

1
Scripture: Mark 15:29-34.

Text: Mark 15:34 b -- "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Theme: That forsaken Feeling.
(or "The Fourth Word from the Cross")

Proposition: That forsaken feeling, or periods of despair, often immediately precede the most successful and glorious experiences.

Date written: March 27, 1959.

Dates and places preached:

March 27, 1959, Community School Friday
service, Congregational Church,
Sheridan, Wyo.

Oct 7, 1962 - Montrose, Colo., W. Wide Communion

April 8, 1965 - Buella, Colo.

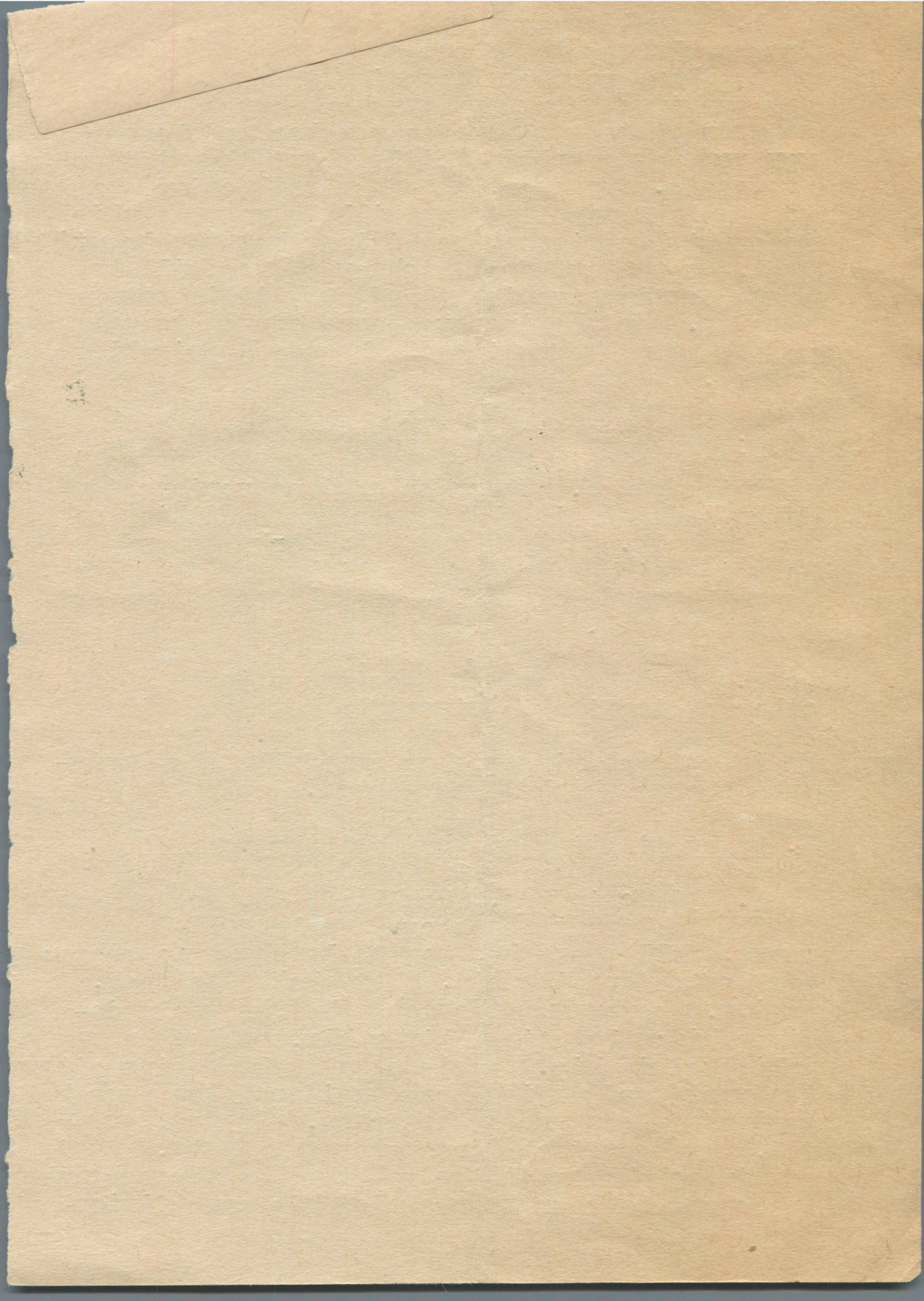
1. Traveling across country these days one frequently has to detour or wait a while at spots where road construction is going on. If you are in a hurry and thus are caused either to stop or to go around a rougher and longer way you may complain acidly about the state of the roads. However, the more reflective a person you are the more apt you will be to take this delay with patience, realizing that the beautiful fast, convenient dual-highway system will be worth any inconvenience and cost it is now causing. In the inconvenience of the moment can be seen the making of the more desirable future.

2. The Scripture which we have read ~~as containing Christ's fourth word from the cross~~ is of this nature. It tells of inconvenience and delay and despair which precedes something of great worth. It tells of the darkness and despair which precedes the light and the glory. It tells of a mood which goes before a success and a triumph.

3. To understand the Scripture in this and either of its implications for both the time of Christ and for now is our purpose. To do so we begin by examining rather carefully the Scripture verses which we have read.

I. An examination of the Scripture.

1. This Scripture, Mark 15:29-34, echoes words of Old Testament prophecy. Psalm 22:7-8 reads, "all they that see me laugh me to scorn; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted the Lord that he would deliver him; let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him." This same Psalm begins with the very words which are considered the fourth saying of Jesus upon the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (22:1). It is not improbable that the mob that had brought the pressures to bear that caused his crucifixion



3
Mark 15:29-34

had followed the procession to Calvary and taunted Jesus in words of derision familiar to them from their ^{own} Scripture to both them and to Jesus.

2. Mark 15:33, the fifth verse of our Scripture here, "and when the sixth hour was come there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour." The sixth hour would be noon, to the gospel writer.

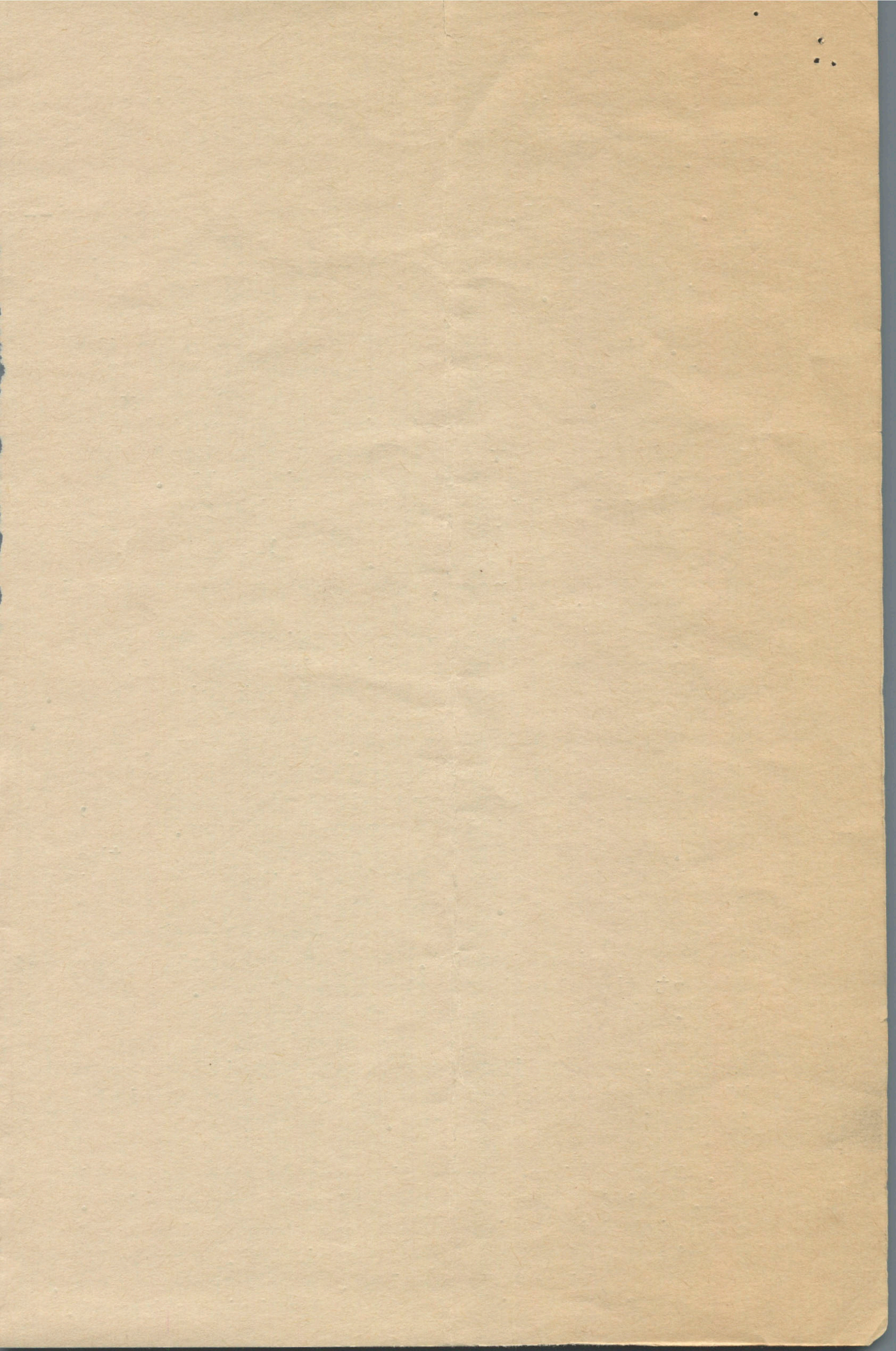
a. The three hours of darkness over the whole land are also reminiscent of the Old Testament. In the 8th chapter of Amos~~x~~ the prophet tells of God's intended punishment on Judgment Day~~x~~ on those of the land who trample the needy and act pridefully. Among the terrible things that shall happen to them is the one put in these words, "And on that day," says the Lord God, "I will make the sun go down at ~~noon~~, and darken the earth in broad daylight."

b. In the prophecy of Isaiah chapter 60 follows a section in which is recorded the prophets' confession of national wickedness. Chapter 60 tells of the future glory of Zion. The words of verse 2 are, "For behold, darkness shall cover the earth and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will rise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you."

c. To the writer of Mark the day of ~~the~~ death of the Son of God was like the terrible day of judgment. Portents at the death of great men and heroes were commonly reported in the ancient world, and were surely appropriate ~~at~~ the death of the Son of God.

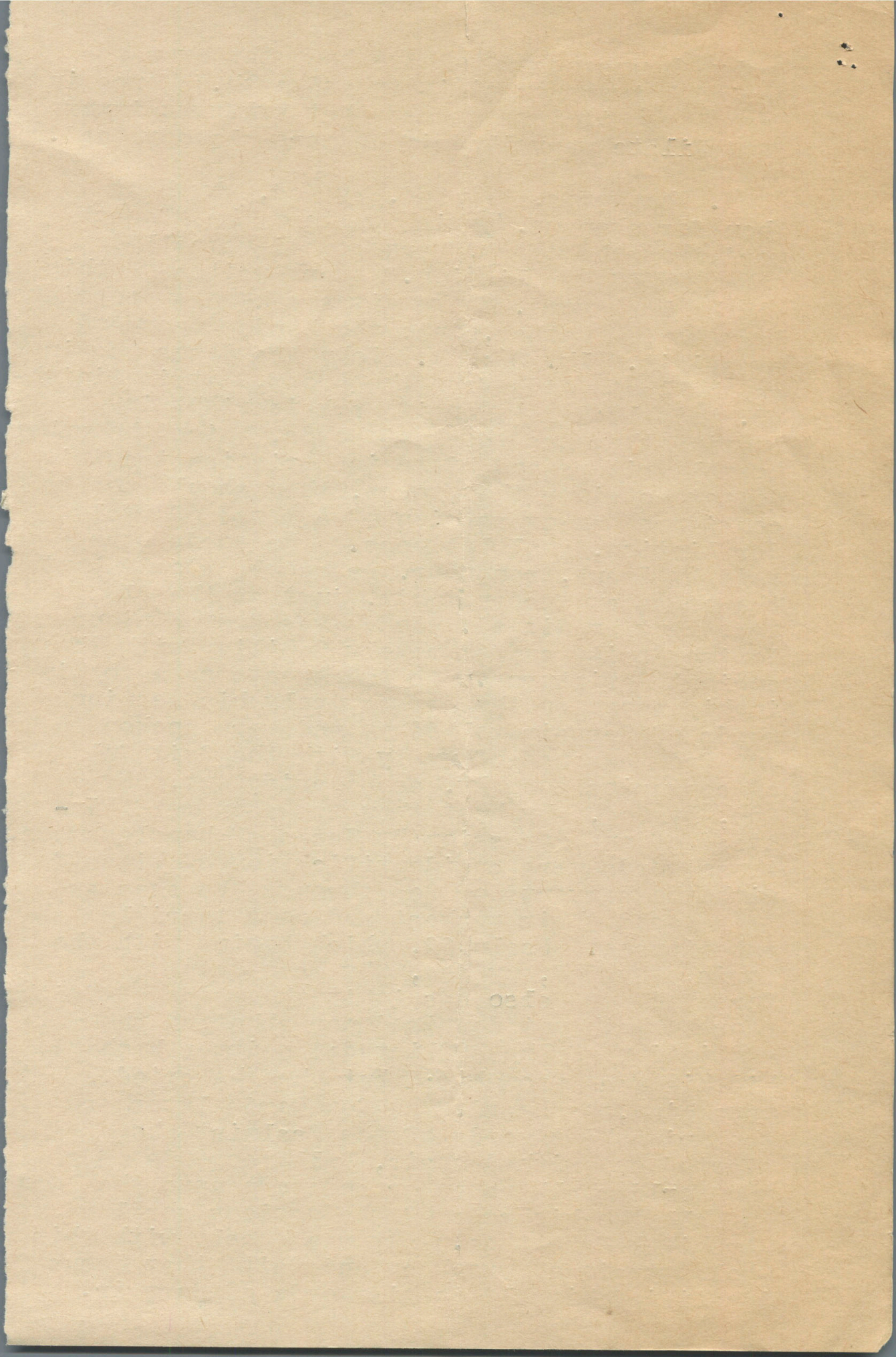
d. The three hours of darkness are the basis of our three-hour services on Good Friday, reminding us of the terribleness and blackness that comes upon men when Christ is denied and cast out.

3. Jesus lived upon the cross for only six hours, which was a comparatively short time. The Jewish historian Josephus found three of his friends who had been crucified, several days after the fall of Jerusalem, and rescued them, but two of them died in the physicians hands.



Twelve hours seems to have been the average period between crucifixion and death. Hence in Mark 15:44 it is recorded that ~~Pilate~~ ~~and Pilate~~ "and Pilate marvelled if he were already dead."

4. The words, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me," which we term the "fourth word from the cross," are sometimes called "the cry of dereliction." Mark writes of this as the last word. Luke gives a more appropriate last word, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." (Lk. 26:46). John has Jesus saying as the last words from the cross, "It is finished." (Jn 19:30) Even if Mark is right in putting these as the last words, which the other Gospel writers and historic Christian tradition do not consider them to be, they should not be considered an expression of a sense of real dereliction, real lostness. The words were said by Jesus, remember, as people stood about the cross and scorned him, just as the Old Testament predicted. Jesus was from a pious Jewish family and extremely familiar with the ancient Scriptures. As the taunts came to him in his agony on the cross surely his seeming words of despair welled up and were spoken out from a sense of unity with the faithful of centuries gone by, as he cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Instead of an expression by Jesus of hopelessness, these words were an identification of himself with the servants of God through the ages as they faced their weakest and most terrible experiences. Psalm 22, which begins with the words, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" also has in it the words of faith, "For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard." A few words later are the triumphant words of the Psalmist who started out with despair, "All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee." It was surely with this whole strain of prophecy and faith that Jesus identified himself in his words of despair.



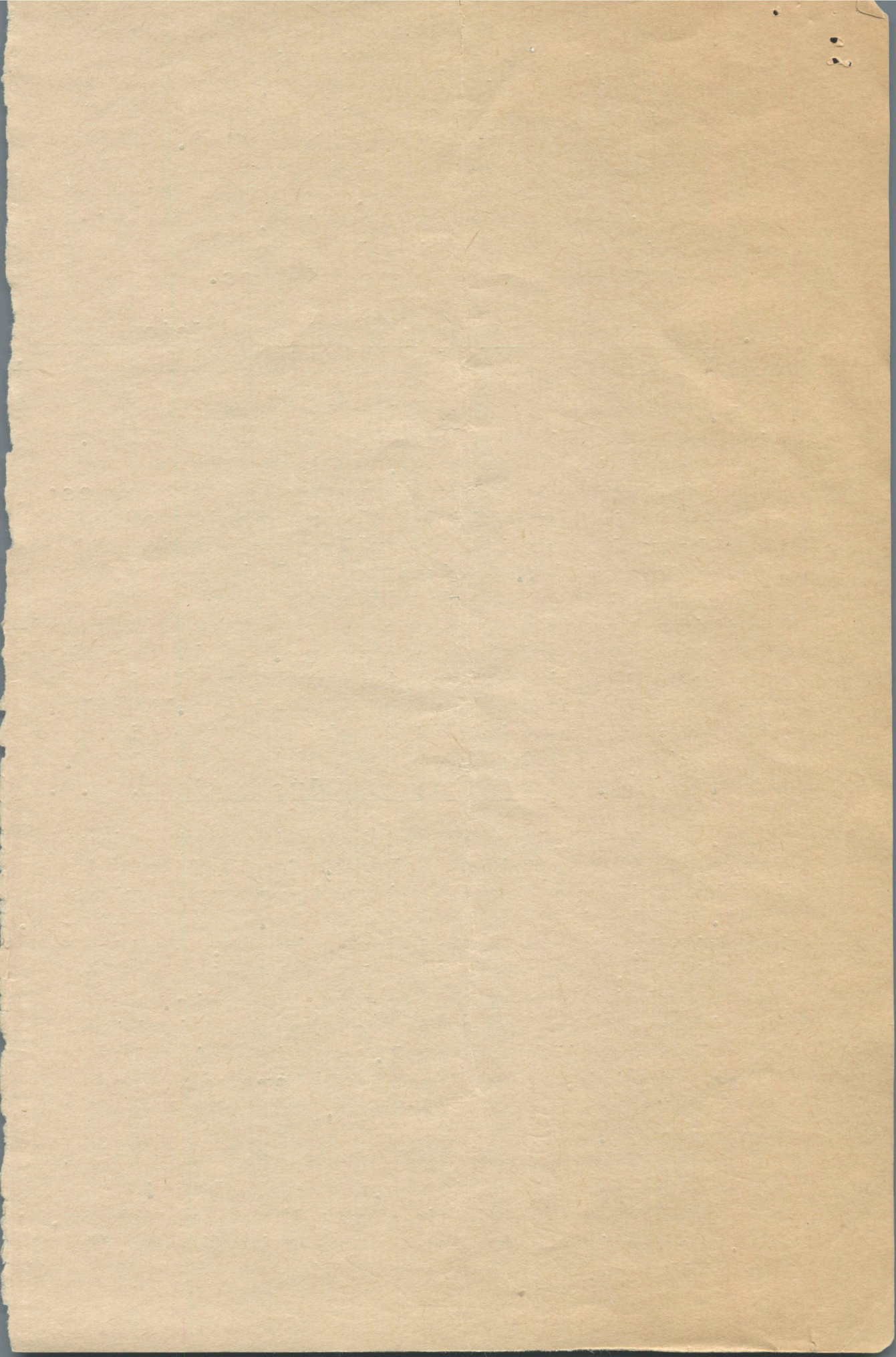
5
5. These bits of knowledge about Jesus as related to his people, to his times, and to the sacred writings which he revered, help us to arrive at the probable meaning of the so-called fourth (or last?) word from the cross. They help us see the meaning which Jesus probably intended the words to have, and they point out to us an important truth of life, that periods of despair often immediately precede the most successful and glorious experiences.

II. Experiences from (recent) history demonstrate how the forsaken feeling often precedes success.

1. President Grover Cleveland was seriously sick and experienced surgery in August 1893. He wrote of this experience, "I have learned how weak the strongest man is under God's decrees; and I see in a new light the necessity of doing my allotted work in the full apprehension of the coming night." Thus to be laid aside for a season from our task not only teaches us humility but makes us more earnest and industrious when strength returns to us. This was the verdict of David after his trouble: "It is good for me that I have been afflicted (Ps.119:71). This was the verdict of Hezekiah after his near approach to death; "By these things men live." (Isa.38:16). ((MaCartney's Illustrations, p.9.))

2. In Jerusalem today there is an institution known as the American Colony, founded to help little children in the city where our Saviour died. This is how it came to be. A well-to-do, beautiful, and talented young woman, resident in Chicago, was crossing the Atlantic on her way to visit her aged parents in Paris. On the journey the steamer was struck amidships by a large sailing vessel, and immediately began to sink. The four daughters who were with this woman were drowned, but she herself was rescued.

When she reached land she sent a cable back to her husband in Chicago, "Saved alone!" Then she began to think about the word "alone,"; and, accepting her great sorrow in the death of her children, and her own deliverance from death,



16,
as a divine message, she resolved to give her life to the welfare of her fellow passengers on life's long voyage, and so established in Jerusalem the Colony, which has brought the knowledge and the spirit of Christ to so many of the children and youth of the Holy City. ((MaCartney's Illustrations, p. 10))

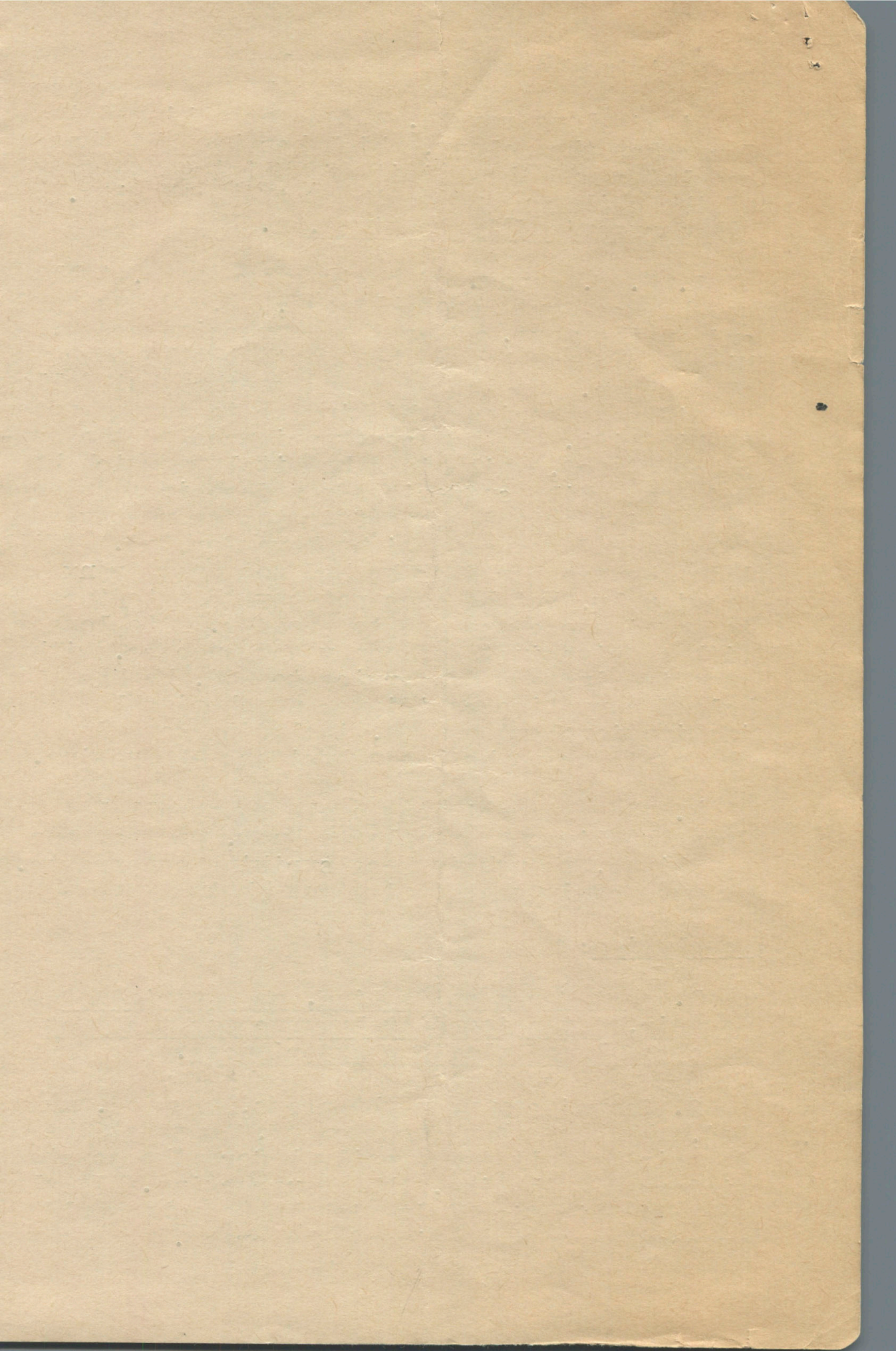
3. J. C. Penny. of chain store fame, tells how he was worth probably \$40,000,000 one day and on the next, after the depression crash, his stocks and bonds were worth little more than paper. In the days and months that followed he did some serious thinking as to the purposes of his life. He had an experience of the presence of God, while in a hospital to which he had gone while suffering from despair and shock, and he determined thereafter to use whatever talents and means he might have for God. Still later he prospered as he had not done ~~even~~ previously, but he does not say that to turn to God is to cause one to prosper. No longer with a drive just for money and success, with a motive instead of service to God, he has helped many fine religious and charitable institutions and causes, including some in the state where he began business -- Wyoming.

4. These experiences could be paralleled from the lives of people we know, or from our own lives, though in less striking contrasts. We must admit that it is true that

Conclusion:

1. That forsaken feeling, or a period of despair, often immediately precedes the most successful and glorious experiences.

2. Jesus' cry upon the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me," suggests the despair he felt temporarily before the greatest victory of all time, the resurrection. It also suggests his firm faith in the God who would overcome even the pain of the cross.



3. The psalmist who said long before Jesus,
"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"
followed this mood with words of joy that we
too can say when through despair we have emerged
victorious. These words are in the spirit
and meaning of Jesus as he cried the words
of despair. They say with faith and confidence,
and we say with faith and confidence, "All
the ends of the world shall remember and turn
unto the Lord."

