

GOD'S HELPERS

Text: "He saw their faith." Luke 5:20

Scripture reading: Luke 5:17-26 (Also Mt. 9:1-8; Mk. 2:1-11)

God's miracles often involve man's help. The Almighty wants the cooperation of puny people. The One who computerized His universe according to His sovereign will wants us to push the buttons to engage His energy, turn the wheels, and achieve His objectives. It has always been so. Remember the little Hebrew slave girl who called the attention of her master, the mighty Syrian general Namaan, to a prophet in Israel whose God could cure his leprosy? Or the little boy whose lunch of 5 loaves and 2 fishes were used by Jesus to feed the 5000? How many mountains have been moved by the seemingly insignificant efforts or unrecorded prayers of countless people whose names are known only to God who "saw their faith?"

Luke 5:17-26 tells us about four such men. His gospel reports that "When Jesus saw their faith," He spoke and He healed. We could study this incident with emphasis on the condition of the paralyzed patient, or concentrate on the Master's words of gracious forgiveness of sin and His Miraculous healing touch. But today we are thinking especially of those four men who set up the situation for Jesus to speak and to act. They were God's Helpers.

We can reconstruct the scene with help from parallel accounts in Matthew 9 and Mark 2. Jesus had been tempted in the wilderness, suffered rejection in His home town of Nazareth, and now was centering His work around Capernaum. Great crowds thronged to hear His teaching and to witness His miracles. Mark says that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town because of the crowds. Luke notes here (5:6) that Jesus sometimes slipped off into the wilderness to pray and rest and prepare. Now he was back "in His own city" which would be Capernaum, probably in the home of Peter. A crowd filled the house and courtyard, pressing about the doors and windows. We Americans are always astonished at the immense crowds that can appear instantly without prior announcement in the Orient, unabashedly indulging their curiosity with much rubber-necking whether it be a roadside medicine show, a missionary changing a flat tire, or some other spectacular event. Let us not belittle such curiosity...Jesus never resented it, but used it as an opportunity to display the power of God and to preach the good tidings of the Kingdom of God.

One large group of special guests was present. Luke says "there were Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting by who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem." That in itself would be a very large audience. Their

purpose was not friendly, or to learn, or to be helpful...just the opposite. God uses not only curiosity but opposition to accomplish His purposes, and Jesus fully appreciated the unprecedented opportunity. In a day of no radio, TV, or newspapers, what better way for His message to reach an entire nation than to have a huge captive audience of her religious leaders? God was controlling these events, as is always the case. What a pity that these men with the abilities, education, and influence failed to have eyes and ears and willing hands like these four men upon whom we now concentrate..."God's Helpers." Look at what kind of men they were.

1. SENSITIVE. These four men were conscious of a need. They were good neighbors, not too preoccupied with their own affairs to ignore a friend who was paralyzed, helpless, desperate. What 20th century medicine cannot always cure now was an even more hopeless situation then. The patient may have been in the prime of life, with a family now deprived of his support. Perhaps he belonged to a crew of a fishing boat along with those four friends...just as Peter and Andrew, James and John worked together. Now he was in desperate need, and could even die an early death. His friends saw his condition with eyes of concern and a desire to help. Mark tells us there were four of them, and as they sat around talking in the cool of the evening after work, they must often have discussed his sad case.

Sensitiveness to need is a God-given virtue. Jesus taught this in the story of the Good Samaritan. The priest and the Levite saw this victim of a severe mugging lying by the roadside, but it aroused in them no compassion, no impulse to help, no twinge of conscience as they slunk by. But a sensitive Samaritan came along, saw him and said, "Here is a man who needs my help." Peter and John were sensitive to the need of a lame man begging at the entrance of the temple as recorded in Acts 3, and met his need. Jesus, of course, was always aware of need...He was moved with compassion.

Even non-Christians must admit that more than anyone else in history, the influence of Jesus Christ has made the world conscious of needy people. The proliferation of various societies, foundations, international commissions, etc. to help orphans, widows, refugees, prisoners, the hungry, the insane, the handicapped, the blind, the deaf, as well as victims of every kind of disease, and the expenditure of vast sums of money and human resources are the result. Almost all of this philanthropy is due to the influence of Jesus through His followers.

Yet this massive effort cannot compare with the one-on-one impact of a single Christian who responds to the need of another person. It is easy to become calloused

to human needs about us. I know that during the Korean War when we were surrounded by massive poverty, hunger, and suffering of all kinds it was easy to grow hardened and indifferent. Perhaps physicians sometimes feel the same way when constantly confronted with human illness. Yet Jesus would never want us to develop a thick skin, anesthetized and insensitive to individual need.

Christian sensitivity to visible need should never blind us to the greater need of those in spiritual poverty, spiritual disease, spiritual hopelessness. On this occasion Jesus saw and met a spiritual need too which He met by offering forgiveness of sin to that paralyzed man. If all Christians were as aware of spiritual need as they are of disease and hunger, world evangelism would be in less trouble! How often we privileged American Christians ignore the need of three billion people in the world who do not know Christ and therefore are without His peace and joy and hope. If four men with eyes to see the need of their paralyzed friend could do so much, what could millions of American Christians sensitive to the world-wide need of a Savior do in sharing not only food for physical hunger, but the Bread of Life as well?

2 EAGER TO ACT. Sensitiveness to need is one thing, doing something about it is another. Plenty of people wring their hands over the sad plight of the helpless, or make angry pronouncements about human rights, or demonstrate against nuclear armament...but are they doing anything to help the victims...even those who live in the same block? James wrote (4:17) "Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin."

These four men didn't stop to argue with each other about who would be chairman of the committee, or whether to go find some other better doctor, or put off action until cooler weather. They rigged up a stretcher, laid the paralytic on it, hoisted it to their shoulders and began to move. Why? Jesus was in town! "Here is the answer to what we have been worried about. Forget about our own work today! Who cares if the weather is hot, and the distance to Jesus in Capernaum is far! No time to dilly-dally! No time to talk, but time to act! Let's move!" There was no energy crisis for these four men!

If all the modern sensitivity to human need, all the talk, all the books and promotional material, all the committee meetings and consultations, all the organizations, were really converted into action, what mountains would be moved! So often great intentions are aroused, elaborate plans proposed...but nothing results simply because in spite of recognized needs, nobody acts! Nobody puts the patient on the stretcher lifts him to our shoulders, and carries him to the Lord!

Jesus wants not just hearers but doers of the Word, He spoke of a farmer with two sons (Mt. 21:28-32). He told them to go to work in his vineyard. The older was aware of the necessity to work and promised to go but failed to do so. The younger refused at first but later repented and went to work. Although less sensitive at first, he nevertheless went into action. This is exactly what God expects of us. We may be weak, or indifferent, or obstinate, but when God calls and says, "There is work to be done," He expects action...not just good intentions, planning sessions, or delegating the job to others.

3 RESOURCEFUL Now the four friends faced a serious problem. The crowd around the house made entrance to Jesus absolutely impossible, especially with a stretcher. "No way!" So they went up the outside stairs to the roof. It was likely gently sloping with tiles which could be easily removed, as was sometimes done to lower caskets into a small room at the time of funerals. Perhaps the owner was Peter or some friend who even encouraged this emergency procedure. Four friends of this sort would also be likely to see that repairs were properly made. The point is that they were determined men...no obstacle could stand in the way...they used their hands and their heads and found a way to accomplish their mission of mercy.

Anyone involved in the Lord's work knows there are always problems, barriers, unexpected obstacles, mountains in the way. Jesus predicted this. Missionaries who leave their homeland and go to strange foreign lands discover this many times over during their service. No project or institution or church ever has smooth sailing all the way. Some may see in every difficulty God closing the door, and resign themselves to inaction with the excuse that nothing can be done. Just suppose those four men had thought that way! But "with God all things are possible." Men and women with determination and who believe in His power but are also willing to act and to sacrifice as did our four friends here...can succeed...their faith moves mountains.

Last year (1987) when we visited a church in Virginia where we had lived when we first started our ministry, an unusual service honoring an 88 year old member was held. This lady had polio as a child and so could never walk easily, her voice was affected so that speech was difficult, and she was otherwise handicapped. Yet she never let these problems daunt her. She taught Sunday School at a distant mission chapel...sometimes walking miles to do so. Her influence on an entire community of children and young people who are now grown adults was immense. The sick, the needy, the helpless were always her concern and when we visited there last year a wonderful tribute was made to her by members of the church. In her reply she humbly said, "I

never questioned why I am this way, but I learned in the catechism many years ago the answer 'God made me for His own glory' and that is what I have always tried to remember." Like those four men, Bernice Jamison never let even personal disabilities or other obstacles get in the way of doing the Lord's work.

4 JESUS SAW THEIR FAITH. Four men sensitive to need, eager to act, resourceful in a difficult situation. Luke records that Jesus "saw their faith." How can you see faith? How can something in our innermost beings be seen? Is it not that this inner conviction of the heart is really meaningless until one steps out on the basis of that faith to act? Faith is far more than intellectual espousal of truth, however Scriptural. It is more than a demonstration of piety or compliance with strict rules of attendance upon church meetings or adherence to practices associated with the Christian life. It includes these, but if that is all, it is sterile, dead!

Faith that is vital, alive and that enlists Divine Power to act, is faith stepping out to do something in the full assurance that God will also work. James told us: "Faith by itself, if it has no works is dead."(2:17) Pointing to Abraham he remarked, "Faith was completed by works."(2:22) Faith is Abraham going out "not knowing where he was to go."(Heb. 11:8) It is the Children of Israel stepping into the bottom of the Red Sea while the waters piled up to the right and the left. It is Philip going to the desert near Gaza, and Paul and Barnabas embarking at Salamis. It is four men convinced that a miraculous cure would take place, taking up their friend, removing roof tiles, and lowering him to where he could receive healing.

Dr. Alan Tippett of Fuller Seminary and a former missionary in the South Pacific writes: "Having many times balanced myself on an island canoe and watched the skilled sailors harness the power of the wind to their crafts, the truth has come home to me that if the navigator could do nothing without the power of the wind, neither could the wind be directed towards purposive goals without the sailing skill of the navigator." God's power is geared in when men's skills and energies go to work for Him. He wants men of faith...but a faith which ACTS..."God's Helpers."

Certain individuals stand out in the history of God's people and we call them great. Seldom was their intellect, skill or leadership ability above average. But their active response to the stimuli of the situation where they found themselves in the plan of God made them great. Our great missionary heroes are an example. So were Luther and Calvin and John Knox. A few were intellectual giants, but most were ordinary people with the same faults, complexes, problems, physical handicaps and other excuses that we have, but they dared to act at a time and place where there was

need. These people ventured into the unknown, undaunted by overwhelming evidence that they were attempting the impossible. But God "saw their faith" and mountains were moved.

Our Lord wants to "see our faith." Attacking the daily schedule, preparing long range plans, initiating major projects...every one is an act of faith. Every time we take on teaching a Bible class, visiting someone in need, doing a good turn for a neighbor, inviting someone to church, or witnessing to them about our Saviour, we are called upon to exercise a faith which can be seen. Granted that God does not reward foolish, ill-conceived, selfish ambitious plunges...it is also true that the super-cautious Christian, refusing to take risks of faith for God, seldom moves the mountains. If four men had stopped to worry...will I catch this man's disease? Will the crowd mob us for interfering with the Master's teaching? Will Jesus Himself rebuke us for tearing up the roof and refuse to heal our friend?...they would have failed.

John Wesley is often thought of as a super-fundamentalist revival preacher, intent on a Bible-thumping pious form of religion. But he was deeply concerned about his fellow men and attempted to act for them, whether they were physically ill, or victims of the evil slave trade, or orphans or widows, or haing gone astray from the Father's house were perishing in a far country of sin. He had this rule of life:

Do all the good you can,
By all the means you can,
In all the ways you can,
In all the places you can,
At all the times you can,
To all the people you can,
As long as you can. (McCartney 102)

"He saw their faith"

1. Sensitive
2. Eager to act
3. Resourceful
4. Full of faith

SAY THE WORD

Text: "Say the word..." Luke 7:7

Scripture Reading: Luke 7:1-10

4 The backbone of the Roman army were the centurions, ^{each} ^{officers} in command of 100 soldiers. They were chosen not only for military skills but also for loyalty, good judgement, integrity and devotion to the people among whom they lived. They were gentlemen as well as officers! The centurions mentioned in the New Testament seemed to have unusual perceptiveness in spiritual matters as well.

(1) The centurion of the unit assigned to crucify Jesus watched those awe-inspiring events with more than casual interest and exclaimed: "Truly, this was the Son of God!"

(2) Cornelius of the Italian Cohort at Caesarea (Acts 10) was a "devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms liberally to the people, and prayed constantly to God." This upright and God-fearing man, well spoken of by the Jews, was told by God to send for Peter from whom he heard and received the Gospel of Jesus, and thereby opened the door of salvation to ~~the Gentiles~~ ^{everyone, regardless of racial origin.}

(3) and (4) In Jerusalem at least two centurions helped Paul receive lawful protection when he was arrested.

(5) Julius of the Augustan Cohort, was assigned to escort Paul as a prisoner from Palestine to Rome. His judgment about the best kind of sailing weather may have been poor, but he learned to admire Paul and depend upon his advice. At ports of call he "treated Paul kindly and gave him leave to go to his friends and be cared for." When their ship wrecked he forbade his soldiers to kill his prisoners in order to spare Paul's life.

(6) The centurion in our story from Luke 7 is un-named, and perhaps not quite so prominent, stationed as he was in charge of the insignificant garrison in the little border town of Capernaum. But Luke's account reveals that (1) he was ^{a beloved and} loved, (2) he was humble, and (3) he was a man of unique faith... ^{each of us to be,} ^{just the kind of person God desires}

^{loving and}
1. THE CENTURION WAS A BELOVED MAN. As a commander his position was not easy. He had to see that his men were housed, fed, clothed, drilled, disciplined, and assigned to their guard duties. He was the responsible Roman officer in charge of this military garrison in occupied alien territory. The odds against popularity in such a position were enormous. Patriotic Jews would hate him as a representative of the despised Roman dictatorship. For religious reasons they would be prejudiced because he was a Gentile who presumably worshipped pagan idols. Yet all the evidence is that he overcame these handicaps and was popular and admired. He was loved because of the kind of man he was.

a. He loved his sick slave, who is described as "highly regarded" by him. He must have been a good worker, trusted and reliable and loved as a friend...almost a member of the family by this Roman centurion. He was sick and about to die...Matthew's account says he was lying paralyzed and in terrible distress. In those days a slave was regarded as a "thing," no better than a farm implement to be thrown away when useless. The centurion could have written his slave off as a business depreciation and let him die. Instead he loved him enough to go to considerable trouble to solicit the help of Jesus. In a society where slavery was accepted without question, he respected the human rights of his slave. This shows something of the character of the centurion in his personal relationships. Anyone who can establish deep love and trust with his closest associates right in his own home is fit for larger responsibilities. If we are loving and caring of those about us, like that centurion we will be beloved. The person who cares for others is always near to Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself said so! "To the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even to the least of them, you did it to Me." (Mt. 26:40)

b. He sent "some Jewish elders" to Jesus. These leaders of the local synagogue were the elite of Capernaum. Whether the friendship of the centurion with these men was on the Rotary Club level or because he was a Gentile convert who now worshipped the true God with them is not clear, but the evidence points to the latter. When he wanted to win a favor from Jesus, this centurion solicited the intercession of the most prominent Jews in town to plead his case. There was nothing wrong with this method. His primary interest was the cure of his slave and the best strategy he knew to achieve his objective was to send those to whom he thought Jesus was most likely to listen.

Those Jewish elders went out of their way to praise him. "...they earnestly entreated Him, saying, 'He is worthy for You to grant this to him; for he loves our nation, and it was he who built us our synagogue.'" They could hardly have said anything finer about their own people. It was astonishing for Jews to be so complimentary of an alien. I am sure he did not expect them to go overboard with their personal praises, yet they began their plea with the words, "He is worthy to have you do this for him." What higher praise could be spoken of a man in his position? As far as his position permitted he seems to have succeeded in integrating with local society. His public relations were of the highest quality. Friendship with community leaders is important and essential for the good of the kingdom of God. Who knows but what this centurion with his affable relationships with local leaders was partly responsible for the generally receptive atmosphere enabling Jesus to perform a major part of His public ministry in Capernaum?

c. He was thoughtful about Jesus too. He knew the Teacher was a busy Person. He had seen and heard Jesus many times. I grew up in Korea under the dictatorial occupation of Korea by imperial Japan whose agents kept strict surveillance of everyone and reported to their superiors. Roman soldiers must have watched Jesus carefully and duly reported His deeds and words to the centurion. He knew all about Jesus. Thus, when Jesus approached his house to heal the slave, the centurion sent other "friends," saying, "Lord, do not trouble Yourself further, for I am not fit for you to come under my roof." How incongruous for a Roman official to address a Jewish peasant as "Lord!"...the equivalent of a colonel addressing a ^acorporal as "Sir"...and you know what that means in military circles.

Here was courtesy and respect, if not outright recognition of the true person of Jesus. He was sensitive enough to see that Jesus was busy, with other important things to take care of, and he had no desire to claim His time. The centurion was not surly, overbearing, or arrogantly asserting his position, but tactful, courteous, and thoughtful...all qualities we Christians must have if we are to represent Christ in an alien world. No wonder the centurion was so highly regarded and beloved...he was lovingly caring of his slave, ²he was on good terms with local leaders, ³he was thoughtful about Jesus. Surely God by His Holy Spirit had prepared this man for contact with Jesus! God requires no less of all those who call themselves Christians.

II THE CENTURION WAS A HUMBLE MAN. The opinion of others about this centurion can be summed up in their words, "He is worthy." What a contrast his opinion was of himself, summed up in his own words, "I am not worthy!" Surely this humility in a high official not only made him beloved by the people of Capernaum but also allowed him to develop the faith which Jesus so frankly admired.

a. "I am not worthy," He said through his friends to Jesus, "for you to come under my roof, which is the reason I did not presume to come to you in person." What did He mean? He must have rated one of the best houses in town and he was approaching Jesus who had no house at all and was probably a guest of the fisherman Peter. Perhaps he was sensitive to the restriction which prevented Jews from entering a Gentile home. But more likely the reference here is not to his house but to himself. When the Jews said of him, "He is worthy," they used a word meaning "of high value." But the word he used of himself in the Greek text here is a different word. Although translated the same in English, when he said "I am not worthy" meant "I am not fit, or deserving." It was Luke who used similar expressions elsewhere. The prodigal son returned to his father saying, "Father, I am no longer worthy to be called your son." There was that penitent publican in the temple, beating his breast and pleading, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!"

This centurion had a deep sense of unworthiness in the presence of the holy Son of God. People who may be unaware of sin in their lives, become deeply conscious of it in contact with the sinless Christ. In contrast to His perfection and holiness, they feel unworthy. They are convicted of sin. We don't know how far along the centurion was in this process, but God's Spirit was definitely at work bringing about conviction of sin. Centuries ago Augustine commented: The centurion "did not receive Jesus into his house, but he had received him already into his heart. The more humble, the more capacity and the more full. For the hills drive back the water, but the valleys are filled by it."

b. The centurion was not only humble in saying of himself, "I am unworthy," but also in recognizing the authority of Jesus. His self-understanding involved more than recognizing that he was not fit to entertain the famous Teacher. As a man under the authority of his superiors and with authority over 100 men himself, he could also recognize and understand the authority he saw in Jesus. "Just SAY THE WORD, and my servant will be healed. For indeed, I am a man under authority with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes; and to another, 'Come!' and he comes; and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does it." Here is a perfect example of the renowned discipline of the Roman army. All the way down the chain of command from the Emperor in Rome, the centurion obeyed orders. When his superiors spoke, he obeyed. He exacted the same obedience from those under his command, and allowed no back talk! Only as a well-disciplined man himself, had he earned the right to command others.

This intelligent man shrewdly saw the same authority in Jesus, the carpenter of Nazareth. In the peasant Teacher, the centurion saw immense authority whose source was not in Caesar but in the real Sovereign of all the universe. Perhaps he had heard Jesus say on one occasion: "I can do nothing on my own authority...I seek not my own will but the will of Him who sent Me." With such authority a command with a word was enough, and orders would be instantly obeyed. Doesn't this tell us a lot about that centurion. He was humble, yes, but not with a grovelling, breast-beating, negative sort of spirit. His humility was born of true self-discipline...he understood his place in the scheme of things. In the presence of Divine authority he was ready to say: "You command, I obey! You are the supreme Commander, I am your servant. What you order is right, I accept without question. SAY THE WORD!" In a day like ours, when all authority seems to be open to question, and when knaves want to rule like kings, and when kings often seem to be trembling in their boots because of self-doubts...how reassuring and comforting for us Christians to find ourselves in the presence of the One about whose authority there can be no doubt as we are reminded by this centurion and who saw and understood and accepted that Authority! And for us too, true humility allows us to receive the power of God into our lives.

7 III. THE CENTURION WAS A MAN OF FAITH. His understanding and acceptance of the authority of Jesus is a perfect picture of faith. For faith is the unconditional acceptance of the absolute authority of our sovereign God. Saving faith in the Lordship of Jesus Christ is the unquestioning surrender to Him ^{as hard} and acceptance of His ^{His} terms of salvation as offered to us in the Gospel.

→ a. No wonder Jesus "marvelled at him" and said to the crowd, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith." Here is the third opinion expressed about that centurion. The Jewish elders had said, "He is worthy." He himself had admitted, "I am not worthy." Jesus marvelled, "I have never seen a man with such faith!" In only one other place was it said that Jesus marvelled. In Nazareth, "His own country," His own relatives and close friends in astonishment asked questions about His authority but refused to accept it. Instead they took offense at Him, so that "He could do no miracle there except that He laid His hands upon a few sick people and healed them" and "he marvelled at their unbelief." (Mark 6:5-6) But here in Capernaum a foreigner who lacked the historical exposure to God's revelation and providence which the Jews had, demonstrated what the Master was looking for among His own people. He was astonished to find it in a Roman soldier. Here was the faith Jesus is always looking for in everyone.

→ b. SAY THE WORD entreated the centurion used to hearing orders barked loud and clear. "With angels and spirits to obey Your word and run swiftly at Your command, You can fulfil from a distance all the good pleasure of Your will. There is then no need that You should come to my house; only commission one of those angels of healing, who will execute speedily the errand of grace and power on which You shall send him." (Trench, p. 141) "SAY THE WORD" is not only a powerful recognition of God's sovereignty, it is also a model prayer for those who accept that Lordship. In a day of doubts and questionings, feelings of inadequacy and insecurity, the man of faith can always say to the Supreme Commander of all the Universe: "SAY THE WORD." When puny earthlings can command the radio waves to maneuver satellites millions of miles out in space, how much more Almighty God who created all things! Were not "the worlds were framed by the Word of God?" (Heb. ^{11:3})

→ The God who said in the beginning, "Let there be light" and "there was light" was asked by that centurion, "SAY THE WORD, and let my servant be healed." Here was the prayer that "expects great things from God and receives great things from God"...for the servant was healed instantly, completely, by DIVINE REMOTE CONTROL! "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." (Heb. 11:1) Even today we too can pray: "SAY THE WORD, O Lord, and heal that sick loved one in the hospital!" "SAY THE WORD, O Lord, and bring harmony and unity and

peace to a troubled world!" "SAY THE WORD, O Lord, and bring pardon, and peace and power into my heart and life!" "SAY THE WORD, O Lord and bring comfort, or guidance, or rebuke, or strength to our homes, our businesses, our loved ones far away!" "SAY THE WORD, O Lord, and bring renewal and growth and great joy to Thy church here and around the world!" Let the Saviour ^{for us} marvel at the faith ^{for the centurion} of His people today, and perform the miracles as He did in Capernaum!

> **CONCLUSION** How the world today needs Christians who like that centurion couple good will between themselves and members of their households and their neighbors with a sure faith in the sovereign authority of God! When we recognize in Jesus the power to heal, the power to save us for eternity, the power deriving from the supreme and absolute Ruler of the universe, we can remain calm and sure and useful in a world full of doubts and vacillation and challenges to authority of every kind. He alone has the right to: "SAY THE WORD" and heal the ills of a sick world. May we have the humble faith of that centurion to be His instruments to accomplish miracles in our time!

101 This is My Father's World

368 My Hope is Built on Nothing Less

408 Jesus Thy Boundless Love to Me

2747 words

6/13/71 Chonju

9/25/88 Canton

Spring 88 Montreat Prayer Meeting

10/14/90 Hot Springs

10/14/90 Walnut

10/28/90 Malheur Hills

Second lesson: "Do you see this woman?"
Deal kindly with the erring, Oh, do not thou forget,
However dalkly stained by sin, He is thy brother yet.

Heir of the selfOsame heritage, Child of the selfOsame God,
He hath but stunbled in thepath Thou hast in weakness trod.

Deal kindly with the erring: Thou yet mayst lead him back,
With holy words and tones of love, from misery's track

Forget not thou has often sinned, And sinfully et must be:
Deal kindly with the erring one, As God has dealt with Thee.

Storny of Harry Ironside

Parable within a Parable Luke 7:36-50

John Newton lived to 82...old converted sea captain.. "What shall the old Africa blasphemer stop while he can still speak? "My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things: 'That I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Savior!'"

Woman wept...sorrow for herpast, gratitude for forgiveness, love for the One who touched and healed her deepest needs, Happiness because of acceptnance into family of God tho rejected by society.

Parable ...28 words in original. .both simple and absurd.

Do you see this woman? Simon thought he did...saw a notorious wretch who had broken laws of God and was stain on society. He saw sinner, Jesus saw a penitent and pardoned sinner Simon saw outcast, Jesus saw child of God Simon saw her on road to hell, Jesus on road to heaven. Jesus turned toward her, Simon wanted to turn back on her.

Demonstrative love is the visible evidence that a work of the Holy Spirit involving repentance, forgiveness, and love has been going on, and should go on, in every true Christian who is born of the spirit.

Jesus saw her sin, of course, but loved her, forgave her, and accepted herdevotion of which her actions at the banquet table were clear evidence. Jesus called that unconditional acceptance FAITH.

Go into peace,,into a new life, a new future, a new joy, a new inner peace thatpasses all understanding. Did she later become one of His attendants.

Two lessons: Our love for God does not rest uponthe size or badness, or numer of our sins...but upon our awareness and conviction of sin and of the gracious forgiveness we have received.

10/14/84

Love Covers a Multitude of Sins

Text: "Her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much." 7:47

Scripture Reading: Luke 7:36-50

Each spring a pancake race at the Olney Church near Cambridge, England preserves an ancient custom. The ladies of the parish race from the center of town to the church flipping pancakes. At the service the winner is announced followed by congregational singing of "Amazing Grace," written two centuries ago by a former pastor, John Newton. His mother died when he was seven, at eleven Newton sailed as a seaman on his father's ship to begin a life of rebellion and debauchery helping collect slaves on the West African coast. Later he became captain of his own slave ship and a part of that cruel and vicious trade. But after a terrible storm he began to read Thomas a Kempis' "Imitation of Christ" and was led of the Holy Spirit to accept Christ as Saviour. For several years he continued as a slave captain, trying to improve conditions as much as possible and even holding worship services for his hardened crew. But the Lord opened his eyes to the inhuman aspects of this work and he became a strong crusader against slavery. He returned to England, married his childhood sweetheart, studied for the ministry, and was strongly influenced by evangelist George Whitefield and the Wesley brothers. He was ordained in the Church of England after having difficulty finding a bishop who would look at him because of his past record...not unlike the attitude of Simon the Pharisee in today's Scripture. But John Newton became an influential pastor, often preaching in public halls to great crowds gathered to hear "the Old Converted Sea Captain." Shortly before his death at 82 someone suggested that he consider retirement because of failing health, eyesight and memory. Newton replied: "What! Shall the old Africa blasphemer stop while he can still speak?" On another occasion before his death, he proclaimed with a loud voice during a message, "My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things: 'That I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Savior!'"

Those words admirably reflect the message of Luke 7. ^{This story of "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretched sinner!"} That chapter records Jesus healing the slave of a Roman centurion, restoring life to the only son of a poor widow in Nain, answering the doubts of John the Baptist by telling his messengers: "Go and report to John what you have seen and hear; the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have the Gospel preached to them." Now verse 36 relates how Jesus was invited to dinner by Simon, a Pharisee who had not accepted Jesus, but was curious to know more about Him...and we are reminded that God has used curiosity all the way from Zacchaeus to Koreans about us today as a way to bring people to Christ. Jesus accepted...proving His willingness to associate not only with despised publicans and sinners but also with self-righteous Pharisees.

As Jesus according to custom reclined at the table, a woman came and stood behind Him at His feet. It was normal for all kinds of people to crowd into such affairs to listen to the conversation of the invited guests, especially if a distinguished visitor such as Jesus was present...in fact a large crowd of this sort was considered a compliment to the host. But this woman was one from whom the rest recoiled, and Simon was embarrassed and upset. Luke says simply she was a sinner. Simon called her a sinner. Jesus did too, saying, "Her sins, which are many." The account clearly implies that she was a bad character, of low morals, mixed up with the very worst elements in the community and everybody knew it.

[Luke, perhaps intentionally, leaves some facts to our imagination, and one of them is that Jesus may have encountered this woman previously and offered her forgiveness.] Today, I am deliberately taking that position. Some have tried to identify her with Mary of Bethany who anointed Jesus before His passion or with Mary Magdalene, but the weight of evidence is that she was another un-named woman. My reason for accepting the view that she had already accepted the Master's

forgiveness is strengthened by the fact that when she heard He was at Simon's house she came fully prepared with her perfume to demonstrate her love for Him.

Standing at His feet, she [↓]wept, overcome with deep emotion...sorrow for her past, gratitude for forgiveness, love for the One who had touched and healed her deepest needs, happiness because of acceptance into the family of God although society still rejected her. While the incensed Simon watched, she did four things. She wet Jesus' feet with her tears. She wiped them with her hair. She kissed His feet. She anointed His feet with the perfume. While some of this was in accord with local custom, it was still a spectacular demonstration of affection and surely Simon was not the only one asking questions. He was silent either from courtesy or because he was speechless with astonishment, but Jesus knew exactly what was going on in his mind: "If this man were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner." He assumed that he knew more about the woman than Jesus did, whereas the truth was that Jesus acted as he did because He knew more. Simon wanted to treat Jesus as a "fake" until proved otherwise, rather than as Lord until proved a "fake." He was to learn shortly that Jesus was not only a prophet, but more than a prophet...One who had power on earth to forgive sins.

Jesus broke the silence: "Simon, I have something to say to you." Simon replied, "Say on, Teacher..." revealing enough respect to use the title "Rabbi." Jesus related a parabolic jewel of only 28 words in the original, including the punch-line question. "A money-lender had two debtors, one owed \$50 and the other \$500. Neither could pay so he forgave them both. Which of the two would love the money-lender more?" The story is both simple and absurd. "Money-lender" would immediately conjure up the same kind of loan-shark with which the world is still afflicted...the kind of person who would never write off a loan no matter how small. But Simon fell into the trap, absurd as it was..."Why of course the one whom He forgave more." And Jesus had His own kindly humor, complimenting Simon for his brilliant answer, "You have judged correctly."

That fatal admission gave Jesus the opportunity to make His point. Verse 44 paints an intriguing picture. "Turning toward the woman, He said to Simon, 'Do you see this woman?'" What a loaded question..."Do you see this woman?" Simon thought he did...he saw a notorious wretch who had broken the laws of God and was a stain on society...an untouchable, a leper, certainly not worthy to touch One who made claims to be the promised Messiah, the Son of God. He saw a sinner, but Jesus saw a penitent and pardoned sinner. He saw an outcast, but Jesus saw a child of God. He saw her on the road to hell, but Jesus saw her already in heaven. Jesus turned toward the woman, Simon wanted to turn his back on her.

Jesus answered His own question, making it plain that Simon did not really see the woman at all. "You gave me no water to wash my feet"...a common courtesy in those days when open sandals left feet hot and dirty...but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. "You gave me no kiss"...still the common greeting we see on TV between Arab dignitaries...but she has continuously kissed my feet...the sign of lowliest homage...and a very old custom in doing obeisance to a political or religious ruler. "You did not anoint My head with oil"...usually provided in abundance by a host for his guests...and we are reminded of familiar words, "Thou anointest my head with oil,"...but she has anointed my feet with precious perfume. Jesus concluded His rebuke with the words of verse 47: "For this reason I say to you, her sins which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little."

These have been controversial words because grammatically they seem to affirm that the woman's forgiveness was earned by her love. This would fail to fit the point of Jesus' parable here and is contrary to all the teachings of Jesus and the New Testament elsewhere. "By grace are you saved" says Paul. God's love takes the initiative in bringing us to repentance, says John. The last half of

the verse says, "He who is forgiven much, loves much." so the parallel in the first part should be, "He who is forgiven much, loves much." Had Jesus said that He would have spared us a lot of scholarly argument. Yet He did not. The New English Bible reads: "And so, I tell you, her great love proves that her many sins have been forgiven." Phillips' paraphrase says, "This is why I tell you, Simon, that her sins, many as they are, are forgiven; for she has shown me so much love." These two attempts to resolve the problem, while true to the teaching of Scripture elsewhere, really distort the clear Greek text.

I think that the real answer is that whereas our human minds love a logical temporal sequence, actually in the spiritual world that order is not necessarily true. In the case of this woman, and probably in most cases, penitence and forgiveness and love are inter-mingled and inseparable. The situation in Simon's house that day, the parable of Jesus, and the words of verse 47 teach us that demonstrative love is the visible evidence that a work of the Holy Spirit involving a simultaneous exercise of repentance, forgiveness, and love has been going on, and should go on, in every true Christian who is born of the Spirit... just as every new-born babe coming into the world develops physical, social and mental processes simultaneously to develop as a normal human being.

Jesus then spoke^{and responses} to the woman: "Your sins have been forgiven." What joy that reassurance must have brought to the poor woman, so often abused by her neighbors. Sadly the other guests were still spiritually blind and deaf, muttering among themselves, "Who is this man who even forgives sin'?" They could not grasp what that woman had already accepted...there here was One who really saw her, loved her, forgave her, and accepted her devotion of which her actions at the banquet were clear evidence. Jesus called that acceptance faith: "Your faith has saved you, go in peace." This is the faith that continues to save the ignorant, the diseased, the poor, the deprived, the depressed in our world...often long before they come to a more mature understanding of all that the Word of God teaches us about the nature of God and His ways of dealing with His world. "Go in peace... pyung-ahn-hi ka-la"...actually "go into peace"...into a new life, a new future, a new joy and peace. Could this poor woman have become one of the band of women mentioned a couple of verses later who attended the needs of Jesus and whose prayer and dedication and witness helped found the first century church?

Someone has called this passage "A parable within a parable" with essentially two messages: (1) Awareness of God's forgiveness should cause proportionate love for Him. (2) Awareness of how God sees others should cause us to really see, forgive, and love them. The first lesson tells us that our love for God, demonstrated by devotion and obedience and service, does not rest upon the magnitude or multitude of our sins...it makes no difference whether that woman was a greater sinner than Simon the Pharisee or vice versa... but upon our awareness of sin and of the gracious forgiveness we have received. It is not that the prodigal son was a worse offender than his elder...but that "he came to himself," whereas his brother never did. That woman had come to herself, but Simon had not. "Sometimes it seems harder for the respectable person to do this than for the notorious sinner; pride stands in the way of full realization and confession." (IB145) To scribes and pharisees Jesus said, "The tax collectors and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you."...something for every Christian to ponder

The other lesson requires us to strive to answer positively that piercing question: "Do you see this woman?"

Deal kindly with the erring, Oh! do not thou forget,
However darkly stained by sin, He is thy brother yet.
Heir of the self-same heritage, Child of the self-same God,
He hath but stumbled in the path Thou hast in weakness trod.
Deal kindly with the erring: Thou yet mayst lead him back,
With holy words and tones of love, From misery's erring track.
Forget not thou has often sinned, And sinful yet must be:
Deal kindly with the erring one, As God has dealt with thee."

"Do you see this woman?" In the throngs on the street, the bus station, the market place, the athletic stadium, the hospital waiting room, the school grounds and...yes...the churches of Korea...may God help us to see the people in their need, their pain, their sin...not with eyes of reproach or rejection as did that Pharisee, but with the eyes of Jesus who and loved, forgave and accepted.

Where cross the crowded ways of life, Where sound the cries of race and clan,
Above the noise of selfish strife, We hear Thy voice, O Son of Man.

In haunts of wretchedness and need, On shadowed thresholds dark with fears,
From paths where hide the lures of greed, We catch the vision of Thy tears.
From tender childhood's helplessness, From woman's grief, man's burdened toil,
From famished souls, from sorrow's stress, Thy heart has never known recoil.

O Master, from the mountain side, Make haste to heal these hearts of pain;
Among these restless throngs abide, O tread the city's streets again."

During his ministry in San Francisco, Dr. Harry Ironside was invited by a group of Salvation Army workers to give his testimony on a street corner. He spotted a well dressed man who had taken a card from his pocket and later politely handed it to him. Inside it read: "Sir, I challenge ^{you} to debate with me the question 'Agnosticism versus Christianity' in the Academy of Science Hall next Sunday at 3:00 P.M." Ironside accepted the challenge on two conditions: "Firstly, you must bring one man who was a 'down and outer'...someone who for years was under the power of evil habits from which he could not deliver himself, but who on some occasion entered one of your meetings, heard your glorification of agnosticism and denunciations of Christianity, and as a result resolved, 'Henceforth, I too am an agnostic!' and went away with a new power to live an upright life and become an asset to society. Secondly, you must bring one woman who was once a poor wrecked, charterless outcast, a slave of evil passions and the victim of man's corrupt living...who hearing your message of agnosticism proclaimed, 'This is just what I need to deliver me from the slavery of sin!' and moved to a clean virtuous happy life as an agnostic. Now," said Ironside, "If you will bring those two people, I promise to meet you with at least 100 men and women who have lived in just such sinful degradation but who have been gloriously saved through believing the gospel which you ridicule."

Turning to the Salvation Army Captain, he asked, "Captain, have you any who could go with me to such a meeting?" The reply: "We can give you 40 at least from this one corps, and we will give you a brass band to lead the procession!" "Fine," said Dr. Ironside, "Now, sir, I will have no difficulty picking up 60 others from various missions, gospel halls, and churches of this city, and we will come in procession with the band playing, 'Onward Christian Soldiers' and I will be ready for the debate!" The agnostic smiled wryly, waved his hand as if to say in surrender, "Nothing doing!" and slunk away from the crowd. (Boice 174)

Let's remember that some day when the great debate is over, The grand procession thru the gates of heaven will be led by
"Her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much, but he who is forgiven little, loves little."

Other verses of "Amazing Grace" written by Newton.

in Red Book
1 The Lord has promised good to me, His Word my hope secures;
He will my shield and portion be as long as life endures.

2. Yes, when this heart and flesh shall fail, and mortal life shall cease,
I shall possess within the veil, a life of joy and peace.

3 The earth shall soon dissolve like snow, the sun forbear to shine;
But God, who called me here below, will be forever mine.

4 When we've been there ten thousand years, Bright shining as the sun
We've no less days to sing God's praise Than when we first begun.

a little woman who
once heard the
Savior say

WHEN CALAMITY WARNS

Scripture Reading: Luke 13:1-9

Text: "Except you repent, you shall all likewise perish." (Luke 13:3)

A preacher was once asked why the parable, such as Jesus used, has such persuasive power over people. He replied, "I will explain this by a parable."

It happened once that Truth walked about the streets as naked as his mother bore him. Naturally, people were scandalized and wouldn't let him into their houses. Whoever saw him got frightened and ran away.

And so as Truth wandered through the streets brooding over his troubles he met Parable. Parable was gaily decked out in fine clothes and was a sight to see. He asked, 'Tell me, what is the meaning of all this? Why do you walk about naked and looking so woebegone?'

Truth shook his head sadly and replied, 'Everything is going downhill with me, brother. I've gotten so old and decrepit that everybody avoids me.'

'What you're saying makes no sense,' said Parable. 'People are not giving you a wide berth because you are old. Take me, for instance, I am no younger than you. Nonetheless, the older I get the more attractive people find me. Just let me confide a secret to you about people. They don't like things plain and bare but dressed up prettily and a little artificial. I'll tell you what. I will lend you some fine clothes like mine and you'll soon see how people will take to you.'

Truth followed this advice and decked himself out in Parable's beautiful clothes. And lo and behold! People no longer shunned him but welcomed him heartily. Since that time Truth and Parable dare to be seen as inseparable companions, esteemed and loved by all.

When Jesus taught His disciples and the multitudes who quickly gathered around, there was much give and take as He was interrupted by questions which He always answered. On one such occasion someone in the crowd reported to Him a recent atrocity in Jerusalem, where their blood had mingled with the blood of sacrifices being offered there...a horrible affair that had shocked the nation. No doubt those hot-headed and violently patriotic Galileans had been plotting against the Roman government whose agents caught them as they offered sacrifices in the temple. As in the case with totalitarian governments even today, retaliation was swift, brutal, and bloody. Yet whoever told Jesus about this did so with the implication that surely those Galileans must have been terrible sinners to have perished in such appalling fashion. The Jews regarded sickness, tragedy and misfortune as the just deserts for some kind of sin.

But Jesus' answer surprised them: "I tell you, no, but, unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." He went on to remind His listeners of another recent event all must have known about, not a man-made tragedy, but what some would call an "act of God." "You know the other day the tower of Siloam fell and killed eighteen people. Do you think they were worse sinners than the thousands of others living in Jerusalem who were not injured...Why no! Except you repent, you shall all likewise perish." While recognizing the horrible nature of these calamities, Jesus refused to accept the verdict that the victims were necessarily great sinners. On another occasion when a blind man was brought before Him and He was asked, "Who sinned, this man or his parents?" Jesus replied, "Neither, but it was in order that the works of God might be displayed in him." So, on this occasion our Lord used these calamities to warn that anyone who fails to repent of sin faces far greater tragedy, "Except you repent, you shall all likewise perish."

When calamities take place, there is always the temptation to ask "Why?" When the innocent suffer as a result, we cannot help but ask this question, and it is always a test of our faith and confidence in God's providence. But Jesus on this occasion knew that His hearers were thinking that the victims of calamity were unusually wicked sinners. He twice declared..."No, it is not for you to regard these events as indication of great sin on the part of those who were victims...what you need to remember is that such calamities warn you to repent or you will also perish!" If Jesus were here with us today, He would say: "When 37 members of the navy ship Stark were killed instantly by a missile in the Persian Gulf, or when 29 perish in a tornado in West Texas...or some other calamity strikes, that is not an occasion for pointing accusing fingers at others, but to regard them as warnings to us that if we do not repent of sin, we will likewise perish."

To clarify this point, Jesus gave an illustration, one of those little stories where Truth is clothed in the beautiful garments of Parable. He told of a man planting a fig tree in his vineyard. Palestine vineyards are often planted on terraced hillsides where there is plenty of sunshine but little usable soil. On such steep terrain there is often considerable unused space between the rows of grape vines. On such a tiny corner of land the farmer planted a fig tree hoping to get a small addition to his usual crop. In Palestine the climate was such that fig trees often bore two crops a year.

For three years the owner came looking for figs and could find none. So he called his vinedresser or tenant and said: "For three years I have looked for fruit on this tree and find none. Cut it down...why use this space for a worthless tree when

we could plant something else that would be more profitable?" Presumably there was no noticeable defect or disease in the fig tree...its only fault was failure to produce figs which is the only purpose for which a fig tree exists. Hence the owner was perfectly justified in order its destruction.

But the attendant begged for another chance. Many a gardener who has toiled over slow-producing tomato vines will keep working desperately in the hope that his labors will not have been in vain and he can produce a crop. So this attendant pleaded: "Give it a little more time and another chance. I'll work the ground around it well and put on more fertilizer...let's see if we can make it produce. Otherwise we will do as you say and cut it down and destroy it." Jesus left us guessing as to how the story ends, but the assumption is that the owner allowed time for that fig tree to produce some fruit.

Why did Jesus tell a little story about fruit bearing when He has just declared twice: "Except you repent, you shall all likewise perish?" The answer is that there is a definite connection between repentance and fruitbearing. What was wrong with the fig-tree? Simply, it had no fruit! Otherwise it was a healthy plant, the leaves were large and green, there was no disease or malformation. But there was no fruit, and the only reason a fig tree should be allowed to exist is to produce fruit. The point of this simple parable is to emphasize the consequences of barrenness. There is only one thing to do with a barren fig tree: cut it down and burn it up!

Jesus was speaking to Jews, God's chosen people. They were a privilege nation and allowed to live in a sunny spot in God's world. Jesus' teaching on this occasion in no way denied that sometimes God sends calamities to punish for sin...and there was ample proof of that in the history of His people who for their disobedience and turning away from God had been defeated by enemies, carried into captivity and in other ways suffered the wrath of God. But here He taught that calamities are not necessarily induced by the sins of their victims, but are warnings to all of us that unless there is repentance we all face disaster, and the evidence of repenting is fruit-bearing. That fiery preacher, John the Baptist, in calling for repentance had already said something similar: "Bring forth fruit in keeping with your repentance...the axe is already laid at the root of the tree; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." (Matthew 3:8-10) This was exactly what the owner of the vineyard wanted to do with the fig tree. What lessons are here for us today?

I. WE OCCUPY A SUNNY SPOT. If any nation was ever favored by God it is America.

We may be problems, we may have our dark hours, we may have our critics, but in our time more than any nation on earth we occupy a sunny spot. We have vast natural resources in abundance, secure borders, opportunity for development, a stable government, freedoms unknown in most of the rest of the world. Our mixture of peoples from many lands has produced a culture rich in intelligence and creativeness. Best of all since the founding of our nation, God has granted Christian men and women the privilege of molding our way of life. And we who worship this morning are heirs of their faith in God, their acceptance of His word as their rule of faith and practice, and their determination to follow Christ as Savior and Lord. Truly "the lines have fallen unto us in pleasant places, and we have received a goodly heritage."

While we can say this of our nation, let us think now of our church and of ourselves. We are a privileged people. God has seen fit to bring us up in a Christian society, He has allowed us to have free access to His Word in our homes all our lives, He has given us beautiful churches and furnished God-fearing Sunday School teachers and pastors and other leaders. Like the fig-tree of the parable, or the Jews in their Promised Land, we occupy sunny soil.

II. WE ARE EXPECTED TO PRODUCE FRUIT. With our roots in sunny soil, God expects good fruit. Privilege and advantage demand corresponding exercise of responsibility and accountability to the One who has planted us here. As the most privileged nation on earth, God wants our nation to produce good fruit for the rest of the world. In many ways we have done so. We have tried to protect the freedoms of other people. We have sent massive aid in times of famine and disaster. We have tried to share our know-how in science and industry. The same can be said of the Church...she too has sent missionaries with the Gospel of salvation, and assisted Christian brothers and sisters around the world. I am not one to beat our breasts for failures because we have in many ways acted responsibly with all the privileges we enjoy.

Yet we must not ignore our failures. So much has been left undone. So many examples of crime and immorality and selfishness have demonstrated barrenness rather than fruit-bearing. When we bring the point Jesus was making to bear upon ourselves, where it is most applicable, does our fruitbearing demonstrate repentance? Apply this to our observance of the 10 commandments for instance. Every time we repent of our failure to observe one of those commandments and turn around 180 degrees (which is what repentance means) we should automatically produce fruit. "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor" says the commandment...if we are truly sorry for telling lies or concealing the truth...the fruit will be speaking what is true and helpful and righteous. "Thou shalt not kill, commit adultery, steal, covet" say other

commandments...repenting of how we have sinned in those matters should produce conversely the fruit of truly loving one another as Christ has commanded. I am not the kind of preacher who points fingers and denounces sins in others...I leave it to you to examine your own hearts and see whether your way of life, your obedience to God's commandments, your fruit-bearing is evidence of the repentance which warrants continuing to live in the sunny spot God has given you. Are you a healthy looking plant...but with no fruit?

III. WE TOO CAN LIKEWISE PERISH. The threat of the owner of the vineyard to the vinedresser was to cut down the vine. Jesus taught that when we hear of calamities involving others, it is time to heed God's warning of what happens when there is no repentance and hence no fruit-bearing. Applied to a nation, this means that a nation which forgets God and fails to exercise responsibility proportionate to privileges received can perish...this happened often in history and could even happen to the United States of America. Applied to a church, it could mean that when she forsakes the Word of God, or wanders off into the ways of the world, she loses her moral and spiritual leadership and influence in society and becomes just another social club devoid of spiritual power. But especially we should apply words of Jesus to our own hearts and lives.

When our lives have no fruit they are as useless to our Master as that fig tree was to the vineyard owner. In John 15, Jesus also taught this to His disciples. "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it, that it may bear more fruit." What is the fruit God wants? It is lives that show we have renounced sin and turned to righteousness, put off the old man and put on the new man, no longer slaves of Satan but now behaving as children of God. The consequences of fruitlessness are dreadful...and every time our newspaper headlines some terrible calamity we should see it as another of God's warnings that uselessness invites disaster...one that is eternal.

IV. WE ARE OFFERED A SECOND CHANCE. In the parable of Jesus, the vinedresser asked the owner to give the fig-tree another chance. He promised to dig around the tree, put on fertilizer...hoping for fruit the next season. I believe God is treating us the same way. He is both the owner and the cultivator of His vineyard. He is the One who is anxious for fruit. So He patiently works with us as a good gardener works with his plants. I like to think that in agricultural terms God is doing three things:

1. He prunes off the dead branches, the places with disease, the unlovely ones, by sending adversity into our lives...sickness, disappointment, failures,

accidents...these are times that help us prune away the things that don't matter and concentrate upon receiving our strength from God alone.

2. He digs around our soil. He shows His care, His love, His desire to make it possible for us to live free and happy lives. He pulls out the weeds and the stones that retard growth. His mercies never cease, His lovingkindness is constant. He provides the soil of His word in which we can be fruitful.

3. He provides a life-giving nutrient, just as the vinedresser provided fertilizer. That life-giving extra is the most important of all...His own Spirit who imparts the life of Jesus Christ Himself to us, so that we may bear fruit.

CONCLUSION. Why does God continue to spare us when others are victims of accident or sickness or major catastrophe? Are we any better than the neighbor killed last night in a wreck, or the child stricken with an incurable disease? Who knows but what we will be next victims of calamity. "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance." (II Peter 3:9) Today He is giving not only the second, but repeated chances to repent and to bring forth in our lives rich ripe fruit for His glory. But we can be sure that the alternative for us is the same as for the fig tree which to the end fails to produce fruit...that is, to be cut down and destroyed, after which there is no further chance. Only by the mercy of God do any of us survive, but when God puts up these warning signs, let us remember that what He is looking for is fruit. "No, I say unto you, except you repent, you shall all likewise perish!"

5/31/87 Bostic
5/31/87 Duncan's Creek
3/13/88 Ridgeview
11/6/88 Canton

2/7/82

Scripture reading: Luke 15:11-32

Text: "His father came out and began entreating him." Luke 15:28a

Some of us are old enough to remember when we could hardly wait for the next copy of the Christian Observer (now discontinued) or the Saturday Evening Post (before they ruined it) to read another installment of a "continued story." A brief synopsis always told what went before. Maybe we would like our story to end with verse 24, but there is an important second installment best understood with the first in mind. Remember we thought of the prodigal, his rebellion, his repentance, and especially his restoration where the father had never ceased to love him, took the initiative to welcome him back, restored him to all the rights and privileges of sonship, and rejoiced over the son who was dead and come to life again, lost and found again.

"They began to be merry." Music and dancing, shouts of joy, friends and neighbors coming and going, servants hustling about serving tables...unprecedented rejoicing in the father's house. In the midst of all this the elder son came in from the field, a significant fact in itself. Although there were many servants, the eldest son was at work. He was obedient to his father, diligent, conscientious. He was no slacker but pulled his full share of the load even though the whole estate was actually his because the younger brother had taken his share. The elder brother was working until night-fall, setting a good example to all the other workers.

He was not only diligent but cautious. Hearing the commotion in the house, he did not go barging in...dirty, sweaty, and tired that he was, but called a servant and asked what was going on. Knowing his young master's ^{temper} attitudes, that servant chose his words well perhaps hoping to influence him to join rather than reject the rejoicing: "Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound." Note the pronouns. Your brother...subtly implying that the elder son should be equally elated over the prodigal's return. Your father...implying an obligation to obey his father's will that there be a welcome with feasting and merriment. He has received him back safe and sound...the all-encompassing reason for the rejoicing.

Did the older brother race in doors to embrace his brother? No indeed! He was furious and refused to go in. In a loud voice he roared with such hot-tempered words that his father heard and came out to entreat him to come in and join the feasting. Of course he was very tired, a point at which many of us react in the wrong way and say things we should not. But this son had his pride! To reject his father's invitation to enter was an insult, but no matter! All the pent-up resentments against his younger brother came cushing out in a tirade of venomous language.

First, he justified himself. "Look! for years I have served you, never neglecting any command of yours; yet you have never given me even a kid to feast with my friends. Probably true. Faithful, loyal, hardworking, utterly dependable to do even the hardest and dirtiest job in seedtime or harvest no matter what the weather. His outburst probably shows that for a long time feelings of rebellion and dissatisfaction had been building up in side him. He fired a brutal shot of criticism at his own father..."you never gave me even a kid to have a feast with my friends..."you are unfair, unjust, unloving." The prodigal had had sense enough to realize that he alone was personally responsible for his troubles, but the elder son blamed everyone else except himself...the very one excluding himself from the merriment.

Next he sounded off about his brother: "But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with harlots, you killed the fattened calf for him." Again note the pronouns. He refused to claim the prodigal as a brother..."this son of yours." No love for a blood brother, no forgiveness for his wayward ways, no joy at

his return. He even displays a nasty mind...thinking the worst about his kid brother with the remark about harlots. No mention had been made of this, but the elder's imagination produced such a charge. And again he attacked his father, bringing up a really sore point a second time... "you killed the fattened calf for him." Maybe that was the last straw that really brought on the outburst of rage. For weeks he had been carefully tending that calf, feeding and fattening it up for a special occasion when he himself would sit in the honored position of elder son at the banquet. But now look! You, thoughtless parent, without a word to me and in disregard of all the hard work I put on that calf, have used it to feast this schoundral!" No wonder he was hurt, indignant, mad as a hornet!

But the father was as gracious and patient with him as with the other son, without condoning what the younger had done, nor apologizing for welcoming him home with rejoicing. "My child," he said gently, using an endearing term of affection far different from the ordinary word for "son" used by the older brother, and likely the way he had addressed him since early boyhood. "You have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours." Even without a special feast, you have every day enjoyed the bounty of my table, absolute security, and knowing that the entire estate now belongs to you. But we had to be merry, it was necessary and fitting...why? Because this brother of yours...gently correcting his son for referring to this son of yours...was dead and has begun to live, was lost and has been found." Verses 24 and 32 seem almost identical, but one speaks of "this son of mine" and the other "this brother of yours." The words point clearly to the vertical relationship of the prodigal, the sinner, to his father, and the horizontal relationship between the brother from the far country and the brother from the far field at home.

Reviewing this story, a heart specialist could diagnose important facts about the heart of the older brother, and the heart of the father.

Look at the heart of the Older Brother. I have to be careful here...my father had 2 sons, and I am the eldest! Any resemblance to anyone here is purely coincidental!

1. It was self-righteous. Outwardly he did all the right things and none of the wrong things. He was like the pillar of the church, key citizen of the community, and chairman of his service club. Yet like the Pharisees he gloried in being "good" without realizing the judgemental attitude in his heart with no desire to forgive. How much did that sanctimonious attitude have to do with driving away the younger brother to begin with. George Buttrick quotes from Kipling's "The Prodigal Son"...

"My father glooms and advises me,
My brother sulks and despises me,
My mother catechises me,
Till I want to go out and swear."

What would have happened had the prodigal first met his older brother rather than his father...would he have fled again to the far country? For all his faults, that younger brother would have been a far more "fun" person to live with than the stodgy older one. Like the Pharisee of Luke 18:9, he trusted in himself that he was right-
epus. An self righteous attitude not only affects our relationship to the Father, it may drive our brother away from the fold

2. It was looking for the worst, rather than the best. His imagination pictured the worst possible and wrote off the younger brother as unworthy, doomed, deserving to die in the pig pen. Words such as those of the apostle Paul had never occurred to him: "Love...does not rejoice in unrighteousness." It had never occurred to him that he had any responsibility to go look for his younger brother and rescue him from whatever trouble had befallen him. His heart showed the exact opposite of the familiar three apes who "see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil." He not only saw, heard, and spoke the worst of that brother, but his heart totally lacked any sign of forgiveness, forgetting the past. No! My brother is not worth loving, forgiving.

3. It was envious, because his brother got the fattened calf. He had worked hard for years at home, and even fattened the calf himself. And then the younger brother got

all the goodies! I am the one who deserves the honors and rewards which you have squandered on a party for this worthless fellow! How much of the elder brother's envious spirit do we share. Someone else gets the rewards, the credits, the lime-light the honors and we get left out...especially if we feel we have done all the dirty work. In a society where many of our associates are extremely touchy when someone younger, or more recently graduated from university, gets promoted ^{in preference to them} over us... let us look to ourselves for similar diagnosis of the state of our hearts.

4. It was the heart of a servant rather than a son. A son works out of loving desire to please his father; but a servant works for pay, for reward. Paradoxically the younger brother had been a servant in a pig pen and became a true son, while the one who apparently had always been a son, had the heart of a hired man. "The elder brother, like the Pharisees, did not understand God's grace. He was basing his relation to his father on achievement and merit, seeking reward for his righteous deeds. He had served and obeyed...He had no more of a relationship of sonship to his father than did the prodigal. He had stayed under the father's roof but had not entered into the spirit of sonship. He served for reward rather than for love of his father. Thus, he could not understand the father's joy, which was the result not of the younger brother's achievement but of the fact that he had once more taken shelter in his love and become a son." (LBC Miller 121)

5. It was an ungrateful heart. The elder son had eaten well at his father's table every day of his life. He enjoyed a warm home, a comfortable bed at night, loving family and devoted servants. Instead of being grateful, he grumbled because his brother was feasted. Those of us who have always been Christians, must be grateful that we have been spared the experience of the "far country". There is no cause to worry that we have missed something because we cannot testify to the ecstasy of a dramatic return to the father's house and the rejoicing at a welcome feast, good and fitting as that is for those for whom it is appropriate. We should give thanks to God that we have been spared the filth and smells and husks of the pig-pen. How much better off would that elder brother have been had he said in the words of John Masefield:

"O God, Thou knowest I'm as blind as he,
As blind, as frantic, not so single, worse,
Only Thy pity spared me from the curse.

"Thy pity, and Thy, mercy, God, did save,
Thy bounteous gifts, not any grace of mine,
From all the pitfalls leading to the grave,
From all the death-feasts with the husks and swine." (Buttrick, p. 198)

Who is the Elder Brother? Certainly Jesus had the Pharisees in mind, but how much of him can we see in ourselves? "Who is this elder son?" The question was once asked in an assembly of ministers at Elberfeldt, and Daniel Krummacher made answer, "I know him very well: I met him only yesterday." "Who is he?" they asked eagerly; and he replied solemnly, "Myself." He then explained that on the previous day, hearing that a very gracious visitation of God's goodness had been received by a very ill-conditioned man, he had felt not a little envy and irritation." (Taylor 864).

Now look at the Heart of the Father. There was room in that heart for both sons. He wanted to treat them both alike. *(We that we said about the heart of the Father towards the prodigal are true here too.)*

1. The Father's heart again took the initiative. Hearing of the elder son's return from the field, he could have shrugged his shoulders saying, "He'll get over sulking and come in soon by himself." He could have ordered a servant to bring him in. But instead he left the table, made a special effort, and went all the way (not just to the door) outside to go out "and entreat him". Again a picture of God in His Son willing to enter the world of Pharisees and receive them as He did Nicodemus, or go to the home of publicans like Zacheus. His heart is big enough for the prodigal in the pigpen and the prodigal at home. God is not partial.

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us to show that kind of father-hood towards others. Parents with their children Sunday school Teachers with their pupils, pastors with their flocks, missionaries with all their contacts...you can share the heart of the Father by impartial love, gentleness, toward the rebellious, the stubborn, the wayward. The father's heart goes out to seek and to save...like the shepherd searching for the lost sheep, the woman looking for the lost coin, and the father who came out and entreated his elder son. Sharing the father's heart involves going out, it means entreating, taking the initiative towards prodigals of every stripe.

2. The Father's heart wants our hearts in tune with His. The elder brother rated "A plus" in obedience and service, but he was entirely out of sympathy with his father's heart which was far more important. Like the Pharisees he could not understand God's grace because he could not understand the heart of God. Referring to his brother not as "my brother" but as "your son" was evidence of a heart full of envy, suppressed evil desires, unspoken resentments and foul attitudes...just the opposite of his father's. The Saviour charged us all: "Go and learn what this means, I desire compassion, and not sacrifice, for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners." Matt. 9:13.

3. The Father's heart wants His house filled. The story ends with the prodigal inside the house feasting, and the elder brother outside sulking. "No one shut him out. He shut himself out. He would not go in. He was barred from heaven by his lovelessness." (Buttrick 201). The Father takes no delight in the death of the wicked

One Sunday afternoon a young pastor told me what had taken place in his church that morning when new members were baptized. A man and his wife and 3 children had taken the catechumen examination 6 months before and were all expected to be baptized that morning. But when examinations were held Saturday afternoon, the oldest son, now away from home in the ROK army failed to appear though they waited late for him. Sunday morning came, still he did not arrive. The service began. It was time for administering the sacrament...suddenly the pastor saw the rear door open, the young man ran in out of breath from running from the bus stop. Quickly summoning his elders to the platform the pastor asked: "What shall we do? This young man should be baptized with his family but he has not been examined." "Wave the rules and baptize him anyhow" was the unanimous decision. So when the pastor read out the names of those to be baptized and included that elder son, not even his own family knew that he had just arrived. And tears of joy burst from the eyes of many as they saw this entire family, together, receiving baptism and joining the church of the living God." And their rejoicing is nothing compared to that of the angels in heaven. God wants his house filled, every lamb brought in from the wilderness, every coin recovered from its dark dusty corner, every prodigal brought in from the pig-pen, every older brother joining in the festivities.

Parable of the Pharisee & Publican
Luke 18:9-17

Text: Luke 18:14.

Introduction: ^{위선자} Nobody likes a conceited man. ^{자존심이 있는 사람} Jesus disliked pride, hypocrisy. Vs. 9. ~~xxx~~ an easy parable to interpret.

Setting: Jesus enroute to Jerusalem for last time. Had observed religious life of Jews, and his own disciples. Jesus interested not in high and mighty but lowly and meek.
a) reception of little children, vs. 15-17; b) demand of rich young ruler to surrender object of pride; c) Cure of blind beggar vs. 42; d) words to ~~xxxxx~~ Zaccheus, 19:9.

I. The Pharisee and the Publican.

- a) Contrasting figures to temple.
- b) Both sincere ^{진실한}
- c) The Pharisee, his prayer
- d) The Publican, his prayer
- e) Jesus' conclusion vs. 14, Ps. 51:17

II. Message of the Parable.

- a) Not confined to prayer life.
- b) Good conduct alone does not automatically win God's approval.

c) Three views of self.

(1) Self as righteous ^{자기는 의롭다}

(2) Self as better than others ^{자기는 다른 사람}

(3) Self as a sinner ^{보다 더 죄다}

자기는 죄인 이라

Conclusion: Our view of self determines whether we are proud or humble. Only by debasing ourselves in our own eyes do we become worthy of God's attention. Only those who recognize sin in themselves can be saved.

Ps. 51:17 ^{하나님의 구하시는 제사는 상한 심령이라}

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^{멸시하지 아니하시리이다.}

The Pharisee & the Publican

Luke 18:9-17

Intro: Conceit. Jesus dislike of hypocrisy. No problems in this parable--lesson plain from intro. vs, and from story. Yet each detail adds meaning.

Setting--Jesus on way to Jerusalem. Had observed religious life of Jewish leaders, & of disciples. Parable followed by illus. that rel. of Jesus not for high and mighty But for lowly & meek: reception of little children, demand that rich y. ruler surrender wealth, cure of blind beggar, gracious words to Zaccheus.

In paragraph before parable Jesus urged necessity for prayer--at core of any man's religion. Parable directed at disciples. Inner vanity and conceit most evident in prayer. In prayer we are forced to reveal our view of our selves, as we seek to establish a relation between our selves and God. If we are to profit, must see in parable lesson for ourselves.

I. The Pharisee and the Publican --contrasting figures. Question of whether they would act like this. Jewish boys pray. Some Publicans (like Zaccheus) did repent. Both sincere and accurate. This estimate of self before God determined the true character of the religion of each man.

Look at Pharisee--refined, educated, clean citizen, pillar of church, ardent patriot, respected as citizen of highest character, in own eyes and by assent a virtuous man. Habit, standing, "prayed thus with himself." "God I thank thee." Judges himself by two standards (1) Superiority, and (2) adherence of law. In comparison with others, Pharisee thoroughly human. Comparisons negative. "In prayer we look up in aspiration or we look down in humility; we never look around in criticism or curiosity." No word about positive virtues, except requirements of law which was other cause for self-congratulation. Jesus' 21 word description. Our revulsion and disgust--until we see ourselves mirrored.

In contrast see Publican--hated and despised. Unpopular. Unscrupulous. Collaborator. Suspect of all forms of wickedness. This man different--went to pray. Attitude depicts heart-felt sorrow, sense of unworthiness. "Afar off" ashamed. "Smoted upon his breast" outward sign of inward grief or self-accusation among Orientals. Prayer brief but true. No list of sins or virtues, no claim of mercy deserved, simply frank yet terrible recognition of sin. Cry of anguish includes hope and petition that God would grant mercy. Not until sin thus fully recognized, not until utter impossibility of any good on our part to counterballance the evil of our nature is

felt, not until a full picture of self in this true light is seen, can a man really throw himself completely at the mercy of God.

Two went to pray: oh, rather say,
One went to bray; the other to pray.
One stands up close, and treads on high
Where th' other dares not send his eye.
One nearer to God's altar trod,
The other to the altar's God.

Jesus concluding words. How was Publican justified? God did not ignore sin, but Publican went home relieved of burden though despondent over sin--had approval of God. Justified--the comparison between the two has reference not to character, but to the relation to God in which they respectively stand. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." Pharisee went proudly home. Estimate of two men in their own eyes were reversed in God's sight. Vs. 14 b.

II. The Message of the Parable. No need to argue purpose. Lesson not confined to prayer life. Concerns every aspect of our lives and thought. Self-complacency, self-satisfaction, smug sense of security resting upon a moral life conforming to the best that society and religion demand-- there are pictured by the Pharisee. A true confession and acknowledgement of sin resulting in absolute humility before God--this spirit sent the Publican home "justified." We see the Pharisee in ourselves more often than the Publican. Church attendance, gifts to benevolent causes, personal devotional life--valuable and necessary--often ends in themselves and in our satisfaction at having achieved a perfect record we think God's approval will be automatic. Parable strikes at church leaders--so satisfied in personal success or success of the program or institution we promote that become victims of pride and self-complacency--too few who ever beat upon breasts and cry God be merciful to me a sinner.

Details point out three views of self.

1. Self as righteous. Revealed in posture and prayer of Pharisee--vs. 9b. "Woe unto you Pharisees! for ye tithe mint and rue and every herb, and pass over justice and the love of God: but these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone." When we look upon Self in this light we place ourselves where even God cannot save us without imposing some catastrophe to humble us and bring us to our senses. There was only One who rightfully claimed absolute innocence before God, yet He chose path of humble obedience.

2. Self as better than others. Attitude of Pharisee who set all others at naught. Many seek to justify themselves before God and man because better than neighbors. Argument that we are not as bad as we might be. No room in Christianity for this sort of thinking. Have to reach up to touch bottom so far as personal righteousness is concerned. All chief of sinners--no room for invidious comparisons.

3. Self as sinner. Only path to success in kingdom of God. We have to go down in humility before we can go up in God's approval. "Except ye turn and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven." Not easy for Publican to shed profitable life. Even more difficult to shed blind-fold of smug satisfaction in our righteousness wrought by Pharisees of all time and to humble ourselves in full recognition of our sinfulness. But not until then will we go down to our house justified. Repentance for sin necessary to obtain forgiveness and eternal life. Full recognition of our own sinful nature will quickly humble even the most proud of us. A humility based on full awareness and penitence for sin puts us in the place where God can accept us and raise us to the status of new creatures in Christ. He that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

With broken heart and contrite sigh,
A trembling sinner, Lord, I cry;
Thy pard'ning grace is rich and free;
O God, be merciful to me!

I smite upon my troubled breast,
With deep and conscious guilt oppressed;
Christ and His cross my only plea;
O God, be merciful to me!

Far off I stand with tearful eyes
Nor dare uplift them to the skies;
But Thou dost all my anguish see;
O God, be merciful to me!

Nor alms, nor deeds that I have done
Can for a single sin atone;
To Calvary alone I flee;
O God, be merciful to me!

And when, redeemed from sin and hell,
With all the ransomed throng I dwell,
My raptured song shall ever be
God has been merciful to me!

Luke 18:9-14

In prayer we look up in aspiration or we look down in humility; we never look around in criticism or curiosity.

Two went to pray: oh! rather say,
One went to bray; the other to pray.
One stands up close, and treads on high,
Where th' other dares not send his eye.
One nearer to God's altar trod,
The other to the altar's God.

The sacrifice of God was a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart & God, you will not despise
Woe unto you Pharisees! For ye tithe mint and rue and every herb, and pass over justice and the love of God: but these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.

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With broken heart and contrite sigh,
A trembling sinner, Lord, I cry;
They pard'ning grace is rich and free:
O God, be merciful to me!

I smite upon my troubled breast,
With deep and conscious guilt oppressed;
Christ and His cross my only plea;
O God, be merciful to me'.

Far off I stand with tearful eyes
Nor dare up lift them to the skies;
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O God, be merciful to me!

Nor alms, nor deeds that I have done
Can for a single sin atone;
To Calvary alone I flee;
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And when, redeemed from sin and hell,
With all the ransomed throng I dwell
My raptured song shall ever be
God has been merciful to me! .

*Except ye turn and become as little children
ye shall in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven.*

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WHY JESUS CAME

Text: "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." Luke 19:10.

Scripture Lesson: Luke 19:1-10.

Why did Jesus come into our world? The answer to that question should be the reason for all our joy and celebration at Christmas. Jesus Himself gave us the answer many times, and one of them is in Luke 19:10: "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Public appearances of Jesus always created a sensation. The Son of God spoke as never man spoke. His teachings astonished listeners among the poor and ignorant as well as the wealthy and sophisticated. His hands possessed the power of the Almighty to heal, to restore, to feed. Little wonder that as Jesus passed Jericho great crowds thronged about Him. Like any rabbi of His day He was discoursing as He walked with other Passover-bound pilgrims. Along the way villagers and townspeople who could not go up to Jerusalem attached themselves to Him just to eavesdrop on what He was saying.

One poor blind beggar had already cried out for help when He heard that the great Healer was passing by. The crowd tried to shut him up so they could hear the Teacher, but Jesus had stopped...as He always does when people need Him...and asked, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man replied the obvious, "Lord, I want to receive my sight!" At once Jesus commanded, "Receive your sight, your faith has made you well." "For Jesus it was always more important to act than to talk. Words always took second place to deeds. Here was a human soul in need. Discourse must end and action begin." (Barclay p. 242)

There was another quite different curious spectator that day. His name was Zaccheus, a resident of Jericho. Watered by the Jordan River, this ancient city was a veritable Eden, a city of palms with a forest of fragrant balsam trees, sometimes called the "fattest" region of Palestine, although today it is dry...almost desert. Her dates and balsam, plus her position on the cross-roads between Jerusalem and the East and the north-south traffic along the Jordan made her one of the key taxation centers in Palestine. On this day Jesus was passing by and no doubt both the high and lowly were out in force. Among them was Zaccheus, about whom we know three things:

1. ZACCHEUS WAS A TAX-COLLECTOR. Besides, he was a chief tax-collector...he had reached the top of his profession. Others in Jericho despised him as a traitor who had sold out his own country by collecting taxes for the hated Roman occupation forces. Nobody loves a tax-collector but a stooge for a foreign power was not only

hated but could be assumed to be totally corrupt...a man of low morals. This first century Scrooge had no close friends...except a few evil cronies. Like anyone who pursues his own selfish interests in total disregard for the welfare of others or the commands of God, Zaccheus the tax-gatherer was a lonely and friendless man.

2. ZACCHEUS WAS RICH. That terse comment implies more than financial wealth. This tax-collector was rich because his greed stooped to all kinds of graft, extortion, and dishonesty. By his own admission he had cheated and defrauded. From the wealthy he had accepted bribes, from the poor he had wrung unjust gain, from the Roman government he had stolen lawful income! Such a man was capable of any other kind of crime. Local religious leaders called him a sinner, and they were right. How tragic that his name means "pure" or "innocent." Years before some loving mother had given him this name, wistfully dreaming that her son would become a fine upstanding citizen and Godly man. How disappointed such mothers are when their prayers appear unanswered and their hopes betrayed. He was rich...but exceedingly wicked as well.

3. ZACCHEUS WAS A LITTLE MAN. Every Sunday School scholar knows that. As he wormed his way through the crowd hoping to see Jesus, people who hated him saw a chance to jab an elbow in his ribs or shove him around or purposely block his view. Why would he want to see Jesus anyhow? Curious like everyone else?...maybe so...but would such a cynical character leave his accounts and his money bags merely to see a Galilean walk by without being moved by some divinely appointed impulse? No! The Spirit of God put into the heart of Zaccheus, the lonely tax-gatherer, the sinful rich man, this little man, the urge to meet Jesus. God put that longing there just as He does in every man. No matter how low he falls, there is something that makes any person look longingly for something better. God sent Zaccheus to see Jesus. There is no one here today in whom God has not put the same impulse. You may be here because you have attended church since childhood, or because someone invited you, or out of curiosity to see what goes on in our church...but whatever the means, it is God who has drawn you. "Only by God's finding could the human soul even begin its search." (IB 323). So this lonely man, Zaccheus, so low he had to reach up to touch bottom, physically small and insignificant, became the object of God's call to meet the visiting Stranger. Running ahead of the crowd he did something undignified for a man in his position...he climbed a tree by the roadside.

Safely out of sight among the branches, far above the milling crowd, Zaccheus assumed he had an unseen vantage point. Yet Jesus stopped, saw him, and spoke to Him. Very likely Jesus had never met Zaccheus, or heard of him, or had any way of recognizing him. Yet He called him by name, "Zaccheus!" In every way Jesus was a

man, yet He was also the Son of God. He already knew that this man would be waiting up in a tree to see Him. How did He know his name? Jesus is God. Just as He knows when a sparrow falls to earth, or the number of the hairs of our heads...so He knows all His children by name. None of us could walk into the White House and expect the President to call us by name...but the Sovereign of all the universe knows each of us, what goes on in our hearts, and there are no secrets hid from Him. When Jesus spoke to Zaccheus He knew that He was a lonely tax-gatherer who needed a Friend, that he was rich from ill-gotten gains and needed a Saviour, and that though physically insignificant he was infinitely valuable in God's sight and capable of great good among his fellow men...needing only the touch of a transforming power to make him a new man. No one is so low-down as to escape the love and power of God.

"Zaccheus, hurry up and come down; for today I must visit your home." Jesus simply invited Himself to dinner. There were local religious leaders, but He did not choose their homes. There were well-to-do respectable citizens, the social lions of the city...but He passed them by to visit the home of a notoriously wicked man. What a huge surprise for a man spurned by neighbors and devoid of their friendly visits! No wonder he quickly came down from the tree, overwhelmed with joy. As a wealthy man you can be sure he ordered a sumptuous feast for his distinguished Guest. Jesus never forces His entry into any home or any heart, but He knows there is a secret longing for His company, and it matters little to Him what the circumstances or environment may be. Poor or rich, men may exclaim that they are not worthy to entertain Him, but He never refuses on those grounds. There is no social situation too decayed, and no human life too down and out, for Him to gladly come with the offer of friendship, of power to change, and of renewal of life and hope.

On-lookers at this unusual banquet grumbled because the Master was eating with a sinner, but that made no difference at all to the Master. Except for the concluding remarks we don't know about the conversation around the dinner table. How we would like to know! Surely Jesus somehow lifted Zaccheus up to a vision of the kind of person he could be if he turned his whole life around. In the presence of One who knew no sin, Zaccheus could review his whole past life of sin with shame and remorse. Somehow he could feel that he was in the presence of One who loved him, who could forgive and restore, and could give him a life of usefulness now and of peace forever. Something about Jesus made that wicked tax-gatherer ready to confess his sins, make restitution for his evil past, and turn his life 180 degrees in a new direction.

"Lord," he said, "I'll give half of what I have to the poor, and whatever I have illegally extorted, I will restore fourfold." 50% of his wealth to charity and 400%

restitution for wrongs he had committed...enough to financially wreck even a wealthy man! Zaccheus knew that only by divesting himself of ill-gotten gains could he live with a clear conscience. He was ready to count all his past as garbage in order to gain Christ as his friend. The only way was complete separation from his old manner of life. Here was real repentance...not just a meaningless "I'm sorry!" Repentance is willingness with God's help to cut all ties with past sin as did Zaccheus.

I once heard a pastor tell of attending a great assembly of Christians from all over the world, where a pastor from India insisted that a funeral must be held before the meeting could begin. A coffin was brought in and placed in front of the rostrum, and the delegates were asked to file by, raise the lid, and gaze on the face of the deceased. All were curious to see whose funeral was being observed. Was it Hitler, the evil dictator responsible for engulfing the world in war? Was it Stalin whose evil genius inspired the spread of communism around the world? Was it some atheistic philosopher, some selfish business tycoon, or some immoral actress? One by one the delegates walked by the coffin, raised the lid, and drew away with sober faces and downcast eyes. Finally my friend went forward. As he looked in he beheld none of the notable people he could think of, but he saw his own face reflected in a mirror. The Indian pastor had known that before Christians could worship and work with Christ in His church, the funeral of the old self had to happen. In the presence of the purity and power of Christ Zaccheus realized this, and met the challenge by offering to bury his old nature in the prospect of a new one. And this is what happens to every person who comes to know Christ in the hospitality of his heart.

How the heart of Zaccheus must have been warmed as Jesus accepted his confession and promise of restitution by saying, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham!" Curses and abusive language had been heaped on Zaccheus by victims of his dishonest ways...how refreshing now to have the blessing of Jesus Christ: "Today salvation has come to this house!" What did Jesus mean here by the word SALVATION? I think he meant far more than the narrow meaning we sometimes give it. He meant: "This man Zaccheus is a new person. He is released from bondage to the sort of person he used to be and his house is a completely different place. From cheating people he turned to helping them; from selfish greed he turned to charity and good work, from living as though God no longer existed, he turned to obedience and reverence for the divine will; from moving down the road to hell, he was on the highway to heaven. At that moment, Zaccheus knew little about theology...why and how Jesus came into the world as the Son of God to die for sinners. Yet by yielding himself to whatever demands Christ would make of him, he opened his heart to that complete salvation made possible when the Saviour died on the cross for his and for

our sins. The legend that Zaccheus later became bishop of Caesarea may not be correct, but we can hardly imagine that after this confrontation with his Saviour that he failed to live as an exemplary Christian thereafter.

But Jesus did not stop with words about salvation: "Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham." Those words may puzzle us, but Jesus' hearers knew what they meant. For 2000 years Abraham had been famous as the greatest man of faith in Hebrew history. Here Jesus declared that Zaccheus had similar faith...and that his salvation was granted not on the basis of the good deeds the tax-collector promised in repenting of his past, but on his faith in God's power to save through Jesus Christ. Salvation was not granted to Zaccheus as a "reward" for his vow to give half his goods to feed the poor and make four-fold restitution of what he had cheated from others. Salvation was based on his faith alone. No amount of good works could earn salvation. But his faith, his willingness to yield in complete obedience to the will of God and cast himself on His mercy...this was the basis of his salvation. His vows to reform were the fruit and not the grounds of his salvation. We too are saved by total commitment to the Saviour and not by attempts to earn Divine approval. "Zaccheus," declared Jesus, "Your whole house is saved, inasmuch as you have in complete faith cast yourself upon the mercy and goodness of God."

The final word of Jesus to Zaccheus that day is one of the greatest texts in the Bible: "FOR THE SON OF MAN HAS COME TO SEEK AND TO SAVE THAT WHICH WAS LOST." "I have come," said Jesus, "to save people just like you. I am looking for those who know their miserable lost condition in sin and look to me in faith for salvation." Jesus knew that until now his host had been a lost man...financially successful perhaps, living in luxury and comfort, yes...but otherwise lost, groping in the dark, utterly without hope. If I lost my watch out in the woods, it would soon rust and corrode and no longer keep time...the purpose for which the watchmaker made it. Just so, all unrepentant sinners are lost and doomed to die...they fail to fulfill the purpose for which God created them. They have taken a wrong turn away from God and are headed over a precipice in the dark.

One famous Bible scholar points out that in the New Testament the word "lost" means simply in the wrong place. He says, "A thing is lost when it has got out of its own place into the wrong place, and when we find such a thing, we return it to the place it ought to occupy. A man is lost when he has wandered away from God; and he is found when once again he takes his rightful place as an obedient child in the household and the family of his Father." (Barclay, p. 245) How many people around here are lost in that sense? They may have gone to Sunday School in childhood, they may

have gone forward in a revival meeting to accept Christ and been baptized and joined the church. They may have read and studied the Bible years ago. But today, like Zaccheus they are lost because they are in the wrong place...out of touch with God their heavenly Father, living their own selfish lives in disregard of Him, not keeping company with the right people in the place of worship...God's house. Jesus wants to enter every such home and every such heart. He wants to declare to all who come to Him as Zaccheus did: "TODAY SALVATION HAS COME TO THIS HOUSE, FOR THIS MAN HAS FAITH LIKE ABRAHAM. FOR THE SON OF MAN HAS COME TO SEEK AND TO SAVE THAT WHICH WAS LOST."

If Christmas raises the question, "WHY DID JESUS COME?" He gave us His answer: He said:

"I have not come to call righteous men but sinners to repentance." (Luke 5:32)

"I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly." (John 10:10)

"I have come as light into the world, that everyone who believes in Me may not remain in darkness." (John 12:46)

"I HAVE COME TO SEEK AND TO SAVE THAT WHICH WAS LOST." (Luke 19:10)

Hymns:

147 "O Come, O come, Emmanuel"

399 "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling"

152 "Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates"

GOOD NEWS FROM THE CROSS

Scripture Reading: Luke 23:32-43

Text: "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." Luke 23:43.

"Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." Good news from the cross to the only person recorded in the Gospels who had ever addressed the Son of God by His given name, a criminal who had pled, "Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingdom." He had seen that "all that matters for entry into this kingdom is to have a place in the mind and heart of this man Jesus, whose place is in the midst of sinners, and whose friendship can be claimed and entered into by any who will to have it." (Wallace, 26) Here is the pure gold of the Gospel: God's Word to man stripped of everything else the world usually associates with the Christian religion...church creeds and politics, pomp and ceremony, property and steeples, liturgies, vestments, hierarchies, church courts and budgets. What the world wants to hear, what the world needs to hear, what the world must hear is this good news from the cross: "Today you will be with me in Paradise."

1. GOOD NEWS FOR THE SINNER. Novelists and others have speculated about these two criminals. Were they common thieves, murderers, insurrectionists against the hated Roman government, or a combination of these? We do not know, but the execution of Jesus was scheduled along with them to add to His humiliation, for "he was numbered with the transgressors." And for all time the cross of Christ between these two men has symbolized the only eternal dividing line which cuts across all our man-made divisions ...the line between the repentant and the unrepentant, believers and unbelievers. In the midst of a torrent of abuse on this One whom men placarded as "the King of the Jews" and in the agony and hopelessness of that hour, one man's heart was changed from vilifying to venerating the Saviour. Within that convict took place the essential miracle of which Jesus had spoken to Nicodemus: "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Amid all the banter about "the king of the Jews," that man realized that Caesar enthroned in Imperial Rome was not the true king, nor was there any validity in the vain dream of the Jews of an earthly messianic king in Jerusalem. No! The kingdom of God was the presence and rule of this dying Jesus in men's hearts! Had He not said, "Behold, the kingdom of God is within of you?" (Lk. 17:21) The kingdom of God was right there...powerful, effective, transforming, in the middle of that awful hour of execution! The dying thief "saw in the presence of this Jesus at his side not an offense, but the sign and pledge that God had so loved him as to give him the companionship of a loving powerful friend and Savior in his death agony." (Wallace 26) Just as surely as Jesus had opened the eyes of the blind or raised Lazarus from the dead, so on his cross, this blind man saw, this dead man came to life!

To his former companion in crime, this man made one of the most remarkable confessions of repentance and faith on record. "Do you not fear God, since you are

under the same sentence of condemnation?" ...God is the One whose laws we have broken...not merely those of state and society... "And we indeed justly for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds" ...a full and open admission of a life of crime and shame. "But this man has done nothing wrong." ...recognition of the sinless nature of Christ. Along with his dying plea to Jesus, the words of this thief contained all the faith in and acceptance of the Lordship and saving power of Christ required in the more elaborate creeds of the church. There was no time for church attendance, no time for participation in the sacraments, no time for good works...all of which he certainly would have done with joy had he lived. Nothing but: "Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingdom."

"Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling."

And the good news for the sinner? "Truly, I say to YOU, today YOU will be with me in Paradise." Here was the word of assurance, the word of pardon, the word of healing, the word of word of love, the word of hope, the word of compassion, the word of friendship...all that poor man had missed in life he now found in one moment on the cross. Jesus was dying for the whole world, but He had the word for that one individual. Not everyone feels his need in the same way, but like this desperate man clinging to his last hope, every man finds peace only when in repentance and faith he accepts these words from the Saviour: "Today YOU will be with me in Paradise." Here is the word of the Saviour to our souls as well. Here is His word not only for ourselves but also for our ministry to others...the sick in body and soul, the oppressed, the neglected, the poor, the friendless, the lost, the hopeless, the dying..."There is a Saviour who assures us, 'Today YOU will be with me in Paradise.'"

2. GOOD NEWS FOR TODAY. "TODAY, you will be with me in Paradise." Luke, the good physician with compassion and concern, who understood what it means to a suffering patient to have immediate relief from intense pain, is the only writer who records this conversation between the crosses. Luke liked the word "today." It is Luke who tells how the angel of the Lord announced to trembling shepherds, "To you is born THIS DAY in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord." (2:11) Later, he records how Jesus began His public ministry in Nazareth by reading the words of Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor...Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." (4:18 and 21) It was Luke who related how Jesus told Zaccheus, the repentant tax-gatherer: "TODAY salvation has come to this house." (19:9)

The good news of the Saviour is always the word for today. It is always today with Jesus who desires to forgive and forget the past and all its sins. He was not talking about our calculations of time, as between Good Friday and Easter and Christmas, or between the date today and the final resurrection, but about "God's today which has appeared in the presence and work of Jesus. God's today is whenever he calls and man responds." (LBC 165) Jesus is always the faithful and loving shepherd, "calling his own sheep by name." His greatest concern is for "the other sheep, that are not of this fold." The banquet is prepared now, the master is waiting now, "Come for all is NOW ready...and I want my house to be filled." (Lk. 14:17, 23) "Behold, NOW is the acceptable time; behold NOW is the day of salvation." (II Cor.

:2) Every man, woman, and child, in this land and in all others lives in God's TODAY as He offers to every responsive heart the promise of Jesus to the dying thief.

The other thief could hear the words of Jesus too. In spite of his mocking and cursing of Jesus...he could have been blessed with the same words of comfort and hope. It was today for him too, if only he would respond. It is today for the one-third of all Americans who make no claim to be Christians, and perhaps another third who seldom give evidence of an active faith. It is today for four billion people in the world yet waiting to hear that a Saviour offers pardon and peace and paradise. Both those two thieves knew full well that they were dying...in a sense there would be no tomorrow for either one. Yet only one of them found his today with Jesus and discovered through faith in His Saviour that there is a future...which brings us to:

3. GOOD NEWS FOR ETERNITY. "Today you WILL be with me in PARADISE." This text has the good news for the Sinner, the good news for Today, and the good news for Eternity. Let's not get hung up on that word "Paradise." "If there are difficulties in it for some people, there were none for this man." To him it stood for the restoration of everything he had been meant to be, but which had been missed or destroyed through sin. Now Jesus in personal love pledged that restoration through the friendship he gave to him here and now!" (Wallace, 31)

Jesus offered an eternity with himself which began at that instant. With the past no longer of any consequence, being with Jesus was all that really mattered. Here was the Good shepherd, faithful to the end, concerned over the recovery of one lost sheep before it was too late. "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand." (Jn. 10:27-28). Both Jesus and His dying companion knew that this was the last chance to impart and to receive this good news for Eternity. There was no time for anything superficial or subsidiary...nothing but time for that vital message. This day may be our last chance to hear these words ourselves, and Jesus also expects His representatives to speak with the same compelling sense of urgency this all-important Word of Good News to our world...a world of people who face eternity. It was Richard Baxter who wrote:

"I preached as never sure to preach again,
And as a dying man to dying men."

William Barclay tells us that "the word 'paradise' is a Persian word meaning a walled garden. When a Persian king wished to do one of his subjects a very special honor he made him a companion of the garden, and he was chosen to walk in the garden with the king. It was more than immortality that Jesus promised the penitent thief. He promised him the honored place of a companion of the garden in the court of heaven." (Barclay 290).

"For years in the fetters of sin I was bound,
The world could not help me--no comfort I found;
But now like the birds and the sunbeams of Spring,
I'm free and rejoicing--I walk with the King."

I walk with the King, hallelujah!
I walk with the King, praise His name!
No longer I roam, my soul faces home,
I walk and I talk with the King."

James Rowe

(Erdman 218) All about us out there is a whole world of dying men and women who face eternity...will they hear from those who speak with the same love and confidence with which Jesus spoke? "Friend, Jesus Christ who is with you today and who speaks this word, assures you that he will be with you forever!" (Wallace 31) We, who look to the One on the cross whose body was broken and whose blood was shed for our sins, not only claim His promise for ourselves but we offer to others these words of Jesus..."Lo, I am with you always," ...in the dark valleys, along the rough highways, through the winding paths. He says...and in the end this is our blessed assurance..."that to depart is 'to be with Christ,' which as Paul puts it, 'is very much better.'"

If the mother of Jesus was standing near the cross that day, could not the mother of that repentant thief have been there too? What joy and comfort to her heart to know that all the past was over, and eternity had begun for her son with Jesus at that very moment. Several years ago on a Palm Sunday afternoon, a young minister friend in Korea told me of the happy occasion that morning in his church when new members were baptized. Among those received was one family of five...father, mother, and three grown children...all baptized at once. Six months before they had taken the preliminary examination required by the Korean church. Since then the oldest son had entered the army but word had been sent for him to come to be examined with his family for baptism on Saturday afternoon. When he failed to appear, they thought he would come early Sunday morning. But by the morning worship hour he had not shown up. They had almost reached the point in the service when baptism was to be administered, when the pastor saw him rush in the back door of the church, perspiration streaming down his face for he had run from the bus stop. Hurriedly the pastor beckoned his elders to the pulpit for a whispered conversation. What should be done? The young man had not been examined, but he must be baptized with his family! Waive the rules and go ahead, was the unanimous opinion. And so, when the pastor called out the names of those to be baptized to come forward and named that son too, few in the congregation, including his own family, knew he had arrived. Tears of joy burst from the eyes of many at the joy of seeing one complete family, united, joining the church of the Living God together. Somehow what had been incomplete was now complete! This is what causes great joy among the angels in heaven ...because more than anything else God wants His family complete and He will not rest until that is so! Every seat at the banquet must be filled! The whole harvest must be gathered in! The last lost sheep must be found! Every prodigal son must be welcomed to the bosom of the Father!

That is our assurance and our joy as we gather around the communion table of our Lord to remember how His death made it possible for us to give thanks for His good news from the cross: "Today, you will be with me in Paradise." Good news for the sinner, good news for today, and good news for eternity.

Prayer

We thank Thee Lord, for the old, old story of Jesus and His love, that love so amazing, so divine, the love that will not let us go. Grant that having heard and accepted this good news from the cross, Thy spirit may empower us to offer that good news to all others who, like us, are without hope save in Jesus Christ.

Good News from London

Today you will be with me in Paradise
Luke 23:43

Mission Mtg
Seoul May 2, 77

Scripture reading: Luke 23:32-43

"Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." Words from the cross to the only person recorded in the Gospels who had ever addressed Jesus by His given name, a criminal who had pled, "Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingly power." He had seen that "all that matters for entry into this kingdom is to have a place in the mind and heart of this man Jesus, whose place is in the midst of sinners, and whose friendship can be claimed and entered into by any who will to have it." (Wallace 26) Here was the pure gold of the Gospel, God's word to man stripped of everything else the world usually associates with the Christian religion...church creeds and politics, pomp and property, steeples, liturgies, vestments, hierarchies, mission policies and budgets. What the world wants to hear, what the world needs to hear, what the world must hear are these words of the Saviour: "Today you will be with me in Paradise."

1. The Word for the Sinner. Novelists and others have speculated about these two criminals. Were they common thieves, murderers, insurrectionists against the hated Roman government, or a combination of all of these? We do not know, but their execution was scheduled with Jesus to add to His humiliation, for "he was numbered with the transgressors." And for all time the cross of Christ between these two men has symbolized the only eternal dividing line which cuts across all our man-made divisions...the line between the repentant and the unrepentant. In the midst of a torrent of abuse of the One whom men placarded as "the King of the Jews" and in the agony and hopelessness of that hour, one man's heart was changed from vilifying the Saviour to trust in Him. Within his heart took place the essential miracle of which Jesus had spoken to Nicodemus: "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

b) With all this banter about "the king of the Jews," that man realized that Caesar enthroned in Rome was not the true king, nor was there validity in the vain dream of the Jews of an earthly messianic king. No! The kingdom of God was the presence of this dying Jesus in men's hearts! Had He not said, "Behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you?" (Lk. 17:21) The kingdom of God was right there...powerful, effective, transforming, in the middle of that awful hour! The thief "saw in the presence of this Jesus at his side not an offense but the sign and pledge that God had so loved him as to give him the companionship of a loving powerful friend in his death agony." (Wallace 26) Just as surely as Jesus had opened the eyes of the blind or raised Lazarus from the dead, so on his cross, this blind man saw, this dead man came to life!

c) To his erstwhile companion in crime, this man made one of the most remarkable confessions of repentance and faith on record. "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?"...He is the One whose laws we have broken...not merely those of state and society. "And we indeed justly; for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds"...full and open admission of a life of crime and shame. "But this man has done nothing wrong"...recognition of the sinless nature of the Christ. Coupled with his dying plea, the words of the thief contained all the faith and acceptance of the Lordship of Christ required in more elaborate creeds of the church. There was no time for good works, no time for church attendance, no time for participation in the sacraments...all of which he doubtless would have done had he lived. Nothing but: "Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingly power."

"Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling."

d) And the word for the sinner? "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." Here was the word of assurance, the word of pardon, the word of healing, the word of love, the word of hope, the word of compassion, the word of friendship...all that that man had missed in life he found in one moment at the cross. Jesus was dying for the whole world, but He had the word for that one individual. Not every man feels his need in the same way, but like this desperate man clinging to his last hope, every man finds peace only when in repentance and faith he accepts those words from the Saviour: "Today you will be with me in Paradise." Here is His word to our own souls. Here is His word for us to repeat as His missionaries to the sick in body and soul, the oppressed, the neglected, the friendless, the lost, the hopeless, the dying..."There is a Saviour who assures us, 'Today you will be with me in Paradise.'"

^{the poor}
2. The Word for Today. "Today, you will be with me in Paradise." ^{conversation between the crosses,} Luke the physician with compassion and concern, who understood what immediate relief from intense pain means to the patient, is the only one who records this incident, and he liked the word "today." It is Luke who tells how the angel of the Lord announced to trembling shepherds, "To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." (2:11). Later, Jesus beginning His public ministry in Nazareth read Isaiah's words: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor..." and then proclaimed: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." (4:21) Luke tells how Jesus told Zaccheus the repentant tax-collector: "Today salvation has come to this house."

d) The word of the Savior is always the word for today. It is always today with Jesus who desires to forgive and forget the past and its sins. He was not talking about time calculations, as between Good Friday and Easter, or between now and the final resurrection, but about "God's today which has appeared in the presence and work of Jesus. God's today is whenever he calls and man responds." (LBC 165) Jesus is ever the faithful and loving shepherd, "calling his own sheep by name." His greatest concern is for "the other sheep, that are not of this fold." The banquet is prepared, the master is waiting, "Come for all is now ready...and I want my house to be filled." "Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold now is the day of salvation." (II Cor. 6:2) Today has arrived in this land where we work in a very special way as God opens opportunities and grants responsive hearts.

^{a week ago}
e) Last Friday, we visited Pang-mai-li in a remote valley over a high pass east of Chungoap at the request of a lady here in Seoul who was there to greet us. 30 years ago Chung-hi was the only girl in that village to attend school. Orphaned and homeless when communist guerillas infiltrated the region after the Yosu insurrection in 1948, at the age of 12 she was sent to Seoul, adopted into the home of a ROK army Christian general, became a Christian herself, married a photographer, and bore six children. She and her husband are active deacons in the Noh-ryang-jin church. Every morning they have family prayers at which the burden of her prayer has been a church back in her native village, a project she is now prepared to support. Even the "new village movement" has hardly penetrated Pang-mai, and the home where we were feasted along with half a dozen of the village "yew-ji" (distinguished citizens) reminded us of those 15 or 20 years ago. There are no Christians in the village, but as these men eagerly pledged their cooperation in starting a church, these thoughts came to me: The new highway from Chungoap was built over the mountains last year, but as yet Pang-mai has not heard of Him who says, "I am the way." The power lines are coming up the valley and soon will provide abundant light, but they have not heard Him say, "I am the light of the world." A mile away a new school educates 225 children, but they know nothing of the One who claims, "I am the truth." A thin line brings a telephone into the village and several hundred yards away on a mountain-top are the mighty towers for long distance telephone relay, but no one has heard the Word made flesh. But Today has come to Pang-mai through Oh Chung-hi Chipsa, as it has come for innumerable

places across this land, and people are ready as was this dying man in the presence of His dying Savior to hear the blessed words, "Today, you will be with me in Paradise."

3. The Word for Eternity. "Today you will be with me in Paradise. The Word for the Sinner, the Word for Today, and the Word for Eternity. Let us not get hung up on that word "Paradise." "If there are difficulties in it for some people, there were none for this man. To him it stood for the restoration of everything he had been meant to be, but which had been missed or destroyed through sin. And now Jesus in personal love pledged that restoration through the friendship he gives to him here and now!" (Wallace, 31).

Jesus offered an eternity with himself which began at that instant. With the past no longer of any consequence, being with Jesus was all that really mattered. Here was the Good Shepherd, faithful to the end, concerned over the recovery of one lost sheep before it was too late. "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand." (Jn. 10:27-28). Both Jesus and His dying companion knew that this was the last chance to impart and to receive that Word for Eternity...no time for anything superficial or subsidiary...nothing but the vital Word. And Jesus expects His representatives in what may this day be our last chance to speak with the same love and confidence and compelling sense of urgency this all-important Word of Good News to our world of people facing eternity. It was Richard Baxter who wrote:
 "I preached as never sure to preach again,
 And as a dying man to dying men."

William Barclay tells us that "The word Paradise is a Persian word meaning a walled garden. When a Persian king wished to do one of his subjects a very special honour he made him a companion of the garden, and he was chosen to walk in the garden with the king. It was more than immortality that Jesus promised the penitent thief. He promised him the honored place of a companion of the garden in the court of heaven." (Barclay 290). Here is.....
 "Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!
 O what a foretaste ~~am~~ of glory divine!"

"The heart of the promise to the dying thief was this: 'Thou shalt be with me.'" (Erdman 218). There is a whole world of dying men and women facing eternity... will they ~~xxxx~~ hear from those who speak with the same love and confidence with which Jesus spoke: "Friend, Jesus Christ who is with you today and who speaks this word, assures you that he will be with you forever!" (Wallace 31). We claim for ourselves and we offer to others these words of Jesus, His promise to be with us..."Lo, I am with you always,"...in the dark valleys, along the rough highways, through the winding alleys. He says...and in the end this is our blessed assurance..."that to depart is 'to be with Christ,' which as Paul puts it, 'is very much better.'"

If the mother of Jesus was standing by that day, could not the mother of that repentant thief have been there too? What joy and comfort to her heart to know that all the past was over and eternity had begun at that very moment. Several weeks ago on Palm Sunday afternoon, a young minister friend of mine in Chunju told of the happy occasion that morning in his church when new members were baptized. Among those received was one family of five, father and mother and children...all baptized at once. When they took the preliminary catechumen examination six months previously the oldest son was a senior at the local university. But now he was in officers' training school in Kwangju. The pastor and family had urged him to return so as to be baptized and received into church membership with the rest of the family. But when the examinations were to begin Saturday afternoon, he failed to appear. They waited until the last but still he

did not come. They hoped he would arrive Sunday morning, but the service started and still no eldest son. They had almost reached the point in the service when baptism was to be administered when the pastor saw the young man rush in the back door of the church, perspiration streaming down his face for he had run the last part of the way to the church. Hurriedly beckoning his elders to the pulpit he held a whispered conversation. What should be done? The young man had not been examined, but he must be baptized with his family! Waive the rules and go ahead, was the unanimous opinion. And so when the pastor called out the names of those to be baptized to come forward and named the son too, few in the congregation, including that family, knew he had arrived. Tears of joy burst from the eyes of all, and the joy of seeing one complete family, united, joining the church. Somehow what had been incomplete was now complete! This is why the angels sing and the heavens ring!....because more than anything else God wants His family complete and He will not rest until that is so! Every seat ~~xx~~ at the banquet must be filled! the whole harvest must be gathered in! the last lost sheep must be found!

This is our assurance and our joy as we gather around the communion table of our Lord to remember and to give thanks for His word from the cross to all of us sinners: "Today, you will be with me in Paradise."

Prayer. We thank Thee Lord, for the old old story of Jesus and His love, that love so amazing, so divine, the love that will not let us go. Grant that having heard this word from the cross, Thy Spirit may empower us to offer it to all others who, like us, are without hope save in Jesus Christ.

Clergy hymn

1. Praise the Lord, sing hallelujah!
Children of God's gracious choice;
Let His praises rise as thunder,
Let the whole earth hear His voice;
Till the song of His salvation
Makes His broken world rejoice!
2. Man's imprisoning night is shattered
At the impact of His Word;
Light and life spring forth deternal
Where that mighty voice is heard;
Let the powers of death and darkness
Own the triumph of their Lord!
3. Praise the Lord until His glory
Floods the farthest realms of earth,
Till from every tribe and nation
Souls rise up in glad rebirth;
Haste the day of His appearing
When all creatures own His worth.
4. Praise the Lord, sing hallelujah!
South His sovereign grace & abroad,
Till His Word is loved and honored
Everywhere man's feet have trod;
Till His ransomed family gathers
Safely round the throne of God!

Written by E. Margaret Clarkson for the
1974 International Congress of World
Evangelization at Lausanne.

Scripture reading: Luke 24:13-35

Text: "Abide with us; for it is toward evening, and the day is now far spent."

24:29

There is a legend that Luke the physician was also a skilled painter. In either case his writings show the interest in details of a ^{careful} ~~skilled~~ observer, giving them remarkable beauty and loveliness. His ^{the} Emmaus story is one of his best, and aside from a brief mention by Mark, he is the only one who tells it.

Late on the first Easter day, two of Jesus' disciples were walking to Emmaus, 7 miles west of Jerusalem, very likely the home of one of them. Cleopas, the only one named, had a Greek name. Luke too, was Greek, the only non-Jewish New Testament writer. Could it have been that the paths of these two com-patriots had crossed somewhere so that Luke had had a personal report of this incident?

The two friends left Jerusalem sad, disappointed, and perplexed. A two-hour walk wasn't a bad ^{therapy} ~~idea~~ for men in this state of mind. When frustrated, mentally tired or disturbed, or upset, I find that getting out in the fresh air, mowing the lawn or taking a hike can help me sort things out. For the two disciples it provided an opportunity to meet the risen Master who always has a way of being infinitely capable of making sense of things. Naturally they discussed the events of the past two days, sharing viewpoints, questioning each other. They were not surprised when a Stranger attached Himself to them as easily happens along rural paths. Nor did they recognize Him...it has been conjectured that walking into the setting sun may have blinded them, though more likely a Divine purpose prevented recognition. At any rate by the end of their visit their faces were set towards the sunshine, toward the dawn of a new day of understanding and joy and hope.

They expressed surprise that Jesus apparently knew nothing of recent events in Jerusalem, and gave Him a short but accurate account of the arrest, crucifixion, and reported resurrection of Jesus. The Stranger replied with an interpretation of those same events in the light of Old Testament Scripture. So fascinating were His words that time passed quickly. As they reached Emmaus, He acted as though He were going further. In courtesy He would not force Himself upon these men, but waited for their spontaneous invitation: "Abide with us; for it is toward evening, and the day is now far spent."

As usual, ^{Jesus was} ready to accept an invitation, Jesus ^{and} entered to eat supper with them. Though a guest, it was when He performed the act of a host and in a familiar way took bread and blessed it, that their eyes were opened and the two disciples recognized their Master. They had been close enough to Him in the past to know some mannerism in His actions or speech which somehow up until now they had not detected in this Christ in His resurrected body. Immediately He vanished, demonstrating that in His resurrected state He was no longer subject to the ordinary physical laws governing humanity. With unbounded joy Cleopas and his friend ran back to Jerusalem to join the other disciples, convinced that Jesus whom they loved so much, was now alive indeed!

Right now, let's consider some thoughts of what happens when Jesus abides with us, as He did with the two on the road to Emmaus and at their supper table.

1 Minds are Enlightened. What would we give for a recording of Jesus' words that day! The two disciples had loved and admired Jesus; They had acknowledged Him as a prophet "mighty in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people." They had set their hopes on Him as the Messiah who would deliver their people. Now they were deeply troubled and perplexed by all the weird things going on that day.

In a way Jesus was demonstrating that no longer need they depend upon His physical

presence as the teacher of God's truth. He was initiating them into how the Holy Spirit ^{whom} He had promised to send would teach them "all things." The technique of that greatest of teachers, the Holy Spirit, demonstrated by Jesus that day, instructs us today as we search the Scriptures, both Old and New Testament, to reveal the things of Jesus Christ.

Jesus began with a rhetorical question: "Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" Suffering and glorification... death and resurrection... cross and crown... the very two matters perplexing these two men! To clarify their confused thinking, He opened up the Scriptures beginning with Moses, the first OT writer, and continuing through the prophets, the last writers. Later that same evening to the rest of the disciples, the risen Christ gave the same message. Vs. 45-47: "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled. And He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures."

He showed how the ^①OT sacrificial system, the ^②prophecies of a Lamb pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities, the ^③promises of One from the line of King David who would reign in the hearts of men to bring peace and justice the ^④One like the Son of Man in a Babylonian fiery furnace ^{who would give} courage and comfort amidst the fires of persecution, the ^⑤One of whom it was said, "Thou wilt not let my soul see destruction," the ^⑥visions of the future exaltation of the suffering Servant... all these and many more were fulfilled in Himself. Beneath and beyond the contemporary and obvious meanings of passages in the Psalms and Prophets, and in the laws and rituals of Judaism, Jesus pointed out the deeper ^{eternal} applications to Himself which both they and we today learn as the Holy Spirit enlightens our minds in the study of Scripture. The Old Testament is not extinct. It is relevant today. When Christ abides with us, His Spirit opens ~~them~~ ^{us} up for us as He did for the two on the road to Emmaus. Minds are enlightened. the word of God

2. Eyes are Opened. "And their eyes were opened and they recognized Him." This was more than physical recognition. Now they saw the real Jesus. They had known Him as a great miracle worker, ^{One} who spoke wonderful words of truth, a gracious and loving friend who understood and sympathized and cared for them in ways never exhibited by their own religious leaders. Now, with minds enlightened by the Scriptures Jesus had been expounding, their eyes were opened to see Him with more than physical eyesight.

a. They saw Jesus in God's plan for the ages. They saw the eternal dimensions of His coming into the world, and especially of the events of the past three days. Before the foundation of the world, God had ordained these events for the salvation of man and for His own glory. He was the key to the whole mystery of God's dealings with men, making good the promises and fulfilling the prophecies. Their eyes were opened to the grandeur of Divine providence and to Jesus Christ at the center of it all!

b. They saw Jesus' death and resurrection not as tragic or sensational, but as crucially vital in restoring relationship between God and sinful man. He made plain that our redemption could only be accomplished by His death. Somehow their eyes had failed to see what He had clearly taught about His own resurrection... now they were opened to see not only the reality of that event, but ^{also} that it made credible all His claims to be the Son of God, the Messiah, the risen, living Saviour who would ^{restore} ~~redeem~~ Israel not by re-instating a kingdom of David or Solomon in Jerusalem, but as the true Israel of God, the redeemed of all ages and all nations for all time.

c. They saw Him as the hope of the world. Life could never be the same. Contemplation of death was transformed. With bodily resurrection now not only possible but certain by positive proof, life took on new meaning as the gateway

to a new and glorious existence. They saw what Jesus meant when He said to Martha at Bethany: "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die." Their eyes were opened to the tremendous truth, which became the cutting edge of the Gospel message of an infant church in a non-believing world.

of the resurrection

3] Hearts are Warmed. "Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road?" Both men felt the same sensation. Their hearts were set on fire while with Jesus on the road and hearing how He related the events of Passion week to ancient Scriptures. We have an expression that something "warms our hearts." It means that some word or event has given us great ^{deep} personal satisfaction and pleasure, and has kicked up emotions of love and devotion and re-dedication. Surely that was what took place when these two men felt their hearts burning

of burning passion

(a) When Jesus abides with us, hearts are warmed with love, devotion and peace. Not long before, Jesus had said to His friends, "Let not your hearts be troubled..." yet for three days, ^{their hearts} they had been ^{filled with} in deep sorrow, with hopes dashed and the future dark and bleak. Now the flames were kindled again, and they could walk in their light and be empowered by their heat. In a little book entitled, "The Romance of the Last Crusade" a Major Gilbert recounts his experiences with General Allenby in the First World War, ^{with} conquest of Palestine. Terrible battles were fought around the traditional site of Emmaus. During a lull in the fighting this officer went to an old monastery where lay one of his company, a mortally wounded youngster.

"I guessed he must be feeling pretty lonely and badly in need of his mother, to whom he had probably gone in the past with every ache and pain, sure of sympathy. He had been a soldier for three years, but now he was just a little boy again, badly hurt and frightened---and terribly afraid to die. But I was his officer, and to an enormous extent, officers and men must always remain strangers. It was hardly to be expected that an officer would listen whilst a common soldier boy, in rough unpolished language, poured out all the doubts and half-formed fears that were perplexing him. On the other hand, how could I say, as God knows I wanted to. 'Just have a good cry, old chap; hang the world and what others may think.'"

"Instead I drew an empty ammunition box towards the bed and sat down, and because I thought it might interest him, I told him the story of Emmaus: Of how Christ had appeared to His disciples upon that very spot after the Crucifixion, just as night was coming on, and how, as He was about to go, one of them had entreated Him saying, 'Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent;' and how He had remained for awhile, and broken bread and blessed it, and given it to them, and had said, 'I am with you always, even unto the end of the world!'"

later

"Just as I finished speaking a ray from the setting sun stole in at the mullioned window and fell across the bed, lighting up the dying soldier's face. The strained, worried look had vanished; a peaceful, almost happy and contented expression had taken its place. His hand crept slowly from the side of the bed. I took it in mine. He whispered, but although his voice was very low, I heard every word he said: 'Thank you for telling me that story, sir. Abide with me, fast falls the eventide is mother's favorite hymn. I shall be able to sleep now. Good-night, sir!' And then, lower still, he murmured, 'God bless you!'"

(b) With hearts ^{now} warmed to face the future, the hearts of the two disciples burned to share the good news... always the fruit of abiding in Him and of His abiding in us. Forgetting physical and emotional exhaustion they raced back to Jerusalem to rejoice with the other disciples and relate their experience. "The Lord is really risen!" With burning hearts, this is the message, the good news, they preached to the world. Now they were "on fire" to let all men know the love of God, and His great plan of the ages already revealed but so little understood in the ancient Scriptures.

After hearing the famous English preacher, G. Campbell Morgan, on this passage a woman named Evelyn Davies wrote another hymn, a conversation between the believer and Jesus, somewhat changing the emphasis of the more familiar hymn.

1. "Abide with us, the nightly shadows fall,
The road is lone and rough for one and all;
But Thou, a Stranger here, wilt lose Thy way,
So come and be our Guest until 'tis day.
2. "'Abide with us! Oh, do I hear aright
That you will give Me shelter for the night,
And welcome Me, as Guest, within your home?
Oh, happiness, I'll bring you to My throne!"
3. "Come in! we fain would entertain Thee now,
And chase that look of sadness from Thy brow;
Footsore and weary, Thou with Thy long walk,
Abide with us, and let us freely talk.
"I will come in gladly
4. "'I will come in and gladly stay with you;
You know not yet, My children, what you do.
My heart is always yearning for that word
"Abide with us"--which I have just now heard.'
5. "So in the calm of that blest evening hour
Those two disciples learnt the secret power
Of close communion with the unknown Lord,
Whom they before had seen--but now adored.
6. "O Jesus, come, and likewise with us stay,
We'll give Thee welcome on Thy lonely way;
Our lives at Thy disposal we will place,
With acts of love, Thy sorrow deep to chase.
7. "Abide with us, and treat us as Thy friends;
Thus may we for past coldness make amends;
Our door to Thee be always open wide;
Come in, and ever with us now abide!
8. "Thus may we know Thee really as Thou art,
As friend with friend learns each the other's heart.
Within our doors reveal Thyself the way;
Lead us to heaven, at eventide, one day."

Oh come to our hearts Lord Jesus
There is room in our hearts for Thee.

The words to

Our three hymns today were all written by Henry Francis Lyte (1793-1847). He was a humble Anglican parson who ministered for 24 years to the fisher-folk of Lower Brixham in England. There is no need to emphasize what his "Abide with me" has meant not only to all England but to a parish as wide as the English-speaking world and now in translation to every nation on earth. Some years ago a study of hymns used in the Oxford churches showed that more than any other hymn, his "Praise my soul, the King of Heaven" was most ^{more} widely used ^{than any other}, including the wedding services of King George VI, the Princess Royal, the Duchess of Kent, the present Queen ^{Elizabeth} (Mary), the 1918 Armistice Day service at Westminster Abbey, and the Jubilee of King George V at St. Paul's. Practically unknown at death, Lyte is today remembered the world over for our three hymns today:

64 Abide with me

179 Jesus, I my cross have taken

31 Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven.

The Forgiveness of Sins

Chap 3/18/73

Text: "Repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem." Luke 24:47

Scripture reading: Luke 24:44-49

I believe in... "the forgiveness of sins." The Apostles' Creed first affirms belief in the three Persons of the Trinity, and then in five great doctrines, which are: "The holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting." Jesus instructed that "repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem." Luke 24:47.

"The forgiveness of sins" is the third of these five. The first two are closely related to each other because they concern the Christian body collectively, i.e., "the holy catholic church and the communion of saints". The last two are also closely related because they concern the future of the Christian, i.e., "The resurrection of the body and the life everlasting." This puts the most fundamental of the five doctrines in the central position, but why did it not come first? Would it not be more logical order to declare: "I believe in the forgiveness of sins, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting?"

William Barclay has an interesting explanation of this. Undoubtedly the early Church preached the forgiveness of sins through Christ to all men. But in Christian literature following the New Testament era the forgiveness of sins was not stressed, but rather the ethical demand of Christianity and the necessity of being different from the world. Sins prior to baptism were forgiven but woe to those who sinned after baptism. Then the theological pendulum swung and the idea came that the church was no longer the exclusive community of saints; it was the inclusive ark of salvation. Early church fathers began to teach that "the church has the power to forgive sins." Now we all know that current problems and points of emphasis affect the formation of creeds, so against this background those who composed the Apostles' Creed put the doctrine of forgiveness of sins right after the statement "I believe in the holy catholic church" because it was believed that it was precisely within the church that this forgiveness was to be found. The church was the vehicle of forgiveness. In later church history this doctrine played an important influence so that this article of the creed came to mean for some: "I believe that forgiveness is to be obtained in the Church of Christ." As long as the church is the place where this message is proclaimed and offered then indeed it should be central in all our doctrines, but error comes when the church itself rather than a gracious Father is the source of forgiveness.

Forgiveness is one of the greatest themes in the Bible. From the dawn of history man has been turning away from God, disobeying His commands, ignoring the standards of righteousness God requires, and refusing to give Him His rightful place in our hearts. As God's spokesmen denounced sin and warned of punishment there was invariably an offer of full forgiveness more magnanimous than men can ever exercise among themselves. Furthermore, again and again God made good on His offer and granted full restoration of rights and privileges. Jesus spoke often of forgiveness. Some of our favorite parables have forgiveness as their theme. He himself pronounced forgiveness of sins. He forgave those whom he met... the publicans, the adulterous woman, the thief on the cross. He forgave the wicked establishment, the morally weak rulers, and the brutal soldiers who connived to execute him, crying out in his dying moments, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Examine the preaching of the apostles, and forgiveness of sins is proclaimed every where. Jesus had commissioned them to be "witnesses" and that meant proclaiming the forgiveness He had taught and demonstrated. In the expanded form

of the "great commission" at the end of Luke's Gospel, Jesus reviewed the Scriptures (the Old Testament), the meaning of His death and resurrection, and the necessity that "repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations." At Pentecost, Peter proclaimed: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins." (2:38). After the lame man was cured, Peter proclaimed to the crowd: "Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out." (3:19) Stephen, caught up in the spirit of forgiveness died praying: "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." (7:60) Paul's first missionary sermon concludes: "Let it be known to you therefore brethren, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you." (13:38). This is the "punch line" of every apostles' sermon!

Clearly this word forgiveness cannot be considered apart from two other great New Testament words: "sin" and "repentance." While Presbyterians do not observe a formal period of confession of sin and repentance leading up to Easter, it is important to relate them to our Lord's passion. In the Apostles' creed, aside from affirmation of the historical fact of the crucifixion, this one confronts us most closely with the heart of the Gospel message.

The Bible has about a dozen words for sin, each adding something which makes us recognize the enormity of it. Consider these briefly. (Taken from Barclay)

1. Sin is failure, missing the mark. We fail to meet the purpose for which God made us. Few of us can claim to have been as good a parent or child or subject of God as we should have been. We have missed the mark.
2. Sin is a stepping across, or transgression. There is a yellow line down the middle of God's highway. We know better, but we veer to the wrong side.
3. Sin is falling. Through lack of care and watchfulness we blunder across the line.
4. Sin is lawlessness, the deliberate act of sin of the man who knows the right and does the wrong.
5. Sin is perversion, a distortion of that which is right perhaps in itself.
6. Sin is rebellion, the refusal to submit, the insistence on one's own way.
7. Sin is ungodliness, the opposite of reverence, the refusal to give God the honor and respect which is His due.
8. Sin is wrong-doing, the refusal to accept God's yardstick of right and wrong, and hence often hurts not only ourselves but other people too.
9. Sin is debt ~~xxxxxxxxxx~~ especially not accepting the obligation that we owe to the love than which none can be greater. "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."
10. Sin is deafness, the deliberate refusal to listen. This self-induced deafness stifles and silences the voice of God.
11. Sin is defeat. It is a man's better knowledge and better self being conquered by that which is below the Christian standard.
12. Sin is a state. Habitual sin becomes a state of wickedness, the exact opposite of righteousness. It is the life pattern into which a sinning man comes.

With so much packed into this little word "sin" who can declare his innocence?

⇒ Chrysostom, the most eloquent of early church preachers, used to say, "There is only one calamity...sin!" Sin is the great leveler of all of us before God.

⇒ Emperor Francis Joseph of Austria was buried in the gloomy crypt of the Church of the Capuchin in Vienna, where sleep all his fathers of the house of Habsburg. As the funeral procession entered the vault it was halted by a voice from within: "Who is there?" The reply was: "His most serene majesty, the Emperor Francis Joseph." The challenger then said, "I know him not, Who is there?" A second reply was made: "The emperor of Austria and Apostolic King of Hungary is outside." Again the challenger answered, "I know him not. Who is there?" This time the voice without replied, "A sinful man, our brother Francis Joseph." Then the portal was opened and the king was laid to rest among his fathers. King and commoner...all alike...sinners before God.

The bridge between our sin and God's forgiveness is the word repentance, and it involves three steps. Repentance involves (1) new thoughts about some action or situation, (2) regret for the mistake that has been made or the wrong that has been done, (3) determination to ~~and~~ amend life in the future and not to make the same mistake or commit the same sin again. God has established all the conditions whereby a ~~and~~ a holy God can ~~right~~ graciously forgive sin; but the Christian message of forgiveness requires repentance on the part of man. God's delay in punishing men and rendering final judgement is nothing more than a part of His great desire to forgive, and so He delays in order to afford us the opportunity to repent. Repentance requires a self-realization of what we are, and this self-realization comes as a gift of our Lord, as His Holy Spirit convict us of sin. What a wonderful God and Saviour, who not only offers forgiveness, but opens our eyes to see our selves and causes us to repent and be forgiven!

The Bible has about as many different words for forgiveness as it does for sin. Perhaps you can think of others I have not thought of here. (See Barclay)

1. Forgiveness is sending away... just like turning cattle loose in a field.
2. Forgiveness is a "free gift"... not deserved, but absolutely free.
3. Forgiveness is to be blotted or cancelled out... just as a sponge could wipe out the ink used on ancient papyrus and remove the record completely.
4. Forgiveness is to put away or abolish. It makes sin inoperative and ineffective, like dropping an old automobile into the bottom of the sea.
5. Forgiveness is rescue or deliverance, as a sailor is rescued after ship wreck at sea, or a man sick unto death is restored to health.
6. Forgiveness is liberation or freedom, as a death row prisoner is released from his barred cell.
7. Forgiveness is a washing. ;It is being purified, cleansed of the ritual uncleanness which prevents us from worship and from the presence of God.
8. Forgiveness is a taking away, so that when a man is truly forgiven God takes away and removes his sin.
9. Forgiveness is to cover, so that God puts our sins out of His sight forever, like the little chorus my father liked to sing to us: "When God forgives, He forg
10. Forgiveness is the great king cancelling out the billion dollar debt of his steward; it is the father welcoming the prodigal son with open arms, clothing him with new garments, putting a ring on his finger, and killing the fatted calf and holding a great feast "for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found."

⇒ If repentance opens the door for forgiveness from man's side, Jesus is the key on the divine side. The New Testament preachers preached the forgiveness of sins in his name, making His person and work the basis of our forgiveness. Jesus spoke of giving himself for us.

"In Jesus Christ God comes to men, and he says, 'I love you like that.' When we see Jesus healing the sick, feeding the hungry, being the friend of outcasts and sinners, this is God saying: 'I love you like that.' When we see Jesus still refusing to do anything but love, even when men betray and insult and revile him, this is God saying: 'I love you like that.' And, if Jesus had stopped before the cross, it would have meant that there was some point beyond which the love of God would not go, but because Jesus, having loved men, loved them to the end, it means there is nothing which can alter the love of God. It means that God in Jesus Christ says: 'You can betray me; you can hate me; you can misjudge me; you can scourge me; you can crucify me; and nothing you can do can alter my love.' No man ever thought of God like that and no man ever could have thought of God like that. This is staggeringly new and utterly undiscoverable by any human means. Only Jesus Christ could tell men that. And therefore it is most literally true that it cost the life and death of Jesus Christ to reconcile men to God. Had it not been for the life and the death and the cross of Christ, no man would ever have known what God is like." Barclay 331.

Some years ago this story appeared in the Reader's Digest. A gentleman riding on a train noticed that the young man sitting opposite was tense and disturbed and kindly asked what the trouble was. The young man replied, "This morning I was released from the penitentiary. Two years ago I was convicted of crime and brought shame to my parents and friends. For two years I have heard nothing from them or seen them and now I want to return home. How will they receive me? I wrote a letter telling them I am returning by train today. Our farm is beside the railroad before we reach the nearest depot, and I asked them if they were willing to forgive and take me back to tie a white cloth to the apple tree in the front yard. If I see it, I will get off the train, knowing that I am forgiven; otherwise I will stay on and never return home." The kindly gentleman replied, "Relax and close your eyes and try to rest; I will watch for the cloth and tell you." Presently he exclaimed: "Ah! Look how you are forgiven, how your parents love you and want you back!" And when the young man looked there was not one cloth, but so many that the tree looked as though a fresh snow had fallen.

I believe...in the forgiveness of sin.

Prayer: Holy Father, we thank thee for thy Word...

"Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord; though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool."

"As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us."

"In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us."

All praise and thanks for forgiveness of our sin. Help us as we preach forgiveness of sin to others in the name of Jesus Christ, that we may demonstrate by forgiving others their trespasses as you have forgiven us.

5/4/86

He Ascended into Heaven

Text: "And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he parted from them, and was carried up into heaven." Luke 24:51

Scripture: Jn. 7:32-36; Lk. 24:⁴⁴~~50~~-53

"Most modern lives of Christ commence at Bethlehem and end with the Ascension, but Christ's life began earlier and continued ^{forever} later." (ISBE loc cit). The Man of the cross is now the Man in glory. Yet the events which took Jesus from the earth back to heaven at about this time of year so long ago are all but ignored. We sing the carols proclaiming His birth, but how many hymns do you know proclaiming His return to Heaven? We preach the cross, as well we should, but we seldom mention the crown with all its benefits to the Christian right now. In the Apostles Creed we recite, "He ascended into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God Almighty..." but forget to consider the significance of His exaltation. Today we remember the Ascension of Christ. Luke 24:51 tells us, "And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he parted from them, and was carried up into heaven."

I. The Ascension Foretold. Jesus never concealed His anticipated return to heaven, and often mentioned it to His disciples, especially in the Gospel of John. When they grumbled because of His difficult teachings, such as, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, ye have not life in yourselves." (Jn. 6:53), Jesus challenged them with the question: "What then if ye should behold the Son of man ascending where he was before," (Jn. 6:62). When Pharisees tried to arrest Him, Jesus threw them into confusion with the remark: "Yet a little while am I with you, and I go unto him that sent me. Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me; and where I am, ye cannot come." (Jn. 7:33-34).

In John 14, Jesus talked at length of His coming departure, yet this may be a brief condensation of all He said about it. "Ye heard how I said to you, I go away, and I come unto you. If ye loved me, ye would have rejoiced, because I go unto the Father." (Jn. 14:28) Later in this discourse, He said, "But now I go unto him that sent me; and none of you ask me, Whither goest thou?" (Jn. 16:5)

On resurrection morning in the garden outside the tomb, Jesus spoke to Mary Magdalene: "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended unto the Father: but go unto my brethren, and say to them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and my God and your God." (Jn. 20:17).

In no sense does Jesus seem to have had an overwhelming longing to return home to His Father. There was no resemblance to GIs counting the days until they return to the States, or even missionaries anticipating immanent furlough! Rather, Jesus was distinctly conscious of Who He was and Why He was here. He sought to convince His followers of the true cosmic significance of His life here within the timeless framework of the designs of almighty God. As He sat down for the Last Supper with His disciples, He knew "that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father" and "that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he came forth from God and goeth unto God." (Jn. 13, 1,3). His anticipation of the Ascension, then, was not so much in terms of what we think of as a "home-going" ...but as the crowning event in God's plan of salvation and continual sovereignty.

II. The Ascension as an Event. Matthew and John do not record the actual event. Mark tells how He was received up into heaven, but these final words of his Gospel are not generally accepted as authentic. But Luke tells us about it both at the end of his Gospel and the beginning of the book of Acts. As a careful historian, Luke recognized the Ascension as the logical beginning of Church History apart from the account of the earthly ministry of Jesus Himself.

The account is brief. His parting words instructed His disciples to be His witnesses to the uttermost parts of the earth. Then "while He blessed them" He parted from them. What a beautiful way to say good-bye. His blessing rests upon all His followers and His witnesses to this day! The accounts vary slightly as to how He left. "He parted from them" "He was carried up into heaven." "He was received up into heaven." "He was taken up out of their sight." The effect

was something more than simply disappearing heavenward. The passive verbs indicate that the disciples were aware of some Power from above which removed Jesus from earth to heaven. This was just as supernatural as the arrival of Jesus in Bethlehem or His resurrection some 40 days before. All three events are fables or myths to those who doubt the miraculous, deny the supernatural, and refuse to believe what they cannot scientifically prove or sensually experience.

For the man of faith, and the man of reasonable nature who accepts the testimony of reliable witnesses, and even more for the man who has experienced the presence and power of the Risen Lord in his life...the Ascension event is the natural and glorious culmination of our Lord's earthly ministry. Some worry over the question that Jesus "went up" whereas modern science indicates no real up and down in the universe; they complain that this places heaven in a physical spot.

"Heaven is at once a place and a state, and as personality necessarily implies locality, some place for Our Lord's Divine. pyetnhuman...Person is essential.... It matters not that our conception today of the physical universe is different from that of New Testament times. We still speak of the sun setting and rising, though strictly these are not true. The details of the Ascension are really unimportant. Christ disappeared from view, and no question need be raised either of distance or direction."(ISBE). The power of God removed Him while He was blessing the disciples...a blessing that has never terminated, which brings us to...

III. The ascension as a doctrine. The Ascension of Jesus has value for us not because of His physical remoteness but because of His spiritual nearness. He said, "Because I live, ye shall live also." This truth has several aspects... every one of which give us comfort and strength and hope and victory.

1 The Ascension means that our redemption is accomplished. Having removed our sin by death on the cross, Jesus demonstrated His righteousness by His return to heaven. Only the righteous can enter heaven, and by His return Jesus who became sin for us could show that atonement was now complete and perfect, and "once for all." When Nansen, the famous Norwegian explorer, set out to reach
His mission was accomplished!

the North Pole, he took with him a carrier pigeon. Upon his arrival in that desolate region, he wrote a tiny message, fastened it securely under the pigeon's wings and launched it on its long journey back to Norway. This expert little navigator made its silent way over 1000 miles of empty snow, another 1000 miles of restless ocean, and eventually came in for a landing on the lap of Nansen's wife. This was all she needed. The descending dove was eloquent testimony her husband had reached his destination." (Journal 3/25/64)

The Ascension therefore is the final fulfilment of the priesthood foreshadowed by the ritual and ceremony of the Levitical priesthood. The services of the Old Testament tabernacle and temple may mean little to modern readers, but one matter we can understand, i.e., the high priest entered once a year into the holy place to render atonement for the people symbolically. The writer of Hebrews points out that not in symbol, but in fact, not repeatedly but once for all, Jesus has entered into heaven...the truly holy place. "For Christ entered not into a holy place made with hands, like in pattern to the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear before the face of God for us." (Heb. 9:24).

2. The ascension means that we now have a perpetual intercessor. Having died for our sins, Jesus Christ sitting at God's right hand remains the perpetual atonement for sin. I Jn. 2:1 tells us, "And if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." The sinner who comes to God in repentance and faith has far more than One who by His death became the perfect mediator between God and man to plead his cause. Not just in the matter of our salvation, but in every daily concern, Jesus stands ~~as~~ our intercessor in every temptation or distress or crisis. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" (Rom. 8:35). We are familiar with the Oriental practice of using a third person with influence to plead our cause as an intercessor to secure a job or some other favor. That is why we pray "in the name of Jesus" who
what more influential intercessor than the Son of God?

is our righteous representative. As both Saviour of men and Son of God, He is in the supreme position of intercessor. Not by any means does He have to argue with God, or persuade God as would a human intercessor. But because of Who He is, God not only wills but is infinitely desirous to bestow His grace on human sinners such as we.

3. The Ascension of Christ signalled the descent of the Holy Spirit. He Himself asserted the connection between His ascension and the coming of the Spirit. Of course the Holy Spirit was present and at active from the foundation of the world. He was granted to particular individuals in Old Testament times...endowing them with special talents or gifts to meet particular historical emergencies. But a few days after His Ascension, Jesus kept His promise to His disciples by sending His Spirit on the day of Pentecost. This baptism of the Spirit continues today whenever a man is born anew into the kingdom of God, whenever God's people are empowered and led into Christian witness or service, ^{and} whenever the Church takes forward steps to reveal the fullness of the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit replaced the physical presence of Jesus by bringing ^{*}(1) A divine Presence, ^{*}(2) a unique Power, and ^{*}(3) A source of further teaching about the truth of the Gospel.

4. The Ascension means that our Saviour now is Lord and Head of the Church. What do the words mean that "Jesus sat down at the right hand of God?" Simply that He now occupies the place of honor than which there is no higher...all authority and power and dominion belongs to Him. Even our human custom places the guest of honor at the right hand of the host, and God so honors His Son. Like the head of the body, Jesus now controls the affairs of the Church. He calls her members, selects her leaders, promotes her missionary witness, and protects her interests. His very life permeates the church giving her life. Like the vine and the branch, the Church abides in Him, and thus bears fruit. Too bad that so often men's struggle to control the church and replace the true Head has caused so much trouble! We need to pray that in all places,

Christians may give Christ His rightful place as Lord in our hearts and churches.

5] The Ascension means that we can always claim the presence of the Living Christ.

As He left, He announced, "Lo, I am with you always." (Mt. 28:20). This Presence is not just a blessed memory of a perfect life; nor is it the possession of the record of His words in our four Gospels; nor even our faith in an atonement for sin accomplished once and for all on Calvary...it is more than these, precious though they may be. "Lo I am with you always" is the assurance that Christ is living, that in His life we have our life, that in Him we have our fellowship with God and receive grace for the tasks of each day and can rejoice in victories over sin and sorrow and death. As a man, Jesus was confined to one place and one group of friends. As our risen and ascended Lord, He is no longer confined by considerations of time and space but, through, a mystery beyond human understanding except through the eyes of faith, He now stands as the personal companion of every lonely Christian facing temptation, to every ambassador carrying the witness to the ends of the earth. He shares the burden of each weary Pilgrim, whether that burden be some temptation, some private worry, some daily odious task. "I am with you always."

6] The Ascension means eternal expectation for the believer. "I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto myself; that where I am there ye may be also." (Jn. 14:1-2).

In various ways the rest of the New Testament echoes these words of promise, of hope, of encouragement. How simply our Lord put it all! No complicated dialectical arguments, no demvthologizing, no foggy theological jargon. "I am going away, back to heaven," He said. "I will prepare a place for you, so that you need not despair that someday you will have a permanent home." All that we believe about the Second Coming of our Lord is based on the fact that He has now returned to heaven. All the confusion about His return vanishes when we return to His simple promise. Meanwhile, we can rest in the certain hope that even now He is making ready a place where we can forever be with Him.

Conclusion. "After the death of ^{the musician} Robert Shumann, his wife, a great pianist in her own right, devoted herself to making her husband's works known. Along with hours of disciplined practice before her concerts, she prepared for the interpretation of the music by reading again and again the treasured letters the great composer had written her. But Christians have for more than the letters of a dead man. ^{of course} They have the inspired Word of the Living Lord, the Book of which He said, 'Search the scriptures for...they are that which testify of me.' (Jn. 5:39). Not only so, but Christians also have within them the Spirit of their risen Saviour, and theirs is the obligation to live and walk with Him ^{as a Living Companion} in the discipline of daily life." (Editorial, Christian Today 3/27/64 p. 25)

Golden harps are sounding, Angel voices sing,
Pearly gates are opened, Opened for the King:
Christ, the King of glory, Jesus King of love,
Is gone up in triumph To his home above.

He who came to save us, He who bled and died,
Now is crowned with glory At his Father's side.
Never more to suffer, Never more to die,
Jesus, King of glory, Is gone up on high.

Praying for his children In that blessed place,
Calling them to glory, Sending them his grace;
His bright home preparing, Faithful ones, for you;
Jesus ever liveth, Ever loveth too.

All his work is ended, Joyfully we sing;
Jesus hath ascended: glory to our King!

Frances R. Havergal

- ① Our redemption is accomplished
- ② We have a perpetual intercessor
- ③ The descent of the Holy Spirit
- ④ Christ is head and Head of His Church
- ⑤ We can claim the presence of a living Saviour
- ⑥ Eternal expectation for the believer

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