

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 1:2-11 and 12:13-14.

Theme: Is Life Worth Living?

Text: Ecclesiastes 12:13b -- "Fear God and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man."

Proposition: Life is worth living only if one has faith in the one, all-wise and all-loving God, the Father of Jesus Christ.

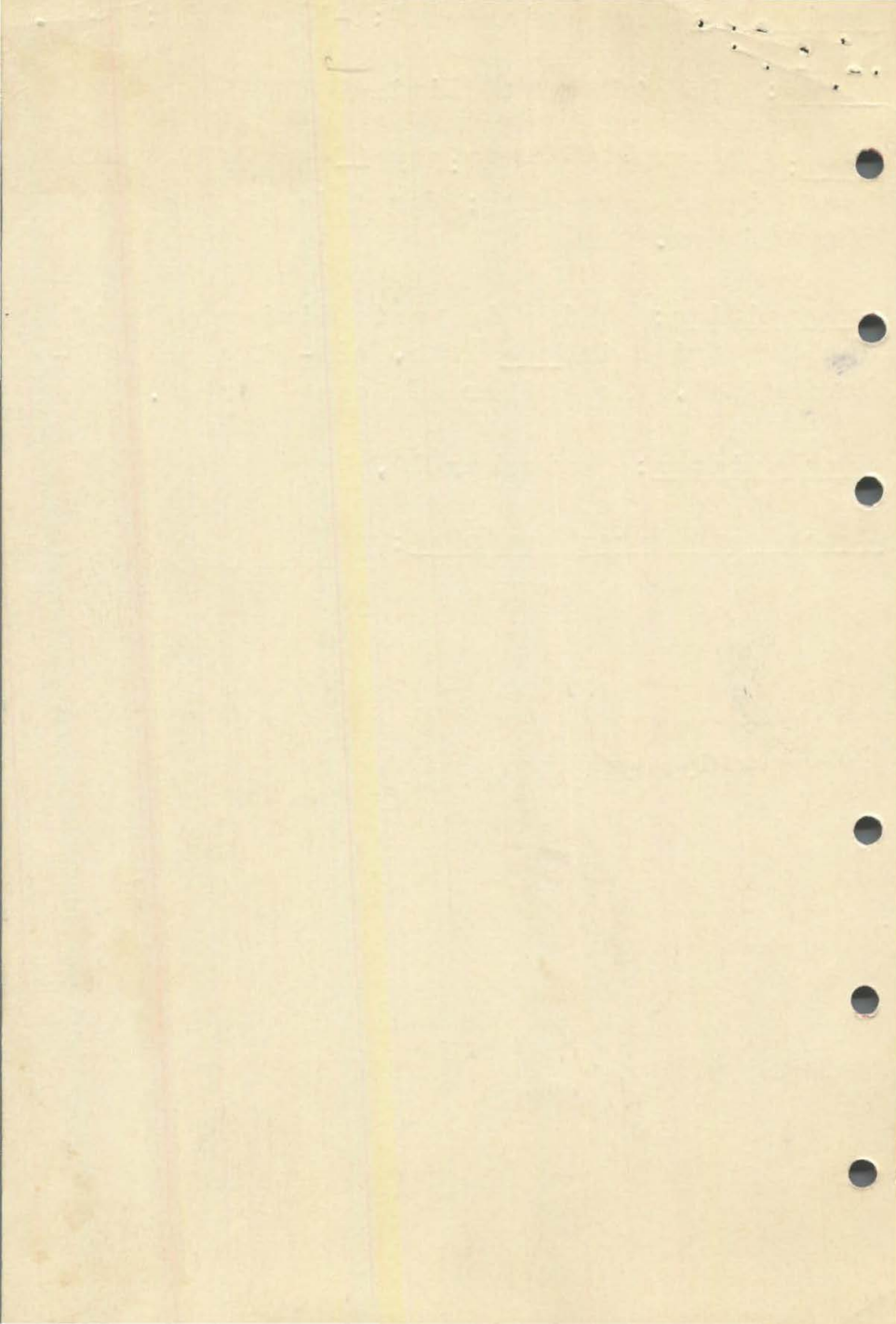
Date written: November 10, 1956

Dates and places preached:

Grace Meth., Cheyenne, Wyo., 8:15 & 11:00 a.m.
Nov. 11, 1956

Shenandoah, Wyo., Oct 9, 1960 (9:30 & 11:00)

Ballou Park, Pa. Sept. 17, 1972

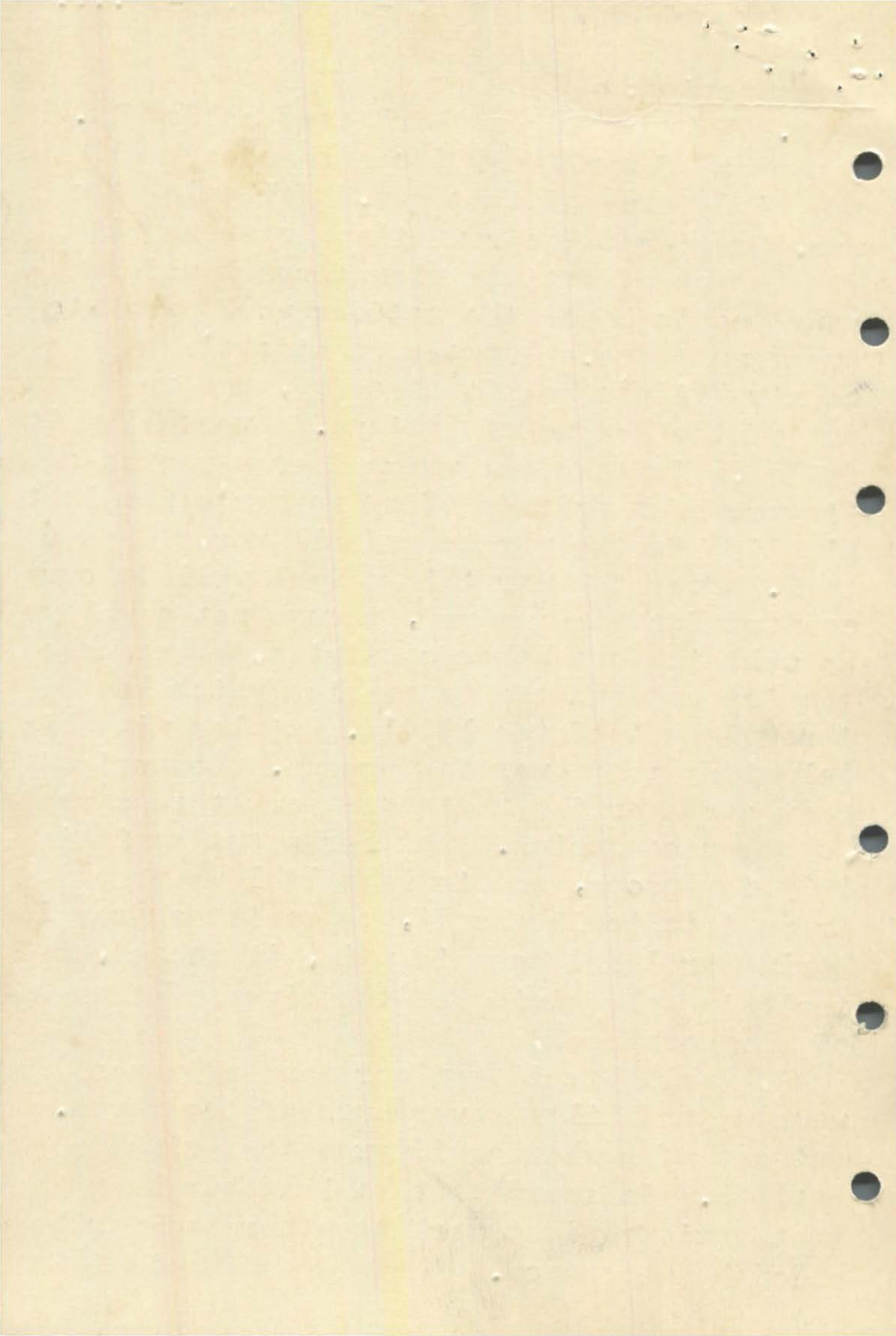


Introduction:

1. The "War to end War" they called it. Veterans of World War I can remember well the high hopes of that day. Following the war, President Woodrow Wilson came up with his League of Nations plan through which many people hoped the nations would work to preserve peace. But the president's own country didn't see it that way, and we stayed out of the League of Nations. Eventually it failed. In the home where I grew up was a picture of a brother of my mother's who lost his life in the war to end all war.

2. After the war things went well in our country for some years, though not equally as well in some other countries. Then came the "crash" and the depression which lasted through most of the 1930's. Hitler with his delusions took over in Germany. Communism grew stronger in Russia and sought to spread to other countries. War ^{broke} ~~burst~~ out again in 1939 in Europe, and in late 1941 we were drawn into World War II, to resist aggression. World War I had been in vain, it seemed, including the giving of the lives of thousand of our young men.

3. World War II saw our men and women wounded and killed over much of the world. But out of World War II grew the United Nations. It seemed that at last our hope that nations might work together and war be ended had a chance.

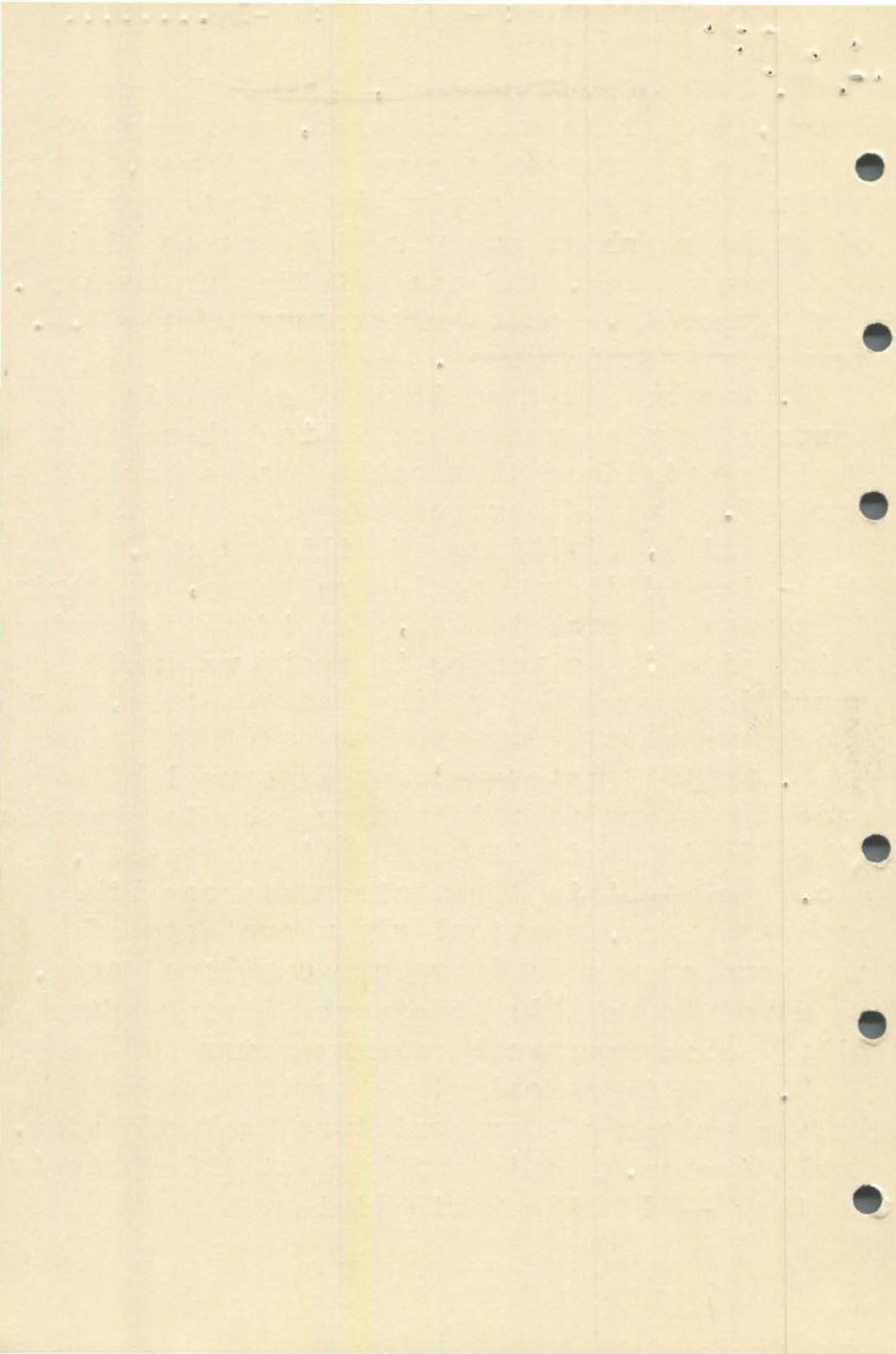


4. But ^{only} ~~soon, it seemed, though~~ 5 years later, war broke out in Korea, and many of our fine young people gave their lives, their health or years of their lives that aggression might be repelled and war at least be limited to a small area, and one outside our country. ~~The authority, power and success of the U.N. seemed proven in Korea.~~

^{VIE} 5. ~~But~~ now in the Middle East and in Central Europe events are taking place that threaten violence that could become World War III. Men of our Reserve and National Guard units, civilians of military age, and full-time military people are tense, wondering if now we go ~~back~~ ^{ANOTHER} to war, and if we do against which side?! We wonder if again we must sacrifice many of our fine young people, for who knows what? ^{WE GOVERN & NINON SOUND TOGETHER ON THIS}

6. ~~On this Veterans' Day~~ a perusal of recent history in this manner prompts questions like "Is it worth it?" "What's the use?", etc. ~~We might~~ ^{WE MIGHT} in these circumstances like repeated wars, particularly where some of the wounded and dead are our own loved ones, be moved to ask "Is life worth living after all?" ~~This is exactly the question~~

7. This is exactly the question posed by the writer of our Scripture Book of today, Ecclesiastes. Let's think about this question together -- IS life worth living?



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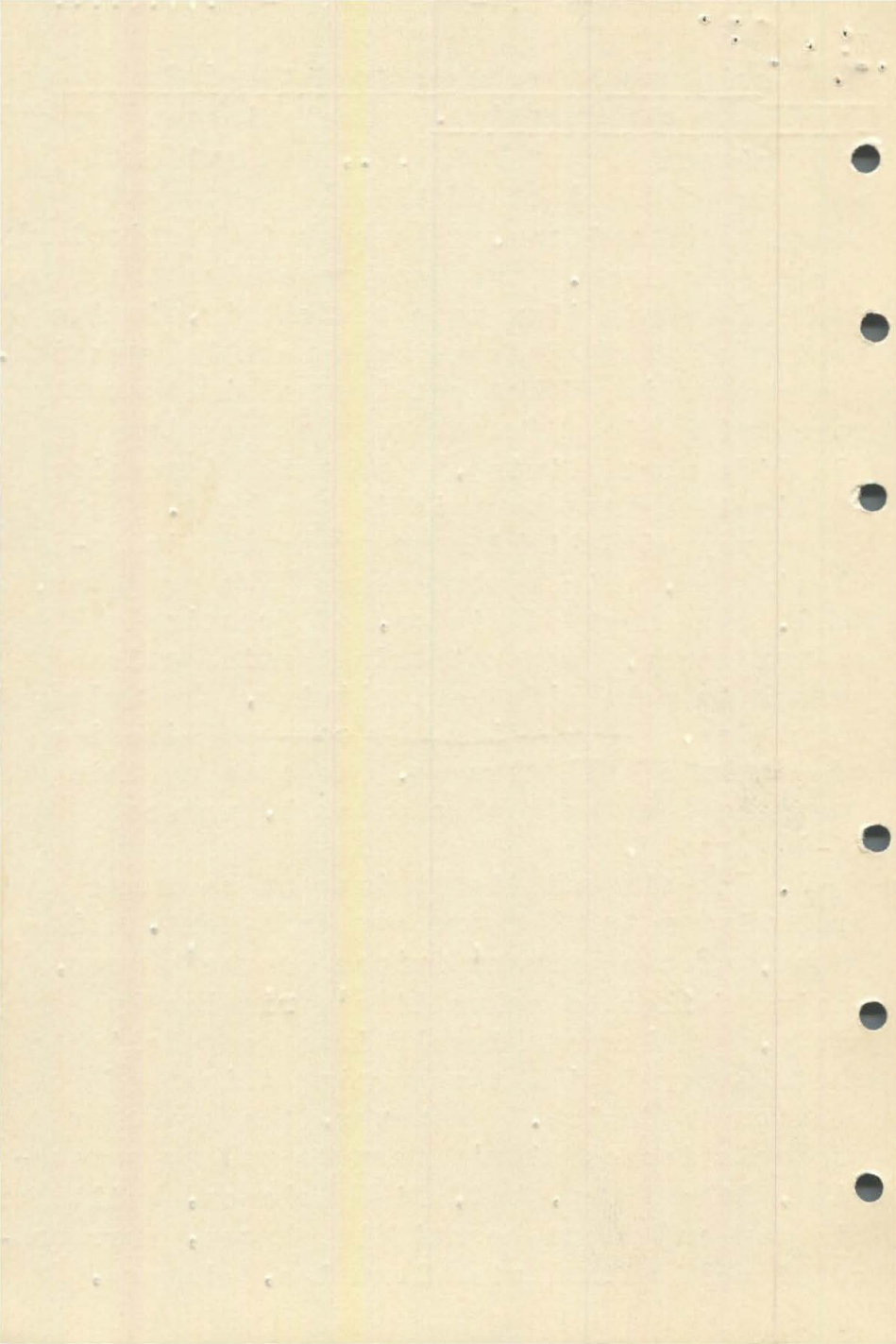
I.

The Scripture approaches to determining the answer to our question. Ecclesiastes probably

as written around 200 B.C., and evidently was one of the last of the Old Testament books to be written. The book is particularly hard to analyze. The Book resembles the Book of Job in its note of despair, in its posing of what seems an unanswerable question. The author in effect catalogues his thoughts concerning his approach to the question "Is life worth living," and ~~this~~ discussion of his thoughts about ~~it~~ is the book. Let us survey his thinking as presented in Ecclesiastes, which word means "The preacher."

1. The quest of wisdom, of practical common sense, does not bring satisfaction enough to make life worth living, the writer concludes. ~~He studies the common miseries of people of all classes.~~ He sums up this quest in the words of chapter 1, verses 15-18 (read).

2. In pain and disappointment he turns from wisdom to pleasure and enjoyment. Like Faust, of the German writer Goethe's poem, having failed to solve life's riddles by study, he plunged himself into deep delights that he may "still the burning thirst of passionate desire." However, the preacher of Ecclesiastes didn't turn to vulgar sensualism, like Faust, but, like Solomon, built for his own enjoyment beautiful palaces, surrounded himself with lavish luxuries, singers,



Ecclesiastes 1:15-18:

What is crokked cannot be made straight,

And what is lacking cannot be numbered.

I said to myself, "I have acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me; and my mind has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge." And I applied my mind to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is but a striving ~~for vexation~~ after the wind.

For in much wisdom is much vexation

And he who increases knowledge increases sorrow."

1941-1942

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servants, and everything that wealth could buy. BUT pleasure and ease brought him, as wisdom did, only pain and disappointment.

3. He next devotes himself to labor and money-making. Surely honest toil, he thinks, ought to bring satisfaction. But in this quest he is again disappointed, and for many reasons:

a. the uncertainty of having a wise successor to inherit his fortune

b. his lot in life is not of his own doing for the most part, but is in the hands of an all-powerful and arbitrary God.

c. In justice takes place in the law courts

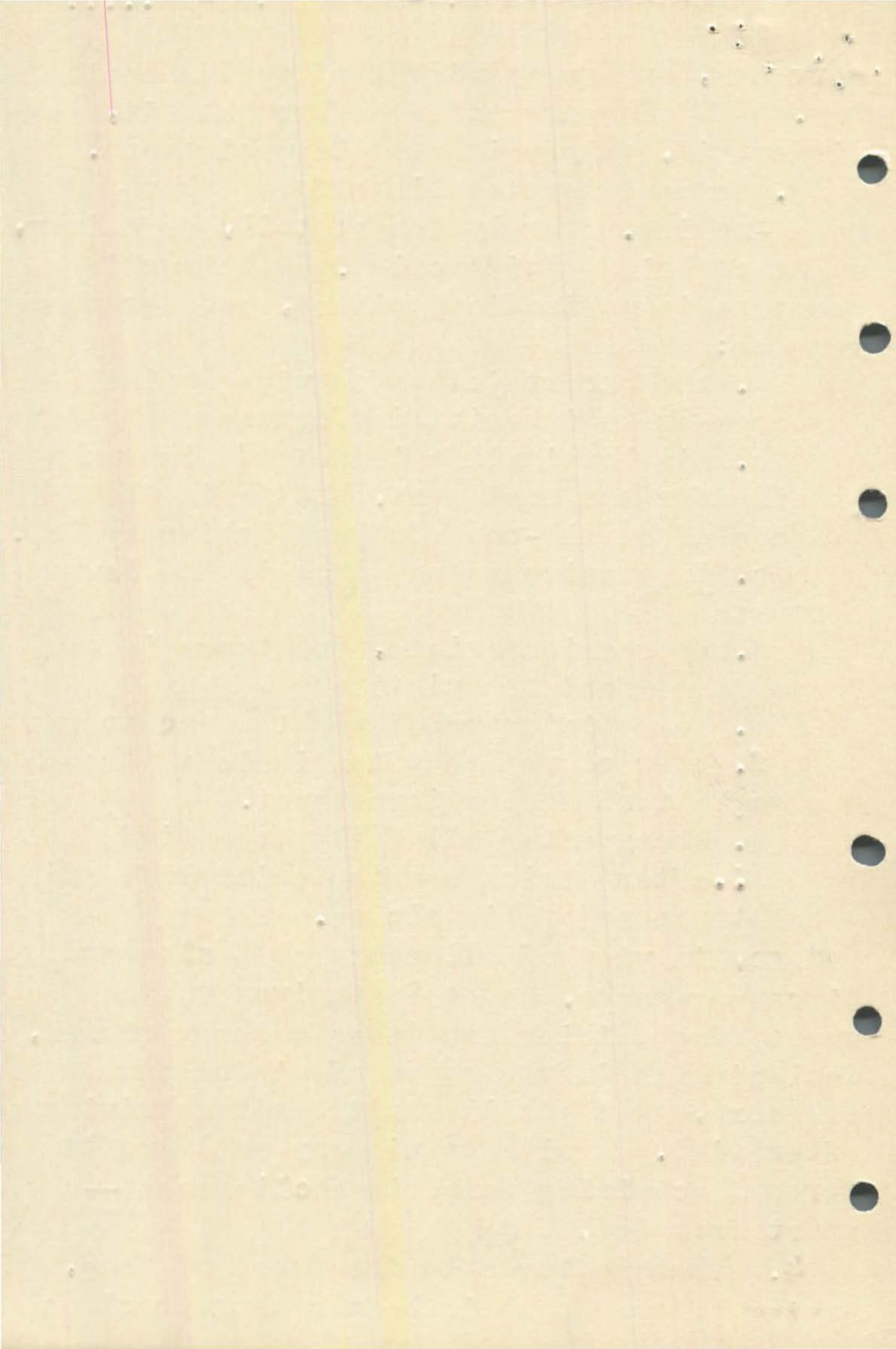
d. Oppression exists, and there is no one to comfort the victims

e. Competition makes wealth hard to get
f. hoarded wealth often is lost through speculation and bad investment.

g. money after all fails to satisfy
h. often a rich man is denied life and health to enjoy his riches.

And so, in view of all these obstacles and discouragements, he at last gives up the quest of obtaining happiness through riches, declaring as in the cases of wisdom and pleasure, that all is vanity and a striving after wind. Trying to win any real profit through acquiring money is foolishness -- (apart from God.)

4. Then he turns to the quest of fame, saying "a good name is better than precious



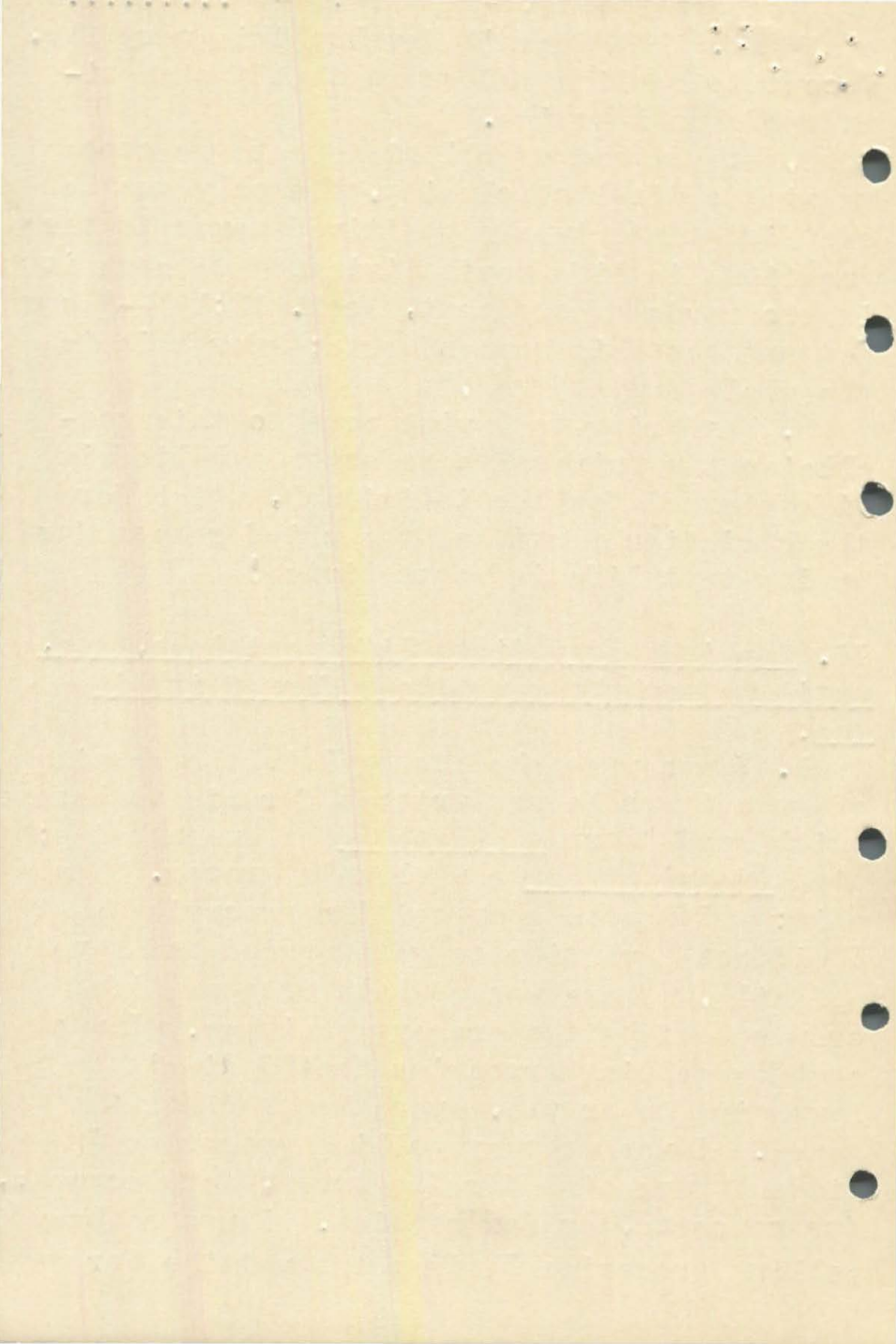
ointment." He doesn't develop this very far, except to realize and comment on the emptiness of human praise.

5. At the end of all his quests he comes up with a final conclusion, the only one he can find that gives a positive answer to the question "is life worth living?" He says it in the words of our text, Eccl. 12:13 -- "Fear God and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man."

6. Yet prior to having come to this conclusion the writer has rejected a belief in life eternal for the individual, which for the christian furnishes the chief reason for saying that life is worth living!

II. Mankind today finds life worthless, too, until he works through to a firm faith in God.

1. A man was asked to explain the meaning of an epitaph he had written for his tombstone which read "Born _____ (date) _____ a human being; died _____ (date) _____ a wholesale grocer." He said: "I was so busy selling groceries that I did not have time to get married and have a family. There was a whole area of life crowded out by the grocery business. I was so busy selling groceries that I didn't have time to travel, even though I had the money. I was so busy selling groceries I did not have time for the drama, for lectures, for concerts, or for reading. I was so busy selling groceries I did not have time for

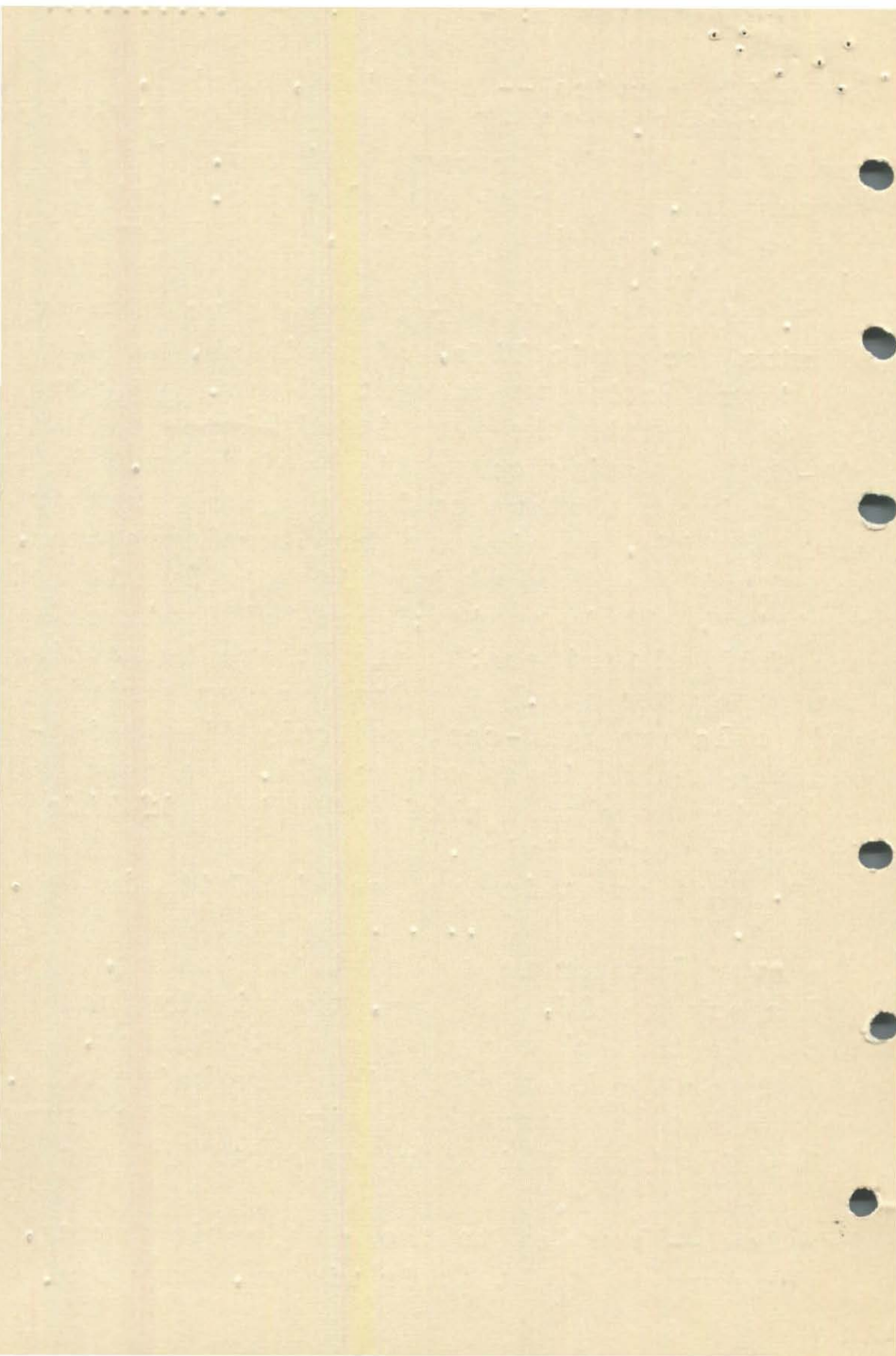


community service -- religious, social, or political. All of these areas of life were pushed out by the grocery business. I was successful. I became a wholesaler. But I was so busy, making a living, that I never had time to live."

2. With this illustration we have thought of ~~life~~ economic life, of business, and in our introduction we thought of war. We seem to find that in the pursuit of ^{ANY OF THESE} either as an all-out objective comes disappointment. I am convinced that we could take many another area of life, as did our Scriptural preacher, and finally end up saying with him "vanity of vanities, all is vanity;" and "all things are full of ~~wariness~~;" and "there is nothing new under the sun." As long as our striving and goals are self-centered, only disappointment and unhappiness can result. We need something more than ~~plea~~ and things, if life is to be worth living.

3. That something we need is faith in God.
a. GOD AND MAN ..S.A. Nagel

Whenever I am prone to doubt and wonder,
I check myself, and say, the mighty One
Who made the solar system cannot blunder,
And for the best all things are being done.
He who set the stars on their eternal courses
Has fashioned this strange earth by some
sure plan.
Bow low -- bow low to those majestic forces,
Nor dare to doubt their wisdom, puny man.

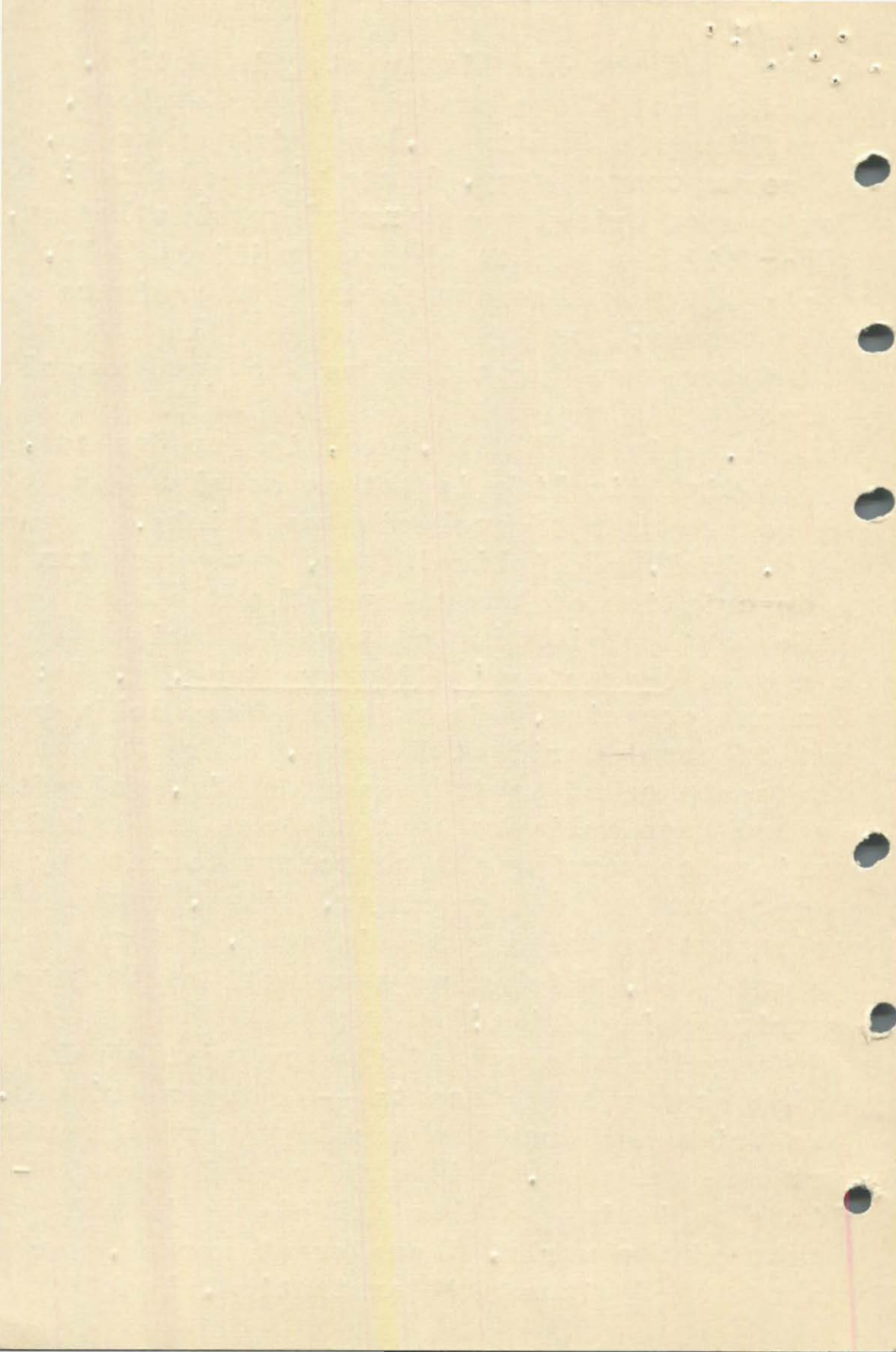


You cannot put one little star in motion,
You cannot shape one single forest leaf,
Nor fling a mountain up, nor sink an ocean,
Presumptuous pygmy, large with unbelief!
You cannot bring one dawn of regal splendor,
Nor bid the day to shadowy twilight fall,
Nor send the pale moon forth with radiance
tender;
And dare you doubt the One who has done all!

b. This GREAT ONE, God, is our God too,
and with Him life is not as hopeless as
the preacher of Ecclesiastes thinks.

4. Paul, of Biblical fame, gave once ~~the~~
a description of the change of outlook on
life that a faith in God through Christ
can make (Macartney's Illustrations, p.55):
On one occasion, after he had been delivered
out of great peril at Ephesus, where he had
the sentence of death passed on him, and after
he had been delivered out of deep and painful
anxiety concerning the church at Corinth by
the return of his messenger, Titus, Paul
cried out in the joy of his soul, "Thanks
be unto God, which always causeth us to have
a triumph in Christ!"

There he made use of the greatest of all
Roman scenes and pageants -- a Roman triumph.
The triumphal arch was the last word in Roman
art and splendor. With their sculptured reliefs
depicting battles and sieges in all
parts of the world, these great arches, such
as those of Titus and Constantine, look

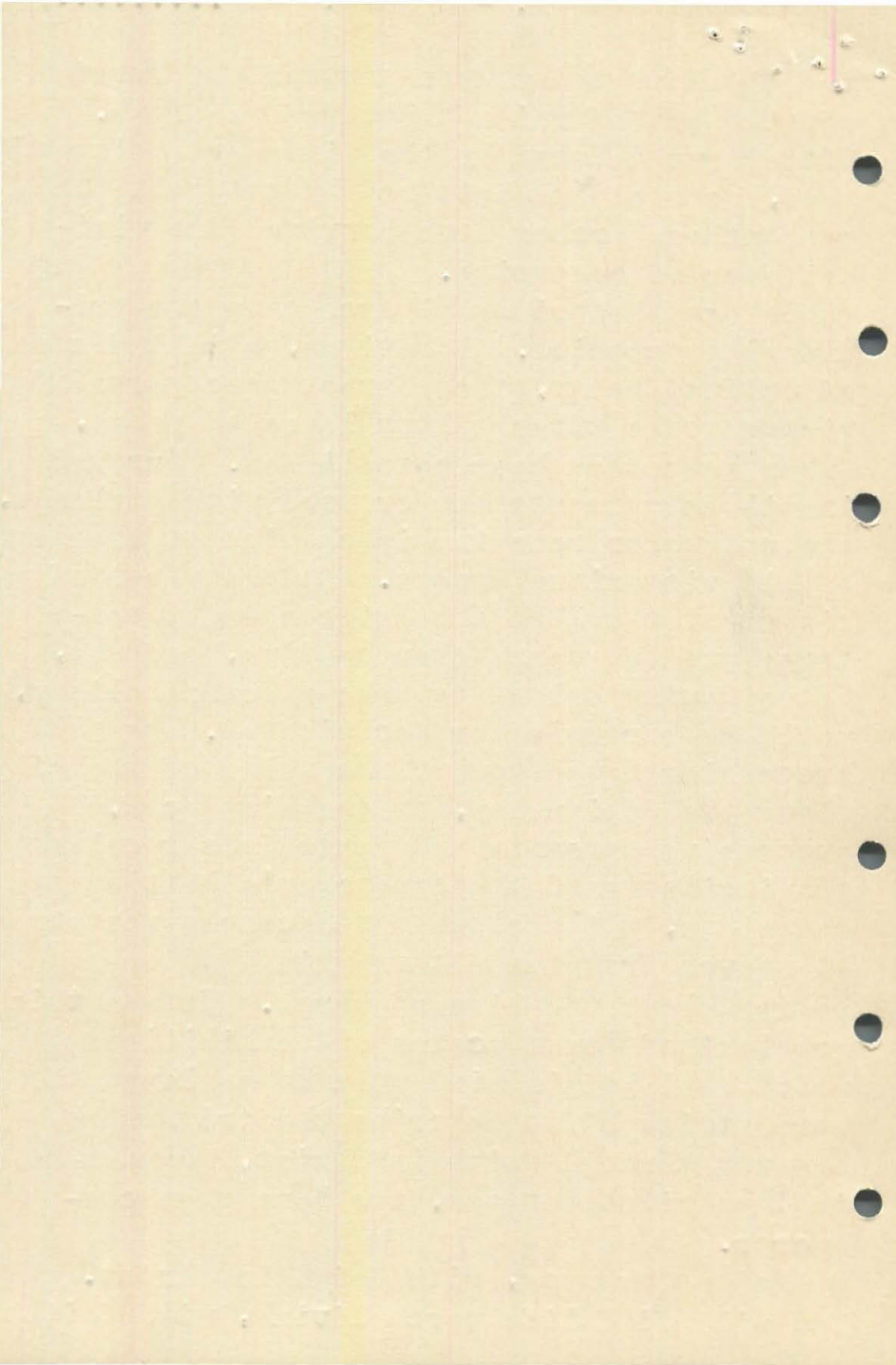


grandly down today upon the heap of rubbish and the sea of ruins that once was Rome.

Bitten and defaced by the winds and rains of ages, scarred and battered by catapult and cannon these arches have survived the vicissitudes of centuries.

" Before the triumphal arch came the triumphal procession. Sometimes, as in the case of Julius Caesar, these great spectacles of victory came after a long lapse of years, when peace had been established. Arrayed in silken garments and crowned with garlands, the conqueror rode in his chariot at the head of his victorious troops. At the wheel of his chariot walked the princes and potentates who had been taken captive, and who, after having helped to make a Roman holiday, would be strangled or decapitated. As the procession moved toward the walls of the city along the Appian Way, or the Via Sacra, successive pageants and pantomimes recalled the incidents of the conqueror's battles and campaigns, while clouds of incense went up to heaven from the altars which had been reared along the line of march. It was this greatest of Roman scenes and exhibitions which Paul had in mind when he employed the word "triumph" to describe the triumph he had won through faith in Christ. Always he is the triumphant man, the more than conqueror."

And so are you, with faith in Christ. You will find life worth living, with faith



in Him.

Conclusion:

1. Life is worth living, but ^{dependably so} only of ~~one~~ ^{one} who has faith in the One, all-wise, and all-lovin' God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

2. With the preacher, in the words of our text we can say "Fear God and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man."

3. Won't you publicly profess your faith, and begin now to prove, with others, that life is worth living?

