

Anchors for a Time of Storm

BY KELSEY REGEN



A SERMON PREACHED AT THE
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA
ON
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ANCHORS FOR A TIME OF STORM

Text: "Then fearing lest we should have fallen upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day." (Acts 27:29)

ON last Sunday morning I suggested here that our life is very like a long-distance race, and that those who would run its course well must strike a spiritual stride which they must find some way of keeping straight through to the end, without breaking, falling away, going to pieces, and quitting. Using another figure of speech this morning, I want to suggest that life is also like a lake or an ocean, upon whose surface we must sail the fragile craft of our individual lives and try to bring them into some port of purpose and value and meaning and usefulness for ourselves and for society. In using this figure of speech I am simply trying to say that there are days when this lake or ocean of life is quiet and calm and still; and we can sail the little boats of our affairs across its surface with ease and comfort and security. Then there are other days when, suddenly and without warning or more slowly and gradually, a frightful storm breaks and churns and rolls up the water into terrifying waves that beat and pound and break upon our lives until it is all we can do to keep from going under and down.

All this came to life for me recently when, reading the twenty-seventh chapter of the book of the Acts of the Apostles, I came upon that portion that reads like the log-book of a certain ship. It describes what happened as that ship and

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its seamen and passengers tried to ride out a storm at sea. At one place it goes like this: "Then fearing lest we should have fallen upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day."

The sequel has it that the anchors held until daylight when the sailors, deciding to beach the ship, cut away the anchors and let her drive into an inlet and beach herself in shallow water. The sailors and passengers reached the shore and the ship was lost. Now it is the sentence about the anchors that has a timely message for us. For in our time of storm and night and darkness that is what we need—strong anchors that will hold until the day breaks and the storm spends itself.

Such storms break frequently upon the little lakes of our personal lives. Sometimes they come in the form of disaster or loss, disappointment or disillusionment, domestic tensions, maladjustment to one's job or to other people, ill-health, discouragement and despair. Any number of things can precipitate a storm of the first magnitude that can break our lives to pieces if we cannot ride them out. At other times these storms are not so much a matter of personal fortune or concern, confined to our own lives. They are more like a general storm period moving relentlessly and destructively across the whole surface of life, involving not just ourselves but the whole of society or a whole period of history. They come with economic debacles, social upheavals, clash of group interests, or, most dangerously of all, when war, breaking out in one part of the world, spreads with all the uncontrollable fury of a hurricane, denying and threatening everything we have dreamed of, struggled for, and achieved.

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We are living in such a time. Such is the kind of storm that rages over the seas of contemporary life. We are being pitched and tossed and shaken and stunned, with some being driven on the rocks of destruction because they cannot ride it out. Already we have read of men who, remembering the last war, took their own life when this one broke. Already we are hearing young married people saying seriously that perhaps it is better that they not bring any children into this kind of world. Already one sees young people slipping into a pre-disaster mood of cynicism, best characterized by the attitude of "what's the use anyway?" And imaginative writers have given us gruesome pictures of the howling wilderness of desolation that will prevail after the war is over. Altogether it is enough to make the stoutest hearts quake and drive the bravest souls below the decks of courageous, constructive effort. But the truth is that none of us know what the future is going to be like. This much, however, we do know: that a thoughtful, spiritually sensitive person cannot stand up to a storm like that and ride it out unless he has some strong anchors he can tie to. This morning, then, I want to try to throw out to your minds a few such anchors to which you can tie the fragile craft of your lives while the storm rages and you try to ride it out.

The first is this: *Faith in the reality and the sovereignty of God*. Faith that God still lives! Faith that his sovereign power and purpose will ultimately rule despite the chaotic consequences of man's evil. To be sure, in a time like this one does not feel like quoting sentimentally the man who said: "God's in his heaven; all's right with the world." But one can say this: "Though very

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much seems to be all wrong in our world, still God lives! And in the last count this is God's world! He will not finally lose it to the forces of evil and destruction! That is our destiny; inherent in the very meaning and nature of God! Whatever may happen in Europe or in Asia or in the Western Hemisphere, whatever may be said or done in Berlin or Rome or Moscow or Tokyo or London or Washington—the last word and the last deed will not be their's. The last word will be God's." That is the meaning of the sovereignty of God in his own universe. How is it the Bible puts it? That God will "make even the wrath of man to serve him." I believe that goes also for the stupidity, and the sinfulness, and the evil of man, too. They cannot finally frustrate and destroy the purpose of God. Such is the unceasing refrain of high religion, begun in the early chapters of Genesis with "In the beginning God"; continued at Bethlehem with: "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us"; climaxed at Calvary with: "be of good cheer, I have overcome the world"; and caught up again by the early Christian Church as when St. Paul says: "That which God hath begun in us, he will fulfill." The refrain still lives in the words and deeds of multitudes of people who, girded with a powerful faith in the sovereign and mysterious purposes of God, do not despair, but carry on with courage, heroism, and brave endurance the struggle to learn and to serve that purpose. When the storms beat and the darkness settles down and the rocks of destruction seem perilously near the little boat of your life throw that anchor out and hold on to it.

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A second anchor is this: *Life (your life) is an entrustment, and we live under obligation.* That sounds trite. But it isn't as trite as it sounds. For whether you believe that or its opposite will make all the difference in the world in determining whether or not you will try to ride out the storms or just let yourself go to pieces. If you believe that from the beginning just by accident and fortuitous circumstance human life just happened to emerge on this planet, without any purpose or thought or creative will back of it, that we are here without reason behind us or destiny ahead of us, then of course there is no sense in wanting or trying to weather the storms. If you came here by chance why not live by chance? and at the last go out by chance? and not bother about anything? That is one way of looking at it. And if there is no sense of entrustment and obligation in life, that is the way you will likely look at life. But there is another way of looking at it. It is the way expressed by Jesus when he said: "The Father hath sent me"! "For this cause came I into the world; and for this was I born." That sounds as if to him, at any rate, life were an entrustment from God, not to be sneered at, not to be wasted and thrown away, not to be misused or profaned or prostituted, but to be lived under a sense of mission and the high obligation of its entrustment. Which means just this: We are here. We are part of the ongoing process of life. And as life goes on we must go on pulling our own weight. Of course life is hard and cruel and seemingly unjust at times. And it is human to rebel, and to want to escape and run away. But if it is a trust we must not run away, we must carry on as best we can unto the end, without sur-

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render and without betrayal. When the storm beats fiercely and the night is dark, and you begin to feel it would be easier to throw up the struggle and let go, say to yourself: "Life—my life—is an entrustment; and I live under obligation to the Lord of life." Throw that anchor out and hold on to it.

A third anchor is this: *The fact that others need us and depend upon us.* There is nothing that matures and steadies and strengthens and brings out the best in a real man or woman like the knowledge that someone else needs him and depends upon him. I saw it happen once to a boy in high school. One day he was a typical high-school youngster. That night his father died suddenly and without warning. The next morning he was the head of a family. And ever since then he has been doing a man's work in the world. The knowledge that others needed him and depended upon him brought out the latent best in him and developed him into a mature, responsible adult while his former classmates went on through the slower process of maturity. Is it not true with all of us? Many are the times we are tempted to let go, struggle not quite so hard, get by the easiest way. And we would were it not for the fact that somebody believes in us, looks to us, leans on us, and depends upon us. That keeps us going. Haven't there been times in your experience when the only thing that held you to an ideal was the fact that somebody else held on too? Well, the chances are that you fill that very same role for someone else. They won't let go so long as they see you holding on. Remember that! When the storms are raging over your life, threatening the destruction of so much you

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have always believed in and worked for, until you wonder what's the use, remember that, and throw that anchor out and hold on to it.

Again, there is this anchor: *Some movement or cause in the world, more lasting and permanent than ourselves, in which we can invest our lives and to which we can tie, so that we can continue and multiply our usefulness and gain a certain amount of security.* Today when death and destruction are sweeping the seas in the form of raiders of one kind or another, the weak and defenseless merchant ships are convoyed through dangerous waters by powerful fighting units, so that shielded by their strength the merchantmen fulfill their usefulness and gain a certain degree of security. That isn't an exact parallel of our lives but it does suggest what I mean. In a time like ours when titanic and devastating forces sweep across our world the frail crafts of individual lives seem helpless and ineffective and insignificant. We feel we are robbed and defeated of all value for constructive living by forces too great for us. Well, at such a time we can recover a certain amount of significance and usefulness and security by identifying ourselves with and investing ourselves in some movement or cause or institution that is greater than we are and more lasting than our lives. Thus some men give themselves to and make their life count for a cause like religion or an institution like the church which will long outlive themselves. Or they give their money to endow a school or a hospital or a scientific research or an agency of social reconciliation and reconstruction which will go on serving mankind long after their death. That, I think, is what Mr. Walter Lippmann had in mind when speak-

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ing to a university audience a few years ago he said: "Only the consciousness of a purpose and a cause that is mightier than any man and worthy of all men can fortify and inspirit and compose the souls of men." And another, whose name I do not recall, said the same thing this way:

"It fortifies my soul to know
That though I perish truth is so;
That how soe'er I stray or range,
What e'er I do, Thou dost not change;
I steadier step when I recall
That though I slip, Thou dost not fall."

Yes, to be able to sail under the leeward protection of a cause greater than we are and more lasting than our lives gives significance and security and ongoing effectiveness to our efforts and our expenditures of energy. In the midst of today's furious storms it will help some if you will throw that anchor out and hold on to it.

And finally, there is this anchor: *The trustworthiness of Jesus and his way of living*. The voices that deny him and his spirit may be loud and furious; the forces that oppose him may be powerful and fierce; the storms that would submerge him may be frightening and fearful. Yet, there he stands—confirmed, validated, sustained by the very fierceness with which he is opposed, and the repeated failure of every other way. If Jesus has not been proved by the world's success in following him, he has been proved by the world's failure in not following him. "Beware of covetousness." "Love your neighbor as yourself." "Do unto others as ye would that they should do unto you." "Bless them that curse you." "Do good unto them that despitefully use you and persecute you." We've heard it a thousand times. We've seen it to be hard. We've not

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lived up to it. So in our worldly sophistication and so-called practical wisdom we dismiss it as visionary, unrealistic, impossible. Perhaps it is for us and our world. So we reverse it, and follow the practical, tragic ways of our own devices, which bring upon us and our world the ugly, hideous, satanic consequences we have known. Perhaps it is not in us yet to do better. But at any rate, there is a better way and we know it because we have seen it in Jesus of Nazareth. As another has put it: "He stands like a lighthouse throwing its beam through the night, like a bell-buoy clanging out its saving signal." And we might add, he stands like a judge condemning our unrighteousness and our evil, and like an anchor to which we can tie our lives while the storms beat upon us and until they spend themselves. In all the crazy, mad, hate-driven world of men, he is the one personality, and his is the one life that still makes sense. Yes, even if we in our blindness or in our evil cannot see it. Throw that anchor out, and hold on to it.

Fearing lest they be driven on the rocks, they cast out anchors, and watched for the dawn. So goes the log-book of an ancient ship and its seamen. But they did more than wish for the dawn. They labored, they worked, they acted in the midst of the storm. And though their ship was lost, they were saved. If you can do that now, it may mean our salvation too.

Prayer: "Almighty God, the ocean of our world is very great; the storms of destruction are very frightening, and the boats of our lives are very small and frail. Give to us courage and wisdom and faith and endurance so to sail that we shall come at last into some port of Thy purpose for us and for our world. Amen."

Privilege—Its Dangers and Its Responsibilities

BY KELSEY REGEN



A SERMON PREACHED AT THE
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
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PRIVILEGE—ITS DANGERS AND ITS RESPONSIBILITIES

Text: "He who has much given him will have much required of him; and he who has much entrusted to him, will have all the more demanded of him." (Luke 12:48b—Moffatt)

ONE of the oldest and most stubborn problems of human experience is this matter of the possession of privilege—with its consequent abuses and uses, with its dangers and its responsibilities. And it still is a timely and troublesome matter. Not so long ago I read this from one of America's most eminent commentators: "Ours is a time of the greatest privileges any people or any generation ever possessed. But it is also a time of unprecedented irresponsibility." Certainly the first is true. Our generation does exceed almost any generation we can imagine in privileges possessed and enjoyed. Whether the last is true, that our generation excels in irresponsibility, I do not know. But it would appear, certainly, to casual observation that our unsurpassed privileges have not produced a corresponding unsurpassed sense of responsibility in individuals.

Now before anybody here says "I might as well have stayed at home this morning; the preacher isn't talking to me; I don't belong to the privileged class"; let me say that I am talking to you this morning, to you in the pew and to myself in the pulpit. With very few exceptions out of this audience we all do belong to the privileged class. Because whereas we here in money-minded America ordinarily think of privilege in terms of economic affluence only, the truth is that privilege

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is of many kinds and composed of many ingredients. Being born here in America and living under American Democracy has in these days turned out to be a very real privilege. Personal freedom and individual liberty are privileges. Having been born into a family tradition of honor and integrity and self-respect is a privilege. Having a good mind, trained and disciplined by a good education is a privilege. Having grown up in a home where you were given the principles of morality and religion and surrounded with a certain degree of culture and refinement constitutes a favored privilege. Opportunities for travel, broadening contacts and associations are a privilege. Your work, bringing with it a certain amount of security and influence, is a privilege. Yes, and even in this matter of economic affluence, though most of us are not rich, still, when the line is drawn between comfort and want, between moderate resources and abject poverty, most of us would find ourselves on the more favored side of that line. So I *am* talking to an audience of privileged people this morning. And because I am, I shall be saying certain things I might not say to a different kind of audience. Every kind and condition of people have their peculiar, characteristic temptations, problems, and sins. And the task of the preacher of course is to try to speak appropriately to his own audience. Let me then, this morning, talk to *us* about *our* privileged position in society, with its subtle dangers and its inescapable responsibilities.

Now lest this sound like the invention of your minister's mind only, let me remind you that Jesus faced the same problem and seemed to have his greatest difficulties with privileged people. With him it was the Priests, the Levites, the

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Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Scribes, the Rulers, and the Tax-collectors. By and large they were the "perfectly good people" of their communities, who believed in religion, who were the stabilizing elements in social life, who were concerned for the conventional forms of morality and ethics. They were the privileged people of their generation, as we are of ours. They possessed education, influence, culture, prestige, position, and all the rest. Now it was upon these privileged people like ourselves that Jesus laid his heaviest requirements. And when they failed to live up to them it was upon these same privileged people that he released his fiercest invective.

Moreover, it seems that it was in this same area that Jesus's own most difficult temptations lay. There on the Mt. of Temptation, where the issue is put in the figurative language of a conversation with the devil, Jesus faced the question of whether he would exploit and abuse his own privileged position (of which he was apparently already conscious), or whether he would use it responsibly. And at the last again, when his friends tried to dissuade him from Jerusalem with its intrigues and attempts upon his life and urged him to stay on amid the safety of friends and the lovely lake shore of Galilee, he again had to settle the question of abusing or using his privileged position. Thus from the beginning to the end of his life Jesus knew personally the dangers and responsibilities of privilege. Moreover, he saw all round him the ugly, damnable consequences of privileges possessed and abused by those who had no corresponding sense of responsibility. Perhaps that is why he dealt so harshly with the privileged people of his own generation, laying upon them heavy obligations, and saying: "He who has much

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given him, will have much required of him; and he who has much entrusted to him will have all the more demanded of him." Perhaps that is why, standing by the temple treasury and watching the rich and the poor make their offerings, he said: "This poor widow who has given her mite hath given more than all they that cast into the treasury." Perhaps that is why he could say to a group of privileged people about to stone a prostitute: "Let him that is without sin *among you* cast the first stone"; and then to the woman: "Go, and sin no more." Jesus seemed to feel that privilege carried with it not just more privilege, but more responsibility. If out of weakness some weak, unprivileged person offends, he deserves a few lashes or light punishment. But if out of knowledge and opportunity and back-ground and a chance to know better some privileged person commits the same offense, he deserves many lashes or severe punishment. Yes, nothing your minister could say this morning could be half so strong as what Jesus has already said on this matter. Let me then simply try to adapt this age-old problem to our contemporary scene.

Well, what are the special dangers of privilege? There are three I want to mention.

For one thing, there is the danger of what Dr. Fosdick (I believe) has called *modern monasticism*. I mean a *modern monasticism that withdraws from the sordid struggle of life and lives within the security and beauty and comfort of its own little, privately-created world*. This has always been one of the most prevalent temptations of finely-bred, keenly-sensitive, highly-refined people. When the world gets dirty or sordid or repulsive or discouraging, they withdraw into their own little private worlds of cleanliness and beauty

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and order and pleasure and live there. In modern America we Protestants don't build monasteries, but we accomplish the same purpose by other roads. We retire to the citadels of our orderly homes, our suburban communities, our exclusive clubs. One sees it happen with almost predictable precision, especially in larger, more crowded cities. A man starts out in life in modest circumstances, taking his part in community life, identifying himself with social enterprises and assuming his appropriate responsibility. Then as he prospers and moves up in the business or professional world he seeks more commodious quarters and a more prosperous neighborhood, until at last he removes so far away from the sordid, seamy, darker side of life that he forgets that it even exists. Of course, nobody blames a man for wanting to steadily improve the living conditions of his family, the opportunities and the environment of his children, and the attractiveness and livableness of his home. That is not only not to be reproached, but should be highly commended. The evil in it is that too easily and too often all that is an outward symbol of what is taking place inside a person. Too often his physical removal, which is understandable, is just the outward form of his psychological and emotional removal, which is deadly. A man, no matter how prosperous he may become or how far away from it he may live, has no right to move clear away mentally and psychologically and emotionally until he loses all concern for or knowledge of the sordid side of his community's life.

Yet that is one of the most prevalent dangers of privilege—that we will use our privileged position as a road to escape into a modern monasticism which loses all concern for a sick and hurt

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and dirty world while it enjoys its own luxury. I saw it happen once to a friend who inherited from his father a comfortable fortune, not one cent of which he had earned. This is the way he received it: "Now I'm going to do as I please. I'm tired of having people tell me what I ought to do or beg me to do all sorts of things for the community. The community be damned; I'm going to live my life now just as I please!" Yes, that is always our peculiar danger. Getting our satisfactions in and from our own privately-created world, we so easily forget that we owe any obligation to the larger world outside which may not be as clean or as lovely or as attractive as our own.

Again, privilege tends to *distort a person's judgment about himself, his world, and about other people*. It makes a man think more highly of himself than he ought to think; and it makes him think less highly of other people than he ought to think. He tends to consider that his privilege is all earned and deserved, and that another's lack of it is all earned and deserved. He is inclined to look at all social problems in terms of their cost on his privileges and not in terms of human values involved. Even when eleven millions of people are unemployed, and the wisest minds in the nation are struggling with that national disease, he will be found saying "anybody who wants to work can find a job." He believes that all poverty is due to indolence and laziness and none of it to a tough break, or prolonged illness, or unfortunate circumstances of one kind or another. He contrasts the cleanliness and orderliness of his own home, kept so out of a certain pride backed up by plentiful resources, with the accumulated dirt and grime of the slums; and he

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protests "why give them better housing? They won't appreciate it." Yes, in almost every such judgment his opinions are formed not by clean, clear-cut, straight thinking but invariably by the traditional prejudices of his privileged position. Indeed, I am sure there is nothing harder for a privileged person to do than to maintain an undistorted view of himself, his world, and his fellow-men.

Now this distortion of judgment in the privileged makes it that much harder for him to really understand and appreciate the basic ills and troubles of the world. It gives literal meaning to the familiar statement that "half the world does not know how the other half lives." If you will permit a personal reference, consider this illustration: All my life I have enjoyed a certain amount of privilege—comfort, opportunity, pleasure, travel, education, culture, delightful associations, plentiful food, adequate shelter and clothing. And that very fact makes it tremendously difficult for me to grasp the full human and social implications of a fact like this: that in the great cities of this country there are thousands of bed-rooms into which there has not come one direct ray of sunlight or one direct draft of fresh air since they were built; and that tens of thousands of people (persons quite like myself and yourself) live in those bed-rooms. It isn't that I am so evil and wicked and perverse that I won't understand that. It is rather that having always been a privileged person who never had to sleep in a place like that and whose children have not yet had to sleep in a place like that I just cannot really know what it means. Of course I can know with my mind; and I try to know. But I cannot know with my emotions and with my heart. Yes, we privileged

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people need desperately to guard against that danger—a distorted judgment about ourselves and our world.

The third danger grows out of these two. Being able to withdraw into our own little world, and not rightly discerning the true nature of human existence as multitudes perforce know it, we privileged people are *inclined to see no reason for change, and are therefore often found in the position of blindly opposing all change and seeking to preserve the status quo whether it be good or bad*. It was Gladstone, I believe, who said once "that in every great social issue the educated, aristocratic, privileged classes in England had been on the wrong side, and if their opinion had prevailed it would have ruined the country." And incidentally, it might be added that the fact that their opinion did so frequently prevail may be partially to blame for England's present ordeal by fire.

Privilege, possessed and enjoyed, tends to make a man satisfied with things as they are, as they are for *other people* as well as for himself. And that is dangerous! Because when a man becomes satisfied with the way things are going; when his privilege becomes closely identified with the status quo he quite naturally does not want that status quo disturbed. He wants it to go on treating him well. Which means that privilege is usually found standing squarely and adamantly in the road to a more liberal social philosophy, especially where that philosophy touches economics. Quite often he is opposed to organized labor; not because organized labor is wrong in itself, but because organized labor might get in a position to challenge the status quo. He doesn't want government "interfering with business"; not because all

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government interference is wrong in principle but because this particular interference might disturb the status quo. Now this isn't because privileged people are perverse and unprivileged are not. It lies inherent in the very nature of privilege. For see how when an unfavored organization like labor unionism once gets in a favored position it takes on the same attitude and the same stubborn resistance against every threat to its special privilege and every attempt to place upon it responsibility commensurate with its power and its privilege. Yes, one of the hardest things a privileged person or a privileged group has to do is to try to see the issues of life in terms of cold, objective facts and not in terms of the heated prejudices and the private interests of their own privilege.

Such are some of the dangers of privilege. What about its responsibilities? Well, obviously its first and most important responsibility is to try to guard against these prevalent and characteristic dangers: to refuse to use privilege as a monastery to escape from the world, to constantly check its view of life against other views to save it from distortion, and to try to see every social issue in terms of its own merit and not in terms of the threat it offers to our privilege. In addition there are other specific responsibilities.

For one thing, there is the *responsibility of identifying one's self and one's privilege with, and participating in, the common struggles for social well-being*. What was it Jesus said to the Scribes and Pharisees? "You lay upon other men burdens grievously to be borne, and you will not put so much as your little finger to them." One trouble with privileged people is not always that we do nothing or too little, but rather that too often we try to do too much of what we do by proxy.

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By proxy of our money, or by proxy of professional hired hands; when what these movements for social well-being so desperately need is the identification of our own personality, our own energy, our own personal interest right in the thick of things. When one considers what Jane Addams did at Hull House one wonders if she ever could have done anything like that had she used her privileged position by proxy. When one considers what a friend of mine has done in the mountains of a southern state one wonders if he ever could have done that except by identifying himself and his privileged position in a large city church with the task itself. Yes, and when one considers all that needs to be done in a church like ours, or a church school like ours, or in a community like ours he wonders if they ever can be done until more privileged people give up trying to get them done by proxy and settle down to doing them with their own minds and their own hands. Occasionally one hears of the amazing amount of physical wastage in American life. But perhaps the greatest wastage of all is the wastage of the personal resources of privileged people who are not actively identified with and participating in any of the great struggles and movements that are going on in the world.

Another responsibility of privilege is to *carry the major burdens of society—economic, political, moral and spiritual*. What was it Jesus said? "To whom much is given, from him shall much be required. And to whom much is entrusted, from him shall even more be demanded." There is a scurrilous vote-getting slogan which says "soak the rich." Politically and economically, of course, that is impractical and self-defeating. And besides, the politician who uses it doesn't care who

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gets soaked so long as he gets elected. But despite its bad political odor there is underneath this obvious corruption a sound moral principle. Namely, that privileged people *should* carry the major burdens of society; because having taken much out of life we are obligated to give back much in return. We privileged people should carry the major burdens whether it be in the form of taxes to provide relief, or brains capable of solving today's troublous problems, or moral and ethical character to throw against the destructive influences of bad social situations. We are rightly looked to to carry more than one person's share of the load. And we ought to do it. Why? "He to whom much has been given, from him shall much be required." There is your answer!

And finally, privilege has the responsibility of *keeping alive in the world those ideals and aspirations that are sometimes choked to death in less favorable environments*. About the only good thing I know to be said about the age of knight-hood is that it kept alive certain virtues of chivalry that might have died in a less favorable atmosphere. About the only justification of the monasteries and their withdrawal from the hazards of the world is that during the dark ages they kept alive and preserved much of the learning and literature that otherwise might have perished from the earth. Similarly with modern privilege. The justification of any privilege we enjoy is not simply that we like it and want to hold on to it, but that it be used responsibly. If we enjoy a privileged position in the world in terms of money or education or opportunity or influence or talent, then in God's name one of our responsibilities is to keep alive those moral and ethical and spiritual values and idealisms that

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otherwise and elsewhere might perish from the earth. You have no right to be shocked at the sordidness and ugliness and crudeness and immorality and criminality that breed in man-made slums. There is some excuse there under the pressure of cramped quarters and dirt and disease and a hopeless and frustrated outlook upon life. But when the same thing happens among privileged people there is plenty of reason for being surprised and even disgusted. Somehow one feels we have the right to expect something more from those to whom more has been given. Some things that are excusable in a child are inexcusable in an adult. Some things that are excusable in an unprivileged person are inexcusable in a privileged person. And that isn't the crazy idea of your preacher. It is the profound insight of Jesus. It was he who said: "Ye are the salt of the earth; but if the salt hath lost its savor wherewith shall it (that is, the earth) be salted?" He also compared his followers to leaven in dough. They were to preserve and keep alive in the world the life-germ of all that is best.

Such are the responsibilities of privilege. I hope no one will go out of this church today saying "that sermon was not for me; but I wish so-and-so had heard it." This sermon is for you and for me. As people standing in one way or another on the privileged side of life we face certain dangers peculiar to our privilege and certain responsibilities inherent in our privilege. And in the face of that fact I sincerely hope that no one of us will be able to escape the impact of Jesus's words: "You to whom much has been given, from you shall much be required."

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Steady Lives In A Jittery World

BY KELSEY REGEN



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SUNDAY, JUNE 22ND, 1941

STEADY LIVES IN A JITTERY WORLD

Text: "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed on Thee" (Psalm 57:7)

DR. PRESTON BRADLEY, the minister of the famous People's Church in Chicago, said not so long ago that there is one word which better than any other sums up and describes the mood of people in the world today. That word, he said, is "bewildered." One might answer, "And why shouldn't we be?" Why shouldn't we be bewildered and confused and uncertain and unsteady? Some of us lived through one world war "to save civilization." About that "salvation" we are not so certain now. We have seen the ugly back-wash of that war in the form of a terrible world-wide depression. And just when it seemed the world was about to get back on its feet again economically the war broke out all over again to "save civilization" again. We have watched the collapse of empires and governments, the dethronement of kings and the rise of dictators. We have seen solemn and sacred promises made and then broken without hesitation, without so much as the "lifting of an eye-brow." We have seen honor and integrity passionately pled for one moment and flouted the next. We have seen the national destiny of whole peoples bartered across conference tables like merchandise across a trading post counter. We have seen rival social and political philosophies locked in bitter and deadly conflict, then suddenly turn and embrace one another as if in common cause. We have watched nations, once strong and secure, tremble and quiver at the word or frown of a belligerent bully. We have seen great nations build supposedly impregnable military

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defenses, then crumble before the onslaught of an invader as if their defenses were made of paper. We have seen moral and spiritual standards ignored or openly denounced. We have watched the spirit of revolution arise from some obscure corner of the earth and then encircle the globe. Added to this is the domestic confusion within our own country—poverty and plenty, abundance and scarcity, unemployment and jobs needing to be filled. And then, as if all that were not enough a new type of warfare—a war of nerves—that has given us all a bad case of the jitters. No wonder we are bewildered! Again, why shouldn't we be?

In the face of such a situation is there anything our world needs more from us than some sane, steady living? Is not steady lives in a jittery world the need of the hour? When *people* grow panicky *persons* need to possess poise. When the whole *world* is unsteady *individuals* must remain steady. What we must have from some of us is the sort of steadiness and poise and self-possession and sanity that enable a man or a woman to live and work in the midst of confusion without themselves becoming utterly confused, to live with the crowd but to see further and more than the crowd sees, to listen sympathetically and generously to the anguished cries of a hurt world without losing his head or his heart, to act courageously and resolutely even when action seems futile. More than anything else perhaps we need some voice to say to us in the midst of our jittery world "Steady! Steady! Don't lose your head! Be sane! Be calm!" And we need the ability to do it.

The chances are we ourselves will have to be that voice for ourselves. The chances are we'll have to find a way to steady ourselves. It can be done. That is what the old Psalmist was doing in that

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ancient poem we read a few moments ago: "God is my refuge and my strength." . . . "Be still, and know that I am God" . . . "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee" . . . And that is what he was doing when he sang: "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed on Thee." Yes, it can be done. A man can say not only to others but to himself "Steady! Steady!" And if his faith is something more than whistling in the dark it can give him a poise and a balance and a stability that will be in sharp contrast to the hysteria that is so often exhibited by the crowds.

But to be able to do that we have to possess certain attitudes and characteristics, certain outlooks upon life and our world. I want to mention a few.

If a man is going to be able to live a steady life in a jittery world he will need, for one thing, *to be something of a historian*. By that I do not mean that we will have to be capable of going into a college class room and giving a lecture on history, or capable of writing a book on history. We don't have to be history scholars. But we do need to have the historian's point of view, the historian's perspective, which can be described no better, I think, than the ability to see *today* in the light of our *yesterdays*, the ability to relate the *modern* world with the *ancient* world, the ability to orient the place we are *now* with the places we have been *before*. Or put another way, the ability to see and understand and interpret and evaluate his own time in the light of the times that have gone before, to look not at just a part of the stream of history, but all of it. That is what we need—the historian's point of view if not the historian's detailed knowledge.

As I think back over the teachers I have had in my life the historians, the philosophers, the theologians seemed to be the steadiest personalities of all,

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the most calm and poised and stable—the historians and those who looked at life with the historian's perspective. I remember one who often counselled his class this way: "Remember that things are rarely, if ever, as bad and hopeless as the pessimists say they are, and rarely, if ever, as good and as promising as the optimists think they are. If you are wise you will never make an important personal decision when you are blue or discouraged or when things look dark. You'll invariably be wrong. If you can't wait until things look brighter, at least try to recall a time when things were brighter, and try to remember that such times will come again." How different was another professor who every time the Sunday newspaper supplement came out with some startling pronouncement on education or psychology or scientific research on Sunday would have a brain storm in his class on Monday! The former always makes for steadiness; the latter rarely does.

Those of us who live entirely in the present, who have no connecting wires with the past—I suppose it is natural that we cannot imagine the world of our own country ever being in worse condition than we have seen it in recent years or than it is today. We cannot imagine any generation ever facing a darker future than we face. But our grandparents, and great-grandparents, and great-great-grandparents could tell most of us some things that would open our eyes and make our times look different in comparison. The history alcove of any good library could tell you that this is not the first time that democracy and freedom have been threatened by tyranny, but rather that the idea of democracy and freedom were born and nourished in just such times. There are those who say that this war will bring the end of civilization on this planet. But the history

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and philosophy alcoves of any good library could tell you that civilization does not reside altogether in skyscraper buildings that can be blown to pieces by bursting bombs but in the spirit of man, and once achieved cannot be so easily or quickly destroyed. It may be eclipsed, even for the long centuries of a Dark Age, but it rises again.

So when the wholly contemporaneous person talks of final and complete *annihilation* the historian talks of *transition*. When the wholly contemporaneous person talks of the *end of civilization* the historian talks of "*mid-passage*." And when the wholly contemporaneous person talks of the *end of the world* the historian talks of the *end of an era and the beginning of another*. That is the difference, you see. And it is a vital difference which must characterize the man who in the midst of a jittery world will be able to say to himself and others "Steady! Steady! Before you give up completely take a long look behind you."

Again, a man needs *to be something of a prophet* if he is going to live a steady life in a jittery world. By which I do not mean one of those persons who claims to look at the stars, or feel the bumps on your head, or gaze into your palm, or study the tea leaves for a dollar and be able to tell you what is going to happen next week or next month or next year. Foretelling what is going to happen is the very least important element in the truly prophetic spirit. That is and has always been a prostitution of the real thing. In all high religion the prophetic spirit has always meant something else altogether. It has meant a moral and spiritual sensitiveness and insight by which one is enabled to feel and interpret the trends of the times in the light of God's judgment and God's purpose, and to discern the directions in which history is moving.

It has meant also a door kept wide open for the sudden entrance of the unexpected and the unpredictable which in former times was called miracle. Those are still the essential elements of prophecy. To look at the contemporary scene and discern its deep, fundamental, sub-surface currents and trends and movements and restlessness that are determining the direction of the future. Yes, and not only that, but to be unprejudiced enough, and open-minded enough, and pliable enough to understand them and use them and direct them toward the attainment of new and better goals.

The historian looks at the present in the light of an actual past, and he keeps his head. The prophetic spirit looks at the present in the light of a possible future, and he keeps his head. Both are saved from the mass hysteria that comes to the crowd when the lights go out. These words reflect the mood of the prophetic spirit: "And this word, yet once more, signifieth the removal of things that are shaken, as things that have been made (that is, made by man), that the things which cannot be shaken may remain." Those words were written during that dark first century of the Christian era, when people who believed what he believed seemed to have no future, when they were heading into social and political storms that would destroy them by the thousands. But looking beneath the surface he discerned certain trends and directions and purpose that recovered his balance and helped him to keep his head emotionally and spiritually though he probably lost it physically and literally. That does not mean that men and nations do not pass through the fires of hell-on-earth because of inevitable judgment upon their evil. They do. And sometimes it is a terrible ordeal bringing destruction upon good and evil alike because we live in a world that closely inter-related. But in the

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end the germ of a better world and a divine purpose lives and goes on. Before you give up completely look deeply enough to see beneath the surface, and far enough to see beyond today's threat to your own personal interests.

Again, if a man is going to possess himself in calm poise and steadiness he needs *to be something of a martyr*. I don't mean he must foolishly go out and get himself needlessly shot or hanged or murdered. I don't even mean that he must fanatically immolate himself upon some self-selected altar of sacrifice. What I mean is that he will need to have this element of the martyr's spirit: he must be able to see in the world (or beyond it) something—some value, some cause which is more important *to himself and to the world* than his own safety, or his own prosperity, or his own security, or his own selfish ambitions, and for which he is willing to spend himself unselfishly and to the last. That constitutes real martyrdom whether a man dies at the stake or in his own bed. The martyr is the man who has sufficiently escaped the shackles of his own egocentricity that he is able to find something more important to himself than himself.

Until that happens none of us is likely to be able to achieve steady, calm, well-poised lives in the midst of a panicky, distraught world. For it is when we are primarily concerned about ourselves that we have nervous breakdowns. It is when we are primarily concerned about ourselves that we crack up when trouble comes. Thus our egocentricity, our habit of putting ourselves at the center of our existence, leaves us wide open to every hazard of uncertainty that can happen in our kind of world. But once we discover something else which we can believe is more important than anything that can happen to us and to which we can give ourselves we

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recover a certain poise and calmness and stability that are almost majestic. That has sent many an unheroic person out to live and sometimes to die heroically. Yes, in a world that sometimes gets a man by the throat and backs him into a corner he needs to be something of a martyr to remain calm and efficient, to be able to say to himself "Steady! Steady! Whatever happens to you the cause will go on; and that is what matters!"

Again, to be able to live a steady life in a jittery world a man needs *to be somewhat of a religious person*. By that I mean that our life has to be organized around a central trust or faith in *One* outside and beyond ourself, and in Whose purposes is our final destiny. Or put plainly, we need to believe in God. We may not accept everything conventional religion and the theologians have said about God. That does not greatly matter. But we do need to have our life organized around and anchored to that kind of faith.

In every age and among every people the secret of strength and power to resist oppression, remain steadfast, and come through has come from the ability to look beyond one's self and the present world to Him in whom they believed. Jesus did it on the Cross: "Father into Thy hands." St. Paul did it in Nero's prison: "I know Whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able." Augustine was so fortified by that kind of trust that he could write "The City of God" while civilization crumbled about him. Martin Luther, possessing that kind of trust was able to defy Church and State, saying: "I will not recant. God helping me, I can do no other." Lincoln, pacing the lonely corridors of the White House, and possessing that kind of trust was able to say in his darkest hours: "In the end right makes might." Yes, and in thousands of unknown places

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men and women are standing bravely up to life because they believe they do not stand alone.

You see, this really is the core of the Psalmist's answer to this problem: "*God* is my refuge and my strength," he said. "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed on *Thee*." And what he gave as his personal faith a great modern psychologist gives as his professional testimony. Dr. C. G. Jung, the world-renowned psychologist, says in one of his books: "Among all my patients in the second half of life, there has not been one whose problem in the last resort was not that of finding a religious outlook on life. It is safe to say that every one of them fell ill because they had lost that thing which living, vital religion in every age has given their followers. And none of them has been really healed who did not regain his religious outlook on life." There is a man who in his professional experience has seen as many unstable, distraught, shattered, storm-wrecked personalities as any other person. And in effect he says: To regain stability and steadiness and mental health and emotional poise you've got to have this other basic thing—the organization of your life around a religious faith in God. In other words, it won't do you much good in the midst of confusion to say to yourself "Steady! Steady!" unless you can hear the strong, reassuring echo of another voice speaking within you but coming from beyond you, saying: "Steady! Steady! You are not alone. Lo, I am with you!"

And finally, if we are going to live steady lives in a jittery world we will need to *practise habitual and regular spiritual discipline*. In some form or other that means *worship*—private and public worship through which the experience and reality of God is kept clear and clean and accessible. Even at the risk of seeming dogmatic I want to contend

that there is simply no adequate substitute for that yet devised. Reading a mystery story, listening to a concert, interesting conversation, delightful social contacts—these won't do it. They are pleasant and sometimes essential. But they just can't take the place of those times of private personal worship when you grow quiet and still and thoughtful and feel the presence of Another not yourself, or are gripped by the compelling power of a new insight into truth, or the irresistible attraction of an ideal. Sleeping late on Sunday morning, breakfast in bed, golfing, swimming, skating, skiing, automobiling—these are enjoyable, healthful, delightful, harmless. But they just never can do for us what a real, genuine experience of worship in a lovely church can do for us, despite Mr. Channing Pollock's contention that they can. The man who went out of church saying "life looks different to me now because I have looked at it for a while in *another light*" expresses what always happens when we really worship. It was Sir William Osler, I believe, the great physician and teacher of physicians, who gave this testimony: "I begin each day with prayer. I spend a few moments in the presence of some great idea or some great soul and as a consequence there is a different note in the day." Jesus, whose life presents one of the most amazing records in human history, had only three years to do his work. But he always took time for this thing we are talking about. In some form or other it has always seemed essential for really great living. Without this habitual, regular spiritual discipline and nourishment life gets touchy, distraught, nervous, jumpy, jittery. With it a man is able to say to himself "Steady! Steady!" And what is more important he is able to live that way.

Some time ago I read a sermon entitled "Bomb-

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proof." I expected it to be about the air-raid shelters of London or Berlin. It turned out to be a statement by a very wise man looking ahead. He was honest enough not to minimize the darkness and the possible danger the future holds. He did not pretend a naïve optimism. Nor did he boast a superability to take what life might do to him. Rather he talked very calmly about a bomb-proof shelter for the emotional and spiritual life of mankind. And what was it? Well, it was this thing we have been talking about. A man's steadying, stabilizing trust in a God who is *omnipotent* and who is *not through*, and those habitual spiritual disciplines by which a strength not our own comes into life.

The shame of most of us is that we do not exhibit more of that. The concern of all of us should be to strive to gain more of that. Only so can we present to a confused, bewildered, jittery world the calmness and the poise and the stabilizing influence of a steady life.

On Being Born Blind

BY KELSEY REGEN



A SERMON PREACHED AT THE
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA
ON
SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 30TH, 1941

ON BEING BORN BLIND

Scriptural background: John 9:1-7

THE RECORD of Jesus' life is heavy with such incidents as that I have just read to you. He is reported to have done many "wonderful works." They range all the way from quieting the fury of a storm at sea to healing the demonic minds of men, from restoring men's bodies to restoring men's souls. There are generally two ways of interpreting such records. There are those who say that all such incidents involving miraculous powers (which is another way of saying powers not understood by us) are pure fiction; that they are not true; that such things simply did not happen, but have been concocted out of somebody's imagination and incorporated into the record for the purpose of supporting extravagant claims to supernatural powers. This school of thought rejects everything in the Bible that cannot be explained in the light of present scientific knowledge. They take the attitude that if modern man with all his ingenuity cannot do these things, then most certainly Jesus could not and did not.

Then there are others who want to give a stiff mechanical and literalistic interpretation to every such story, claiming that every one of them is the accurate record of an actual event, that none of them is to be interpreted in the light of its spiritual symbolism. The truth probably lies somewhere between these two extremes, in the position taken by many of the world's greatest Bible scholars and students. Namely, that some of the things called

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miracle by the people who wrote the record and still unexplainable by us did actually happen, just as the Bible says they happened. They stand in awe and wonder before the mystery of life, and do not deny validity just because they cannot understand. And that many others of such stories are probably fictional (some obviously fictional), incorporated for some special purpose. And that still others are symbolic, figurative vehicles for proclaiming profound spiritual truth, never intended to be taken literally and mechanically, and that we miss their real meaning until we go beneath the surface of words and discover the idea and principle and truth they are trying to convey. This third position would seem to me to be the wiser attitude to take.

But what about our story this morning? There is difference of opinion. One of the greatest, if not the greatest, preachers in American history, a deeply spiritual, thoroughly orthodox Bible student of several generations ago, gave it symbolic, figurative, spiritual meaning only. On the other hand, a more modern and liberal New Testament scholar, well known and highly respected on both sides of the Atlantic, gives it historical and literal accuracy. Now without dwelling on that issue and so making this sermon an argument about miracles (which I did not intend it to be), I simply want to say that without denying its historical accuracy it appeals to me primarily for its symbolic, spiritual meaning. Personally I am convinced that many kinds of stubborn human illnesses did and still do respond to the power of faith released through a strong spiritual personality like Jesus. And from the record I find no reason to doubt that this was one of them. Indeed this very week

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the newspapers have reported the sudden, mysterious, unexplained recovery of sight by a student in a well-known eastern university after long years of blindness. But having said all that, I want to leave this issue of miracle entirely aside now and go on to the spiritual message I believe this incident has for every one of us, and which I believe was St. John's primary purpose in recording it. Such an interpretation seems to fit the whole setting and context.

When we do that we discover that this story deals with some of the profoundest truths of spiritual religion. It fits like a glove on the hand such doctrines as original sin, and natural depravity, and the need for rebirth, and the experience of guilt, repentance, forgiveness, and conversion. It fits also those psychological principles involved in education, growth, intellectual and emotional maturing from childhood to adulthood. When we go beneath the surface of the words of the story and begin to look at its spiritual meanings we discover a universality that brings it home to the doorstep of each one of us. For here in this story we see the spiritual biography of every soul which having been born and having lived in spiritual blindness and darkness, has his eyes opened and beholds the light of spiritual truth. Consider now for a few moments some of the ways it speaks to us.

This man—we do not know his name; but this certain man—was born blind, the story says. So are we all! We are all born blind! And we remain blind throughout life until and unless something or someone opens our eyes. I am speaking figuratively, symbolically, spiritually, of course, just as the Bible does. We are born blind—and

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sight and wisdom and vision and insight do not come until and unless our eyes are opened. We are born blind—and a great part of the world's evil and darkness and suffering and misery and heartache come from the fact that, all being born blind, so many *remain* blind, failing to have their eyes opened. We are born blind—and many not knowing they walk in darkness mistake darkness for light, do not recognize truth when they see it, call evil good, or only partially recovering their sight “see men as trees walking”; and so our earth is shadowed, and men who should walk in the light grope their way through deep darkness. So that altogether the most thrilling thing and the most saving thing that ever happens to us, or that one of us ever sees happening in another, is this opening of the eyes, this recovery of sight, this gaining of insight, this breaking of the seals of the blindnesses with which we are born.

The analogy begins on the lowest level of *physical sight*. Even here there is a sense in which an infant is born blind. At first there is only a sort of animal, sub-human awareness that he has moved out into another environment. His eyes are opened to light, but that is all. Soon he shows evidence of seeing and responding to objects and bright colors held directly before his eyes at the proper distance. But move the object beyond this particular range and he is blind again, because muscular and nerve coordination has not come; and change of focus is not yet known to him. Then later this coordination does come, so that he can follow moving objects within a limited range, and he seems to respond to change of colors, and will be attracted to seek out sources of noise. Later there comes recognition of familiar faces

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and familiar objects. Thus the process of the *opening* of the child's eyes is on. And if successful along the way can culminate at last in the skillful vision and careful knowledge of a universe revealed to us by telescope and microscope. You see, even on the level of physical vision we are born blind; we must *achieve* sight.

The analogy carries through to the next level of *intellectual sight and insight*. Intellectually we are born blind. We are given a brain; but its windows are still shuttered. We possess no knowledge or wisdom. These are ours only potentially at first. And they become actual only as the eyes of our mind are opened. The speed varies with different individuals. At first, in infancy, we learn some things by experience and observation: that crying brings attention or that it doesn't; that a certain familiar procedure means food; another means bath-time; and still another sleep-time. Later come the first steps, and the first words, and the first stories which we learn to recognize and request. Thus the process of the opening of the eyes of the mind is on. And the process goes on through the early years of home training, primary schooling, and higher education—the alphabet, words, phrases, sentences, the multiplication tables, the arts and the sciences, and the philosophies. Until at long last, through native endowment and tenacity of purpose and helpful parents and wise teachers, you get now and then at the top an Edison, or an Einstein, or a Millikan, or a William James, or brilliant teachers, lawyers, doctors, scientists, philosophers who having had their eyes opened, in turn open the eyes of others to vast fields of knowledge. Yes, we are born blind intellectually; and we *achieve* sight, knowledge,

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wisdom, insight as our eyes are opened through the long process of education and experience.

The analogy grows more fascinating as we move up into the realm of the *social and the moral*. Here too we are born blind. And our social and moral horizons are widened only as the miracle of inward growth takes place and our eyes are opened. Our first consciousness is a *self*-consciousness: *my* hunger, *my* pain, *my* warmth, *my* comfort. And the world is *my* world even if it extends no farther than my arm can reach, or the sides of the crib, or the walls of the nursery. And our first morality is a blind urge, a natural instinct prompted by hunger, fear of insecurity and fear of loud noises, possessiveness, self-assertion, and anger.

Then gradually and mysteriously comes the opening of the social eyes. And we discover there are *others* in our world—mother, father, brothers, sisters, playmates, friends. As the years roll on we become varyingly sensitive to such concepts as “gang” and “society” and “community” and “brotherhood.” If this process of having our social eyes opened does not become abortive somewhere along the line you get at last and at the top the sort of social awareness and social consciousness you find in a Florence Nightingale or a Jane Addams or a Lincoln or a Grenfell or a Schweitzer or a Rauschenbush or a Debbs who could say “so long as there is a soul in prison I am not free.” Similarly comes the opening of the moral eyes. “I want” is qualified by “I must,” even though the coercion be external. Later, external coercion is replaced by internal coercion; and our own “ought” takes the place of another’s “must.” Desire begins to be disciplined by duty.

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Self-restraint and self-control loom more worthy than self-indulgence. Thus a whole new vocabulary of moral idealism opens to us. Words like honesty, honor, integrity, discipline, duty, unselfishness, courage, loyalty, truth, right, and love come to us freighted with meaning and power. And what we are in the dark becomes quite as important as what we are in broad daylight. If this process is not distorted or foreshortened you get at last the sort of moral conscience that makes a man say what Immanuel Kant said, "Two things fill me with awe—the starry heavens above and the moral law within"; and you get that mysterious compulsion of an inner censor that makes a man do or be a hard and high thing when he *could* do or be an easier but lower thing. You see, in social relationships and in moral compulsion we are born blind; and light and wisdom and awareness and sensitiveness and responsibility and inward character come only as our eyes are opened through the long, slow process of inward growth and the miracle of conscience.

The analogy reaches its climax when we move higher still into the realm of *spiritual values and religious experience*. Here too we are born blind. And we gain deep insight, true wisdom, religious faith, and spiritual character only as in one way or another our eyes are opened. At first the divine is only *imaged* in us; it has to be *made actual*. We are born *ego-centric*; we have to *become other-centric*. We are born selfish; we must *achieve* unselfishness. We are endowed with vanity; we must *cultivate* modesty. We are given to dissembling; we must *cherish* sincerity. We are given pride; we must *achieve* humility. We are naturally arrogant; we must *nurture* considerate-

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ness. We are instinctively cruel; we must *cultivate* compassion. We are naturally indifferent; we must *grow* sympathetic. We are infected with bigotry; we must *acquire* tolerance. We are given to injustice; we must *study* justice. We are endowed with fear; we must *win* our faith. We are natural idolaters (worshipping creatures rather than Creator); we must laboriously *build* a faith like monotheism. At first we see only in part (as through a glass darkly); we must *struggle* for a total view of life. We are set in fragmentariness; we must *accomplish* wholeness. We are surrounded with the immediate, the tangible; we must *envision* the ultimate and the intangible. With the sight of our eyes we see death; with the insight of our faith we must *discover* immortality. Naturally we doubt except we can see and touch and handle; we must *win* the blessedness of those who believe even though they have not seen. We are instinctively attracted by the glitter of a crown; through deep travail we must *learn* the glory of a Cross. Yes, we are born blind to spiritual reality and religious faith. And these transitions, these achievements come only by acquirement, when through deliberate application, or purposeful worship, or persistent search, or sudden insight, or soul-shaking experience *plus* the grace of God our eyes are opened and we see.

I wonder if you understand what I have been trying to say, though poorly? I have been talking about the most mysterious and marvellous and magnificent thing that ever happens to personality—the growth of the soul from infancy to adulthood, from immaturity to maturity, from animality to spirituality, from blindness to vision, from darkness to light, from sons of men to sons of

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God. No life fully lives until that happens. That is why religion calls all this a "rebirth." In one way or another, gradually or suddenly, it must come or we remain in the blindness with which we were born. And we go on seeing darkness instead of light; calling evil good and good evil; seeing things instead of persons, creatures instead of Creator; enjoying flowers and friends, music and beauty, but never suspecting from whence they come; worshipping life instead of the Giver and Sustainer and Redeemer of life. Preoccupied with the *rind* of life we miss its *core*, and perforce are shallow and superficial. Having an abundance of the *means* of living we lose sight of the *end* or the *purpose* of life, until some incisive voice reminds us "that what we call progress is often simply *improved methods toward unimproved ends*." Outwardly we glory in our brilliance; but inwardly we are still haunted with misgivings. We think we are successful; but are still harassed and soiled with wars and hates and fears and disillusionments and misdeeds. And we are lost until with unerring accuracy some diagnostic and healing finger touches our ailment, reminding us that our eyes have not been opened, that we still live in the blindness wherein we were born.

Where then is our hope of recovery of vision, of salvation? The answer is in our story. The man born blind had his eyes opened by "Jesus who was passing by." The setting is ancient, beyond our familiar experience; the method sounds strange to us, but the spiritual meaning is continuous and effective. God is always passing by, touching our lives in multitudinous ways—by judgment, by providence, by love, by physical

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law, by moral compulsion, by mystery of the unknown, by the still small voice of conscience, by the hidden leading of His Spirit, by the terrible but compelling picture of a cross and that One dying on it, and by the risen, ongoing, living Christ still giving light and life to men born blind. Thus this man recovered sight; thus Peter moved out of his darkness; thus Saul of Tarsus became St. Paul; and thus have countless others had their eyes opened. If we are honest we must confess that the process in us seems slow and halting and incomplete. And sometimes we grow discouraged. But this is our hope: The Christ who passing by opened the eyes of this man in order that the works of God might be made manifest is still the same Christ, who, laying his wisdom, his compassion, his revelation, his truth, his gospel, his redemptive, vicarious love down alongside our spiritual blindness, can still open our eyes to behold the Light and the Truth and the One who can save us. He is always there, passing by. But the outcome depends on us and our response. May God, even in our deep darkness, enable us to respond that we might have our eyes opened and see and live.

Through Disaster to Redemption

BY KELSEY REGEN



A SERMON PREACHED AT THE
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA
ON
SUNDAY, DECEMBER 28TH, 1941

THROUGH DISASTER TO REDEMPTION

Text: "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord" (Isaiah 6:1a). Scripture background: Isaiah 6:1-9a.

SOME sermons are easy to preach and pleasant to listen to. Their literary style is polished; their subject-matter is interesting or entertaining; the speaker is a smooth orator; and the message is comforting and reassuring. But there are other sermons that are not so easy to preach or so pleasant to hear. Their style may or may not be polished; their subject-matter may or may not be interesting; the speaker may or may not be a skillful orator. But the value of such sermons does not lie in any of these things, or in whether or not the people enjoy hearing them. Their chief value lies in a sort of strange, almost uncanny and spearpoint appropriateness to contemporary life with which they cut right to the heart of the current scene and drive home their message in unmistakable terms. Whether anybody likes such a sermon or not is beside the point. The important thing is that we hear its irrefutable message.

Now I have the feeling that the sermon I shall try to preach to you this morning is of this latter kind. Any merit it may have lies in no skill of the preacher. For it comes almost ready-made right out of human experience, and needs only to be laid down alongside the contemporary scene. I don't think you will find it entertaining; perhaps not even interesting. And if you find any comfort and reassurance in it you will have to follow it carefully, and try to see it clear through

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to the end and beyond. But what you may think about it, or how your preacher may preach it, have very little, if anything, to do with its timeliness or its truth. It is one of those universal principles that are inherent in the very nature of truth, and in the very structure of ourselves and of our world.

The message of this sermon comes directly out of that passage from the Old Testament I read a moment ago. It is part of a man's life story. The man is Isaiah. The story is of a crisis experience in his life when he faced a twofold disaster—an overwhelming sense of personal loss and the threatened destruction of the social and national life of which he was so important a part. Listen while I recall to your memories the background situation.

Isaiah was born in Jerusalem during those turbulent years of the eighth century B.C. He was of the royal family. His father was a brother of King Amaziah, which would make Isaiah first cousin of King Uzziah whose death is mentioned in the passage just read. We do not know a great deal about Isaiah's youth and early manhood. But from all available evidence it would seem that he grew up amid court life. He had that social prestige that belonged only to royalty. He possessed culture, education, refinement, influence, comfort, and easy access to court circles. There is evidence of early interest in religion. Now, growing up in the court life of Jerusalem would be enough to make Isaiah identify, in his own mind, his personal welfare and his future career with the continued well-being of the national life as it was expressed in the King and his regime. Added to this was the constant threat upon that

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security by strong and aggressive neighbors, which would naturally make Isaiah see his own safety in the continuance of a strong national government. Uzziah had come to the throne at the age of sixteen. He ruled for fifty-five years, giving Israel one of its greatest eras of prosperity. He was wise in his domestic policies and in his foreign alliances. He combined the qualities of statesmanship, military genius, and builder. Altogether he gave Israel an era of splendor and greatness. It is not strange then that with that kind of leadership Isaiah and his people should have felt strong and secure.

Then with the suddenness of a summer storm disaster struck. This splendid king lay stricken with leprosy. Of all eastern diseases this was the most horrible and humiliating. It seemed to forebode ill for people and nation. Isaiah with his easy access to court life must have heard much about the king's dreadful plight, and may have seen him slip into the jaws of death. The king died. The strong man, the symbol of security and prosperity, was suddenly removed. The throne was empty. The national life lost the magnetic center around which it revolved. And it is not easy for us to imagine the mood of disaster, despair, and gloom that settled down upon the people, especially upon Isaiah, whose life and destiny seemed so precariously identified with that of the king. He doubtless felt it meant the end of his personal career and certain destruction for his nation.

It was in that mood apparently that he went to the temple. There something happened that became the dividing point in his life. In short, curt words he simply says: "In the year that King

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Uzziah died, I saw the Lord." What happened he then goes on to describe in figurative, symbolic language which is the only way a person can describe an inward experience. We might call it a deep spiritual experience of personal religion. Isaiah called it a vision. But what we call it does not greatly matter. The whole point of this sermon is that what happened and the consequent results enabled Isaiah to go through his disaster to recovery and redemption.

Crisis, disaster, adversity, loss, danger, tragedy—these all have the power to do either of two things to us depending on how we react and on what happens within us. They can ruin us or make us. They can disintegrate us or pull us together and weld us into something tough and hard. They can make us bitter and rebellious and sour or they can make us humble and repentant and kind. They can make us fearful and drive us into a paralyzing panic or they can make us calm and give us quiet courage. They can break us to pieces and bring destruction, or they can open our eyes to some hard, high, difficult truth which if we are sane enough to see and brave enough to follow can lead us through the crisis and bring our recovery and redemption. And thereon hangs the spear-point appropriateness of this whole matter for our life. What happened to Isaiah when disaster drove him to the temple brought his own recovery and redemption and that of his people. It changed him from an ornamental court attaché into the greatest prophet-statesman of his times, from whom wisdom and spiritual energy flowed out into the life of his people. If we in our time can take a page or two from his life it might bring our salvation too.

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For we too face the crisis of impending disaster. And I don't mean simply the treacherous invasion by Japan or the threat of Hitler. I mean rather the possible collapse of what we have thought of as modern civilization, of which we are a part, with which we are so closely tied up, and which, despite some elements of true greatness, has within it so much of corruption, and evil, and injustice, and moral rottenness that at last it has not been able to withstand the strain already put upon it and yet to be put upon it, no matter who wins the war. Try as some of us may to escape that dark outlook we cannot do it. No, not even by appealing to God. Because you can be sure of this, I think, that a righteous God is no more zealous to preserve the injustices and evils of civilization than he is to stay the injustices and evils of barbarism. On the contrary, it was because of their belief in just such a righteous God of just such impartial nature that prophets, age after age, have been able to predict the collapse of brilliant civilizations, which unfortunately brings destruction upon both the good and the evil, the true and the false. It was the further insight of prophecy, however, that after such trial by fire the evil is purged and the good survives for another chance.

Just as Isaiah faced the death of his king, so we here in modern America face the death of many symbolic "kings" and the threatened demise of others. Within the lifetime of most of us here this morning one "king" after another has been enthroned in our national life only later to be dethroned. Not so long ago we made of popular education a "king" around which American life was to reach its paradise. Then when the crime

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problem increased with the expansion of educational opportunity we suddenly waked up to the fact that educated immorality is even more vicious than moronic immorality. Once we talked about the new sciences as if they were the "king" around which our life would be saved. By them could we not tame the wild elements of both nature and human nature! Then we learned at frightful cost that science can destroy faster than it can create, depending on what kind of minds and morals direct its powers. Such a short time ago we believed that the dark ages of tyranny were over and that with democracy and liberty and freedom ensured for all we could set up a veritable Kingdom of God on the earth. But alas, that "king" lies wounded almost to death; and we now know that personal character, not political systems, is our major problem.

In the face of such crises individuals and nations either go under altogether or they go *through* the crisis and the disaster and the fire to their redemption as Isaiah did. And this morning, in the light of the situation that confronts us, I dare to suggest that we are not hearing from Washington or London or Moscow or Vichy or Berlin or Rome or Tokyo the words that can save us. The words we hear from these capitals are strong words and brave words and necessary words, but they are not *saving* words. Nor are we hearing them from the military or the industrialists or the financiers or the newspaper columnists or the radio commentators, however brilliant their words may be. We hear them rather, if we hear them at all, out of the life and experience of a man like Isaiah, a man of long ago, but as contemporary as today and tomorrow. A man who

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in a time of personal and national crisis passed through an inward experience of deep moral and spiritual renewal which so transformed his own life and so affected the patterns of society that it brought his own and his nation's recovery and redemption into another era of greatness. The fact that such words later cost him his life is beside the point. He anticipated that.

Well, what was that redemptive experience? It is clearly marked in the steps of a spiritual and emotional process that is psychologically sound. Look at it briefly.

First, *"In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, seated on a high and lofty throne. . . . Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts. . . . His majestic splendor fills the whole earth."* Sobered by the seriousness of his times, driven by desperation to seek help from beyond himself, Isaiah saw God as he had never seen him before—himself the true king and ruler of men and nations, whose majesty and glory and inescapable structure of truth fill the earth, and in comparison to which the small talk and gossip, the gaudy show and superficiality, the soft indulgence and luxurious life of the court were seen for what they were. For the first time in his life probably, Isaiah was awed into an experience of real worship, and he came out with a new reverence in his life. Now he knew there was something more important than the king's death, and the threat of Assyria, and the certain loss of his own comfortable sinecure, and the disintegration of what he thought was Israel's true greatness, but which, as a matter of fact, was harlot's clothes in which Israel's true greatness was hidden. That something more important was the Eternal, Creative,

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Sustaining God and his own and his nation's relationship and moral responsibility to that God.

So Isaiah was sobered by his crisis until in worship and awe and reverence he saw God in a different light altogether than that which the court priests had customarily portrayed him. Well might we be so sobered! Until we gain enough wisdom and discernment to know what in our personal and national life is true greatness and what is harlot's clothes; until in shame we scorn our love of ease and selfishness and soft indulgence that makes us ready to sell our souls to gain them; and until we discover all over again what values are worth our reverence and stop our idolatrous worship of whatever is big and noisy and bright and pleasant; until in some silent sanctuary of the soul we behold the terrible moral splendor of God.

Second, "*Then said I, Alas, I am undone! man of unclean lips that I am, living among a people of unclean lips. I am undone for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts.*" In the presence of God's pure holiness Isaiah saw himself as he was—a sinful man living in the midst of a sinful people. He did not try to shut his eyes to that fact or find some convenient scapegoat. He did not cry aloud that Egypt was the child of the devil, or that Assyria was the hound of hell. One doesn't make such discoveries first about his neighbors in the presence of God's holiness. He makes those discoveries first about *himself* when he stands face to face with a righteous God. *I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips. I am a sinful man, O God, and the society of which I am a part is sinful.* In Thy sight we see our guilt. That is what happened to

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courtly, regal, brilliant Isaiah when disaster drove him to God.

I won't go into a lengthy discussion of sin this morning. This definition by Susanna Wesley will suffice. "Whatever weakens your reason, impairs the sensitiveness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, or takes off the relish of spiritual things, that is sin to you." When one of us moderns, or all of us together, takes that definition of sin into the presence of God what a load of guilt he takes with him! I might stand here this morning and tell you that all the angels of heaven are in England and the lands of her allies, including America; and that all the angels of hell are in Germany and the lands of her axis partners. If I did some of you would like it; and the more condemnation I heaped on the enemy the better you'd like it. But deep within your souls you would know that is not the whole truth, just as I know it. Deep within your souls you would know that today's hell has come not from the sins of one man or one nation only, but from the sins of all men and all nations, especially those that have been in positions of great power during the past twenty-five years. That includes America, too.

There is no need to prolong and enumerate. Just contemplate the personal and social and national life of America both in her times of prosperity and in her times of depression. What you have seen in terms of unemployment and suffering and hunger and poverty and unrest and violence and crime and irresponsibility and gangsterism and immorality are not the real evils. Those are only symptoms of another deeper evil for which there is no better name than *sin* in the sight of a righteous and holy God. Selfishness and greed

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that give people an insatiable lust for money and power. Indifference and complacency toward existing ills that weaken our reason; a cheap toleration that says "anything goes"; an over-concern for ourselves which dulls the sensitiveness of our conscience; a brazen sky over-arching a man-made world of materialism until God is obscured; and such over-indulgence with soft, easy, carnal pleasures that the relish of spiritual things has been taken off. Is that too much to say about us? Sometimes when I stand in the presence of some flash of true greatness bursting suddenly out of the life around me, I feel that it is. But when I betake myself and my generation into this other presence—the presence of a holy God—I know it is the naked, tragic truth. And until we, here in America, see that as Isaiah saw it our crisis will have small chance of bringing our redemption.

Third, *"But one of the seraphs flew towards me with a live coal in his hand, which he had lifted with tongs from the altar; he touched my mouth with it, saying, 'Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has gone, your sin is forgiven.'"* A vision of God's holiness; an overwhelming sense of guilt in its presence; repentance; and now forgiveness and cleansing through an ordeal of fire symbolized by a hot coal. Yes, that too Isaiah had to face and endure before his disaster moved on into redemption. The chances are he did not fully understand what that ordeal would be like. But the symbolism of the hot coal from the altar of God touching his lips convinced him it had to come. One wonders if it symbolized those terrible years that followed in Israel's life when, caught between two contending powers, she was all but crushed to death? In any event, Isaiah's insight

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was that not until such an ordeal had burned away his guilt and that of his people, purging the evil and folly and silly pride from their life, would he and his people be able to move out to their true redemption.

What that hot coal of cleansing will be for us here in America I do not profess to know. I only proclaim to you this morning that it must surely come, yea, is already coming, and will probably come with full intensity within the lifetime of most of us here. For we can be sure of this—that such cleansing of men's souls and a people's life comes in one or the other of two ways. A people either see their own evil in the light of God's righteousness, and if they are not too corrupted desire that righteousness and turn from their evil. Or, if being so corrupt they cannot even desire goodness when they have seen it, and persist in their evil ways, then under the inviolable laws of a righteous God their evil becomes self-destructive and self-defeating until they are broken, shattered, and thrown back upon themselves, and in agony, heartache, and ruin they must start all over again. It is still the testimony of history that recovery and redemption must come in one or the other of those ways. That is why messiahs have to die on crosses or their equivalents. These two ways have been called the two hands of God's providence. We may take one or the other. We are given our choice. But the consequences do not wait forever upon our decision.

And finally, *"Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? and who will go for us?' I answered, 'Here am I; send me.' Then he said, 'Go and tell this people.'"* After repentance came forgiveness and cleansing. And

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after cleansing came a call to a new and different, to a harder and costlier way of life than Isaiah had previously known. Isaiah responded to that call. And God commissioned him to a world-remaking task, and released through him world-remaking energies. It was in that call to a higher and harder way of life, its compulsion upon Isaiah's conscience, his response to it, and his subsequent fidelity and loyalty to that new way of life that finally brought Isaiah and his people through disaster into recovery and redemption. Altogether this experience of Isaiah cannot be better named than to call it an experience of moral and spiritual rebirth and renewal without which the long, slow process of redemption never is completed for individuals or for societies.

Without being an alarmist, that, I firmly believe, is the calm, sober truth about us and this thing we call modern civilization. In one way or another there must come into our life first as individuals and then as a people some such moral rebirth and spiritual renewal as Isaiah experienced in his religion, or the fires we shall be called upon to go through will become the fires of our destruction rather than of our redemption. Such spiritual renewal is of a kind which I doubt will come out of a comfortably conventional and a rigidly institutionalized religion which so easily falls into the mistake of substituting creeds and formulas and liturgies and rituals for deep spirituality. It will come rather, if it comes at all, as here and there in the lives of individuals and groups of individuals the spirit of the living God, incarnate and revealed in Jesus, the Christ, flares up until it illumines the earth and lights mankind's way into that harder and higher and cleaner road that awaits us.

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I said at the beginning that if this sermon were to give you any comfort it would come only if you could follow it clear through to the end and beyond. That beyond is a faith and an idea that became the bulwark of Isaiah's whole later message and ministry. It was the idea of a *remnant*, a portion of the people, a part of the human family who by their faith in God and by their fidelity to God's purpose working through them would keep alive on the earth at least a token presence of the truth and beauty and goodness and righteousness of the Eternal God until at last the tide could be turned and humanity move on again toward its redemption. The real crisis for us here in America is how many of us—people like yourselves and myself—will be able by the grace of God to so manage our lives that we shall become a part of that redemptive movement. In the year that King Uzziah died Isaiah saw the Lord; with the result that impending disaster moved out into recovery and redemption. Can we behold such a cleansing and remaking vision before it is too late? God grant that we may!



How Much Can You Take?

BY KELSEY REGEN

A SERMON PREACHED AT THE
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA

ON

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HOW MUCH CAN YOU TAKE?

Scriptural Texts: "He that endureth unto the end shall be saved." (Matthew 10:22)

"Therefore endure hardness as a good soldier." (2 Timothy 2:3)

"He endured as seeing him who is invisible." (Hebrews 11:27)

IN AT LEAST TWO respects this war differs from all previous wars. To a degree unequalled before this is a war of *machines*. Like prehistoric monsters gigantic instruments of iron and steel on land and sea, in the air and under the sea engage in deadly combat. Speed and striking power seem to be the essential elements in their success. On the one hand then, this war is requiring tough machines plus tough and skillful men to operate them. And thus far the military aspect of this struggle seems to depend largely upon which side can produce and deliver to the scenes of action the most and the toughest machines together with the men to operate them.

The second respect in which this war differs from previous wars is that it is a war of *nerves*. Of course all wars try men's souls and test their nerves. But to a degree unequalled before this war is doing that. It is a war of nerves not only for military and governmental leaders but especially for civilian populations. In most previous wars the brunt has been borne mainly by the men on the battlefields. In this war the brunt is being borne with almost equal fierceness by the civilian populations in great cities like London, Coventry, Birmingham, Moscow, Sevastopol, Berlin, Cologne, Bremen, and in the towns and villages of occupied and threatened countries. This aspect of the war has not yet touched us here in America with such ferocity and destruction: but

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it has touched us. So that we too know and will yet know more vividly, I suspect, what this war of nerves really means. For that reason I want to talk with you for a while this morning on "How Much Can You Take?"

Consider in the first place, that *here is one of, if not the most crucial issue in this whole struggle*—the issue of how much *you* can take and endure. That can conceivably become the decisive factor in this war. Not just how much our fighting men and machines can take: but how much *civilians* like you and me can take. How much bad news can we take without getting frantic and hysterical and slipping into a "blue funk"? How much self-denial and want and loss of deprivation and imposed discipline and suffering can we take without being ready to give up? How much false propaganda can we close our ears to? How much doubt and fear can we keep to ourselves without spluttering it over the courage and faith and labor of others? How much hard work can we do without complaining and quitting because we are weary or because we are not getting "time-and-a-half for over-time"? How much can we give up without whimpering and whining and crying? That is *our issue*: that is the issue for all of us whose duties may keep us here on the home front.

Herr Hitler knows that all too well. That is why what he calls "the softening-up process" always precedes actual invasion. That is why he said a long while ago, though mistakenly I trust, "we won't have to invade America: we will just hold out a dollar sign to them and they will come running." By intrigue, sabotage, false propaganda, doubts, fears, intimidation, threats, persecution, display of force, and Quislings he seeks to undermine the natural resistance that would rise up to meet his forces.

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And that is what he meant when he said, "the outcome of this war depends upon which side cracks first." He did not mean which side cracks first on the battlefield only: he meant also which side cracks first on the home front. He is dead right. So that no more serious issue faces us here at home than just this—how much can we take without cracking up?

For this struggle is engaged not just between the tanks and airplanes and ships and guns and men of the two sides. The struggle is also engaged between the Nazi spirit and the spirit of the free world. The real question is two-fold: can we make and deliver superior machines and power to the scenes of battle *and* can the spirit of free peoples outlast the spirit of Nazi slavery? The answer to the first question is largely up to the industrial, governmental, and military administration of this country. But the answer to the second question is largely up to *you* and the millions of others like you. It is not just tough machines that will win: it is also tough, hard, enduring character that will survive. In one of Israel's darkest hours Ezekiel put this same issue to his people in these forceful words: "Can thine heart endure and can thine hands be strong in the days that the Lord shall deal with thee"? I ask myself that this morning: and I ask you. It is an appropriate question anytime. For always—whether in war or in peace—the values we care for most depend at long last upon spiritual morale, fortitude, stamina, courage, endurance, the ability to take it, the inner spirit in a man that *makes* him get up and try again when every ounce of his body cries out in weariness that he can't get up again. So whether we are facing the wear and tear of the daily routine or whether we are caught in the death struggle of a whole planet

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the crucial issue is largely the same—how much can you take and keep going?

In the second place, and in answer to that question, I want to say this: *If you are an average or better-than-average person you can take a great deal more than you probably now think you can.* That isn't personal braggadocio: That isn't a delusion of grandeur about human nature: Nor is it a Polly-annish philosophy of life. That is the bald, naked, though often unsuspected truth about *you* as has been proven again and again by experience. Whose experience? Why, the experience of multitudes, including your own. Suppose ten years ago someone had predicted the things that would happen to you during the past ten years? The chances are that you would have said about some of those things: "No, not that! I can't stand that! If that happens to me I will surely die!" You would have been sure ten years ago that you could not possibly endure some of the things the last ten years have done to you. But those years have come and gone: and brought with them those very things: and you are still here, carrying on. You *have taken* them—the very things which if known in advance you would have thought unbearable. And more than that, you have managed to make some sort of workable adjustment to them, so that you have been able to carry on with some degree of effectiveness and satisfaction and courage.

You see, when the time comes you *can* take more than you think you can. We are made that way: things which in anticipation appear unbearable when actually upon us are faced and handled by a power we did not know was ours. What is it the Bible says? "As thy days are so shall thy strength be." That is a promise of God's universal providence demonstrated in multitudes of lives. It does not promise immunity or escape: it doesn't say that the

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strength will come in advance while we are worrying and wondering about it: it does say "as thy days *are*"—when the ordeal is actually upon us—there is a strength available that can make us equal to them. I am not saying that we are all and always heroes. I know myself too well to be the victim of that illusion. But I am saying that most of the people I have known intimately do manage to stand up to and take and handle courageously much more than they ordinarily think they can. Unless you are very different from the average person the same thing is true of you: you can take a great deal more than you now think you can.

But *how*? That is the deeper question. Is there anything that can help? Any way in which we can strengthen ourselves in advance for the ordeal and so be able to take and endure all that the days ahead will bring upon us? I shall try now to suggest some of those things.

The first help is elemental and needs no elaboration: *take care of your physical health*. Your doctor can give you wiser counsel here than your preacher. But this much we can say with confidence: Live simply, sanely, and sensibly. As far as possible maintain a proper balance between work and rest. Get enough sleep. Eat wisely. Plan occasional and recreative recreation. Take a vacation if possible. Some of us preach this better than we practice it: but it is wise nevertheless. There is a close interrelation between our physical health and our emotional health, between our physical energy and our spiritual stamina. Take care of your physical health then just as you are now being urged to take care of the various mechanical gadgets by which you live and do your work. That will partly determine how much you can stand up to.

The second help goes deeper. We need a *reason*

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for enduring: we must have a *cause* for which we will endure. Men do not voluntarily sacrifice themselves and their property until they believe the cause is worth it and that it is necessary. Therefore it will help you to endure *if you can look deeply enough beneath the surface issues to discover the real issues that are at stake in this struggle*. What are the issues? There are some who in cynicism and disillusionment say "it is just another war between rival imperialisms"; or "just another struggle for territory, or oil wells, or raw resources"; or "just another fight between the selfish leaders of selfish nations in which the common people are being crucified." Well, I suspect those things and worse things *are* involved: for men are still selfish whether in peace or in war: and none of our interests is wholly void of *self-interest*. It may conceivably happen that when it is all over these and even less worthy motives will loom too large and be too influential in the settlement that follows.

But they are not the whole truth. There are also profounder issues at stake. I believe Mr. Henry Wallace, Vice-President of the United States, came nearer the truth when he called this a struggle "between the slave world of Naziism and the free world of the common man." It is a death-struggle or a *birth-struggle* between two ways of living, two philosophies of life. The one seeks to *impose* itself by force upon an enslaved world: the other seeks to *maintain* itself for those who desire it. The one seeks to *revive* and *live* by the tyranny of mediaevalism: the other seeks to keep the way open for the *birth* of a new era—the era of the common man. The one seeks to *subdue* and *shackle* the free, questing, resilient spirit of man: the other seeks to *liberate* and *lift* the spirit of man.

I hope no one will go out of here this morning

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saying; "Well, the preacher certainly gave America and her allies a heavy coat of moral white-wash this morning." I am as aware as you are of our faults and our failures and our sins against God and man. I know as you do that democracy and freedom are nowhere perfect. I realize as you do that there is much in the "American way" that needs some radical re-making. But I am saying that *the deeper cause is worthy even if we have not lived up to it*. And I am saying that that cause is so significant and is now so threatened that the well-being and hopes of mankind for centuries may hang upon the outcome of this struggle. Such is the real, deeper issue at stake. If we can see that and believe that we will have our *reason* for enduring and our *cause* for which we will endure.

What is it the New Testament says about Moses who in the face of overwhelming odds led his people out of bondage to freedom in a new world? "He endured as seeing him who is invisible." I suspect the real meaning is "he endured *because* he could see him who is invisible." The world has always been saved in a time like this by those men and women who with the vision of faith and a brave spirit could look beneath the surface turmoil and confusion and see those values and causes invisible to the eyes of selfishness and expediency and timid fear. By the same vision will we be enabled to endure.

A third thing that will help us to stand up and keep going is *action, doing something, in one way or another making our contribution*. It has been said on good authority, I presume, that it is easier to keep up the morale of an army under fire than in the training camps. There is a reason for that: and I suspect the same reason applies to civilians like ourselves. It is significant that the incidence of nervous

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disorders and breakdowns has showed a marked decline in London since the air-raids began. Those who report that attribute it largely to the fact that the civilian populace is meeting that emergency with *action*. They are *doing something*: they are not sitting idle and helpless. If you have ever been caught in an emergency like a fire or a flood you learned this: that action, doing something, can make you forget weariness and pain and fear, and keep you going long past your normal endurance. It is when we sit in idleness by our radios listening to what others are doing or not doing: it is when we go along uninterruptedly with our parties and bridge and pleasure-seeking while others do all the work: it is when we resent the rationing restrictions with the attitude "I'll beat the game some way and get mine regardless" that we begin to grow doubtful, fearful, critical and ineffective. Inertia, inaction, idleness—these are the worst destroyers of morale and faith. And direct action is usually the most effective cure for such moods. There is much to do. There is enough opportunity for volunteer labor to go around. Both regular and emergency enterprises are partly crippled for lack of help. You can offer yourself. Moreover, you can give—if it be in you you can give sacrificially—to relieve the great, tragic hurt of mankind in the world. That way lies recovery of stamina in you. Do something, work, labor, give, think, pray—and you will be better able to take whatever you may have to take.

A fourth source of help is *the brave and heroic and sacrificial example of others*. Did you read in the paper the other day about the Naval officer and his men who when their ship was torpedoed took to the life boats: then dived overboard into shark-infested waters in order that their wounded and injured shipmates might occupy their places? Only

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two of them are known to have been picked up. Have you read about those three airmen whose plane was shot into the sea: who lived for thirty-four days on a rubber life-raft eight by four feet in size: with no food except what they could take from the sea and air with a pocket knife and a pistol: how when they came at last to the beach of an unknown island, and despite their exhaustion and pain, without shoes or clothes or a weapon with which to defend themselves, nevertheless stood up and marched in military file because (as they put it) "if it were an enemy-held island we didn't want to be seen crawling"? Have you read that epic account of the last days on Bataan and Corregidor? Though faced with overwhelming odds of machines and fresh men: though harassed by sickness, fever, and lack of ammunition: though having only two makeshift planes left to them—nevertheless gave up that swamp-infested jungle inch by inch and foxhole by foxhole, saying "it just don't make sense to give up and quit": and surrendering at last not to their enemy but to circumstances over which they had no control and which left them nothing to fight with? If you haven't read that you ought to. It will either shame you or inspire you: probably both.

And have you read enough of the heroism of the common people in Czechoslovakia, Poland, Norway, Denmark, Holland, Belgium, France, Russia, China, and England to feel something of their unconquerable spirit? A Britisher tells this story of a newspaper man who came upon two children on a bombed street in Coventry. They were young children—a boy and his little sister: and they were pushing a cart loaded with everything the bombs had left them. "I want to go home," cried the little girl. Her brother—just a little older, his old, young face looking straight ahead—replied, "We can't go back home,

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Kid. Home's gone with a bomb. We've got to go on." If we can read or hear about that sort of thing without being shamed out of our whining complaint and demand for security or inspired out of our selfish desire for ease and comfort and "business as usual"—then we simply are not worthy. Dwell much upon such heroism in common men and women and little children and you will be helped to stand up to whatever comes. For in the presence or knowledge of such courage it will be harder for you to play the coward and the weakling.

And finally, there is help in a *religious faith that not only gives strength, but is itself our strength, and which sustains our hope for the future*. I am not saying that because you believe in God you will be given the kind of victory you may desire. I am not saying that the triumph of truth and justice and righteousness will be complete and absolute. We don't live in that kind of world. In this world every triumph of truth and justice and righteousness is a *partial* triumph within the framework of human limitations. The insight of religion is that God's final and complete triumph will come *beyond* human history. That is part of the meaning of the doctrine of heaven. But I am saying that God is still present in His world and over it: that even the wrath and folly and evil of men must ultimately serve His purpose: that though He may be frustrated He cannot be ultimately defeated: that though tomorrow may not bring Utopia after our pattern it can bring some *steps of progress* toward the preservation and achievement of our ideals: and that no man in his struggle for goodness struggles *alone*.

Do you recall that story in the Bible about three young men who were called to pass through the fiery furnace: how in the midst of their ordeal they discovered they were not alone: that a Fourth was with

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them to give them strength and courage to endure and come through: and that that Fourth was the living Presence of the God in whom they believed? That is a figurative, symbolic story coming out of a historic situation of persecution and tragedy. But it is more than just a story. It is religion's way of saying what it has always said in one way or another: "You are not alone. There is Another in the struggle to sustain and succor. As thy days are so shall thy strength be. They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. He that endureth unto the end shall be saved. He that overcometh shall inherit all things." Possessing that kind of faith men and women whom the world has considered weaklings have revealed a physical and moral and spiritual stamina that has left their brawnier fellows in open-mouthed amazement.

Now, if ever, we need that ministry of religious faith. Now, if ever, we should through prayer and worship cultivate and nourish that kind of faith and keep our lives wide open to receive its help. This is no time to neglect your religious and spiritual life. You need it to endure. To the early Christians their religious faith was largely that—a way of endurance. With it they outlasted the persecutions of the Roman Empire and saw it fall in ruins. They literally lived by their faith in God. Desperately do we need something that can do that for us now.

Have you seen that prayer that was used every night in a London air-raid shelter during the time of regular bombings? Listen while I read it: and try to imagine yourself one of the crowd gathered there in that shelter. "Under the shadow of Thy love, O God, our Father, we compose ourselves for sleep. Above us and around us are dangers: but Thou art nearer than all dangers: and we are not afraid. Thou art our Shelter, and in Thee do we

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find our rest and strength. Give Thy divine protection to the homes of London this night. Be Thou a Home to those whose homes have been destroyed. Save all little children from harm and fear. Be with the brave men who are fighting for us on land and sea and in the air, and with those who risk their lives for us in rescue and fire service. Preserve them in the midst of danger, and strengthen them in times of temptation. Grant victory to righteousness and truth, we beseech Thee, and a speedy end to this and all wars. Till then, our Father, give to us loyalty, courage, understanding and love. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen." The man who reports that prayer adds, "That is part of the reason why Hitler has not broken the spirit of London's people." If we can get and keep that our spirit will not break either. And we will be enabled to endure whatever comes, and labor and wait for victory—God's victory—however long.

In one of England's darkest hours Mr. Churchill made one of his greatest speeches, in which he said: "Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duty, and so bear ourselves that if the British Commonwealth lasts for a thousand years, men will say, 'This was their finest hour.'" Now and in the days ahead let each of us take that to himself, remembering that "he that endureth unto the end shall be saved."



A Time for Courage

By KELSEY REGEN



A SERMON PREACHED AT THE
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA
ON
SUNDAY, MAY 23RD, 1943

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Text: "Be strong and of good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed; for the Lord, thy God, is with thee whithersoever thou goest."
(Joshua 1:19.)

AN EMINENT psychologist told us not long ago that this is a time for hatred. A well-known economist warns repeatedly that this is a time for the individual and the small businessman to clear indebtedness and prepare for the economic storms to come. Farsighted churchmen and statesmen say that this is a time to lay the foundations for a new and different kind of post-war world. The able editor of the *Louisville Courier-Journal* wrote a book to say that this is "*A Time for Greatness*." The whole purpose of this sermon is to say that this is a time for *courage*.

That, of course, is true of any time and all times. Thomas Carlyle put it this way: "Life's ultimate question for every man is 'Wilt thou be a hero or a coward?'" It is! In every life there are the ingredients of courage and cowardice. In the facing of life every man is a potential hero or coward. And the persistent issue for each of us is which of these will be dominant. Courage has always been a cardinal virtue. Ancient ethics placed it at the top: courage, justice, temperance, and wisdom. It runs like a bright thread through the Hebrew ethic: the passage read a moment ago rings with it. Christianity incorporated it: and mixed courage with compassion, humility, and love. In Jesus of Nazareth it gave to the world the embodiment of courage par excellence. "O Son of Man, our Hero strong and tender" is a phrase that fits him as it fits no other. And among those who have followed his spirit the

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Christian *saints* have been identical with the Christian *heroes*. Yes, every time is a time for courage. Life's ultimate question for every generation is "wilt thou live courageously or cravenly?"

But I wonder if there was ever a time when courage was *more needed* than now? Certainly not within our life-time! And I wonder if there is any other quality of spirit needed now more than courage? When one looks out upon the darkness and danger and suffering and tragedy and destruction and loss and tyranny and evil and stark terror that engulf mankind, one wonders how they can ever be faced and lived through except by brave courage. The kinds of situations requiring courage of us in our time may be no different from those faced by every other generation: death is death, come when or how it may: and loss is loss, whenever it strikes: and pain is pain, whatever be the cause. But for our generation the condition and the need are heightened and intensified by a planetary multiple. Dr. John Haynes Holmes's question, "How Can We Face the Horror of Our Time?" is every man's question now. And the answer is: "By courage in the hearts and souls and minds of men and women and young people and children."

Bataan, Corregidor, New Guinea, Guadalcanal, Wake Island, Pearl Harbor, Tunisia, Dunkirk, Attu, Stalingrad, Smolensk, Dieppe—these are just placenames for most of us, remote from our life. But for multitudes of men and women, combatants and civilians alike, they are real life! They are or were the scenes of a life and death struggle that had to be faced with courage or cowardice. And from them there comes back evidence that

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courage was not lacking there. Blitzkrieg is a word to us—a strange word. But to the people of Warsaw and Amsterdam and London and Coventry it is a terror striking at night, with the roar of airplane motors, and the shriek of falling bombs, and the wail of the air-raid siren, and the bursting of explosives, and the staccato of ack-ack fire, and piles of smoking debris, and only rubble where homes once stood. To live through that, to know that it will surely come again, without knowing when, yet somehow to carry on the duties of normal life without running away or growing helplessly hysterical—that takes courage. And the courage was there. To be called after an air-raid, and told to go to a certain spot, and there kill a delayed-action bomb that has not yet exploded; to know that that is such a dangerous job that the rules say only one man can work on one bomb at a time, and that after the first few months only thirty-eight out of an original five-hundred volunteers for that work were still living; but nevertheless to go and lie down beside that bomb, and as you work describe over a microphone to a listener a mile away everything you find and everything you do, so that if you are killed another will know how to work on that kind of bomb—to do that takes courage. Yet in England men with such courage have volunteered for such work. To be one of a long line of wounded soldiers waiting to be evacuated by airplane ambulance from a position about to be given up to the enemy; to realize that the next plane to take off may be the last one; but seeing a wounded mother lying nearby, to say to those about to put you in your place on the plane, "Give her my place. Tell her you'll get me next

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time." That takes courage, but that happened in Burma. To be a merchant-seaman who has had three tankers torpedoed from under you; to have gone over the side into flaming oil on top of a freezing sea; to have drifted for two, three, four months in an open boat, with death just beyond the last sip of water; then when you are rescued and nursed back to health, to return to the hiring halls and ask to be shipped right back out again because "it's my part in a war we've got to win." That takes courage. And the hiring halls of any port are full of it. To be a mine-sapper; to go ahead of your troops to explode or dig up land-mines left by the retreating enemy; to be a para-trooper and take your first jump, knowing that when you get into the real thing you will be an easy, slow-motion target for the enemy on the ground; to be any kind of soldier in this war—on land or sea or in the air—takes courage. And the one bright light shining through all its horror is that such courage is not lacking. Every newspaper, every radio report, every echo from every place where the enemy is engaged bear witness to the presence of stout hearts and brave courage on the battlefronts. Whatever bestial qualities of human nature this war may have revealed, it has also revealed a capacity for courage in ordinary, everyday human beings that will leave a lasting trail of glory across the horizon of this generation's memory.

But courage is no less needed on the home front too. If this is a time for courage in those who go out to do battle, it is nonetheless a time for courage in those of us who must remain at home.

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"Courage does not lie alone, in dying for a cause.
To die is only giving :
Courage is to feel
The daily daggers of persistent steel,
And keep on living."

Douglas Malloch, who wrote those lines, knew that the courage needed in every-day, ordinary living is just as brave and often far harder than the courage of battle. Life soon or late, in one way or another, is hard for everybody. And it does take courage to meet it and handle it and live it commendably.

To have lived and labored in "double harness" for ten, twenty, thirty years, and then to lose a husband or a wife and carry on alone takes courage. To lose your job or have your business fail and have to start out all over again at fifty takes courage. To possess deep convictions, to be misunderstood and ridiculed, yet to stand by them for no other reason except you believe them right takes courage. To go against the grain of a prevailing but vicious social pattern takes courage. To give yourself to an unpopular cause and serve it even at the price of the bitterness of extremists on both sides takes courage. To speak out when someone needs to speak out, and to keep silent when silence is not only golden but magnanimous takes courage. To be a young person about to launch out upon preparation for a cherished career, then to have to forsake that to take up the burdens laid down by a parent who has died takes courage. To endure unending pain, poor health, incurable disease, handicap bravely and without whining takes courage. To face sudden, shattering disaster, then the hard, long-drawn-out readjustment to cruel circumstance takes cour-

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age. Indeed to live at any time at any place with any degree of spiritual grandeur takes courage.

But what everybody needs all the time, we here on the home-front need more desperately now than ever before. In some ways I can imagine it is harder to be a soldier's wife than to be a soldier. To be separated from your lover; to say the last goodbye never knowing if you'll see him again; to take over the whole burden of the home and the children; to carry on on reduced resources; to assume full responsibility for the children's training, education, safety, health; to have no one to share the problems with; to have to make all decisions alone; to live through anxious days and nights but never reveal your anxiety lest you frighten the children; to wonder what day will bring dread news; to keep the home spiritually as well as physically; to do all that alone today; to go to bed weary and exhausted; and then to get up and do it all over again tomorrow and every tomorrow until he comes back, or doesn't. That takes courage: a courage equal to any battlefield. To be a mother or a father of a soldier; to see the son into whose life you have poured every thing you have and are go off to war; to realize all that may mean; to watch him go off and give him a cheering word and brave smile takes courage. To be a sweetheart of a soldier and have to wait and wonder if he'll come back at all; or come back maimed and crippled; and to consider what you will do takes courage. To be a businessman seeking honestly to meet the government restrictions in good faith while others chisel and cheat; to wonder how long you will be able to comply with the rules and stay in

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business; but to keep on trying takes courage. To be a wage-earner or his wife finding it harder every day to stretch wages to meet rising prices; to be a young person trying to keep steady in the midst of moral confusion; to be an old person who has gone through this sort of thing once, twice, maybe three times, and now to have to do it all over again; indeed to live at all in these days takes courage. The courage not of the headlines but of the home and office and shop. To be a Christian pacifist, a conscientious objector and to have to take the unreasoned, bitter abuse and criticism of friends and family takes courage. This war will bedeck many soldiers with medals for bravery in combat. But there will be countless others who will deserve to wear medals for courage and bravery and endurance in the kitchen and living-room, and by the bedside, and in office and factory, in school room and hospital, and on the Civilian Defense front. For theirs is a courage quite as brave and often more difficult.

What I have been trying to say is that such times as ours require stout hearts and tough spirits: that courage is the one indispensable ingredient of character for right now: that though we lose every material possession before this struggle is over, we must keep our courage. But how? How are we going to get it if we don't already have it? And how are those who have some going to get enough to see them through? Courage does not come easily. It rarely comes by direct attack. There was a time when a man or a woman could say "I will dress myself up"; and then proceed to go to the stores and do it. But there never was a time when a man could get

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courage that way: by buying it, or by blowing on his hands, as it were, and saying, "I will be courageous." Courage comes as a by-product of something else. Of what else? I want to mention now a few of those things from which courage is born. They are not the result of your preacher's sitting at his desk and concocting theories. They come from an analysis of many exhibitions of courage, and they emerge as the basic conditions and attitudes from which courage has come.

The first sounds strange and contradictory: but the evidence supports its validity. There is a courage that is born of *fear and the grim necessity of hard circumstance*. Someone has said that "heroism is fear redeemed by faith and transformed into courage." In almost every testimony from the men who have been through the hell of war and walked very close to death there is the honest and healthy admission of fear at the first. Then only after the first cold, paralyzing terror has passed does courage come. In "*Flight to Arras*" St. Exupery tells of a low reconnaissance flight over a strongly fortified enemy position. He admits the fear and anxiety of the whole crew. "Would we last it out?" he thought. "How could we?" "Then I began to believe in us. I had a winning team after all." And "I wondered if those Germans below who were firing at us realized they were creating in us the very life they were trying to destroy." Yes, there is a courage that comes from fear and grim necessity. And there is comfort in that. Who, when he is honest, does not wonder about himself? Wonder if he could ever match the courage he beholds in others? Wonder if when faced

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with the real thing he will be able to take it? Well, the truth is, there is no way of knowing in advance. You've got to live through it before you can ever really know. That is why boastful bravado is even more stupid than it is obnoxious. The Bible promises "as thy days are so shall thy strength be." But "the days" must come first: the need must precede the giving of strength and courage. And no man ever knows his strength or his courage until the grim necessity of circumstance demands all there is in him. There is hope there for every man who is still untried by the fires of adversity.

And courage is born of *hope*, too. To have something to live for and struggle for; to be able to recall a past you want to get back to, or to envision a future you desire to arrive at; to have some one or some cause that needs you; to be able to envision an ideal worth living for or dying for, and to keep it clear and vivid through all enshrouding darkness—that gives a courage born of hope.

Did you read about those three Canadian airmen who were forced down on an ice-cap in Greenland? For fourteen days and nights they lived through forty-degrees-below-zero temperature, with little food and water, and only the clothes they wore and their parachutes ripped up and wrapped around them to keep them from freezing. Then they started trekking across the frozen wastes, skirting crevasses a thousand feet deep, their clothes freezing together when at night they huddled close to each other to try to keep warm. At last they were rescued. When an interviewer asked them what kept them going, one of them answered like this: "Dave had his wife

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and baby. Al was worried about his mother alone in Winnipeg. And I had my wife back home. Do you see what I mean? We all had something to live for." There it is: courage to endure born of hope!

But courage born of fear and hard circumstance and hope must be nourished by something else if it is to carry us through. That too comes out of the evidence. Running through almost every story of great courage there is the element of *faith*. Every man has a faith of some kind. It is as fundamental as hunger and love: and sometimes equally distorted. Its significance for courage lies in *what a man believes*. What are the basic assumptions upon which he lives? That every man is alone in a universe that is unconcerned? That honor and integrity do not matter to men of God? That man's noblest instinct is to save his own skin at any price? That self-centeredness is more worthy than self-sacrifice? Or that man is not alone? That he lives in a universe that is concerned for his highest and holiest aspirations? That back of everything is a *Mind* wiser than our minds, and *Arms* stronger than our arms? That honor and integrity and character and love and capacity for self-sacrifice are man's truest glory? And that there is Help beyond our weakness or our strength? Which of those sets of faith a man really believes seems to make the difference in the courage he can command.

In February 1942 four Dutch boys tried to escape from Holland to rejoin the free Dutch forces. They were caught by the Gestapo and sentenced to die by a firing squad on February 27th. On the night before the execution one of

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them, a twenty-two-year-old boy, wrote a letter to his father. It began like this: "Dear Father, it is difficult for me to write this letter to you, for I must tell you that the military court has pronounced a very heavy sentence upon us. Read this letter alone, and then tell mother carefully. . . . Fortunately, this has not been a time of fear. We have got past that. I have been able to pray much; and have the firm conviction that I may look forward to a death in Christ. In a little while, at five o'clock, it is going to happen. It is, after all, only one moment; and then I shall be with God. . . . It is much worse for you and mother than for me. . . . Do not mourn. Trust in God and pray for strength." Then follow tender intimacies to members of the family. And this at the end: "We are courageous. You must be the same. They can only take our bodies. Our souls are in God's hands. That should be sufficient consolation. I am going now. And I am not afraid. Until we meet again in a reunion that will be so much happier, may God bless you all. I die without hatred. God rules everything. (Signed) Kees." There it is: courage born of faith. Comment upon it by one who has never waited for a firing squad would be sacrilege.

There are the records of Captain Rickenbacker's crew who drifted twenty-one days on tiny life-rafts in the South Pacific. Subjected to starvation, lack of water, cruel exposure to heat by day and cold by night, they wasted away. Some died: others came through. Lieutenant Whittaker has written about their experience, and called it "We Thought We Heard the Angels Sing." They were not openly religious men. But facing death,

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they prayed. And unashamedly they confess their conviction that God answered their prayers: and by unmistakable directness. And for you or me to let our sophistication born of ease and comfort and safety discredit their testimony is little short of blasphemy. They were there: we weren't! And they believe God answered their prayers for food and water and strength and courage. Who are we to write our bold, impudent question marks? Wait until you go through what they went through! Lieutenant Whittaker tells how after twenty-one days of exhaustion he experienced the second of two divine deliverances. An island was sighted. It turned out to be twelve miles away: and took seven and a half hours to paddle the rubber raft to it. He prayed: "God, don't quit me now!" And adds: "He didn't. In a final effort to reach the island against an adverse current I was literally bending those oars against the waves. But it was not Jim Whittaker bending them. I didn't have strength to bend a pin. *There were other hands than mine on those oars. . . .* As soon as we reached shore we thanked God for our landfall." There it is again: courage and strength born of a man's faith in Divine help.

Courage is born of *experience*, too: our own experience and that of others. That also emerges from the evidence. A broader term would be "historical perspective." Courage comes from the long-view. St. Paul put it this way: "Experience worketh hope." We might add "and courage." It does when seen broadly enough and rightly interpreted.

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"A shipwrecked sailor on this coast bids you set sail,
Full many a gallant ship, e'er we were lost, weath-
ered the gale."

That is a poet's way of saying "what others have been and done can be done again: and by *you*." Men and women and young people have lived through Dark Ages and revolutions and tyrannies and wars before: and they can again. Civilizations have perished: but not civilization. Hard times have engulfed men's souls before: but man's spirit has come back with powerful resilience. Mr. Irwin Edman reminds us that "vegetation dies every autumn: but nature does not die." Our tribulations and tragedies are peculiarly our own: and for that reason more acute. But they are not necessarily *final* just because they are our own. Historical-mindedness, the long view, generates courage to face and endure and live through every present disaster.

In February 1942 the Quisling regime in Norway arrested the Dean of the Cathedral at Trondheim, ousted the congregation, and locked the Cathedral doors. In the freezing cold of a winter morning two thousand Norwegian Christians gathered outside the Cathedral doors and sang:

"A mighty fortress is our God:
Let goods and kindred go;
This mortal life also;
The body they may kill:
God's truth abideth still;
His Kingdom is forever."

After the devastating bombing of Coventry the depleted choir and congregation of Coventry Cathedral gathered in the ruined nave of their church on Christmas morning and sang their songs of praise to God and Christ, His Son. And

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Mr. J. B. Priestley attributes England's refusal to submit and quit to that spirit. How is such courage accomplished? Professor William E. Hocking gives part of the answer when he says: "The Church has had time to think it through. The Church represents One who has been this way before." For centuries the Church has watched the gates of hell storm the citadel of man's spirit, only to reel back broken and beaten. Such perspective gives courage to do it again and never to quit.

Courage is also born of a *disciplined commitment that won't let a man go back on his vow of loyalty*. That is the real purpose of vows and pledges and oaths of allegiance. When a man really means it, it holds him steady in a time of crisis. Such is the psychology back of much of a soldier's training. He is inducted by an oath of allegiance. Thereafter he goes through a process of mass training that disciplines him to respond automatically to orders. Thus when under fire he is more likely to stand up to it. There is at least a spark of honor in every man that makes him want to stand by a promise of commitment. It helps to steady a husband or a wife during times of emotional tension. It makes a student keep the honor system. It enables a Martin Luther to take his stand, and when threatened to say: "Here I stand. God helping me, I can do no other."

Did you read the other day that story about a submarine commander? In a surface engagement with the enemy the commander was wounded. As they prepared to crashdive to save the submarine and its crew, the commander was caught on the conning tower, and could not get below. To delay the dive to get him below would en-

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danger the whole crew. So lying there, helpless, doubtless recalling the tradition of the Navy to which he had committed himself, this order rang out from him: "Take 'er down!" They took her down and left him to the sea. Such courage comes from disciplined commitment.

This story is told about Lou Gehrig. When the Iron Man of baseball was forced to retire because of an incurable paralysis that was later to take his life, he was offered two jobs. One as parole commissioner of New York City that paid six thousand dollars a year. Another with a notorious drinking establishment that offered thirty thousand dollars a year. You know of course that Gehrig took the former. When asked why by a friend he is said to have explained it this way: "It didn't seem the right thing to do. I just couldn't see my name in lights over a place like that." Somewhere in the background of such moral courage as that was the anchor of a disciplined commitment to a deep conviction.

And finally, courage is born and nourished by *fellowship*. Cowardice is contagious. "The panic spread" is a common phrase. Some zoologists say that in fear the human body gives off an odor to which wild animals are sensitive, and that is why they are more likely to attack a frightened person than a fearless one. But *courage is contagious*, too.

"Give me ten men who are stout-hearted men,
And I'll soon give you ten thousand more"

is good psychology as well as a good Glee Club song. One New Testament character who is too little known was named Barnabas, meaning "son of encouragement." Fellowship with him so

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transformed John Mark who had once deserted St. Paul, that at the last St. Paul calls for John Mark by name to come to him. Morale is always an important word: but doubly so today. It means "the courage of the company." Fellowship throws around a man such stimulus and such restraint that it can actually take him clear out of himself and mould him into the group: for good or for ill. That is why companions are so tremendously important: why the "company a man keeps" can make him or ruin him. That is why the Church and your constancy to it are so important. That is one of the values of your regular participation in corporate worship. The right kind of fellowship can actually take a coward and make him heroic: or an evil-minded person and make him clean-minded.

Harold F. Dixon was one of three men who, when their plane fell into the sea, lived for thirty-four days on a tiny life-raft. They went through the tortures and agony of a slow dying-by-degrees. After they were rescued Dixon says this about their ordeal, after the raft had capsized and they had lost what few useful implements they had taken from the plane. "There we were: returned to the primeval: stark naked, fighting a howling storm at sea. Through the night we huddled together to keep warm, and thought slowly and solemnly of death. Then the sun came up. The bones stuck out of our inflamed bodies which burned and peeled and burned again. Our eyes were sunk an inch and a half into our skulls. We wanted to give up. But we shook hands and went on." "We wanted to give up": that was the despair of solitary loneliness! "We

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shook hands and went on": that was the courage of fellowship!

Stories of unbelievable endurance and heroism are coming from the underground resistance in the occupied countries. And one in a position to know explains their ongoing endurance this way: "They constitute an unseen, but powerfully felt community: getting such courage from one another that they can't quit. They are held together by a fellowship of desperation."

I have talked too long for a sermon. But this has been more than a sermon. It has been a prayer to God, and a spiritual wrestling with my own soul and yours, that in these days and in the time ahead that will require the very best that is in us, we may find in the midst of darkness and travail from the extremity of adversity, from unflagging hope, from our faith in God, from the testimony of experience, from a disciplined commitment, and from our fellowship with one another in Christ the courage of mind and heart and soul that will take us through valiantly and with honor.

The Winds Were Against Us

BY DAVID M. CURRIE



A SERMON PREACHED AT THE
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA
ON
SUNDAY, JANUARY 3RD, 1965

“THE WINDS WERE AGAINST US”

Acts 27 :4, 22-25

THE TEXT used today comes from a travel diary recorded in the Acts of the Apostles.

It is Luke's record of the sea voyage of Paul, himself and others from the eastern coast of the Mediterranean to the seaport serving the city of Rome.

In and of themselves the words of the text convey no gospel message:

THE WINDS WERE AGAINST US.

They simply report the weather conditions and the consequent route of the voyage as the group left the port of Sidon. “THE WINDS WERE AGAINST US so putting to sea from Sidon the ship sailed under the lee of the island of Cyprus.”

Contrary winds, however, became characteristic of the whole voyage on which Paul and Luke went. Reference is made again and again in the succeeding verses to the contrary nature of the winds.

In a profound sense the words of the text are not only a report of the weather conditions on this trip of Paul's; they also are a report of the weather conditions facing Paul throughout all his life from the time of his conversion on the Damascus road: THE WINDS WERE AGAINST US.

Many winds blew in Paul's favor prior to his conversion by Jesus Christ. Paul had been born into a fine family, well regarded in his native

THE WINDS WERE AGAINST US

town of Tarsus. His father had been granted the highly beneficial status of a citizen of the Roman Empire and his son, Paul, was then born into this high estate. Paul had a brilliant mind which had been well trained by the finest Jewish teachers of his day. His fine mind was accompanied by a sensitive spirit.

Even so, by and large Paul's whole life was a struggle against the winds that were against him.

Prior to his conversion his supersensitive spirit had plagued him, goading him on and on in an endeavor to lead a life fully in keeping with the provisions of the Jewish law. Always struggling, he never felt that he was keeping the whole of the law.

After his conversion by the Lord Jesus Christ, these inner stormy winds of conscience were quieted; but storms without continued to rage. Yes, in a real sense the weather conditions of all of Paul's life as a Christian are described by the words of the text: THE WINDS WERE AGAINST US.

It began right in the city of Damascus immediately following his conversion. The Christian community in that city was suspicious of Paul, thinking that he who had come to Damascus with warrants for their arrest as "followers of the way" could not now really be a converted member of their fellowship. And likewise, the Jewish community in Damascus was suspicious of Paul; called him a turncoat, and vowed that he would not leave the city alive. Surely THE WINDS

THE WINDS WERE AGAINST US

WERE AGAINST Paul from the very beginning of his life as a Christian.

Paul fared little better when he returned to the Christian community in Jerusalem. They, too, were suspicious of him. Opposition to him from Jewish communities all around the Mediterranean continued throughout his missionary life.

Not only this, his very commission from Christ his Lord to be a missionary to "carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and sons of Israel" had set against him the winds of primitive travel conditions of the day: weary walking along bandit infested trails, sailing on numerous occasions in ships of questionable seaworthiness, proclaiming the gospel in hostile communities.

THE WINDS WERE AGAINST US is pretty much the weather report surrounding all Paul's days and travels. His friends frequently disappointed him, Roman officials frequently were lax in their treatment of him, and cherished plans frequently had to be drastically altered.

THE WINDS WERE AGAINST US. Don't these words likewise describe the weather conditions which surround the life of most of us? We desire a world at peace, but conflict blazes forth locally, nationally, and world-wide. We wish for economic security, but businesses fail, jobs are lost, inflation comes, skills mastered become obsolete. We long for joyful family life, but trust is betrayed, love is not returned, children rebel and parents domineer. We seek for physical health, but disease and accident cripple our search. Yes,

THE WINDS WERE AGAINST US

for most of us, just as for Paul, the weather report of our life is THE WINDS WERE AGAINST US.

In spite of the direction of the winds Paul reached his destination! Even though the journey begins with the declaration THE WINDS WERE AGAINST US, the scripture declares in Acts 28:14 "And so we came to Rome." The appointed destination was reached. The contrary direction of the winds delayed the arrival, but it did not in this instance prohibit arrival.

Sailors of yesteryear, just as yachting enthusiasts of today, had learned how to use contrary winds so as to reach a desired goal. By tacking back and forth with his ship, a helmsman can bring her to port right up wind. While sailing before the wind is an exhilarating experience, and while a properly quartering wind will impart most speed to a sailing craft, reaching port when THE WINDS are AGAINST US is not impossible.

THE WINDS WERE AGAINST Paul 'most all his life, but he mastered the art of reaching port in spite of contrary winds.

He was tossed into prison shortly after reaching Philippi, but in prison he sang his faith and a jailer was converted.

He carried in his body some physical handicap—perhaps a bad eye with a fluxy discharge or maybe it was that he came under the grips of epileptic seizures—but he came to glory in this very infirmity because it kept him continually relying on God for strength.

THE WINDS WERE AGAINST US

On this very voyage he was shipwrecked, but in the ship's hour of greatest need he bore witness to the power and presence of God.

From the time of his conversion on, it seems that THE WINDS WERE AGAINST Paul; yet in spite of this, he lived a life of great usefulness and accomplishment, never despairing, always forging ahead.

How came this?

The answer lies in the fact that Paul had a deep sense of destiny; he had a clear knowledge of God's purpose for his life. Verses 23-25 of chapter 27 of the Acts of the Apostles makes this evident:

FOR THIS VERY NIGHT THERE
STOOD BY ME AN ANGEL OF THE
GOD TO WHOM I BELONG AND
WHOM I WORSHIP, AND HE SAID,
'DO NOT BE AFRAID, PAUL: YOU
MUST STAND BEFORE CAESAR;
AND LO, GOD HAS GRANTED YOU
ALL THOSE WHO SAIL WITH YOU'.
SO TAKE HEART, MEN, FOR I HAVE
FAITH IN GOD, THAT IT WILL BE
EXACTLY AS I HAVE BEEN TOLD.

How was it that Paul, in spite of the fact that THE WINDS WERE AGAINST him lived a life of great usefulness and accomplishment, never despairing, always forging ahead? He had a deep sense of destiny, and he had a clear knowledge of God's purpose for his life.

THE WINDS WERE AGAINST US

Now lest anyone of us take a light view of Paul's situation, let us review it briefly: He had gone to Jerusalem to take to the hard-pressed Christians there a love gift of money from the converts in the western part of the Mediterranean. While in Jerusalem on this mission of mercy he had been set upon by a vengeful mob of Jewish persons. He was delivered from their murderous grasp by Roman soldiers, and charged with disturbing the peace. For two whole years he sat in jail awaiting Roman justice. Two rulers would have set him free if he had given them a bribe.

Here he sat in prison, Paul, who had been commissioned by Christ to be missionary to the Gentiles—two whole years detained in jail. Finally in impatience he had exercised his right as a citizen of the empire and appealed to have his trial before Caesar himself.

He was turned over to a centurion to be transported to Rome. Paul, who knew the sea, counselled against the time of sailing and the route chosen—but to no avail. Ultimately the ship had entered a fierce storm. Think of it, for fourteen days they had not seen the sun or the stars! They did not know where they were and all were fearful lest they be blown completely across the sea into the quicksands of the north African coast. While the storm still was raging and the crew of the ship had given up in despair, Paul appears on deck and says:

I NOW BID YOU TO TAKE HEART.

THE WINDS WERE AGAINST US

THE WINDS WERE AGAINST US. But this man who had a deep sense of destiny and a clear knowledge of God's purpose for his life stands forth, prisoner though he was, to take charge. SO TAKE HEART, MEN, he says, FOR I HAVE FAITH IN GOD THAT IT WILL BE EXACTLY AS I HAVE BEEN TOLD.

What had he been told? Three things: (1) Do not be afraid, Paul—even in the midst of the storm, even not now knowing where they were, and even as a prisoner Paul was counselled by God not to be afraid. (2) You must stand before Caesar—this had been his commission by Christ at the time of his conversion; could he then have imagined that as prisoner he would stand before Caesar—but stand there he would!, his destiny fulfilled, God's purpose for his life being achieved; he would have opportunity to declare the gospel before Caesar himself! (3) Lo, God has granted you all those who sail with you—those whose prisoner he was; those, like Luke, his friends who were with him, those pagan sailors on whose ship he sailed. Lo, God has granted you all those who sail with you.

It was his sense of destiny, his knowledge of God's purpose for his life that enabled Paul to keep going, even when THE WINDS WERE AGAINST him!

And note well, even with this reassurance which came to him by a vision during the storm, Paul labored hard with hand and spirit in the

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desperate hours which followed—assisting in throwing overboard the cargo, keeping together the 276 persons on board (sailors, soldiers, owners and friends), setting the example of eating for strength before the final ordeal of making it to shore.

SO TAKE HEART, MEN, FOR I HAVE FAITH IN GOD THAT IT WILL BE EXACTLY AS I HAVE BEEN TOLD—faith in God to whom I belong and whom I worship—and it was so.

Here is a man with a deep sense of destiny, with a clear knowledge of God's will for his life arriving at his destination, even though THE WINDS WERE AGAINST US.

Good friends, surely the winds have been against many of you in these days:

business careers ended by forced retirement
unrelievable physical handicaps diagnosed
progress up the promotional ladder stymied
hopes for stable family life severely shaken
educational aspirations blocked
deep affection, devotedly given, spurned
financial reverses descending like a flood
the permanent fact of death to be reckoned
with

What shall you do?

You can quit, give up, cry out against the vicissitudes of life. You can blame the negligence of others, the seeming caprice of nature, your own failures to perform adequately.

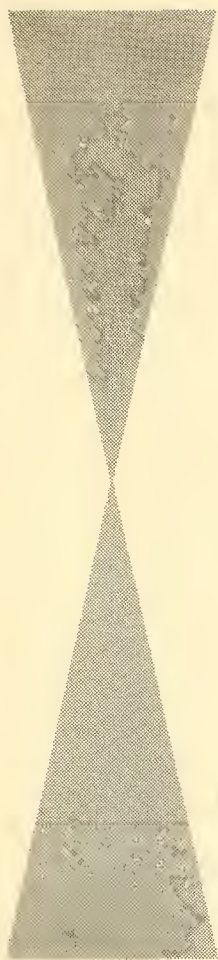
THE WINDS WERE AGAINST US

Or you can, like Paul, out of a deep sense of destiny and a clear knowledge of God's purpose for your life, listen for His message in the midst of catastrophe saying, "Do not be afraid . . . you must stand before Caesar . . . and God has granted you all those who sail with you."

Do then as Paul did—take courage and take charge! Turn with eager will and steady hands in the New Year—speak to others with sound wisdom and wise counsel—take emergency measures now, confident in God, whose you are and whom you worship. Claim his promised providences, confident he will "give you those who sail with you," and bring you on toward the destiny he has for you.

THE WINDS WERE AGAINST US.

THIS VERY NIGHT THERE STOOD BEFORE ME AN ANGEL OF THE GOD TO WHOM I BELONG AND WHOM I WORSHIP, AND HE SAID, 'DO NOT BE AFRAID . . . YOU MUST STAND BEFORE CAESAR; AND LO, GOD HAS GRANTED YOU ALL THOSE WHO SAIL WITH YOU.' SO TAKE HEART, MEN, FOR I HAVE FAITH IN GOD THAT IT WILL BE EXACTLY AS I HAVE BEEN TOLD.



The Anguish of White Anglo-Saxon Protestants

by

DAVID M. CURRIE

A SERMON PREACHED AT THE
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA
ON FEBRUARY 18, 1968

THE ANGUISH OF WHITE ANGLO-SAXON PROTESTANTS

"At that time, says the Lord, I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people."

Thus, says the Lord:

"The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness; when Israel sought for rest, the Lord appeared to him from afar.

"I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.

"Again I will build you, and you shall be built, O virgin Israel! Again you shall adorn yourself with timbrels, and shall go forth in the dance of the merry-makers. Again you shall plant and shall enjoy the fruit. For there shall be a day when watchmen will call in the hill country of Ephraim: 'Arise, and let us go up to Zion, to the Lord our God'.
— Jeremiah 31:1-6

I spent several days this week with the prophet Jeremiah . . . and I commend the same to you.

He was a man caught in the midst of turmoil:

He declared that there was no security in pious participation in religious services when righteous living did not flow from such participation.

He condemned syncretistic worship: enfolding into the worship of God the worship also of various aspects of society.

He was arrested and imprisoned for prophesying the destruction of Jerusalem.

When many of his countrymen were captured and displaced, he was criticized for counseling them to indigenize in the land of their captivity.

He had many a violent exchange with God; and yet, through a tortuous maze, he remained faithful to his vocation as a spokesman for God in his day.

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A kaleidoscopic sequence of changes: political, cultural, economic, social, was the situation in which Jeremiah lived out his last days upon the earth. Yet, of one thing Jeremiah was certain: the everlasting love and faithfulness of God.

The text for today is in the midst of Chapter 31 of the book of Jeremiah's writings, biography and prophecy. This chapter has been called "The Gospel According to Jeremiah." The section from which we have read today has many similarities to Psalm 23. The words that are text are words from God through Jeremiah to Jeremiah's contemporaries:

"I have loved you with an everlasting love;
therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you."

One reason I commend to you time spent in the company of Jeremiah is that white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants are caught up in our day in the midst of turmoil as profound, as pervasive, as shattering as were the experiences of Jeremiah. Let me mention a few "shockers" which have come recently to white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants:

1. Members of Protestant seminary faculties have written of the death of God.
2. An Anglican Bishop wrote a book, *Honest to God*, raising questions about long-revered theological doctrines.
3. A former professor at St. Mary's in Raleigh, Joseph Fletcher, writes that situations determine right and wrong, not long-standing moral codes.
4. A Canadian journalist writes that the Church as an institution is on the way out as an organization relevant to contemporary culture.

5. A Harvard Divinity School professor declares that urbanization, industrialization, automation, and cybernetics replace the green pastures and still waters as the locus for the people of God, and that we can't think of ourselves any longer as sheep.
6. A Southern Baptist theologian in Chapel Hill concludes his recent book, *Southern Churches in Crisis*, with:

" Popular southern Protestantism is a chapter—perhaps only a footnote—in the history of Christianity. This is not to say that it will die out . . . But it cannot be the bearer of Christianity for very long in the context of a broad cultural environment." — page 211

Many white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants are crying out in perplexity—if not in despair. Many are in anguish over the shaking of lifelong foundations of conviction and assurance. Many look with great nostalgia back to the middle 1950's when Dwight D. Eisenhower was President—who, upon his election made his profession of faith in Jesus as Lord and Saviour, was baptized and became a member of a Presbyterian congregation in Washington— when there were prayer breakfasts along the Potomac; when Billy Graham crusades (note the word) were winning thousands of "decisions for Christ" in this land and abroad; when Norman Vincent Peale's books and sermons widely proclaimed the way to peace of mind and success; when Protestant churches were spending a billion dollars a year in construction of magnificent buildings and membership curves were climbing faster than population curves.

Today many white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants are crying out:

“What has happened?”

“What HAS happened?”

“Have we been abandoned?”

“Why such turmoil?”

“Can we be sure, really sure, of anything anymore?”

Spend time with Jeremiah . . . and regain your assurance! Spend time with Jeremiah . . . and discover that yours is not the only time of rapid, widespread, foundation-shaking events. Let his testimony re-assure you of God's everlasting love, of God's faithfulness toward you.

Jeremiah saw helpful reforms in worship become prostituted until he, Jeremiah, said words about the Temple which Jesus quoted centuries later:

“Has this house, which is called by my name,
become a den of robbers?”

— Jeremiah 7:11

Jeremiah saw political alliances switch as rapidly as you have seen Russia change from anathema to ally to enigma; or Japan from fierce foe to friendly neighbor.

Jeremiah saw the wicked apparently prosper, and he saw himself, faithful as he knew how to be, imprisoned, misunderstood, derided. Yet of two things he continued confident: God is, and He is working his purposes out through his everlasting love and faithfulness to his people.

Contemporary shaking of the foundations proves neither that God has been over-thrown, nor that God no longer cares. Such shaking rather calls man to examine anew the foundations to see if he has not been building upon false foundations.

A professor at Yale Divinity School has advanced the hypothesis that it is the false foundations upon which white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants have been resting for four hundred years that are crumbling today. God continues faithful and his love is everlasting. He has not relinquished control of his creation, nor has man become God's superior and banished him.

What are some of the false foundations which white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants have seen crumble?

1. The foundation that white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants are God's especially chosen people.

From 1558 when Elizabeth became Queen of England, until 1960 when Dwight Eisenhower stepped down as President of the United States, Anglo-Saxons had been governed by Protestant rulers. Elizabeth and her successors have been titled "Defenders of the Faith"—and the faith they defended was Protestantism. With the election of John Kennedy as President, Protestant Anglo-Saxons had to face the fact squarely that Roman Catholics were also first class citizens in the United States, and also were genuinely among the people of God. And the Second Vatican Council has intensified this latter awareness.

- 2. The foundation that God was the celestial mechanic, managing the world from above as a puppeteer.**

From the early 1600's when Galileo asserted that Nature's great book was written, not in Hebrew or Greek, but in mathematical language, Western man began to wonder where the base of God's operations were. With the Sputnik of the late 1950's and the lunar-landings of the 1960's, white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants have wondered if God has not become technologically unemployed in the realm of celestial mechanics and co-relatively useless in the realm of terrestrial nuclear physics.

- 3. The foundation that American public education was an arm of the Protestant church.**

From the days of the McGuffey reader until the 1963 decision of the Supreme Court outlawing the reading of the Bible in public schools, white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants have felt that God ordained public education for the propagation of the Protestant faith. Now Protestants face the fact that they live in a pluralistic republic in which Jews and agnostics and atheists have political rights.

- 4. The foundation that Negroes could be no better than stepbrothers in the household of faith.**

The Federal Civil Rights Act of 1964 declared that Negroes in the United States have equal rights as citizens, and, by implication, surely Negro Christians are full-fledged members of the household of faith.

5. The foundation that God made the fields and man made the cities.

The 1965 decision of the Supreme Court commonly known as "one man—one vote," and the consequent re-alignment of state legislative assemblies giving cities actual proportional representation have shaken the white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants' confidence that they could rule the nation for God from a rural and suburban base.

6. The foundation that, when necessary, God would bless a war his people decided to fight.

The conflict in Viet Nam, made so vivid through living room observation of agony, has shaken to the roots the conviction of white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants that war, when entered into by the people of God, must receive, Q.E.D., divine endorsement and support.

7. The foundation that honesty, industry and frugality are the only virtues needed in economic endeavors.

The discovery of the possibility of an economy of abundance has grievously shaken the three-century old white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant conviction that laissez-faire capitalism is the only viable form of production and distribution open to the people of God.

No doubt about it, seven foundation stones of white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant conviction have been severely shaken within the last decade. But God has not thereby been dislodged from his sovereignty within his universe.

THE ANGUISH OF WHITE ANGLO-SAXON PROTESTANTS

Let it be said speedily, with candor and with emphasis: many, many have been the contributions which white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants have made, as part of the people of God, to the general welfare of mankind and as witnesses to the wisdom, the purpose and the presence of God. In many ways, theirs has been an unparralleled record of devotion and faithfulness to God and of service to mankind.

The text from the Gospel According to Jeremiah, before us today, is not a word of judgment, nor a word of reprimand. It is a word, spoken by a person caught in a maelstrom of transition, to persons also caught in such turmoil. It is a word declaring the abiding verities to the people of God amid the whirlwind. It is a word from God himself, spoken now, as it was then, to his people in transition:

"I have loved you with an everlasting love;
therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you."

With such assurance we will stand: more than that . . . with such assurance we will move forward, abandoning those false foundations which are crumbling, and continue building on that sure foundation: Jesus Christ, through whom God reveals himself to us—singing as we go words written by a Protestant, not Anglo-Saxon, but white:

THE ANGUISH OF WHITE ANGLO-SAXON PROTESTANTS

A mighty Fortress is our God,
a Bulwark never failing,
Our Helper, He, amid the flood
of mortal ills prevailing.
For still our ancient foe
doth seek to work us woe,
His craft and power are great;
And armed with cruel hate,
on earth is not his equal.

Did we in our own strength confide,
our striving would be losing;
Were not the right man on our side,
the man of God's own choosing.
Dost ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus, it is He,
Lord Sabaoth His name,
From age to age the same,
and He must win the battle.

Amen.

Sermon preached by
Wallace M. Alston, Jr.
in the First Presbyterian Church,
Durham, on Sunday, January 9, 1972

"ON DISCERNING GOOD FAITH FROM BAD RELIGION"

This morning I want to deal as honestly and practically as I can with an attitude toward religion that I have heard expressed time after time by good and well-meaning people in the Christian Church. Stated very simply, it is an attitude that believes that all religion is good religion.

Someone has said that we are living in one of the most religious periods in recent history and there is a sense in which I believe that to be true. People are searching for something these days, something they feel they have missed, something they sense is lacking in their lives. Young people are searching for it; older people are searching for it. There seems to be widespread agreement in our time at least about this one thing, namely, that there is something very important missing from our lives. The knowledge explosion, rather than quenching our thirst, has made it more acute. Social problems, rather than satisfying our need for a challenge and occupying our time and interests, have overwhelmed us with the realization that our problems are far too great for our meager energies alone. International brinksmanship, ineffective political and social systems, a greed-capitalism, the depersonalization of life, the dissolution of families, rather than discouraging us in our search, have only pressed us harder to find something in life, or about life, that has meaning and value and purpose. This is a very religious time in which we are living; people are searching frantically for that ultimate something they have lost, or else never had, but want even more than life itself.

"In the dingy back room of an abandoned music store," one magazine reports, "fourteen young men and women in brightly colored psychedelic robes sit cross-legged on the floor and chant in Sanskrit to the tinkling of a tiny triangle, while the perfumed smoke of incense floats about their nodding heads."

"A respectable Episcopal clergyman informs his middle class congregation that recently he has been meeting with members of his flock who speak in strange tongues, and that he himself has begun to speak words he does not understand."

"A 36 year old minister of a spiritualist church who believes that communication with the dead is a scientific fact informs the press that during the past 4 or 5 years there has been a tremendous upsurge of interest in his sect and maintains that hearing voices and seeing people from the 'other side' is all a part of modern Christian experience."

"A white-haired, dignified cleric launches into a hip Sunday sermon entitled "Love á Gogo," proclaiming that his aim is to turn people on to the swinging aspects of God's love."

"Buddhist sects spring up overnight like mushrooms, including one in which devotees howl, scream and curse their miseries away..."

"A diabolist...delivers well attended weekly lectures on topics such as "The Ineffable Essence of Nothing."

"A Christian Church trying to raise money for its theater group throws an evening of entertainment dedicated to the god of wine, advertising 'wild ceremonial dances, initiation into Bacchic rites, a slave auction, and the sacrifice of a virgin chosen from the crowd,' promising all this...and immortality too...for only \$2.50 in advance."

"And", the article continues, "people run ads in newspapers announcing that they have found the true way to God...through group therapy, Synanon 'games', flying saucers, sensory awakening, cosmogonic art, astral 'trips', psychodrama, mathematical computations, IBM machines, " and schemes of every conceivable sort.

It is a religious generation. People by the hundreds are searching for the presence and power of the living God. But the direction of that search for so many is simply pathetic.

The search for the presence of God in life is also taking place in ways more normal and, thus, more ambiguous than these far-out religious expressions. We have it right here in Durham. We have seen the rise of all sorts of groups and sects in recent days, from the large revival and healing movements, including the vivid pentecostal experiences, reminiscent of frontier America; to the small prayer and fellowship groups that gather from breakfast until evening, primarily in homes and offices of middle and upper-class white people. The pitch to the young is the communication of a simple theology concerning a personal God, called "the Lord," by means of the "in" language, catchy songs, and attractive leaders, which often include beauty queens, campus leaders and athletic stars. The approach to the adult is even more dubious, because more often than not it is directed to weakness rather than strength...to his disjointed emotions, his fears and frustrations, his loneliness and failure in personal relationships, especially in marriage, and to his increasing awareness of his own death. This can be a very dangerous thing indeed for the middle-aged adult.

Now, I believe in tolerance, and in the right of each person to make his own decisions and go his own way in these things. And I believe that God works in all sorts of ways and uses all kinds of people for His own glory. And I believe that different people have different needs to be met. But I also believe that one of the most pressing things for Christian men, women, and young people today who desire a rich and wholesome experience of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is the need to develop a critical faculty that is both balanced and informed, so that they might be able to discern good faith from bad religion. Doctors have this critical capacity to discern good medicine from bad medicine. They call the bad ones "quacks". Lawyers have this critical capacity to discern the good from the bad in law. They call the bad ones "shysters". Businessmen have the ability to discern good business from bad business. I am simply asking for the same degree of common sense in matters concerning our faith in God.

Not all religion, you know, is good religion. Martin Luther once said in effect that there is no more sin in a man's sex life than there is in his religious life. Luther, with his characteristic bluntness, was simply stating a fact which Christian people should never forget, and that is that religion can become one of the most wicked and ruinous forces in all of human experience. All religion is not good religion. Some religion is worse than no religion at all. Religion is like water... it can refresh and cleanse, or it can engulf and drown. Christian people are sometimes tempted to think that some religion, regardless of whether it is particularly good or not, is better than no religion at all. But remember what bad religion has done to people in human history: its bloody wars, its cruel persecutions, its brutal rites of human sacrifice, its ugly superstitions, the barricades set up by religion against every advance of science. Some religion is bad religion, harmful religion, much worse than no religion at all. Some religion can be dynamite to a person who is emotionally unstable. Some religion can be dynamite to a person who has been rejected by husband or wife and is looking for a substitute. Some religion can be dynamite to a person looking for an escape from coping with his problems. Religion is like electricity; it is ambiguous. It may illumine and warm; or it may blast and kill. A third of my time in the Christian ministry, I imagine, has been spent trying to help people, young people and older people, to put enough pieces back together, broken pieces of a life blasted apart by bad religion, so that a person might find and experience a rich and wholesome Christian faith in God. One of the greatest needs I know is for Christian people, parents and children, to develop an informed and critical capacity that will enable them to discern the difference between good and healthy faith, and bad and destructive religion.

Jesus Himself spent much of His life trying to help people discern good faith from bad religion. So far as we know, neither Jesus nor any of his disciples had much problem with irreligion or atheism. The problems Jesus faced were the problems caused by bad religion...the bigots, the fanatics, the hypocrites, the narrow-minded, the self-opinionated, those who felt that they had all the truth and were willing to put the Messiah to death to prove it.

So, I agree with Martin Luther. The religious life of a man can be a very sinful thing indeed. It can warp a person; it can make him queer and hard; it can keep him from a rich, happy and full life. Bad religion can be as destructive as a hand grenade in the pocket with the pin pulled! But a good and lively faith can give newness in life. And precisely because nothing is more important for our world today, for our homes and churches and communities, than a rich faith in God, we need to be able to tell the difference between the good and the bad. Now, how? How do we wade through all of these religious movements that are abroad in the land, and help our children to wade through them, in love, without being hostile and still being tolerant, but discerning all the same between the good and the bad? I venture to suggest five criteria that have helped me to discern good faith in the Biblical sense of the word from bad religion in all its many expressions.

I. First, in trying to discern good faith from bad religion, it always helps me to ask: is it intellectually honest? Now, of course, I do not mean that a person must be an intellectual to believe in God. That would be sheer nonsense! Some people are; some are not; and the Gospel of Christ is both simple enough to be understood by the most uneducated man and complex enough to challenge the greatest intellect. That's not the point. The point is that our faith in God must square with the facts of life. It must be honest to our best knowledge, from whatever source, about the nature of life in the world. You can believe that the world is flat if you want to; you can call yellow green; you can believe that Russia does not exist simply because you have never seen it; but to do so would simply not be intellectually honest. A religion that tells me that cancer is really demon-possession is not honest. It just does not square with the best information I have about the nature of things. Our faith in God must not fly in the face of all our best information. Some like to say that you can prove any point of view you want to from the Bible, but that is not true...not if you are going to be honest to the facts. I know people who walk around with Bibles in their pockets, spouting quotation after quotation out of context, trying to prove or disprove something or other, and, for the most part, what is being worked at is simply not honest to the information we have about what the Bible is and what it says. Every religious faith must stand the test of honesty if it is of God. God is honest and pioucity is no substitute for honesty. God gave us minds and I think He plans for us to use them in our attempt to discern the good from the bad in matters of faith.

II. Second, as I try to make my own decisions about what is good and bad in matters of religion, I find that it is helpful to ask: is it truly personal? We speak often of a "personal relationship to Jesus Christ" but there are times when what we mean by that is not really personal at all. For example, to be truly personal, one's faith in God ought to make its appeal to the whole man, mind as well as emotions, will as well as heart. It ought to appeal to one's strengths as well as one's weaknesses. So much bad religion plays on our weaknesses, our fears, our failures, our needs, and fails to help us very much at the point of our strength. It makes us feel like such a scrub. For it to be truly personal, it seems to me, one's faith in God should free a person to be himself; it should enrich a person's life and make everything else in the world...home, family, friendships, job...more rewarding. It should not make one queer, narrow, intolerant, obnoxious to others, harder to live with, sour, bitter, anxious and generally unhappy.

Then, again, if one's faith in God is truly personal, it should lead one to deep personal commitment and earnest prayer. Now, of course, prayer is not always good. It too can be bad religion. It can be ignorant and superstitious. It can be a kind of Aladdin's lamp, which, if rightly rubbed, can get you what you want. It can be a kind of celestial charity organization where the improvident applicants try to get on the dole. It can be a short-cut, whereby a select coterie of "saints" try to secure things they have not fulfilled the conditions of getting. Prayer can be bad religion. But prayer as an inward trysting place where the soul of a man, the deepest in man's being, meets the presence of his God, in all human honesty of faith and doubt, receptively, responsively, with humility and dedication...that is the vital heart of good faith.

Or again, to be truly personal, one's faith in God should have the power in life to shape personal behavior. It always interests me that some of those who talk the loudest with all the religious language often are left so unaffected as to behavior. If you can sing the catchy songs and pray the group prayers, and still act the same way toward people, and still smoke the pot, and still go out and get drunk, and still behave sexually in the same careless way, then, young person, something is wrong somewhere. A good and lively faith in God is something so personal that it changes a person's life. It has the power to shape behavior.

The second criterion for me, then, is this: is it truly personal?

III. Third, it helps me in deciding between the good and the bad in matters of religion to ask how this religion is related to the world of human suffering. I would have to ask whether this religion of mine leads me into the world or is for me an escape from the world. I would put this question to the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, the Campus Crusade for Christ, the Young Life, the Navigators, the revivalists, the healers, the breakfast and business men's groups, and to the faith of the Christian Church in its local expression as well. Does it demand that I involve myself directly and at considerable risk in social action...in the issues of war and peace, of racial justice, of criminal justice and prison reform, in housing and hunger, and whatever presses down the body or spirit of human beings all around me. Does it lead me to consider giving my life to what we used to call in older days "full-time Christian service" or to some other means of giving my life for the service of man? Is it inclusive of all races and classes, or is it primarily a middle-class, privileged thing? Does it take human history seriously? Does it deal with the tragic element in life realistically and try to do something concretely about it? So much that parades under the name of religion these days is no more than a shabby bromide that seeks to get one's soul in order for eternal life, but which has little concrete interest in the service of people.

IV. Four, I would have to ask: is it consistent with the understanding of God that we find in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible; and with God's own self-identification in Jesus Christ? Not just the Book of Acts, mind you, but how does it square with Isaiah and Jeremiah, and with the God we see in human flesh in Jesus Christ? How does it square with the experience of the God of the Bible as that God has been experienced in these 1900-plus years of Christian history? Does it square with the Church's experience of God through the ages or not? I am afraid that a lot of things going on in the name of religion in this very city would lose out here. There is a lot of bad religion going around these days that uses Biblical language and that does things that Christians also do, but that has little substantial relationship to the worship and service of the God we read about in Isaiah and Matthew, and even less to do with the God known in the history of the Christian Church.

V. Then, finally, this criterion: does it lead one deeper into the life and worship of the Christian Church, or does it lead one away from the Christian Church? The Church is guilty of many mistakes and has made many errors in its time. But, regardless of all its mistakes, the New Testament includes life in the active and organized Church as a part of the Christian Gospel. The Church needs to be changed, always. It needs to be renewed and revitalized, always. But any so-called "religious" movement for young people or for adults that leads one away from this struggle for integrity in the life of the Church is not that good and lively faith one finds in the New Testament. There are a lot of religious groups and gatherings that make their bread and butter off the possibility that active membership in the church is negotiable and that people can really be Christian alone. That's bad religion! One good way to discern the difference between good faith and bad religion, then, is to note the interest and relationship this or that religious movement has, not only in the contemporary Church, but in the Holy Catholic Church, which over the centuries has done battle with just about every form of bad religion imaginable, under the rubric of "heresy".

Micah tells us what God requires of us. Three practical, down-to-earth things that are real, not queer, and highly livable for these days..."do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with thy God."

Jesus once warned us to discern carefully between the light and the darkness. How tragic it is when a person mistakes the darkness for the light! "If the light in you is darkness, " He said, "how great the darkness!"

God expects us to be able to discern good faith from bad religion and then to be willing to take our stand for the very best that we know. When face to face with many different religious quests, it helps me to ask: 1) Is it intellectually honest? Does it ring true to the facts or does it fly in the face of all I know to be true? 2) Is it truly personal, making its appeal to the whole man, mind as well as heart, strength as well as weakness; and does it have the power to shape my behavior? 3) Is it concerned with the world and those who suffer? 4) Does it square with the Biblical understanding of God as He is revealed in the law and the prophets, and in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; and with the experience of the Christian Church? 5) And finally, does it lead one into the life of some local church or away from it? These are criteria that have always helped me in the effort to discern good faith from bad religion...to find Christianity at its best, and to try to translate it from thinking into living in the midst of a troubled and questing world.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Sermon preached by
Wallace M. Alston, Jr.
in the First Presbyterian Church,
Durham, on Sunday, January 16, 1972

"ON KEEPING LIFE IN SUSPENSE"

We come together each Sunday, and at times during the week, as the community of faith, worshiping together, learning together, working together, because in a sense we believe together. Even when we are apart and physically separated, we are together as the "Church scattered". We are very different from each other in many outward respects, but we are fundamentally bound together, whether we be gathered or scattered, by something that transcends our differences, namely, our faith in a personal God, who revealed Himself in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and who is alive in the midst of our lives in the presence of His Holy Spirit.

But we must never forget that we do not represent the majority opinion in these matters of faith. We must always be conscious of the fact that most of the people in the world think we are wrong. Most people do not believe what we believe. Some of them do not want to believe as we; others of them actively believe something else; still others would like to believe, if they could, but feel in all honesty that they cannot. It is this last group of people to whom I wish to speak this morning, sensing that someone may be in this room right now, giving Christian faith one last chance, or perhaps a first hearing; sensing also that all of us have trouble believing some of the time. Sermons, more often than not, are part of the dialogue of faith, and rightly so. Only now and again sermons should seek to include those who find themselves on the fringes of faith. So it is this morning.

"For whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him."
Hebrews 11:6

Heinrich Ott, the German theologian who succeeded to Karl Barth's chair at the University of Basel, Switzerland, writes in his book on God (Gott) that the most crucial question for modern man is not the existence of God as such, but the reality of a personal God in the midst of the world. Not "is there a First Cause or Elemental Spirit in the Universe?" But "is there a personal God, who meets me, who speaks to me and answers me when I speak to Him?" I know people who would like to believe in a God like that, but who find confident faith in Him impossible in our time. I know people who in a real sense are trapped between the inability to believe in a personal God, on the one hand; and the inability to be an atheist, on the other. Someone said to me not long ago: "I do not seem to be able to believe in God, but I find the atheistic, materialistic explanation of the universe and of man's place in it an equally unbelievable option. I suppose that kind of understanding is beyond my ken. I am really an agnostic." "Atheism," of course, is the faith that there is no God; "theism" is the faith that there is a God; "agnosticism" is the faith that one can live without having to answer the question. I want to speak this morning especially to the agnostic who, in whole or in part, is trying to keep life in suspense and to build a life on "I don't know."

I. First, let me say that I have great respect for the honest agnostic, who, because of intellectual honesty or ethical sensitivity to such issues as the problem that evil presents for faith, simply cannot believe in a personal God. In contrast to the know-it-all dogmatism often found in the Church, agnosticism can be a very healthy attitude for people to have. There are many things about God and His dealings with people about which even the most ardent believer ought to be agnostic. The Bible testifies to a good form of agnosticism. "Can you find the deep things of God?" asks the author of Job. "Can you find out the limit of the Almighty?" These are rhetorical questions, of course. The answer is "no". "Now we see through a glass darkly," echos the New Testament. "How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable His ways!" writes the Apostle Paul. John Calvin has the reputation of being a stern dogmatist, but even he testified to that good form of agnosticism when he wrote: "His (God's) essence indeed is incomprehensible, utterly transcending all human thought." Some believers, in fear

rather than in genuine faith, "make believe" they know it all; but all intelligent faith in God has behind it a humble background of healthy agnosticism, for the ultimate truth behind this universe cannot be caught and cabined in our limited minds and hearts. Even with regard to knowledge of the physical universe, Sir Isaac Newton compared himself, despite all of his great discoveries, to a little boy playing on the seashore "whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me." To put it mildly, a similar modesty before the Mystery of God befits those who try to formulate their faith in Him. "People who have once really encountered God, look differently and speak differently of God from those self-assertive persons who converse with Him on terms of easy equality." Karl Holl said that about Luther's rejection of the Wittenburg enthusiasts, the spiritualists and glib pietists of his time, and it is just as true for us today. When agnosticism expresses a certain humility of a person before the great Mystery of God, then, certainly, it is a mark of true faith.

II. Now, granted that there is a place for healthy agnosticism in Biblical faith, something tells me that a person who stops here is going to be a very frustrated person indeed. Something tells me that it is going to be nigh unto impossible for a person to remain permanently neutral, as though we could live life with any degree of integration in suspense somewhere between theism and atheism. The reason I say this is that the matter at issue is not a speculative matter or an intellectual matter at all, but a very practical matter of whether or not life has any ultimate meaning or value or purpose. Everyone has to make up his life, if not his mind, on that. Young people ask: where do I want to go to school? What do I want to do with my life? But the basic question is: why do anything at all? What is life's meaning that gives meaning to my decisions? If life is just earning a living, getting ahead, and succeeding, then it is a very shallow thing indeed and "all's fair in love and war". If I say that I like people and want to help people, then the question still remains: why bother? If life is ultimately meaningless, then I might as well get, for there is no ultimate reason to give. What is it that gets you out of bed in the morning? What is it that determines your values and goals? What is it that keeps you going when life gets tough and appears to tumble in? That, you see, is the issue. That is the God-question and every person who has ever lived has had to make up his life, if not his mind, on one basis, one faith, or another. It is a frustrating thing indeed, perhaps an impossible thing altogether, to build a life on "I don't know".

One evening, as we were cleaning up after a small discussion group had met in our apartment in Zürich, Switzerland, I found under a chair a folded piece of paper on which a young person present had been doodling. We had been discussing the question of God, and on that piece of paper were written these words: "...and what if there is nothing? Catch life, hold it hard, squeeze the living out, wring out the tears, choke out the joy, wear out your body, fatigue your mind; there is all Time for nothing." Is that really what life is all about? I think that every person must make up his life about that one way or another.

G. K. Chesterton, in The Ball and the Cross, writes that he would contend for his friend, yet would remain were his friend to die; and that he would contend for his country, yet would still persist were his country to be destroyed; but, wrote Chesterton, if God were not, I, the man, would burst like a bubble. Everyone, I think, must confront the alternatives and make his life up one way or the other.

One of the most fragmented and frustrated lives ever lived, I imagine, was that of Bishop James A. Pike, the Episcopal priest who could never quite make his life up between his faith and his doubt. Do you remember him? I can't seem to get his life out of my mind. John Cogley, in writing an article in Life magazine about the symbolism in Pike's death, commented that, perhaps, there is a little bit of James Pike in every man. "Most of us," wrote Cogley, "are part believers in our own immortality, part doubters about our own significance, part men of faith, part children of doubt." The problem is, as with the Bishop, that creative life cannot be built in the frustration of suspense. Bishop Pike had decided to go to the Holy Land to unmask Jesus of Nazareth, so one of his colleagues later told me. When the end came, James Pike, alienated now from his church, was wandering, lost, in the very wilderness the Messiah chose when He wanted to withdraw from the affairs of men. He was alone in an unknown terrain, cut off from all human

contact and wholly dependent on his own resources. He died finally of exhaustion, after a fall, and when they found his body days later, they found it in a kneeling position. Perhaps in those last moments, believer triumphed over agnostic. One does not have to read too much into this story to see that even in death, James Pike symbolized our modern frustration, for his life was a parable of an attempt to keep life in suspense.

Many people who have given up God philosophically have had to concoct all sorts of psychological substitutes for Him, precisely because life cannot be lived in suspense. Each of us is instinctively a worshiper. I think we were made that way. That's what it means to be made in the "image of God". Each of us has a reason for living and doing what we do, even if we do not consciously acknowledge it. As Martin Luther was wont to say: "Whatsoever, then, thy heart clings to, I say, and relies upon, that is properly thy God." There is a certain healthy agnosticism that befits an honest confession of faith, but I fear that no one can stop there very long and live "essentially". Everyone must make up his life, if not his mind, one way or another. Is there ultimate meaning, purpose, value in life and about life, or not? That's the question of God and we all must live one faith or another.

III. Now, let me briefly mention a few of the positive contributions which Christian faith in God makes to one's life. First, it legitimates a basic confidence in the soundness and security of the universe. On shipboard sometimes an individual is decidedly uncomfortable, especially when there is a storm. The wind is high; the sea is rough; the ship is rolling; dishes fly; ankles are sprained and arms broken. But, for all that, some people on board are able to have a basic confidence in that ship, namely, that it is sound, that it can ride out the storm, and that ultimately it will make port. Around all of the individual discomfort is the encompassing security of the voyage as a whole. So it is with life lived in the parentheses of a faith in God. Our personal and social problems are exceedingly severe, and every one of us is called to help shore up the bulkheads of humanity against the onslaughts of racism, poverty, the inequitable distribution of wealth, war, and ultimate despair. But to a person who has faith in God, the universe is basically sound...it will make port, for the Captain is still at the helm and the bearings have not been lost. Christian faith in God legitimates that confidence. The agnostic, I fear, must try to make up his life without that basic confidence in the soundness of things.

Second, Christian faith in God gives a man not only a measure of confidence in the soundness of the ship, but also a basic confidence in the ultimate goodness of the Captain on the bridge. To see God in and through the perspective of Jesus Christ, and to stake one's life there, is to know something of the power of God's goodness and of the goodness of God's power. In the midst of all the evil and suffering we see about us, each of us must decide and make up our lives either on the faith that life is essentially evil and empty or that life is essentially good and gracious. An agnostic, who tries to live on the "I don't know", can be a very frustrated person at best, for he can never quite decide what is normative about life. The Christian, knowing not only Cross but also Resurrection, is confident that ultimately life's goodness will be victorious over the ill, and he is able to live in that light so that it shines on the sufferings of others. That's not escape or shabby sentimentalism. It is the motive power to take all sorts of risks, personally and societally, in order to shape one's environment so that it might reflect that light. Here theology (faith) and ethics (action) become one.

Third, there is that basic confidence that there is meaning and purpose in the universe...not simply those meanings that we put into life, but also those which we discover in life because God, our Creator and Redeemer, put them there. I for one have difficulty understanding how a man continues to live creatively in a world which he believes to be fundamentally meaningless. "If man had no eternal consequences," said Søren Kierkegaard, "if, at the bottom of everything, there were merely a wild, seething force producing everything, both large and trifling, in the storm of dark passions; if the bottomless void that nothing can fill underlay all things, what would life be but despair?" Some people try to avoid the question of the ultimate meaning of life by ceaseless activity, irrational business, and various intoxications of fun and games. But Christian faith in God gives one the liberating confidence that life really is, after all, "essentially" worth living.

Then, I would remind you of the experience of Christian people of those interior resources that have moved people to say, with Paul, "in Him who strengthens me I am able for anything." Too many people have found the strength and power to cope, and the wherewithal not to escape, in these resources for them not to be taken seriously by us. But, of course, the man who allows his life to hang in suspense, without ever making the leap of faith, without ever saying with Martin Luther, "Here I stand! God help me; I can do no other!" . . . must somehow live without ever knowing these resources that so often pass far beyond our understanding.

There are many other positive contributions which Christian faith in God makes to one's life and which agnosticism must miss . . . all the way from confidence in who we are, to what we were created to be, to what societies may in fact become, to what hope there is for us when we fail and when we die.

But how does one begin to believe, you say, without giving up one's honesty or one's conscience or without selling-out to the values and mores of the culture? First, let me suggest that you try believing, if not in God Himself, at least in the validity of the experience of God and thus give the evidence fair-minded consideration. Second, even though you do not have all of the answers or, perhaps, you have only a few that satisfy you; try to walk faithfully by the best light you have. Take what you do know and begin to build on that. Third, begin to experiment with the possibility of understanding and living your life in terms of the assumption that God is involved in your common affairs. You do not have to be certain about it to try it. Try thinking of things around you and living in the world as though God were there and ultimately interested in you . . . just to see if it makes any sense for you or not. Fourth, begin, consciously and willfully, to put yourselves into those situations in which faith is possible rather than systematically avoiding them. Read, question, associate for awhile with people who do find meaning in a Christian faith in God, just to test out for yourself whether or not truth is here.

I return in closing to something I said in the very beginning. Conceivably a man may leave his mind in suspense between theism and atheism, but with regard to the meanings and experiences which the question of God or no-God raises, how can a man live with any measure of creativity or effectiveness with a life kept in suspense? At any rate, I have not been able to live like that. Life, if not mind, gets made up one way or another. As Fredreck Myers pictures the Apostle Paul saying, so say I to you:

"Whoso has felt the Spirit of the Highest
Cannot confound nor doubt nor deny:
Yea with one voice, O world, tho' thou deniest,
Stand thou on that side, for on this am I!"

Amen.

"CHRIST AND THE ECONOMIC CRISIS"

Text: Matthew 6: 25-33

by

WALLACE M. ALSTON, JR.

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Durham, North Carolina

Sunday, May 27, 1973

"CHRIST AND THE ECONOMIC CRISIS"

I was reminded one evening this past week that the Watergate scandal of which I spoke last Sunday represented but one part of the current crisis facing our nation right now; that we are in the midst of a general low period in many areas of our nation's life; and that, particularly in the economic community, there are some earth-shaking tremors being felt that affect the lives of many people in our nation. The word "crisis" comes from the Greek "krisis" meaning judgment. A crisis calls us all into question. It brings us into judgment. Death is a "crisis" in the sense that it calls life radically into question. So also, a crisis in our economy calls the basic principles on which we are operating as a society into question. Look at the situation for a moment. Inflation is rampant; there is an energy crisis that threatens to cut the life-blood from our machine-economy. Taxes increase; the welfare rolls grow; unemployment is becoming a problem for those who are well-educated and well-motivated as well as those who are unskilled and lazy. The dollar is losing its power and the confidence of the world in our economy has slipped badly in the recent past. Now, I ask you, does Christ have anything to do with all that? The temptation, of course, is to say "No". Christ and taxes and jobs and the price of meat just don't quite go together, do they? And yet, if Christ has nothing to do with our economic crisis, then He misses us at the point of one of our most critical needs right now. Then, He would not really be either Lord or Savior, because there would be whole sectors of life in which He made no sense. And, what's more, the New Testament writers did remember that Jesus had said some very specific things about economics in His lifetime, and they made certain that their memory of them was preserved for us. So, as a beginning, I set before you a text that is very familiar and yet so difficult to understand that I have studiously avoided using it in preaching in all the years of my ministry. It reads: "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things shall be yours as well" (Matt. 6:33). What things? Obviously, "all these things"...not the luxury items of our culture, but "all these things" necessary for living...food, drink, and clothes to wear. The basic things of material prosperity are meant, and that's the problem. It was as though Jesus had said: "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and you shall have a measure of material prosperity in your life". And that, I say, is difficult to handle in the light of the cruel poverty in our world that does not seem to be related either to our goodness or to our badness.

The first problem with what Jesus said about economics, of course, is that often it simply is not true that He who seeks first the great things of God always gets material prosperity. Some people try to "make believe" that there is this one-to-one relationship between my piety and my material blessings. There was a famous preacher of the peace of mind in New York City who often used to say in his sermons: "I was talking just the other day to a man, whose name you all would know should I call it, who was poor and unsuccessful in business, until he gave his life to Jesus, and then strangely everything he did turned to profit, etc." Which, of course, is a form of low-grade profanity in the face of the Biblical story without even the benefit of humor. It did not turn out so for Jesus Himself. If anyone sought first the kingdom and the righteousness of God, Jesus did, and yet life dealt Him not the card of material prosperity, but the bitter bread of pain to eat and vinegar to drink, and at the foot of the Cross men shot dice even for the wherewithal with which He was clothed! Often it seems as though the equation works just the other way around, so that the Vesco's and the Capone's, and these gamblers in Durham we read about in the

paper yesterday morning whose dirty business supports the drug traffic in this city end up with the prosperity, and the humble man who gives his life to help alcoholics in the inner-city because of his commitment to Christ scarcely makes a living wage. No wonder Jesus has so often been written-off as a visionary, an unrealistic, impractical poet, who is as irrelevant to our practical business economy as angels at a boxing match. Unless...

Unless, at the root of the economic crisis in this nation, there is something other than economics; unless, perhaps, our traditional American way of life is in fact being overtaken by events that are not altogether devoid of ultimate meaning and purpose. Unless, those insights of Jesus into the meaning of life itself were actually and literally true, the understanding and application of which are necessary for the continued survival of this nation. Then Jesus would turn out to be the supreme realist of history, wouldn't He, and not the idealistic dreamer at all. For, although we may not say to individuals that if they, one by one, give their hearts to God, to them, one by one, God will give material prosperity; there do seem to be some basic ethical or human conditions rooted deep in the heart of reality that must be met and responded to or else, no matter what we do, we can never know real prosperity. Jesus seems to have been saying that, in any universe created, ruled and sustained by God, we who are His creatures must first seek His plan and purpose for life or else we will never solve the problem of food and drink and clothing. It may be that in another kind of universe it would be another way, but in God's universe, it goes like this. And before you write that off as too obvious for words, let me spell out what I think that means, and why it is I think that Christ has something to say to the economic crisis, and why I think that it is something very practical and concrete indeed.

Something very basic has happened to our society in the last few decades. It has been radically secularized. Some think that that is good and liberating. I think not so! Our society has lost whatever dimension of depth it once had in the orientation of our forefathers to the real presence of the sovereignty of God in the world. It is now economics for its own sake, so that we now try in the highest councils of government and business to find purely economic solutions to economic problems, when in fact the nature and meaning of human existence is far more complex than that. We have lost the perspective as a nation that those who once considered a free economy at least dimly held and it is to that perspective that Christ speaks, and He speaks in very practical terms.

I. Take first of all this matter of war. It would not be fair to ascribe all of our economic dislocations to the fact of war, but who can easily overestimate the influence of war, and especially the Vietnam war, on the economic problems currently being experienced in this land? Ever since our machine-economy began, a long-drawn-out aftermath has always followed international conflict. Yet we continue to sentimentalize war and to make special heroes out of those who carry it on and off, as though we were acting out an old, out-of-date John Wayne movie; and we continue to hold out the possibility that we may fight a war again even in a day when our own inventions mock us with the power to dis inhabit the universe! The best illustration I know is the battle of Waterloo, so much memorialized and sentimentalized in literature, in poetry and in our history books. But do you know what happened the year after Waterloo, not to defeated France but to victorious England? The year after Waterloo

was one of the real low points in English history. Industry, no longer stimulated by the demand for munitions, collapsed. The labor market was flooded by returning soldiers and unemployment skyrocketed. The nations of Europe which had been England's customers were now too weak to buy. And then the harvest failed. Not in a century had England been plunged into such deep crisis.

Obviously, the economic crisis is a part of a whole crisis that confronts our nation right now, one that calls us and our nation into judgment. And I doubt that the problems we face will ever be solved until we achieve the ethical insight and the courage to rule the phenomenon of war out of bounds. If someone says that not only does war cause economic crises, but that economic imperialism also causes war, that may well be true. The two make a vicious circle. War plays into the hands of economic imperialism because war demands the distant control of raw materials for munitions; and in turn economic imperialism plays into the hands of war, because the struggle for raw materials is one of war's chief causes. So, it may well be true that so long as we have war, we shall have economic imperialism; and so long as we have economic imperialism, we shall have war; and so long as we have them both, we cannot possibly have real prosperity.

So, you see, we are back full circle to our text and we must now look Jesus Christ squarely in the eye. Impractical idealist, we have called Him. Perhaps, just to the contrary, Jesus is stating a basic truth that must be heard in any universe which is of God, namely this: seek first peace and righteousness and human community, or else there will be no real prosperity. Isn't that the truth? You may have all the money and goods in the world, but you will never know economic safety or prosperity for yourself or for anyone else for that matter until somehow you deal with this ethical issue of war and peace. Christ literally bestrides this power-conscious, war-ridden world, with these words that sound above the din of clashing systems of politics and economics: without peace in the human community, there will be no real prosperity in any system or in any land.

II. And again, just as there will be no prosperity without peace, so there will be none either without the active presence of justice in the world; not enough to eat or to drink or to put on, without righteousness coming first. Is that visionary poetry, or is it hard practical truth?

Our Statue of Liberty says: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to be free," but in many instances we have not allowed great segments of our population to benefit from our prosperity. There has been injustice in the distribution of income from our economic processes. Many who work hard all the days of their lives remain poor, while others who do nothing have received from inheritance enough to make them rich. Men return from Vietnam, especially those of minority groups, having been told that they were fighting for a great way of life, finding now that that way of life is not open to them, even though others have made millions of dollars in profit from the war. Black people, whose forebearers helped to build this economy, needed now by this economy as consumers, do not have the background or the skills to make it work for them. People locked into ghettos of ignorance and filth, and welfare rolls growing to the hurt of both the haves and the have-nots. Another vicious circle, you see; the spiritual and the ethical linked tightly to the material and the economic, just as Jesus indicated they were. The point of His words was that ethical issues precede, underlie and even dominate economic issues, so that there are in God's world no purely

economic solutions to economic problems. "Christ and the Economic Crisis" you see; that's the issue! Seek first what is "right", He said. Look first to what is just and fair and humane, or else you will never be prosperous as a people. Now you answer; was He really an impractical dreamer when He said this? Or was He the most practical, down-to-earth realist who ever walked the earth?

III. Or consider a final illustration of this truth in the fact that, for the most part, we have lost our vision in this nation of what an economic system is for.

Now, God's grace is shown to us in the very fact that preachers are not called upon to devise economic systems or to say with any authority what the government should own and what should remain in the private domain, etc. But if preachers are not both willing and able to speak Christ as perspective and purpose of economics in this world which is of God, then they are not worthy of their place among men. If our text means anything at all, therefore, it means that economics in order to be viable at all must be kept in proper perspective, and, if it is not, then "crisis" (judgment) is its middle name and its failure is guaranteed.

Now, we who are Presbyterians inherit a peculiar theology of economics from the Reformers, and especially from John Calvin. John Calvin would have laughed at the person who said the church ought to stay out of social issues--or cried. And our nation was founded by men who were not unfamiliar with this perspective. They erred in many ways, but they did have down deep a sense of the reality of the sovereignty of God over all areas of our life in this world, and they tried at different times and places, and in different ways, to deal with this matter of economics in the light of their faith in God.

John Calvin, for example, felt that the economic process was the basic social service of the people, given to us in the providence of God, and that its functions ought to be as sacred and were as indispensable as the functions of a doctor or a teacher. Calvin felt that money was a gift of God whereby He made Himself known to us as a loving Father, by giving to us the means of making life livable for all people. He felt that money had a spiritual mission and that economics was simply the way a people had of organizing their productive life to provide for the common good. He felt that income should be worked for, but that it should be distributed by those who have to those who have not according to need as testimony to the compassion God has for the lives of His children. He felt that there should be a mutual communication of goods, that the rich were actually God's "ministers to the poor", and he spoke of God's sending the poor to the rich as a test of their faithful obedience. According to the Gospels, Calvin said, theft is not only the act of grabbing something that belongs to the neighbor. Theft is first of all refusing to give to our neighbor that which love ought to give him...keeping for one's self that which ought rightly to be returned to others on the part of God and according to the order of charity. And he felt that ultimately we and our systems would be judged of God, called into "crisis" by God, as to our integrity in this ministry of economics.

Now, of course, we do not think in these terms very much any more. Our economy, along with much else in this nation, has been radically secularized...the God-dimension having been dropped out...and we have lost any depth perspective that would inform our ownership and use of "all these things" with any sacramental value. And so, again, we run headlong into Christ, whose words seem to say that in any world created and sustained by God, economics must always be "in context", and we are warned that, when any system denies or disobeys that context, it is in for serious trouble from within.

This is not idealism for pious church people. It is, I believe, a truth about the nature of this universe in which we live. Jesus knew nothing of the economic problems facing us now, but He did know something about what kind of world this is and about what kind of God is in charge of it all. And His words mean in effect that no nation can take the vast resources of a continent, which God gave to all people, and use them in careless disregard of the welfare of millions of people, without in the end being punished...not so much for its sins, but by its sins. And, I think, that speaks directly to us. Still from that Galilean hillside the voice sounds which we may heed or neglect, but which ultimately we cannot escape, because it is the way and the truth and the only life that will go in this kind of universe... first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and that means peace, social justice, and a God-perspective, or else not enough to eat or to drink or to wear.

IV. So, what's the conclusion, that all businessmen should repent and do better?

No, not at all. That, perhaps, had best be left for the businessman himself to say to himself and to his processes. The conclusion of the matter for me is the failure of the Church to keep a culture alive to its foundations. Look at the indispensable social function that was handed to us as the Church. We were given the responsibility of furnishing society with its perspectives, and its aims, and its values, as a light in the darkness, a candle set on a hill, and a leaven in the lump. We were supposed to put first not our buildings and our budgets and our trite meetings and concerns but, as Jesus said, the kingdom of God and His righteousness...peace and justice and the real presence of the sovereignty of God as the only realistic perspective on life...so that children born into our civilization should feel the dominant influence of those directions and goals. Instead, we have remained silent; we have neglected the Christian education of our children and their parents; and we have settled for an acceptance of what-is without criticism or question.

Never before has this nation so needed the Church, and by that I mean a cadre of literate and committed people, dedicated to the task of infiltrating this culture with the integrity and values and perspectives that only a faith in the God who revealed Himself in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ can give. With or without the religious language, and on the part not so much of clergymen, but of laymen and women in our business community, it is the dimension of depth that our nation and its economy desperately need right now. For nothing can be well with anything, not even with what we eat or what we drink or with what we wear, unless first we seek for our common life the peace and the justice and the perspective of His kingdom and His righteousness. Then, perhaps, our text will make practical sense for us and Christ will be seen, and accepted, and adored not as dreamer, but as "God of God, Light of Light, Very God and Very God...who for us...and for our salvation, came down from heaven..." (The Nicene Creed).

"But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things shall be yours as well."

Visionary?...Or Realist?

Amen.