

Scrip: III John.....
Text: III John 2b -- "I know that it
is well with your soul."

Theme: It is Well with Your Soul.

Proposition: A strong faith in Christ's
resurrection gives the basis for a happy
life now and a removal of the fear of
death, enabling it to be said, "It is
well with your soul."

Date written: April 20, 1957.

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Places and dates preached:

April 21, 57 - 8:15 & 11:00 a.m.
Grace Church, Cheyenne, Wyo.

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Introduction:

1. Life magazine some years ago carried a series of pictures which the caption writers said showed that people are a worried lot. Old folks and young, men and women, boys and girls; waiting for bus, train or traffic light; sitting at desk, standing at factory machine or purchasing from a store counter; all the pictures indicated a worry, an unsureness a ~~soleing~~ and rather dim view of things.

2. In contrast, consider a young man who was hitchhiking through the country, trying after an Easter vacation to get back to his college, during the days when few students had cars or travel money. He ~~thumbed~~ unsuccessfully in a small town for some hours. Then, tired and with only about 50¢ in his pockets, he walked into one of the village's general stores to get a bottle of milk and perhaps a nickel cake or package of crackers for his lunch. The contrast of bright outside light and the dark interior of the store was blinding, so he stood still, just inside the store entrance, until his eyes could adjust to the darker light inside. As he stood there a clerk's voice spoke up from behind the counter to his left and said to him, "You must be a preacher, or at least a mighty happy Christian." The young man wanted to know

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what made the clerk say this. "The way you smile and don't look worried," came the answer.

3. The contrast between the people of Life's picture article~~x~~ on America's worried folks and the college student of our illustration is a contrast which illustrates a difference between folks who are too concerned with minor things and those whose chief approach to life is guided by the inward certainty of the Christian faith. The approach to life from great concern over minor things ~~xx~~ causes worry, grim faces, and uncertainties. An approach to life based on the truths of Christian faith provides a basis for cheer, hope, and bright faces. We would apply this theme here particularly to the Easter fact, for it is the central and strong fact in the Christian faith that Jesus arose. A strong faith in Christ's resurrection gives the basis for a happy life now, or as happy one as can be known under particular circumstances, and a removal of the fear of death, enabling it to be said of the believer, "It is well with your soul."

I. Our Scripture brings us the idea that faith in the risen Christ includes worthwhile life now and a removal of the fear of death.

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1. III John is one of the three books near the end of the New Testament which bears the name of John, and which were written possibly between 75 and 100 a.d. They were written by a man about whom we know very little, but who probably was named John, though called "the elder" within the books. III John is a personal letter of "the Elder" to his beloved friend Gaius, whom he greets warmly and congratulates for his well-known hospitality, after referring to his spiritual progress. We are given, in verses 5-8, a glimpse of early church practice. Not only apostles, but ordinary church brethren as well, travelled from church to church, receiving hospitality as they went from church to church. Gaius is commended for the faithful way in which he offered hospitality to such visitors even when the brethren were strangers to him. Such brethren appear to be on the move again, as he writes, and Gaius is urged to help them when they come to him, for they are refusing to receive help from pagans. There is therefore an obligation on Christians to give them necessary aid, by which the givers become "fellow workers in the truth." But, III John goes on, all men do not respect their Christian duty, and Diotrephes, who seems to have held a

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position of some authority, is singled out for mention. This man had resisted the writer of the letter, suppressing one of his letters, ignoring his teachings, and refusing to have anything to do with the other Brethren. He was ambitious for power. The writer urges Gaius not to follow such bad examples and adds "he who does good is of God; but he who does evil has not seen God." He then commends a person named Demetrius. The letter ends with the hope that soon he will see face to face the ones to whom he writes.

2. Part of the words of the second verse of this 15-verse Bible Book of III John give us our thought for today, a thought true to the total message of both III John and of Easter Day. The words are "I know that it is well with your soul," and these words are our text. The writer knew it was well with the soul of Gaius because Gaius based his daily conduct and his outlook on the future on his faith in the risen Christ.

3. The Easter Day message for us, too, is that "it is well with your soul," well with you and me, when we place our faith as did Gaius to whom III John was written on the risen Christ. As Emil Brunner, European theologian of today, has pointed out, the fact of the resurrection is the historical fact upon which Christian

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base both the love which they practice now and the hope of eternal life.

4. We believe, indeed, that the empty tomb tells us that He ~~has~~ gone ahead to prepare a place for us. That place is not one to which we can earn our way, but one which we accept by simple trust in God's love and forgiveness. We can not describe it, but we believe eternity to be a place in the knowledge of (where we know) God, a place of justice and beauty, joy and peace. The good that we do now we do because we love God and are grateful to Him for His promise to us of this eternity, not because our goodness buys our way into that heaven. Jesus Christ, whom last Sunday we called God Incarnate, in the flesh, demonstrated conclusively for the Christian that death is not the end, but a gateway into eternal life with God.

5. It is well with your soul, as with ~~that~~ of Gaius of our Scripture, ~~when~~ you do good, live cheerfully, and don't fear death because you believe you will live eternally. Your soul is the real you, that which leaves ~~this~~ mold of minerals we call a body at the time of death. The Easter faith brings well-being to you, to your soul

II. A modern, popular book, illustrates

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our theme for us.

1. At a WAFB chapel one day I noticed in the literature racks a leaflet entitled Bridey Murphy and the Christian Faith. I picked it up, read it, and decided it might be of help in illustrating our central theme of Christianity, as we are here doing.

As you perhaps remember, Bridey Murphy is the name, supposedly of an Irish woman who lived in Ireland from 1802 for a normal life span. The reason we know about her is because she was inhabiting the body, supposedly, of a Pueblo, Colo. housewife in 1952. At least, the amateur hypnotist who wrote a best-seller book seemed to believe that was true, in the book he wrote about it. By questioning the modern young woman, and thus while she was hypnotised forcing her attention beyond her birth, he gathered a lot of information from her, which he gathered together to make the book, called The Search for Bridey Murphy. The theory of personality which comes out of this book is that each of us here in this life was once incarnated ~~or~~ in another body, in other lands or places; that we live both before and after this life, and that our souls, our selves, our real beings, live ~~over~~ and over ~~again~~ in different forms.

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2. When the Bridey Murphy story was written up in one of the Denver paper's Sunday supplement, the youth of the church in which I was then serving asked me what I thought about it. I told them I was very interested in it, and surely wouldn't say it was a fake or a fraud; although research in Ireland into the real, historical Bridey Murphy, has shown that many important details of her life were falsely given by the hypnosis subject in Pueblo. I thought that perhaps some sort of thought-wave transference, of extra-sensory perception, such as psychologists like Dr. J. B. Rhine of Duke University have studied for 30 or more years, would more nearly serve as the explanation of the Pueblo experience; that Bridey's thoughts had been partly caught by the housewife in Colorado, and that this was a much more satisfactory explanation than that of reincarnation. I still do.

But, I went on, the theory of reincarnation, which was drawn from the book is not new. It is the basic one of the Hindu religion. The main thing wrong with this theory, I told them, is that it undermines much motive for goodness in this life, or for much effort in this life; and, also, it is entirely opposite and contrary to the

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Christian insistence that this life counts and must be used to the very best account, as our only chance of preparation for the future. If one gets several more shots at living, why worry about this life? A mistake or two don't matter too much, even a wilful sin, for an eternity of lives stretches ahead to make it up, when things get too bad. Christian concepts of God's judgment and mercy on a once-for-all basis, of a heavenly home; and other Christian articles of faith that give life meaning become useless if you accept the Bridey Murphy idea.

3. The leaflet Bridey Murphy and the Christian Faith, gives other important thoughts which show the unattractive, illogical and unchristian thinking of a theory of repeated incarnations, and also point out why the Christian belief in one life and one eternity is so important. The method of the leaflets is to ask three questions, which we would do well to consider here:

a. Does this belief in immortality make me less of a person, less useful in this world of here and now? The difficulty with dabbling in the occult, trying to contact the spirit world or find out your former birth, if there was one, is that it makes you other-

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worldly. You spend all your time on what you feel is the "spiritual world" so that you neglect your duties and work in this ~~world~~ physical, bodily, material, historical world right around you. The trouble with reincarnation is that you are apt to look at your body as unreal, not part of you. You tend to say: "After all, I am a spirit. I've inhabited many bodies and this one is just another house to inhabit in my longer journey. I'll soon get rid of it for another." So, like many oriental religions, you withdraw from the bodily and the physical into other-worldliness.

What has always been amazing about early Christianity is that it resisted other-worldliness. True, the church preached the Resurrection of Jesus, as we are doing today. The Church was certainly concerned with the end of the world and the age. But the Church never retreated from the world, never quite became a mystery religion practiced in secret by some spiritualist society. As a certain point, it always resisted what you and I would call other-worldliness. The very first books of the New Testament to be written are the two letters of Paul to the Thessalonians, written about

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20 years after Christ's death. And with what are they concerned? People who are getting other-worldly, people who are neglecting their work, their bodies, their human duties to others, all in the name of Christianity..

They've gotten religion. Ordinary life is now an illusion, a shell. And Paul's advice is very down to earth:

"Any man that will not work, let him not eat." That's the way early Christianity with all its belief in immortality handled the other-worldly. This was its heritage from Judaism. The ancient Jew never separated body from spirit. So, even today, Christianity warns us: **"Beware** of any theory of immortality that neglects the mortal, the material, the here-and-now."

b. A second question, asked in the leaflet, and the answer to which we largely quote, is "Is this **theory** (reincarnation) of immortality interested in life or life-with-God?" This is the distinction between "everlasting" and "eternal" life in the New Testament. Notice, for instance, how Bridget Murphy describes her life after her death in Ireland, her life before she was reincarnated in Colorado in 1923. She says it was a "kind of limbo in which she felt no pain or any

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great happiness." This is interesting because if you have ever been to a spiritualist seance you know that the spirit voice usually says something like this: "Don't worry, dear about me. Mother is all right. It's all peaceful and quiet here." You see what you get in a lot of occult religions, from the Greek religions with their heroes in Hades clear down to Bridey Murphy, is the picture of the future life as a washed-out-existence, an existence in which there is no pain, no great happiness, but just a peaceful, biological continuation of time.

At this point the Christian faith disagrees with Bridey Murphy. Christianity is concerned about life-with-God and not just life. It's concerned about eternal life, something qualitative, not everlasting life, just going on, one life after another, one body after another. To the Christian the thought of just living forever is intolerable. The Marine sergeant who led his men into battle shouting "Come on, boys, who wants to live forever?" was right. Who DOES want to live forever, just to live? The Indian religions, Hinduism and its cousins, cry out "Save us from the

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is actually a God of impersonal moral justice rather than of love or forgiveness. You get what you deserve and you get it not only in this life but in all your future living. Born now in one type of person, if you are good in this life, you will be in a higher bracket in the next; or if not so good you may sink lower, into another caste, or even to an animal. In any case, you achieve your future state by your present moral goodness or evil. God is simply the judge who makes the "punishment fit the crime." He is justice without mercy. He is law without love. He condemns you to live forever and then to live according to what you deserve.

If the Christian Gospel is anything, it is that God is not that sort of God. His love is greater than we deserve. His mercy is round about us like the sea. We don't achieve the future life; he gives it to us. We don't earn immortality; we receive it. And at death we stand before Him not as prisoners brought ~~before~~ into the docket of a high court, awaiting sentence, but as children coming home to our Father's house.

Conclusion:

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chain of life," and no wonder. The early Greeks had their myth of the man condemned to live forever. Of course, this is the mistake of Bridey Murphy, for if the theory the book about her, and which other spiritualists advance, is correct, all you'll be in the hereafter is a washed-out twittering ghost no pain, no happiness, no personality. But the Christian Gospel is life-with-God, eternal life, the fullness of life, not less a person but more a person, not quantity of life, but quality of life. The trouble with reincarnation, with many theories of immortality, is that they think of biological life, something going on forever. Christianity's only interest in the future life is in terms of eternal life, life with God.

b. The third question of our leaflet, the answer to which we also use to a large degree here, is What is the nature of that God of Christianity? Belief in immortality is always dependent upon your belief in God. Your belief in God is primary, not secondary. So, Christians believe in the future life because and only because God is the source of God he is, a God of love, wisdom, and infinite goodness.

The God of any theory of ~~reincarnation~~

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1. III John tells us that "it is well with your soul" when you place your faith in the resurrected Christ.

2. The modern Bridey Murphy story illustrates for us the unattractiveness, grimness, and hopelessness of a life unending, such as a theory of re-incarnation like some religions hold.

3. The Easter faith of Christianity should tell us that "He is Risen," and we too shall therefore rise from death to live an attractive, happy and glorious life in God's presence. No longer need we fear death, or the life after death.

4. The reaction to this faith in daily living is one of happiness, of love and service to God and others in gratitude for the resurrection and its message.

5. We must conclude that a strong faith in Christ's resurrection gives the basis for a happy life now and a removal of the fear of death, enabling it to be said confidently with the writer of III John "It is well with your soul."

5. Our faith in the life eternal on Easter Day and always can let us say ~~it~~ with ~~Phillip~~ Bliss, the hymn writer:

"When peace like a river attendeth my way
When sorrows like sea billows roll,
Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to
say: "It is Well, it is well, with
my soul."

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