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The First Resurrection

"...of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question..." Acts 23:6

When the Apostle Paul stood before the Jewish Sanhedrin he pointed out the true basis of Christian orthodoxy -- the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. Men have eagerly accepted the hope of a future life rather than accept that of a *resurrection* of the dead. It has been easier for average professing Christians to accept the teachings of the ancient Greeks, of the Egyptian Book of the Dead, or of Hindu mythology than it has been for them to believe the real teachings of Christ upon the subject.

A woman once remarked that she knew that she had an immortal soul because she had often felt it move within her. Such a firm credulity is impossible to shake.

The ego is flattered to think that within each heart there burns a spark of immortal fire. People like to think that their life will continue after death because of some good within them (by of birth or because of some great lifetime accomplishment). Some even find it humiliating to accept the idea that after their death they are dependent upon the good will of God and his power for a life after death.

In spite of these false hopes the resurrection teaching is the essence of Christian faith. As its founder stood at Lazarus' tomb, he intimated the final result of God's plan for man and his purpose in dying on behalf of the race.

Mary and Martha had sent word to Jesus of Lazarus' sickness, but Jesus had deliberately delayed his return to Bethany in answer to their plea for assistance. When Jesus arrived, the evidence of Lazarus' death had become apparent. Corruption and decay had set in. Mary and Martha greeted Jesus; their words, "... Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died" (John 11:21), mingled grief and faith and reproach. Jesus replied to Martha, "... Thy brother shall rise again" (John 11:23). If she had only the belief of the majority of professing Christians she might have said something like, "But Lord, is he not alive and happy now in heaven?" Being better instructed,

what she said was, "... *I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day*" (John 11:24).

Jesus now had an opportunity to declare himself. Albeit with tears and agony of heart, the words which Jesus spoke rolled forth like peals of thunder from his lips. Here he laid forth the fundamentals of faith, "... *the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*" (Heb. 11:1).

In answer to Martha's confession of faith, Jesus said:

"I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die ... Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God? ... Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me ... Take away the stone! ... Lazarus come forth" (John 11:25,26,40,43 excerpted)!

He that was dead came forth! With the removal of the stone from the tomb and the loosing of its prisoner, the stone is also removed from every believing heart, fears vanish, tears are dried, hope gilds the future, and joyful anticipation replaces grief and fear.

The Glory of God

Glory is a reflex action. It is created in the minds of others by the excellence of the one who is glorified. God's greatest glory among men shall always be his power to restore life to the dead. As man's greatest need is life, to him the most glorious being is the one who has the power to give life. Jesus, standing before the tomb of Lazarus, associates his awakening with the glory of God. In harmony with this we read that Christ Jesus was also "... *raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father*" (Rom. 6:4). "*And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together...*" (Isa. 40:5). What an assurance of a general resurrection! This glory is an inherent trait of the Holy City which shall come to earth (Rev. 21:2), "...*having the glory of God...*" (Rev. 21:11).

The Three Resurrections

Three different resurrections are spoken of in the New Testament: the first resurrection (Rev. 20:5,6); a better resurrection for the Ancient Worthies (Heb. 11:35); the general resurrection, in which "... *all that are in the graves ... shall come forth...*" (John 5:28).

In reverse order these might be compared as good, better, and best.

"Blessed and holy is he who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and they shall reign with him a thousand years" (Re . 20:6, RSV).

This "first" resurrection is so superior and desirable that Paul declares that he sacrificed his every earthly interest and possession. He was eager to share the death and sufferings of Christ in order that he might know "... *the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; if by any means [he] might attain unto the (out-) resurrection of the dead*" (Phil. 3:10,11). The apostle uses a prefix in connection with the word meaning "resurrection." his prefix means "out," but is nowhere else used. Thus, he differentiates between the "first" resurrection (which he was seeking) and the general resurrection.

Conformed

The Greek word *summorphos*, which means "to make like" or "jointly form," appears two other times in the New Testament. It means a "bringing into the close resemblance," or "is entity." Paul uses this word to describe his longing to be joined in Jesus' death.

For our citizenship is in heaven; whence also we wait for a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed ["into a conformity" -- *Diaglott*] to the body of his glory ... " (Phil. 3:20, ASV).

This is a restatement of the thought so often borrowed from his pen that if we be dead with him we shall also live with him and if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death we shall also be raised in the likeness of his resurrection (Rom. 6:5; 2 Tim. 2:11). The third use of this word is,

"And we know that to them that love God all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to his purpose. For whom he foreknew, he also foreordained *to be conformed to the image of his Son*, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. 8:28, ASV, author's italics).

Here is Paul's complete thought: He desired to participate in Christ's suffering so that through them he might be conformed to the character of Jesus, just as he had been made perfect through the things which he had suffered (Heb. 2:10). Paul sought conformity in Jesus' death so that he might also share in the likeness of Jesus' resurrection -- the "first" and glorious resurrection.

Such a transcendent ambition is no mere *interest*. It is a passion, a compulsion. It is to such as share his feelings that he discusses the subject of the "first" resurrection. "*But some will say, How are the dead raised? and with what manner of body do they come?*" (1 Cor. 15:35, ASV). If these questions were written with reference to the general resurrection the answers would be comparatively simple. How are the dead raised? By the power of their Creator -- and only fools say there is no God (Ps. 14:1). With what manner of body do they come? With a human body. Mankind, in general, die as men; there is no change in the grave; in the resurrection they shall come forth unchanged in the essential elements of their personalities -- their human minds, bodies, connections, and surroundings. They will know themselves as human beings; they could not know them-selves otherwise.

The butterfly bears no apparent relationship to the caterpillar, but the connection is vital -- the butterfly proceeds from the caterpillar's egg. Of the new creation it is said "*Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures*" (James 1:18). Such are begotten again, "... *not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever*" (1 Pet. 1:23). But, "... *as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God...*" (John 1:12).

The caterpillar's egg does not come from a lowly worm. It originates with a creature of the air, of the sunshine and of flowers. Nor does the New Creation result from any human begetting. The New Creation is begotten by the Spirit of God, but it is first found in human form, in a "body of humiliation" (Phil. 3:21, ASV), and is figuratively hidden in a "worm of the dust." Isaiah aptly described this aspect of Jesus' life saying, "... *he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him there is no beauty that we should desire him*" (Isa. 53:2). He was "... *despised and rejected of men...*" (Isa. 53:3) as are his followers.

Caterpillars are voracious eaters. Their appetites are often exclusive -- to the leaves of a single variety of tree; and so feeding, they grow at an astonishing rate. The new creature also has an insatiable appetite: for the Word of God. Jesus said:

"... Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God (Matt. 4:4) ... The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life (John 6:63). I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread he shall live forever ... Except ye eat a flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood ye have no life in you (John 6:51,53). Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." (Matt. 5:6).

And finally Peter's words, "*As newborn babes, long for the spiritual milk ... that ye may grow thereby ...*" (1 Pet. 2:2). This is no ordinary appetite to which Peter refers. This is a passion that will not be denied -- if the coming *imago* -- or "image" -- is to be fully developed.

The caterpillar does not eat to sustain the life of the caterpillar. It is absorbing the nutrients necessary to create the future butterfly. Nor is it to preserve his human life that the believer eats the flesh and drinks the blood of Jesus Christ (John 6:53). He is absorbing spiritual materials from which the spirit being will eventually be born in the "first" resurrection.

The Third Stage

Another stage remains before the butterfly emerges as the *imago*. It enters the pupa or chrysalis stage. It forms a shell around itself and to all appearances it dies. There is no evidence of life. In fact, during this time the pupa has no individual life. It seems controlled by a sort of collective, creative mind of the species, because when it comes forth it is no longer just a worm. It is no a creature of another world; no longer ugly and repugnant.

The new creature in Christ Jesus must also pass through a chrysalis stage.

Come my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast ... Lord thou wilt ordain peace for us: for thou also hast wrought all our works in us ... Arise and sing, ye that dwell in the dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead. (Isa. 26:20,12,19)

Apply this language to the butterfly. How uniquely it fits. The worm dwelt in the dust, but it is destined to awake and sing -- to rejoice as a butterfly. Its dew or juices come from herbs, but this Hebrew word also means light and prosperity, suggesting that the juices of the worm furnish the life fluids of the butterfly, a creature of light and prosperity.

Looking next at the antitype: "chambers" *are* identified with death (Prov. 7:27). The psalmist prophesies concerning God's people:

God standeth in the congregation of the mighty; he judgeth among the gods ... I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High. But ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes. (Ps. 82:1,6,7)

In a mystic sense the Christian weaves his own chamber of death. Figuratively, he enters his chamber, or chrysalis, when he consecrates himself to God, to follow his Master even unto death. Thereafter he is considered dead. And increasingly, he is cut off (mentally) from his surroundings. It is the holy Spirit which works in him -- transforming him from a creature suited to this

earth to a creature suited to live in the heavenlies. *"Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God"* (Col. 3:3). Figuratively, the feeding stage (worm) and the transforming (chrysalis) proceed simultaneously. Like the worm's transformation the process is not voluntary in the sense that the results are accomplished by the work of the Christian believer. A higher mind, a superior, spiritual law works in us, just as a higher racial law works in the chrysalis to create the butterfly and to teach it to fly.

Just as every stage of the butterfly's life contributes to the final *imago*, so every stage of the Christian's life contributes to the final "image" of Christ. The transformation is completed in the first resurrection. That is the final operation of the creative Spirit of God on behalf of the Christian. *"And the God of all grace, who called you unto his eternal glory in Christ, after that ye have suffered a little while, shall himself perfect, establish, strengthen you"* (I Pet. 5:10) -- beyond the suffering.

"The earth shall cast forth her dead." The word here translated "dead" is *rephaim* meaning "shades," or "spirit beings." As the earth cast forth or released Jesus as a spirit being, so shall it cast forth those who follow the Lamb whithersoever he goes. *"When Christ, who is our life, shall be manifested, then shall ye also with him be manifested in glory"* (Col. 3:4, ASV).

These *rephaim* are not all that Isaiah declares the earth will release *"... the earth also shall disclose her blood: and shall no more cover her slain"* (Isa. 26:21);

"... all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth ..." (John 5:28,29). These are references to the general resurrection.

The Great Example

The only example of the first resurrection that has yet been manifested to man is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The description recorded of the risen Christ is meager, but two facts concerning his resurrection appearances stand out:

- 1.) It was *"this same Jesus"* in personality and character, who died and rose again.
- 2.) The risen Christ was a very different being, in bodily powers and conditions, than the one who died.

To impress the first fact upon his disciples' minds he appeared in complete possession of human attributes saying, *"...A spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have"* (Luke 24:39). Yet a few minutes later, he fulfilled his own definition of one who was born of the spirit (John 3:8) by disappearing from sight. He came and went without regard for time, space, or the obstructions of human walls and locked doors. He ascended into heaven without wings or mechanical aid. The apostles realized the completeness of the metamorphosis, for they declare: *"... we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know him no more"* (2 Cor. 5:16) He became the King, eternal, immortal, invisible (1 Tim. 1:17).

Have we ever considered the change to which we have committed ourselves? The cold darkness of interstellar space and the absence of physical comforts and associations are not attractive surroundings for the natural mind to contemplate. It is indeed a far and strange country to which we journey.

Yet, if we are well acquainted with this same Jesus and remember that he went before us, we will remember that his Father (whom he loved as a man and to whom he longed to return) is also our Father. He loves us because we have loved his Son and believe on him. Our faith will transcend our fears and we shall gladly enter into our chambers. The first resurrection's transition from the fleshly to the

spirit conditions will be as strange and marvelous as that of the worm to the butterfly. But it will also be just as natural, perfect, and altogether happy.

"O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will set thy stones in fair colors, and lay thy foundations with sapphires. And I will make thy pinnacles of rubies, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy border of precious stones. And all thy children shall be taught of Jehovah; and great shall be the peace of thy children. In righteousness shalt thou be established: thou shalt be far from oppression, for thou shalt not fear; and from terror, for it shall not come near thee" (Isa. 54:11-14).

Be Vigilant

Up then, and linger not, thou saint of God,
Fling from thy shoulders each impeding load;
Be brave and wise, shake off earth's soil and sin
That with the bridegroom thou may'st enter in.
O watch and pray!

Clear hath the voice been heard, Behold I've come --
That voice that calls thee to thy glorious home,
That bids thee leave these vales and take swift wing
To meet the hosts of thy descending king; --
And thou may'st rise!

Here's a thick throng of foes, afar and near;
The grave in front, a hating world in rear;
Yet flee thou canst not, victory must be won
Ere fall the shadows of thy setting sun: --
And thou must fight.

Gird on thy armor; face each weaponed foe;
Deal with the sword of heaven the deadly blow;
Forward, still forward, till the prize divine
Rewards thy zeal, and victory is thine;
Win thou the crown.

Thou Passest Through

When thou passest through the waters
Deep the waves may be and cold,
But Jehovah is our refuge,
And his promise is our hold;
For the Lord himself hath said it,
He, the faithful God and true:
When thou comest to the waters
Thou shalt not go down, *but through*.

Seas of sorrow, seas of trial,
Bitterest anguish, fiercest pain,
Rolling surges of temptation
Sweeping over heart and brain --
They shall never overflow us
For we know his word is true;
All his waves and all his billows
He will lead us safely through.

Threatening breakers of destruction,
Doubts insidious undertow,
Shall not sink us, shall not drag us
Out to ocean depths of woe;
For his promise shall sustain us,
Praise the Lord, whose word is true!
We shall not go down, or under,
For he saith, "*Thou passes through*."

I Am My Beloved's, and My Beloved is Mine

Song of Solomon 6:3

The Bible is an extraordinary love story, one with which no human story compares. It contains the story of God's love for our race. Originally, we were created in his likeness, but by Adam's disobedience we fell under God's just condemnation. What a blend of heavenly parental emotion is conveyed in the Bible narrative. God so loved the world, while we were yet sinners, that he gave his only begotten son to be our redeemer, that he might restore us again to divine favor. Only after we have been reconciled to him can we fulfill his creative purpose.

This view of God, of his character and plans for man, is different from that which once terrorized many Christians. There was a time when many viewed God as almighty in power and knowledge, but destitute of love and sympathy. There was a time when many considered that God once sat in the councils of eternity, before the creation of the earth or of our race, and there planned our creation and everlasting destiny. Many supposed that God deliberately placed the race under such unfavorable conditions that only a comparative handful would attain to a life of bliss -- either in this life or in that to come. Such also considered that because the majority of men would be steeped in sin, God decided that such should never end their miserable existence. Oh, how horrible, how revolting this logic is, even to the human mind. And yet it is such logic which mistakenly teaches that God shall consign millions to an eternity of torture.

God Is Truly Love

What a relief it has been to awaken to a better knowledge of God and of his Word. What a relief it has been to recognize that the teachings of the Dark Ages are no more than a horrible nightmare - - as unreal as they were cruel and unjust -- as unscriptural as they were contrary to the conception of reasonable minds. Surely these false teachings do not agree with the harmony of God's character: his love, wisdom, justice, and power.

Just as human parents have occasionally used the caricatures found in nursery rhymes to obtain from their children a frightened form of obedience, man has attempted to secure this same obedience from other men on behalf of God. But, the ghosts and goblins of infancy faded from our physical memory and we began to take note of such deceptions and by whom they were practiced. Similarly, God's spiritual children have learned the truth about such "terrors of the Lord" -- which, however severe, have been distorted by theologians who hoped to exercise a restraining effect upon evil. We learn in the Scriptures that their fear toward God is taught by men (Isa. 29:13), not by divine precept.

It is a relief to know the love of God. He is not just willing to save to the uttermost (Heb. 7:25). He is also able to save all who put their trust in him! Not only so, God is so willing to save that he made provision for every human being to come to a clear knowledge of his grace and a full opportunity to attain eternal life through Christ Jesus: by obeying God.

We do well to reflect upon the figurative "pit" from which Jehovah lifted us when he placed our feet upon the Rock, Christ Jesus. We are blessed in remembering his mercy, by which he anointed our eyes to see wonderful things in his Word. By bringing us out of darkness and into his marvelous light (I Pet. 2:9) we have been able to brush away superstitions, misunderstanding, and mistranslation. These errors have long clouded both his Word and his children's perception of their great Father of lights, from whom every good and perfect gift proceeds (James 1:17).

Individuals Chosen To Be the Bride of Christ

Our theme text deals with another part of this great love story. Our Father did more than merely provide redemption for our race through Christ Jesus. He honored and glorified our Redeemer as a reward for those things which he endured for the sake of obedience to the Father (Phil. 2:8-11). Additionally, he arranged to select a bride and joint heir for his son, our Lord Jesus. No one individual was so chosen; but rather a group of individuals. By comparison to all the humans in the world this group, which is called the "elect" (Col. 3:12) or the "church" (Col. 1:18), is only a little flock (Luke 12:32). These are now in the process of selection and perfection. When their number is complete they will become "... *the Bride, the Lamb's wife*" (Rev. 21:9).

None of man's love stories will ever compare with the story of Christ and how he gave his life for his church. Jesus redeemed "her" with his own life. These who are to be rewarded by God with an excellent glory are invited to share in his cross, in his sufferings, and in his death. If they are prove faithful, they are also to be received into glory with him, are to share his love and in his throne and the Father's favor. Our readers are familiar with the details of this arrangement, and we will not review them now.

Our text briefly makes two basic points: I am my beloved's; my beloved is mine.

Who Are the Beloved's?

No one enters this company unawares. Consequently, no heathen philosopher or any who have lived and died without a personal knowledge of their personal Savior can ever become members of this elect church. All who become members are able to say "I am my beloved's." Manifestly, many Christian church members will not have a part in this company because only a few can truly say that they are his beloved. This union with the Beloved (Christ) implies that justification through repentance and faith in the precious blood had already taken place.

A Covenant People

It is implied that those who call their Savior their "Beloved" have not only heard of Christ but have also made a definite and positive compact with him. This commitment to be his in every thought, word, and deed becomes the believer's marriage vow or covenant -- if he will accept us and be our bridegroom.

As long as evil prevails in this world and as long as the god of this world blinds the minds of most men, none will approach our Lord Jesus unless the Father draws them (John 6:44). At this time, the Father is not drawing all men. His work is intentionally limited to this elect class. The work of drawing the world will be accomplished during the Messianic Age. Then Christ and his glorified church shall be God's agents. They will fill the whole earth with the knowledge of the truth. The power of truth has the power to attract. When it reaches the heart (our center of human understanding), its effect is to attract man to it. Yet, it is also true that this drawing power may be resisted: not only in the present age, but also in the age to come (Acts 3:23).

Only a few are now being drawn to Christ because only a few know the truth. Consequently, many do not see the opportunity of accepting the Bridegroom and of becoming one with him. Some, however, do accept. To them belongs the privilege of sealing the covenant between themselves and the Lord through the grace which binds them.

A Privileged Few

Have you accepted the invitation to give yourself to the Lord (Prov. 23:26; Rom. 12:1)? It is proper that each answer this question individually. Those who answer "yes" are to be accepted as members of his bride, if they continue faithful. And those who answer "yes" may also be assured of the second part of our text: *"my beloved is mine."* We may consciously decide to continue in this attitude throughout our life. And if we are faithful (Rev. 2:10) we have the assurance that we will be with our Lord in the resurrection, that we will be like him and will share in his glory and in his throne (Rev. 3:21).

Consider the Implications

My beloved is mine! What do those words imply? The Scriptures declare that, *"He who has the Son has life; he who has not the Son has not life"* (1 John 5:12, RSV). Here is a promise of eternal life. All things are to become theirs, and this we know on the authority of the Apostle Paul. *"Whether ... things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's and Christ is God's"* (1 Cor. 3:22,23). We have been relieved to know that our sins were forgiven by grace through the merit of Jesus' blood. How much more are we encouraged by knowing that we have been united with the Son of the King of the universe -- the same son in whom the Father is well pleased -- the same son whom God has made his sole associate in the glory and dominion of the universe.

We may enjoy many of these blessings now. Surely, there are some which are reserved for the future: the glory and the honor. But we are already enjoying the care of our Bridegroom! He protects us. He provides for us. He comforts us now, while we abide in this human tabernacle. And why? So that as we pass through the valley of the shadow of death we need fear no evil (Ps. 23:4). Yes, he is with us. His rod and his staff are our comfort.

Those who live up to the words: *"I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine"* have another promise belonging to this life. The Master says to them, *"... lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age"* (Matt. 28:20, RSV). He is especially near to his own at the end of the age. He promised to reveal himself to his faithful in special ways, even before she is changed and beholds him in his glory.

To These Belong the Promises *"Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises ..."* (2 Pet. 1:4). It is the privilege of these "engaged" ones to apply the promises to themselves, to accept the offerings and tokens of our Lord's love for them, undeserved as it may be. These may hear him say, I will deliver you in six troubles, and in the seventh I will not forsake you (Job 5:19). His grace is sufficient for us (2 Cor. 12:9). He invites us to call upon him in the day of trouble that he might deliver us (Ps. 50:15). He is so careful over his own that we have the assurance that all things work together for the good of those who love God, and are called according to his purpose (Rom. 8:28).

These promises were summed up by the poet:

In every condition, in sickness, in health;
In poverty's vale, or abounding in wealth,
At home and abroad, on the land or the sea,
As thy days may demand, shall thy strength ever be.
When through the deep waters I call thee to go,
The rivers of woe shall not thee overflow;
For I will be with thee thy troubles to bless,
And sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.
When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
My grace all-sufficient shall be thy supply;
The flames shall no hurt thee -- I only design
Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.

What peace, what quietness of spirit, what strength to endure hardness lies behind these assurances of our Bridegroom. We are our beloved's and his is ours. Such confidence has allowed his faithful ones to endure dark experiences. Their endurance has surprised the world. They have entered the fiery furnace, but the world has not recognized that the Son of God was with them just as he was with the three Hebrew youths (Dan. 3:25). These have endured as seeing him who is invisible (Heb. 11:27).

The world does not know this invisible Friend. They are unacquainted with the heavenly Bridegroom. They do not know his sustaining grace during their trials. They are greatly to be pitied because they bear their burdens alone. But the Lord's people may lay their burdens at the feet of him who said, "*Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*" (Matt. 11:28).

The world's case is sad indeed. But, how much worse it is for those who have once loved him, who have once experienced his care, and who have wandered off -- having lost their first love? These have forgotten that they were purged from their sins. They become deaf to the promises of God: those pertaining to this life and to the life to come (2 Cor. 4:17,18). They battle for things which last for a moment. These are in a worse condition than the world because the apostle declares that it would have been better for them had they never known he way than, after knowing it, to turn their backs upon the knowledge delivered to them (2 Pet. 2:21).

Let those who have named the name of Christ abide in him. Let each, individually, continue in faith, in love, in zeal, walking in his footsteps. Thus they shall make their calling and election sure (2 Pet. 1:10).

- C.T. Russell

The Music of the Rest

"He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad because they are quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven." - Psalm 107:29-30

In the grand oratorios of life
God writes us unexpected rests!
These break the rush, the strain,
 the storm, the strife,
And are our surely needed tests!

Speed seems to be the keynote of the twentieth century. We are able to crowd as much into a single day as our grandparents could accomplish in an entire week. This condition is possible because of the rate of commercial travel and automation. We are easily caught up in this swirl of activity and may become so busy -- even in Christian activities -- as to leave no room for Christ. The reminder to pause, to rest, to listen is sometimes as necessary for us as is the stop sign which we find at every railroad crossing. That ominous "STOP," which safeguards lives, has a spiritual equivalent in the life of the Christian.

I Stand At The Door And Knock Jesus often knocks for admission to our lives. But we may not always hear that knock above the clamor of our daily lives. There is so much to think about, so much to do! We become preoccupied. And when his friendly rap is heard upon the door we may feel more irritation at the interruption than joy at the opportunity. Yes, there is much to do, places to go, with such a carefully arranged timetable that we have but a few minutes to spare. Oh, if we must have visitors let them come on our schedule -- when we are prepared for them. Not many will go to the door with joyous expectancy, hoping to find at the door some long time friend in whose company we can relax, listen, and be refreshed, one who is always welcome and for whose sake all chores are gladly abandoned.

Yet, Jesus is such a visitor. *"If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with me"* (Rev. 3:20, NIV).

Jesus taught us that food for our spirit is more important than a busy schedule which provides no time for rest. We need time to sit with him and listen to what he has to say. The busy Marthas, rushing around on various errands, feeling the strain of their self-imposed schedules, are admirable people. Yes, the world would be lost without them. The quiet Mary like individuals may give the world its beauty, but the world needs its Marthas to translate the spiritual visions of the few Marys into reality.

We are by nature mixed personalities, full of curiosity and varying interests, and we need those "knocks" at the doors of our mind in order to learn when we should be busy, and when to be quiet -- to rest and take in new strength. That is the purpose of the rest and it is the reason for our Master's knock on the door.

It is during the most hectic of days that Jesus knocks. When we are behind schedule before we have even started, or when any delay seems contrived to undo all that we have accomplished, it is then that we hear the Master's gentle knock. We may protest that we are too busy. We have no time to stop. Our own business may be completely unselfish, but the Lord says: "I have spread the meal, cease your labors. Come and sup with me and I with you."

A hearty response to that gracious call is its own reward. The door that shuts out the crowded days, that calls a halt to its own business, also shuts in "... *the peace of God, which transcends all understanding...* " (Phil. 4:7,NIV).

How refreshing is that short rest! A brief pause gives us quiet thought, a reassessment of our situation, a reappraisal of our liabilities and assets, the reassurance of the promise: "... *My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness*" (2 Cor. 12:9).

A few minutes alone in the presence of the Lord will change the tenor of the day. From frenzied haste to calm leisured action, from snapping strain to sunny ease, the day rolls out unwrinkled, successful, and satisfying. We have supped with him and he with us. The brief visit has been invigorating, an intercourse with the Unseen Guest.

The way is sometimes weary
To yonder nearing clime,
But a little talk with Jesus
Hath helped me many a time.
The more I come to know him,
And all his grace explore,
It sets me ever longing
To know him more and more

The Apostle John records an interesting incident in Jesus' post-Resurrection ministry (John 21:1-13). Jesus' appearances to his followers had become less frequent. Weary of waiting, the active Peter decided to go fishing. Ready to follow his lead, the other disciples went along with him. They fished all night but caught nothing. But when morning came a strange stood on the shore calling: "Children, have you any meat?"

This was a common practice. A hungry traveler, would not hesitate to hail a fishing boat in the hopes of getting a fish from which to make himself a roadside meal. From the distance, the stranger could barely be seen, and his salutation was a common one. Unaware of his identity, they sent one word back across the gray waters, "No! "

No one bothered to explain. Nor did they apologize or their lack of food. Neither could they hide the disappointment which these cold, wet, tired, and hungry men must have felt. Their blunt, disgruntled and unfriendly answer carried across the waves to the stranger. But, oh what an answer returned to them. Did Peter and John glance one at the other, each asking the unspoken question? For the answer that reached them was simple: "Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and you shall find."

How often have Jesus' followers toiled too hard and too long in the wrong place. At length, many have admitted that they have achieved no Thing. So also these disciples. It was no longer their time or place to fish for scaly creatures. The Master had called the away from such pursuits. He bid them wait until they received his new commission: to become fishers of men. But the men had grown tired of waiting. Content in their wisdom, they set about doing something -- returning to their profitless past. But Jesus knew their heart. He did not rebuke them. Instead, with infinite love he ministered to them in the way that only he could. They had nothing for him, but he had plenty for them.

They had learned well their earlier lessons of obedience. They cast the net as instructed and found it so full that they could hardly pull it to the shore.

Oh, what a scene that must have been, with the early morning sun shedding its first beams on that quiet coast! Peter grabbed his fisherman's coat and dove into the sea, hastily stroking towards the shore. He forgot all but his desire to reach the feet of his Lord. The others slowly pulled the heavy net and its catch toward the beach. And what do they see when they first arrive on land? Those tired eyes are met by the sight of fish and bread cooking on a cheery fire by the shore. The Master had made them a meal, but so that it would not be a one sided affair, he bids them bring their share of fish to the fire.

Single-handedly, Peter (now infused with strength and revitalized by the presence of the Master) hauls the full net onto the land. They count the fish and marvel that the net was not torn by the sheer weight of their catch.

The Master waits for them. There is no reprimand. He asks no questions. He offers only an invitation: "Come and dine." Now quiet, they gather around him, each busy with his own thoughts. He gives fish and bread to each man. What would we give to have been there, to have shared in that meal, prepared and served by the risen Savior in continuation of his ministry to men?

The privilege is still ours. Even today he calls across the noise of our busy hours, when tired, frustrated, and empty, we occupy our time with the busy getting and doing which adds little or nothing to the spiritual treasure we bear in these earthly bodies. " 'Tis not thy work the Master wants, but thee." *"It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to service, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them"* (Luke 12:37 NIV).

He has prepared a feast for us. He invites us to take time to eat with him, to rest with him in sweet and holy fellowship. None can rest with him without bearing the evidences of his heavenly companionship. In our homes, in our meetings, at the places of our business, in our social contacts, there remains that touch of grace which we have received of him. To be with him often, to admire him, to love him, to be served and sustained by him is to be transformed into his likeness little by little. It is to receive from him a radiant sanity as well as the power of a fuller, richer ministry.

Ye Can Do Nothing

With Christ in the boat the storm becomes a calm. With Christ on the shore his counsel filled the net. With his spirit within the inner chamber of the heart each day becomes a triumph.

Courage crowds out care. Glorified common sense directs our actions, trims the tasks and slows down our hurried pace. The love which empties itself in service dominates all human contacts. Courtesy, kindness, compassion, and sympathy; calm strength which lifts life's load with ease, which takes in its stride its numerous changes -- these are some of the outer evidences of our inner rest with him who said: *"Take my yoke upon you ... my yoke is easy and my burden is light"* (Matt. 11: 29,30, NIV).

How much we need that pause, that rest, That converse with the Unseen Guest.

- condensed from F.A. Shuttleworth, Scotland

Notice of Annual Meeting

The Annual Meeting of the Pastoral Bible Institute, Inc. will be held (D.V.) on June 6, 1987. Reports will be rendered and matters discussed concerning the activities of the Institute. There will also be an election of Directors to serve during the coming fiscal year.

We remind members that they may nominate brethren whom they wish to elect as directors. The Institute's affairs are committed to seven brethren elected from among the Institute's membership. Those now serving are:

Buss, J.L. Albuquerque, NM
Gonczewski, A. West Suffield, CT
Jarmola, A. Chicago, IL
Pazucha, P.J. Milwaukee, WI
Petran, L. Racine, WI
Webster, L.R. Topsfield, MA
Webster, J.B. Haverhill, MA

We, your brethren, report that a Christian spirit dwells among us and we believe that the Lord has blessed our association in this ministry. We would gladly continue in this service, but recognize that our reelection is not essential: selfishness, even in the Lord's service, is not appropriate. We would see the Word of the Lord proclaimed with the greatest efficiency and it is always possible that those involved with the intricacies of any work may not see opportunities that are apparent to others. Changes in office can be beneficial and we are ready to stand cheerfully aside if the membership feels that others are better fitted for this service.

Pray about this. If the Lord leads you to nominate other brethren, forward their names and addresses (with their consent) to this office before April 3, 1987. The list of nominees will be published in the May-June issue of the HERALD for the prayerful consideration of the membership prior to the meeting.

About Our Contributors:

It continues to be our policy to list the names of contributing authors where that is possible. Sometimes it is not possible. Authors may request that their article be run without attribution. Other pieces are reused after such a lengthy period of time that their origin is not known. Still other articles are the result of extensive collaboration.

When authorship is not attributed we suggest that readers accept the thoughts presented for their evident value. Such articles are not intended as position statements on the part of the Institute. In those cases where the material represents a position of the Institute such will be clearly stated in the body of the article.

- Editorial Committee

The Table of the Lord

"Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." - 1 Corinthians 5: 8

The Memorial Supper of our Lord celebrated once a year, on its anniversary, by many of our readers, was instituted by Jesus on the night in which he was betrayed. It is symbolic of what may be regarded as a preliminary course -- "that part of a meal served at one time, with its accompaniments" -- of the great feast that the Father promises to provide for *"all people."* Special food is supplied for this course, for specially invited guests.

Some may desire to partake whom others may think are not of those for whom the Memorial is particularly intended; but they are welcome at the Table, in accordance with the laws of hospitality so emphasized by the Lord in his Word. None may rightfully designate who may partake or who may not, except by the invitation extended in the Lord's own words. It is for each participant to judge his own heart and need. *"Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup..." (1 Cor. 11:28).*

The symbols of the supper represent, by the bread, the counsel and example of Jesus -- his body broken by three and a half years of arduous sacrificial service; and by the cup of wine, his death as the Redeemer of all mankind; *"... to be testified in due time..." (1 Tim. 2:6).* He himself said:

"The bread of God is he which cometh down out of heaven, and giveth life unto the world ... I am the bread of life ... This is the will of my Father, that every one that beholdeth the Son, and believeth on him, should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day ... The words that I have spoken unto you are spirit, and are life" (John 6:33,35,40,63).

Similarly, of the cup Jesus said: *"This is my blood of the new covenant which is poured out for many ..."* (Mark 14:24). Thus these symbols represent the death of the Lord Jesus, which we memorialize *"till he come"* (1 Cor. 11:26) in power and glory to bless all the nations of the earth in accordance with God's oathbound covenant with Abraham, as expounded by the Apostle Paul (Gen. 22:18; Rom. 4:13; Gal. 3:16, 29).

Some latitude of understanding is permitted by variations in the four accounts of the institution of the Memorial Supper--those of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Paul. Matthew's and Mark's accounts quote the Lord as saying when he served the cup: *"This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many."* Luke says he said: "for you," and mentions two cups, one served during and one after the Supper. Paul's account (1 Cor. 11:23-26) omits any designation "for many" or "for you." His explanation of the significance of the emblems in the preceding chapter (10:14-17), owing to the breadth of meaning of several of the Greek words he uses, may be taken to indicate either a sharing of the benefits symbolized in the loaf and the cup or a personal participation in what they symbolize -- a common union of the blood of Christ, a common union of the Body of Christ.

[For more information about how these seeming variations between the gospels may be harmonized, see Edersheim's The Temple: Its Ministry and Services. -- Editorial Committee.]

Perhaps this variation in the accounts is intended, under the direction of the holy Spirit, to permit those who realize a mystic unity with their Head, in sacrifice and suffering and in present and

future service, to see in the emblems a reminder of this relationship. Certainly such a view tends to add to the solemnity and impressiveness of the celebration.

On the other hand, those who feel that this claim would be presumptuous on their part, yet who would "...follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth..." need suffer no loss of benefit. Holders of both views recognize the all sufficiency of the sacrifice of their Lord, and their paramount indebtedness to him. "Let each man be fully persuaded in his own mind..." and let each respect the others' convictions. "Christ our Passover hath been slain for us."

One of the most important lessons of his Memorial celebration, as emphasized by St. Paul (1 Cor. 10:17; 11:19-21, 27-30) is the unity of the body -- of those who partake. A lack of heart unity with other believers vitiates the significance and value of the observance to the one cherishing a partisan or sectarian attitude.

For yet a little while -- how short! how short!
the Coming One will be here, and will not tarry!

- H.E. Hollister

The Memorial Supper

"For as often as ye eat this Bread and drink this Cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He come."

According to our usual method of reckoning, the Memorial celebration this year should be held after sundown, Sunday, April 12, 1987.

This, according to the Jewish calendar, is the 14th of Nisan, and the appropriate time for the brethren to meet "in remembrance" of the Lamb who was slain.

"This do in remembrance of Me."

Comforters of the Brethren

"What is that in thine hand?" - Exodus 4:2

Moses had been commissioned by God to deliver his brethren from Egypt's bondage. As he stood before the Lord, Moses asked God why he had been the one chosen (Exod. 4:1). Moses knew the task which lay ahead and viewed himself as impotent to undertake it. Why? Because he thought that he would be unable to convince the people of his divine commission.

Knowing Moses' hesitance, God drew his attention to the walking staff (or "rod") which lay in Moses' hand. God showed Moses that this rod was all that he would need, since Divine power could be manifested through it. What Moses already possessed (if used as God directed) would accomplish the defeat of Pharaoh and enable him to liberate his burdened brethren.

Using this simple rod as an instrument of God great things were accomplished. God can do great things with any tool or vessel given over to him for use. With his rod Moses performed miracles before the king of Egypt, lifted it over the waters of the Red Sea to make a pathway for Israel's hosts, and at the desert rock used it to bring forth refreshing water to quench their thirst.

Later, a rod was used to demonstrate God's approval of Aaron as a priest. By it God stamped his service with the divine blessing. When this rod's temporary use had ended, it was laid up in the Ark within the Most Holy as a perpetual memorial of God's beneficent overruling.

Both of these rods were simple tools at the time they were called to God's service. Both performed great tasks. Both were used according to his word.

Today, God asks of us, *"What is that in thine hand?"* We too are called to serve his cause and his people, however feeble our abilities may seem. The Word clearly says: *"... it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful"* (I Cor. 4:2). We are also to be diligent in using the opportunities we have, for *"... the night cometh, when no man can work"* (John 9:4). Another text implies a similar thought: *"Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might..."* (Eccl. 9:10). There are no vacations in the Lord's service to those who recognize the force of these Scriptures; neither need there be idleness so long as we have the strength to act or a heart and mind disposed to pray for one another.

What Can I Do?

The question is asked, "Where is there a place for me in the Lord's service? I cannot preach the Word; my life is filled with obligations that limit my time and means. What can I do but stand idle while others serve in more worthwhile ways?"

This attitude illustrates a misunderstanding, a failure in interpreting the words, do with thy might what thy hands find to do? The words imply that we should search for something to do. They cannot mean a careless sitting down to complain about our enforced idleness. They cannot mean a waiting for something to be thrust into empty hands. *"... he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened"* (Luke 11:10).

If we are ready to be used in little things (Luke 16:10), to use what we already possess, God will show how he may spread his Word and lend a helping hand to others along life's upward way. If thus used, we may be like the rods of Moses and Aaron. God will reveal how he can be glorified

through our service. He is able to make our "rods" bud, blossom, and . fruit in a continual remembrance of his grace.

Kind words never die; acts of love are registered in heaven, and the words of Jesus are still wonderfully, blessedly true: "... *Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me*" (Matt. 5:40).

Opportunities Overlooked

Listen for the question that God may ask of u: "*What is that in thine hand?*" By wanting to please him, by faithfully answering this question from God, we may some glad day hear the Lord say: "... *thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord*" (Matt. 25:21). In line with this thought the Scriptures show that the greatest of privileges are easily overlooked in the affairs of life.

It was so of Mary. She poured out her fragrant ointment upon her Lord. But her act of love seemed secondary to what others considered important. For, "... *there 're some that had indignation within themselves, and said, Why as this waste of the ointment made*" (Mark 14:4)? There is always something in our hands. Are we looking, as did Mary, for some opportunity to serve with whatever we have? The ease with which we can neglect such opportunities to act is brought home to us in Jesus' words: "... *Inasmuch as ye did it not t' one of the least of these, ye did it not to me*" (Matt. 25:45).

The context of this verse reveals that those to whom Jesus spoke will yet be truly surprised. He says the, will ask, When did we see the Lord so near and waiting to be served? This is an important point to remember lest we also miss the disguise which the Lord assumes for a purpose. Even now we note the presence of the Lord in the age ending times; he is unmistakably present in those little ones yet found in the earth. Above our other privileges, none can compare with that if being true Barnabas characters, comforters of the brethren.

Jesus' law and exemplary love demand that we be alert to support the weak (Acts 20:35) and not to please ourselves (Rom. 15:1). This is not the world's ideal, for they are interested in the strength. But we see that such service rates high in the Lord's estimation. To him, our greatest opportunity is that of laying down life itself for the brethren (John 15:13), of bearing one another's burdens, and so fulfilling the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2). This word includes us. We may be poor. We may be only a minor feature in God's grand scheme of things. Nevertheless, the word remains: this is how we know love "... *because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren*" (1 John 3:16).

The Parable of the Trees

"Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is: for he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit." - Jeremiah 17:7-8

Trees are often used in Scripture to picture nations, peoples, and individuals. To refresh our minds we will note just a few:

"... Appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness [people of God], the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified" (Isa. 61:3).

And all the trees of the field [all the people of the world], shall know that I the Lord have brought down the high tree [the proud and haughty nation], have exalted the low tree [the humble nation], have dried up the green tree [the nation of Israel once vigorous], and have made the dry tree to flourish [prophetic of his favor returning to Israel]: I the Lord have spoken and have done it (Ezek. 17:24).

For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains [kingdoms] and the hills [smaller nations] shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field [people of the world] shall clap their hands (Isa. 55:12).

Let the field [the world] be joyful, and all that is therein: then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice (Ps. 96:12).

We turn our attention to our Master's words: "... *Behold the fig tree, and all the trees*" (Luke 21:29). In view of the rebirth of the state of Israel, we here find a particularly modern statement. He urges us to observe what transpires in Israel, and we now see that she is rising -- coming up. But Jesus tells us not to end our observations at the nation of Israel. We are to observe "... *all the trees.*"

As we look at "*all the trees,*" the gentile nations we ask ourselves, What is happening? They are declining, their favor by God is ending.

Man Worship In Israel

Remember Gideon's record: his victories; how Israel attributed their victories to Gideon instead of to the God of Israel (who had used Gideon as his instrument). This provides us an example of man worship. Israel decided to make Gideon their ruler. The Scriptures record their words, and Gideon's reply:

Then the men of Israel said unto Gideon, Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son's son also; for thou hast delivered us from the hand of Midian. And Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the Lord shall rule ... (Judges 8:22,23).

Gideon was a great man and servant of God! Had he been prone to arrogance, pride, or vanity, what an opportunity this would have been for him. He had planned and achieved an outstanding victory. The praises of the multitude rang in his ears. And now they would come to make him

ruler, to make him the founder of a royal dynasty, to start a royal line with him and afterward his son and his son's son after him through successive generations. Gideon wanted nothing to do with it. His reply was sure and certain.

In today's political scene there are men who refuse to be candidates for office, but in refusing, they usually express reservations. The people respond politically to those reservations. They say: "He is subject to draft," which is what the politician expects them to do -- to draft him as their one indispensable man. Gideon gave Israel no loopholes. He offered them no chance to draft him at a later date.

Have you ever heard a rejection speech? Have you ever heard a presidential candidate reject a convention nomination? No. Men make speeches of acceptance; often written far in advance because they anticipate the nomination. The nominee may even pretend to be preoccupied, having meetings scheduled a thousand miles away. But, he will wait for the call to come. And perhaps with an airplane standing by to whisk him to the convention, he will hurry to accept the nomination as quickly as possible.

Gideon was offered the highest position on the earth: rulership over God's typical kingdom. Flushed with victory, Gideon rose to give a speech. Surely this too would be a speech of acceptance! Gideon was different. His was a speech of rejection. Nothing like it had been done before. He rejected their offer and made the people a better nomination: *"And Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: The Lord shall rule over you."*

What loyalty on the part of Gideon! His reason for rejection was that the Lord alone was entitled to the rulership. The Lord had given Gideon's forces the victory. Alone, Gideon knew that he would have gone down in defeat. He was an instrument in the hand of God. So Gideon returned to private life and for forty years Israel listened to his advice. While Gideon lived, Israel dwelt in peace and quietness and safety.

Years passed. Gideon was gathered to his fathers and the scene quickly changed. Man worship once again arose in Israel, but this time someone aided and encouraged it. The offer was made to Abimelech, who, while a son of Gideon, is a different personality than his father. His father was good faithful, and wise; Abimelech was evil. He induced his brothers to aid him. When they had done so, he gathered a gang of criminals who murdered all but one of his brothers, eliminating all who might oppose him in the future. Abimelech was proclaimed ruler of Israel (cf. Judges 9). Let us turn our attention to Abimelech's brother Jotham, the one who escaped.

Jotham was Gideon's youngest son. Only he cherished his father's memory; only he stood for the altars of his father and the temple of his God in the face of danger. Jotham limbed Mt. Gerizim and with ringing voice he rebuked Israel with a parable.

Before turning to the parable let us note one of the admonitions found in Paul's second Epistle to Timothy (2 Tim. 3:16, 17):

All scripture is given by inspiration, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

These words include the parable of Jotham. Its application was not only for those of the past, nor only for those of the future. The words speak to us.

Parable Of The Trees

We read the parable:

"And when they told it to Jotham, he went and stood in the top of Mount Gerizim, and lifted up his voice, and cried, and said unto them, Hearken unto me, ye men of Schechem, that God may hearken unto you. The trees went forth on a time to anoint a king over them; and they said unto the olive tree, Reign thou over us. But the olive tree said unto them, Should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they honor God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees? And the trees said to the fig tree, Come thou, and reign over us. But the fig tree said unto them, Should I forsake my sweetness, and my good fruit, and go to be promoted over the trees? Then said the trees unto the vine, Come thou and reign over us. And the vine said unto them, should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees? Then said all the trees unto the bramble, Come thou and reign over us. And the bramble said unto the trees, If in truth ye anoint me king over you, then come and put your trust in my shadow; and if not, let fire come out of the bramble and devour the cedars of Lebanon." - (Judges 9:7-15)

The trees of the forest wanted a ruler. First, they turned to trees that bore fruit. They asked the olive tree, and note the answer they received: *"Shall I leave my fatness, and go to be promoted over the trees?"* The trees then turned to the fig and the vine. When they were asked, they gave practically the same answer. Their reason for not ruling over the other trees is the same: namely, that their hands were full. They were busy; they had enough to do with the service the Lord gave them.

A follower of Christ will find that he too has much to do to keep his heart and life right and to fulfill the duties and privileges the Lord has given him. Such find that there is no time to rule over his fellow servants. Each ecclesia has enough to do in taking care of its own affairs, without attempting to dictate the affairs of another ecclesia. Applying this parable spiritually, to the church, we see its beautiful simplicity.

Who Will Rule God's People?

Which trees were asked to rule? They were trees which were already serving the people. These trees had entered upon their service without orders from any other tree.

The olive tree, first to refuse rulership, provides oil which is highly valued. It is healing, soothing, and possesses medicinal properties that are renowned in the Word of God and among mankind. What a beautiful picture of the holy Spirit and its operation in the mind and heart of the new creature. The holy Spirit illuminates the mind and tenderizes the heart. The child of God who is filled with this oil of the holy Spirit is the last to desire to rule over God's heritage. Such are meek and humble -- no traces of pride, arrogance, or self-importance mark their characters.

Dictators do not arise because of humility. Humility is not part of their character. Dictators, whether political or religious, are either the spawn of ambitious intolerance or of financial or spiritual depression.

The fig tree is next to refuse rulership over the trees. No one in Palestine need be reminded of its luscious fruit. Figs are nourishing, sweet, and wholesome -- a fruit of great nutritious value. The fig tree says: *"I am busy bearing sweet fruit and should I forsake my sweetness, the bearing of such good fruit, for the purpose of becoming ruler over the rest of the trees?"*

Is this a lesson for God's children today? The fig tree realized that fruit bearing would cease the day it started to rule over other trees. The two could not go together. No matter how sweet the beginning might be, such sweetness would not last in the ruling process; it would be replaced by a different spirit. In the hands of men, whips contain no sweetness; though the bud might have a sweet taste, yet bitter would be the flower.

It is a duty and privilege of the child of God to develop the fruits and graces of the spirit! How lovely are those who do so! Ambition to shine or to rule over their brethren is not found among such dear ones. Were such an ambition to arise in the heart of such an one, all fruit bearing would cease. All sweetness would be lost; that sweetness which is so pleasing and honoring to the Lord, so refreshing to God's children, and which even worldly people are quick to recognize.

The trees turn to the vine. How beautiful is the reputation of the vine in this world. Yet it is still more beautiful in spiritual symbology. Need we dwell on the juice of the grape, how it has cheered and comforted the heart of man, bringing nourishment to his body in times of sickness, even when other foods were abhorred. What shall we say of the spiritual significance of the juice of the grape. It is inherent to the growth of the new creature from the hour of begetting to the moment of birth. It is essential, too, in the course of mankind from the day of resurrection to the attainment of restitution. The juice of the grape pictures the blood of Christ, the great and essential truth of the Ransom. From this central truth radiate all other truths of the Gospel.

How did the vine reply to the trees? *"The vine said unto them, Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees?"*

Notice the course chosen by the trees in their search for a ruler. They began by going to the best of the trees. They recognized those qualities that were worthy of praise. They reasoned that if they could induce such a tree to take headship, all would go well. They did not realize that for any one of those trees to comply with their request would mean apostasy from the work that God had given them to do.

Applying the Parable

In church history, from Pentecost on, there have been those who were not content with Jesus' headship. These have reached for an arm of flesh. It has been easy for such to satisfy their longing. In many instances their motives have been honest. Men have looked for those whom they felt would be best qualified for such a position.

They might find another who seems filled with the holy Spirit, like the oil of the olive tree. They believe that one with such a sweet spirit of love and zeal would be the best equipped to exercise rulership in the church. This brother is approached with a request that he assume headship over them. Like the olive tree, he says: "Brethren, I am too busy with things that honor God to attempt to rule his people. I have enough to do in learning to rule myself, and in the service in which the Lord has placed me."

Another brother evidences growth in the fruits and graces of the spirit. He is offered rulership, but he also refuses. He, too, is occupied in developing the fruits and graces of the Spirit. He has no time to busybody in the affairs of his fellow servants.

These well meaning but mistaken ones continue their quest. They find a brother who might be pictured by the vine of the parable. He delights in upholding the ransom sacrifice before people and in standing firm on fundamental truths. They say, here is the one to rule over us. What a

wonderful grasp he has of the Scriptures! He is the one we want. So they ask this brother to rule over them. Again they meet refusal. Such an one would have a large measure of the Lord's spirit as well as strength in fundamental truths. He is also doing his utmost to cultivate the fruits and graces of the Spirit. This brother is well balanced. In his refusal he might even quote the words of Paul: "*I have planted and Apollos watered, but God giveth the increase.*" There is no uncertainty in his refusal. He does not encourage their man worship. He plainly tells them that his time is filled with doing good unto all men especially unto those of the household of faith, and with making his own calling and election sure. He will probably tell them that he that ruleth over his own spirit is greater than he that taketh a city.

A Last Resort

Then said all the trees unto the bramble, Come thou, and reign over us. And the bramble said unto the trees, If in truth ye anoint me king over you, then come and put your trust in my shadow: and if not, let fire come out of the bramble, and devour the cedars of Lebanon (vs. 14-15).

The bramble is elected to rule the trees. This is a fitting picture of an ambitious man or organization. Review the history of the Gospel Age church. Self seeking men have often risen to lordship over God's heritage! Those men pictured by the bramble seize what a consecrated man would not think of aspiring to: a position that rightfully belongs to our Lord alone.

Who have these men been? Men devoid of the spirit of Christ, devoid of loyalty to Christ, devoid of brotherhood with other followers of Christ. These, instead of shedding forth spiritual pollen to assist others in their spiritual growth, have brought about the worship of men, organizationalism, corruption, apostasy, and spiritual disaster. Such is the result of the rule of man among the people of God.

They Trust In A Shadow

The bramble gives a speech of acceptance. Note the words: "*If in truth ye anoint me king over you, then come and put your trust in my shadow.*" Here is a frankness and candor that one very rarely hears. It is rarer still in a speech of acceptance. The bramble tells the trees that if they wish him to be king over them, they must put their trust in his shadow. They must let him make all the arrangements.

At least the trees are told in advance what it is that they are going to have to put their trust in -- a shadow. Have you ever heard such a thing? If only the antitypical brambles of this Gospel Age been as frank in telling their prospective religious subjects what they could expect. Had they known, the people of God would have been saved from many bitter trials and disappointments, from bitter illusions and still more bitter disillusionments.

In the rulership of man among the people of God many put their trust in a shadow. They do not sit in the sunshine of heavenly favor and approval, in the light of the one who sent his Son into the world to dispel the shadows of error and man worship. Instead, they sit in the shadow of heavenly disapproval. Those who usurp rulership and lordship may know the Word of God. They may use the Word to point to their own importance. These lack that motivating love which influences every child of God. They lack the most important accomplishment in the life of every true child of God -- the development of those fruits and graces of the spirit without which no man shall see God. Such are unfit for any service to God.

Woe to the rebellious children, saith the Lord, that take counsel but not of me, and that cover with a covering but not of my spirit, that they may add sin to sin. That walk to go down into Egypt, and rave not asked at my mouth, to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh and to trust in the shadow of Egypt. Therefore shall the strength of Pharaoh be your shame, and the trust in the shadow of Egypt your confusion (Isa. 30:1-3).

Isaiah records how God's people turned away from the worship of God. Refusing to counsel with him, the only one entitled to their worship, they put their trust in a shadow, the shadow of Egypt.

The psalmist compares the life of the wicked to a shadow. A shadow is formed when anything comes between us and the sun. Let the child of God permit no object, no idol, no man or men, to come between himself and God. Neither let anyone place us in the shadow. Turn aside from everything that would come between us and the sunshine of God's love, between us and that liberty that belongs to the sons of God, between us and the sweet smile of God's favor and approval; for he is the Judge; he alone renders the final decision. He alone is worthy of all worship and praise.

Rule Or Ruin

Note the frankness of the bramble. He not only tells the trees that they must put their trust in his shadow, but also, that if they fail to do this he will set fire to the trees -- in other words, he will either rule them or ruin them.

Why has such a spirit been accepted among the Lord's people? Because the spirit of worldliness has entered. They have permitted themselves to be lulled to sleep. They have been content to leave matters to their leaders, they have let them think and decide for them. Thus, ecclesiasticism has crept in. They have forgotten that "eternal vigilance is the price of liberty."

Jotham's parable had a literal fulfillment in a short time. We will not discuss it at this time other than to say that it was a time of strife, treachery, and bloodshed, ending with the death of Abimelech. But, the parable was not recorded merely for our knowledge of the history of this ancient period. All this is available from singular historians.

Jotham's course was a contrast to that of his brothers. He did not join the conflict. He came out from it. Jotham fled to a place by the name of Beer. Beer was a well. He dwelt by the well and drank from it. What a beautiful picture of the child of God who flees all striving for authority, taking refuge in the Word of God which is his sole authority. The Word of God is his well of salvation. Dwelling there, he drinks from that fountain.

Holding The Head

There would be no message in this parable for the church today if all danger were past. It behooves us to watch and pray. If we are overtaken, it will be because we have not been alert. Satan will assure that there are always brambles at hand. Jesus is our Head. We are brethren. We recognize his headship by doing his will, by avoiding the shadow of human usurpers, by remembering that dictation is not fellowship, nor is it cooperation. Let us stand fast in the liberty wherewith Jesus hath made us free. May we let no shadow come between us and our true head, and let us recognize that all such shadows are but the spirit of the bramble.

Why is the spirit of human rule so abhorrent to God. Why should God's people be so jealous of human intrusion into a place of authority and rulership among them? Simply, because in every

case it is displacing the authority of Christ Jesus the head. It is as though the hand or the foot were to serve notice to the head that from henceforth it will take the governing position over the rest of the body. For any man or organization to do this, to rule and control God's people, is a usurpation of the position of Christ.

Let no man beguile you of your reward, in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels [or of messengers, human leaders], intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding the Head, from which all the Body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God. (Col. 2:18,19)

What a beautiful statement, not of organization, but of an organism. As the human body is an organism, so it is in the glorious Body of Christ. May we love and cherish that body of which Jesus is the Head and all we are members.

I love thy church, O God,
Her walls before me stand;
Dear as the apple of thine eye
Engraven on thine hand.

For her my tears shall fall,
For her my prayers ascend,
For her my cares and toils be given,
Till toils and care shall end.

Beyond my highest joy,
I prize her heavenly ways;
Her sweet communion, solemn vows,
Her hymns of love and praise.

The trees spoke in Jotham's days; the trees have been speaking throughout the Gospel Age; and those trees still speak today!

- H.V. Warren

HEROISM

It takes great strength to train
To modern service your ancestral brain;
To lift the weight of the unnumbered years
Of dead men's habits, methods and ideas;
To hold that back with one hand, and support
With the other the weak steps of new resolve!
It takes strength to bring your life up square
With your accepted thought, and hold it there,
Resisting the inertia that drags back
From new attempts to the old habits track.
It is so easy to drift back -- to sink --
So hard to live abreast of what you think!

It takes great strength to live where you belong,
When other people think that you are wrong;
People you love, and who love you, and whose
Approval is a pleasure you would choose.
To bear this pressure, and succeed at length
In living your belief -- well, it takes strength --
Courage, too. But what does courage mean
Save strength to help you face a pain foreseen;
Courage to undertake this lifelong strain
Of setting yourself against your grandsire's brain:
Dangerous risk of walking alone and free,
Out of the easy paths that used to be;
And the fierce pain of hurting those we love,
When love meets truth, and truth must ride above!

But the best courage man has ever shown,
Is daring to cut loose, and think alone.
Dark are the unlit chambers of clear space.
Where light shines back from no reflecting face.
Our sun's wide glare, our heaven's shining Hue,
We owe to fog and dust they fumble through;
And our rich wisdom that we treasure so,
Shines from a thousand things that we don't know.
But *to think new* -- it takes a courage grim
As led Columbus over the world's rim.
To think -- it costs some courage -- and to go --
Try it -- it taxes every power you know.

It takes great love to stir a human heart
To live beyond the others, and apart;
A love that is not shallow, is not small;
Is not for one or two, but for them all.
Love that can wound love for its higher need;
Love that can leave love, though the heart may bleed;
Love that can lose love, family and friend.
Yet steadfastly live, loving to the end.
A love that asks no answer, that can live,
Moved by one burning, deathless force -- to give!
Love, strength, courage; courage, strength, and love --
The heroes of all time are built thereof.

Entered into Rest

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