

The Miracle of the Caring Christ

GWFT Winter 85-86

Read Mark 4:35-49

Those fishermen had experienced many storms on the Sea of Galilee. The sea was subject to sudden, violent wind squalls. They knew it took "all hands" to keep the boat from capsizing.

But Jesus wasn't helping. He was sleeping!

"Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" Mark 4:49 (NIV)

They interpreted his sleep as indifference. They didn't expect Him to rebuke the storm to calm it. We know they didn't because they were incredulous when it happened. But they certainly expected Him to care enough to help. After all, it was He who had suggested that they sail to the other side.

He did care. His first act on being aroused was to rebuke the storm, not to rebuke them. Until the storm subsided, they could hardly pay attention to what He had to say. Previously, at His bidding, they had cast out devils and healed the sick, but the terror of this emergency drove out any other thoughts.

Their real trouble was that they didn't fully realize who was with them, the Son of God, the Creator who has authority over all. Knowing Him drives out fear and inspires faith.

The miracle shows that He cared. We may charge Him with not caring, even when we know He is with us. We, like them, may call on Him just to help us struggle along, when all the time He has the authority to calm the turbulence. Our storm is stilled, not just because He is there, but because of Who He is and because He knows our fears, our needs, and He cares.

The Miracle of Compassion
GWFT Winter 85-86

Read Mark 5:1-21

He was out in the mountains, crying. Day and night he cried. Sometimes he was among the tombs, crying. Not knowing why, he was bleeding and scarred from cutting himself with stones. In heat or cold he wandered naked, always crying.

The people of the community were afraid of him. As if he were a wild animal, they tried to tie him with fetters and chains, but in superhuman strength he broke them off. He could not be tamed. He was in the control of the demons in him.

Even demons know who Jesus is and that as the Son of God He is worthy of worship. They also know that they are subject to His power. When the demons saw Jesus afar off, they caused the man to run to worship Jesus and to beg for mercy.

Jesus addressed the evil spirits, not the man. The man was not in his right mind. He didn't know his condition or the cause of it. He didn't pray or ask Jesus for healing.

This wild, disheveled, naked, crying man, a being created by God, was being destroyed by Satan, the enemy of God. In compassion for him, so helpless in the grasp of Satan, Jesus delivered him from the demons.

It was God's compassion that brought Christ to earth to free us ^{helpless} from the guilt and power of sin, clothing us in His righteousness, restoring a right mind, causing our crying to cease.

"Go home to thy friends, and tell them...the Lord...
hath had compassion on thee." Mark 5:19

Beyond the Miracle

GWFT Winter 85-86

Read Mark 5:22-43

The little woman who pushed through the crowd to touch the garment of Jesus, brought more than her illness with her.

She brought the unanswerable stresses that accompany prolonged sickness. No money left, so how could she face the future? No physician was able to help, so did she have to go on and on like this for months and years? The physical problem only grew worse and worse, so her hopelessness grew, too.

For all who are chronically ill there are accompanying stressful, unanswered and unanswerable questions. What will happen to my family? How can I pay for this? Will this pain never go away? Why don't others understand? Why me? And, upon touching Him, and being found out, another fear arose in her. She trembled, fearing His anger, since she had come unbidden; fearing His rejection, since she had had the temerity to touch Him.

"And he said unto her, Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague." Mark 5:34

Jesus did heal her in response to her faith. But He did more than heal her of her plague. He said, "Go in peace." Peace instead of stress. Peace, not just at the moment of healing, but peace as she went her way.

Jesus knew, and knows, our need beyond the illness itself and He speaks to us the peace that accompanies healing. "Go" says that life will go on, and it will be a life marked by God's peace.

The Miracle of God's Good Will

GWFT Winter 85-86

Read Luke 2:1-20

Christmas time can put us on the defensive. Greeting cards and carols, with rejoicing, repeat the words of the angels:

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." Luke 2:14

Perhaps you have had friends who have challenged the message because of world conditions. Peace on earth? Good will? All about are contradictions of those words: hostility between races and nations; violence out of control.

It is intolerable to suggest that the angels sang only wishfully or sang an untruth; so in an effort to reconcile the words with the situation, some translations of the Bible have changed the words to read: "Peace among men of goodwill."

Not so. It is not goodwill among men. That will come only when Jesus Christ reigns. It is, instead, God's good will toward men.

Yes, indeed, peace on earth. There is no waiting until we get to heaven. Now. Here. For all mankind, peace with God is possible. For that is the announced peace. "We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). Read also Ephesians 2:14-17. It is peace between God and man, not between man and man that He achieved. No wonder the angels praised God!

So we, too, joyfully sing, not only at Christmas time, but as long as we live: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace with God through God's good will toward men."

A Coöperative Ministry

GWFT Winter 85-86

Read Mark 6:7-13, 36-44

It was the disciples who took the initiative. Jesus was teaching the people and in His compassion for their spiritual need He seemed to pay no attention to the fact that it was getting late and the people had not eaten. So the disciples took it on themselves to tell Jesus what to do! They told Him to send the people away to find something for themselves.

The word "disciple" means "learner". Now they were about to learn that they had a part in nourishing hungry people.

"How many loaves do you have? Go and see." (Mark 6:38)

From the story we learn four steps in feeding the people..

1. Find out what you have. We must look. Often we are unaware of what is there. What they found didn't even belong to them, but it was what was available.

2. Get the people ready to receive. They were to sit down in groups. This task was assigned to the disciples. It was necessary for orderly distribution, that all could be served.

3. Bring what you have to Jesus. The miracle required coöperation. Certainly the five loaves and two fish were a ludicrous amount for feeding so many. What we have, by itself, will never do, but in His hands it miraculously becomes enough.

4. Give the blessed food to the hungry people. Jesus gave them the responsibility of distributing the multiplied food. They also served in gathering the leftovers.

There are always hungry people, spiritually and physically. How many loaves do you have? Go and see.

The Disciples Learn Courage
GWFT Winter 85-86

Read Matthew 14:22-36

Ghosts are more "ghostly" when all else is eerie, too. The disciples were in frightening circumstances.

The night was dark; the winds were howling; the boat was being tossed in the waves. With their hearts already filled with fear, they saw a ghost! What else could it be, coming across the ^{rough stormy} water like that?

And then came the voice! What was it saying? Above the whistling wind, calling across the rough water, they heard:

"Take courage. It is I. Be not afraid." (Matt. 14:27)

It was Jesus! They had not called for Him, but He had come. In our own storms, like Peter, we cry out, "If it is really You, let me come to You."

Peter came while the storm was still raging. The waves had not ceased tumbling. The wind still buffeted the boat. As he walked toward Jesus, suddenly aware of the danger, he began to sink and cried out for help.

But that is not the end of the story. He didn't drown. He even walked on the water some more because Jesus took him by the hand; together, with the storm still tumultuous, they walked to the boat. Only then did the storm die down.

The storm need not cease for us to be safe. Held by Jesus' hand and with the assurance of His words, we can make it with courage through the storm in dangerous circumstances. Peter was as safe on the boisterous water as in the boat because Jesus was with him.

Read Acts 2:41-47

Three thousand steadfast souls! They were men and women who understood that not only were they dead to sin because of the death of Christ, but that through His resurrection they were now alive unto God.

They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship and in breaking of bread and prayers. (verse 42)

[Steadfastness is ongoing, daily, not a once-for-all act.]

Their steadfastness produced results in their own lives and in the lives of others. There came a deep sense of awe; there was unity among the brethren, accompanied by joy and gladness, marked by an undivided heart toward God. They enjoyed fellowship and communion with God and each other, and were filled with praise.

There was an outreach, too. In compassion they shared with their needy brethren; the community looked on them with favor; and many others came to know God's saving grace.

"Be ye steadfast, unmoving, always abounding in the work of the Lord." (1 Corinthians 15:58a)

Three thousand steadfast souls! Yet those three thousand were made up of ^{1's} ones. They were individuals. There is no way that a corporate three thousand can be steadfast unless EACH ONE is continuing steadily.

That is our challenge today: that each of us shall be steadfast in doctrine, fellowship, communion and prayers, anticipating the results that accompany such steadfastness.

Sure Enough!

GWFT Winter 87

Read Psalm 23:1-6

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. (verse 6)

"Surely" because it is the Lord who is my Shepherd. Of His own will He has made Himself responsible for the sheep.

There is assurance of provision: green pastures and good water because the Good Shepherd leads me. [We sing, "All the way my Savior leads me; what have I to ask beside?"]

There is assurance of restoration and being led in right ways. His reputation as a Good Shepherd is at stake.

There is assurance even in the presence of death. He Who conquered death when He rose again is with me, so I fear not.

There is assurance in the presence of danger. His rod protects from predators and His staff gets me out of crevices or thickets where I may have wandered or blundered.

There is assurance of peace even when surrounded by enemies. The security does not come from absence of enemies but from His presence and provision.

There is assurance of caring for wounds and scratches. He sees my hurts and anoints them with oil.

No wonder the psalmist declares "surely." That surety includes His goodness and mercy in this life ("ALL the days of my life") and confidence for the life hereafter ("I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever").

The Shepherd expects the sheep to follow where He leads. Let us stay close to our Shepherd.

Never Out Of Sight
GWFT Winter 87

Read Psalm 41:1-13

Thou...settest me before Thy Face forever." (verse 12)

A child is seldom far from his mother's thoughts. She may be busy with her work, but an unexpected noise makes her drop it, not just to find the cause of the noise, but to see if something has happened to her youngsters.

If the child is playing in the yard, she frequently stops to check to be sure everything is all right. Even when she is away from home in a social gathering, her mind turns to the tot, hoping that he is secure, wondering if all is well.

When the child is grown and away from home the parental concern continues. Even when they are no longer in her presence they are still "before her face."

This awareness is not confined to interest in their well-being. The parent is proud of the child's achievements, of how he is developing both physically and spiritually.

So it is with God and His children. This psalm says God is aware of our concern for the poor and He in turn blesses us. His eye is on us and His thoughts ^{are} ₁ ^{ing} concern us.

He sees our inner hurts and heals them. He is aware of those who seek to destroy His children and of those who tell lies about them.

There is no time when we are not "before His face."
"Forever," He declares. [That ^{is} gave assurance to the
Psalmist and it gives assurance to us. "Casting all your
care upon Him, for He careth for you." (1 Peter 5:7)]

BLESSED ASSURANCE THURSDAY, JANUARY 8 Maxine Williams

Think Of That!

GWFT Winter 87

Read Psalm 46:1-11

The Lord of Hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah (v.7)
Selah. This word appears three times in this psalm. The

psalms were songs; ~~this~~ ^{Selah} word is a musical term indicating a pause. It goes beyond a mere musical rest in that it suggests thinking about what was just sung. The Amplified Version reads, "Pause and think calmly of that."

Verses 1-3 ask us to consider the strength and presence of God in troubled times. The reading brings to mind severe earthquakes that shake and move mountains, and destructive, rushing, roaring waters. No man has control of natural disasters, but because God is our help we can face even such ^{emergencies} disasters. The world can never understand the peace that God gives when all around is shaking. Selah!

Verses 4-7 ask us to ponder the stability of the kingdom of God and His ultimate victory over the rage of ungodliness. "The Lord of Hosts" is His military or conquering Name. We are not mere spectators; we are participants. "He is with us." In our battles we are not alone nor defeated. [In Him we have the assurance of a haven.] Selah!

Verses 8-11 speak of His ultimate victory in the earth, with world-wide peace. He not only ^{defeat the enemy} ~~wins the battle~~, He destroys their weapons, their chariots. ~~The enemy~~ will be unable to make further warfare. Think about this and cease fretting. Be still. He is God. [He is to be exalted in the earth. The psalm reminds once again that this victorious God is WITH US. He is our refuge. Selah!] Selah!

(To the editor: "Selah" is my "quoted Scripture" for this devotion, hence it is underlined.)

Sing It Out!

GWFT Winter 87

Read Psalm 118:1-9

Since the psalms are songs, imagine this psalm being sung antiphonally by a large choir. Listen, as they sing with joy:

Full choir: "O give thanks unto the Lord; for He is good;"

Antiphonal response: "For His mercy endureth forever."

Women's voices: "Let Israel now say..."

Response: "That His mercy endureth forever."

Men's voices: "Let the house of Aaron now say..."

Response: "That His mercy endureth forever."

Full choir: "Let them now that fear the Lord say..."

Response: "That His mercy endureth forever."

[Sing jubilantly, in full assurance of His continuing mercy.]

They are praising the character of God in His goodness. What would we ever do if His mercy ceased? ["Thou changest not." "He is the same yesterday, today and forever."]

The history of Israel is a story of God's mercy. How many times they had failed Him, yet in mercy He forgave and continued to lead them. [As in the Shepherd Psalm, His mercy and goodness will follow Israel (and us) forever. Thank Him!]

The house of Aaron represents the priests, the mediators between God and man. They symbolize the mercy exercised in the forgiveness of sin through a substitutionary sacrifice.

O give thanks unto the Lord; for He is good; because His mercy endureth for ever
["It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed; they are new every morning." (Lamentations 3:22a and 23a)] *(v. 1)*

Then, as with one voice, "with all who reverence God," we join the swelling chorus: "His mercy endures forever."

Assured Privileges

GWFT, Winter 87

Read Romans 5:1-11

Having been made righteous through faith in the work of the Cross, we enter into a life of assured privileges.

1. We have peace with God (emphasis on have). Sin had made us His enemies and cut us off from fellowship with Him. The Way translation urges, "Let us enjoy peace with God."

2. We have access to His grace (again, the emphasis is on have.) The word "access" was used in Greek as "a place for ships to put in". So Paul speaks of Jesus as having brought us out of stressful storms into the haven of God's grace.

3. We rejoice in hope of the glory of God. (verse 2) *not their choice of emphasizes verse.*
The word is "exult in the hope." "Exult" means "feeling a lively or triumphant joy, to be highly elated."

Moreover, "hope" in the Bible does not refer to merely desiring or wishing for, but it is "the anticipation of a certainty." [It is that certainty that allows us to glory in the tribulations, the endurance and the experiences of life.]

4. We are saved from wrath. He loved us enough to die for us when we were sinners. Now that He is raised from the dead His life is the guarantee that in Him we will be saved from the wrath of God upon sin.

5. We are full of joy. The original words give emphasis to now, as contrasted with the future. [Before, it was fear and anxiety in the presence of God because of sin; now it is joy and rejoicing.]

[Praise God for assured privileges through His salvation.]

v. 10 *emphasis on now*

Dependable Love

GWFT Winter 87

Read Romans 8:28-39

Some are fearful of accepting Christ, saying, "I'm afraid I couldn't hold out." Others feel that the presence of trouble means that God no longer cares and has abandoned them. Answers to four questions in this reading are reassuring.

If God be for us, Who can be against us (verse 31)? God spared not His son to save us; He will surely give us victory over every enemy that might be against us. Christ has been given dominion over every power and ^{authority} might, in this world, and in that which is to come. (See Ephesians 1:20-21)

They omitted this

[Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? (verse 33) The Phillips translation reads, "The Judge Himself has declared us free from sin."]

Who is he that condemneth (verse 34)? Previously ~~the law~~ condemned us, our conscience condemn^{ed} us, and because of sin, God condemned us. But Christ died for us! Christ rose for us! Christ reigns in power for us! Christ prays for us! Only Christ is in a position to condemn, and He is now FOR us.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ (verse 35)? If we could be separated, then we could and should fear, but as long as His love continues all is well. These verses do not mean that none of these difficult circumstances can make me stop loving Him, but that their presence does not indicate that He has stopped loving us. (See verses 37-38.)

I am persuaded that [nothing] shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Yes, We Know

GWFT Winter 87

Read 1 John 3:19-24

"You know" is currently a hackneyed, overworked expression. It often substitutes for clear thinking and can be irritating when used three or four times in a single sentence.

But "you know" ("we know") is also an expression of assurance, used at least seventeen times in this epistle.

The reading for today speaks of a condition that often undermines peace of mind: "If your heart condemn you." Memory of our failures, of falling short of God's standards, or even of not measuring up to our own standards, causes us to be doubtful of acceptance with God.

He certainly does know all these remembered guilts, but He has forgiven us in Christ. He is greater in His mercy than any guilty past or present. It has been said that He is the only safe refuge for the imperfect.

Praise God, our memories are not the basis of fellowship. "God is greater than our heart." This epistle declares that He is concerned with our love for Him and for the brethren. John presents love as the highest standard of righteousness. [Our love for God is expressed in love for the brethren. "We perceive that we are of the truth" by our love.]

The realization that God is greater than our hearts brings us out of the spirit of self-accusation and makes it possible for us to come to God without condemnation of heart to enjoy fellowship with Him and to have confidence before Him.

Not by we know we are of the truth and

1 We know we shall assure our hearts before Him. (verse 19)

Obedience and Blessing
GWFT Winter 87

Read Deuteronomy 11:8-32

Obedience ^{was the proof of their love to God (v. 22)} [is a thread that goes from Genesis to Revelation.]

It is the ultimate test of our true relationship to God. It was the test of Adam and Eve; it was the test of Israel throughout its history; and it is our test. "Hereby we do know that we know Him if we keep His commandments." (1 John 2:3)

Great blessings were to follow Israel if they would obey. The blessings to them and their children, clearly stated in this chapter, and contingent upon their obedience were:

1. ^{To} Possess the land. God Himself would give it to them. Even nations mightier than they would not prevail. God promised: "No man shall be able to stand before you."

2. ^{To} Prosper in the land. Whereas in flat, dry Egypt they had had to irrigate the land by raising the Nile waters by foot power, in Canaan God would send rain. Their crops would prosper; they and their cattle would eat and be full. But all was dependent on obeying God and not going after ^{other} the gods [of the land.]

3. ^{To} Prolong their days. Not only would their lives be prolonged, but their children would live long in the land.

Obedience was the proof of their love to God (verse 22), and it is the proof of our love, too. Jesus said, "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me." He responds to that love with blessing.

I set before you...a blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the Lord your God. (verses 26a and 27a)

Blessed People

GWFT Winter 87

Read Deuteronomy 28:1-14

Shortly before Jesus ascended, He gave a commission to His disciples. Having evangelized and baptized in all nations, [they were to teach them. It is important to notice that the teaching included more than giving information.] They were to teach them to OBSERVE all that Christ had commanded.

This has been God's plan for His people from the beginning. This chapter begins with the promise of blessing, but that blessing ^{which depends} is dependent not only upon hearing God's commandments but upon observing and doing them (verse 1).

These blessings came directly from God: THE LORD shall make thee plenteous; THE LORD shall open unto thee His good treasure; THE LORD shall make thee the head and not the tail.

The blessings in verses 3-9 are inclusive. Wherever they might live or whatever they owned would be blessed; their work would be blessed; they would not need to fear enemies. Despite being a relatively small country they would be leaders and they would prosper to the point of lending to others.

Why is observing His Word so important? It declares Him to be Lord. "Be ye doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves." (James 1:22)

^{after} When Christ said to teach to observe His commandments, He concluded by saying, "Lo, I am with you always." [As with Israel,] it is because He is with us that we are blessed.

The Lord shall establish thee an holy people unto Himself.

(verse 9a)

Choose Life
GWFT Winter 87

Read Deuteronomy 30:1-19

There is no greater blessing than life, especially eternal life. The word "eternal" includes more than simply being without end. God is eternal, and eternal life includes the qualities emanating from God.

God offers us this life, but makes it a matter of choice. Throughout the statements of blessings in Deuteronomy are included reminders of cursings. All depends on choice.

^{God's} His commandment is known. He says we do not have to go to heaven to find it, nor to the depths of the sea. There is no saying, "If I only knew His commandment, I would do it!" It is near us. Very near, says verse 14. The challenge is to choose to do it. The promised result is life.

A corresponding choice is given in the New Testament in Romans 10:6-8. Paul had presented faith as the only means to obtain righteousness. There were those who wanted the Law to be the means; ^{many} there were others who thought their ^{own} works would be sufficient.

We know ^{God's} His terms. His word is ^{near} nigh us. Jesus is the only means of salvation. "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." But, "He that believeth not...is condemned." (John 3:18b)

The blessing of life is available, but we must choose it.

I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life. (v. 19)

Heaps and Heaps

GWFT Winter 87

Read 2 Chronicles 31:2-10

Twenty-five year old Hezekiah had grown up under his evil father. King Ahaz had stripped the Temple of its treasures and sacrificed to heathen gods throughout Judah.

On coming to the throne, Hezekiah reversed this. He re-consecrated the priests and Levites; *In* sixteen days they had cleansed the Temple and renewed God's sacrifices. For the first time in many years the people celebrated the Passover in Jerusalem.

"So there was great joy in Jerusalem: for since the time of Solomon...there was not the like in Jerusalem." (30:26)

Hezekiah was king of all Judah, not just Jerusalem, so he also destroyed the idols and shrines in the countryside.

He gave his own offerings; he encouraged the people to obey God's law in tithing to support the priests and Levites, so that those spiritual leaders could give themselves to teaching the laws of God.

How important ^{is} good leadership! The enthusiasm and example of Hezekiah were contagious. The people were so blessed in their spiritual restoration that they began to give tithes wholeheartedly. So much was given that the priests and Levites couldn't use it all. They began to make heaps of the grain, the fruits and all the excess.

[The word for today is that of] Azariah ^{said:} [the chief priest:]

We have had enough to eat and have left plenty: for the Lord hath blessed His people. (v. 10)

I Can Sleep

GWFT Winter 87

Read Psalm 3:1-8

Getting people to sleep is a big industry these days.

Sales Sleeping pills, tranquilizers, and other sedatives *amount to* ~~are sold in~~ the millions of dollars.

One common cause of sleeplessness is worry over life's situations. David certainly had cause for sleeplessness when he wrote this psalm. He was king of Israel, but his son Absalom had gained a following and in rebellion had seized the throne. Now David was in flight. He had left the palace to seek refuge east of the Jordan river.

Some said, "There is no help for him in God (verse 2). But David knew better. His early experiences as a shepherd and his preservation in his years of escaping death at the hands of King Saul had taught him to know God. "I cried unto the Lord" (verse 4). He knew God answers prayer.

I laid me down and slept; I awakened; for the Lord sustained me. (verse 5)

Instead of tossing and turning, fretting and worrying, he lay down and went to sleep, trusting himself to God's care. But he didn't sleep to escape his troubles; *he* awakened. *[It meant]* he still had to face the new day with its dangers from his enemies. *David* He says his enemies numbered in the thousands. He called his preservation a blessing from the Lord.

"Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you."
(1 Peter 5:7) *[We can pray with the children: "Now I lay me down to sleep."]*

A Dependable Plan

GWPT Winter 87

Read Amos 9:11-15

I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel. (14)

God has wonderful plans for the nation of Israel. The long centuries of the dispersion without a homeland; the terrible experiences of [the Inquisition and] the Holocaust; [the] being "a hissing and a byword" among the nations will end.

["Next year in Jerusalem" was a saying of anticipation based not only on hope and desire, but on the sure Word Of God.] The ^{Yeh's} plan of God included not only the land, but restoration of worship, incredibly abundant harvests, and peace without fear of again being dispossessed. ^{This} The hope sustained them through ^{Israel} many terrors. God ^{had} has a dependable plan for them.

We, too, are part of a dependable plan. As long ago as the days of Adam and Eve, a Redeemer was promised Who would destroy the works and power of the devil and restore us to fellowship with God.

The Plan of Redemption was ^{foreshadowed by animal} continued through the sacrifices ^{pointing} to the ultimate sacrifice of Christ on the cross. His plan continues through the work of the Holy Spirit until the day He "presents us faultless ^{8/4} in the presence of His glory, with exceeding joy" (Jude 24).

Chapters 21 and 22 of Revelation give the culmination of His dependable plan. There is to be a secure dwelling place, free from the scourge of sin; there will be the blessings of light and life, and the wonder of enjoying the presence of God. The plan is as sure as the integrity of God.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 26

Maxine Williams

Willing Hearts

GWFT Winter 1987-88

Personal Reading: Exodus 25--28

Family Reading: Exodus 25:1-9

And Let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them. (25:8)

The dwelling place for God began with willing hearts. There is no coercion in the worship of God. God Himself issued an invitation to make the offering, but only willing hearts were to respond. (25:2)

The New Testament dwelling place of God, the Church which is also called His Body and His Temple, is formed from willing hearts who delight to give themselves to Him.

A second characteristic of offerings for this dwelling place was the variety: variety of metals, of colors, of fabrics, of skins, of oils, of jewels. (25:3-7)

1 Corinthians 12 speaks of the great variety in God's Church. Each part makes its contribution to one glorious Whole. No one person, in building the Tabernacle, gave something of everything. Each contributed what he had and what he willingly offered.

And finally, the workmen, too, took of it all, and according to God's instructions (25:9) built the Tabernacle. The New Testament corresponds by saying, "He hath set each in the Body as it hath pleased Him." (1 Cor. 12:18)

Praise God, we can offer ourselves and what we have, and He will build it into an acceptable habitation of God.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 27

Maxine Williams

A Kingdom of Priests

GWFT Winter 87-88

Personal Reading: Exodus 29--31

Family Reading: Exodus 29:1-28

And this is the thing that thou shalt do...to hallow them, to minister in the priest's office. (29:1)

So many details in their consecration! Washings, clothing explicitly described, precise method of anointing, exact instructions for the offerings for sin and for consecration.

We think of Old Testament practices as being in the past. It is true that the ceremonial aspects are no longer observed. But God intended the "go-between" concept to continue. At that time it was continued through Aaron and his sons.

Then came Jesus, our great High Priest, who became both the offerer and the sacrifice, who now continues His priestly work in the presence of the Father interceding for us.

We can never take the atoning work of the High Priest, but we have been given priestly intercessory work. We are called to be a "kingdom of priests." (1 Peter 2:5, 9 RV)

There are details in our hallowing, tpp; not the same as for Aaron's line, but just as explicit. 1 Peter 2:1, 2 gives the cleansing elements for our priesthood. These are not exterior washings nor kinds of garments, but the cleansing of old attitudes such as malice, guile, hypocrisy, envy, and evil speaking. The inner man is to be renewed by the Word.

As priests, we do not serve in the Tabernacle, but we worship and serve God and help others to be reconciled to God.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 28

Maxine Williams

No angel, please

GNFT Winter 87-88

Personal Reading: Exodus 32--34

Family Reading: Exodus 33:1-11

The Israelites had made and worshiped the Golden Calf and God had judged them.

God had promised the Land of Canaan to Abraham and his descendants (32:34). He would keep His promise, but because of their sin there was to be a change. God would see to it that the inhabitants of the land were driven out, but it would be a deputized being, an angel, who would take charge.

Getting to the land was not the issue, for the angel would have taken them there. But to get there without God! That was intolerable.

Everyone which sought the Lord went out to the Tabernacle of the Congregation, which was without the camp. (33:7)

The Tabernacle, which normally stood in the center of the camp, was moved outside it. Those who really cared whether or not God was with them went out to the Tabernacle. They mourned and stripped off their ornaments. Anxiously they watched as Moses entered. What a relief when the sign of the presence of God, the Cloud, appeared.

Are we mainly occupied with getting the thing promised? Does it make any difference whether God is with us? Angels have their effective ministry, but what we really need is God in our midst, guiding, leading. Not even an angel will satisfactorily substitute for His presence.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 29

Maxine Williams

Stirred-up Hearts

GWFT Winter 87-88

Personal Reading: Exodus 35--40

Family Reading: Exodus 35:1-29

The heart is the secret. Eight times in these verses the heart is the prompter. Everyone, men, women, even rulers, were stirred-up to give and to work.

Willing hearts (35:5) brought an offering; not just any offering, but one that corresponded to the needs of building the Tabernacle according to the plan of God.

The wisehearted (35:10) came and they made the items needed. Some had given offerings of jewels and precious stones. These wisehearted ones made walls and furniture. God's work has opportunities for those who have little to give other than their time and work.

Those with stirred-up hearts (35:21-22) offered. Besides the jewels and gold, others brought fabrics, and some even brought wood. They brought what they had.

The wisehearted women (35:25-26) were spinners, wise spinners the Bible declares.

And they came, both men and women, as many as were willing-hearted. (35:22)

The secret is plainly declared (35:29); it was the heart that made them willing to offer.

The MAPS programs of the Assemblies of God have amply demonstrated the effectiveness of the combination of giving and work in furthering the kingdom of God.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 30

Maxine Williams

Satisfy Us Early

GWET Winter 87-88

Personal reading: Psalm 90

Family Reading: Psalm 90

In the history of evangelism in this century it was not, and perhaps is not, uncommon to see brightly-painted banners touting a lurid past: "From Prison to Christ"; "Fifty Years an Atheist"; "Hollywood Dope Addict Converted".

The intent was twofold: to draw a crowd, but also to glorify God's mercy. Unfortunately, sometimes the impression was given that this past made their salvation superior. Some young people in the church, (I among them), felt our lives had been so tame, so sheltered that we could not really appreciate God's mercy.

Oh satisfy us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. (90:14)

The Psalmist longs that early in life we shall experience God's mercy. It is not necessary nor desirable to waste one's years in sin, leaving scars of regret and remorse. He uses the expression "all our days". He declares that to experience God's mercy early in life will make us glad and rejoice.

"Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth." (Ecc. 12:1)

This is not to minimize the wonderful deliverance and salvation of those who were saved from their bondage to sin. Our joy and rejoicing does not come from having experienced the depths of sin, but from experiencing God's mercy as early as possible.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 31

Maxine Williams

Who~~s~~oever May Come

GWFT Winter 87-88

Personal Reading: Leviticus 1--7

Family Reading: Leviticus 1:1-17

He shall bring his offering of turtledoves, or of young pigeons. (1:14)

When Jesus was forty days old, Joseph and Mary took Him from Bethlehem the six miles up to the Temple in Jerusalem. They went to make an offering, in obedience to the law of the firstborn.

They were poor. Usually the offering was of a larger animal, such as a bullock, but God had provided for the poor. No one was kept away from His mercy and presence because he had little or nothing.

We have seen dozens of doves or pigeons fluttering in parks or around buildings. They are so common that it would cost very little to purchase one in a market.

It wasn't the size or the cost of the offering that mattered. God had made a way. He wanted an expression that acknowledged Him as Lord and God. Offering pigeons was as much an act of obedience and honor as offering a bullock.

Now we offer neither bullocks nor pigeons. Jesus is the only acceptable offering. In taking Jesus as our Savior, no matter our economic status, we obey God, and come in His designated way. It is acceptable to Him. "No man cometh unto the Father but by Me." Rich or poor, young or old, weak or strong, God has made provision for all.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 1

Maxine Williams

Holy Difference

GWFT Winter 87-88

Personal Reading: Leviticus 8--10

Family Reading: Leviticus 10:1-20

When God says in 2 Corinthians 6:17 that we are to "come out from among them and be separate", he was not speaking of dwelling apart nor of isolating ourselves. The Essenes in Jesus' day believed they could best maintain holiness by living apart in a desert colony near the Dead Sea.

The Israelites were going to dwell among the heathen, but they were to be separate in behavior and worship. They were not to serve idols, join in their orgies, or marry them.

And that ye may put difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean. (10:10)

The word of significance is difference. This is contrary to human thinking. The pressures of society, from earliest childhood, are to be like everyone else. We abhor being different. Peter's expression "peculiar people" did not mean being odd or strange, but to be set apart for God's own possession. Commitment is an act of the will.

Christians should make every effort to help their children to do this; to orient them to the acceptability of the differences that come from belonging to God. Such commitment does not make us outcasts, but brings love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, and other traits of the Holy Spirit.

He speaks to us in our Scripture that we are to make a difference between holy and unholy.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 2

Maxine Williams

Hope for the Hopeless

GWFT Winter 87-88

Personal Reading: Leviticus 11-14

Family Reading: Leviticus 13:9-17

Leprosy is a dreaded, world-wide disease. In recent years medicines and drugs have brought some control, but it is still considered loathsome. In some areas there is no isolation from the general public, but there is rejection, in that often the leper is reduced to begging as his only means of sustenance. The famous leper colony of Molokai in the Hawaiian Islands was a desperate place of isolation until the dedicated Father Damien came to bring help and hope.

A missionary doctor in India, Dr. Paul Stoddard, discovered that many times the mutilations of hands and feet came, not because of decay, but because of the lack of feeling that left their extremities prey to gnawing animals.

The Bible required isolation until the disease was inactive or it was decided that the lesion was not leprosy after all.

When the plague of leprosy is in a man, then he shall be brought unto the priest. (13:9)

The priest was God's representative in the community. The only way of reinstatement in the community was by decision of the priest as to the condition.

Leprosy has often been used as a symbol of sin because of its dread effect on mankind and because sin brings separation from God. Only Jesus, our High Priest, can declare us free from sin and restore us to fellowship with God.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 3

Maxine Williams

There's Been A Change!

GWFT Winter 87-88

Personal Reading: Leviticus 15--16

Family Reading: Leviticus 16

Speak unto Aaron thy brother that he come not at all times into the holy place within the veil. (16:2)

The penalty for disobeying this injunction was death! Aaron could enter God's presence only after a specific procedure of cleansing and then only at stipulated intervals. Entering the presence of God was not to be commonplace.

(Read Hebrews 10.) Praise God there's been a change!

Jesus Christ, God's Son, died on the cross; He made Himself the ultimate and only acceptable sacrifice for sin. "There remaineth no more sacrifice for sin," we are told. It is Jesus or nothing. The Old Testament way of animal sacrifice has been superceded, but nothing will ever supercede the atoning work of Jesus to reconcile us to God.

The change came when He died. The veil of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom. Now we, though not of the Aaronic priesthood, may enter into His presence without fear. "Having therefore boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way...through the veil," (Hebrews 10:19-20)

This was a privilege never imagined by the Israelites. It is not a brash boldness, but a trustful response to God, Who, because of Jesus, invites us into His presence.

What a change! What a privilege!

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 4

Maxine Williams

Nothing But The Blood

GWFT Winter 87-88

Personal Reading: Leviticus 17--22

Family Reading: Leviticus 17:10--10:5

We sing "Nothing But The Blood" can wash away our sin. Praise and thank to God for His revelation of the way to Him through the Blood.

As you will be aware of by now, the books of Exodus and Leviticus are full of detailed symbolic behavior. Man cannot of himself even imagine God's holiness or the depth of the estrangement brought about by the sinful nature. Mankind says, "After all, what can you expect? I'm only human."

Nor can man possibly invent a satisfactory way to be acceptable to God. We see what happens without a revelation from God's Word by looking at the ways the heathen have tried to win the favor of their gods: shaping ugly idols, mutilating themselves in frenzies, sometimes even offering their children to appease their gods. Results? Depravity.

God gave the Israelites and us a revelation of sin, of His holiness, and of the forgiveness of sins through symbols.

From the beginning God knew it would take the death of His Son to obtain righteousness and reconciliation for man. So He began by giving importance to the blood: in the Passover lamb, in all the sacrifices of the Tabernacle and the Temple, the blood rituals were most significant.

For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you to make ^{an atonement.} atonement. (17:11)

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 5

Maxine Williams

Constant Reminders

GWFT Winter 87-88

Personal Reading: Leviticus 23--27

Family Reading: Leviticus 23:1-8

Mothers have exclaimed in frustration, "How many times must I tell you to hang up your clothes?" Fathers in irritation ask, "Do I have to tell you again not to leave your skateboard in the middle of the garage?"

It is a fact of human living that we must be reminded again and again. These laws in Leviticus were given at Sinai, but God knew that many generations would follow, to whom Sinai would be only history, not even a memory.

These are the feasts of the Lord, even holy convocations, which ye shall proclaim in their seasons. (23:4)

God had to keep them mindful of Who He was and of their commitment to the Covenant: "All that the Lord has said, we will do" (Exodus 24:3). So He instituted, in addition to the civil and moral laws, a series of observances.

There was the weekly Sabbath, which kept them different from their heathen neighbors and reminded them of God. In the spring of the year were three feasts: Passover, Feast of Unleavened Bread, and fifty days later the Feast of Weeks. In the fall was the Day of Atonement, the Feast of Trumpets, and the Feast of Tabernacles. There were also special reminders every seven years and every fifty years.

We, too, need to be reminded daily, weekly, and yearly of God and His mercies.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 6

Maxine Williams

Order in the Camp

GWFT Winter 87-88

Personal Reading: Numbers 1--4

Family Reading: Numbers 1:47-54

The Israelites had never functioned as a nation before the Exodus. In Egypt they had been slaves. The descendants of Jacob had grown from seventy to nation-size in Egypt, but had had no rulers, laws, or regulations of their own. God not only gave them laws at Sinai, but He organized them with Himself in the Tabernacle as the center.

And the children of Israel shall pitch their tents, every man by his own camp. (1:52)

Now He appointed the Levites as caretakers for the Tabernacle. God certainly did not choose the Levites because of their holiness. Jacob (Gen. 49:5-7) identified them as cruel, and cursed their fierce anger. He chose them in His sovereignty and gave them a special task. Their tribe would not be given land with the rest. They would be given cities distributed throughout Israel, to teach the law and to serve God, in addition to Tabernacle duties.

The rest of Israel encamped in a given order in four groups of three tribes each. The Levites lived immediately surrounding the Tabernacle. They took it down and set it up.

We, God's people, do not function well in disarray. Paul's epistle to the Corinthians also shows that God has order in the Church, and in which He is central. "Everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way." (1 Co. 14:40 NIV)

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 7

Maxine Williams

Special Separation

GWFT Winter 87-88

~~Parabens~~ Reading: Numbers 5--7

Family Reading: Numbers 6:1-21

Simon the Stylite separated himself by sitting on a pole. Some lived in desert colonies, others wandered through life.

The Nazarite vow (not to be confused with "Nazarene", one who came from Nazareth) was a vow of separation, not in terms of space, but of appearance, food and defilement.

None of the excluded items was sinful in itself, but commitment to the vow was a matter of self-denial and an identification with a separation unto the Lord.

As a rule, the vow ended, was temporary, as with Paul (Acts 21:24), but it could be for a lifetime, as with Samson. It was usually voluntary, but on occasion was mandated by God (Judges 13:7). Men, women, or even rulers could make a Nazarite vow. (6:2)

All the days of his separation...in the which he separateth himself unto the Lord, he shall be holy. (6:3)

God still calls to special service. Limited, or for a lifetime, the voluntary vow requires a separation from one's customary life style.

In any case, it involves self-denial. For example, it may involve living among street people, with a different habitat, companions, or hours than one might prefer.

Such vows must never be made lightly, whether temporary or life-long.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 8

Maxine Williams

He Leadeth Me!

GWFT Winter 87-88

Personal Reading: Numbers 8-10

Family Reading: Numbers 9:15-23

Because we have the whole story, we know they were on their way to Canaan. Because it was promised to Abraham, we tend to feel they were returning to a remembered homeland.

The truth is that they were out in a wilderness. Not one of them had ever been in Canaan; not even their grandfathers had lived there. The land was already full of people who would not welcome them. It had never been "home" to them.

On the way to the unfamiliar, even threatening future, out in a trackless *unfriendly* wilderness, how wonderful to have a sure guide. God gave them His visible presence in the Cloud and Fire. The secret was to follow where He led, to go when He moved, to stop when He stopped. When the Cloud abode on the Tabernacle they "rested in their tents," they "kept the charge of the Lord."

At the commandment of the Lord they journeyed, and at the commandment of the Lord they pitched. (9:18)

It is a secret of the lives of God's people. We have no Cloud or Fire, but we do have His Word which is "a lamp unto our feet." We have the Holy Spirit Who knows the Father's will and shares it with us.

We can say with David, "He leadeth me...I will fear no evil...surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." (Psalm 23)