenly house. The contrast is made between being naked and clothed. Groaning, burdens, and mortality will be swallowed up of life. Not just an aged prisoner, but everyone should have this earnest desire.

With all our burdens, grief, and the accompanying desires to find respite, we are assured that God does care. The Psalmist said, “Lord, all my **desire** is before thee; and my groaning is not hid from thee” (Psm. 38:9). Isaiah wrote,

With my soul have I **desired** thee in the night;
yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee
early... (Isa. 26:9).

Sometimes, the darkness of night can become almost unbearable when we are left alone. When sleep is a stranger, and rest gives way to nightmarish visions, we need to remember the example of the prophet whose soul was seeking after God. He is a very present help in time of trouble (Psm. 46:1).

As we reflect backward upon the distressful days of the ancient patriarchs, we are reminded of their great faith which sustained them in all their sore trials. The inspired penman enables us to see how they could endure when he wrote,

But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city (Heb. 11:16).

We are not afraid to desire a better land. "The desire of the righteous is only good..." (Prov. 11:23). May this be "...our heart's desire..." (Rom. 10:1).

The inspired apostle knew that for him life's evening sun was sinking low. Like the ancient people of God who "desired a better country; that is an heavenly" (Heb. 11:16), Paul lived and labored for a better place. The ancient worthies "died in faith." They walked by faith and died in faith. The same was true of Paul. The troublers of God's people could not destroy the strong desire which they had for a better country.

It mattered not one whit that Mesopotamia had been the native land of those old pilgrims. They preferred something better. The persecutor from Tarsus had cut all ties with earthly tribes, and he longed for some place which would be better than a Roman prison cell.

We can stretch our imagination to the limit as we think, dream, plan, and purpose for something better than this world. In all honesty, as much as we enjoy the beauties and pleasures of this present world, it does not take much effort to think of situations which can be so much better, especially when we see so much suffering and death down here below.

To Paul the "better place" was also a "heavenly place." It will help us to reflect upon that wonderful abode as being the habitation of God, the New Jerusalem, the city of God, the throne of God, the house of many mansions, as well as other descriptive titles and terms. Surely no place in Mesopotamia or Jerusalem had anything to compare with what waited for those people of great faith.

When we grow old and weak, we become weary, worn and tired. A better place will be a place where eternal rest will be enjoyed. It will be a place where the battles of life will be known no more. It will be better because there will be life evermore without death.

The heavenly country is something to be desired because it will be a sinless place. Try to imagine the beauty and bliss of this earthly land before sin with its destruction entered. As one views the planet earth, the sorry situation is impossible to describe. The devil has certainly made a mess of things.

It is very easy to desire a better place when the place we occupy here is one of perpetual pain and suffering. Think of the fulfillment of Paul's desire to be with Christ as being a place of perfect, healthful surroundings.

If perchance we could be borne up as if on eagles wings, and visit every hospital, infirmary, clinic and hospice-house on earth, what would we see and hear? There we would see and hear the moanings of the monarch, as well as the poverty stricken peon and peasant. Indeed,

there is a terrible train of sickness and pain which permeates every abode of man.

We have never known a place where everything is perfect. That heavenly country which is desired is populated with all that which is perfect. Think of the multitudes in this ungodly world who are devouring one another as wild beasts. God, as well as His children, is hated and despised by very many wicked people. It will be far better to be free from all the hurt and vexations of this life which are brought to bear by evil men. This evil is composed when innocent victims are inflicted with suffering and death.

We all enjoy events and circumstances which fulfill various physical, emotional and spiritual needs. Many people have often gathered for family reunions where social ties were cemented stronger and where a wonderful banquet of delicious food was enjoyed. These precious events have eventually to close as the days pass by. We desire a better place where the reunion will be eternal. This is another reason why Paul would have a desire to be with Christ. There would be unending bliss and comfort. It is easy to affix one's desires to such grand and glorious hopes.

Chapter 7
**My God,
My God, Why?**

Our little boy was almost two years of age when death called him away. Although months and years have passed, there lingers the sorrow and some unanswered questions as to why he died. We had to suffer such grief. Why did this happen to us when we were struggling so hard to live "...righteously and godly in this present world" (Titus 2:11-14)? Why could it not have happened to someone else? What sort of punishment was this? Did God take our baby away and have some purpose which is beyond my comprehension? These and other questions coursed through my mind with such intensity that I kept saying, "My God, My God, Why..." (Matt. 27:46)? There were not questions of doubt and disbelief. Never for one second did I become skeptical about the goodness of God and His love. I think the inquisitiveness within my own heart must have been that which caused the only begotten Son of God to cry in anguish, "...My God, My God, Why...?"

Through the years we have listened as grief-stricken and perplexed parents ask "Why?" Like myself, they often become bewildered when there are no clear answers.

I have been consoled by thinking, since God did not answer His own beloved Son who cried in anguish, then why should I expect Him to have a ready answer for all my questions. Do we get to the point that we almost demand answers? We may ask some questions while in the throes of sadness and despair, which would be foolish to an infinite God. We therefore should be careful lest we walk with Job's wife and speak that which is foolish. When death robs the cradle of a precious jewel, we come to realize our finitude more than at any other time in life. It is a

strong sense of personhood that keeps us searching for answers which never seem to be clear.

We may be about ready to struggle with some of the mystifying questions of life when we realize that we are not furnished all the answers, but we may be so impetuous and demanding as to want answers immediately. There was the person who thought that his biggest problem was lack of patience, so he prayed, "Lord give me lots of patience—right now." I feel sorry for that segment of our society who are positive that they have all the answers, but if we listen to them for a while, we soon learn that they do not know even what the real questions are.

Are you searching and trying to see through tear-dimmed eyes for all the answers? If so, this assures that you are still a part of humanity. Of course, we do not have all the answers, and often the ones we most desire are out there beyond our reach.

A very crucial point which parents need to consider is to refrain from fabricating our own answers, or letting others conjure up answers which are not valid. We are very prone to do this when there is no clearly defined solution to our questions.

"SURELY GOD TOOK HIM"

When a child dies, a common cliché which we hear is, "It was God's will." Since we always accept God's will to be proper and right, then the next step is to conclude that my child died because God willed it to be so. But how far are we willing to go with this philosophy of fatalism? Are we positively sure and certain that God determined that my son should die, but determined that some other little children should live? I may want to ask the question, "Why did God let a baby like **Adolph Hitler** live, but determine that my baby should die?"

Others have responded, especially during the tragic death of a child, that “**we should not question the purposes of God.**” Certainly we must not question God’s purposes, but first we need to realize that we do not know all the purposes of God. Before I assign a specific purpose of God to some specific act in my life, or the life of another, would it not be wise to know whereof I speak? I do not know any of God’s purposes other than those which are revealed to me.

There are some of God’s ways which are still “...past finding out” (Rom. 11:33). This will ever be the case. But to talk about the great purposes and plans of God will not give us all of the answers which we seek.

I have found many times, when a child suffers death due to some tragic accident, a few sympathetic friends, or even a hard-pressed preacher, may quote the scripture which says,

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose (Rom. 8:28).

This supposedly resolves the matter, but does it really relate to the issue of death? We do not think so and shall state reasons which we think are cogent and decisive.

We believe as firmly and confidently in the Word of God as ability and strength will allow! Since it is possible to believe in God, we pray without ceasing for greater faith and continually study in order to have a stronger faith (Rom. 10:17). There is not one jot nor tittle of truth that we question, doubt or deny. There must never be a moment of doubting or questioning God, or His inspired Word.

It is an obvious fact that every scripture must be studied in its contextual setting. We must look at Romans 8:28 in view of what is said before and after the verse, and only by so doing can we ever hope to arrive at the thought

conveyed by inspiration. As I study this passage, immediately my mind is focused on the phrase "all things." This does not mean some things or a few things, but indeed all things as are set before us. Does this include the devil and every instance of evil which this world knows? There are those old fleshly lusts which war against the soul and with these we have to contend daily (I Peter 2:11). Does fornication, drunkenness and lying work for my good or the good of anyone else?

In Romans 1:16, Paul introduces the gospel of Christ as being the power of God unto salvation to believers. He continues with this same trend of thought and shows clearly how the great scheme of redemption had gradually unfolded throughout the ages, eventually culminating in the coming of Christ and His work of redemption. Thus he could say, "...Now, to those who are in Christ and walk aright, there is no condemnation" (Rom. 8:1). Because of its weakness, the old covenant law could not make men free from sin. As a result of the death and resurrection of Christ, we can live by the teachings of the Spirit and be alive (v. 11). We are now children of God and joint-heirs with Christ (v. 17). The creation had groaned until now, and we join with them waiting (v. 22). Even now we have hope. God foreordained that we might be conformed to the image of His Son (v. 29).

What God did in days gone by, He did for the good of those who love Him and who are the called according to His eternal purpose. All things in His purposes and plans eventually came to fruition in the divine plan for man to love God and be saved. Thus, we know that every single purpose and plan of God which has ultimately found fulfillment in the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ, does even now work for good to "those who love the Lord."

It just does not impress me at all for someone to try to tell me that I know something, when I know that I do

not know. If my baby is murdered, I would not want someone to say we know that it was best that the baby was murdered, and moreover it is best for you as the father, and we know it is for your good. If my child is kidnapped, and kept in strange surroundings for days, if it is starved, and suffers emotionally, physically, and weeps day and night, does it make sense for some person to say, "It works for good?" Does it really work for the good of the infant when he is lonely, hungry, and abused? Do we know this? Of course, we know just the opposite. Does it work for the good of parents who keep a lonely vigil for days praying for the return of the stolen baby? We know just the opposite is true. How long will it be before good begins to work? When does it begin? How many times do I need to hear the perversion, before I feel good? But, someone says, "Eventually, all things will work out 'for good.'" The text does not say that we will someday, tomorrow, eventually, sometime later, receive good. "We know" is a present tense verb, denoting **now**, in the precise moment.

People often misuse Romans 8:28 because they are blindly seeking an answer, and it is fairly simple to invent answers. Children die of parents who love the Lord, and of parents who forever hate and despise the very thought of God. Children meet with tragic deaths whose parents are not Christians and who never become faithful to God, but curse and swear by the majestic name of God. Then there are little ones who die, and the trauma is so severe that the parents divorce, turn away from God, and even commit suicide, which is hardly working for good. This happens sometimes even when there has been every indication that the parents had been deeply devoted to Christ.

Then what are the answers? I have convinced myself as a weeping parent that first, I am not supposed to know all the mysteries of life and death. Secondly, I am reconciled

to the fact that I know but very little; however, I must not subscribe to some notion that results in putting God on trial. The “explanation” which would have God killing a child can very well result in a parent bringing railing accusations against God. We should know better.

Some people hold the creedal position that God decrees every single act and thought, even including the sin which a person commits. Of course this belief is as false as it can be. It would seem that if one believed that God decreed the death of a child by murder, then the murderer could not help his actions and should not be punished for an act over which he had no control.

Anguished parents sometimes cry out, “Why did God do this to me?” With such attitudes, it is not any wonder that some people become obsessed with bitterness toward God.

We know that God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34). We are forbidden to show respect of persons (James 2:1; 3; 9). God sends the rain on the just and the unjust (Matt. 5:45). Would it not be unjust and partial to decree the death of my child, but allow the child of a murderer of millions to live? I could never reconcile myself to worship and adore a God who would so decree.

I have no problem in explaining the death of my child in a manner which at least satisfies my own questioning heart. Every parent realizes that there is such a thing as natural law. By this we can know that fire will burn, whereas ice will have the very opposite effect upon the human anatomy. At least we can understand this very simple principle as being a part of natural law. There is such a thing as gravity which we all know will result in a rock falling to the ground when it is released from the hand of a standing man. How many laws of nature are there? No one knows, but there must be multiplied trillions effective at all times.

To explore this matter a bit further, we know that there are some married couples who are never able to beget and/or conceive so as to have children. When questioned about the problem, we are told in language which highly trained medical specialists can use and comprehend easily. There are instances which we label as malfunctions which precludes some couples from bearing children. Many young couples become greatly perplexed when confronted with this inability to have children, especially when they see so many whoremongers having babies almost in litters. We must not accuse God of consenting for lowly prostitutes to have many babies but forbidding humble, God-fearing couples to become parents.

Any time a little child is born dead, many questions are asked. Did God determine the death of the baby? Perhaps if we look at similar events and circumstances in other species of the animal kingdom, we might be able to have a better understanding of this bewildering problem.

There is a principle which is operative in the natural realm, specifically in the area of genetics, where certain characteristics and features either good or bad are passed along to the offspring. We have become aware of this problem in recent years as many babies are born addicted to drugs because their mothers were hooked on dope. Also, when a mother is a carrier of certain diseases, the result can be affliction, retardation, or death for the baby. The laws of genetics should be respected. We have long since realized the utter folly from a genetic standpoint of continued breeding of animals within certain kinship patterns. These same basic laws will hold true with respect to humans.

My dad was a farmer, and always had a variety of animals on the farm. I recall on one occasion when he bought an entire truck load of goats, and when he returned home with the animals, we learned that some of them were

“nervous goats.” If someone ran toward these animals and made a sudden noise, many of them would fall over and begin to tremble and shake. Their legs would be stiff for a while; they would be unable to move. There were some of the poor critters that would not fall over, but their legs would become so stiff that they could neither run or walk. Obviously this was a poor condition in which to exist for animals, but we did not blame God for such wretched conditions. There is a very positive natural law which will result in a strain of nervous goats, if parents are allowed to inbreed with their extended offspring. It is certain that there are millions of people who could see a baby goat fall over trembling on its side, and such a scene would really get them excited. My point is that they would have no earthly idea what the problem might be. In fact, we would probably be correct to assume that there are any number of Americans who would not even know what a goat is, but anyone with some knowledge of animal science can understand this lesson. But what is the point in this? We are attempting to explain that there are many things which we do not comprehend, thus we should not be too hasty in jumping to false conclusions. There is not any real reason to assert that God has helped your herd of goats to multiply and grow larger, but He has made my herd grow much smaller with a high incident of death among the new born. Surely we can understand some of these very basic principles of natural law. Natural law is far too complex to be fully understood. We must be reminded that there must be trillions of variables in the natural realm as applied to life and death. There are situations which we have come to accept as normal, but there are exceptions. We sometimes wonder how any of us could come into the world as “normal” people when there are so many things which can go wrong. We do not want to leave the impression that couples are at fault, or to be blamed in so many of the

“unnatural” or “abnormal” conditions relative to conception and birth. As we have already mentioned, when one or both parents act like vomiting dogs and wallowing hogs, the incident of problems in the offspring are greater, but then we are left sometimes with no valid answers. It is not a valid answer when we make up a theory.

As human beings, we have no problem understanding the laws of nature with respect to conception. Although it may seem trite, we fully accept the premise that two people of the same sex cannot cause conception. Why is this so? We answer that it is contrary to nature’s laws. This is just a very simple law which has been operative since the beginning. Some might be distressed about this, but at least we understand that it works, whether we understand it or not. It seems that if we can know that normal conception occurs in keeping with natural law, it should be no problem to understand that the laws of nature continue to be operative with us as long as we live on earth. Sometimes they operate as we want them to, but at times they do not coincide with our wishes. It should be our purpose to cooperate with natural law to the best of our knowledge, and ability, realizing that there are great gaps and deficiencies in our knowledge, and this will always be, until time’s knell shall have been sounded and the ransomed are gathered home.

With reference to the little boy spoken of in the beginning of this chapter, “No, I’m not God,” but I have experienced much grief and sorrow and worked with so many sad and sighing families that I feel more determined than ever to be the kind of person so as eventually to be where there will be no more death and grief. This is to be with God.

My God, My God, Why?

Chapter 8

I Can Go To Him

As we, along with close relatives, friends, neighbors, brethren, and sisters in Christ sat listening to the gospel preacher who was trying to utter words of comfort, I kept thinking about the simple sentence, "I can go to Him" (II Sam. 12:23).

We were gathered for the funeral service of our little blue-eyed boy who had lost his life in an accident. The kind and compassionate minister related the ancient story of King David whose small son had died. I could relate to the story, for my little boy lay before me in a small white casket. We had selected a little blue suit for him to wear, and even now as I write, years afterwards, tears drop down my cheeks, into my lap, as I relive that event, as though it happened this morning, rather than a day in the distant past. I can objectively state that writers do not know what they are scribbling, when they state that parents will be able to work "through" their grief and emerge as the victor. There is no magic formula where a parent can follow a "Step By Step, Out Of Grief," nor is it possible to "work through" one's grief. We can work with the problem, but a dead child will forever remain a loss and a detachment. A person can work with the problem of having a leg amputated, but this loss will forever be irreparable. There is no step by step process of getting beyond the loss, and indeed, there is not anything to compare with the loss sustained when a child is killed by an accident.

Like all parents, I have asked ten-thousand times over,

Why did I have to lose my child, when I desired so much to have him, to see him grow into mature years and contribute something of great value to this world?

I trust this will not seem to be selfish, but how is it possible to have more of self in anything than that of one's self in one's child? One of the horrors of dying is a sense of losing one's self-hood, and in truth a part of self always dies when a little child dies who is loved very much.

At the funeral, the minister related the experiences of David. I listened intently, for I had also used this well known Bible story to assure sobbing parents that we can endure trials and survive.

David lived thousands of years ago when there was a law of vengeance and retribution different than the law under which we now live as New Testament Christians. A very casual acquaintance with the Old Testament will confirm this. It will not be amiss to reconsider the case of the King. David had committed adultery with Bathsheba. This was followed by a conspiracy to have her husband, Uriah, killed in battle. The Lord stood aloof from David for one year before Nathan the prophet was sent to rebuke the king. David knew the law of retribution and replied to Nathan,

...As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die: And he shall restore the lamb fourfold... (II Sam. 12:5-6).

He knew about restoring fourfold (Exod. 21:37). Also, he knew that a thief was to be put to death. He deserves death surely and swiftly. He was overcome with guilt and confessed, "I have sinned against the Lord" (II Sam. 12:13). He prattles no pretense, excuse or fabrication, but in penitence, his heart is poured out before Jehovah (Psm. 32:5). Again we see the humble and contrite spirit in David when we read Psalms 51:15.

The child of David and Bathsheba became very sick, whereupon the king went into the house and refused to eat. He was prostrate in prayer and refused the help of his

servants. Any sorrowing father can understand how the desire for food diminishes. After an illness which lasted seven days, the child died, and the servants were fearful to tell David, lest he harm himself. When he learned that his son had died, the king arose from the ground, and after he had washed and anointed himself, he went into the house of God to worship. Afterward, he went home and ate. His behavior was peculiar to the servants, but he said to them,

...While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live? But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me (II Sam. 12:22-23).

The person who with valiant courage and undaunted faith could meet a huge giant, dare the entire Philistine army, and who could subdue the king of beasts, has been lying on the ground with bitter tears like well springs flowing from his eyes. How can this be? The answer is because his little son is dead. The father should have died, but the son dies in his stead.

We can understand the writings of the Psalmist better when we realize the conditions of his life. For example, he wrote,

Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; in whose heart are the ways of them. Who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well... (Psm. 84:5-6).

“Baca” means valley of weeping, and David certainly had been to Baca. Many of us join him in this valley rather frequently.

We should not reason that since the child of David was made to experience death because of the sin of his

father, that we are to feel guilty and assume that our child likewise died because of some horrible sin in our life. We must be able to see that God dealt with people under the Old Testament system in a different manner from that which regulates our lives under the New Testament era. Under the Old Covenant, God would often have an inspired prophet go to and speak directly to a person and pronounce the penalty for sin and guilt. There were certain sins for which the penalty was death, and as mentioned before, David had committed such sins. One penalty for his sin was sacrificing the life of his son. By this I mean that David had to suffer the pangs of death. We can know for certain that sin took its toll in this instance, but we must not hasten to conclude that God still exacts “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” Under the Old Testament system, we learn that “every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward” (Heb. 2:2). “He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses” (Heb. 10:28). There are numerous examples of physical punishment being given under the Old Law, but this ancient code has been taken away (Heb. 9:15-17).

There is an interesting, as well as informative, chapter which parents should study when they feel guilty because of the unexplained death of a child. The Weeping Prophet spoke of the days when a New Covenant would be made (Jer. 31:31-34). We know this has reference to the New Testament Law of Jesus Christ because the inspired Paul quoted the very words of Jeremiah in the Hebrews letter, and applied it to the New Covenant (Heb. 8:8-13). As we look at the context wherein a new and better covenant was promised we read,

And it shall come to pass, that like as I have
watched over them, to pluck up, and to break

down, and to throw down, and to destroy, and to afflict; so will I watch over them, to build, and to plant, saith the Lord. In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge. But every one shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge (Jer. 31:28-30).

The next verse denotes that the New Covenant would be ushered in and things would be vastly different.

In a similar setting, Ezekiel spoke the Word of God to the people and said,

What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge? As I live, saith the Lord God, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel. Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die. But if a man be just, and do that which is lawful and right...he shall surely live, saith the Lord God (Ezek. 18:2-9).

If he beget a son that is a robber, a shedder of blood, and that doeth the like to any one of these things...he shall surely die; his blood shall be upon him (Ezek. 18:10, 13).

Yet say ye, Why? doth not the son bear the iniquity of the father (v. 19).

...The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him (v. 19-20).

I Can Go To Him

Yet ye say, The way of the Lord is not equal.
Hear now, O house of Israel; Is not my way
equal? are not your ways unequal (v. 25)?

Yet saith the house of Israel, The way of the Lord
is not equal. O house of Israel, are not my ways
equal? are not your ways unequal? (v. 29).

For I have no pleasure in the death of him that
dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn
yourselves, and live ye (v. 32).

Israel thought that God's ways were "not right." How often modern man is prone to question the ways of God. We are clearly told that God has no pleasure in the dying of man. With these principles before us, let us not charge God in a foolish manner. We must not say that God took my child, and God's ways are not equal or right.

If parents wreck and dissipate their lives and bodies, obviously the children can be expected to be wounded and scarred unto death. But there still remains those mysterious cases where parents adhere to every known principle of hygiene, and yet something goes wrong with the process of having a baby. In such cases we remember,

Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the
hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a
maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our
eyes wait upon the Lord our God, until that he
have mercy upon us. (Psm. 123:2).

During the terrible bombing raids which were launched on London in World War II, thousands of children were removed out of the great city into the country for safety. One wee lad was asked where he and others were being taken. He replied, "I do not know, but the good king knows." So it is with us, the good King knows, and I am determined that I can and will go to Him. Only then will I be able to understand it better by and by.

Chapter 9

Jesus Loves Me This I Know

One of the sweetest sounds this side of heaven is to hear little children sing some of their favorite songs. We have taught children that Jesus loves them, and they can become exceedingly happy as they proclaim this fact. All the truth in the songs which precious little ones sing is certainly not comprehended, but they can be dynamic and powerful when they sing with the full power of their sweet voices, "...for the Bible tells me so."

We cannot imagine how anyone could not love little children. Our Lord was a very busy person and never seemed to be still in one place for long, but it is most interesting to read about the occasions when He took time to be with children. Jesus was never a father, but nonetheless, He cared very much for the children of others.

As finite beings we love our children beyond our ability to express in word or deed. God's love is infinite and very much greater in scope, in height and depth than is the love of humans. We are able to know only a part of God's great love, but like millions of stars which are out beyond in the chandeliers of heaven, ever unseen to us, so is the far reaching love of God and Christ for each of us.

Thankfully, our Lord has demonstrated His marvelous love in so many ways which we can see. One of the purest acts of love on the part of Christ occurred when He came to Capernaum and was asked an improper question by His disciples. They, like some pompous characters even now, desired to be dignitaries. Jesus called a little child unto Him and set him in the midst of them. He told the disciples that they needed to become as little children. Then

He related that they needed to humble themselves as a child, and woe unto that person who offends one of the little ones (Matt. 18:3-6). In the account given by Mark, we learn that Jesus took the child in His arms (Mark 9:36). This demonstrates the tenderness and love which Jesus had for little children, and it surely presents a vivid example for us.

We recall how Jesus further showed His concern for “little ones” when He said,

Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven (Matt. 18:10).

We certainly must not despise any person, but indeed, we can despise their actions. Our Lord is forbidding us to “think down on,” as if we might be so much superior.

As to the matter of angels guarding little ones, without doubt, some of the most bizarre and unreal interpretations which men can conjure in their minds have been rendered on this verse.

Some few years ago a picture was very popular which depicted two little children picking flowers close to a high cliff, and in the background the imaginative artist had painted what to him was the likeness of an angel. I do not see that every child, or even any child, has an angel as a guardian, for indeed, if they do, the angels can be as careless as human beings, and apparently no more effective in caring for the little ones. The record of injured, maimed, murdered, and dead children runs pretty high, yet according to the theology of some people, every little one is supposedly guarded. We are prone to think as the prophet Elijah when he had his contest with the prophets of Baal. He taunted those prophets by telling them that their gods must have gone to sleep. If all children have

guardian angels, then the angels must take some long naps, for unless parents or some careful person watches after the little ones, they will certainly experience some rough times.

A simple analysis of Jesus' statement will reveal that the angels are in heaven where they "...always behold the face of" the Father. These angels are not on earth, and the text says not one word about guardian angels. This guardian angel theory fits in perfectly with the concept of patron saints, which is excellent mythology but unsound scripturally. All heavenly beings are certainly interested in serving Almighty God, and as such, they are concerned with the divine will. As God's will relates to man and for man, it is contained in the inspired written Word.

If I have ever had any sort of special guardian to assist and direct me along through life, I have never been aware of it. We must not accept ideas which will not harmonize with truth.

On one occasion, some "little children" were brought to Jesus,

...that he should put his hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 19:13-14).

Luke informs us that those brought were infants, and they were brought that Jesus might touch them (Luke 18:15).

Someone has alluded to the idea that there is no account in the scripture where Jesus ever laughed or smiled. As kind, tender, loving, and caring for children as He was, could Jesus really hold infants in His arms, and not smile and be happy on such occasions?

The sleepless nights, and distracting days which many parents experience when children are sick and afflicted are

such as have ever been common among families. There were those in Jesus' day who suffered because their little children were afflicted in very many ways. Jesus showed deep concern, and compassion for those suffering children.

Our Lord never left His country but twice insofar as we know. When He was a baby He was taken to Egypt, and also He went to Tyre and Sidon apparently to rest. He did not want people to know where He was "...but He could not be hid." There was a woman whose daughter was "badly demonized." She fell at the feet of Jesus and begged Him to heal the daughter. It was all right with her to be as the dogs and get the crumbs. Jesus helped the poor woman and healed the daughter (Matt. 15:24-30).

After Jesus came down from the Mount of Transfiguration, a man came and knelt before Him and begged for mercy in the behalf of his child who was possessed of a devil. Jesus rebuked the devil, and the child was cured (Matt. 17:14-18).

Once more we see the compassion and concern of our Lord for children as He came to Capernaum and was met by a nobleman, or ruler, whose son was at the point of death. The man pleaded, "...Sir, come down ere my child die" (John 4:49). Jesus healed the son. Of course the nobleman believed in the Lord and His great power and did what Jesus said, namely, "...Go thy way; thy son liveth" (v. 50). We can visualize the joy of this household at the recovery of this son and how a deep burden was lifted from his heart.

Our blessed Lord not only healed some of the children who were desperately sick, but we read of His raising some of them from the dead. Matthew, Mark, and Luke record the raising of Jairus' daughter. Jairus was a ruler of the synagogue. His only daughter, about twelve years of age, was at the point of death. The grieving father came to Jesus

and fell down at His feet and worshipped Him. His sorrow was great because the "little daughter" was the only one he had, and "she lay dying." As Jesus journeyed toward the house of Jairus, a great multitude followed along. When He came to the ruler's house, there were those playing on their flutes, and general pandemonium prevailed. The little girl had died. Jesus said that the damsel was sleeping. He referred to death as a sleep, so the people laughed at Him. Jesus took the father and mother into the room, and in their presence, the little one was raised from the dead (Matt. 9:18-24).

On another occasion, our Lord raised a young person from the dead in the village of Nain. In some respects, this event differs from the previous case where the ruler of the synagogue was powerful and a person of renown. Children of the high and mighty can also die. In the village of Nain there lived a widow. Her circumstances must have been limited from a material standpoint. Her husband had died, and now her only son is dead and is being carried to the place of burial. The weeping mother follows behind the bier. How much loss can the human heart experience? Our blessed Lord had compassion on this dear mother, and He said to her, "...weep not," which must have seemed rather strange. Then Jesus restored the young person to life and to his mother. Because of that which Jesus did, the people glorified God (Luke 7:11).

We do not expect our dead children to be restored to us. Such events do not occur today, although there are some people who tell of their out-of-the-body experiences. Whatever hallucinations they may experience I cannot know, but I do know that people are not dying and then being raised from the dead. If there is a reviving, or resuscitation, there was not a case of death. I have personally used the CPR method on people who stopped

breathing and revived them from what certainly would have been complete death, but none of us can resurrect the dead. This will occur for all the dead in the last day (Matt. 25:31-46).

People experience clinical death only one time. Unconsciousness is not to be equated with death.

Chapter 10

But We Had Such Hopes

Many times expectant parents dream and plan for weeks and months for the arrival of a new baby. There are preparations so carefully made in order to have just exactly the proper kind and amount of little clothes. The baby bed is prepared, and in fact, all things are made ready. Days, weeks, and even months may be spent trying to select the perfect baby's name.

We are reminded of the little boy who later came to be known as "Paul the Apostle," that he was given the name, Saul, which in the Hebrew language meant "desired, wanted, or asked for." We wish all little babies were desired and wanted, but this is not always the case. When expectant parents ask for, desire, and dream about the arrival of a precious infant, their desires and hopes can be turned into dismal nightmares, if the fetus arrives by miscarriage, or at full time delivery, and is born dead. What does one do in such circumstances? In one such personal experience of my wife and me, we cried, which seemed the natural thing to do. As two young bewildered people, we were fortunate to have a very faithful Christian physician who spent considerable time talking with us. I think his being with us and demonstrating a willingness to explain some of our questions may have helped more than we can express. Indeed, I too have been there and know how one can be.

While my wife was carrying the baby, she was stricken with the dreaded and frightening disease of poliomyelitis. The fever and sickness which she experienced apparently were contributing factors to losing the baby in a premature birth. The kind physician tried to explain that nature was

simply carrying out its prescribed course. Something was wrong, and in our case, we could probably understand, or at least we tried to understand. Complications can and do happen in very many of our experiences. We try to adjust as they come.

We were young and inexperienced with such matters and also bewildered as to what to do. Since the baby came in the hospital, and was quite premature, I asked the physician, who was also our friend what would need to be done with the fetus. He very wisely suggested that if we wanted to, we could let the hospital take care of the situation. We both felt that there could be no real value or purpose in having such a tiny little fetus buried in the cemetery. I am convinced we made the right decision, at least for us, and I am thankful for a caring and considerate Christian doctor who really tried to help strengthen us emotionally.

We can truly appreciate the concern and sympathy of friends when we undergo severe trials and suffer with a broken heart, but no person can possibly understand until he or she has had similar experiences.

I have mentioned the preceding personal matter primarily to state that I do know how parents grieve when their dreams become nightmares. I have been there, and if it is of any comfort, I can say that we can survive by trying, and of course, since we are mature enough to be potential parents, we obviously are mature enough to be strong and of good courage when battles have to be fought.

It is hard to have to put the little baby clothes away as they become wet with tears which fall upon them. But tears help to wash away some of our sorrows, and it does not help a person to suppress one's grief. My suggestion would be to express grief, rather than bottle it up inside.

I have worked with several young couples who have met with tremendous disappointment by having their baby

born dead, or otherwise living for just a few hours. Although it may not assuage their grief for me to tell them that I have gone through a similar experience, I usually remind them that thousands of other young couples have managed to survive, and I am sure that after some very difficult days they can live with their heart breaking trials. I do not think that many parents are at all interested when I tell or explain to them that I too suffered the loss of a little one. I do think that the important thing in telling them this, is to be able to assure them that they can grieve, cry, be disappointed like others, and be able to endure. Wounds will be slow to heal, and scars will remain, but we must keep trying to go onward. Millions of others have plodded along blinded by the tears which fell from their eyes. As a young couple, my grandparents buried two little two year old boys. Years afterward, my mother and daddy buried a little two year old girl. This is the story of all generations, and will ever be so.

Some grieving parents want to see their baby dead, and if it is practical, by all means this should be granted. There are cases where a mother should not be permitted, if at all possible, to view the deceased child. This is simply my value judgment.

A number of years ago I was called to the local hospital to receive the remains of a still-born infant and carry it to the funeral home. The parents had requested the baby to be placed in a casket and be buried in the Memorial Gardens. When I arrived at the hospital, I learned that the mother had undergone a Cesarean section and that the baby had been dead inside the womb for a dangerously long while. The husband met me in the hallway of the hospital and told me that the mother would like to see the infant if it was possible. I did not think I was the one to make that decision. It seems that the attending physician should have been consulted about the matter. As a Funeral

Director, I had already picked up the remains, and had a sheet wrapped very tightly about the baby, and had a small chenille cover over the sheet and baby. The little fellow was in terrible shape because decomposition was very obvious. I explained to the father that in my judgment the mother should not view the baby. As a means of lending support to my suggestion, the young mother had her mother present, and I asked the grandmother privately if she would care to see the baby, and help with the decision. She very readily agreed, so we took the stretcher cot on which the baby had been placed into an adjoining room, and with nurses assisting, we let the grandmother see the baby. She was very firm in not allowing the infant's mother to see it. I am sure if there was delayed anxiety over not getting to see the little one, there would have been severe traumas had she seen her baby. I suggested to the father that we place the little baby in a casket and not open it, and have a burial as soon as possible. We have a section set aside in our Memorial Gardens which we call Babyland. I told the father that we gave a space in Babyland for the little babies who die. This seemed to please him. Today there are quite a number of these tiny graves in Babyland with most of them having small memorial stones. Some of them have names on the stones, and some are simply remembered as a son or daughter of "John or Mary Doe."

On another occasion when a little baby was born dead, in my role as a mortician, I was called to the hospital, and the little one had the appearance of a beautiful doll. The parents wanted to have a grave side service in Babyland. The father asked if I could put the baby in a little casket and bring it back to the hospital so the mother could be with the infant for a little while. I had to get permission from the hospital doctors and discuss the matter with the nurses. The permission was granted, so after we dressed the little one and placed it in a tiny pink casket, I drove

back to the hospital with the casket in my car. I had draped a piece of cloth over the little casket so as to keep visitors inside the hospital from staring and wondering what I might be doing.

With a few very close family members inside the hospital room, I opened the casket lid and placed the small casket on the bed by the mother at her request. She wept and sobbed bitterly as did all of us while she touched her baby. This was the best grief therapy on earth for this modern Rachel who lamented for her child. She talked about the little pink dress which she had prepared for a live baby, instead of one that was dead. I am thankful that this heart-broken mother could touch her baby, and adjust its little dress, and feel of its tiny hands and feet. All of this helped her to accept the reality of her baby being dead. To have her mother and other relatives with her during this experience was most helpful. It would hurt later when she went to Babyland to visit the grave, but it would be much more bearable because she was able to do some of her grieving with the support of loving members of her family close by.

When we try to insist that death is only for the aged, perhaps we need to be reminded that in the United States, over fifty-five thousand newborn infants die in one year. Indeed, not all graves in the cemeteries are occupied by aged adults. All other things being equal, there is probably space awaiting each of us in some silent city of the dead.

Indeed, we can have great hopes, dreams, and many wonderful plans in this life, but they can be blown away in a brief moment. There is a hope which will endure and which serves as an anchor for our souls when the troubled waters surge against us (Heb. 6:19).

Chapter 11

We'll Understand It Better

Some years ago John Donne reminded us that the death of any person is diminishing. Without question, the most difficult death with which to deal is that which is sudden and unexpected. Yes, some of us know from experience how this can hurt.

When a child is sick for several weeks or months, and we are told that death will absolutely come in a short while, we can experience anticipatory grief, which means that we do a considerable amount of our grieving before death occurs. Not that we are fully prepared for the final moment, but at least we have been able to grieve in anticipation of the arrival of death. Parents of leukemic children do a great deal of grieving before death takes the child.

The unexpected nature of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) becomes unbearable to some parents. This mysterious type of death is most frequent between the first and seventh month. There have been cases of "SIDS" in children who were five, and six years of age. Most of these deaths occur, however, before a baby reaches its sixth month, and almost all, or ninety-nine percent of the deaths occur before the first birthday.

Most of the time when an adult dies, a team of physicians can determine what were the causal factors. At the present, however, there is not any apparent medical reason available for "crib deaths." There are government agencies working incessantly in research programs, but they have no sure word for us. We do know that one peculiar thing about "SIDS" is that it happens while the child is asleep. Also, we have learned that there is a higher incident

of "SIDS" among children who have been born prematurely. What the correlation is, we do not know. At the present, there are some theories which are being researched, but until something definite is established, we will still be guessing.

We know the unspeakable joy and the thrill of being able to talk to a little baby and see the sparkle in its eyes. We all but burst with ecstasy as the little fellows begin to laugh and "talk" back to us with approving sounds. Try to imagine happy parents who spend delightful and treasured moments playing with what appears to be a perfectly healthy baby before bed-time. They give the baby its bottle, hug the little one, and with a goodnight kiss of deep love and affection, he is put to bed. In the morning the child is found dead, without any sign of struggle. His arms are not drawn up, nor his hands clenched as if he died in pain. What happened? Why did it happen? These, and countless other questions run through the mind with staccato reverberations. Perhaps the first question which one normally asks is, "What will we do?"

There are things which must be done, and they are most difficult. It is a matter of legal statute that all such deaths must be investigated by some law enforcement agency. Also, there is a coroner's report which has to be made. When parents are distraught and filled with paroxysms of grief, it is not the best of times to try to answer questions from a policeman. These gentlemen have to do their assigned tasks, and they would surely like to be involved in other matters. Most of them have children, and they do try to be caring and gentle as they fill out their reports. We know in our society that not all little babies are loved and cuddled before they go to sleep, for indeed, some of these precious little ones are battered and beaten, and their little bodies cannot withstand the brutality

of savage parents. We therefore must understand why the police come, or the Medical Examiner is summoned to investigate.

What will we do? Whatever we do will not remove the distress from the heart. We should not be ashamed of our tears. Man is so created that he can be happy, and also be sad. He can laugh and also cry, so we must not feel abashed to be crying.

There have been cases where parents have not only been afflicted with normal grief when they lose a baby by crib death, but they feel a deep sense of personal guilt. They imagine that if conditions had just been different, the baby might not have died. Sometimes they accuse themselves by not responding if the baby had whimpered or made some sound which they never heard.

This is one of the values of the Medical Examiner's making a complete check on matters. With all the combined and constant research being done, we feel that parents should not blame themselves for that which the best medical specialists in the world have not as yet been able to answer.

One mother was so filled with grief that she needed tremendous help. After her baby was found dead in its bed, she really imagined that she killed it, thus she called the police and reported that she had killed her baby. They came and questioned her at length. She seemed to be in a complete daze and seemed altogether confused. When asked how she had killed the infant, she finally replied by saying that she had taken a large pillow and put it over the baby. The police looked for a large pillow, but could not find one; however, the mother was arrested and taken to jail. She sat in her cell in a very stoic manner and seemed oblivious to all that happened. At her preliminary hearing, the judge assigned her an attorney. He did not believe his

client had killed her baby and sought to prove his beliefs. He had his client to undergo extensive psychiatric testing, and also he sought and obtained a copy of the autopsy report which showed conclusively and beyond question that the baby could not have died from suffocation at the hands of its mother. This poor mother was so afflicted with grief and woe, that she simply could not cope in any satisfactory way.

It is a difficult time when we are confronted with the death of a child, but there is a faith and a hope which will help sustain us. I like to think of some of the great promises of God and believe that we can stand upon them. God said,

When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee... (Isa. 43:2).

We are not promised that the waters will always be clear, calm, and still. They overwhelm us as raging billows, but there remains the promise, "...I will be with thee." We can expect muddy rivers and swollen streams, but we can, with God's help, manage to cross them.

I suppose it can be helpful not really to know what to do at times. This suggests that we know our limitations, and can look to God. We are like Jehoshaphat who said, "...neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee" (II Chron. 20:12). We can remember that the Psalmist said, "...my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book" (Psm. 56:8). Indeed, our tears are not wasted when we, like Rachel, weep for our children. God has a record of each tear-drop. After a while, we can join our little ones, and there will be no more tears, for God shall forever wipe them away.

Sometimes a dissipation of life which plunges downward into a moral living can be such a heart-

rendering episode for good parents. Their only response is a feeble, "Why?" "We do not understand why."

As we read the first twenty-three verses of Lamentations three, we can certainly understand the innermost feeling of the prophet. He said,

I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath....My flesh and my skin hath he made old; he hath broken my bones....He hath filled me with bitterness, he hath made me drunken with wormwood....My strength and my hope is perished from the Lord.

What a tragic existence for good man to have to endure! Such was not the end of the prophet's reflections.

If each of us were content to reflect and/or relive the sad portion of our lives, no more than one chapter would be needed to chronicle the matters. Like the writer of old, we need to reflect upon the good things which have come to us. You respond that such is extremely difficult for us as we sit inside the funeral home, or stand beside a new-made grave. Yes, this is exceedingly difficult, but it needs to be done. Note very carefully what was expressed by the prophet of old time when he wrote,

It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness (Lam. 3:22-23).

What will be the expressions of the recipient for all the goodness of God? He said,

The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him...It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord....He putteth his mouth in the dust; if so be there may be hope...Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment

of his sins? Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord. Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens (Lam. 3:24-66).

I must ask what my portion is. What is my lot, division or inheritance with respect to the Land of Promise? No part or parcel in Palestine would be comparable to the inheritance we have in God as His children. David wrote,

The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage (Psm. 16:5-6).

The two writers, as listed above, do not refer to God as filling some void or emptiness of a material or physical manner.

It was significant that the distressed prophet declared, "The Lord is my portion." God was presently the lot or inheritance of the prophet. This was not something to claim in the far-away, distant days ahead.

I have been amused more than once as I noted the behavior of people who were anticipating and relished the high hopes of inheriting portions of wealthy estates. One very wealthy person spoke rather pointedly about the somewhat distant relatives who had never demonstrated any real concern or noticeable affection for the very aged person until the time when reading of the will would not be very distant. There was an obvious change in the behavior of some of the would-be heirs. This attitude was very different in the thinking of the inspired penmen.

Since God is a present portion, the writer understood that God was also an all-sufficient portion. To Abraham, God declared, "...I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect" (Gen. 17:1). The wisdom, power, and goodness of God is all sufficient for the children of God.

Amid all the hard and difficult times which come to

us, we can rest assured that our God is a sure portion, He is an unmixed portion, He is an external portion, and He can be thought of as a common portion, just as salvation is common (Jude 3).

The expected, natural, and certain thing would be for the child of God to say, "Therefore will I hope in Him." I do not understand that one would hope to be exempted from all trouble, affliction, trials, and temptations. We can hope for the strength to measure up to our duty. Paul prayed to God, and the reply was, "...My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness..." (II Cor. 12:9). How God supplied the strength needed by the apostle is not exactly clear to me.

Stand with me at the gates which open to severe trials and distresses. It is a time to hope in God for comfort. Beyond the open gates, darkness may be so dense, and we may be disposed to grope and stumble, but it is a time to remember, "Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness" (Psm. 112:4).

As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem (Isa. 66:13).

The faithful saint hopes in God for deliverance. We must rest assured that God is under no obligation to furnish deliverance when, how, or in the manner that we select. He has declared,

When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee (Isa. 43:2).

Many enemies are crouching around the upright, ready to destroy them at will. We can triumph through Christ our Lord.

Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us (Rom. 8:37).

We do not have to be overcome with hopelessness and despair when the lifeless remains of the little ones are left in the cemetery or sleeping place. We can have such high hopes. Paul expressed it as follows,

Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself (Phil. 3:21).

Do we still feel frustrated, hopeless, and without strength? Let us keep our hopes fastened, and forever riveted on God, remembering that He has promised:

For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (II Peter 1:11).

What hope can be higher than this? Yes, we will understand it better by and by.

Chapter 12

Troubles ~ Troubles ~ Troubles

One of the deep and constant perplexities of life is to be overcome by troubles. Our families, friends, and, indeed, everyone is acquainted with troubles. The ancient patriarch wrote, "Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble" (Job 14:1). He also wrote,

Although affliction cometh not forth of the dust,
neither doth trouble spring out of the ground;
Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly
upward (Job 5:6-7).

Truly, man is no stranger to trouble, catastrophic illness, untimely deaths, and crushing burdens which bear down upon us in avalanche fashion, and though we may be able to mumble a weak "Why?" the only answer is a weak echo.

We must accept the fact that troubles are as real as life, and they will ultimately come for a visit into every mansion or hamlet. Do you recall when the strong bulls of Bashan compassed the Psalmist about? He wrote, "Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help" (Psm. 22:11).

It may seem that in our darkened perception, troubles are for those who are vile and wicked, but such is not the case. We may question why the wicked do not experience the harsh realities of troubles and hurt, whereas the righteous seem never to have a day of joy and delight. We must realize that all of life's questions do not have ready-made answers. The Psalmist asked,

Lord, how are they increased that trouble me!
many are they that rise up against me (Psm. 3:1).

The Psalmist had a disturbed vision, or perception as he viewed some of the wicked. He declared,

...For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men....they have more than heart could wish....waters of a full cup are wrung out to them....Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches....Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end....So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee....Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee....But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, that I may declare all thy works (Psm. 73:1-28).

We recall how the three friends of Job came to visit the poor creature, and they were so devastated that they sat in silence. Their visit was for the purpose of lending comfort to Job, but what they saw caused them to weep and antagonized them.

Eventually the three visitors accused Job of being the recipient of so much trouble because of his wickedness. Job denied the charges. With all their malignant accusations against him, Job retained his integrity before Jehovah, even though his face was foul with weeping and on his eyelids was the shadow of death (Job 16:16).

So often the ancient kings and their subjects would turn away from the voice of Jehovah, and trouble would result. Jeremiah, the faithful prophet, declared that the people had "...rejected the word of the LORD..." (Jer. 8:9). They were blissfully and ignorantly saying "...peace, peace, when there is no peace" (Jer. 8:11). The prophet said, "We

looked for peace, but no good came; and for a time of health, and behold trouble" (Jer. 8:15). The sad and sorrowful note was sounded when Jeremiah wrote, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved" (Jer. 8:20).

During World War II, the entire universe was engulfed in such woeful vexations and trouble. The calamitous and loathsome conditions have never been adequately described. Someone wrote a song which millions of hearts tried to sing, even though the words could not be uttered at times. There was a cadence, a canticle, a mellifluous sound as individuals and groups intoned,

It seems there's nothing but trouble and trouble
and trouble, in this troublesome world below.

There was some hope, however, as millions were hopeful that "the lights would go on again—all over the world." And indeed, the lights did begin to burn again, but a lone votary candle continued to burn in the windows where the panes had been darkened by death.

It was as stated by Isaiah long centuries ago when he declared "...and darkness, dimness of anguish; and they shall be driven to darkness" (Isa. 8:22). The prophet promised that at eveningtide there would be trouble (Isa. 17:14).

When the prophets pronounced the doom of Jerusalem they wrote,

...there shall be a time of trouble, such as never
was since there was a nation even to that same
time... (Dan. 12:1).

Zephaniah described the situation as

...a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress,
a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of

darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness (Zeph. 1:15).

There were troublesome times due to the fact that people had no shepherds. We read,

For the idols have spoken vanity, and the diviners have seen a lie, and have told false dreams; they comfort in vain: therefore they went their way as a flock, they were troubled, because there was no shepherd (Zech. 10:2).

OUR LORD FACED TROUBLE FROM SO MANY

After Jesus made His entry into Jerusalem, riding on the foal of an ass, He stated,

Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour (John 12:27).

I suppose no right thinking person would choose to be physically tortured. This is something which all people try to escape. Try to imagine the mental and emotional anguish and trouble of soul which came to Jesus before the physical pain of the cross was inflicted. Jesus was troubled in His soul. His spirit was weeping within, because He knew what was just ahead. While Jesus was in an upper room with His disciples, He ate the passover supper and washed the disciples feet. When this was done, He taught a marvelous lesson. "When Jesus had thus said, he was troubled in spirit..." (John 13:21).

Perhaps no passage portrays the deep troubles of the Son of God as vividly as that presented by Isaiah and repeated by Luke. Of Jesus it was said,

He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did

esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed (Isa. 53:3-5).

I wonder how I might be able to

...fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church (Col. 1:24).

We know a little relative to the troubles which the early Christians experienced. For good reason, not much information is given nor are the explicit details written. God has told us what He wants us to know, and no more. We know that sore trials came upon those early Christians.

Paul wrote,

We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body (II Cor. 4:8-10).

For, when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears (II Cor. 7:5).

Paul wrote about the

...thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure (II Cor. 12:7).

Note carefully when he wrote,

Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong (II Cor. 12:10).

The faithful saints in Galatia were troubled by false teachers who perverted the gospel of Christ (Gal. 1:7). Paul declared that "...he that troubleth you shall bear his judgment, whosoever he be" (Gal. 5:10).

The brethren in Thessalonica were having troubles from wicked people. God would recompense tribulation to the troublers (II Thess. 1:6). Those who were being troubled would receive rest.

God comforts us in all our trouble,

...that we may be able to comfort them which
are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith
we ourselves are comforted of God (II Cor. 1:4).

When Jesus visited in the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, He was teaching Mary while Martha served the meal. Martha was disturbed and requested help from Mary. Our Lord responded to Martha's request by saying, "...Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things" (Luke 10:41).

Sometimes our troubles are self-induced. At other times we are beset with troubles concerning which we have no answers. When sore trials come upon us, we should do as we have done before the troubles came. We need to walk closely with our Lord. He should be our friend and helper. The people of God have been taught to look unto the Lord for strength and help.

The book of Psalms will certainly come to mean more as we read the majestic messages concerning the manner in which the Psalmist turned to Jehovah in time of trouble. It will help us to look at a few of those marvelous passages. The Psalmist wrote:

The Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed,
a refuge in times of trouble (Psm. 9:9).

Have mercy upon me, O Lord; consider my
trouble which I suffer of them that hate me, thou

Troubles ~ Troubles ~ Troubles

that liftest me up from the gates of death (Psm. 9:13).

I will be glad and rejoice in thy mercy: for thou hast considered my trouble; thou hast known my soul in adversities (Psm. 31:7).

Have mercy upon me, O Lord, for I am in trouble: mine eye is consumed with grief, yea, my soul and my belly (Psm. 31:9).

For my life is spent with grief, and my years with sighing: my strength faileth because of mine iniquity, and my bones are consumed (Psm. 31:10).

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble (Psm. 46:1).

And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me (Psm. 50:15).

But I will sing of thy power; yea, I will sing aloud of thy mercy in the morning: for thou hast been my defence and refuge in the day of my trouble (Psm. 59:16).

In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord: my soul ran in the night, and ceased not: my soul refused to be comforted. I remembered God, and was troubled: I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed. Selah. Thou holdest mine eyes waking: I am so troubled that I cannot speak....And I said, This is my infirmity: but I will remember the years of the right hand of the most High (Psm. 77:2-4, 10).

In the day of my trouble I will call upon thee: for thou wilt answer me (Psm. 86:7).

Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou wilt revive me: thou shalt stretch forth thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies, and thy right hand shall save me (Psm. 138:7).

I cried unto the Lord with my voice; with my voice unto the Lord did I make my supplication. I poured out my complaint before him; I shewed before him my trouble (Psm. 142:1-2).

It is a wrong idea to think that good people will never experience troubles here in this life. With our troubles we need to remember that success will ultimately come, surely if not in this life, then in the world to come.

The wicked is snared by the transgression of his lips: but the just shall come out of trouble (Prov. 12:13).

Jesus declared, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me" (John 14:1). All our troubles will end when we are ushered into the presence of our Lord. The bitter pain and sorrow will be turned into eternal bliss.

Chapter 13

When Jesus Faced Death

TEXT: HEBREWS 5:7

INTRODUCTION

Throughout all the centuries of man's existence upon the earth, he has attempted to conquer death, but still he remains defeated. As we gather for any funeral occasion, it but reminds us that our feeble searching for superiority over death has so far been unsuccessful.

We have achieved such great things in so many areas, but we continue to be reminded that we ultimately must face death with the same certainty as our forefathers.

We are constantly reminded by all sorts of plans, regulations, laws, and gadgets which are supposed to be very effective in saving lives, and we are not disposed to question their value, but we must admit that eventually all efforts must fail, and man must die.

OUR LORD LOVED LIFE

One of the hurtful things about death and dying is the termination of earthly ties. Jesus had His close friends who were very dear to Him. He was deeply saddened when death took them away. Of course, our Lord loved His life just as we love our lives. The scriptures teach us to love life.

For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile (I Peter 3:10).

When our friends are called from this earthly pilgrimage, it is the most natural thing for us to be overwhelmed with sorrow. Then there comes to each

person that time when life is but a lingering flicker, or perhaps the torch is snuffed out immediately without warning. Of course, almost everyone desires to continue the enjoyment of God's wonderful world.

While Jesus lived in the flesh, He knew that the brittle thread of life would soon snap. He lived only some thirty-three years and was "...cut off out of the land of the living..." (Isa. 53:8). Like a young, tender plant, Jesus was cut off prematurely. He wanted to live just as much as any human could.

Because of man's love for life, he has developed many things in the area of medical science which enable us to live a little longer than our fore parents. It is a good thing for good people to live long upon the earth (Eph. 6:1-3).

Satan told a part of the truth when he said, "And Satan answered the LORD, and said, Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life" (Job 2:4). Man's life is so great that huge fortunes will be gladly spent in an effort to prolong his days on earth. When faced with the end of life, some have expressed a desire to purchase a bit more time, but how can we buy time? When the sun goes down, can we reverse it a little? It is because of our great love for life that the hurt of death is so penetrating. In his minor dialogues Seneca wrote, "Life, it is thanks to death that I hold thee so dear." I feel most confident that if we could just stay on the earth forever without any thoughts except caring for our physical needs, then life would become as a sorry mess for us, so life becomes immeasurably heightened by the certainty and solemnity of its cessation here.

As great and enjoyable as life can be, it is not true that all men will give their all just to be alive. Rather than sacrifice their faith to the gods, many have faced martyrdom. Rather than betray a sacred trust, strong men

have submitted to death. Nathan Hale remains immortalized in the minds of our youth because he said, "I regret that I have only one life to give for my country." Young Sam Davis chose death, rather than capitulate to the enemy. Many of the Old Testament Worthies maintained their faith in God, even though they were "...sawn asunder..." (Heb. 11:37).

OUR LORD FEARED HIS OWN DEATH

We must realize that we are not alone in our fears of death. Jesus was both human and divine, thus He could and did suffer as He faced death with fear and trembling. I cannot understand this fearful reaction to death upon the part of Jesus, unless I realize that it was His humanity which was suffering and dying. It was the Son of Man that had to tread the winepress alone. It was **Man** who was exceeding sorrowful unto death. The agony, the heartache, the sorrow which began back in that first garden had swollen and increased down through the centuries until it became a rushing, mighty torrent, beating at the very heart of the Master as He lay prostrate in the garden of prayer. The despairing galley slave has never sweated with agony as did our Saviour, while He was praying in the dark shadows of Calvary. Death was such an awesome, fearful thing to Him, and He pathetically had to tread the winepress alone (Isa. 63:3). Why could someone not have been with my Lord?

We have no information that our Lord ever feared any man while He lived on earth. He taught His disciples not to be fearful of man (Matt. 10:28). Jesus could stand before the tribunals of men as they glared at Him like ferocious beasts, but He was undaunted. He could lie down in peaceful sleep while the raging billows rolled (Matt. 8:25). However, the sleep of death was very terrifying to our Lord!

OUR LORD FACED HIS DEATH WITH WEeping

So affected was Christ as He contemplated His death, that He uttered strong cries and shed bitter tears. This was a cry for help. Many of us have experienced a feeling of complete helplessness and total emptiness as we watched our precious loved ones slowly pass away. When we gather in the funeral homes and cemeteries for memorial services, our tears can freely flow.

When Jesus was so distressed at the plight of Jerusalem, He sat on Olivet and wept (Luke 19:41). While visiting in the home of Mary and Martha, when Lazarus died, Jesus wept (John 11:35).

As Jesus was being led to the place of crucifixion,

...there followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him. But Jesus turning unto them said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children (Luke 23:27-28).

Why did Jesus weep for Himself, but ask these women not to weep for Him? He knew the troubles and trials which would soon befall them, and those horrible times would cause those women to weep and wail.

Trudging along behind, the good women were full of sympathy for the Lord. They showed this by shedding tears. It was women who wept, anointed the Lord for burial, first came to the tomb and showed such great concern. There is no instance where women ever deserted, betrayed, or persecuted the Lord.

'Twas a woman who came to the sepulchre very early on the first day of the week, while it was yet dark, and stood without, weeping (John 20:11).

We know our Lord appreciated the tears of all these women, for indeed, He was not an ingrate. We can truly be thankful for those who come and weep with us when we say our final farewell to family members.

OUR LORD FACED HIS DEATH WITH PRAYER

When Jesus was to be offered up as a sacrifice for sin, He did not hesitate to offer up strong prayers and supplications unto God. We strongly believe that one of the great values of a funeral for Christian people is the fact that we can collectively pray to God when we are in the deep throes of grief. Jesus offered prayers, which would suggest that He did not pray only one time. As we review the sad scene in Gethsemane, we are able to behold a suffering Saviour who has fallen prostrate, as He pours out His heart in prayer to God to let the cup of suffering pass away from Him. Jesus was heard, because of His reverential fear for God. He was not spared the ordeal of death, but He was delivered from the captivity of the grave, since it "...was not possible that he should be holden of it" (Acts 2:24).

CONCLUSION

We have broken hearts and crushed lives when death comes. Let us be thankful as survivors for a Father who loves us, knows our grief, and bids us to come to Him for comfort. Let us be strengthened by the love, strength and care from friends who mean more than all temporal things. Especially should we be thankful for hope which sustains us each day.

Chapter 14

Children ~ Tragedies And God Who Is Able

As a rather young lad, I stood by the bedside of my baby sister and saw her as she drew her last breath. We had hoped, prayed, wept and waited for her recovery. She was really special in our family, and also in our neighborhood, because she was a twin with big blue eyes and curly hair, and perfect doll-like features. Our family was hurt, saddened and choked with the loss of the little one. We have never ceased to remember the helpless feeling and the agony of heart which cut like a sword. We realize that God does not desire for us to know all.

Somehow, I like to think of the forecasts made by John as he spoke of a land where no storm clouds gather, and where there would be no need of sunshine, for the glory of God and the Lamb would be the brightness thereof (Rev. 21:23). Men who forecast weather conditions will invariably miss their predictions, but John certainly wrote faithful sayings when he promised faithful adults and all little children a home in the land of cloudless day.

We almost despair of life when some tragedy strikes and claims the life of one of our children. This seems worse when a little one is the victim of some senseless act. We wonder how people can be so brutal and heartless, but brutality is not something known only to my generation.

In days gone by, children were sold or taken by creditors in order to pay debts. In the time of Elisha, there was a poor widow who was left owing a debt. She cried unto the prophet and said, "...the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen" (II Kings 4:1). There is not anything basically wrong with selling a child, **if** he is only another kind of two-legged animal. We think

nothing of selling animals with four legs and other creatures without any legs. When a sufficient number of people can be convinced that Christianity is to be relegated to the knot holes of mythology, and that Humanism and Evolution is the only rational philosophy, then without question, mankind will leap backward to those halcyon days of yore when children and chickens were sold for a price. Even now, as I write these lines, there is to my left a newspaper with an account of a mother having been indicted for trying to sell her child. Men are absurdly inconsistent to contend that there is no God and no absolute moral standard, but then will prance and pant when something occurs which to them is "wrong." Was it really "wrong" for parents to sell their children when the society of which they were a part approved of the practice?

In order to see the depravity of man at its worst, we need to read the entire twenty-fourth chapter of Job. One of the curses of Job's time was, "They pluck the fatherless from the breast, and take a pledge of the poor" (Job 24:9). These babies were objects of pity, because they were without fathers. Also, they were so small that they had not been weaned from the breast. These monsters without mercy would not only take the infant, but strip the mother of her clothing and drive her out to fend for her food and shelter. This is a perfect example of the depths of depravity into which men will plunge when they forget God, and yet it is tragic that so many people refuse to see this.

The practice of burning little children as sacrifices to heathen gods would at least assure the pitiable victims of a reward with God and Christ eternally. We cannot fathom the attitude of anyone who would burn a little child to death, but there were several occasions of this as recorded in the Old Testament.

By the time Ahaz ascended the throne in Judah, prosperity and wealth was in abundance, so much so that

the people forgot God and began to adopt the worship and practices of the heathen. The doors of the porch which led into the temple were closed, and worship in the temple was eliminated. There was a prophet who tried to help, but his efforts were futile. Isaiah was scorned like faithful prophets in many places today. No doubt those people thought they were making progress when they erected a heathen altar where God's brazen altar had been. King Ahaz made molten images to Baal. "He made his son pass through the fire." This suggests that the son was burnt as a sacrifice to Moloch (II Kings 16:3). This is the first occasion recorded of the people of God offering children to Moloch like the surrounding nations. From other verses we can gather that the children were actually slain and subsequently burned on the altars. Remember, this practice was introduced by Ahaz who was king over Judah. The ghastly deed of killing children as a sacrificial act had been practiced by heathen nations, as is seen when the king of Moab offered his son as a sacrifice to his god (Kings 4:27). Later, Ezekiel condemned Israel by saying,

Moreover thou hast taken thy sons and thy daughters, whom thou hast borne unto me, and these hast thou sacrificed unto them to be devoured (Ezek. 16:20).

Later, he also said,

...and their sons also whom they bear to Me they had caused to pass through to them to be destroyed (Ezek. 23:37).

We shall give but one other instance of child sacrifices and trust that we may be comforted by the fact that decent Christian people do not resort to such abominable practices. That only applies to the heathen who murder seven million hapless victims in this "Christian" nation before they are born.

Jehovah had Jeremiah to say to the wicked people of his time,

And they built the high places of Baal, which are in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire unto Molech; which I commanded them not, neither came it into my mind, that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin (Jer. 32:35).

These verses depict Jehovah as being chagrined that His people would so conduct themselves. We feel bad when horrendous events occur, but let us remember that our Father likewise is troubled. "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass" (Psm. 37:5).

"The way of the transgressor is hard" (Prov. 13:15). In fact, it can become difficult beyond our imagination.

There is an interesting story of a woman who asked the king of Israel for help. She related the plan of how another woman had said to her,

...Give thy son, that we may eat him to day, and we will eat my son to morrow. So we boiled my son, and did eat him: and I said unto her on the next day, Give thy son, that we may eat him: and she hath hid her son (II Kings 6:28-29).

These are indeed matters above which some may not care to read, but Jehovah has placed them in His Book for a purpose. When I read such horrifying accounts of the troubles which have overtaken wicked people of the past, I can certainly get down on my knees and thank God for so many blessings. Even though sad and sorrowful days have come to all of us, we have never reached the point where we practice cannibalism with our children. When man becomes extremely wicked and the earth loses its

“salt,” then God allows the unfit salt to be trodden under foot. This was the condition of those ancient times which God wants us to remember.

It was in a very crucial period of time when Jeremiah came on the scene. He did his best to help the people, but they refused to give heed. He foretold the desolation which would come to Jerusalem by saying,

And I will make this city desolate, and an hissing; every one that passeth thereby shall be astonished and hiss because of all the plagues thereof. And I will cause them to eat the flesh of their sons and the flesh of their daughters, and they shall eat every one the flesh of his friend in the siege and straitness, wherewith their enemies, and they that seek their lives, shall straiten them (Jer. 19:8-9).

There were numerous people who simply would not have thought that Jerusalem would be brought so low.

The kings of the earth, and all the inhabitants of the world, would not have believed that the adversary and the enemy should have entered into the gates of Jerusalem (Lam. 4:12).

Even the high and mighty can be brought to desolation. The weeping prophet explained what would happen by saying,

Behold, O Lord, and consider to whom thou hast done this. Shall the women eat their fruit, and children of a span long... (Lam. 2:20).

And then he continues to describe the hunger that makes animals out of human beings.

Their visage is blacker than a coal; they are not known in the streets: their skin cleaveth to their bones; it is withered, it is become like a stick. They that be slain with the sword are better than

they that be slain with hunger: for these pine away, stricken through for want of the fruits of the field. The hands of the pitiful women have sodden their own children: they were their meat in the destruction of the daughter of my people (Lam. 4:8-10).

When Moses delivered his lengthy speech at Sinai, very much of what he said consisted of warnings and threats. Because of their extreme wickedness, Jehovah would chastise Israel, and He promised,

And ye shall eat the flesh of your sons, and the flesh of your daughters shall ye eat (Lev. 26:29).

In a similar statement, Moses again pointed to the consequences of disobedience by saying,

And thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons and of thy daughters... (Deut. 28:53).

God had Ezekiel to warn the people of their transgressions and what would befall them.

Therefore the fathers shall eat the sons in the midst of thee, and the sons shall eat their fathers; and I will execute judgments in thee, and the whole remnant of thee will I scatter into all the winds (Ezek. 5:10).

When Darius asked Daniel "...who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions," the prophet was certain as to the outcome (Dan. 6:27). His was a faith which could say, "...our God is able..." (Dan. 4:17). Even now, we need people who will dare to be a Daniel. There are still lions with which to contend. We may lose one or more of our children to the ferocious enemy, but let us serve God who is able to deliver us all from the enemy of death and who has promised to do so. Yes, Our God is Able.

Chapter 15

Fourscore And Ten

Before the flood, God said,
...My spirit shall not always strive with man, for
that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an
hundred and twenty years (Gen. 6:3).

The obvious meaning of the text relates to the fact that
God purposed to put an end to the stupidity of sinful man.

And God saw that the wickedness of man was
great in the earth, and that every imagination of
the thoughts of his heart was only evil
continually (Gen. 6:5).

The earth also was corrupt before God, and the
earth was filled with violence. And God looked
upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for
all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth
(Gen. 6:11-12).

We would think that when "...the Lord said," at least a
sizeable number of the sons of God would have listened.
What had happened to all those sons of God? We know
that they had become enamored and obsessed with the
daughters of men (Gen. 6:2). A lot of filth and corruption
can be fomented in a period of one hundred twenty years.
Of course, true to His promise but still with great
longsuffering, God allowed man to perish in his own
cesspool of sin.

Many years thereafter, Almighty God declared that,

The days of our years are threescore years and
ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore
years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow;
for it is soon cut off, and we fly away (Psm.
90:10).

We must not construe this passage to state that God bound

man with an exact limit of seventy years to live. It would be possible for some to live eighty years or even longer.

In a recent study, it was found that some 3600 people in the U.S. are over one hundred years old. Because of so many advances in medical science, and with more emphasis being placed upon observing rules of healthful living, we are able to live longer. It is not to be expected that we will continue to expand the population of the earth into the billions and at the same time be able to attain unto the years of many of the ancient patriarchs.

No one has a valid explanation of how men could live so long before the flood. Adam lived 930 years (Gen. 5:5), Seth lived 912 years (Gen. 5:8), Enos lived 905 years (Gen. 5:11), Cain lived 910 years (Gen. 5:14), Mahalaleel lived 895 years (Gen. 5:17), Jared lived 962 years (Gen. 5:20), Enoch, the seventh in our present calendar year (Gen. 5:23), Methuselah lived 969 years and was the oldest man to have lived in recorded history (Gen. 5:27). Noah lived almost as long as Methuselah, but he died at 950 years of age (Gen. 9:21). Others were able to live very long upon the earth.

It is the desire of normal people to live long, happy, and useful lives, and we are seeing many who are blessed in this manner. How wonderful to be able to live and help others until the day of one's departure. Sometimes people live a long time but experience devastating disease, pain, helplessness, and despair. Life becomes really burdensome to self and perhaps others. We may ask questions, but the answers cannot be found this side of the grave.

There are some who are able to live long upon the earth, and instead of smelling the roses, they purposefully hunt for thorns. In such cases, we need to reassess and reaffirm our faith in God and in His Word. It really does not make much sense for us to be empty when we can be full; to be sad when we can be glad; to sigh when we can sing; to be faithless when we can be faithful.

The very nature of man is to desire to live. When God gave the old covenant law, He said,

Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee (Exodus 20:12).

Living a long time was the reward promised by Jehovah for giving honour to parents. He could have offered other incentives and rewards. Why was long life offered if it was not something to be greatly favored?

When Solomon was made king after the death of his father, the Lord appeared unto him in a dream and said, "...Ask what I shall give thee" (I Kings 3:5). Solomon realized his frailty and thought of himself as a little child. With this attitude, Solomon said,

Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people (I Kings 3:9)?

The request of the king was pleasing to God, and He said,

...Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life...Behold, I have done according to thy words...And if thou wilt walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days (I Kings 3:11-14).

Long life for Solomon was very important, but there was something of much greater value. Because the king chose the better part, God promised an additional reward by extending time and length to his days. It is not wrong to desire an extension of life on this earth, but we should make a request according to God's will. The Psalmist wrote, "He asked life of thee, and thou gavest it him, even length of days for ever and ever" (Psm. 21:4). He asks, "What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he

may see good" (Psm. 34:12)? Because of one's fidelity to God, the promise has been made, "With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation" (Psm. 91:16). The wise man counseled his son to keep the commandments,

For length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee....Length of days is in her right hand... (Prov. 3:2, 16).

It is the result of wisdom that "...thy days shall be multiplied, and the years of thy life shall be increased" (Prov. 9:11). We further learn that "The fear of the Lord prolongeth days..." (Prov. 10:27).

It is from the New Testament that we learn,

For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile (I Peter 3:10).

All of the above passages remind us of man's interest in living long upon the earth.

Many have asked the question which Barzillai asked David. When the King asked his friend to accompany him to Jerusalem, Barzillai replied, "...How long have I to live, that I should go up with the king unto Jerusalem" (II Sam. 19:34)? It is not given for us to know how few or many of our years shall be on earth. When Pharaoh asked Jacob his age, the old patriarch replied,

...The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage (Gen. 47:9).

There seems to have been some remorse in the heart of Jacob because of the brevity of his life.

In our desire to live long and useful lives, we should continually pray to depart this old world like David, who

“...died in a good old age, full of days, riches, and honour...”
(I Chron. 29:28). The Psalmist had prayed,

Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake
me not when my strength faileth...Now also
when I am old and grayheaded, O God, forsake
me not; until I have shewed thy strength unto
this generation, and thy power to every one that
is to come (Psm. 71:9, 18).

If by reason of strength we reach fourscore years, we know that eventually our physical strength will fail. Faithful children of God have a reserve of strength and power in God. It was a most noble purpose for the old, grey-headed person to desire to shew the strength and power of God to others. God has made a wonderful promise to the righteous. He said, “They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing” (Psm. 92:14).

Somewhere along the way we have been duped into thinking that old people are of very little benefit. Perhaps some older folks contribute to that falsehood by thinking that their usefulness terminates with age. This has never been the case, and must not be. It is true that the strength needed to perform hard, physical labor in younger days is not present in old age, but thank God, one is not constrained always to persist in hard labor eternally. There are thousands of things which are waiting for the fourscore set to tackle, with challenges enough to keep body and mind “fat and flourishing.”

When Caleb and the other spies were sent into Canaan to check over the land, we know that Caleb was only forty years of age. He was kept alive by the Lord while the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness. At eighty five years of age, Caleb said, “Now therefore give me this mountain...” (Joshua 14:10-12). It was a mountain of wood and needed to be cut down (Joshua 17:15). The old man did not run from a challenge but,

instead, asked for that which would present opportunities for exacting labour. Caleb was not a compromiser with hard work. Most men in our day do not like to climb mountains at eighty five years of age.

Solomon informed us that,

If a man beget an hundred children, and live many years, so that the days of his years be many, and his soul be not filled with good, and also that he have no burial; I say, that an untimely birth is better than he (Eccl. 6:3).

A good life, then, is not necessarily a long life, but a good life is one that is filled with good. When one's life is filled with good and the life span is extended on into a ripe old age, then just think of all the tremendous good, the influence, the rich blessings which can be spread abroad. We believe righteous people should really desire to live long lives, because of the good which can be done.

The world has far too many evil men of every age. If I live in a community where there are ten aged men, five of them righteous and five of them unrighteous, I would certainly hope and pray that the influence of the righteous would far outweigh the evil influence of the wicked. If I were numbered with the God-fearing five, would it really help others and me by my becoming unfaithful and assisting the community to have six wicked old men and four righteous? Furthermore, if I am a part of the five who are righteous, would it be wise for me to persist in filthy habits and practices which all admit would contribute to shortening my days? Why should I do that which I know full well will cut short my life and my opportunities for doing good? One fellow said, "Oh well, I'm going to die of something." This is true, but such a statement can come only from some sort of deranged or demented mind, when one knows full well that a slave-binding habit is unsafe, unhealthy, and destructive of life.

Yes, we will die of something, but who wants to be thrown into a deep well and left to perish, or who would choose to be burned gradually to death?

We devoutly wish that every saint could reach the fourscore mark, simply because this earth needs more saving salt for longer periods. Then at sunset, we can be content to "...come to thy grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in his season" (Job 5:26).

Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was:
and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it
(Eccl. 12:7).

Chapter 16

Not Fitten' To Pray

The saintly mother had been lowered into the bleak and barren grave in the little country cemetery. I had been asked to be present and take care of the closing services. Some appropriate scriptures were read with a few comments, and the service was concluded with a prayer to Almighty God.

As the neighbors were filling the grave, one of the sons walked over and stood by me. As he sobbed over the loss of his dear mother he muttered,

There she was dying in the hospital room with all six of us children standing by the bed, and not a one of us was fitten' to pray.

Six children! Three sons and three daughters! Children with whom I had played as a very young boy! Sons and daughters who had been taken to worship, protracted meetings, and Sunday school by faithful parents! Children of a father who had been instrumental in converting people to Christ. At one point the good father had converted a neighbor and baptized him in a stock pond! Children of a father who gave a comforting funeral sermon when a neighbor passed away! Children who were "not fitten' to pray" as they stood beside the bed of a dying mother! Ah, the pity of such spiritual poverty!

Did that mother need her children as she lay dying? Could she look into the faces of those sons and daughters and whisper, "Please, pray for me?" Would it have been consoling to that godly mother to have had her hand clasped by a stalwart son or devoted daughter and heard them pray to a loving God? Such sad scenes make us long to search for the juniper tree of the ancient prophet and sit down for awhile.

In our final hours upon this old sin-cursed earth, why do we feel satisfied in being unable, unfit and unwilling to give that which is needed most? Why the curse of having children who are not fitten' to pray?

O the bitter pain and sorrow,
That a time could ever be,
When I proudly said to Jesus
All of self and none of Thee.

The pangs of remorse which surged through the heart of that "unfit" son certainly made his burden so much heavier. What loss can be greater than the loss of a godly mother or father? I know the constant and abiding hurt which never goes away. No son ever loved a mom or dad more than I loved mine. If I loved not sufficiently, it was because my ability was deranged and grossly lacking.

In the good Providence of God, I stood by my mother's bedside as she moved out of her mortal body. One sister and I were there, and I recall saying, "Let us give thanks to our loving Father." Yes, I believe we were "fitten'" to pray as we said farewell to Mother, and called upon our Almighty Father to help us.

My dear mother had been comatose for about six years. She could not look into my face during that final hour and ask me to pray. If such had been possible, would I have exclaimed, "I'm not fitten' to pray?"

I certainly believe in the efficacy of prayer, and I believe that there are some definite guidelines to prayer. One must not think that one can run with the devil's crowd all the time and then "have a little talk with Jesus," as we so foolishly sing, when afflictions come. I repeat that I do not subscribe to the religion of the fellow who said, "Now that we've done all we can do, let us pray." Why not pray first, then do whatever we can? Why say,

Not Fitten' To Pray

Lord, we will try to do this without You, but if we see that we cannot, please stay around close enough so we can call on You.

Such is the practice of multitudes.

Being "fitten' to pray" is to recognize that one must stay "fitten,'" and it is also to realize that God will not hear the prayers of the unfit, misfits, and dimwits who rebel against Him. It is the case that the prayer of the rebel is an abomination to God (Prov. 15:8). It is still the truth that

...God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth (John 9:31).

Let us not forget that

He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination (Prov. 28:9).

Sometimes people can be so obstinate and obnoxious as not to be on speaking terms with the Lord. This occurs when we had rather speak with, for and to appease the devil instead of Jehovah God.

Our blessed Lord said that "...men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1). The peerless apostle to the Gentiles wrote,

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints (Eph. 6:18).

He also wrote,

Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God (Phil. 4:6).

To the Colossians Paul wrote, "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving" (Col. 4:2). Again we read, "Pray without ceasing" (I Thess. 5:17). It is beyond question that one of the requisites to prayer in the life of any Christian is to be given to daily prayer. This is no contradiction, albeit to some it might be so. If one wants to be "fit," one must stay "fit."

Our blessed Lord was given to prayer (Matt. 14:23; Mark 6:46; Luke 6:12; 9:28). In deep sorrow Jesus prayed (Matt. 26:36; Luke 5:16; Luke 22:44; Heb. 5:7).

We are reminded that in the presence of death, Jesus stopped to help people (Luke 7:11ff). One of the best ways we can help people as well as ourselves is to keep "fitten' to pray."

Chapter 17

A Final Farewell

TEXT: II CORINTHIANS 13:11

INTRODUCTION

For two thousand years, mankind has derived guidance and strength from great scriptural selections. Our text must be one of the favorite passages for Christians when the final curtain is being drawn. It is very interesting that Paul closes his letter to the church of Corinth with some comforting words.

“FINALLY”

The word “finally” reminds us of the finish, or conclusion. In life, we are called upon to experience a number of concluding events. A young student looks forward to that great eventful day when he will finally graduate from school. With diploma in hand he exclaims, “I finally made the grade.”

The desperate husband and father who has had such terrible days and sleepless nights trying to find a job in order to support his family can rejoice with joy unspeakable. He finally found a job, and his searching days are finished.

The faithful saint who has been weakened by the hard battles fought with disease finally finishes the race and gains the crown (II Tim. 4:6). There is not anything as final for us as death. When our Lord was dying on the cross, He said, “...it is finished” (John 19:30). We know that whatever Jesus meant, certainly He had reference to the ordeal of the cross and the final moment of life thereon. Just as Jesus had to reach the end of the race, so must each one of us.

“BRETHREN”

Why use this term instead of another? He could have referred to them as disciples, but he chose a better term. There were times when Paul would call the members, citizens, and fellows. He prefers a word in conclusion which denotes a closeness like the bond of kinship. These brethren were so very dear to each other that Paul could even ask them to salute each other with a holy kiss (II Cor. 13:12). Although at times we may not be as thoughtful of our brethren, yet, how could we live without them? Who would want to live on a lonely Patmos away from brothers and sisters? There is no greater joy this side of heaven than that which is experienced by brethren in Christ. Think of the bliss and rejoicing which occur when we have a great “Homecoming Day.” Let us try to see through our tear stained eyes and think of the funeral service for our brothers and sisters as a “Homecoming Day” for them.

This will be made easier for us when we recall that the Holy Spirit said,

For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren (Heb. 2:11).

We count our Lord as a brother, and there is no greater blessing to enjoy.

“FAREWELL”

We cannot imagine life without its sad farewells. Oceans of tears have flowed since that dark day when our parents were forced to bid farewell to their Edenic home with God. Sorrow has indeed multiplied since that time.

It is a balm for troubled souls when we can believe and hope that our dead will “fare well.” Paul would neither say nor do anything that would hamper the welfare of others.

Very many lives are filled with turmoil, tragedy, and grief as we grope along in this old troublesome world. There is a burden we can lift and make somewhat lighter for others. A dear friend is prostrate in grief and needs support. A family has a deep tragedy and needs someone who can understand. A death has occurred, and a life has been left shattered and lonely. A friend is needed who can assist in every way possible to help others fare well.

“BE PERFECT”

There is a place of perfection “beyond this land of parting, losing, and leaving.” We think of that as a place for the pure and blest. Here we cannot attain unto perfection, but it is a worthy goal and requires much effort on our part. We are to be being perfect.

So often we are beset with physical troubles which blow our lives to pieces. Things seem to fall apart, and there is not that state of tranquility and perfection for which we sigh. We can believe that through the grace of God we will be strengthened and sustained here, and have a far better life hereafter (II Cor. 5:1-4).

“BE COMFORTED”

We have grown accustomed to very many comforts in life. When we lie down at night, we want a comfortable bed. When we work hard and need rest, we like to find a comfortable chair.

If sad news is brought, we are naturally dis comforted mentally and emotionally. This can sometimes lead to many illnesses. We talk about comfort, and all of us desire it. There are very many people over the globe who never have a moment of comfort. Some of our aged people are lacking in many of the real comforts of living. Life for them is a real heartache and is filled with drudgery from daybreak ‘til dusk.

The greatest comfort for all is spiritual in nature. This is the very basis of mental and emotional comfort. We all know the hurt of death and the joy of comfort. We can rest in the hope and be sustained in our comfort when we know that our loved ones have died in the Lord (Rev. 14:13). Our Lord promised to comfort those who mourn (Matt. 5:4). God is the Father of Mercies and the God of all Comfort (II Cor. 1:3). We can receive much comfort from our brethren (Acts 16:40). With God's help and the help of brethren, when we are cast down, we can be lifted up (II Cor. 7:6).

There is a very sad account related in the scriptures which occurred when Jesus was born. The notoriously and beastly Herod was king. When the wise men came to Jerusalem in search of the Christ child, Herod somehow heard enough and believed sufficiently to be troubled at the thought of another king being born (Matt. 2:3). Ignoring the orders of Herod, the wise men went back to their own country after their visit to Bethlehem. So infuriated was Herod that he had all the children murdered

...that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men (Matt. 2:16).

God permitted this evil, but He did not ordain it. This was the work of a very evil person. Moral evil is permitted in this world, and it has to be, if we are to be human beings in the true sense. There is no moral evil when a large tree in the forest blows over, breaks, crushes, and uproots the smaller trees. In order for man to be free, he must be able even to rebel against God; hence, the partial answer to evil and suffering can be found in man's freedom to rebel. We, too, must be free to pluck the forbidden fruit. Like the prodigal son, we must be free to go waste our inheritance

and to be in want. Since we are made in the image of God, we cannot be free from freedom. How does one escape from freedom? Foolish people may day-dream about total freedom, but they become slaves to their own devices. We can never be free from suffering and eventual death. Although it may seem contradictory, it is good that we can be free to experience suffering and eventual death. Growing out of this freedom, evil man can subject others to suffering and at times death. From one standpoint, death but demonstrates our freedom to be free and also our freedom from freedom.

Concurrent with men's freedom is that which we call **conscience**. This also is another valid reason why we experience grief when we lose a little one. Yet, not every person's conscience is operative on the same level. Whereas some people feel perfectly sane and secure while murdering **seven** million unborn infants each year, yet others think of this as bordering on insanity. Apparently Herod the Great had no compunction of conscience when he had the innocents of Bethlehem slaughtered. Obviously, the parents of those precious children were overcome with grief as they witnessed the death of their innocent babies. We know that Jesus was spared during this ordeal in order that the scriptures might be fulfilled (Matt. 2:15, 23). No person can ever know the number of innocent children who have been killed because of ignorant and evil men.

When the children of Israel were slaves in Egypt, they were

...fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them (Exodus 1:7).

Pharaoh became alarmed at the threat which was posed because of so many Hebrews, thus he decided to have all the male babies cast into the river. He appointed midwives

to attend to the women who were bearing children and said, "...if it be a son, then ye shall kill him..." (Exodus 1:16). The providential hand of God intervened, and the children were spared. We do know that the wrath of Pharaoh was terrible and that the mothers must have experienced great suffering and grief as they tried to hide, and thus protect their babies from death. As a result of this wicked decree, Moses was hidden for three months. Every moment must have been a nightmare for his parents. They lived in constant fear that the child would be found and killed. Eventually, when his mother felt that it was no longer safe to try to hide her baby, she prepared a little ark and put the baby in it, "...and she laid it in the flags by the river's brink" (Exodus 3:3). Millions of mothers daily walk along by brackish rivers while their child is rocked by the turbulent waters. Those three months must have been days of shadows and without any sunshine for Jochebed as she tried to protect her baby.

Chapter 18

No More Pain

A place where there will be no more pain! I do not comprehend the significance thereof. This world and the places I have occupied therein have visited me with very much suffering and pain. I am not alone in experiencing suffering. As a baby I was almost burned to death, and at the present, I still carry those dreadful scars. There are legions who bear many scars, and so often pain is constant, just as the scars. It is not an idle thought as we think of a place free from hurt and pain.

In the last few years it has been my lot in life to suffer from two episodes of cancer—some five years apart, and in between, four by-passes of heart surgery. Added to this was a bout with H-Pylori ulcers which kill its victims—if it is not arrested. The weeks of radiation and chemotherapy have been almost more than I could bear.

Have not others likewise suffered from their own misfortunes? Indeed so! Three wonderful people who were taking their chemotherapy doses at the same time I was have already expired. Here I linger with my daily pains and suffering, dependent upon strong pain medications to enable me to groan and moan.

Someone is ready to counter, “Why tell us such tales of woe?” If the foregoing conditions seem irksome to the readers, I can only reply that the half has not as yet been told. I take comfort in reflecting on a place which is free from pain.

I suspect, to one who experiences great pain and eventual death therefrom, the thought of a place where there will be no more pain becomes much more meaningful. We might wonder why the aged John wrote from his exile on Patmos and told the brethren that he was allowed to see a place where

...there shall be no more **death**, neither **sorrow**,
nor **crying**, neither shall there be any more **pain**:
for the former things are passed away (Rev. 21:4).

We can make a long list of “former things” which we would like to eliminate from our lives. My list might differ from your list, but they also might overlap in some respects. The “former things” can deal some heavy blows to us, and so often we grope for reasons when there seems to be no earthly reasons given.

No sorrow, nor crying, nor pain, nor death! A place where such troubles will never be known arouses within us a strong desire to find that place. We know that we cannot stay here on earth forever. Who would want to, as the infirmities of age overwhelm us? But it is the case that often one is compassed about with infirmities at a very young age. Visit the ward of a children’s hospital and see how the heart can ache while observing the pain etched in the brow of a precious child. Be thankful for a place far removed from the children’s hospital. The children suffer physical pain, and the parents are overwhelmed with mental and emotional anguish. There are occasions when the mental stress and agony so great that some forlorn victims go stark raving mad. The emotional pain eats away all the tidbits of rationality. Even the medications prescribed by physicians eventually become ineffective when pain continues to saturate our mortal bodies.

When Paul penned his second letter to Corinth he wrote,

For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be
clothed upon with our house which is from
heaven (II Cor. 5:2).

The pain and suffering which was experienced by the Apostle was horrible. The aged saint knew what it was to hurt and groan. He could write, “...I die daily” (I Cor. 15:31). He had to fight with lions in Ephesus (v. 32). This may have reference to false teachers who caused so much

No More Pain

trouble. To be chastised with rods at Philippi was a terrible, painful experience. Paul was stoned at Lystra, and his enemies dragged him out of the city and left him. They thought he was dead (Acts 14:19). How many stones did it take to destroy the life of Paul? Every blow was painful and grossly inhumane. There was no sound of any friend or helper. Only the groans from Paul were forthcoming. What Paul was wearing certainly became torn and tattered as the fusillade of stones continued to be hurled at him. He could wish for heavenly garments as the last moment of consciousness faded away. Paul could say,

For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens (II Cor. 5:1).

What a contrast in the earthly house and the house not made with hands! The building of God is eternal in the heavens. It will not be dissolved, and this will be a different situation from that of the earthly tabernacle.

Physical hands can construct beautiful mansions, but decay is inscribed upon them. We may be so strong and powerful as to feel like Atlas but eventually "...in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened..." (II Cor. 5:4).

To the church in Rome, Paul wrote, "For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now" (Rom. 8:22). To be afflicted with pain and groanings is the common lot of human beings. One would think that the whole creation would have their thoughts arrested by the idea that there is a place where there will be no pain.

It is so very comforting to read that

...even we ourselves **groan** within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body (Rom. 8:23).

Our body serves, among other things, as a dwelling place for very many aches and pains. This is especially true as old age creeps upon us. The torture which afflicts and the affliction which tortures get a firm grip upon us, and we can only wait for release and “the redemption of our body.”

We find solace in the words of Paul when we read,

For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us (Rom. 8:18).

The rigors of deep and abiding pain will eventually take its toll. The heart wears down with so much suffering, and the audible groans become hushed silence. There is a place where there will be no more pain.

It is probable that the first sound of a new baby is a wail and cry. The old story is circulated that the physician who delivers the baby whacks it on its rear-end in order to start the little fellow to breathing. This being the case, the first and last sounds of a human being on this earth could well be the sound of crying out in pain.

When he recounted the difficult experiences which came to him, Paul mentioned that he had been beaten, stoned, suffered shipwreck, in perils of waters, robbers, heathen, the wilderness, hunger, cold, nakedness, false brethren, in weariness and painfulness (II Cor. 11:24-27). When we consider the pain which the Apostle suffered, we can understand why he could say, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21). Paul could say,

For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better (Phil. 1:23).

Such a marvelous faith would sustain the suffering servant in all his trials. There is a place of quiet rest where we will be free from all pain.

No More Pain

When the spirits of just men are made perfect (Heb 12:23), there will be no more suffering. Our blessed Lord was acquainted with such terrible suffering as He hung on the old rugged cross. Who can read the crucifixion story and not be disturbed in heart?

For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings (Heb. 2:10).

Peter wrote,

Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow (I Peter 1:11).

The inspired Apostle Peter wrote,

But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy (I Peter 4:13).

Again we read, "For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ" (II Cor. 1:5). "...as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation" (II Cor. 1:7). Paul wrote,

That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death (Phil. 3:10).

There is a place where there will be no more suffering and crying. We recall that the Hebrews writer spoke of the crying and tears of our Lord,

Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying

and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared (Heb. 5:7).

Many of us know what it means to weep to such an extent that tears can no longer flow. Only silent sobs can be expressed. Like small children crying themselves to sleep, weariness from weeping will soon overcome us, and we find respite for a while, until suffering stirs our mortal frames. Is there a place for us where there will be no more crying? The Bible tells me so, and to that place I must prepare to go. If I fail, then eternal weeping and gnashing of teeth will be my lot (Matt. 25:30).

There will be no more sorrow. How wonderful is the thought! Look around and behold the sorrow which is etched into the faces of so many. Truly this world is filled with sorrow, and such has been its story since Adam and Eve transgressed the law of Jehovah. Indeed, sorrow was pronounced upon the first pair "...all the days of thy life" (Gen. 3:16-17).

The Psalmist wrote,

The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away (Psm. 90:10).

We read that our Lord shared in the sorrows of life (Isa. 53:3-4).

When Jesus went to Gethsemane to pray, He took Peter, James, and John with Him. The Record states,

...and began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy; And saith unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death: tarry ye here, and watch (Mark 14:33-34).

The brethren in Thessalonica were deeply disturbed

No More Pain

about their loved ones who had died. Paul wrote words of comfort to them saying,

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope (I Thess. 4:13).

There can be no sorrow as great as that which wells up within one when there is a consciousness that a loved one is eternally lost in torment, "Those who have no hope!"

There are millions who have no hope, and there are millions of others who have false hopes, and the tragedy is compounded when people are so unconcerned as not to make proper preparation for eternity.

There is a place where there will be no more death. It was said of the Egyptians when the plague of death was visited upon them, "...there was not a house where there was not one dead" (Exodus 12:30). This is certainly true in our day. At some point physical death is visited upon all families. Almighty God warned Adam and Eve and promised the death penalty if they disobeyed His will (Gen. 2:17). The story has never ended and will not, until death as an enemy is destroyed (I Cor. 15:26).

The inspired Record tells about Enoch and Elijah who were not allowed to experience physical death, but these two ancient worthies were transported to heaven in a miraculous manner.

Our Lord pronounced a blessing upon those faithful children of God who die in the Lord (Rev. 14:13). In his great vision, John saw the dead standing before God to be judged according to their works (Rev. 20:12).

As painful and hurtful as physical death is, there is a spiritual death which is far more dreadful. Paul reminded the brethren in Ephesus that they had been "...dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1). To the brethren in Colossee,

Paul wrote,

And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses (Col. 2:13).

Paul spoke of those women who live in pleasure and are dead while they live (I Tim. 5:6).

When Jesus came to this sin-cursed earth He tried to change the hearts of people, but sin was so prevalent He made but little impression on a sin-hardened society. The enemies of Truth crucified the Lord, but His marvelous influence was not destroyed. The scriptures teach us,

But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel (II Tim. 1:10).

In the resurrection of Christ from the death, the powers of death were broken. Immortality was brought to light through the saving gospel. We thus read,

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 (Heb. 2:14-15).

It is consoling and so wonderful to know that we can be in a place throughout eternity where there will be no more death.

Chapter 19

Good Grief

There is no wound as severe as the grief which we experience due to the death of a precious loved one. Perhaps more subjective judgments have been given relative to grief than to any other emotion. During the last decade, death and grief have been worn out. Courses have been started in colleges, and special seminars have been held by self-proclaimed specialists. Counselors have hung up their shingles announcing their therapeutic skills. Apparently all of these seem to have forgotten that human beings have been dealing with grief for some few thousand years.

I claim to be no kind of expert or specialist, but as has been the case in years gone by, I can cite to any and all, the source of comfort, and no one can do more to help the bereaved.

While considering the matter of grief, it might be helpful to look at some of the synonyms and words closely connected with grief. What is "grief"? Like some other conditions, it is not so easily defined. We might think of some closely related words such as affliction, distress, mourning, melancholy, sorrow, sadness, woe, anguish, lamentation, heartache, disquietude, and misery. All of these terms are closely related and express the deep mental and emotional misery which we often experience.

Grief is a mental condition which results from a severe loss or deep disappointment. A grievance denotes a difficult burden. We use the word derived from the Latin **gravis**, which suggests that which lies heavy on the heart. Grief is a hardship that passes heavily onto its victims. As can be seen, there are many kinds or sources of grievances. This is why we cannot always dismiss acute grief as if we held

a magic wand. We know that to grieve is to be affected inwardly. A man might grieve on account of his own wayward conduct or the foolishness of someone else. One may grieve not only on account of self-imposed actions, but as is so often the case, one may grieve on the account of others, and help may be too distant in such cases.

Since the root word for grief denotes heaviness or burden, we often speak of a person or family suffering from a heavy heart. Perhaps the burden of grief is too heavy for someone to carry alone. Solomon wrote,

Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop:
but a good word maketh it glad (Prov. 12:25).

The Psalmist wrote,

Reproach hath broken my heart; and I am full of
heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity,
but there was none; and for comforters, but I
found none (Psm. 69:20).

As he that taketh away a garment in cold
weather, and as vinegar upon nitre, so is he that
singeth songs to an heavy heart (Prov. 25:20).

Paul wrote, "I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart" (Rom. 9:2). Jesus said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28), "For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (v. 30).

It is a common thing for the burdens of life to become too heavy, and the result often ends in death. Why do we gather as friends and neighbors in Funeral Chapels? One major reason is to help bear the great burden which overcomes our friends, family and loved ones. When Paul wrote to the brethren in Galatia, he said, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). To the Romans Paul wrote, "...weep with them that weep" (Rom. 12:15).

When the people followed Moses on their way to the Promised Land, they began to complain, started lusting and weeping. Moses was greatly troubled and asked Jehovah,

...wherefore have I not found favour in thy sight,
that thou layest the burden of all this people
upon me (Num. 11:11)?

I am not able to bear all this people alone,
because it is too heavy for me (v. 14).

Job asked,

...why hast thou set me as a mark against thee,
so that I am a burden to myself (Job 7:20)?

The Psalmist was crushed beneath heavy burdens when he wrote,

For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as
an heavy burden they are too heavy for me (Psm.
38:4).

The remedy was set forth when the writer said,

Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall
sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous
to be moved (Psm. 55:22).

We must keep in mind that

we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being
burdened: not for that we would be unclothed,
but clothed upon, that mortality might be
swallowed up of life (II Cor. 5:4).

To the church at Thyatira Jesus said,

...I will put upon you none other burden. But
that which ye have already hold fast till I come
(Rev. 2:24-25).

To be burdened in spirit suggests a state of heaviness of heart. The greater the burden, the worse will be the

grief. Job wrote of his grief saying,

Oh that my grief were throughly weighed, and
my calamity laid in the balances together! For
now it would be heavier than the sand of the
sea: therefore my words are swallowed up (Job
6:2-3).

Job also said, "Though I speak, my grief is not asswaged:
and though I forbear, what am I eased" (Job 16:6). The
Psalmist wrote, "Mine eye is consumed because of grief; it
waxeth old because of all mine enemies" (Psm. 6:7).
Jeremiah wrote, "...before me continually is grief and
wounds" (Jer. 6:7). The prophet continued by saying,

Woe is me now! for the Lord hath added grief
to my sorrow; I fainted in my sighing, and I find
no rest (Jer. 45:3).

There are tons of medications which can be purchased
and applied to various maladies. There is no concoction
which can be administered to eradicate grief. Sedatives can
be effective for a brief time in dulling the senses, but grief
remains.

We realize that grief is a heart problem. The Psalmist
wrote, "Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in
my reins" (Psm. 73:21). The writer needed some kind of
panacea to help his heart.

If my heart is broken with grief, I need to realize that
heartache is common to all. Millions succumb to the grim
reaper each week, and trails of tears and grief are left
behind.

The Christian realizes that God is "the God of all
comfort" (II Cor. 1:3). This simply states that God is able
and ready to comfort those who are grieved. It would be
remiss to try to turn the bereaved family away from God.
With the same love and loyalty which is shown before
God when the sun is shining, the Christian will continue

to lean upon God when darkness prevails.

The inspired remedy as set forth by Paul will continue to be of help when we are bereft and broken hearted. To his brethren Paul wrote, "Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (I Thess. 4:18). There are some words which are harmful, and there are some speakers who do harm even though they may intend to do good. Words are powerful when expressed properly. They are painful when expressed improperly

In order to help us, God has given a long list of words for which we should be thankful. Notice,

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble (Psm. 46:1).

There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God (Heb. 4:9).

For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us (Rom. 8:18).

God...comforteth those that are cast down... (II Cor. 7:6).

To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you (I Peter 1:4).

And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads (Rev. 22:4).

In all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us (Rom. 8:37).

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain (Phil. 1:21).

What expressions of comfort and assurance could be greater than those contained in the words of scripture as

given above? It is meaningless to read that God is the God of all comfort, yet think that He refuses to extend comfort to His people.

Remove every jot and tittle of comfort from the heart of human beings and despair will move in and conquer. People who have unfeigned faith in Almighty God look to Him for help. His revealed Word expresses the care of God for His people. If God utilizes some means or method to comfort the bereaved other than His Holy Word, I do not know anything about it. I certainly have no disposition to guess about the matter. The written Word is every whit the inspired Truth of God, and it will furnish me as needs arise.

We read of God's gracious provisions in days of yore, and we also see His goodness on every hand at the present (Rom. 11:22). We rejoice in the precious promises for the future which come from God. Robert Harkness wrote:

When our loved ones leave us
there need be no shadows,
If their faith is fixed in Jesus as their Lord;
For they go to be with Him
who died to save them,
To be with the One
whom they have long adored.

We are relieved with the promise, "...to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord" (II Cor. 5:8). "...and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (I Thess. 4:17). In Jesus' prayer for His disciples He said,

Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast
given me...for thou lovedst me before the
foundation of the world (John 17:24).

It is important to realize from this passage that Jesus wanted His disciples to be with Him. He did not want them to be in some far-off state of existence. The Lord of

love desired the disciples of His love to be able to behold His glory. To be with the Lord would be the same as "being home with the Lord." Jesus knew that "in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore" (Psm. 16:11)

As I write, I am sitting in an electric chair. It is not the kind used in the penal institution, but rather by pushing a button the chair will lift me up and enable me to stand. It will also help me to recline. On yesterday, the sun shone through the glass doors and surrounded me with warmth and comfort for a brief time. Today as I write, not a ray of sunshine can be seen. Such is typical of life in this world. Our sunshine can turn to cold, cloudy days which beat the life out of us as we hurt. One must never give over to grief and defeat "...that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble..." (II Cor. 1:4). It is a sad fact that many people do not have any idea at all about comforting others. They are somewhat like those miserable comforters who tormented Job (Job 16:2). We could be charitable and think that these three friends meant well, but nonetheless, they were failures. Their efforts were harmful.

Why grief continues to be so persistent, we do not know. With some, every moment is a time of grief, and what amounts to a short period of grief, pain and suffering, may seem to be an eternity. We may remark with Jeremiah who said, "Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there?" (Jer. 8:22). What may seem to be an age-long affliction is discussed by Paul when he wrote to Corinth. He said,

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen

are temporal; but the things which are not seen
are eternal (II Cor. 4:17-18).

Perhaps there are some key words in the above scripture which will help us. Afflictions can be light, contrasted with the heavy burden of eternal suffering. The affliction is momentary, compared to an eternity. The affliction is physical, compared to the glory of the spiritual state.

Good grief is far better than a grief which destroys us. May we be spared the horrible grief and pain which are so common to so many, and after the cloudy day passes, may we be able to live where Jesus the Christ lives.

Chapter 20

A Time To Mourn

In his great wisdom, Solomon wrote,
To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven...a time to mourn... (Eccl. 3:1-4).

The concept of mourning is parallel to grieving. Mourning is a very painful experience and is considered to be expressed in some visible manner. The death of a loved one results in the survivors mourning. A loss has been keenly felt, and it leaves one with a sad and heavy heart. There are those who try to make a distinction between grieving and mourning. I am not able to dissect any difference. We know that tender people are able to grieve and mourn, but self-centered, animal-like characters find nothing about which to mourn. They may be sad and morose when things refuse to go their way, but mourning over the dead is out of the question.

There is a very sad story relative to the death of Moses. We remember that Moses was the greatest of prophets of Israel (Deut. 34:10). Like little children following their parents, the people had followed Moses and depended upon him for long decades, but time had come for Moses to be separated from the people. At his death, the children of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days; "...so the days of weeping and mourning for Moses were ended" (Deut. 34:8).

When the spies returned to camp after having journeyed over into Canaan, ten of the men brought back a negative report. Joshua and Caleb delivered a trustworthy report, but the multitude of people accepted the word of the false spies. As a result,

And all the congregation lifted up their voice,
and cried; and the people wept that night (Num.
14:1).

A false and faithless report can cause the falling of many
tear drops.

The initial efforts of Saul as king over Israel were
praiseworthy, but like so many, Saul was unable to contain
himself and depend upon Jehovah. At the end, Saul died
in disgrace, in spite of the fact that Samuel the faithful
prophet tried to help the king. "...nevertheless Samuel
mourned for Saul..." (I Sam. 15:35).

And the Lord said unto Samuel, How long wilt
thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him
from reigning over Israel? (I Sam. 16:1).

King Saul had gotten pretty sorry, but the heart of Samuel
was full of sadness. Like Jehovah, Samuel was very pitiful
and full of tender mercies (James 5:11).

When Absalom became so rebellious toward his father
David, a virtual war developed. The events seem so utterly
senseless, but we can suppose that Absalom had run out
of all good sense. We know Absalom fled to the king of
Geshur. "And David mourned for his son every day."
Absalom stayed in Geshur for three years.

And the soul of king David longed to go forth
unto Absalom: for he was comforted concerning
Amnon, seeing he was dead (II Sam. 13:39).

During the time of Ezra, Israel turned farther away
from God, which deeply disturbed Ezra. He confessed the
sins of the people, he wept and cast himself down before
the house of God. The multitude of people gathered with
Ezra, and they "...wept very sore" (Ezra 10:2). We learn
that Ezra fasted and "...mourned because of the transgression of
them that had been carried away" (Ezra 10:6).

When Isaiah foretold of the coming Redeemer, he

described Him as one who would

...preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound...to comfort all that mourn (Isa. 61:1-2).

When the calamities of Job became very severe, his three friends heard of all the problems which Job experienced,

...for they had made an appointment together to come to mourn with him and to comfort him....for they saw that his grief was very great (Job 2:11, 13).

The wicked decree had been issued by king Ahasuerus to destroy the Jews. When Mordecai heard the dreadful news, he

...rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and cried with a loud and a bitter cry...And in every province, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, and fasting, and weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes (Esther 4:1, 3).

Mourning may include the people of an entire nation, and it certainly should when a nation spurns the only true God.

It was characteristic for mourners to attire themselves in certain types of garb (II Sam. 14:2). These mourners would go about the streets wailing their sad and melancholy expressions (Eccl. 12:5).

The book of James censures the wicked who had turned away from God. The writer says,

Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness (James 4:9).

We recall where Jesus said, "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted" (Matt. 5:4). It is a blessed thing when hearts are not so calloused and stone-formed as to preclude mourning. It is possible to become past feeling (Eph. 4:19). There are myriads who feel no distress whatsoever about sin, regardless of how prevalent or serious it might be.

Blessed is the person who can mourn and who will mourn on account of sin. When Paul wrote to the brethren in Philippi, he reminded them that he had often warned them and wept, due to the enemies which prevailed. For three years Paul warned the brethren in Ephesus with many tears (Acts 20:19). He wrote to the brethren in Corinth with many tears (II Cor. 2:4). Life paid some difficult wages to the apostles.

The mournful heart is filled with deep sorrow, great distress and crushing affliction. We think of affliction as a compound word which denotes to strike to the ground. The death of a dear loved one leaves one afflicted.

In the beautiful paradise of Eden, there must not have been any abiding sorrow, but Satan did not want man to be happy and free from sorrow, so the temptation was presented, and the happy couple became the sorrowful pair.

And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life (Gen. 3:17).

The statutes which God gave to Israel through Moses would guide the people when they entered the land of Canaan. The wonderful promises and conditions of blessings were too plain to misunderstand and too marvelous to miss. If Israel turned away from God, He declared,

A Time To Mourn

I also will do this unto you; I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning ague, that shall consume the eyes, and cause sorrow of heart: and ye shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it (Lev. 26:16).

The entire chapter is a series of woes which would be brought to bear against the disobedient people. We have never seen anyone who enjoys sorrow of heart. Israel could have avoided all their heart problems by remaining obedient to the Lord God as they were so often commanded.

The Jews had been taken captive, and one of those slaves was Nehemiah who had become cup bearer to King Artaxerxes in Shushan. Word came to Nehemiah relative to the destruction of Jerusalem. Nehemiah wrote,

...when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven (Neh. 1:4).

When Nehemiah went before the king, his sorrow was not concealed. He wrote,

Wherefore the king said unto me, Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? this is nothing else but sorrow of heart... (Neh. 2:2).

The Psalmist asked, "How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily..." (Psm. 13:2). He also wrote,

The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and **sorrow**; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away (Psm. 90:10).

The wise man wrote,

A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance:
but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken
(Prov. 15:13).

Solomon also reminded the young man that God will bring all things into judgment. He said,

Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and
put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and
youth are vanity (Eccl. 11:10).

When Jesus told His disciples that He was going away, they were deeply perplexed. Jesus said to them, "But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart" (John 16:6).

Paul informed the brethren in Rome "That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart" (Rom. 9:2). This heavy burden was grievous to the apostle, as the idea of grief denotes, to bear down heavily; we can surely understand a little concerning the weight which rested upon Paul.

The brethren in Corinth had been extremely careless with their lives. In order to help them, Paul wrote two letters to the church. He was mindful of the mourning upon the part of the brethren for him. Paul said,

I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent,
though I did repent: for I perceive that the same
epistle hath made you sorry, though it were but
for a season. Now I rejoice, not that ye were
made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance:
for ye were made sorry after a godly manner,
that ye might receive damage by us in nothing.
For godly sorrow worketh repentance to
salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow
of the world worketh death (II Cor. 7:8-10).

There are very many circumstances which can affect the heart. Some of these can be helpful, whereas some can

A Time To Mourn

be hurtful. The sorrow of the world is very prevalent among worldly minded people. Judas Iscariot was full of remorse, but he did not repent. His heaviness of heart resulted in suicide. Judas loved money and materials too much. To Timothy Paul wrote,

For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows (I Tim. 6:10).

Amidst so much grief and sorrow in this life, it is helpful to read,

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away (Rev. 21:4).

When the brothers of Joseph went to Egypt to get grain, they were put into prison for three days. Joseph accused them of being spies and requested their younger brother to be brought in order to verify their words. The brothers said,

...We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the **anguish** of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us (Gen. 42:21).

The dastardly crime against young Joseph was horrible, but his renegade brothers were not affected by his "anguish of soul."

When the Israelites served as slaves under Pharaoh in Egypt, Moses was sent to the people with a message of promise and hope.

And Moses spake so unto the children of Israel: but they hearkened not unto Moses for anguish of spirit, and for cruel bondage (Exodus 6:9).

The misery of those people cannot be adequately described. They suffered under the “curse bondage,” which I have never experienced.

Poor Job describes some of the bitter conditions which came to him. His flesh was clothed with worms and clods of dust. His skin was broken and loathsome. Job said,

Therefore I will not refrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul (Job 7:11).

When Paul wrote to the brethren in Corinth he said,

For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you (II Cor. 2:4).

Trials, troubles and tribulations seem to be forever around us and cause much sorrow. Paul stated that God is the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, “Who comforteth us in all our tribulation...” (II Cor. 1:4). The brethren in Rome were told to be “...patient in tribulation...” (Rom. 12:12). He reminded the brethren that tribulation could not separate them from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:35, 39). We are told that tribulation worketh patience, thus we glory in tribulations (Rom. 5:3). We are reminded that God comforts us in all our tribulations (II Cor. 1:4). Paul could say, “...I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation” (II Cor. 7:4). Paul reminded the brethren,

For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know (I Thess. 3:4).

We realize that Paul’s faithful brethren were very much disturbed because of his troubles and persecutions, nonetheless he wrote, “Wherefore I desire that ye faint not

A Time To Mourn

at my tribulations for you, which is your glory" (Eph. 3:13).

Times were hard, and troubles were many which came to the early Christians. The church in Thessalonica had sore trials. Paul wrote,

So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure (II Thess. 1:4).

The beloved John wrote to the seven churches in Asia and referred to himself as "I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation..." (Rev. 1:9). When Stephen, the faithful saint was stoned to death, the "...devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him" (Acts 8:2).

We can rest assured that troubles and trials will be visited upon us. In such circumstances we can be like the Psalmist who wrote,

In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried unto my God: he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears (Psm. 18:6).

I called upon the Lord in distress: the Lord answered me, and set me in a large place (Psm. 118:5).

Paul summed up the matter by saying,

Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong (II Cor. 12:10).

This life will present us with trials which may eventually bear down so much that the burden takes its toll, and a life of mourning gives way to eternal comfort.

