

# THE REASON FOR OUR HOPE

by

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## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### GOD'S WORLD-TRANSFORMING WORD

IN THE COURSE of his four years at St. John's College, Annapolis, Maryland, every student is required to read nearly two hundred books ranging from ancient classics such as Homer's Odyssey to recent writings like those of Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud. The student becomes acquainted with those books which have exerted the most powerful and abiding influence upon the world.

Ernst Haeckel, the noted German scientist who was an untiring protagonist of atheistic rationalism, admitted the world-transforming power of the Bible when he said:

“Beyond all doubt the present degree of human culture owes, in great part, its perfection to the propagation of the Christian system of morals and its ennobling influence.”

And George Romanes, the British physicist, made this somewhat similar statement:

“It is on all sides worth considering (blatant ignorance or base vulgarity alone excepted) that the revolution effected by Christianity in human life is immeasurable and unparalleled by any other movement in history.

“But not only is Christianity thus so immeasurably in advance of all other religions. It is no less so of every other system of thought that has ever been promulgated in regard to all that is moral and spiritual. Whether it be true or false, it is certain that neither philosophy, science, nor poetry has ever produced results in thought, conduct, or beauty in any degree to be compared with it.

“Only to a man wholly destitute of spiritual perception can it be that Christianity should fail to appear the greatest exhibition of the beautiful, the sublime, and of all else that appeals to our spiritual nature, which has ever been known upon our earth.”

To see the world-transforming power of the Bible, consider the history of England.

“England became the people of a book, and that book was the Bible. It was, as yet, the one English book which was familiar to every Englishman. It was read in churches, it was read at home, and everywhere its words, as they fell on ears which custom had not deadened to their force and beauty, kindled a startling enthusiasm . . .

“Elizabeth might silence or tune the pulpits, but it was impossible for her to silence or tune the great preachers of justice and mercy and truth, who spoke from the book which the Lord again opened to the people . . . The effect of the Bible in this way was simply amazing. The whole temper of the nation was changed. A new conception of life and of man superseded the old. A new moral and religious impulse spread through every class . . . Theology rules there, said Grotius of England, only ten years after Elizabeth’s death. The whole nation, in fact, becomes a church.”

— J. H. Green, *Short History of the English People*

Or listen to Hilaire Belloc:

“England is and has long been fundamentally Protestant. Indeed no large proportion (i.e., of Englishmen) read the Bible habitually. But the mass of English agnostics and atheists are, in morals and outlook, of the same Bible-Christian kind as were their fathers.

“The whole body of English literature is Protestant.

“The Bible is everywhere woven into the stuff of the British.

“The astounding strength of Biblical influence on England, the depth to which it has penetrated the English mind, the universality of its effect and the extraordinary persistence of it in our own generation, when all the old religious basis of it is disappearing, proceeding from a special factor which only those to whom the English language is native can understand. This factor was the power of the Word.”

Then, consider the remark of Goethe, the man-o letters:

“Germany owes her freedom and her greatness to the open Bible, which Martin Luther found in the monastery at Erfurth and gave to the people in their own language. All the power of the German language, all its greatest men, and all its imperial progress, date from the time the German people were placed in possession of the Word of God in the common language.”

Or turn from Germany to the United States, the stronghold of democracy. What is the foundation and source American’s greatness? The Bible!

A friend of Rufus Choate in looking over the large library of that outstanding lawyer remarked banteringly, “Seven editions of the New Testament and not a copy of the constitution!” To which Choate replied, “Ah, my friend, you forget that the constitution of my country is in them all.”

And if you imagine that Rufus Choate was exaggerating, think about this: What is the origin of Lincoln’s imperishable phrase, “Government of the people, by the people and for the people”? That phrase, which is the essence of democracy, comes from the introduction to Wycliffe’s Bible, the first English Version of Holy Scripture. Here is the preface to that pioneer translation: “The Bible will make possible a Government of people, by people, and for people.”

James Russell Lowell, a noted writer with no particular affection for traditional Christianity, tells us:

“I fear that when we indulge ourselves in the amusement of going without a religion, we are not, perhaps, aware how much we are sustained by an enormous mass of religious feeling and religious conviction, so that, whatever it may be safe for us to think, for us who have had great advantages, and have been brought up in such a way that a certain moral direction has been given to our character, I do not know what would become of the less favoured classes of mankind, if they undertook to play the same game.”

Then, after remarking that in his opinion Christianity certainly has some lamentable defects, he goes on to say that it is nevertheless.

“Infinitely preferable to any form of polite and polished skepticism, which gathers as its votaries the degenerate sons of heroic ancestors, who, having been trained in a society and educated in schools, the foundations of which were laid by men of faith and piety, now turn and kick down the ladder by which they have climbed up, and persuade men to live without God and leave them to die without hope. These men, indulging themselves in the amusement of going without a religion, may be thankful that they live in lands where the Gospel they neglect has tamed the beastliness and ferocity of the men who, but for Christianity, might long ago have eaten their carcasses like the South Sea Islanders, or cut off their heads and tanned their hides like the monsters of the French Revolution.”

And Lowell concludes by suggesting that when the keen scrutiny of skeptics

“Has found a place on this planet, ten miles square, where a decent man can live in decency, comfort, and security, supporting and educating his children unspoiled and unpolluted, a place where age is revered, infancy respected, womanhood honored, and human life held in due regard, on this globe, where the Gospel of Christ has not gone and cleared the way and laid the foundations, and made decency and security possible, it will then be in order for the skeptical literati to move thither, and then ventilate their views. But so long as these men are very dependent on the religion which they discard for every privilege they enjoy, they may well hesitate a little before they seek to rob a Christian of his hope and humanity of its faith in that Saviour who alone has given to men that hope of eternal life which makes life tolerable and society possible, and robs death of its terrors and the grave of its gloom.”

By way of additional illustration, consider what the Bible has done to advance the position of womankind. This is a crucial touchstone of a nation's real greatness, for as John Adams, the second president of the United States put it, the position of woman is “the most infallible barometer to ascertain the degree of morality in a nation.”

To learn what the Bible has achieved in this regard, we need not go back to Greece and Rome where the position of woman was degraded and her lot unenviable in the days before Christianity; all we need do is look at Japan where Christianity has hardly done more than scratch the surface. One observer declares:

“The daughter of the Japanese family has at the age of twenty but little development of her higher nature, very little indeed of the uplifting of the soul into the atmosphere above the routine of daily life. On the other hand, her master, man, pushing the principles of feminine obedience to the serving of his own selfishness, crushes out by trampling upon the most noble of feminine instincts. To satisfy his own needs, he degrades the glorious principle of feminine obedience into the depths of damnable abomination. A father in debt, an ambitious brother to get an education in order to win office, will sell the body of daughter or sister, even as the beasts are sold. Horribly significant is the proverb — ‘A father with many daughters need not fear poverty in old age.’”

Christianity does these six things which have elevated woman’s position:

1. —Christianity teaches the spiritual equality of both sexes.
2. —Christianity insists that purity is as much incumbent upon men as women.
3. —Christianity maintains that marriage is a sacred and permanently binding contract.
4. —Christianity fights the current evil of easy divorce.
5. —Christianity improves the legal status of women.
6. —Christianity enlists in its service large numbers of the noblest women, to whom it gives unique opportunities for exercising those virtues which supremely characterize their sex.

Truly, as Caleb Cushing wrote:

“The Christian religion levels upward, elevating all men to the same high standard of sanctity, faith and spiritual promise on earth as in heaven. Just so is it, that, wherever Christianity is taught, it inevitably dignifies and exalts the female character.”

The Bible possesses a world-transforming power because it possesses a life-transforming power. The Bible is able to change nations and customs only because, to begin with, it is able to change the hearts and characters of men. Probably there is no more sensational example of the life-transforming power of the Bible than the unbelievable story of *Mutiny on the Bounty*.

In 1787 the *Bounty*, under Captain Bligh, set sail for the island of Tahiti in the South Seas. After a voyage of ten months, the ship arrived at her destination, and further six months were spent collecting palm saplings. The sailors meanwhile had become attached to the native girls, so upon receiving the order to embark, they mutinied, set the captain and a few men adrift in an open boat, and returned to the island.

Captain Bligh, however, survived his ordeal and eventually arrived home in England. A punitive expedition was sent out, which captured fourteen of the mutineers. But nine of them had transferred to another island, where they formed a new colony. Here, in the language of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, they degenerated so fast and became so fierce as to make the life of the colony a hell on earth. The chief reason for this was the distillation of whiskey from a native plant. Quarrels, orgies and murders were a common feature of their life. Finally all the men except one were killed or had died off.

Alexander Smith was left alone with a crowd of native women and half-breed children. Then a strange thing happened. In a battered chest he found a Bible. He read it, believed it, and began to live it.

Determining to make amends for his past evil life, he gathered the women and children around him and taught them too. Time rolled on. The children grew up and became Christians. The community prospered exceedingly. Nearly twenty years later an American ship visited the island and brought back to Europe and England word of its peaceful state. The British Government took no further action. There was no need. The island was a Christian community. There was no disease, no insanity, no crime, no illiteracy, and no strong drink. Life and property were safe, and the moral standards of the people were as high as anywhere in the world. It was a veritable Utopia on a small scale. What had brought about this astounding transformation? Just the reading of a book, and that book the Bible.

Think of the miracle which occurred in the life of Henry Moorhouse. Here is Richard Day's picturesque description of his career:

“Born in Ardwich, in 1840, he was hell-bent-on-high by the time he was twenty; a cocky little bantamweight prizefighter, battling equally vs. men and alcohol. At nineteen he was done for. One night, in an excess of remorse, he stood in a dark hall toying with a loaded pistol. Someone was holding a little meeting overhead, door open; he heard a voice reading the Prodigal Son, and the mystery of conviction covered his poor soul. Just the Word! And a few weeks later, a faithful fireman in a Manchester warehouse basement brought him to light with Romans 10:9-10. Just the Word!

“He at once began to witness with just the Word in the mission rooms. No one ‘cared enough about the little runt’ to suggest a course of study. So he kept to just the Word; soaked it up; flavored himself therewith to the fingertips. Within four years, he was a bright and shining light. Men from every strata, burly colliers or brainy courtiers, sat spellbound before him. In 1879 his health crumbled. Physicians told him, ‘You must stop — your heart!’ ‘How long will I live if I stop?’ ‘Probably eighteen months.’ ‘And if I keep on?’ ‘Perhaps nine months.’ ‘Very well, I’ll take the nine months, and preach Christ as long as I can.’ On December 25, 1880, he spent his first Christmas in heaven, after twenty years of incredibly fruitful ministry in the Word, intercessory prayer, and life changing.”

The apostle Paul exclaims: “**The word of God is quick and powerful.**” And this Book, the Word of God, which has been able to change nations is able to change your own life if you will but read it and believe it. For, in the words of Dr. R. S. Storr:

“While the Bible has changed the face of Europe, building cathedrals, hospitals, universities, and has covered this country with at least the foundations and lower stories of its appropriate civilization, while it has made the enlightened and aspiring Christendom of today the fact of chief importance thus far in the progress of mankind — its true glory is that it has wiped the tears of sorrow from the eyes of its disciples, and has comforted hearts which were desolate with grief; that it has given celestial visions to those who dwelt beneath thatched roofs.

“And it has taught a happier humility to the proud; that it has shed victorious tranquility on those who have seen the shadows of death closing around them, and has caused to be written over their graves the lofty words of promise and cheer, ‘**I am the Resurrection and the Life.**’”

~ end of chapter 11 ~

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