

SHOWERS UPON THE GRASS

A companion volume to As the Small Rain

by

Bob Jones, Jr.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

“WITH GOOD WILL DOING SERVICE”

A SHINING LIGHT

A light may burn and not shine. If it is shut up in a closet, none may be aware that the light is burning, because it does not shine out. It is not only important to keep the light of a lighthouse burning, but also to keep the lenses polished and cleansed so the light can shine out across the water.

It is possible that a man may have the light of God’s eternal life burning within him, and the light in his life be of little value in a dark world because the light is not shining. Sometimes clouds of sin can cut off the glow. Again, a man may so shut his testimony for Christ away that the light is all closed up as in a closet.

The Lord Jesus used the illustration of the shining light when He said: **“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven”** (Matthew 5:16).

Naturally, there can be no shining where there is no light. A man must have the light of God, found through faith in Jesus Christ, burning within himself, if there is to be any light shining out from his life. But it is not enough to have the light there. The light should be so displayed that its brilliance casts rays out into the darkness of a needy, sinful world about him. The light, our Lord tells us, is not to be hidden under a bushel, but is to be placed on a stand where it can give light to all in the house (Luke 11:33).

If a Christian is to be of any value to his Lord in the world, there must be a cleanness of life, a freedom from sin and selfishness which may dim his testimony. There must be streaming out from him through good works and unassumed love for needy men the evidence of his having been ignited within by his contact with Jesus Christ, who is the Light of the World.

The purpose of a beacon is not only to give warning of danger but also to point to safety. The revolving beacons of the airways indicate to the pilot that he is on his course and point him toward his destination, toward the airfield and toward safety. And so the Christian in the world is to point men to Christ as their hope and safety. It is very important that the light be not only burning, but also shining.

Stars are of mighty use: the night
Is dark and long
The road foal—and where one goes right,
Six may go wrong.
One twinkling ray
Shot o'er some cloud,
May clear much way and guide a crowd.

God's saints are shining lights: who stays
Here long, must pass
O'er hills, swift streams, and steep ways
As smooth as glass;
But these, all night,
Like candles, shed
Their beams, and light
Us into bed.

— Henry Vaughan

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BROKEN FOR BLESSING

Not long ago I went into a shop which specialized in antique china and glassware. On all the walls were signs: Please Do Not Handle, Hands Off. In letters larger and blacker than any others, one sign warned, What You Break, You Buy. Naturally, there were reasons for those signs. That china and that ancient glassware had value until it was broken.

But some things have value when they are broken.

- The ground is broken by the plow.
- The seed, buried in the warm, damp soil, is broken as the germ of life inside tears through the shell.
- The aspiring sprouts burst through the sod. The grain appears on the stalk, and the stalks are cut and broken.
- The grain is crushed and ground. From the flour bread is made.
- The loaf is broken by the knife in order that men may eat. How many breakings go into every slice of bread!
- The meat which comes to our table costs the breaking of the life and body of the animal upon whom we feed.
- The tree in the forest or on the hillside becomes useful to men, not while it is whole, but when it has been torn apart by the saws that men may use the boards taken from the tree.
- The hills are broken open that men may take out the treasure of mineral wealth, of iron and gold, of coal and of silver.

- The thirsty people of Israel drank water from the rock which Moses broke when he smote it at the command of God.
- A hungry multitude in the twilight time were fed from loaves and fishes which God's Son, having blessed, broke; and in the breaking, with His blessing, they were multiplied until the lunch from the basket of one little boy fed thousands.
- A woman came with a lovely vase of alabaster, fragile and delicate, and broke it that she might anoint Him with the oil which it contained; and it was in the breaking of the vase that the fragrance of the perfumed ointment was released and filled the house.

Paul and his fellow voyagers were in a ship, blown before the storm for days; and suddenly the vessel, which was apparently their only hope of safety, struck a reef; and the force of the waves as they beat upon the vessel, trapped by the lurking gray rocks, began to break it to pieces. The Book of Acts tells us that some reached shore on broken parts of the ship (Acts 27:44).

A roof was broken one day that a sick man might be let down to the feet of Jesus to have his sins forgiven and health restored to his poor, disease-racked body.

Our Lord, the Blessed Lamb of God, purchased our salvation when He was broken on the Cross for our redemption. Salvation comes to men, not when in the pride of their own hearts they feel themselves without a need of grace and pardon, but when, broken by a sense of guilt and torn by a feeling of helplessness and sin, they turn to Him. **"A broken and a contrite heart, O God,"** cries the Psalmist, **"thou wilt not despise"** (Psalm 51:17).

The reference is not to a heart which is broken by sorrows such as the loss of loved ones, but rather to one whose heart has been broken by grief for sin.

From a breaking of the things which we hold dear, a shattering of the things most precious and sometimes apparently most necessary, God brings rich joy and blessing. When His hands snap or tear or shatter, they do so, not in harshness, but in love; and blessing comes with the breaking.

A broken heart, my God, my King,
To Thee a sacrifice I bring:
The God of grace will ne'er despise
A broken heart for sacrifice.

My soul lies humbled in the dust,
And owns Thy dreadful sentence just:
Look down, O Lord, with pitying eye,
And save the soul condemned to die.

Then will I teach the world Thy ways;
Sinners shall learn Thy sovereign grace;
I'll lead them to my Saviour's blood,
And they shall praise a pardoning God.

O may Thy love inspire my tongue!
Salvation shall be all my song;
And all my powers shall join to bless
The Lord, my strength and righteousness.

— Isaac Watts

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ATHRIST IN THE DESERT

Philip was sensitive to the will of God and obedient to His voice. He had a great evangelistic meeting in Samaria. Many were converted as he preached. Then the angel of the Lord came to Philip, saying, “**Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza . . .**” (Acts 8:26). Philip obeyed without asking questions. A chariot came by in which sat the treasurer of Ethiopia who had been up to Jerusalem. At the command of the Lord, Philip ran and joined himself to the chariot. Invited to come up and sit, he found the eunuch reading from the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, and Philip “**began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.**”

I have always wondered what was the matter with the church in Jerusalem that this hungry-hearted man had not been, reached with the Gospel. As a proselyte to the Jewish faith, he had been in Jerusalem worshipping. There was by this time a very large group of Christians in that city. They had even been sending out missionaries to other places, yet apparently none of the Christians in Jerusalem had touched this Ethiopian for Christ.

How many opportunities the Church still misses! How many hungry souls go without the Bread of Life because Christians fail to speak to them about the Lord. What a contact that Ethiopian was—the keeper of the treasure of the queen, an important personage in the court society of his country! Had he become a Christian, he would be in a position to give an effective testimony in his own land, yet he left Jerusalem unconverted. God had to send a surrendered man down to the desert to lead him to Christ.

The Ethiopian was ready and eager for Philip’s message. The Spirit of God had gone before and prepared his heart. God always goes before when He sends His servant on a mission for Him.

God knew the hunger in the heart of the Ethiopian and God sent Philip to bring him the message of salvation. God still uses surrendered men who are willing to trust His wisdom and to go unquestionably where He sends them.

Awake, my soul; stretch every nerve,
And press with vigor on:
A heavenly race demands thy zeal,
And an immortal crown.

A cloud of witnesses around
Hold thee in full survey;
Forget the steps already trod,
And onward urge thy way.

'Tis God's all-animating voice
That calls thee from on high;
'Tis His own hand presents the prize
To thine aspiring eye,—

That prize, with peerless glories bright,
Which shall new luster boast
When victors' wreaths and monarchs' gems
Shall blend in common dust.

— Philip Doddridge

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NEGLECTED OPPORTUNITY

On the Cross, Christ, praying for those who crucified Him, cried, “**Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do**” (Luke 23:34). The Roman soldiers were simply carrying out the orders issued by the authority it was their duty to obey. It is to be doubted that any of them, nailing God's Son upon the Cross, had even the faintest perception of the meaning of Calvary or the divine person of Christ.

But which of us does not need that same prayer prayed for us!

What sins of ignorance we commit! How blind we are who cannot see the final result of the deed done today! What son, if he could see the broken heart and the white hair on the head of his mother tomorrow, would commit the little act today which adds the first weight to the heart and brings the first gray hair! Who, if he could see the results of the word thoughtlessly spoken today, as it takes root in the heart and brings a crop of bitterness in the life of a loved one tomorrow, would permit the word to pass his lips!

A man today rejects God's grace, heedlessly turns aside from the opportunity of salvation God offers in the Gospel of His Son, not because he intends to go out lost and undone to eternity, but because he is busy or thoughtless. He intends sometime to settle the question of his salvation, but little does he realize that in neglecting this opportunity he neglects the last.

The Christian touches a life and fails to give the Word of the Gospel, and that one may tomorrow or next year and forever be lost because the Christian neglected to speak to him the Word of the Gospel.

We are all guilty of the sin of thoughtlessness—blind to the consequences of our words and deeds, neglectful because we do not realize what the result of our neglect may be. O, Lord, pray for us: **“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”**

At the blest mercy seat,
Pleading for me,
My feeble faith looks up,
Jesus, to Thee;
Help me the cross to bear,
Thy wondrous love declare,
Some song to raise, or prayer,
Something for Thee.

Give me a faithful heart,
Likeness to Thee,
That each departing day
Henceforth may see
Some work of love begun,
Some deed of kindness done,
Some wanderer sought and won,
Something for Thee.

All that I am and have,
Thy gifts so free,
In joy, in grief, through life,
Dear Lord, for Thee!
And when Thy face I see,
My ransomed soul shall be,
Through all eternity,
Something for Thee.

— Sylvanus D. Phelps

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“BIG” MEN

We hear much talk these days about the scarcity of greatness among the leaders of the nations.

We lament the fact that there are not more “big” men; but the need of the nations is not primarily great men, for a great man of the wrong sort can do great harm. Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, had the right idea when he suggested to Moses the type men needed for positions of national leadership and government.

This is his advice to Moses:

“Thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them . . .” (Exodus 18:21).

“**Able men,**” that is, men who are capable and qualified, not necessarily men of great brilliance or dominant personality, but efficient men who are well qualified for their jobs.

In other words, men are to be picked for offices because of their capabilities rather than to pay off a political debt or a party obligation.

“**Such as fear God.**” That means reverent men who are spiritually minded. Such men will accept their appointment as carrying with it an obligation to discharge its duties in the fear of God and in such fashion as will please Him.

“**Men of truth.**” This is another way of saying, just and honest men, men who seek to do right because they love right, men who execute justice because they love justice. There is no oppression of minorities when this type of states man is in office. There is no feeling of fear on the part of humble men under the governance of such a man.

“**Hating covetousness.**” In other words, unselfish and divorced from self-seeking. This is a rare characteristic among politicians in any nation or generation. Such men, naturally, would not accept bribes themselves, nor would they tolerate personal aggrandizement by others at the expense of the nation’s welfare.

Perhaps, after all, we do need “big” men, for only a great man would possess all these qualifications.

I want a principle within,
Of jealous, godly fear;
A sensibility of sin,
A pain to feel it near:

I want the first approach to feel
Of pride, or fond desire;
To catch the wandering of my will,
And quench the kindling fire.

From Thee that I no more may part
No more Thy goodness grieve,
The filial awe, the fleshly heart,
The tender conscience, give.

Quick as the apple of an eye,
O God, my conscience make!
Awake my soul when sin is nigh,
And keep it still awake.

If to the right or left I stray,
That moment, Lord, reprove;
And let me weep my life away
For having grieved Thy love.

O may the least omission pain
My well-instructed soul,
And drive me to the blood again
Which makes the wounded whole!

— Charles Wesley

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LABORS DONE

There is a strange expression used in recounting the death of great men of the Old Testament. It is the phrase, “**full of days**,” or “**full of years**.” Job, David and Jeremiah, the High Priest, the record declares, died “**full of days**.” Abraham and Isaac were said to have come down to death “**full of years**.” The expression means obviously “in ripe old age,” but it means more than that. It carries the thought of being fully satisfied with life. The Bible applies it only to righteous men, and it is only such who know the full meaning of satisfaction in life.

It is possible to live well beyond one’s allotted three score years and ten and still be greedy for more time to live. Or, on the other hand, a young man disappointed and disillusioned may find the short span of his selfish years more than enough, and, satisfied with the emptiness of vain pleasure, desire the end of it all.

These Old Testament characters, however, died with a feeling of comfortable satisfaction that their years had been full and rich and blessed. Not always perfect, sometimes marred by their sins and scarred by their failures, they were able to look back upon a long stretch of days for the most part usefully spent and divinely ordered. Their cup was full. Their days were complete.

They were ready to go, because they knew that He who had blessed them on the pilgrimage of life would not take them home until their task was completed and the time was come to rest from their labors. His love had been about them all the way and they were satisfied with Him and in Him.

No one can criticize a book until the book is read. No one can fully judge a life until the life is closed. Present prosperity is no indication of a successful or happy life. Only upon the completion of the whole can it be said, “This life was a success.”

The best means of assuring true happiness for this life, however, is to make preparation for the life after death.

How blest the righteous when he dies!
When sinks a weary soul to rest,
How mildly beam the closing eyes,
How gently heaves th' expiring breast!

So fades a summer cloud away;
So sinks the gale when storms are o'er;
So gently shuts the eye of day;
So dies a wave along the shore.

A holy quiet reigns around,
A calm which life nor death destroys;
And naught disturbs that peace profound
Which his unfettered soul enjoys.

Life's labor done, as sinks the day,
Light from its load the spirit flies,
While heaven and earth combine to say,
"How blest the righteous when he dies!"

— Anna L. Barbauld

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HEAVENLY RACE

Self-satisfaction is the great enemy of achievement. A man who feels he has "arrived" has nothing more to live for. Indeed, there is nothing which can so limit a life and reduce it to a dull plane of uselessness as can a feeling of self-complacence; but the worst type of self-satisfaction is not that which men feel when they have reached the peak in business or politics but that which is felt by some in regard to their religious experience. No man can ever sound the depth of the wisdom and knowledge of God.

Yet there are some who, when they come into a certain amount of truth, feel that they have discovered the whole. There are some who, when they have overcome, by the grace of God, certain sins and habits of their lives, feel that they have well-nigh reached perfection. As a matter of fact, the greater the feeling of self-contentment, the lesser the signs of fullness of grace.

Paul never felt that he had attained unto an ideal state of life or that he had sounded the depths and heights of the mysteries of God in His Word. He makes it very plain that he felt a constant state of dissatisfaction with himself, when he says in the third chapter of Philippians, the thirteenth verse: "**I count not, myself to have apprehended.**"

What a pity that some Christian people do not echo the sentence of Paul. Not feeling satisfied, this remarkable man constantly was seeking to press forward.

Had anyone ever had grounds for religious self-satisfaction, it certainly would have been Paul. Yet he to whom the Holy Spirit had revealed so much Truth and whom God had so greatly used was continually seeking newer experience and fuller insight into God's Truth.

This feeling of having attained is one of the things which make for division among God's people.

Having come into what they believe is the truth of some matter of Scriptural interpretation; they do not wish further enlightenment.

If they read the Word of God, it is not to acquire broader horizons, but rather to add further proof to the opinion or interpretation which they have already found completely satisfying; and, it must be admitted, the satisfaction is oftentimes one of the ego rather than one of the heart and soul.

Paul admonishes such as these when he says: "**Whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing**" (Philippians 3:16).

The rule by which he walked is very clear. It was this: "**Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus**" (Philippians 3:13-14).

Only those who are thus minded can claim to follow in the footsteps of Paul; and being thus minded with him and incessantly seeking new heights, we find that with Paul we truly walk in the light.

Henceforth there must be no more turning back
For me, to things that I have shut my heart
Against, and closed my eyes; I must depart
Old ways, forbidden, and smooth-traveled tracks
My feet have known; as one who silently—
Deliberately—goes out and shuts the door
Behind him, knowing he shall nevermore
Re-enter there, so must there be for me
No turning back;

Old idols that have marred
True worship—torn from God—I now must pass
Unseeing by; when one seeks gold the brass
Should glitter less. Although I may be scarred,
I am not beaten—no, nor yet shall be;
I would not pray strength sufficient for the task—
When Sodom beckons, only this I ask,—
"God, let there be no turning back for me."

— Ruth M. Gibbs

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MODERN GIVING

“And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.” This is the way the last verse of the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians appears in the King James version. Another translation states it this way: “And now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.” Actually, neither translation catches the full meaning of the word, for the Greek word means both charity and love and more than either. It implies a pouring out of oneself in service to another because of a deep and abiding affection for him. It is possibly best exemplified in the relation of a mother to a child. It means actions of goodness springing from a heart of love.

Even our good deeds have become so streamlined in this modern day that all the soul and vitality is gone from our charity. We write a check for the Associated Charities or the Community Chest and feel we have discharged our responsibility. There is no personal contact between the giver and the receiver of the gift. Doubtless there is more efficiency in the modern method, but I wonder if the giver has not lost the blessing in achieving efficiency.

Much of our modern giving does not even spring from an interest in the cause to which we give, or from any concern about the needy ones who profit by our gift. All too often we give because it is expected of us, because our social position demands it, or because we are a little ashamed of ourselves if we do not.

I suppose it is better to give for these reasons than not to give at all. At least we can look ourselves in the face without feeling little and stingy! But can we, as Christian people, look God in the face as those who give because of love for Him and devotion to His cause?

When Jesus dwelt in mortal clay,
What were His works from day to day,
But miracles of power and grace,
That spread salvation through our race?

Teach us, O Lord, to keep in view
Thy pattern, and Thy steps pursue;
Let alms bestowed, let kindness done,
Be witnessed by each rolling sun.

Teach us to mark, from day to day,
In generous acts our radiant way,
Tread the same path our Saviour trod,
The path to glory and to God.

— Thomas Gibbons

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GRUDGING GIFTS

In His physical agony in the crucifixion Jesus Christ cried out, “**I thirst**” (John 19:28). This cry was answered. A rough Roman soldier took a sponge, put it on a reed, and lifted it to the lips of the Son of God. It was not a very nice sponge, possibly the same sponge which the soldiers kept in the basin to wipe the blood from their own hands after they had driven the nails.

One of the things which speaks of the humiliation of the Lord Jesus Christ is this sponge of a soldier, dipped in the vinegar—the sour wine which the soldiers drank, stuck upon the end of a spear, the shaft of a spear, a reed, or a piece of cane, and lifted to His lips.

“**I thirst!**” This cry, faint and seeming to come from a long way off as it reached the ears of those at the Cross, brought forth on the part of the soldier some degree of compassion apparently; for he hastened to moisten the sponge and lift it up. But it is a strange compassion, for it is a compassion that is mixed with mockery. We are told in the Word of God that the soldier who gave Him the drink mocked Him (Luke 23:36).

The Lord asks man for a gift for Himself. The Lord calls, and man answers. Man even yet sometimes answers with vinegar. The Lord asks for the gift of some good thing in man’s life, and man gives it so grudgingly that the gift which might have been sweet wine is like vinegar to Him.

Sometimes we who call ourselves Christians give so begrudgingly, and our lives are so at variance with the things we profess, that the Lord is mocked by our gifts. This soldier, rough, possibly a bit compassionate as one might be compassionate with the suffering of an animal, but not recognizing the deity of the Man on the Cross, offered Him drink. He offered the Lord his own sour wine, not because he felt any deep compassion for the Son of God, but because he saw the man who was suffering and heard him cry out for drink. It was given without any grudge or any genuine goodness—given with mockery. Sometimes our gifts to the Lord are much like that, full of mockery even while we make them.

O how can they look up to heaven,
And ask for mercy there,
Who never soothed the poor man’s pang,
Nor dried the orphan’s tear?

The dread omnipotence of heaven
We every hour provoke;
Yet still the mercy of our God
Withholds the avenging stroke.

And Christ was still the healing friend
Of poverty and pain;
And never did imploring soul
His garment touch in vain.

May we with humble effort take
Example from above;
And thence the active lesson learn
Of charity and love!

— Simon Browne

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ADORATION DEMANDED

The story of the blind man whose sight the Lord restored and who, being questioned about the miracle, answered, “**One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see**” (John 9:25), is a familiar one. But one of the most interesting incidents in connection with the story is often overlooked. It is this: that having heard that the man had been questioned and reviled by the Pharisees and cast out by them, Jesus found him and made known His own deity unto him, declaring that He was the Son of God, and asked him if he believed on Him. The man replied, “**Lord, I believe**” (John 9:38). And, says the record, “**He worshipped Him.**”

This is a natural sequence of events. The man who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ, who accepts His deity, who acknowledges the fact that He is the Son of God, must perform worship Him, for deity demands adoration.

The salvation of the souls of men depends upon their belief in Jesus Christ. They believe on the Lord Jesus Christ to be saved; but that belief, the Scripture makes plain, is more than simply an intellectual acceptance of His deity; it is more than a mere mental assent to the truth of the Scripture which reveals the fact that He is God come in the flesh.

The belief in Christ which brings salvation is the belief which has its center in the heart of the believer. Since all the issues of life, the Bible tells us, are out of the heart, what a man believes in his heart will affect the way he lives, will shape the course of his life. Every man, therefore, who truly believes in Jesus Christ, will do exactly as the man who had known the miracle of restored eyesight. He will worship Him, for when the heart believes, the knee must bow.

Come, let us tune our loftiest song,
And raise to Christ our joyful strain;
Worship and thanks to Him belong,
Who reigns, and shall forever reign.

His sovereign power our bodies made;
Our souls are His immortal breath;
And when His creatures sinned, He bled,
To save us from eternal death.

Extol the Lamb with loftiest song,
Ascend for Him our cheerful strain;
Worship and thanks to Him belong,
Who reigns, and shall forever reign.

—Robert A. West

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PROMPT OBEDIENCE

It is doubtful if there were ever another church with two such deacons as those first men chosen by the disciples of the Early Church in Jerusalem. One of them, Stephen, became the first Christian martyr, and what a triumph of Christian victory his martyrdom was! The other deacon was Philip, who proved by his life what Stephen proved by his death that they were men “full of **the Holy Ghost and wisdom . . .**” (Acts 6:3).

Philip was in the midst of a great revival in Samaria. So spectacular were the reports which reached Jerusalem that Peter and John went down to look over the situation and see for themselves whether all they had heard was true.

Seeing the evidence of the outpouring of God’s power, they were convinced that here, through Philip, God was accomplishing a great work of grace. It was in the midst of such a useful ministry that the angel of the Lord came to Philip commanding him to go down into the desert country toward the south.

A man less filled with the Holy Ghost would have stopped to protest that here in Samaria many souls were being saved, that here he was doing a great work for God. Surely, he would argue, under these circumstances it would be foolish to leave a city where throngs were hearing his messages and set out for the desert. But not Philip! So responsive was he to the voice of God, so controlled by the Holy Spirit that without a word of argument “**he arose and went**” (Acts 8:27).

Deep faith always begets prompt obedience. God knew what He was doing when He picked Philip up out of the great revival of Samaria and sent him down to the desert. He had arranged a rendezvous there for Philip with the treasurer of Ethiopia. God needed Philip there in the wilderness to point the Ethiopian to Christ. Tradition has it that this Ethiopian eunuch went back to his own country to found there the first Christian church in all Africa. Who knows but that eternity will reveal countless thousands of dark-skinned men among the hosts of the redeemed because of Philip’s obedience to the command of God! Who knows what great things you can accomplish for God if you will only trust and obey!

Whate’er my God ordains is right;
His will is ever just;
Howe’er He orders now my cause,
I will be still and trust.

He is my God;
Though dark my road,
He holds me that I shall not fall,
Wherefore to Him I leave it all.

Whate'er my God ordains is right;
My light, my life is He,
Who cannot will me aught but good;
I trust Him utterly;

For well I know,
In joy or woe,
We soon shall see, as sunlight clear,
How faithful was our guardian here.

Whate'er my God ordains is right;
Here will I take my stand,
Though sorrow, need, or death make earth
For me a desert land.

My Father's care Is round me there,
He holds me that I shall not fall;
And so to Him I leave it all.

—Samuel Rodigast
(Translated by Catherine Winkworth)

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JOY IN TRIAL

Possibly one of the most misunderstood verses in the Scripture is the second verse of the first chapter of James: “**Count it all joy when you fall into divers temptations.**” The reason for this misunderstanding is due to the fact that certain words in the time when our King James translation was made had a different meaning from that which is now applied to them. In modern English, this verse means: “Count it all joy when you fall into all kinds of trials.”

Every man and woman is beset by all sorts of difficulties and obstacles and unpleasant things which he would, if he could, avoid; but he is overtaken by them whether he will or not. The Christian, and it is to Christian people that James is writing, is admonished, however, to receive such trials and testings with joy. Indeed, since he knows that “**all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose**” (Romans 8:28), how else can he receive them but with joy, since very obviously they are sent for his good. However unpleasant they may be at the time, they bring blessing into his life.

After all, aside from being good Scriptural admonition, this verse is psychologically good advice, for the best way to bear a trial is to bear it patiently and joyfully. The man who “**kicks against the pricks,**” *who struggles against that which he cannot avoid*, finds it more difficult than the man who relaxes and accepts what comes. But to the Christian, it is not a mere bearing stoically what he must endure; it is with him a relaxing because of his trust in God and his knowledge that God sends only that which comes to bless him.

To the Christian, trials are a revelation of God’s love. We know that those “**whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth . . .**” (Hebrews 12:6), and the trials are a part of God’s chastening.

The purpose of all chastening is not a mere desire to make the object of the chastening suffer, but rather to train him that he may develop into a finer person. As the gold is refined by the fire, so are the soul and character refined through trial and suffering.

- Without testing, there can be no development;
- Without trials, there can be no growth;
- Without chastening, there can be no learning.

A child finds out when he is burned that fire must be avoided as dangerous; so God’s testings for the saints are oftentimes God’s best ways of teaching us. Jesus instructs us to count it joy when we fall into all kinds of trials and testings because we know that the trying of our faith worketh patience, and patience must have her perfect work if we are to come into the perfection which God desires of His children.

God, make me brave for life: oh, braver than this.
Let me straighten after pain, as a tree straightens after the rain,
Shining and lovely again.
God, make me brave for life; much braver than this.
As the blown grass lifts, let me rise
From sorrow with quiet eyes,
Knowing Thy way is wise.
God, make me brave, life brings
Such blinding things.
Help me to keep my sight;
Help me to see aright
That out of dark comes light.

— Anonymous

* * *

EPITAPHS

Nothing may be more false than an epitaph. Affection or mere human kindness induces men to write words of tribute on the tombs of the departed of which the deceased have been unworthy.

Great kings and emperors in bygone ages have left behind them monuments covered with bombastic praise of themselves and of their works which the sculptors, working under royal mandate, must have inscribed with their tongues in their cheeks or have had much “ado” to keep their sense of humor from betraying them into a smile.

Much, however, can be known about a man from one sentence aptly chosen and honestly worded. A lifetime of devotion and unselfish service can be glimpsed in those words inscribed on the headstone of a missionary’s lonely grave on a distant shore.

“When he landed there were no Christians on the island.
When he died there were no heathen.”

In the Bible there are a number of men about whom only a few words are written, but from the accurate record of God’s Book it is possible to learn as much about the character of the man from a brief statement as if a whole biography had been written.

For example, in the list of “**the mighty men of valour**” set down in II Chronicles, chapter seventeen, is included the name of Amasiah, the son of Zichri, who the writer says, “**Willingly offered himself unto the Lord.**”

This much and no more the record contains, but in this brief statement we catch the glimpse of a man who is successful and wise and brave, for all these are characteristic of the man who gives himself to God. It is the wise thing to do. What finer epitaph could be written for a nobleman of God than this of Amasiah, who “**willingly offered himself unto the Lord.**”

Lord, I am Thine, entirely Thine,
Purchased and saved by blood divine;
With full consent Thine I would be,
And own Thy sovereign right in me.

Grant one poor sinner more a place
Among the children of Thy grace;
A wretched sinner, lost to God,
But ransomed by Immanuel’s blood.

Thine would I live, Thine would I die,
Be Thine through all eternity;
The vow is past beyond repeal,
And now I set the solemn seal.

Here, at that Cross where flows the blood
That bought my guilty soul for God,
Thee, my new Master, now I call,
And consecrate to Thee my all.

—Samuel Davies

* * *

“WHATS IN A NAME”

“What’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.” These words of Shakespeare are often quoted to show how little value a name possesses, but Shakespeare’s philosophy here is not as sound as it seems at first glance. Association gives importance to a name.

Names have become so associated with certain products that the name has become almost a synonym for the article manufactured under the name. This name calls to mind a fountain pen; that, a typewriter; a third, a cosmetic.

Some men have forever debased their name. Judas has come to mean betrayer, and Quisling has made his name synonymous with traitor. There is a great deal in a name. Men name their sons after great men, after statesmen, heroes, reformers. How many of our common names are taken from the great names of the Bible: Paul, Peter, Mark, James and Joseph, Ruth and Mary.

In Bible names particularly there is a great significance.

Names were often changed when the circumstances of a man’s life underwent some change. Meshach, Shadrach and Abednego were not the names given to those three Israelites at their birth but the names bestowed upon them by the prince of the eunuchs when they were taken captives to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar. When Joseph became the prime minister of Egypt, his name was changed by the Pharaoh to “Zaphnathpaaneah.” This name means “*a man to whom secrets are revealed*” or “*the revealer of secrets*”—a most appropriate name for one who could interpret the dreams and visions of others and who was given to prophetic visions and dreams himself.

God sometimes changed a man’s name. Abram, which means: “*high father*,” was changed to Abraham, which means: “*father of a great multitude*.” Jacob was changed to Israel. Saul, the “*great one*,” became Paul, the “*little one*.”

“**The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch,**” and ever since that day the followers of the Lord have been known by the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Names are important, but more important than the fact that it is by our names that men know us is the truth that the Lord Himself knows His own. “**I am the good Shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine**” (John 10:14).

Thou dear Redeemer, dying Lamb,
I love to hear of Thee;
No music’s like Thy charming name,
Nor half so sweet can be.

My Jesus shall be still my theme,
While in this world I stay;
I'll sing my Jesus' lovely Name
When all things else decay.

When I appear in yonder cloud,
With all Thy favored throng,
Then will I sing more sweet, more loud,
And Christ shall be my song.

— John Cennick

* * *

HARVEST COMES

A great New England preacher once promised to fill the pulpit of a country church on a certain Sunday. That Sunday New England was held in the grip of a blizzard. Roads were almost impassable. The preacher thought to himself, "There is no use in my going out to that church. No one will come out through such a storm. There will be nobody to preach to."

But, being a conscientious man, he went. Setting out on his journey quite early, he was able to make his way through the snowdrifts, and finally arrived a few minutes before the time of worship. Stabling his horse in a shed behind the church, he entered the deserted building, built a fire and went up into the pulpit.

Precisely on the hour when the service was to begin one man entered the church and sat down at the back.

The preacher wondered whether or not he should go ahead with a service in the presence of a congregation of one. Finally he announced a hymn, and the occupant of the pew and the occupant of the pulpit sang it together. The preacher prayed, another hymn was sung and the service proceeded just as if the church had been filled with worshippers. At the close of his message the minister pronounced the benediction, intending to speak to his "congregation" afterward; but when he had spoken the final "Amen" and opened his eyes, the man was gone.

Twenty years later out in Ohio a stranger came up to the New England minister. "Do you remember me?" he asked. "You and I spent an hour and a half together alone in a blizzard twenty years ago. I was saved that day under your preaching of the Gospel. Now I also am a preacher, and within this state there are a half-dozen men standing in pulpits who were saved under my ministry. All this has come because you were faithful in witnessing when the testimony must have seemed to you of little value."

While the follower of Christ is not responsible for the results which his testimony produces, he is responsible to live a life which will prove the truth of his words.

As followers of Christ we must live like people who have met a Risen Saviour. Unless there is in your life something of the sweetness which characterizes the Saviour, something of His humility and gentleness and long-suffering and mercy, you cannot be very well acquainted with Him. You cannot know Him in the power of His Resurrection life without a newness of life yourself, and your works lend weight to your witness.

Sow in the morn thy seed;
At eve hold not thy hand;
To doubt and fear give thou no heed,
Broadcast it o'er the land.

Thou knowest not which shall strive,
The late or early sown;
Grace keeps the precious germ alive,
When and where ever strewn:

Thou canst not toil in vain:
Cold, heat and moist and dry,
Shall foster and mature the grain
For garnerers in the sky.

Thence, when the glorious end,
The day of God, shall come,
The angel reapers shall descend,
And heaven shout, "Harvest home!"

— James Montgomery

* * *

SERVING THE LORD

He who would serve the Lord must be both diligent in his business and fervent in spirit. "**Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord**" (Romans 12:11), is the admonition of the writer of the Book of Romans. Often a man is diligent about the task he must perform, but there is no warmth and fervor and love for the task; and such service must always be limited and uninspired and unenjoyed by the laborer.

A nurse, hired to look after children, may be careful to perform her task well and be diligent to see that she does her duty; but a mother, loving her children and happy with them and thrilled with the opportunity of caring for them, has a fervency in spirit which glorifies and hangs an aura of beauty and of blessing over the most menial task in, the home.

Our Lord speaks of the difference between the shepherd and the hireling in the moment of crisis when the wolf comes.

The shepherd, He declares, “**giveth his life for the sheep**” (John 10:11); but “**the hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep**” (John 10:13). Diligence may manifest itself under ordinary routine, but it takes fervency to glorify such routine and to meet the crisis when it comes.

The really useful servant of God is the one who is always abounding in the work of the Lord and who at the same time prays without ceasing. If “**the plowing of the wicked is sin**” (Proverbs 21:4), then by the same rule, any task of God’s man, infused with His spirit and steeped in prayer, becomes a sacred task and true service for the Lord.

A man cannot pray about a godless act, and a man cannot be unceasing in prayer unless he is truly abounding in the work of the Lord. To serve God and serve Him right, there must be a devotion and affection for Him and a warmth of heart which leads instinctively to prayer.

At the same time, there must be no slothfulness in business. One must be both diligent and fervent truly to serve the Lord. Without both, the service is incomplete and can never merit the Master’s “**Well done!**”

Somehow strength lasted through the day,
Hope joined with courage in the way;
The feet still kept the uphill road,
The shoulders did not drop their load,
And unseen Power sustained the heart
When flesh and will failed in their part,
While God gave light
By day and night,
And also grace to bear the smart.
For this give thanks.

— Anonymous

* * *

THE REJECTED STONE

There is an old legend that when Solomon’s Temple was being built in Jerusalem, a stone came up from the quarries below for which the workers could find no place in the building. Apparently it did not fit anywhere into the structure. Assuming that a mistake had been made by the quarry workers, the stone was tumbled over the edge of the eminence upon which the Temple was being constructed and allowed to fall down into the debris of the valley below.

Weeks later they found that everything seemed to be on hand except the chief corner stone which was to complete the structure. Word was sent down to the quarry foreman that they were ready for the cornerstone, and the reply came that this had been sent weeks before.

They searched but failed to find it until someone remembered the stone thrown over the edge of the hill, and going down into the valley, they found there the stone which was intended for the chief ornamentation of the structure. With laborious effort they pulled it back up again and slipped it into place, and the Temple was finished.

Whether there is any truth in the old story, no man can say; but true or not, it illustrates very graphically the meaning of the verse, “**The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner**” (Luke 20:17). God, the Father, has selected the Lord Jesus Christ for the chief place in the plan of the ages. He it is who shall rule as King; and until He occupies the throne, there will be no universal justice and peace.

The world has sought to achieve concord in human relationships and a perfection of civilization without Him. He has been rejected, and the house of civilization will be forever incomplete until He has His rightful place.

God, the Father, in His own good time, will see that His Son, which the builders of “a brave, new world” have rejected, shall become the very Center and Foundation of the social structure. He was rejected and nailed to a cross; but because He endured that shame, the Father has in His plans highly exalted Him; and He someday shall occupy the chief place in the affairs of men as He is now the center of worship of heavenly beings.

A new and spotless page appears
With every coming dawn,
And thou, O soul, art given to choose
What thou shalt write thereon.

What name shall grace the page today,
Thine own in words of fire?
Or shall “The Christ” be blazoned there,
His Cross thy sole desire?

— Ruth Gibbs

~ end of book ~

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