

Scripture Reading: I Samuel 25:1-13, 29

Text: "...the life of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living in the care of the Lord your God." I Sam. 25:29

Like a good Western movie

I Samuel 25 features a "heel," a "hero," and a "heroine." The prophet Samuel had just died. He had anointed Saul as king, but the good-looking and popular <sup>ruler</sup> king disappointed his people, disobeyed his God, and became a <sup>dysfunctional</sup> mental case. Meanwhile God selected the shepherd boy David to replace him. This valiant youth had killed Goliath, become a close friend of Saul's son Jonathan, had incurred the king's <sup>murderous</sup> wrath, and had been forced to flee into the wilderness where he and a band of outlaws lived as guerrillas, like Robin Hood and his jolly yeomen in Sherwood forest.

That region is wild, desolate, and full of rocky crags, dark canyons, and caves...ideal for guerilla warfare. David's band indulged in no raids against the king, but they did have to eat and <sup>thus</sup> depended upon local supplies for existence. Living and doing business in small towns of the region was a rich man named Nabal, who owned 3000 sheep and 1000 goats. David heard that it was shearing time...an occasion <sup>always</sup> regarded as a festival when owners were expected to be generous and hospitable. "Now the name of the man was Nabal, and the name of his wife Abigail. The woman was of good understanding and beautiful, but the man was churlish and ill-behaved; he was a Calebite. What a combination! I can just hear someone muttering these words about the occupants of the Hopper house! Nabal was a descendant of Caleb who had conquered the region around Hebron. The family bore that name as proudly as any Highland clan of Scotland, but Nabal was the black sheep of the family tribe."

David ordered ten of his young men to visit Nabal's sheep-shearing. With ten men David signalled that he not only expected considerable generosity, but <sup>also</sup> that he had <sup>formidable</sup> considerable military clout. He ordered them to make a courteous request: "Thus you shall salute him: 'Peace be to you, and peace be to your house, and peace be to all that you have. I heard that you have shearers; now your shepherds have been with us, and we did them no harm, and they missed nothing, all the time they were with us in Carmel. Ask your young men, and they will tell you. Therefore let my young men find favor in your eyes; for we have come on a feast day. Pray, give whatever you have at hand to your servants and to your son David.'" Remember there was no stable government, and David and his band were the <sup>rulers</sup> de facto ~~government~~ of the region and had protected the shepherds and their flocks in an era when bands of hoodlums and bandits and enemy tribes infested the region. By those standards, David's request was reasonable, courteous, and <sup>actually</sup> his due for services already rendered.

David's men did as they were told, but "then they waited," somewhat like a poor guy cooling his heels in the waiting room while a business tycoon in his mahogany paneled office puffs his cigar and watches the stock-market ticker tape. When Nabal's answer came it was insulting: "Who is this fellow David?...all kinds of fellows are running away from their masters now-a-days. Shall I take my bread and my water and my meat that I have killed for my shearers, and give it to men who come from I do not know where?" Nabal was discourteous, rude, belittling of David who was already a hero in Israel and a power to be reckoned with. How narrowly selfish with his own possessions! A cad, no less!

David hit the ceiling when his men reported. "Put on your swords" he ordered as he buckled on his own. Out he marched with 400 men, leaving 200 to watch the camp. David had a temper too, just as Nabal did. "From Saul David had expected injuries, and against those he was prepared and stood upon his guard, and so kept his temper; but from Nabal he expected kindness, and therefore the affront he gave him was a surprise to him, found him off his guard, and by a sudden and unexpected attack, put him for the present into disorder. How we need to pray, Lord, led us not into temptation!" (Mt. Hen Com.) How easy to stand firm in the big temptations and then let a relatively minor event literally throw us for a loss!

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, one of Nabal's young men reported all this to his mistress, the beautiful and wise Abigail. Maybe he was nervous lest he himself be a victim of David's vengeance, especially if some kind of deal had already been made. It would be natural for shepherds to make an "arrangement" with whoever controlled the grazing land in such unsettled times, and this would have included an understanding about proper compensation..."You take care of us and when the time comes we will say a good word for you to our master!" This young man also knew he should warn Abigail and confirm the reasonableness of David's request of Nabal. "The men were very good to us, and we suffered no harm, and we did not miss anything when we were in the fields, as long as we went with them keeping the sheep. Now therefore know this and consider what you should do; for evil is determined against our master and against all his house, and he is so ill-natured that no one can speak to him."

*They were a wall to us both by night and by day all the time we were with them tending the sheep.*

Now Abigail swung into action, proving that she was not only of "good understanding and beautiful," but sensible, decisive, and efficient. Verse 18 says, "Abigail made haste." I appreciate a woman who can "make haste" and at three crucial points in the narrative we are told she "made haste." She fixed 200 loaves, 2 skins of wine, 5 sheep ready dressed, 5 measures of parched grain, and 100 clusters of raisins, and 200 cakes of figs...not too much for 600 men hungry for home cooking! The food was ready for Nabal's feast, but she didn't stop to dither around about what to send or ask anybody's opinion. She acted without telling Nabal, knowing how he would explode, and order<sup>ed</sup> her young men to load all this on asses and move out ahead of her to meet David. Why didn't she go along

with them? Maybe it was to appease David and cool his temper ahead of time, but I think it was because she was still a woman. Surely she had to take off her curlers and fix her face and put on her prettiest frock! Evidence in all the rest of the story points to her strategy to stun David with the first blow, and so she did with 100% success!

As she galloped out a freak accident happened...although we must remember that with God there are no accidents but only His guiding hand. She came around a mountain and met David's band before her// young men did. David was breathing fire and brimstone, raging: "Surely in vain have I guarded all that [Nabal] has in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that belonged to him; and he has returned to me evil for good. God do so to David and more also, if by morning I leave so much as one male of all who belong to him." David meant every word of it. Nothing but a bloody mess would be left of Nabal's house. What tee-ed him off was expressed in the words "he has returned to me evil for good." How often we use that as an excuse to let tempers fly, to harbor ugly feelings, or to attempt to get even. Suppose God treated us that way? He gives us so many good things and we are often ungrateful, or even reject Him! We even killed the Son He sent to save us. Yet instead of David's attitude, God continues to forgive.

In this sudden encounter, Abigail again recognized an emergency. For the second time she made haste...this time to fall on her face before David and bow to the ground. No time to wring her hands about where the young men with <sup>her</sup> ~~the~~ gifts were, or shed appropriate tears. She wasted no time in doing and saying the right thing. Her speech was far more than sweet-talking, although it contained plenty of that. It was shrewd, it was persuasive, and it evidenced true realization of the status of David in God's plan for her country. How fortunate any of us men would be if our wives could talk us out of trouble as beautifully as she did! She even illustrates how we should approach God in prayer, as we plead for forgiveness of the sins of ourselves and others.

With very few words (also remarkable) Abigail made ten points:

- ① She spoke respectfully to David.
- ② She took the blame herself.
- ③ She excused her husband's fault by imputing it to his natural weakness. "Let not my lord regard this ill-natured fellow Nabal; for as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name, and folly is with him." Nabal means fool...even his wife admitted it!
- ④ She pled her own ignorance that she had not seen David's young men.
- ⑤ She took it for granted that she had already won her point..."Now the Lord has restrained you from blood-guilt, and from taking vengeance with your own hand." How could David turn down a beautiful woman who made such a flattering assumption?
- ⑥ She offered her presents to David's young men. Her servants had shown up, but

tactfully the gifts are offered to his men and not to David himself so as not to hurt his pride.

*and evil shall not be found in you all your days.*

⑦. She applauded David's services for his country and his God... "my lord is fighting the battles of the Lord." It never hurts to pay a compliment!

⑧. She foretold the glorious end of his present troubles with words of comfort and of faith. "If men rise up to pursue you and to seek your life, the life of my Lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living in the care of the Lord your God; and the lives of your enemies he shall sling out as from the hollow of a sling." Nabal's troubles were nothing compared to the uncertainties and difficulties surround<sup>ing</sup> David in the future. Here ⇒ Abigail reminded David of God's protective care in which he had faith and about which he had sung in his psalms... "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me."

⑨. She asked David to consider how much better his conscience would feel for not taking vengeance himself and shedding innocent blood. That may not be the highest motive for refraining from sin, but it does no harm to consider how acting on sudden impulse today may bring pain tomorrow.

⑩. She recommended herself to his favor after the Lord has blessed David. He certainly did not forget the request, perhaps a bit sooner than she anticipated.

We can blame David for his violent temper, but we must admire how he accepted the reasonable and pious counsel of Abigail. Nabal and David both lost their tempers. But ⇒ Nabal was the kind of person you could not talk to...he would never listen to reason. David was open to what he now recognized not only as the wisdom of a beautiful woman, but as the voice of the Lord speaking through her. "Blessed be your discretion, and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodquilt and from avenging myself with my own hand. For as surely as the Lord the God of Israel lives, who has restrained me from hurting you, unless you had made haste and come to meet me, truly by morning there had not been left to Nabal so much as one male." God had hold of David's conscience, even though David had been temporarily deaf to God's voice. He listened to wise and faithful reproof, accepted the gift graciously, and courteously sent Abigail home.

This remarkable woman knew it was not right to conceal what she had done from her husband, wrong as he was. She found him holding a feast, "like the feast of a king," and roaring drunk. When she spoke to him the next morning... "his heart died within him, and he became as a stone." And about ten days later the Lord smote Nabal; and he died." Whether from a sense of guilt for his sin, shame because his wife showed more sense than he did, or shock at his narrow escape, or intemperate drinking...Nabal suffered a heart attack or stroke which paralyzed him. Ten days later the Lord smote him (perhaps <sup>with</sup> another stroke) and he died. Everyone saw that God had punished him.



Hearing this news, David's first reaction was to thank God for taking care of a situation which David had attempted to do in his own power, and for preserving him from doing evil. We often ask for God's care in dangers and troubles...yet it is just as true that God preserves us from sins we never commit, and we must thank Him for keeping our steps from evil. David's almost simultaneous reaction was to send and woo Abigail to make her his wife. Verse 40 describes the courtship. "And when the servants of David came to Abigail at Carmel, they said to her, 'David has sent us to you to take you to him as his wife.' And Abigail made haste and rose and mounted on an ass and her five maidens attended her; she went after the messengers of David, and became his wife." Such rapid remarriage seems not to have been uncommon, but it was completely in character for Abigail to make haste...for the third time in this chapter. Everything ends just right: "The churlish husband is fortunately removed; the charming and clever wife gets her reward; the brave lover gets the girl." (IB) Actually he got <sup>two</sup> of them, reminding us that David was far from perfect...even though a close friend of God.

① These three characters teach three truths. Nabal illustrates the sin of ill-temper, self-centeredness, and ingratitude which God rebuked through his wife and punished by his death. Described as churlish, ill-behaved, ill-natured...this mean character was literally Nabal...which means fool...and he got what every fool deserves. We too sin when we are grouchy, bad-tempered, unreasonable, and unapproachable.

② David shows our prone to sin, especially that of taking matters into our own hands instead of leaving them up to God. Yet though he came to the brink of sin, God restrained David who had sense to recognize God's hand. It is always good to be on the look-out for God's warnings to keep us from blindly stepping over the precipice and dashing ourselves to pieces on the rocks of sin below.

③ Abigail was quick to see where she could fill a useful role. She never questioned or resisted God's prompting...she knew what she could do and did it well. God often uses ordinary people to do important things for Him in moments of stress or crisis. He gives superior powers of wisdom and tact and the gift of wise words. How the world needs intercessors, men and women with the love of God in their hearts, the willingness to "take a chance" on getting hurt themselves, in order to bring reconciliation between others. We who believe that God sent His Son to reconcile the world to Himself, can be used of God to intercede and be reconcilers for the peace of the world.

How well Abigail spoke to David: "The life of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living in the care of the Lord your God." God later demonstrated this repeatedly in the life of David who must have recalled the words of Abigail. They are a promise to us



Chunju 11/21/73

Bound in the bundle of the living

Text: I Sam. 25:29 "...the life of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living in the care of the Lord your God..."

Scripture reading. I Sam. 25:1-13; 29.

Here is one of our favorite Old Testament stories. It has human interest, a delicious oriental flavor, and lessons every Christian needs to know. Like a good Hollywood drama, it features a "heel", a "hero" and a "heroine" graphically portrayed. It's a part of God's Word, and in its characters we see ourselves and how God deals with us.

Our chapter opens with the statement that Samuel died and was buried amid suitable national mourning. A brief obituary for a great man who had dominated an important era when his nation was transformed into a kingdom under Saul whom he had anointed king. But the good-looking and popular king disappointed his people, disobeyed his God, and literally became a mental case. Meanwhile God selected David to replace him. Prior to this chapter David had been anointed, he had fought and killed Goliath, he had become a close friend of prince Jonathan, he had become the object of King Saul's lunatic wrath, and had been forced to flee into a guerilla type existence where he lived a sort of Robin Hood ~~existence~~ <sup>existence</sup>. He had just played the prank of ~~sneaking into the king's chamber and cutting off the skirt of Saul's robe~~ <sup>sneaking into the king's chamber and cutting off the skirt of Saul's robe</sup> in a dark cave and then kidding him about it so that Saul had been forced to recognize David's goodness and acknowledge that the kingdom would pass to his control. Even though they promised to do each other no harm, David thought it prudent not to trust the mad king and retreated with his men to a wilderness stronghold.

With the death of Samuel, David may have thought that all restraints upon Saul were gone so he went further into the wilderness about 15 miles south of his home town of Bethelhem. I have seen this region and it is wild and desolate, a place of rocky crags and caves and deep dark canyons, ideal for partisan warfare. David and his men apparently did little more than attempt to exist, and indulged in no raids against King Saul. But a guerilla band has to eat. I recall during the Korean war that these mountains around Chunju were full of guerillas who raided villages not to inflict military damage but to get food. What burning and killing they did was mostly to keep the villagers terrorized into supplying food. At one time the nursing school was full of refugee patients ...not because of the war itself but because the UN forces and Korean police had to destroy villages in the no-man's land of the mountain valleys to deprive guerillas of food, and this eventually led to their defeat.

Now, living and doing business in a couple of small towns ~~of~~ of the region was a rich man who owned 3000 sheep and 1000 goats and it was shearing time. The description is classic: "Now the name of the man was Nabal, and the name of his wife Abigail. The woman was of good understanding and beautiful, but the man was churlish and ill-behaved; he was a Calebite." Ah! what a combination! I can just hear someone muttering these words about the occupants of the Hopper house! The man was a descendant of Caleb, the noble old man who <sup>conquered</sup> ~~occupied~~ the region around Hebron during the war of occupation, and the tribe bore that name as proudly as any Highland clan of Scotland. Sheep-shearing was a festival when the owners were expected to be generous and hospitable. Just as in Korea any festival or wedding or funeral is a time all the beggars in the neighborhood expect a hand-out, it was normal procedure to request generosity from a rich man.

David heard of the sheep-shearing and ordered ten of his young men to go see Nabal. Since David's home was not far away he may have <sup>met</sup> ~~met~~ Nabal, but certainly both men knew about each other. In sending ten men, David indicated not only that he expected considerable generosity, but ~~possibly~~ <sup>possibly</sup> he was demonstrating his potential ~~own~~ <sup>own</sup> clout. Anyway, he ordered them to present their request cour-

teously: "Thus you shall salute him: 'Peace be to you, and peace be to your house, and peace be to all that you have. I hear that you have shearers; now your shepherds have been with us, and we did them no harm, and they missed nothing, all the time they were with us in Carmel. Ask your young men, and they will tell you. Therefore let my young men find favor in your eyes; for we have come on a feast day. Pray, give whatever you have at hand to your servants and to your son David.'" Looked at one way he was asking for protection money, but let this not rile our Westernized ideas of morality. Remember there was no stable government, and David and his band were the de facto government of the region and had provided safety for the shepherds and their flocks in an era when bands of hoodlums and bandits and alien tribes infested the region. The request was reasonable, courteously presented without verbal threats, and was actually for services already rendered.

David's messengers did exactly as they were told, "and then they waited." My mental picture is of the poor guy in the outer office cooling his heels while the tycoon inside the mahogany paneled office puffs his cigar and watches the stock-market ticker-tape. When the answer came it was insulting: "Who is this fellow David?...all kinds of fellows are running away from their master now-a-days? Shall I take my bread and my water and my meat that I have killed for my shearers, and give it to men who come from I do not know where?" How revealing of the man Nabal, discourteous, rude, belittling of one already a hero in Israel and a power to be reckoned with, and narrowly selfish with his own possessions! True, he may have feared getting into trouble with KING Saul if he played footsy with David, but still no reason for such insults except that that was the kind of man he was.

The report of the young men threw David into a cold temper. "Put on your swords" he ordered and buckled on his own while they were doing so. Out he marched with 400 men leaving 200 to watch the camp...a not inconsiderable force to be reckoned with under any circumstances. Here we see something about David. He had a temper too, just like Nabal. Yet "from Saul David had expected injuries, and against those he was prepared and stood upon his guard, and so kept his temper; but from Nabal he expected kindness, and therefore ~~he was surprised~~ the affront he gave him was a surprise to him, found him off his guard, and, by a sudden and unexpected attack, put him for the present into disorder. What need have we to pray, Lord, lead us not into temptation?" (Mt. Hen. Com). How often we stand firm in the big temptations and spiritual crises of life; only to let a relatively insignificant event literally throw us for a loss.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, one of Nabal's young men told his mistress Abigail what had happened. He may have been nervous lest he himself be a victim of David's vengeance, but more than that he knew it was right to warn his mistress and confirm the reasonableness of David's request to his master who had only "cussed him out." "The men were very good to us, and we suffered no harm, and we did not miss anything when we were in the fields, as long as we went with them; they were a wall to us both by night and by day, all the while we were with them keeping the sheep. Now therefore know this and consider what you should do; for evil is determined against our master and against all his house, and he is so ill natured that one cannot speak to him." What a reputation to have! Nabal was such a vile tempered and unreasonable fellow you couldn't talk to him! Even the servant was free to say so to the man's wife without fear of repercussions. Do I sense that a deal had already been made between these shepherds and David? Surely such shepherds had to make an "arrangement" with whoever controlled the grazing lands in such unsettled times, and this would have included an understanding about proper compensation. "You take care and when the right time comes we will say a good word for you!" and insinuate to human intentions. Now Abigail swung into action and proves that she was not only of good understanding and beautiful, but sensible, decisive, and efficient. It says, "Abigail made haste". I appreciate a woman who can "make haste" and at three cur-



*in this narrative*  
cial points it says she "made haste." She fixed 200 loaves, 2 skins of wine, 5 sheep ready dressed, 5 measures of parched grain, and a 100 clusters of ~~raisins~~ raisins, and 200 cakes of figs, loaded them on asses and ordered the young men to move out to meet David ahead of her. The food was probably already fixed for all the feasting but she didn't stop to dither around about what to send or ask anybody's opinion. She acted, but she didn't tell Nabal knowing full well the explosion it would touch off. Why do you suppose she didn't go along with the young men? Maybe it was to appease David and cool his temper like Jacob sending advance gifts to Esau centuries before...but I think she was still a woman<sup>xx</sup>. Surely she had to take off her curlers and fix her face and put on the latest pants suit? All the evidence of the rest of the story points to her being ready to stun David with the first blow, and she did so with 100% success.

As she galloped out a freak accident took place. Somehow she came around the mountain and met David's band before her own young men did. David was breathing fire and brimstone: "Surely in vain have I guarded all that this fellow has in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that belonged to him; and he has returned to me evil for good. God do so to David and more also, if by morning I leave so much as one male of all who belong to him." David meant every word of it...nothing but a bloody mess would have been left of Nabal's house. What tee-ed him off was expressed in the phrase "he has returned to me evil for good." How often we use that as an excuse to let tempers fly, to harbor bad feelings, or to get even. Suppose God treated us that way? We even killed the Son He sent to save and often we still reject His goodness... yet instead of this attitude of David, God continues to forgive.

When the two met so unexpectedly, Abigail again recognized the emergency...she made haste ...this time to fall on her face before David and bow to the ground. No time to ~~about~~ <sup>wring her hands</sup> where the young men with the gifts were, or shed some appropriate tears. She wasted no time in doing and saying the right thing. Her speech was far more than sweet-talking, although it contained plenty of that. It was shrewd, it was persuasive, and it evidenced true realization of the status of David in God's plan for her country. How lucky any of us would be if our wives could talk us men out of trouble as beautifully as she did! Somebody has <sup>noted</sup> pointed out that she makes 10 points in a few words, also rather remarkable for a woman! *men*

1. She spoke respectfully to David.
2. She took the blame herself.
3. She excuses her husband's fault by imputing it to his natural weakness. "Let not my lord regard this ill-natured fellow Nabal; for as his name is, so is he; Nabalzzforzazhiszname is his name, and folly is with him." Nabal means fool. He was so bad even his wife could not cover up for him better than that.
4. Pleads her own ignorance.
5. Takes it for granted she has gained her point..."Now then, my lord, as the Lord lives, and as your soul lives, seeing the Lord has restrained you from bloodguilt, and from taking vengeance with your own hand." After all, she knew David could hardly turn down a beautiful woman who made such an assumption.
6. She offers the present to the young men. Presumably the asses had shown up now, but tactfully the gifts are offered not to David himself but his men so as not to hurt his pride at all.
7. Applauds David's services for his country and his God..."my lord is fighting the battles of the Lord."
8. Foretells the glorious issue of his present troubles with words of comfort and ~~xxxxxx~~ faith. "If men rise up to pursue you and to seek your life, the life of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living in the care of the Lord your God; and the lives of your enemies he shall sling out as from the hollow of a sling." Actually the trouble with Nabal was as nothing compared ~~xxx~~ to the uncertainties and difficulties surrounding David into the foreseeable future. Abigail here reminded David of the protective care of God in which he had faith and about which he had sung in his psalms.



9. Asks David to consider how much more comfortable his conscience will be... for not having taken vengeance himself and shed innocent blood. Perhaps this is not the highest motive for refraining from sin, but it does no harm to consider the future pain acting on sudden impulse today ~~he~~ may bring.

10. Recommends herself ~~to~~ to his favor after the Lord has blessed David. Perhaps this was rewarded a bit sooner than she anticipated, and David certainly did not forget the request.

"If we blame David for his heedless passion, we must not less admire the readiness with which he listened to the reasonable and pious counsel of Abigail." (X) B) "Wise and good men hear reason...even from their inferiors" (Mat. Hen. Com.) Both Nabal and David lost their tempers. But Nabal was the kind you could not talk to...he would never listen to reason. David was open to what he now recognized not only as the wise discretion of Abigail but to the voice of the Lord speaking ~~through~~ through her. "Blessed ~~be~~ by your discretion, and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodguilt and from avenging myself with my own hand. For as surely as the Lord the God of Israel lives, who has restrained me from hurting you ~~and I would have done so~~, unless you had made haste and come to meet me, truly by morning there had not been left to Nabal so much as one male." He had vowed to kill Nabal, but David knew that "oaths cannot bind us to that which is sinful." (MBC). God had hold of David's conscience, even though David had been temporarily deaf to His voice, so he heeded the wise and faithful reproof., accepted the gift graciously, and courteously dismissed Abigail to her home.

X Yet this remarkable woman knew ~~xxx~~ it was wrong to continue to conceal what she had done from her husband, wrong as he was. When she returned home he was holding a feast "like the feast of a king" ~~xxx~~ and was roaring drunk, so she had to wait until the next morning to tell what had happened... "and his heart died within him, and he became as a stone. And about ten days later the Lord smote Nabal; and he died." Whether from a sense of guilt at his sin, shame because his wife showed more sense than he did, or shock at his narrow escape or some combination, Nabal suffered some kind of heart attack or stroke which may have paralyzed him, and ten days later the Lord smote him (perhaps with a nother stroke) and he died. The picture looks like his electro-cardiogram sent into a violent flutter and then straightened out like a ruler and finally stopped dead. So far as everyone was concerned, God had punished him.

When David heard the news, his first reaction was to thank God for taking care of the situation which David had attempted to do himself and to preserve him from doing evil. We often ask God's protection from dangers, and we thank Him for preserving us in troubles...yet it is just as true that God preserves us from sins we never commit and we are under as much obligation to thank Him for keeping our steps from evil, which is what David did. But the almost simultaneous reaction of David was to send and woo Abigail to make her his wife. Verse 40 evidently describes the wooing: "And when the servants of David came to Abigail at Carmel, they said to her, 'David has sent us to you to take you to him as his wife.'" And Abigail made haste and rose and mounted on an ass and her five maidens attended her; she went after the messengers of David, and became his wife." Such rapid remarriage of a widow after the death of a first husband seems not to have been uncommon, but it was completely in character for Abigail to make haste, for the third time in this chapter. Everything ends just right: "The churlish husband is fortunately removed; the charming and clever wife gets her reward; the brave lover gets the girl" (IB) X Actually he got two of them, which helps us to remember that David was not perfect either, in spite of his closeness to God.

In this ancient story the three characters impress three truths upon us. Nabal illustrates the sin of ill-temper, self-centeredness, ingratitude which God had to deal with ~~xxx~~ by a rebuke through his wife and finally by causing his death. Described as churlish, ill-behaved, ill-natured, this mean character was literally Nabal, a fool, and he got what every fool deserves.

of intelligent thinking

we are whom we are grossly, lead-  
tempted, unmarriageable, unapproachable

David, also, shows human weakness and proneness to sin, especially that of taking matters into our own hands instead of leaving them up to God. Yet though David came to the brink of sin, God restrained him and David had sense to recognize God's restraint and God's interference into his planned course of action. It is good to look for God's guidance as to what we ought to do for Him; it is also good to be on the look-out for his warnings to keep us from blindly stepping over the brink and dashing ourselves to pieces in sin. God rewarded David's obedience and David again ~~qaaa~~ was quick to see and thank God for this deliverance from evil.

In addition to all the other good things we can say about Abigail she was quick to see where she could fill a useful role. Call it the instinct for self-preservation of herself and household, if you please, still under God's prompting which she never resisted or questioned, she knew what she could do and did it well. God often uses the ordinary people of the world to do important things for Him in moments of stress or crisis, giving them superior powers of wisdom and tact and the gift of wise words, as in the case of Abigail...and he can use us in the same way. How the world needs intercessors, men and women with the love of God in their hearts, the willingness to "take a chance" on getting hurt themselves, in order to bring reconciliation between men. We who believe that God sent His son to reconcile the world to Himself, can be used of God to intercede and to reconcile between men for the peace of the world.

How well ABigail spoke to David: The life of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living in the care of the Lord your God." Over the years this was repeatedly demonstrated in the life of David, and I am sure he often recalled these words. They are an equally valid promise for us. We are in the middle of a bundle of blessings when we commit ourselves to God. What Abigail said to David (Your life shall be bound in the bundle of the living), Paul said in a far better way in Col. ~~xxxx~~ 3;3 "Your life is hid with Christ in God."

9/14/80

The Fruits of Victory

Scripture Lesson: I Sam. 30:1-31

Text: "For as his share is who goes down to the battle, so shall his share be who stays by the baggage; they shall share alike." I Sam. 30:24

Steering a straight course in a morass of shady ethics, undiluted wickedness... what Paul ~~called~~ a crooked and perverse generation... is no easier now than it has ever been. An experience of young David gives us some good pointers, although like all of us, he was by no means exempt from personal involvement in some of the evil about him. Yet there was in David, even in his youth, that which made even a Philistine king say that he was "like an angel of God," and of whom God Himself said, "I have found in David a man after my own heart, who will do all my will."

I Sam. 30 opens with David and his men returning to Ziklag, his base camp in a town given him by Achish, the Philistine king of Gath. King Saul of Isarel in his madness had tried to kill David several times, so in desperation the young man had fled to the Philistines who naturally gave refuge to an opponent of Saul. With the 600 men who followed him he played a sort of Robin Hood game. Those men were an unruly bunch of roughnecks, difficult to control. The only way to keep them in line was to be busy raiding, so David would raid Canaanite villages south of Judah, leaving no witnesses by totally wiping out their entire populations, and then telling the Philistines that he had raided towns in Judah. This clever deceit at once pleased the Philistines, did no harm to Judah, and eliminated some of their Canaanite enemies.

*(kept his men happy)*

About this time the Philistines prepared for war with the Israelites, and David and his men went along with King Achish to battle. But the Philistine generals objected: "We don't want these men who might turn against us in the heat of battle... wouldn't that be David's way of winning favor with our enemy Saul?" They refused to listen to the pleas of King Achish, forcing him to ask David to return to Ziglag. David acted peeved, as though his sincerity was questioned, but I suspect that secretly he had figured how this would turn out all along, and was happy to have demonstrated loyalty to Achish while avoiding a fight with his own nation.

Returning to Ziglag, David and his men found that Amalekites had attacked their town, burning their homes, and carried off their wives and children and all their possessions. These Amalekites had been among the main targets of the raids David and his men had been making. A superficial glance might make us think the Amalekites had a right to retaliate. But you must look back further into the account. In I Sam. 15, when God made Saul king of Israel, an important item in his job description was to punish Amalek... to utterly destroy Amalek and to put to death both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey. Saul had won a victory over the Amalekites but kept their king Agag alive with the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs and all that was good. For this reason God sent Samuel to denounce Saul. Because of this disobedience, God removed the kingship from him. Samuel then had Agag brought in, took a sword, and "hewed Agag to pieces before the Lord at Gilgal."

Why such merciless treatment of the Amalekites and such a bloody punishment of their king? We have to look back several hundred years to when the children of Israel were travelling from Egypt to the Promised Land. These Amalekites made an unprovoked attack upon them at Rephidim, the battle where Moses had to have his hands held up by Aaron and Hur during which time God gave them victory. At that time God commanded the complete destruction of the Amalekites when Israel entered



Canaan. For centuries this hatred and periodic warfare had continued. There must have been something exceedingly wicked about them which God recognized as a threat to His people. Perhaps there is an illustration here of the insidious peril which un-rebuked and un-conquered sin can bring to the Christian life by cropping up over and over again to lead us into temptation. The only cure for this problem is to annihilate that sin completely, even when drastic surgery is necessary. David's destructive raids against the Amalekites <sup>were</sup> really carrying out orders God had given to Saul. Later when the Philistines defeated Saul in the very battle David had so adroitly avoided, it was an Amalekite who reported the death of Saul and his sons to David. <sup>told David that he</sup> When David learned that this messenger had killed the wounded king and brought his crown and bracelet to David, he ordered him <sup>executed</sup> slain on the spot.

<sup>Alonso Saul had actually killed himself.</sup> To return to David and his men who found their village destroyed, their possessions gone, their families kidnapped: We are told they "lifted up their voices and wept until there was no strength in them to weep." These men had been away a long time and had looked forward to returning to their homes and families. So it is with anyone who loves his "koh-yang"...to lose everything was such a blow that strong men broke down and wept until there were no more tears. Exhausted, un-nerved, devastated!

But for David it was worse. He was responsible. Possibly he felt rebuked by God for having deserted to the Philistines, deceiving them about his own rading, and the charade of joining them in battle against his own nation. There is no record that he had consulted God in any of this...a lesson the young leader needed to learn. To add to his troubles the men with him were so embittered by the loss of their families they blamed him for their loss and threatened to stone him. David had every reason to be down in the dumps and discouraged. King Saul had thrown him out, the Philistines had rebuffed him, the Amalekites had wiped out all he had, his wives were taken prisoner...now his own men turned against him. He had to reach up to touch bottom on his Gallop Poll rating.

But at this point David did the right thing...something he may have temporarily forgotten...yet something he had learned as a boy in a Godly home in Bethlehem. "David strengthened himself in the Lord his God." (30:6) Here is the secret of his greatness. Sometimes God has to let us get to the bottom of the pit of despair, with all personal resources gone, before we realize our hopeless condition. Here is where man in despair is brought to turn himself back to God. Paul said that when we are weak then we are strong...knowing that only in God's strength is there any hope. Experiences like this taught David to write:

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble..  
The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge."

David strengthened himself in the Lord his God. Later he sometimes forgot to do this during his long career, but always he came back to touch base on this point: Strength comes from God alone.

Now David did what he should have been doing all along but apparently had forgotten. He asked God what to do. He called in Abiathar the priest. Since every one in Ziklag had been carried off, presumably the priest had been with David's band on their journey more as decoration than communicator of God's will...something a lot of Christians like to do with their religion. Now David had him inquire of the Lord whether or not to pursue the Amalekites. David would likely not have gotten into all this mess had he more frequently consulted God. Sometimes it takes a desperate sort of situation to bring us to prayer for God's guidance. "Should I pursue the Amalekites or not?" "Go after them and you will rescue all!"

David took off with his 600 men, already near exhaustion from 3 days march. At the Brook Besor 200 could go no further. Not everyone has the same strength, and David sympathetically understood this. We Christians, especially professional

workers, sometimes worry that we cannot keep up the pace with more energetic or talented Christians in the Lord's work. But God does not give each of us the same strengths and there is no warrant for criticism of ourselves or others when unable to keep up the full pace. David's band found a <sup>sick</sup> half starved man in the desert, revived him with food and drink, learned that he was an Egyptian slave of an Amalekite who was only too happy to lead them to the Amalekite camp where they caught them by surprise. The Amalekites were scattered over the landscape with no security, feasting and drinking and dancing to celebrate their victory. How cruel to have left one of their own slaves to starve to death in the wilderness while they gorged themselves on the spoils of war...perhaps a symptom of the wickedness of these people.

The slaughter of the Amalekites continued for more than 24 hours and David's victory was complete. A curious note is that "not a man of them escaped except 400 young men who rode on camels and fled." This was a sizeable number, the same number as the total David had, and indicates the tremendous size of the original Amalekite force. Miraculously, their captives (the wives and children of David and his men) had not been harmed. Possibly they were to be sold as slaves in Egypt, but certainly they had been preserved by the grace of God Himself, a fact which was not lost on David. Not only did they recover their families and all their own possessions, but that of the Amalekites too. Our 20th century morality may wince at the brutality of the whole business, but it was God's way of teaching His people in an evil age how to look to Him for guidance, depend upon Him for success, by obeying His will as to what to do about evil.

But the key lesson in this story is found in the fruits of the victory. A clear contrast is drawn between the greed of some of David's men, and His own magnanimous recognition of his obligations under God who gave him the victory. *It is nothing to*

⇒ *remember God when in defeat and defeat, and let's remember Him in victory and success.*  
Look first at his men. When they returned to the Brook Besor where the 200 exhausted men greeted them, some of the "wicked and worthless men" under David's command griped, "Because these men did not go with us to battle, they don't deserve any of the spoil except the return of their wives and children." How selfish and unfeeling! How cruel to <sup>give</sup> back their families but send them out into the wilderness with absolutely nothing to live on! David had a delicate administrative problem...one which not infrequently creeps up even today among Christian people in churches and institutions. The problem was greed, selfishness, "me-firstism," a callous disregard of the feelings and needs of others.

David put his finger right on the correct point: "You must <sup>not</sup> do so, my brothers, with what the Lord has given us, who has kept us and delivered into our hand the band that came against us." David did not base his plea upon any human standard or law or sense of fairness but upon God's graciousness...a remarkable evidence of David's relationship with God! Out in the wilderness, flush with victory, spoils beyond their wildest dreams, surrounded by lawless and unprincipled warriors...what a demonstration of leadership by a man who had "strengthened himself in the Lord his God" before battle! David pronounced one of the great quotable quotes of the Bible, still the law of civilized nations: "For as his share is who goes down to the battle, so shall his share be who stays by the baggage; they ~~XX~~ shall share alike."

"The 200 were just as brave, just as patriotic, just as true, as the stronger 400 who did cross the brook. The 200 did the best they could. That is all God asks of anybody." (Truett 205) "Prosperity not only tests men, but it also reveals them." (Ibid) David's men showed up in all their avarice; David himself showed up as devoted to God and generous to his fellow men. "All of Christ's soldiers, great and small, rich and poor, clever and ordinary, shall share alike in the reward at the last, provided they are equally faithful at their posts of service."



(Ibid 206). This is the principle of the parable of the talents, the parable of the laborers paid for one hour of work the same as those who worked in the heat of the day, the remark of Paul that "it is required of stewards that they be found faithful" (I Cor. 4:2), the "faithful unto death", those deserving the highest final accolade: "those who are called and chosen and faithful." (Rev. 17:14).

Dr. George W. Truett, famous Baptist preacher whose visits in Montreat when I was working there as a college student used to jam every space and roadway with cars and busses of those anxious to hear his message, tells of a young Sunday School teacher who, after his morning sermon, came to him in tears telling of her determination to go to China as a missionary. Dr. Truett reminded her of the history of tuberculosis in her family and warned her that the Mission Board might turn her down for that reason. He was right, but shortly thereafter she came to Dr. Truett with radiant face saying, "I am going to China, but not the way I proposed. "How are you planning to go," he asked. "Why I am going to support a missionary all by myself. I have a modest income from a poor farm left me by my parents. X Then I am a teacher and get some income from that. I am going to live more economically, and I am going to support a missionary all by myself, and thus I am going to China." For years she wholly supported a missionary in that great world field. And when the noble man whom she supported came back and told the Baptist Convention the story of the triumph of Christ's conquering Gospel in China, the effect was tremendous. In the words of Dr. Truett: "As he told his story with powerful, joyful conviction, the people were swayed by his speech, as the wheat fields are ~~swayed~~ by the passing breeze. All the time he was telling us that story, my mind harked back to the frail teacher who had for years paid every cent of his salary. As his part is that goeth down to China to witness there for Christ, so is the faithful girl's part who supported that missionary entirely out of her humble modest means." (Truett 206ff) We are reminded of words most of us memorized years ago...from Milton's Sonnet, On His Blindness beginning

and continuing:

"When I consider how my light is spent...  
Thousands at his bidding speed,  
And post o'er land and ocean without rest;  
They also serve who only stand and wait."

"This Scripture that we are studying today teaches that the little, obscure, inconspicuous, unknown Christ, faithful at his or her post, shall share equally with Spurgeon, or Livingston, or Paul, provided that such Christian is equally faithful with those mighty men in service." (Ibid 209). Like Aaron and Hur their greatest contribution may be holding up the preacher's hands!

In conclusion we must not overlook that for David the "Fruits of Victory" were not only for fair distribution to his valliant men. In recognition of what God had done for him, he distributed gifts from spoil taken from the Amalekites themselves in all the towns in southern Judah where he and his men had been accustomed to go and had probably been received with hospitality. David could be accused of clever public relations, or of political cultivation of a part of Saul's kingdom. But I think that more than this it showed genuine appreciation for their friendship, and a desire to share with others gifts which he recognized came from God...a lesson to be learned by each of us. When God does bring us through hard times, difficult experiences, crises of finance or family or profession... let it not be a time for self-congratulation and selfish enjoyment of victories won by His grace, but a time to give as we have been given to. More than 1000 years before John, David practiced the admonition of that Apostle according to his lights in that tumultuous time: "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."

## THE KINDNESS OF GOD

Text: "Is there not yet anyone of the house of Saul to whom I may show the kindness of God?"

Scripture: II Sam 9:1-13.

The world is full of people like Mephibosheth, plagued with misfortune, helpless in the midst of circumstances beyond their control. Pathetic as he appears, we cannot ignore a man mentioned in 5 different chapters. Adverse circumstances sweetened rather than soured him. In an age when monarchs who founded a new dynasty normally killed off all family members of the old dynasty, Mephibosheth was spared by King David, who was moved to "show the KINDNESS OF GOD." Our text is II Sam. 9:3, "And the king (David) said, 'Is there not yet anyone of the house of Saul to whom I may show the kindness of God?'" Four words outline the account of Mephibosheth: (1) Accident, (2) Acceptance, (3) Accused, and (4) Acquitted.

Accusation                      Acquittal

**I. ACCIDENT.** (II Sam 4:4) Saul, the first king of Israel, had failed to live up to expectations. This tall, handsome, modest young man later became vicious, mean, and unpredictable...unworthy of the throne and incapable of its responsibilities. Realizing that God had chosen young David to replace him, Saul turned his jealousy and hatred upon the shepherd lad. But Saul's son Jonathan, the natural heir to the throne, befriended David and predicted that he would eventually become king. Meanwhile David patiently waited for God to work things out.

News of the great battle <sup>with the Philistines</sup> at Mount Gilboa brought word of the slaughter of Saul and his sons, including Jonathan. Saul's household was terrified, fearing massacre by the victorious Philistines or by David who would kill off all rivals. In panic a nurse picked up the five year old son of Jonathan, named Mephibosheth, and fled to the countryside. Somehow in her haste she accidentally dropped the child and he was badly injured so that he became lame, crippled in both feet. In those days there were no orthopedic surgeons...he was handicapped for life!

Millions in our world today are victims of accidents...not all of them physically crippling, although there are plenty of them. But there are accidents at birth, accidents of unhappy homes, accidents of an impoverished or backward society, accidents of natural or man-made calamity such as famine, flood, economic depression, political repression, or warfare. Like Mephibosheth, millions of victims have little hope...they merely exist, struggling just to keep alive from day to day in circumstances beyond their control. When this is coupled with friendlessness and fears, how awful! How wonderful that the Bible clearly teaches that we have a God who does not forget those whom society so easily overlooks. Jesus said, "Are not two

sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father...Therefore do not fear; you are of more value than many sparrows." (Mt. 10:29,31). And so was this accident victim, Mephibosheth!

**II. ACCEPTANCE.** (9:1-13) It took years for David to consolidate and re-organize his kingdom. But with Philistine enemies defeated, squabbling generals pacified, cabinet ministers appointed, and the ark restored to Jerusalem, David paused and recalled his vows of eternal friendship to Jonathan and his family, and asked, "Is there anyone left of the house of Saul to whom I may be kind for Jonathan's sake?" He had waited about 15 years to get around to this, but remember he had been a busy man..."better late than never!" Someone sent for Ziba, former king Saul's old family retainer who had looked after his lands and livestock and knew all about the family.

David asked: "Are you Ziba?" The old man affirmed this saying, "I am your servant." The king inquired: "Is there not yet anyone of the house of Saul to whom I may show the kindness of God?" Long ago in his covenant of friendship with David, Jonathan had anticipated a situation of this sort and stipulated: "And if I am still alive, will you not show me the lovingkindness of the Lord, that I may not die? And you shall not cut off your lovingkindness from my house forever." (1 Sam 20:14-15) Here David used the same phrase, "the kindness of God." Ziba replied, "There is a son of Jonathan who is crippled in both feet." "Where is he?" asked David. "He is in the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, in Lo-de-bar." Machir is otherwise unknown but shines like a brilliant star on a dark night. Out of kindness he had taken this poor cripple into his home and at some personal risk shielded him from possible death at the hands of the new king. Years later when David's son Absalom rebelled against him, this same Machir provided food and other supplies for David as he fled Jerusalem. How thankful we should be for people like this Machir, often perfect strangers, who appear suddenly along our paths to offer assistance...when the car won't start, or bad weather catches us out in the open, or some more desperate emergency. Thank God for Good Samaritans like Machir of Lo-de-bar who may also show the kindness of God.

David sent for Mephibosheth who prostrated himself, trembling lest as a surviving member of Saul's family he be killed. David called him by name, making sure this was the same small lad he had known in his friend Jonathan's house. Mephibosheth answered, "Here is your servant!"...signalling that he no longer claimed any royal status. David reassured him, "Do not fear, for I will surely show kindness to you for the sake of your father Jonathan, and will restore to you all the land of your grandfather Saul; and you shall eat at my table regularly." Saul had been a wealthy man and David could have confiscated all his estate for himself. Instead he bestowed

it on the young cripple, and for the third time spoke of showing kindness. David had his faults, great glaring ones at that. But in going out of his way to show kindness he demonstrated <sup>one reason</sup> why it could be said that he was "a man after God's own heart." He was showing "the kindness of God."

David <sup>again</sup> summoned Ziba and ordered him to continue to cultivate Saul's lands to support Mephibosheth who had married and had a son. Ziba agreed, but probably not too happily. As for Mephibosheth, he was to eat at the king's table, and this is repeated three times. For him that was more important than ownership of the family property. Why? Because it meant that now he was accepted! He had been a cripple, a refugee, impoverished, and forgotten. Now he was seated at the king's table, a regular member of the royal household, daily conversing with the king, and feasting on the best that could be provided. He was ACCEPTED!

Isn't that what so many in our world today need and want? All the little non-persons, the physically and mentally handicapped, the ignorant and poor, the ones with no status, the disenfranchised, the downtrodden, the victims of discrimination, the losers in the battles of the giants...what do they crave? They want to be accepted. What did the prodigal son long for?...not to reline his wallet again but to be accepted, even as a servant, by his father. Here David showed the "kindness of God." He didn't just keep his vow to Jonathan by restoring family property and sending the cripple away...he accepted him into his own household.

We can (another) learn a lesson in kindness from David. He must have been besieged with all kinds of requests for charity, yet he turned aside from them all to seek out a needy person who had made no plea for help yet was in desperate need. We too are deluged with requests for help...all that junk mail, often from worthy causes, asking for donations. How often do we have "the kindness of God" shown by David, and seek out those who very likely are far more deserving than those who ask for our charity? Remember that God in heaven has shown His kindness by seeking out sinful man in the person of His Son. Tit. 3:4-5 "But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us..." Eph. 2:6-7 "God...raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, in order that in the ages to come he might show the surpassing riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

*This king, who was "a man after God's own heart" gives us an illustration of the kindness of God in restoring to us sinners, the rights of citizenship in His kingdom, restoration to His family, and rights to feast at His table.*

**IV. ACCUSED.** (16:1-4) **ACCUSATION** Some years later, David's son Absalom led an uprising and David had to flee. On the way old Ziba met him with a couple of saddled donkeys loaded with provisions. "What's all this?" asked David. "The donkeys are for the



king's household to ride, and the food for you and your young men as you travel in the wilderness." David did not bother to thank him, but blurted out the question uppermost in his mind, "Where is your master's son...Mephibosheth?" Ziba replied, "He stayed behind in Jerusalem hoping that in this political upheaval he will be restored to his father's throne."

Imagine David's heartache! After all his kindness to Mephibosheth, what ingratitude! even after eating at the king's table <sup>for him</sup> to try to seize the kingship! One more dagger in David's heart besides the blows of Absalom and others! Haven't we all felt the same sickening sensation when someone we have tried to help turns against us? So he told Ziba, "Behold, all that belongs to Mephibosheth, is yours." Ziba, without pleading for Mephibosheth at all, accepted, saying, "I prostrate myself; let me find favor in your sight, O my lord, the king!" If David had not been pre-occupied with problems and sadness, he might have detected Ziba's somewhat over-eager acceptance of this windfall. Under the circumstances, perhaps he can be excused for failing to listen to both sides of the story...as we often fail to do.

Meanwhile consider poor Mephibosheth! <sup>①</sup> He no longer enjoyed the hospitality of the king who had fled. <sup>②</sup> His servant Ziba had deserted him to attend the king. <sup>③</sup> Worse of all he was being accused of the very worst sort of behavior...turning against his benefactor. Bad enough <sup>to</sup> hide for years as a political refugee, but to be branded a traitor, a turn-coat, an ungrateful opportunist, was even worse. I know from experience that it hurts to <sup>be</sup> accused of wrongdoing of which we are not guilty. Christians often have to face false charge, something Satan likes to promote. Jesus predicted this, "Blessed are you when men revile you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on my account." Jesus Himself was a victim of slander, of false accusations resulting in His crucifixion. In our life time more saints and martyrs have participated in our Lord's suffering in the same way than in all the rest of history put together. Mephibosheth suffered false accusation.

## ACQUITTAL

IV ACQUITTED (19:26-30; 21:7) With Absalom's defeat and death, David sadly returned to Jerusalem. Somehow Mephibosheth got some help and came out to meet the king. He had "neither cared for his feet (possibly his lameness required special attention) nor trimmed his mustache, nor washed his clothes" during David's exile. This refusal of normal care for himself was evidence of his grief over David's departure. Now the king wasted no words, "Why did you not go with me, Mephibosheth?" He was in no humor to play around with words.

Mephibosheth poured out the whole sorry tale. "I ordered Ziba to saddle a donkey



for me so I could go with you, because I am lame. But he left without me, lied and slandered about me. You have been like an angel of God to me, so do what is right in your eyes. I and all my family were like dead men, but you caused me to sit and eat at your table. What right have I to claim any more favors?" David saw that he was speaking the truth. He at once realized Ziba's scheme. That old servant had been in charge of Saul's property for so long he had come to regard it as his own, and had prospered as a result. He now had 15 sons and 20 servants of his own. All along he had resented the restoration of those lands to Mephibosheth, looked for a chance to recover them, and almost succeeded.

David's verdict shows he was tired physically and emotionally, and weary of conflict. All he wanted was peace and quiet. Initially he had given Saul's property to Mephibosheth, then had erred in too hastily giving it to Ziba. Now he said, "Why do you keep discussing this business...I have decided. You and Ziba shall divide the land." David figured this was the best way to insure that Mephibosheth got at least something. He knew that without violence there was no way to evict Ziba...and he was fed up with scrapping. David was doing his best to salvage something for Mephibosheth and to keep the peace at the same time.

Mephibosheth responded with true humility and gratitude "Just let Ziba have all the property...it's enough for me to know that the king is safely back in his own house!" Of course he was pleased to be acquitted of false charges, but it was an even greater joy to know that the king was safely restored to his rightful throne. Undoubtedly Mephibosheth was also seated again at the king's table. 21:7 tells of a later incident when David spared his life for Jonathan's sake. This humble and sensitive cripple could justly claim the promise of I Peter 2:20, "For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it, you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God."

**Conclusion:** Think again of the "KINDNESS OF GOD" which David showed Mephibosheth. Kindness is very closely akin to love...in fact the Psalms frequently acclaim the "lovingkindness of God." Yet somehow we think of kindness as love in action in kind deeds. And this is what is expected of the children of God who are filled with His Spirit. "The fruit of the Spirit (wrote Paul in Gal. 5:22) is love, joy, peace, patience, KINDNESS, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." The Apostle urged us to commend ourselves as servants of God "in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in KINDNESS, in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love." (II Cor. 6:6) May God use each of us to demonstrate the "KINDNESS OF GOD" especially to the little people of

our community and our world...the crippled in body and mind and soul, the ones who want and need our acceptance, the ones who are often accused and abused and helpless in securing justice, the ones who want and need our acceptance! And may this demonstration of the "KINDNESS OF GOD" and our acceptance of them lead to their acceptance of the "KINDNESS OF GOD" Himself in Christ Jesus.!

Little drops of water, little grains of sand,  
Make the mighty ocean, and the pleasant land.

Little deeds of kindness, little words of love,  
Help to make earth happy like the heaven above."  
(Julia A. Fletcher Carney)

Showing the "KINDNESS OF GOD."

From "Master, No Offering costly and Sweet."

Daily our lives would show  
Weakness made strong,  
Toilsome and gloomy ways  
Brightened with song;  
Some deeds of kindness done,  
Some souls by patience won,  
Dear Lord, to Thee,  
Dear Lord, to Thee.

Some word of hope for hearts  
Burdened with fears,  
Some balm of peace for eyes  
Blinded with tears,  
Some dews of mercy shed,  
Some wayward foot-steps led,  
Dear Lord, to Thee,  
Dear Lord, to Thee.

Edwin P. Parker

5/24/87 Bortin  
"Dumaine's Co."  
10/20/88 Canton

## THE COST OF SACRIFICE

Scripture Reading: II Samuel 24:18-25 (see also I Chronicles 21:18-22:1)

Text: "I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God which cost me nothing."  
II Sam. 24:24b (see also I Chron. 21:24).

The historic site of the Temple in Jerusalem is sacred to Jews and Christians and Moslems. Because a peculiar rock out-cropping crowns that mountain-top, the present Mohammedan Mosque over it is sometimes called the Dome of the Rock. One legend has it that this rock marked the boundary between farms owned by two brothers who loved each other dearly. The older had a wife and children, but the other lived alone. Once, during harvest season, the younger awoke in the night and thought: "My brother has a large family to support, and I have none; I must help him." Arising in the night he went out into his fields, took a great armload of cut grain from his own stack, crossed into his brother's field and laid it on the stack there. During the same night, the older brother awoke, and feeling sorry for his lonely younger brother, went out and carried a bundle of his own grain and placed it on his brother's pile. Next morning both stacks remained substantially unchanged. This went on for several nights. Finally, one night the two brothers met between the two fields and both learned of the great sacrificial love of the other. And on this spot of the display of great brotherly love, the temple of the Lord, says the legend, was built.

The Bible gives us plenty of facts about this spot. God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac on Mt. Moriah, probably the same general area where Solomon's temple later stood. After that severe test of his faith when God provided a ram for the sacrifice, Abraham named the place "Jehovah-jireh," meaning "The Lord will provide." Thus the Jews had a proverb, "On the mount of the Lord, it shall be provided" (Gen. 22:14). This incident foreshadowed God's provision near the same spot of the perfect sacrifice...the "Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world."

II Samuel 24 relates how this site was chosen by David for the temple. I Chronicles 21 gives an even longer account. King David was "a man after God's own heart," yet he often sinned gravely. Once he was tempted to take a census of his armed forces, against God's will and the advice of his commanding general, Joab. Perhaps this was vanity, or perhaps it showed lack of trust in God's power to protect his land. Later his conscience hurt and he confessed his sin to God. Through the prophet Gad, God offered David a choice of punishment: Seven years of famine, three months when his armies would flee before his enemies, or three days of pestilence. David replied, "I am in great distress; let me fall into the hand of the Lord, for his mercy is very great; but let me not fall into the hand of man." Rather than be at the

mercy of hostile armies, or of nature in the form of famine, he chose to be in the hands of a loving God. When God sent an epidemic His angel destroyed 70,000 people until stopped by the Lord before entering Jerusalem at the threshing floor of Araunah. God said, "It is enough, now stay your hand."

At this point, David saw the angel of death standing between heaven and earth with a drawn sword in his hand threatening Jerusalem. Clad in sack-cloth, the symbol of mourning, and with his officials, David bowed to God and prayed, "I am the one who has sinned...let me take the responsibility...punish me and my family but not my people who have done no wrong." God then sent the prophet Gad again, instructing David to build an altar on the threshing floor of Araunah where the plague had been stopped. I Chronicles 3:1 identifies this spot as on Mount Moriah...probably a flat surface on the top of a breezy mountain would be perfect for threshing grain where the chaff could be easily blown away. The owner was Araunah, a Jebusite, a Gentile who had converted to the Hebrew faith and was allowed to live with the Jews.

Notice that David went to Araunah. As king he could have ordered him to come to his palace or sent a servant to demand use of the threshing floor. But in humility he went in person. Araunah was threshing wheat and must have been astonished to see the king coming, and hurried out to bow with his head all the way to the ground in Oriental obeisance. David went right to the point: "Give me the site of this threshing floor, that I may build on it an altar to the Lord; for the full price you shall give it to me, that the plague may be restrained from the people." But Araunah offered to give it for nothing. Perhaps he was grateful that he was allowed to live in this land, although he was a Gentile. Or maybe he too wanted to spare the people of Jerusalem from the plague. Or perhaps he generously wanted to have this part in erecting an altar to God. For whatever reason, this man of princely spirit offered the site as a gift, and even offered his team of oxen for the sacrifice and the threshing sledges as wood for the fire, and the grain to be offered up too. All those materials were at hand because those oxen were used to drag great wooden frames around on the flat surface to help thresh the grain. David knew full well that this was a valuable site, and that this offer probably represented most of the wealth of Araunah.

But King David insisted, "No indeed! I will buy this place for its full price. I will not take what belongs to you to give the Lord. I WILL NOT OFFER BURNT OFFERINGS TO THE LORD MY GOD WHICH COST ME NOTHING." This shows David was determined not to take advantage of Araunah's generosity, not to charge the public treasury of the kingdom, but to pay for this sacrifice out of his own pocket. He paid for the spot immediately, built an altar, and offered his sacrifice. God acknowledged this



form of David's repentance and as a sign of His acceptance sent fire from heaven on the altar of burnt offering. Here in the place which marked a man's repentance from sin and faith in a forgiving God, the temple of Jerusalem was later built.

"I WILL NOT OFFER BURNT OFFERINGS TO THE LORD MY GOD WHICH COST ME NOTHING" insisted David as he purchased this place to worship. God's infinite power had just been demonstrated by His exaction of a terrible punishment for David's sin. His loving mercy had just been demonstrated by His staying the hand of the angel of death in response to David's plea to spare Jerusalem. In the presence of such a God, mighty in his anger against sin, mighty in His desire to grant salvation, David said: "I WILL NOT OFFER TO SUCH A GOD SOMETHING THAT COST ME NOTHING!" In spite of his sin, David's religion was genuine and he could not endure a sham, a fake, or a cheap approach to such a God. He knew that restoration of fellowship with God, broken by sin, took sacrifice...a truth clearly evident all through the Bible. For David sacrifice did not mean just offering an animal on the altar...it included a cost to himself. Not the cost of 70,000 lives killed in the plague, not the cost of Araunah's donated property, but a real cost to David himself! Even the payment of his silver and gold was just symbol to God of David's gift of himself as an offering to God. "I WILL NOT OFFER BURNT OFFERINGS TO THE LORD MY GOD WHICH COST ME NOTHING!"

This incident teaches us two lessons, and there is a relation between the two.  
(1) CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP IS NOT CHEAP. (2) CHRISTIAN SALVATION IS NOT CHEAP.

I. CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP IS NOT CHEAP. God had already stopped the plague, yet King David had an inner compulsion to show his gratitude by offering something to God, and that something had to be costly. In no sense was David trying to "earn" deliverance from the terror stalking his land...the angel of death had already been stopped at the threshing floor of Araunah. But overwhelmed with gratitude, David felt there was absolutely nothing too good, nothing good enough, to offer God...not only out of thanksgiving but as an act of faith and worship. God the Almighty had shown the mercy he did not deserve. God had demonstrated power more than enough to awe even a royal monarch. In such a Presence, David felt compelled to express his gratitude, his submission, his reverence...not with a cheap bargain but with a costly sacrifice.

We Christians can learn something here. We all like to get something for nothing, a real bargain, or even with some kind of "free" dole. Maybe we would like to receive all God's blessings at some cut-rate price too. It isn't easy to think of giving something costly to God, as David did and thereby show our gratitude, our faith, our reverent worship. It's so easy to think in terms of how much we need to

live on and give the left-overs to the Lord. When there are needs in the work of the church which demand time and energy, to say nothing of financial support, we seem to be able to find time for our own jobs, our families, our recreation...but all too little for Him. When our abilities could be used to help some of the needs in God's world we are unwilling to offer them. Time, abilities, money...all are assets we like to reserve for ourselves...but think how they could be used as costly gifts to God who has done so much for us!

When Saul, later called Paul, was converted so dramatically on the road to Damascus by that vision of the risen and glorified Christ, his first words were: "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" David Livingstone, pioneer missionary and explorer of Africa, declared: "I will place no value on anything I have or may possess in relation to the kingdom of Christ. If anything I have will advance the interests of that kingdom, it shall be given away or kept only as by giving or keeping it, I may promote the glory of Him to whom I owe all my hope and faith in time and eternity." Each of us are challenged to search our own hearts. Are we too willing to follow David in presenting something to the Lord that is costly...making sure we are not just giving something that costs us nothing?

God does not expect that we all sacrifice alike, but He does require sacrifice from all of us. Somewhere I picked up this bit of doggerel:

"Shamgar had an oxgoad, David had a sling,  
Dorcas had a needle, Rahab had some string,  
Samson had a jawbone, Moses had a rod,  
Mary had some ointment, And all were used for God."

It is not sacrifice unless it costs ME something. For the widow it was a mite...all she had, for Mary costly perfume, for Zaccheus one-half of his possession to feed the poor, and for Barnabas the sale of a valuable piece of property. True sacrifice is from my own earnings. from yielding some of my personal pleasure or privileges, or status or position. God wants the "first fruits"...the very best. Above all He wants our own hearts coming to Him in repentance and submission:

"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit,  
 A broken and contrite heart,  
 O God, Thou wilt not despise."

**II. CHRISTIAN SALVATION IS NOT CHEAP.** Salvation may be free, but it is not cheap...which may sound like a contradiction. By the grace of God we are offered salvation freely through the cross of Jesus Christ, and it is true that He demands no bribes or payments to receive it...no costly gifts, no good deeds, no merit earned in some special way. Paul tells us that we are saved by God's grace AS A GIFT. And yet our salvation costs us something! We are not born with salvation, we cannot borrow

it, we cannot bargain for it.

We are not born possessing salvation, no matter how godly our parents and ancestors. We Presbyterians believe that the promises of God are to believers and to their children...but there comes a time when every man, woman, and child by personal choice and commitment to Christ must claim the blessings of salvation through Him as his own. We can never coast into heaven on the momentum of our ancestor's spiritual energy, even though we may sing "Faith of our fathers...we will be true to thee till death." It costs us something in terms of personal commitment.

We cannot borrow salvation, no matter what fine Christian friends we have, or are on a church roll. David was an all-powerful king and could have seized the threshing floor from his friend Araunah, or borrowed from the public treasury to pay for it...but he insisted on paying personally. So with our salvation...we are not covered by any kind of group insurance in God's sight. Remember that old spiritual: "Not my brother nor my father, but it's me O Lord, standing in the need of prayer! Not my brother nor my neighbor, but its me, O Lord, standing in the need of prayer!" Not just prayer...but salvation itself cannot be borrowed.

We cannot bargain for salvation, no matter how clever we are. How many Christians there are who try to get by with the very least exhibition of religious devotion, or righteous living! They want a discounted ticket to heaven. But God wants the maximum...that is always something costly. That's because more than our money, our time, our abilities, God wants our selves. Rom. 12 tells us to present ourselves as "living sacrifices, holy acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." Salvation is free, but it is not cheap...it was even costly to God!

**CONCLUSION** When David said he would not offer God something which cost him nothing he demonstrated that "he was a man after God's own heart." Like God he was willing to make a costly sacrifice...just as God offered His only Son for the salvation of us sinners. What could be more costly than that? How could God the Almighty, Creator of all wealth, do such a thing? The wisest and most brilliant scholars cannot full understand this act of God's grace. He did not "spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all." David reflected the spirit of God who declares, "For the sin of the world, I am willing to give that which cannot be excelled as a gift...my only Son." That example of giving for us is our grounds for giving Him the costliest and not the cheapest of sacrifices.

"Were the whole real of nature mine, That were a present far too small;  
Love so amazing, so divine, Demands my soul, my life, my all."

"I WILL NOT OFFER BURNT OFFERINGS TO THE LORD MY GOD WHICH COST ME NOTHING

*Savior, Thy dying love*

## PERFECT JUSTICE

Scripture reading: I Kings 3:16-38, II Cor. 5:10

Text: "Behold, a greater than Solomon is here." (Mt. 12:42b)

Legend in the Hopper family has it that when my Father was a little boy, he sent a Christmas card to a favorite elderly spinster aunt, and wrote in it: "Dear Aunt Matt: Are you ready for the Judgment Day?" A good question for each of us, resting on the Biblical affirmation that Jesus will come "to judge the living and the dead." The Old Testament account of King Solomon's famous trial illustrates some truths about that final day of PERFECT JUSTICE. This familiar story covers the essentials of the case from beginning to end. It is the only example of Solomon's wisdom as a judge about which glowing reports circulated over the world of his day. He must have judged hundreds of cases, but this one is singled out to demonstrate his God-given wisdom.

Two women came before him. They were harlots, very likely low class, despised by their neighbors, poor and ignorant, living in the rear rooms of a tavern. One of them clutched a new-born baby. Clearly there had been a whopping row between them, with plenty of hair-pulling and vile language. A motley crowd of curious spectators pushed into the palace behind them with everybody loudly expressing opinions as to the rights and wrongs of the case. In a richly decorated gallery to one side sat distinguished observers from foreign lands...anxious to see if the reports of the skills of this young king were true. At the end of the magnificent hall on the great throne of ivory and gold resting on a platform above six steps, flanked by fierce golden lions sat Solomon in all his glory.

Even before the king gave consent, one woman began to scream accusations. "We two live together. I gave birth to a baby son while she was with me. On the third day afterwards she too had a son, but one night she rolled over in her sleep and her child was smothered to death. So she got up in the middle of the night and exchanged her dead son for my live baby. When I could see in the morning, I looked, but he was not really my son! I appeal for justice and to have my live son back again!"

The other woman was equally vehement. "No...the living baby is mine, and the dead one is hers!" But the first one cried out, "No, the dead son is yours, and the living one is mine!" Palace guards had to pull apart the snarling, face-scratching mothers. What would the king do? There were no witnesses to the alleged crime except the two strongly prejudiced women. Even today, it is sometimes difficult to straighten out



hospital nursery babies who get mixed up. Anyone as shrewd as Solomon had probably figured out which was the true mother, but he had to be sure because his decision was final. Clearly it was a test case before his own people and his reputation before foreign guests was also at stake. Did he deserve to be a king, and therefore a judge?

First he clearly stated the facts of the case (v. 23)...something we should all do when settling a dispute. Suddenly, to everyone's astonishment, Solomon commanded: "Bring me a sword!" A palace guard proffered one...big, shiny, and sharp...twice as long as the little baby. The king barked a cruel order: "Take the sword and divide the baby and give half to each woman!"..as though he was dividing a candy bar between two squabbling children. Immediately the true mother, lovingly concerned over her child, cried out: "O king, give the other woman the living child, and by no means kill it!" Unspoken was her thought: "One dead child is enough." But her companion callously agreed with the king: "Divide him...the child will belong to neither of us!" One showed love, the other no love...the true state of each heart was instantly exposed for all to see.

Then Solomon pronounced judgment: "Give the child to the first woman and by no means kill him. She is his mother!" Reluctantly the other woman yielded up the child, and the true mother clutched him to her bosom with tears of joy and a look of inexpressible gratitude as she thanked the king. What Solomon said to the guilty woman is not recorded. She stood shamed and condemned not only for her carelessness but for her wretched conduct in trying to steal another's live child. News of the king's decision raced like wild fire throughout the whole kingdom so that all "feared the king." Here was awe and respect mingled with the sure knowledge that every citizen could expect perfect justice from Solomon, so that even secret wrong could not be concealed from him. They saw something more than human in this judge. "They saw that the wisdom of God was in him to administer justice."

Solomon's decision perfectly illustrates certain features of a judgment each of us must some day face. Jesus once said: "Behold, a greater than Solomon is here." He was talking about Himself. God's Word teaches that (1) Jesus is coming again, (2) the dead will be raised, (3) they will be judged along with those still alive, and (4) that the judge will be Christ Jesus. We read in II Cor. 5:10, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." The trial of those two women illustrates three things that will be true on that last great judgment day before the "greater than Solomon." On that day all creation will see (1) SIN

EXPOSED, (2) JUSTICE EXECUTED, and (3) THE JUDGE EXALTED.

I. SIN EXPOSED. Solomon exposed that guilty women's wickedness just as surely as if he had cut away her attempted cover-up with that sword. This was not a mere trick, but because his intimate knowledge of human nature enabled him to discern the true from the false mother. On the final day of accounting, each of us will stand before a judge far "greater than Solomon." He will know all the thoughts and intents of our hearts. Recorded in His omniscient mind in detail will be every action, every word, every thought which every man, woman and child has ever had. Faster than any computer He will instantly recall, evaluate, and judge this vast store of information. As David confessed in Psalm 139...

O Lord, Thou has searched me and known me,  
Thou dost know when I sit down and when I rise up;  
Thou dost understand my thought from afar.  
Thou dost scrutinize my path and my lying down,  
And art intimately acquainted with all my ways.  
Even before there is a word on my tongue,  
Behold, O Lord, Thou dost know it all.

God has appointed the Judge, Jesus Christ, and endowed Him with infinite wisdom and power. Before Him our true selves will be completely exposed to public view. Every "idle word" (Mt. 12:36), every "secret thing" (Rom. 2:16) will appear. We naturally cringe and recoil from this. That is because of sin. We are ashamed. We don't want to be seen as we really are. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve disobeyed God, ate the forbidden fruit, were ashamed, and ran to hide in the underbrush. Innocence changed to shame because sin had come between them and God. Ever since, the natural inclination of us all, born in sin as we are, is to conceal, to hide, to cover up our sin.

But on the day of judgment every sin will be exposed. What a terrifying thought! All right to expose the sins of a gangster like Al Capone, or a dictator like Hitler, or a monster like one of those mass murderers. But would you want to have your every secret thought, every hasty word, every selfish action, every conformation to the wicked ways of the world boldly headlined in the morning paper? I sure would not! Just thinking about this embarrassing exposure, to say nothing of our failure to please the Lord, should cause us to work and pray harder to be more pure, holy, and obedient to God. Knowing that the books will be audited, a report card is coming out, a complete evaluation made of our careers...can act as a healthy stimulus.

Before the Judge will stand not only wicked unrepentant sinners, but also Christians who accept Him as Lord, have repented of their sin, and cast themselves upon His mercy for salvation. These too will be held accountable for all deeds in the body, good and

bad. But remember: No longer will we stand naked in our sin, but the Judge Himself will clothe us with perfect new clothes...the garments of His righteousness, provided by him for all who believe in Him. The Judge will look upon these clothes as He pronounces His verdict: "Innocent! Enter into the joy of the Lord!"

When He shall come with trumpet sound,  
Oh, may I then in Him be found:  
Dressed in His righteousness alone,  
Faultless to stand before the throne.

II JUSTICE EXECUTED. Solomon rendered perfect justice, restoring the living child to his real mother...all the reward she wanted. How he punished the other we don't know. She had been negligent in caring for her own baby, she had stolen another woman's child, lied about it, and even consented to have the living child murdered too. Surely Solomon had a proper punishment for such a spiteful hateful woman and righted the wrong that had been done. Here is an illustration of how justice will be executed on the Day of Judgment.

In our world there is so much that is unfair, illegal, immoral, and unjust. The undeserving get the honors and the deserving are overlooked. Wicked, dishonest, unscrupulous men live in luxury, while good and loving and diligent people suffer. Jesus spoke of the rich man Dives gorging himself at a sumptuous banquet...accepted "as a part of the landscape" (Barclay)...while the poor beggar Lazarus sat starving at his gate with the dogs licking his open sores...but the time comes when the situation is reversed because perfect justice is executed. We Christians may be tempted to wonder why God allows so much that seems unfair, just as ancient Job wrestled with the problem of the sufferings of the righteous. Today we may not understand God's ways and can only in faith accept that He knows best.

But the day is coming when all this will be understood and set right. The Judge will answer all such questions of "Why? Why? Why?" "When the Son comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. And all the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats." (Mt. 25:31) "An hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment." (Jn. 5:29) All will know that "There is no partiality with God." (Rom. 2:11)

Much speculation and some nonsense has been spoken about the Day of Judgment...all the way from those who would exonerate everybody at the hands of a Judge too loving to condemn anyone to eternal punishment to those who paint dark, terrifying pictures of

the horrors of the damned. Are not these matters to leave in the hands of the righteous Judge? As Abraham pled with God who was about to rain down fire and brimstone on Sodom and Gomorrah, he pled: "Shall not the judge of all the earth deal justly?" (Gen. 18:25) If He is infinitely just, He cannot allow unrepentant sin to go unpunished. If He is infinitely loving, He will graciously forgive and reward His obedient children, which was why His Son died on a cross to pay the penalty for their sin. People are concerned about "human rights" but ultimately "divine rights" will determine our destiny. All men, of every kind, are sinners and therefore deserve nothing but the wrath of God and eternal death...that would be justice. But by the grace of God those who repent and believe are spared and rewarded with an inheritance in His Kingdom. All others are doomed. How wonderful that our faith rests on a Judge who is infinitely righteous to execute perfect justice!

III. THE JUDGE EXALTED. The account of Solomon's trial concludes: "All Israel feared the king." That fear included awe, respect, and honor. Elsewhere (I Kings 4:30-34) we read: "Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the sons of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt...his fame was known in all the surrounding nations...and men came from all peoples to hear the wisdom of Solomon." "All the kings of the earth were seeking the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom which God had put in his heart." (I Chron. 9:22-23) The Queen of Sheba heard of his fame and came to visit and left saying, "Behold, the half was not told me. You exceed in wisdom and prosperity the report which I heard." (I Kings 10:7) Possibly no judge in all history was ever so exalted, yet we know that in many respects Solomon was imperfect and far from wise. But as a Judge, Jesus Christ will be perfectly righteous, wise, and just, and infinitely more exalted. Of Him too, "the half has not been told!"

On the judgment day, the central figure in the courtroom will not be the sinner on trial, as in human courts, but the Judge. All eyes will behold Him! All ears will hear Him! All lips will praise Him! "The honor of judging the living and the dead was conferred on Christ as Mediator in reward for His atoning work and as a part of His kingship. In His capacity as Judge too, Christ is saving His people to the uttermost; He completes their redemption, justifies them publicly, and removes the last consequences of sin." (Berkof 732)

The grand purpose of history will reach its final climax on that day. Even disobedient unrepentant sinners, and Satan and his demons, will recognize and exalt Him as the Righteous Judge although they will not share in the inheritance granted to believers. Heavens will ring with shouts of "Hallelujah" and saints will join in joyful anthems of praise..."Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and



riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing." Then will be fulfilled to perfection the words of Paul: "God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the father." (Phil. 2:9-11)

Conclusion. "Dear Aunt Matt: Are you ready for the judgment day?" A good question. It carries with it a warning of the consequences of unrepented sin, a stimulus to live as new creatures in Christ, and a triumphant certainty of final exoneration before the righteous Judge who Himself has paid our penalty...the day when Sin is exposed, Justice executed, and the Judge exalted. "Behold, a greater than Solomon is here."

Day of judgment! day of wonders! Hark! the trumpet's awful sound,  
Louder than a thousand thunders, Shakes the vast creation round,  
How the summons Will the sinner's heart confound!

See the Judge, our nature wearing, Clothed in majesty divine;  
You who long for His appearing Then shall say, This God is mine!  
Gracious Saviour, Own me in that day as thine.

At His call the dead awaken, Rise to life from earth and sea;  
All the pow'rs of nature shaken By His looks, prepare to flee.  
Careless sinner, What will then become of thee?

But to those who have confessed, Loved and served the Lord below,  
He will say, Come near, ye blessed, See the kingdom I bestow;  
You for ever Shall my love and glory know.

John Newton (Trinity Hymnal 241)

## CHRISTIAN COSMETICS

Scripture reading: Titus 2:7-14.

Text: "...that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in every respect."  
(Titus 2:10b).

Three of our grand-daughters were playing together and decided to dress up. They tied up their hair...one put on a wig. Lipstick, eye-shadow, nail-polish, and perfume were lavishly applied. Long dresses and a mother's nightgowns and high-heeled shoes completed their costumes as they paraded into the living room and I snapped their picture. They were simply responding to a normal human instinct to adorn themselves, so as to look pretty and beautiful and attractive to others.

This was what my father meant when he frequently used these words in his prayers, asking God "that we may adorn the religion that we profess." He had in mind Paul's words to certain Christians urging that "they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in every respect." (Titus 2:10). With this text in mind, let's think about CHRISTIAN COSMETICS. Let me put you at ease at once by saying that this is by no means a denunciation or diatribe against modern cosmetics...or I might not get any supper tonight! The Bible is not as censorious in these matters as some might think. For instance, Peter complemented "holy women who hoped in God" and "adorned themselves, being in subjection to their husbands."

The Greek word for "adorn" is "kosmos," the same word from which our word "cosmetics" comes. It originally meant "order" or "beauty." As ancient people saw our world and the starry universe in a perfect system, beautiful in its order and arrangement as opposed to utter chaos, they called this harmonious and complete system the "cosmos." On a clear night we can see this harmony, order, symmetry, and beauty of God's handiwork. Hence we too call it the "cosmos," and space travellers are sometimes called "cosmonauts." One of our common flowers which is beautiful, fragrant, and perfectly designed we call "cosmos." Small wonder that the Bible uses the same word to describe the adornment of the Temple in Jerusalem, or the Church adorned as the bride of Christ, and even the appearance and conduct of each of us Christians.

Anything used to make a pleasing and attractive appearance can be called cosmetic...whether it is the trim on an automobile, the jacket of a book, new suits, pretty dresses, hair-dos, makeup, or a thousand other things. My dictionary says that cosmetics are "any preparation intended to be applied to any part of the human body for cleansing, beautifying, promoting attractiveness, or altering its appearance." Sometimes use of such things can be called vanity, but on the other hand there is something highly commendable in making an object or person desirable so that others will say, "I want a car like that one" or "I want to be like that person."

Several years ago our youngest daughter was married. Preparations had been going on

for months before-hand. The bridal dress was selected and fitted with care. The bouquet of flowers to be carried was ordered from the florist. Hours before the ceremony she disappeared to be dressed and groomed and the special cosmetics applied to appeal to the sense of sight and smell. As long as this adorning is for the approval of the one who deserves her love and has a right to her love the Word of God not only commands but also commends such adorning. It uses that same word to describe the Church made ready to meet the approval of the Bridegroom, Jesus Christ. Writing to the Corinthians Paul says that Christians are (or should be) the "sweet aroma of the knowledge of Christ in every place" and that "we are a fragrance of Christ to God"...in other words, like sweet perfume. CHRISTIAN COSMETICS then are simultaneously whatever makes us pleasing to God and also attractive to all about us, "that we may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect."

I. THE LETTER OF TITUS was written late in Paul's career, many think after his release from a first imprisonment in Rome. It is likely that he had toured parts of the Mediterranean Sea and visited the island of Crete. As was his custom, after founding a church there, he sent others, usually young disciples, to cultivate, organize, and mature the church. Paul then wrote letters to these young evangelists, such as our letters to Timothy and Titus. We know little about Titus except that he was a Greek convert of Paul's. Galatians 2 tells us that a great controversy arose over Titus because, although he was not circumcised according to Jewish ceremonial law, Paul took him to Jerusalem as a sort of "test case" or "exhibit A." Because of Titus the first great general assembly of the church was held in Jerusalem and the Holy Spirit led that council to declare our Christian freedom from such laws now that we are saved through faith in Jesus Christ by the grace of God and not by any works of our own.

Titus had energy, vigor, discretion, and the ability to make wise decisions. He deserved to be a trusted representative of Paul in dealing with many church problems. Paul first sent him to Corinth where the church was divided because of immorality, irreverence, and false teaching. While correcting these concerns, Titus also collected a relief fund for suffering Christians in Jerusalem...simultaneous jobs which many of us would consider mutually exclusive, but he carried them out successfully. Paul may have sent him as a trouble-shooter to other places too, but in this letter we find him on the island of Crete.

This was a difficult assignment too. Centuries before this, Crete had a brilliant civilization as modern archaeologists have discovered, but now her people were regarded as barbarous and crude. They had a terrible reputation for lawlessness and dishonesty, and these traits even made trouble in the little new church. Paul underscored this bad reputation in this letter (1:12-13) by quoting a native of the island who had lived six centuries before, a famous scholar named Epimenides: "One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, 'Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, idle gluttons.' This testimony is true." Evidently these people were so notoriously

wicked that Paul did not hesitate to say so in writing a letter which the Cretans would be reading. He was thoroughly disgusted with these people who called themselves Christians but still followed the wicked behavior patterns of their native islanders. As he wrote in 1:16: "They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedience, and worthless for any good deed." (1:16)

**II. Holy Living** is the particular thrust of this little letter, and that thought pervades each of the three points he drives home. One centered around church organization. He directed Titus to set up the right kind of local leadership. In the light of the evil character of the people of this island, he insisted that the elders or bishops of this church be able to teach Christian truth and refute false teachings and exhibit exemplary moral lives. Leaders who promote conforming to the current standards of conduct as a substitute for God-given precepts would have no place in Paul's teaching. He knew that with leaders who were upright, a pure and holy church could thrive even in the sordid environment of Crete.

Secondly, the apostle had much to say about sound doctrine without which even a perfect organization with the best of leaders is meaningless and lifeless...something I fear we Presbyterians may sometimes overlook in our emphasis on structure, table of organization, and expertise in administration or leadership. Paul uses the word "sound" five times..."sound doctrine," "sound in the faith," and "sound in speech." It suggests exactly what the doctor means after giving a thorough physical examination and then pronouncing the patient healthy and whole. One of our best concise declarations of sound Christian doctrine is given in 3:4-7: "But when the kindness of God our savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing by the Holy Spirit whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that being justified by His grace we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

But Paul concentrates on his **third** theme, summed up in this text: "Adorn the doctrine of God our savior in every respect." What good does splendid organization, brilliant leadership, or the most orthodox theology do, if they have become tarnished, unattractive, and even repulsive because they are represented by Christians who fail to give it the cosmetic touch? Did you ever see a mud-spattered new automobile in a dealer's showroom? Look at the beautifully designed packaging of everything in the super-market! What "advertising appeal" does it have to claim "I am a born-again Christ," or, "I am a Bible-believing Christian," or "I am a conservative," or, "I am a fundamentalist" when our attitudes, our speech, our behavior...yes, even our appearance, says to others..."If that's what the Christian religion is, I'll have none of it!"

So much of this letter seems to be addressed to the conduct of slaves, including the context of our text, that we assume many of the church members were slaves.



Christianity has eventually helped to abolish the institution of slavery, but Paul here says nothing about its overthrow. Instead he exhorts slaves to be faithful, obedient, striving to please their masters. His words apply just as well to each of us in whatever job we have. With the generally low moral tone of that island, it is likely the slaves there were of the worst kind. When serving their Roman masters there was ample opportunity for all kinds of dishonesty and deceit. In the first part of the verse from which we take our text Paul urged slaves to be "well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect." The apostle asked even the lowest and most helpless class of society, in a wicked and desolate part of the world, to "adorn the doctrine." We Christians are not to make excuses for our behavior because of heredity, environment, or adverse circumstances!

**III. THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION** of Paul's words to Titus can never be over-emphasized. "Adorn the doctrine"...make your Christian faith so beautiful that everyone will want it too. One Bible teacher illustrates it thus: "Here is a piece of music. I take it up and look at it. I notice that the marks upon the page are darker and thicker here, and more straggling there. I am told it is a wonderful piece of music, but I cannot comprehend it. Presently some one comes and takes the piece of music, and plays it upon an instrument; and so the player adorns the music. The player does not compose it, is quite unequal to composing it, but he plays it, interprets it, adorns it, to his fellow man who has no knowledge of it. This is the great business of the Christian Church, to adorn the doctrine. We cannot create the doctrine, the doctrine is created; but the Church is to adorn this great mystery of godliness by living it. That is the supreme responsibility of the Church." (Campbell Morgan).

Now there are all kinds of good things we can and should do as Christians...such as working for the Red Cross, helping orphans, feeding the poor, donating blood, meals on wheels...all of us can participate in these things. But even more Paul is talking about the quality of our lives by which we give beauty and meaning to the things we say we believe in our Christian religion. Helping with the Red Cross but failure in being thoughtful and kind to our next door neighbors does not adorn our doctrine. Contributing generously to the community chest while we are mean and fussy with the store clerk doesn't either. And especially if, while we are doing something in the name of the church, we express no joy on our faces, no concern for the feelings of others, no willingness to let others take the first places, no humility in allowing others to profit even though we suffer personal loss or suffering...then we are not adorning our doctrine! God wants a pleasing fragrance...not just the opposite!

The ornaments which adorn the bride are not for the purpose of attracting attention to themselves...they are to contribute to showing off the beauty of the bride. We are the ornaments making the doctrine of God...yes even our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ...attractive to others. Note that Paul says that this "adorning should be "in every respect" and "in all things." He is not talking about dressing up only for

special occasions while normally being sloppy, poorly groomed, and unattractive. The Apostle was not interested in just a Sunday-go-meeting religion! The Christian must radiate all the time by attitudes and conduct the joy and beauty of the new life he has found in Christ. This is "adorning the doctrine."

There is one other place in the Bible where this same word for "adorn" is used, but it is translated in our Bible as "trimmed." "When the Lord spoke of the wise and foolish virgins, and declared that at midnight the cry went out, 'Behold the bridegroom cometh,' He said that 'they trimmed their lamps.' 'Trimmed' is the same word as is translated 'adorn' in our text. That meant trimming off that black sooty carbon that forms on the wick and prevents it from giving a clean bright light when lit. 'Adorning' may not just mean applying cosmetics or putting on good clothes...it may mean applying washcloth and soap and water...exactly what Paul was urging the Christians of Crete to do in putting away all the wicked things which soiled their ability to shine for Christ. A wick is snuffed so that the flame may burn brighter; and in proportion as that poor carbon of our life knows the principle of the Cross, which is the snuffing of the wick, we adorn the doctrine." (Campbell).

**CONCLUSION.** Paul knew how difficult it is to adorn the doctrine, and included himself as one who needed to do so. In 3:3 he wrote: "For we also once were foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another." But he recognized that "by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit" (v. 5) we have the power from God to "adorn the doctrine." One of the glories of the Gospel is that it can take wicked slaves and proud Pharisees and transform them into obedient, honest, chaste, sober, humble and loving men and women who obey the words of the Master in Matt. 5:16: "Even so let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." Elsewhere Paul told us to "become blameless and harmless, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom ye are seen as lights in the world." God grant that our lives may be to His truth before all men what ornaments...cosmetics if you please...are to the bride. "That we may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things."

So let our lips and lives express  
The holy Gospel we profess;  
So let our works and virtues shine,  
To prove the doctrine all divine.

Thus shall we best proclaim abroad  
The honors of our Savior God,  
When His salvation reigns within,  
And grace subdues the power of sin.

2/8/87 Bostic  
2/8/87 Duncan's Creek  
6/23-91 Rocky Springs & Eusebia  
7/7/91 Canton