

CAIN



THE
OWN AND
COUNTRY



PULPIT



SERMON BLUEPRINTS FOR
40 SPECIAL DAYS

BENJAMIN H. CAIN

THE TOWN AND COUNTRY PULPIT

Warner
Press

The Town and Country Pulpit

**Sermon Blueprints for
Forty Special Days**

BY BENJAMIN H. CAIN, D. D.

DEDICATION

*To my colleagues in town and country
church work:*

CHAUNCEY R. SWARTZ

FRANK A. SPONG

HOWARD R. JAMES

C. RAYMOND JACKSON

KEITH L. GRIFFITH

CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
Preface	4
How Big Is Our Church? (<i>New Year</i>)	7
The Quest for the Best (<i>Youth Sunday</i>)	10
God's Requirements (<i>Race Relations Sunday</i>)	14
Running for Your Life! (<i>Pre-Easter Season</i>)	16
Four P's in a Pod (<i>World Temperance Sunday</i>)	19
Like a Tree (<i>Arbor Day</i>)	23
Lessons from Palm Sunday	25
Easter in a Garden	27
Seed Growing Secretly (<i>Seedtime</i>)	30
Basic Rural Values (<i>Rural Life Sunday</i>)	32
Four Soils (<i>Rural Life Sunday</i>)	35
The Home by the Side of the Road (<i>Mother's Day</i>)	38
Getting Down to Earth (<i>Soil Stewardship Sunday</i>)	41
Family Devotions (<i>Christian Family Sunday</i>)	42
Childlikeness (<i>Children's Day</i>)	45
The Rural Home in a Changing World (<i>Home Dedication</i>)	48
The Ascension and Exaltation of Jesus (<i>Ascension Day</i>)	51
Power to Put It Across (<i>Pentecost Sunday</i>)	54
We Need a Memorial Day	57
The Head of a Royal Household (<i>Father's Day</i>)	60
Christian Citizenship (<i>Independence Day</i>)	62
Stepping Up Production (<i>Labor Day</i>)	64
We Are All Here (<i>Rally Day</i>)	67

What a Friend We Have in Jesus (<i>World Communion Sunday</i>)	70
Seedtime and Harvest (<i>Harvest Home</i>)	73
Life's Richest Offering (<i>Stewardship Sunday</i>)	74
What Is God Doing? (<i>Veterans' Day</i>)	76
Pass the Salt, Please! (<i>Community Emphasis Sunday</i>)	79
Cause for Thanksgiving (<i>Thanksgiving Day</i>)	83
The Saddest Words in the Bible (<i>Advent Season</i>)	85
The Bible, the Greatest Book in the World (<i>Universal Bible Sunday</i>)	88
A Small Town Savior (<i>Christmas</i>)	91
Why I Believe in the 4-H Club Movement	94
The Meaning and Challenge of an Anniversary (<i>Church Anniversary</i>)	97
Benefits of the Lord's Acre Plan (<i>Lord's Acre Sunday</i>)	99
Growing Older Gracefully (<i>Senior Citizen's Day</i>)	101
A Four-Leaf Clover Bouquet (<i>Wedding Anniversary Sermon</i>)	104
A Church for Our Day (<i>Church Dedication</i>)	107
Save Our Sunday	110

PREFACE

Several reasons are set forth here for the producing of this small book at this particular time. First, this task came as a specific recommendation to me as secretary of the Department of the Town and Country Church of the Evangelical United Brethren Church. Special helps for the observance of rural festivals and special days on the calendar were desired.

Not a few pastors write me at certain seasons of the year and state that the "barrel" needs replenishing. To attempt to help all of these brethren from various church groups has been a real joy. What I offer here to men such as these is intended only as a broad resource where resource for special days in the rural setting is generally lacking.

A third reason for the production of this book is my desire to do something that will be of immediate and practical help to town and country church pastors. Heretofore, much of my work and writing has been related to surveys, conferences, programs, techniques, workshops, and convocations. All of these are well and good in their places. But this is a different sort of thing. Enriching helps and suggestions for the pulpit ministry in this book should increase the usefulness of rural pastors as they preach and encourage them in their great work.

The pastor will find it helpful to follow the calendar of special days in the church, at least within certain limits and with appropriate adjustments to meet local needs. In preparing these sermon outlines with such a calendar in mind attention has been given in the following areas:

1. The Bible is widely covered.
2. Observances furnishing opportunities for effective Christian education have been noted.

3. A historic sense of religion is cultivated.

4. Personal and social needs are emphasized and dealt with.

5. Fellowship and worship across church lines are taken into account and encouraged.

The Scripture passages quoted in this book are almost entirely from the Revised Standard Version of the Holy Bible and are used by permission of the copyright owners. It is expected, of course, that ministers or other speakers using these outlines will employ various translations in preparing their messages and in the pulpit will use the translation they deem most suitable for their purposes.

—Benjamin H. Cain
Dayton, Ohio

HOW BIG IS OUR CHURCH?

(NEW YEAR)

"Then I was given a measuring rod like a staff, and I was told: 'Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there.'" —Revelation 11:1

I. Introduction

The Temple had been destroyed by the time our text was written. The true temple exists in "the church of the living God." John was commanded to measure the temple, altar, and people. How big is our church? What is the extent of her sacrifices? Do her people qualify for worship? These are appropriate questions for the New Year.

II. Does our church have youthful vigor?

(Youth departments, activities, and programs)

- A. Courage is characteristic of young people. Youth have the forward look; they are willing to venture and to blaze new trails. (Refer to Charles Lindberg's first solo flight across the Atlantic or to our space pioneers of today.)
- B. Young people have enthusiasm. A visit to a high school, a college campus, or to a training camp gives one the "thrill of youth"; it does something to you. These young people have what we call zip, pep, and vigor. Enthusiasm is the root of all achievement.
- C. Young people have abilities and talents that need to be harnessed by the church (voices, energy, dramatic abilities, leadership). Young people make many contacts: they are constant "minglers." J. Gordon Howard coined the phrase, "Use me or lose me." Youth say this.

- D. Youth and age are complementary (they need each other). Timothy needed the maturity, wisdom, counsel, and experience of Paul. Paul needed the courage, forward look, and enthusiasm of Timothy. Pastors can keep the church young through study and youth activities.

III. Does our church have missionary interests and activities?

- A. What is her outreach in the community?
She is the only "good shepherd" the community has. Does she co-operate with other churches and community agencies?
- B. What is her world outreach?
The Master's plan is to "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19a). Our church can do no less; she has no other reason for existence. If she fails to carry out the Great Commission, she will degenerate into a club.
- C. Does she give liberally to missions?
John was asked to "measure the altar" of sacrifice. We need missionary workers, stewards, and intercessors. A steady flow of consecrated dollars is needed to advance the Kingdom.
- D. Does she offer learning opportunities in missions? Missionaries on furlough, study classes, institutions, sermons, and literature will help create a missionary spirit and give valuable information.

IV. Does our church have evangelistic success?

- A. The entire program of our church should be evangelistic. The primary function of the church is to "make disciples." This includes indoctrination, enlistment, conservation.
- B. Evangelism must be a year-round function.
We will never win the world to Christ through

“two weeks of revival,” Holy Week services, and summer camps. These are the harvest seasons; we must sow the “gospel seed” fifty-two weeks a year. Someone noted this sign on the Church of Heavenly Rest in one of our large cities: “Closed for the summer.”

- C. We must use a variety of evangelistic methods to suit all ages. Priority methods used today are educational, personal, visitation, and mass evangelism. Paul said, “I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some” (I Cor. 9:22b).
- D. Our methods for conserving new converts should be effective. New converts need the right atmosphere, food, and work to “grow in grace” (II Pet. 3:18). Indoctrination linked with tasks of the church in proportion to age and ability.

V. Is our church enjoying consistent growth?

Is growth gradual? Is it steady, not spasmodic? Is it consistent? The lines of Christian growth include:

- A. Growing in Christlikeness.
The church needs to become more like Christ in such things as love, sacrifice, prayer, forgiveness, purity, race relations, and world peace. This growth is “an inside job.”
- B. Growing in the conception of her task in the community. Christianity is the gospel to all men and the gospel to the whole man. Is our church convinced of her whole task?
- C. Growing in willingness to accept her task in the community. It is possible to see and not to accept. Illustration: Twelve spies were sent into the Promised Land; ten of them saw, but would not accept; two saw and accepted.
- D. Growing in community influence and power.

This comes from an outward expression of her inward faith. Is it genuine? Growth comes when the church serves all the people, all the needs of the people, and acts as the evangelistic force of the community.

E. Growing in membership.

Is she building up the Body of Christ? expanding like a tree?

VI. Conclusion

January 1 is the time to get out the yardstick and measuring rod. We need to measure ourselves and our church according to God's standards.

THE QUEST FOR THE BEST

(YOUTH SUNDAY)

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it."

—Matthew 13:45-46

I. Introduction

There are three classes of people in our society:

- A. Drifters. They have no aim in life, no port of destination; they sing, "I don't know where I am going, but I'm on my way." They are like light driftwood floating downstream; they do little harm and no good.
- B. Deluded. Many of them are good people who have the wrong purpose in life. They devote all their time, energy, and knowledge to the acquiring of material possessions.
- C. Seekers. These persons have a definite purpose in life. They are out to get the biggest and best

life has to offer—"pearls of great value." For these they quest as a hunter does for game.

II. Imitation pearls

"Beware of imitation." There is tragedy in missing the best things of life. Some imitation pearls are:

A. Dollars.

Big wallets, bank accounts, and many possessions. The objectives are wrong; they miss the pearls. Illustration: Judas Iscariot.

B. A lofty reputation (fame).

Napoleon sought to write his name high. His objective was wrong. He was "blowing bubbles in the air." He missed the pearls.

C. Pleasure (thrills and entertainment for their sake). "Eat, drink, and be merry." Mark Anthony built a civilization on sand. In the night of revelry, he dissolved a pearl worth \$375,000.00 and drank a toast to Cleopatra. His objective was wrong; he missed the pearls.

D. Mere intellectual attainments.

Both pulpit and press have made use of the story of a certain man who continued his university education until he died at the age of fifty-four. He earned all the degrees offered; others were manufactured for him. The last one was D.P.M. (Doctor of Perpetual Motion). He never associated himself with a world of need. The world was no better because of him. His purpose was wrong; he missed the pearls.

III. The pearls of great value are life's biggest and best

These lasting treasures are all in the realm of spirit and character.

A. A good character.

Refer to Joseph, Daniel, Ruth, Esther, David, and Paul. We know them for what they were

more than for what they did. Character is capital. It wins the approval of God and man.

B. A Christian education.

Education plus character and spirit—fourfold: “And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man” (Luke 2:52). Religion is an absolute necessity in building a life. Ideals, inspiration, and aspiration are of God. Make his teaching the hub of your life.

C. An enlarged vision of human needs.

See with Christ the oneness of humanity, oneness before God, oneness of needs, and oneness of our task and destiny. Our vision must be cosmopolitan in nature: “Where there is no prophecy the people cast off restraint” (Prov. 29:18a).

D. A capacity for hard work.

A college catalogue states, “Go to college; earn more.” That is not the purpose of a Christian college. As Christians we go to college so that we can do more and do our work more efficiently. Only incidentally will the graduate of a Christian college get more salary.

“Success is 98 per cent perspiration and 2 per cent inspiration.” Be absorbed in your work; don’t be a clock watcher.

E. An honorable and useful calling.

“Be somebody.” (Whether as teachers, missionaries, scientists, farmers, or merchants, we all need to strive to serve humanity.) Find your work in life, and then work your find. Don’t be a cipher.

IV. How are these pearls to be found?

We must quest for them—“like a merchant man in search of fine pearls.”

A. Be an industrious seeker.

Take the tools of education and dig down where pearls are. "Go to it" with aim and purpose. "Don't let the grass grow under your feet." The industrious person is on the way up.

B. Be a thorough seeker.

Be thorough with the telescope and the microscope. Never be satisfied with half-truths. It is said that Lyle Rader, the chemist, read the story of Moses grinding gold to powder, strewing it upon the waters, the waters turning to blood. Said Rader, "If that experiment works, I will become a Christian." He tried it thirteen times before the water turned red. He became a Christian.

C. Be a businesslike seeker.

Robert E. Speer spoke of two men who had made a wager. At a given time they were to drive their cars from equally distant opposite directions to the center of the city. One of them was to disregard all traffic regulations, and the other one was to observe all of them. The result was that the violator was stopped by the police at the third traffic light. He was not only caught violating the law but snarled traffic for several blocks in all four directions. The careful observer drove steadily to the stated destination.

D. Be a timely seeker.

Be up to date. Hitch posts stand while the rest of the world goes by. A seeker who follows these four rules will find that for which he seeks.

V. Conclusion

Seek the big things of life. Never fritter away your time, energy, and life "chasing rainbows." Be an unsatisfied person; there are bigger and better things ahead. Illustration: Thorwaldson,

the Danish sculptor, when seventy-six years old was asked, "Which is your masterpiece?" He replied, "It has not yet been produced."

GOD'S REQUIREMENTS

(RACE RELATIONS SUNDAY)

*"He has showed you, O man, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?"*

—Micah 6:8

I. Introduction

The text shows us the simplicity of God's requirements as compared with man's often elaborate yet feeble attempts to do God's will.

II. The manward look—"do justice"

Our relationships with other people.

A. Justice is a moral attribute of God.

1. He has no favorites, pets, or stepchildren.
2. The Law taught justice, and the New Testament has its Golden Rule.
3. Preamble of our Constitution: "establish justice."
4. Flag salute: "One nation under God, with liberty and justice for all."
5. We seek "a just and durable peace."

B. God demands justice in all our relationships.

Far more impressive to God than any prayers we offer in the sanctuary is the justice we show to our fellow men in:

1. Social life.
2. Race relations.
3. Economic life.

4. Community relations.
5. Concern for underprivileged people.
6. Concern for minority groups.

III. The inward look—"Love mercy" (kindness)

- A. A God of kindness and mercy (mercy, a moral attribute of God). Mercy originated with God, "the Father of mercies" (II Cor. 1:3). His mercy is shown in:
 1. The gift of His son (John 3:16).
 2. His patience with our wanderings.
 3. His daily provisions for our needs.No one can be as merciful as God.
- B. God is not only a God of mercy, but he loves to show mercy. "I am the Lord who practices kindness, justice, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, says the Lord" (Jer. 9:24). (Recall his many gifts of mercy to us.)
- C. Those like Christ are merciful and kind. They love to show mercy. Illustration: Good Samaritan, "the one who showed mercy on him" (Luke 10:37). Jesus said, "Blessed are the merciful" (Matt. 5:7). Gifts of mercy: The Heifer Project sent 10,000 cattle to 43 different countries in 10 years; CROP sent gifts valued at \$32,000,000 in 14 years to needy people in many countries.

IV. The Godward look—"Walk humbly with your God"

- A. The Christian religion is a personal affair—"your God." It is a happy day in our lives when we can say: "My savior, My Lord." Unless we have personal relationship with God, we cannot walk with him.
- B. The Christian life is a walk with God. A quiet everyday walk in personal fellowship with God (no fanfare or noise). The Christian

is in step with Divinity. He “walks and talks with the King.”

- C. Humility is a trait of those who walk with God. The only way possible to walk with God. Paul said: “I am the least”; “I am the chief of sinners”; “But by the grace of God I am what I am.”

V. Conclusion

These three things—the manward look, the inward look, and the godward look—God requires of us all.

RUNNING FOR YOUR LIFE!

(A PRE-EASTER SESSION)

“Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.” —I Corinthians 9:24-25

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” —Hebrews 12:1-2

I. Introduction

Paul took keen interest in the Grecian games and races. He saw spiritual values in contests. They require discipline, alertness, action, endurance, fair play, co-operation, and skill. As we get ready to observe Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter, it is well that we work on

making ourselves more worthy of our Lord's sacrifice for us.

II. A figure of the Christian life—"race"

It is:

A. A race to be run.

A life to be lived, a contest not with other Christians but an hourly struggle to live abundantly. Keeping spiritually fit requires discipline.

B. A race set before us.

We choose to enter the contest. Our choice determines our character, career, and destiny. ". . . choose this day whom you will serve . . ." (Josh. 24:15).

C. A race surrounded by many witnesses.

The benches are full of visible and invisible spectators who praise, encourage, or criticize our lives. The invisible ones are those who have completed the race and want us to win. These we often forget.

D. A race with a definite goal.

In figure, "an imperishable wreath." The rewards are for the victor. At sunset of life, "life everlasting."

III. How to deal with encumbrances (excess baggage)

"Lay aside every weight, and sin."

A. Weights.

Anything that holds us back, impedes progress in Christian living, such as worry, pleasure, love of money. The "fat man" is disqualified from a race. He has too much excess baggage.

B. Besetting sins.

Sins that ambush and sidetrack us. With Moses it was anger, with Peter impetuosity, with

Jacob dishonesty, with Saul jealousy. Weights and sins are to be "laid aside" as one does a garment.

IV. Rules and regulations of the Christian race

A. Keep your eyes on Jesus Christ.

"Looking to Jesus." He will give you strength, guidance, and endurance. Illustration: "Peter's experience was that "when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and began to sink . . ." (Matt. 14:30). Look straight ahead.

B. Exert self-control.

"Exercises self-control." You are in charge of yourself. Cut out harmful things; live according to God's laws. You do not break them; they break you.

C. Exercise patience.

"Run with perseverance." This is an age of hurry, noise, and nerves. Do not act prematurely—wait! Illustration: A farmer plows ground, plants crop, and waits for the harvest. A harvest of some sort is inevitable; it will come. It counts.

D. Develop endurance (second wind).

Sometimes trials are long, drawn out. Time has a way of solving problems. Need "stick-to-it-iveness."

V. The goal or prize

All runners who finish the race in the Christian life are winners!

A. The honor of the contest.

The best people who have ever lived were in it for life. The best ones living now are in it. Mention Lincoln's concern about being "on the Lord's side."

- B. The consciousness of doing good.
You have added to someone's happiness. Encouraged, steadied, lifted, and sustained others. Your unconscious influence has also been helpful. You have been someone's ideal and hero.
- C. The approval of God's favor.
Jesus said of Mary, "She has done what she could" (Mark 14:8a). Commendation at the last judgment was: "Well done" (Matt. 25:21).
- D. Eternal life.
This life is a vestibule to a "beautiful temple," a dressing room for "the wedding," a school of preparation for "the mansions prepared." Heaven is a place where sin, pain, sickness, and death are absent.

VI. Conclusion

Have you entered the race, or are you just a bystander? What are you doing with your excess baggage? Are you keeping your eyes on Jesus? Keep the prize—the goal—before you always!

FOUR P'S IN A POD

(WORLD TEMPERANCE SUNDAY)

"But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's rich food, or with the wine which he drank; therefore he asked the chief of eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself."
—Daniel 1:8

"When Daniel knew the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem; and he got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously."

—Daniel 6:10

I. Introduction

Relate the early history of Daniel, facts of his captivity in Babylon, and his training for service in the courts of the king, as given in the opening verses of chapter 1.

II. Purpose

“Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself.”

- A. Daniel set before himself an object of attainment. His was a settled purpose. It was his deliberate choice and will to keep clean. Men without a purpose are like a traveler without a destination, a builder without plans, and a marksman without a mark.
- B. Every Christian should highly resolve to be:
 - 1. A number-one, full-time, consistent, and reliable Christian person.
 - 2. A clean Christian.
 - 3. A person who wastes no time and who wins souls for the Kingdom. Don't be a “jack at all trades and master of none.” Be somebody!
- C. The church of Christ should live purposefully, especially in the work of temperance. Clean Christian living should be the purpose of our evangelism, Christian education, fellowship, and missionary endeavors. We should support the best organized efforts for temperance.
- D. We should remain loyal to our purposes. To resolve to be is but half of the purpose. Carrying out our resolutions is the other half. Do not swerve in all directions like a car out of control. Be steadfast.

III. Purity

“Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself.” Daniel and the other three Hebrew young people

in the king's court were one of the first temperance societies.

- A. Kings' courts usually are polluted places. Clean young men must have purpose, heart, will, and backbone when surrounded by drunkenness, vice, temptations, and impurity. In these unfavorable surroundings, Daniel and his three companions lived a life of purity and devotion.
- B. They exercised self-control.
They would not defile their bodies with rich food, liquor, cigarettes, and so forth. We are in charge of ourselves. It was Socrates who said, "Control thyself." Jesus said, "Deny thyself"; say no to self.
- C. They depended upon God's help and guidance in everything. Their wills were undergirded with power divine. Paul said, "I can do all things in him who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13).

IV. Prayer

The incident of the second text (Dan. 6:10) took place years later. (Tell the story of the official jealousy that led to the king's decree.)

- A. Open windows symbolize religious faith.
A busy statesman holds to his childhood beliefs and those of his homeland. The value of early teachings.
- B. Open windows reveal Daniel's belief in spiritual fellowship. He prized his religion and kept it up to date. He kept in touch with headquarters. There is no substitute for personal fellowship with God.
- C. Daniel's prayer life is characterized by:
 - 1. Humility—"got down on his knees." A president, prophet, statesman, adviser of emperors on his knees. No wonder he could see so far.

2. Regularity—"three times a day." Such praying will help in the carrying out of a purpose. Our praying must be regular and not spasmodic. Holy habits are our best friends.
3. Consistency—"as he had done previously." He did not wait until the crisis came to start praying, but he stored up a reservoir of spiritual strength in advance.

V. Power

A. Physical.

Daniel lived during the reigns of five intemperate and ungodly kings. Clean, obedient, and fearless people often live longer and always lead richer lives. "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's spirit dwells in you?" (1 Cor. 3:16).

B. Governmental.

At this time, Babylon was the most powerful nation on earth. Daniel did the thinking and planning for three great emperors. As adviser, he possessed "the spirit of wisdom."

C. Spiritual.

God spoke to Daniel through dreams. That was his method of communication in that day. Daniel had the special gift of interpreting dreams of others, especially those who were in high governmental positions. The most famous illustration of his spiritual power is his miraculous preservation in the lions' den.

D. Exemplary

Young people of every age since Daniel have looked at him as a clean example of what youth may be by the help of Christian faith and practice. Hymns have been written and sung in keeping with his pure and beautiful life.

VI. Conclusion

The secret of a great life is purpose, purity, prayer, and power. Thank God for the Christian example and useful life of Daniel in a pagan country.

LIKE A TREE

(ARBOR DAY)

*“He is like a tree
planted by streams of water,
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers.”*
—Psalm 1:3

I. Introduction

The Bible and trees:

A row of trees from Eden to Paradise. Forty-two different species mentioned in forty books of the Bible. Trees are a symbol of the Christian life.

II. Like a tree the Christian is:

A. Firmly planted.

He is not so by chance or nature; God does the planting.

B. Deeply rooted—“by the streams of water.”

He has found the source of strength in the depths of God’s grace. Surface Christians are easily uprooted. Illustration: California’s big trees are deeply rooted. They grow tall.

III. Like a tree the Christian’s influence is like sheltering and comforting shade

Influence in Bible symbolized by shadows or shade.

A. All of us have a shadow (differs from shade only

in outline). Our influence is taking others up or down. Healing shadows: Acts 5:15.

B. We seek protection and help from great characters in:

1. Times of affliction and loss.
2. Financial difficulties.
3. Family problems.
4. Spiritual needs.

Isaiah 32 (2) Each will be like a hiding-place from the wind,
a covert from the tempest,
like streams of water in a dry place,
like the shade of a great rock in a weary land.

IV. Like a tree the Christian branches out with an expanding life

A. He is community minded.

He is deeply concerned about the welfare of all:

1. Families of community.
2. Public schools.
3. Community business.
4. Health of community.
5. Fellowship and recreation.
6. Conserving of natural resources.
7. God's kingdom here and now.

B. He has a world vision (missionary minded).

The Master's plan: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations." He can do no less. His church has no other reason for existence.

V. Like a tree the Christian bears fruits

A. Christian usefulness.

George Washington Carver found 107 products could be made from the sweet potato. Jesus "went about doing good" (Acts 10:38). We can be useful in the home, community, sickroom,

business, and church life. God is interested in “fruit.”

B. God wants us all to be useful.

The pruning process of John 15:2: “. . . every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.”

VI. Conclusion

The sharp contrast: “The wicked are not so, but are like chaff which the wind drives away” (Psalm 1:4).

LESSONS FROM PALM SUNDAY

“And the crowds that went before him and that followed him shouted, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed be he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!’”
—Matthew 21:9

I. Introduction

Jesus makes his first claim to royalty. How different were the outward expressions of that claim—no soldiers, police, banners, brass bands, cheer leaders, loud speakers, or blazing headlines. Why? “‘My kingship is not of this world,’” (John 18:36a). This historical pageant teaches us four lessons.

II. Obedience

A. Orders from the Master.

“Go into the village,” etc.

B. The prompt obedience of the disciples.

“They went.”

C. Stewardship of Palm Sunday.

Supplies and equipment for it were provided by others.

III. Enthusiasm

- A. The two singing crowds—"that went before and followed." They were not ashamed of their king. Singing is the handmaiden of the gospel.
- B. Fickle and shallow enthusiasm should be discouraged. It is like a skyrocket that burns out rapidly.
- C. Enthusiasm that arises out of deep convictions, loyalty, and devotion should always be encouraged.

IV. Testimony

- A. The great procession stirred the city.
The Pharisees asked, "Who is this?" The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet of Nazareth." It took a lot of courage to say that one week before Easter.
- B. We are debtors to Christ for his sacrifice for us. We owe it to him to show our colors, take our stand, and raise our flag. "Drops of grief can ne'er repay," etc. Have we lost the art of testimony?

V. Service

As a token of respect to royalty:

- A. The disciples, with garments and branches, made a carpet for Christ to ride in triumph. He needs our gifts.
- B. Their services were costly.
Today it is serve "us." There is nothing too costly for Jesus. Example: the "alabaster box" of Mary (John 12:1-8). We must bring to Him our lives, talents, and possessions. The church moves forward on our sacrifices.

VI. Conclusion

There is another Palm Sunday coming (Rev. 7:9-10) —“Palms of victory.”

EASTER IN A GARDEN

“Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb where no one had ever been laid . . . they laid Jesus there.”

—John 19:41-42

I. Introduction

This particular garden is closely associated with history's most important fact. Following the death of Jesus Christ on Good Friday afternoon, two wealthy and influential men begged his body from Pilate and buried it in a garden tomb near by. Nicodemus made his contribution to the burial, “a hundred pounds of aloes.” Joseph of Arimathea contributed “his own tomb hewn out of rock.” The kindly arms of nature graciously received and held Christ's mangled body until resurrection morn three days later.

II. An unused tomb in a garden

“A new tomb where no one had ever yet been laid.”

A. The Bible says a lot about gardens.

It opens with the garden scene in Eden and closes with “the paradise of God” in the book of Revelation. God loves the beautiful, the growing, fragrant, and productive works of his creation.

B. In Jesus' day, gardens (orchards) were meeting places for social, business, and religious festivities. Gardens were also used for burying grounds. Abraham buried Sarah in the Garden

of Macpelah. The Old Testament had its famous "Garden of Kings" which corresponds to our Arlington. Jesus was buried in a garden.

C. The unused tomb was Joseph's own.

Joseph loaned his own tomb for Jesus' body. For this he will always be remembered with great appreciation. All of life is like a garden—childhood, youth, and maturity. In our pursuits, joys, and pleasures, "a tomb is nigh at hand" for each one of us.

III. The tomb is harmless (conquered)

Jesus took out of the tomb the gloom, despair, horror, and fear we associate with it and made it radiant and fragrant.

A. He overcame sin by his atonement.

Sin is strong, but Christ is stronger. "Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (Rom. 5:20). "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" (I Cor. 15:22). ". . . Who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light . . ." (II Tim. 1:10).

B. Jesus Christ arose from the tomb.

The Roman soldiers, guards, seals, and huge stone were all helpless in attempting to prevent his resurrection. "But God raised him up" (Acts 2:24a). He had taught, "I lay down my life, that I may take it again" (John 10:17b). "I died, and behold I am alive for evermore" (Rev. 1:18b).

C. He guaranteed our immortality.

This guarantee is written out for us in John 14:19b, "Because I live, you will live also." "In my Father's house are many rooms; . . . I go and prepare a place for you" (John 14:2-3a). The tomb has been conquered. It is harmless.

IV. Practical lessons from Easter

(Live in the garden and not in the tomb.) The Bible does not make death prominent. We do not know where Peter, Paul, Mary, John, James, and many other leading characters of the Bible died. The Bible is more interested in life, redemption, eternity, and service here and now. Then let us live:

A. In the garden of love.

Love God, Jesus Christ, the Bible, the church, our brethren of all races, the unsaved, and the unlovely of our day. Love is the cement that binds the church together. No weeds of hate and jealousy ever grow in this garden. Read again I Corinthians 13.

B. In the garden of faith.

Faith is a living and growing thing. It increases by experience. In the New Testament, faith is personal, saving, suffering, and victorious. See Hebrews 11. So we sing "My Faith Looks Up to Thee."

C. In the garden of hope.

We have "hope boxes" in this life and for eternity. The influence of hope is "a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul" (Heb. 6:19a). This hope is based on the Word of God and the atonement of Christ.

D. In the garden of prayer.

In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus found strength for a great decision and burden. It was there that he gained the victory to go on to Calvary. Hymn: "There's a Garden Where Jesus Is Waiting."

E. In the garden of service.

Our task is to transform the world into "the garden of God." It is to make it to "rejoice and

blossom" (Isa. 35:1). The judgment scene in Matthew 25:31-46 is based on service rendered.

V. Conclusion

The tomb has been conquered for us; it is harmless. We say with Paul, "But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:57). The garden of life should concern us most—live and serve Him.

With the kiss of the sun for pardon,
And the song of the birds for mirth
We are nearer God's heart in a garden,
Than anywhere else on earth.

—Author unknown

SEED GROWING SECRETLY

(SEEDTIME)

"And he said, 'The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed upon the ground, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he knows not how. The earth produces of itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.'" —Mark 4:26-29

"The seed is the word of God." —Luke 8:11

I. Introduction

This brief parable is overshadowed by the greatest of all parables—the parable of the Soils. It is unexplained and has many different interpretations. It teaches co-operation with God in the spiritual world as in the natural world. We shall consider the seed, the growth, and the harvest.

II. The seed (God's Word)

- A. All seed is from God (Gen. 1:11).
(It is valuable as a germ of life.)
- B. In order to produce, seed must be sown—placed in the earth. Preaching the Word is the will of God. All men need it. Many channels of sowing.
- C. Sowing seed requires:
 - 1. Faith in seed, soil, weather, and God.
 - 2. Patient toil.
 - 3. Cultivation of plants.

III. Growth—"should sprout and grow"

- A. Growth is normal. It begins with germination (conversion).
- B. Growth is mysterious. "He knoweth not how."
- C. Growth is gradual.
There are progressive steps—"blade, ear, full corn." We do not become mature Christians overnight.
- D. Growth is silent.
Invisible processes are at work. God is at work—"night and day." Noise is not growth.

IV. The harvest—"When the harvest is come"

- A. Seed is productive.
The reason for sowing is the harvest. (Illustrate with wheat and corn.)
- B. The harvest is inevitable.
It is certain to come. It is the harvest that counts. We obey the laws of God and wait on the harvest. Fruits "clubbed" from the tree will not last.
- C. God's work is complete when we reap.
"When the harvest is come, he [farmer] putteth in the sickle." Grain is a precious thing and must

be garnered into the bins. Souls are precious and must be garnered into the church.

- D. The harvest of the Kingdom is now.
“The harvest is now, not four months hence” (John 4:35). Keep machinery of church in good repair, well oiled, up to date, and functioning smoothly.

V. Conclusion

As a church, we are a part of this growing Kingdom. Its victories, joys, and glories are ours. Be loyal to the chief factor in Kingdom growth—the church.

BASIC RURAL VALUES

(RURAL LIFE SUNDAY)

*“The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;
yea, I have a goodly heritage.”*

—Psalm 16:6

I. Introduction

Values originate in the country. They are often exploited in the cities. Some of them need to be rescued and preserved for society. A significant inscription appears on the Union Depot in Washington, D.C. It reads: “The farm—best home of the family—the main source of national wealth—the foundation of civilized society—the natural Providence.” Six rural values are considered.

II. Creative work

- A. Creative work is an American heritage.
Forefathers and pilgrim fathers used minds, hands, and hearts to produce commodities and a way of life. This human machine was made

for work. Work develops personality, keeps one happy, and produces for human consumption.

- B. Children are an asset on the farm.
Twelve-year-olds drive tractors and help with chores. There is always something for children to do on the farm. Not so in the city.
- C. Habits of industry are important in life.
The lazy person is useless; he is a misfit in God's great and good universe. Lazy oxen and horses do have some value.

III. Co-operation

- A. Co-operation is a principle of the universe.
There is harmony in the solar system. Eclipses on sun and moon are determined years ahead. It is the mission of rural people to work with God in the feeding and clothing of all peoples in the world.
- B. The farm home and community are educators of co-operation. In the home everyone has a job to do. Chores are assigned to each one. Farmers work with each other in fields. They learn to live and work together in peace and harmony.
- C. The rural church should be an example and champion of co-operation.
 - 1. In its own ranks.
 - 2. With other Christian groups.
 - 3. With independent farm organizations.
 - 4. With civic and educational groups.
 - 5. In fellowship and recreation.

IV. Thrift

- A. The Bible teaches diligence and thrift.
"Six days you shall labor, and do all your work" (Exodus 20:9). "But Jesus answered them, 'My Father is working still, and I am working'" (John 5:17). "If any one does not provide for

his relatives, and especially for his own family, he has disowned the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (I Tim. 5:8).

- B. Meager income of most farm boys makes thrift and economy a necessity.
- C. A biblical example of genuine thrift is found in the career of Joseph, who became "Secretary of Agriculture" in Egypt. He knew how to plan wisely, manage resources, and organize and carry out plans.

V. Self-reliance

- A. The farmer must think and act for himself. He must make decisions that are far-reaching each day; he must rely on his best judgment.
- B. Difficult situations often call for immediate decisions. Past experiences and good judgment help the farmer to be self-reliant.

VI. Respect for authority

- A. Rural people as a class are law-abiding citizens. They "growl" a lot about certain laws, but abide by them until change comes. Most lawbreakers are found in the crowded cities. Rural parents teach their children respect for law and property, for the aged, and for father and mother.
- B. The home, church, school, and state are all concerned in developing the character traits in our citizens. They are essential to our democracy.

VII. Reverence for God

- A. Their contact with creative forces links rural folks with the "Holy Earth." They are closely associated with the miraculous and the supernatural. These contacts encourage reverence for God.
- B. Working with these processes inspires more

reverence than working with machines. The farmer is a partner with God in the creation and distribution of food, fiber, and clothing to supply world needs.

C. Nature magnifies God.

Man-made machines magnify their creators or designers. The lofty mountains, canyons, waterfalls, streams, and starry heavens inspire reverence for the Creator. The rural home is the balance wheel of the nation.

VIII. Conclusion

Work, co-operation, thrift, self-reliance, respect, and reverence—these values can best be conserved by working them into the programs of our lives, homes, community, and church.

FOUR SOILS

(RURAL LIFE SUNDAY)

“But those that were sown upon good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty-fold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.” —Mark 4:20

I. Introduction

Setting of the parable (seaside). The disciples question, “Why did you shift to parables?” Our attention will be on the soils, representing four kinds of hearts among those who hear the gospel message.

II. Wayside soil (hardened heart)

A. No response to message.

Ground fertile but unprepared. No germination of seed. Hearer “stone deaf.”

- B. If soil does not receive the seed, birds do.
 "Birds of the air devour it." The devil has many agents that swoop down on the gospel seed—morning paper, business, golf, trips.
- C. We go to church to strengthen the inner voice. We go to prevent "hardening of the heart." It is possible to become "gospel hardened." Hardened soil can be plowed.

III. Shallow soil (emotions only)—"rocky ground"

- A. Response but no growth.
 "Received the word with gladness." No root in themselves. Surface Christians, shallow living, easily uprooted. Reaching the emotions only is not enough.
- B. Testing times come.
 "When tribulation and persecution arise on account of the word." Christianity is more than "gladness"; it is a cross to be borne. The new plants die: "immediately they fall away."
- C. We go to church to give stability to our faith.
 We must go down through the rocks to the un-failing springs of God's grace. Illustration: the Empire State Building in New York is 110 stories high; the foundation is 10 stories in the ground.

IV. Thorn-choked soil (worldly living)—"sown among thorns"

- A. There was response and growth but no fruit.
 We cannot grow a harvest of thorns and wheat in the same field. Christ and the world cannot live in the same heart: "No one can serve two masters" (Matt. 6:24a).
- B. Three thorns mentioned (cares, riches, pleasure)
 - 1. Cares. Worries—domestic, social, business, political.

2. Riches. Riches are deceitful. Business gets too big for the Christian life, so the man drops out of church affairs. Emerson said: "The worst thing about money is that it costs so much."
 3. Pleasure. Vacations, hobbies, and other leisure interests are right when they fit us for better services. They are wrong when they lessen our usefulness.
- C. We go to church to help build a supreme loyalty to God. We must clean out the thorns so that the wheat can grow.

V. The fruitful hearer

- A. Response to the Word—"hear, accept, bear fruit." There was germination, growth, and fruit. They prayed during the sermon: "Lord, help me to get this message."
- B. They accepted what they heard.
Did not memorize it or write it down. They obeyed and practiced the word. Live up to best light we have and more will come. If we fail to practice what we hear, we will fail to believe.
- C. They were fruitful Christians.
It takes faith and patience to raise a crop. The order is: hear, obey, bear fruit; the results, "thirtyfold, sixtyfold, a hundredfold."
- D. We go to church to multiply our chances for doing good. The thirty- and sixtyfold may increase to one hundredfold.

VI. Conclusion

- Why go to church according to this parable?
- A. To strengthen the inner life.
 - B. To give stability to our faith.
 - C. To clean the thorns out of our lives.
 - D. To multiply chances for doing good.

THE HOME BY THE SIDE OF THE ROAD

(MOTHER'S DAY)

"One day Elisha went to Shunem, where a wealthy woman lived, who urged him to eat some food. So whenever he passed that way, he would turn in there to eat food. And she said to her husband, 'Behold now, I perceive that this is a holy man of God, who is continually passing our way. Let us make a small roof chamber with walls, and put there for him a bed, a table, a chair, and a lamp, so that whenever he comes to us, he can go in there.'" —II Kings 4:8-10

I. Introduction

Tell the story of Elisha's itinerary from Mount Carmel to Jerusalem and the addition to the home in Shunem for the prophet's convenience. This is the first biblical idea of a parsonage. It was the people within who made this wonderful home. The bulwarks of this ideal home were godliness, hospitality, contentment, and faith.

II. Godliness

A. This was a Christian home.

Money will buy a house, but not a home. Someone has defined home as "where the great are small and the small are great." In such a home we find the Bible, Christian pictures on the walls, acts of worship, love, harmony, and good will.

B. Godless mothers and fathers have besmirched the pages of history. The kings and queens of Israel and Judah are fitting examples of such living. Jezebel was a most wicked woman. Included in this list are Herod the Great, Cleopatra, and many others who have written unerasable records.

- C. Godly mothers and fathers have illumined the pages of history. Hannah, the mother of Samuel, Jocabed, the mother of Moses, Lois and Eunice of Timothy's family, Mary and Joseph, Susanna Wesley, Nancy Hanks, and many unknown parents are great luminaries on the pages of history.
- D. The greatest need of our nation is for Christian homes. Christ wants to come into our homes: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me" (Rev. 3:20).

III. Hospitality

- A. The woman of Shunem was a good homemaker. It is not the products of great factories but of the home plant that make strong national life. Many modern girls with every appliance are poor homemakers. Girls should be prepared and trained for motherhood.
- B. Hospitality of this home was shared with a visitor, a prophet and a man of God. The family built an addition to their home for Elisha and Gehazi. They shared their wealth for a noble cause. Too much of modern entertainment is left to commercial institutions.
- C. Mothers have broad interests. The WCTU, women's societies at church, sewing circles, auxiliaries, clubs, and other organizations give us some idea of the outreach of the services of Christian women.

IV. Contentment

- A. Elisha had influence with the king. He wanted to reward the woman of Shunem and her husband for their hospitality by getting

them a position with the king or a prominent place in the army: "Would you have a word spoken on your behalf to the king or the commander of the army?" (II Kings 4:13a).

- B. The woman's response to the offer was:
"I dwell among my own people" (II Kings 4:13b). They were content with home; friends and neighbors and were happy together. They were not interested in honor and favors.
- C. Many people seek recognition.
They want places of prominence, honor, and power. Some sacrifice home, domestic peace, friends, conscience, and God, for honor prominence, and money. Christ's answer to such ambitions is, "He who is greatest among you shall be your servant; whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted" (Matt. 23:11-12).

V. Faith (II Kings 4:17)

- A. She was blessed with a son in her old age.
Her good husband was unstinted in love and sacrificial service. The climax of the whole story centers about their child.
- B. Godly parents are not exempted from bereavement and loss. Their son died at the age of six. The parents used common sense in the crisis; they sent for Elisha, the holy man of God.
- C. They betook themselves to God.
Theirs was a common experience of parents—sunshine and gladness, sadness and loss, joys, deep concerns, and peace. Their son was restored to life through Elisha.

VI. Conclusion

Godliness, hospitality, contentment, and faith are the bulwarks that will make modern homes useful and strong.

GETTING DOWN TO EARTH

(SOIL STEWARDSHIP SUNDAY)

"The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it." —Genesis 2:15

I. Introduction

God is owner of the good earth. Man is a steward. Stewardship must be acknowledged.

II. The unchristian use of the good earth

We waste it through:

A. Erosion (depletion)

1. Erosion depletes people and communities.
2. Erosion affects urban people (they need milk, butter, meat, eggs).

B. Unchristian distribution of the good earth's products. We have room and food enough for 300,000,000 people in the United States.

C. Perversion of the good earth's products into instruments of destruction (intoxicating liquors, etc.).

III. The Christian use of the good earth

We must:

A. Acknowledge God's ownership of the soil.

"The earth is the Lord's" (Ps. 24:1).

B. Practice Christian stewardship of natural resources. Rebuild and conserve soils; care for minerals, forests, wild life, and streams.

- C. Enter into partnership with God in the creation and distribution of food, fiber, and clothing. God and the farmer feed and clothe the world.
- D. Share the fruits of the good earth with the needy, distressed, and hungry of our world. Through our gifts they will accept Christ as Savior and Lord.
- E. Recapture the honor and dignity of farming as a calling. The farmer has a mission.

IV. Conclusion

Secularism crowds God out of all of life. Christianity packs God into all phases of life. Be a good steward of the good earth.

FAMILY DEVOTIONS

(CHRISTIAN FAMILY SUNDAY)

"Behold, I and the children whom the Lord has given me are signs and portents in Israel from the Lord of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion." —Isaiah 8:18

"Lo, sons are a heritage from the Lord."
—Psalm 127:3a

I. Introduction

A Mother's Day tragedy—Anna Jarvis, who founded Mother's Day in 1902, died as a recluse in 1957 at the age of eighty-four. She grew bitter because of the commercialism of Mother's Day, a development which she had hoped would never occur.

II. A mother's pride

The prophet is speaking through his wife: "Behold"—a loving, reverential exclamation of a grateful

soul, a cry of deep admiration; "Behold . . . the children whom the Lord has given me."

A. A child is a beautiful thing.

Hannah lifted Samuel up and said, "For this child I prayed" (I Sam. 1:27a); then follow ten verses of thanksgiving (see I Samuel 2:1-10). Mary, with the Christ child in her arms, sings, "My soul magnifies the Lord" (Luke 1:46). Simeon in the Temple takes the child Jesus in his arms and says, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace" (Luke 2:29a).

B. Motherhood is a mission.

Many women do not want children (unnatural). Some who cannot be mothers adopt children so that their mother love may have an outlet. To be childless was a disgrace to Jewish women. The text expresses the joy of the prophet and Mrs. Isaiah over two sons.

III. Children are a gift from God

"The children whom the Lord has given me."

A. Children, as a gift from God, still are his. We should dedicate them to God.

B. Children are a solemn trust from God.

We must care for God's property. Children are more valuable than cars, clubs, theaters, bridge parties, and fishing trips. Parents should be interested in their child's:

1. Health.
2. Schooling.
3. Social life.
4. Play.
5. Guidance of soul.
6. Future.

Many parents are delinquent in their responsibilities.

IV. Right relationships

Parents and children belong together: "I and the children." They belong together:

A. In the home.

Togetherness is the only way to make a home. The family tied together with love, companionship, prayer, and worship is God's ideal.

B. In Sunday school.

Parents, take your children to Sunday school. (Sending them alone is shirking responsibility.) Fortunate is the church that serves her children with qualified and devoted teachers, adequate buildings and equipment, lots of room for play, work, and worship.

C. In church.

The Sunday school of today is the church of tomorrow. Today, only one third of the Sunday school attend church services. Families should sit together in church services. In the family circle at home, talk about the good things of the church. (Some families have "roast pastor" for dinner!)

D. At the Lord's table.

Christ died for every family as well as for me. It is a beautiful sight when parents and children take communion together.

E. In heaven.

We are together on earth so why not in heaven? United here and united there. Many funeral prayers plea for "an unbroken family in heaven."

V. Children are the hope of the future

"Children . . . signs and portents in Israel."

A. We live both for today and for tomorrow.

We should strive to make it easier for the next

generation by saving this one. Six million children started to school for the first time last autumn. (They are our challenge.)

- B. We can build our influence into the future. Jesus and Paul did. Neither one had any of this world's goods. So did Robert Raikes, the founder of the Sunday school movement, Francis Clark of the Christian Endeavor, David Livingstone of England, and Fanny J. Crosby.
- C. Children are good omens for a better future. Isaiah and his wife saw a better day for children and, through them, a better future for the nation.

VI. Conclusion

The big trees of California grow in families. "Families that pray and worship together stay together."

CHILDLIKENESS

(CHILDREN'S DAY)

"... Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

—Matthew 18:3-4

I. Introduction

The question of rank: "Who is the greatest?" The disciples were concerned about position, rank, and honor in the coming Kingdom. Jesus teaches by an object lesson: "And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them." The center of interest is on children. His sermon to the adult disciples was, "Truly . . . unless you turn and become like children."

II. The need of becoming childlike (conversion)

- A. It is universal.
“Unless you turn.” “Unless one is born anew” (John 3:3b). There is only one way of getting into the kingdom of God: One must go in “heart first.” By nature we are “outsiders.”
- B. A Christian experience is the only thing that satisfies God—and us. The New Testament demands it. The moral man may do many good things and be a good person, but he is without a knowledge of sins forgiven and a new life in Christ.

III. The work of conversion

- A. It is a spiritual change of heart and life.
“Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation . . .” (II Cor. 5:17a).
- B. It involves an act by man and an act by God:
 - 1. *Repentance*—a turning from a life of sin to God. It involves confession. It brings about a new mind toward God.
 - 2. *Regeneration*—a new heart from God by the power of the Holy Spirit. For the person, it is a new birth: “Born anew.” This we call conversion.

IV. The fruits of conversion

“Become like children.”

- A. Humility.
Humility is the key to the Kingdom. The disciples had to reverse their desire for rank to humility. Children do not have pride or worldly ambitions. It is the grownups who argue about being great. A Christian principle is: “Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled, and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted” (Matt. 23:12).

B. Faith.

Children naturally believe. We learn to become skeptics and unbelievers. Faith is necessary to live right. "And without faith it is impossible to please him" (Heb. 11:6). Faith may be increased through experience. The disciples prayed, "Lord, increase our faith."

C. Forgiveness.

Children forgive and forget. Even if they quarrel several times a day, they make up in five minutes. The Lord's prayer says, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." Jesus taught that we should never try to get even with those who have wronged us. Booker T. Washington said, "My soul is too big and too glad to be at heart the enemy of any man." An unforgiving person cannot live in fellowship with a forgiving God.

D. Simplicity.

Children do not use big words. Words are not a sign that one knows a lot anyway. The great things of life are simple: God, mother, father, love, home, heaven, do, give, be. All of these things children may understand. Jesus talked about a coin, lost boy, lost sheep, seeds, flowers, birds, and trees.

E. Play.

Children play. They are not often still one minute. It is said they have ninety-eight muscles with which to wiggle and only two with which to keep still. All ages of people should play. It keeps them from getting grouchy, sour, pessimistic, old, and grumpy. We must keep our spirits alive. There is such a thing as growing older gracefully. Jesus was no recluse. Children followed him everywhere.

F. Solidarity of the race.

Race discrimination is taught children by example and precept. They play together without discrimination. We seek to consolidate our interests and responsibilities. The one sheep lost to the one hundred in the parable (Luke 15:3-7) may have been a black sheep. God looks on the heart, not on the color of skin.

V. Conclusion

Let us be alert to learn the lessons children teach: humility, faith, forgiveness, simplicity, play, solidarity. (Repeat the text.)

THE RURAL HOME IN A CHANGING WORLD

(HOME DEDICATION)

“And Samuel said to Jesse, ‘Are all your sons here?’ And he said, ‘There remains yet the youngest, but behold, he is keeping the sheep.’ And Samuel said to Jesse, ‘Send and fetch him; for we will not sit down till he comes here.’”
—I Samuel 16:11

I. Introduction

The prophet Samuel is looking among the seven sons of Jesse for a King to rule over Israel. Briefly tell the story of this ideal rural home as pictured in the context.

II. The rural family is important

A. Socially (biologically)

The rural family is the “seed bed of population.” World population is 75 per cent rural. In the U.S.A. the population is 70 per cent urban and 30 per cent rural. Only 10 per cent of our rural

people are farmers. Children are the best crop of all.

B. Cohesively.

There are destructive forces at work in our society, tearing it to pieces (economic changes, easy divorces, hasty marriages, low moral movies, alcohol, and literature). There is one divorce out of every three marriages in urban areas. There is one divorce to every fourteen marriages in rural areas. The family sticks together. Strong families make strong homes, communities, and churches.

C. Religiously.

1. The family is the heart of evangelism.

2. The family is the base of Christian education. Parents are the first evangelists and educators in the home. Here we learn co-operation, the give and take of life, service without rewards, and the value of the individual.

III. Needs of the rural family

A. A Christian philosophy of life.

(A philosophy is a way of thinking and living.)
God first in relation to the person, family, soil, farming, business, education, and fellowship.

B. Christian literature on tables and Christian pictures on walls. Literature and art are the interpreters of religion. They voice the ideals of the home. Guard the radio and TV lest they bring unwholesome ideals into your home.

C. Christian music.

Music in the home should be the same as that of the church. Music has been the handmaiden of religion ever since the angels sang "Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth to men of good will." Keep the home singing.

D. A sense of pride in the home.

The "home of the nation" is not necessarily the White House in Washington, D.C., nor a glamour house pictured in *Better Homes and Gardens*. It is the home where God is revered, loved, obeyed, and served. It may be only a hut. Make the home the best, cleanest, and happiest place in the world—"Home, Sweet Home."

IV. Resources of the rural home

A. Worship in the home.

Make the home a sanctuary, "a retreat," an "upper room." Your church literature provides devotional helps for the family.

B. Regular public worship.

We cannot serve a God whom we do not worship. *Get the habit of churchgoing*. Worship quiets the heart, gives new strength, clears the vision, and strengthens the will. It gives new courage to go forward.

C. Education for home building.

This is the teaching task of the church. Christian marriage is a necessity to ensure a good home. Young adults are the family producers. They should know how to be good parents, good neighbors, and good citizens.

D. Fellowship with other families.

Families need each other just as persons do. They need to eat, play, work, and worship together. This is a tie that binds hearts together. Let the church have lots of home-comings, picnics, reunions, and other get-togethers for the good of families.

E. Evangelistic fervor and motive.

When the families get the stir of "revive us again," the church will be revived and will work

to save others. It is easier for unchurched homes to admit Christ through a living and growing church.

V. Conclusion

The rural home must lay hold of the resources at hand:

- A. Worship.
- B. Instruction.
- C. Fellowship.
- D. Evangelism.

THE ASCENSION AND EXALTATION OF JESUS

(ASCENSION DAY)

“So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God.”
—Mark 16:19

I. Introduction

The meaning of the two terms in the subject. Ascension—Jesus’ visible exit from earth to heaven. Exaltation—“right hand of God,” a figure of speech denoting a place of power and authority. He makes intercession for us now as our High Priest. We go through him to the Father: “No one comes to the Father, but by me” (John 14:6b).

II. The necessity of the Ascension and exaltation of Christ

His ascension was necessary because of:

- A. The nature of Christ’s resurrected body.
It was not subject to ordinary laws; hence could not permanently abide here.

- B. Christ's unique personality and sinless life required such an exit. His entrance into this life was accompanied by "angels," "a star," "wise men," and "shepherds." The Ascension, as the Bible gives it, was a fitting finish for a sinless life.
- C. The Ascension and exaltation of Christ were necessary to complete the plan of salvation. The plan was not completed on the cross or on Easter morning but when Jesus returned to the Father and "sat down at the right hand of God."
- D. The Ascension and exaltation of Christ gave the Apostles and early church a satisfactory account of the disappearance of his body. They could say in the language of the text: "We saw him 'taken up into heaven and sat down on the right hand of God.'"
- E. The Ascension and exaltation of Christ were necessary to make him an object of worship for the whole race. His earthly ministry was local. Now he has changed his presence for his omnipresence: "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24).

III. The purpose of the Ascension and exaltation of Christ

- A. Christ entered into heaven as a forerunner.
 - ". . . where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf" (Heb. 6:20a). A forerunner enters a place where the rest are to follow; he is one who is sent on before to make observation, to scout, and to spy out.
- B. He has gone to prepare a place for his people. Make ready for their coming. "And when I go

and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself, . . ." (John 14:3).

C. He is appearing in our behalf.

"Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning" (Heb. 4:14-15).

IV. The results of the Ascension, an exaltation of Christ

A. Free access to God.

"By the new and living way which he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a high priest over the house of God, let us draw near . . ." (Heb. 10:20-22a). All believers have this access to God.

B. Assured hope of immortality.

We will take our place in heaven with a body "like unto his glorious body." Paul said: "For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (II Cor. 5:1).

C. Confidence in God's dealings with us.

We can master our circumstances and environment with God's help. Paul said: "I can do all things in him who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13). "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (Rom. 8:35).

V. Conclusion

Recapitulate briefly.

POWER TO PUT IT ACROSS

(PENTECOST SUNDAY)

"... but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high." —Luke 24:49b

"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; ..." —Acts 1:8a

"For ... our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. ..." —I Thessalonians 1:5a

I. Introduction

The church of our day has leadership, buildings, programs, attendance, budgets, and prestige. If there is one thing the modern church lacks, it is dynamics.

II. Power defined

A. Our world is full of natural power.

1. Power of the elements—wind, water, heat, steam, gas, electricity, atoms.
2. Power of man—social, intellectual, political, financial, ecclesiastical, and military. All these are on our own level.

B. Supernatural power—"power from on high."

Illustration: Niagara Falls—169 feet above level ground (water from on high). Supernatural power is the vitalizing and energizing power of the Holy Spirit. It is the spark that ignites the powder. It is the power of God.

III. Power needed

A. Our attention, activities, and energies center about programs, organizations, and money. Our interests are bound up in the secondary things of life. We are more problem conscious than power conscious.

- B. The power of the Holy Spirit is available to all Christians. "But stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high." The power of the Spirit is for the work of the Spirit. The Spirit-filled life is normal, healthy, and dynamic.

IV. The source of power—"The Holy Spirit"

A. The Holy Spirit.

His office is to regenerate and empower for service. The secret of the triumphant march of the early church was the Holy Spirit.

- B. Christ fulfilled his promise to send the Holy Spirit. On the day of Pentecost God opened the flood gates and poured the Holy Spirit into waiting, hungry, tired, empty, and wavering hearts. They were all changed by the power of the Spirit.

V. The use of power

It is to be experienced and used. Power must always be a servant.

A. Power to witness.

Scope of witness: "Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8b). A witness must be true, reliable, and consistent.

B. Power to preach the gospel.

Peter was "filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 4:8). Only Spirit-filled preaching is effective.

C. Converting power.

After ten days of waiting in prayer and one hour of preaching, 3,000 souls were won (Acts 2:41). The revival was continuous.

D. Power to suffer.

“Yet if one suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed . . .” (I Pet. 4:16a). According to Hebrews 11, many suffered for their faith. It is so today in many countries.

E. Power to serve.

“No one can serve two masters” (Matt. 6:24a). “. . . but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Josh. 24:15b). Service stands out on every page of the Bible.

VI. Channels of power

Refer to the hymn, “Is Your Life a Channel of Blessing?”

A. An earnest, pure, and unselfish life.

Power will not flow through a life of impurity. Refer to Simon (Acts 8:19). Jesus said, “Blessed are the pure in heart” (Matt. 5:8a).

B. Right habits of prayer.

An Indian said, “I used to pray three times a day, but now I pray only once a day, and that is all the time.” The prayer habit will help us to build up reservoirs of power.

C. A genuine love for the Bible.

Have a good grip on the Bible. Believe in its inspiration, the truth and efficacy of the blood, reality of sin, forgiveness, and judgment. Know how to handle your Bible.

D. A passion for lost men.

Christ’s heart ached for lost people (Luke 15).

VII. Conclusion

All of us can obey the Bible as interpreted by the Holy Spirit. (The Bible is full of tragedies of disobedience.) Be alone with your Bible daily. Let it speak to you. Be a good listener.

WE NEED A MEMORIAL DAY

"This day shall be for you a memorial day."

—Exodus 12:14a

I. Introduction

Memorial Day was founded by General John A. Logan on May 30, 1868. It was the day the last Union soldier was discharged. Decoration Day originated with the South, was adopted by the North, and approved by all states. Memorial Day is a day consecrated to the memory of our heroic dead. On it we rehearse the heroism, bravery, and sacrifices of soldiers of all our wars. The nation places flowers on the graves of her dead.

II. The nation needs a Memorial Day to:

A. Perpetuate the memory of great events in history and what they teach. Each generation should know what has been done for it by its predecessors. The Bible memorialized:

1. The Sabbath—a finished creation.
2. The deliverance from Egyptian bondage (Feast of the Passover).
3. The Christian church memorializes the death of Christ by the Holy Communion; his resurrection, by the Lord's Day (Sunday).

How else can great events be perpetuated?

B. Our days of national remembrance include:

1. Thanksgiving Day—1621.
2. Independence Day—1776.
3. Memorial Day—1868.
4. Veteran's Day—1918.
5. V.E. and V.J. Days—1945.

"Lord of hosts be with us yet,
Lest we forget, lest we forget."

III. The nation needs a Memorial Day to give thanks

Give thanks for the past and make high resolves for the future.

- A. Gratitude for the price paid and sacrifices made for our freedom. Young men left their homes, schools, pursuits for "call of country" to face dangers, exposure, and death for a cause dear to us all.
- B. Their sacrifices were made for us—the living. Today the nation should bow in humble prayer and gratitude for its heroic dead. Gratitude is more than "noise," "fireworks," and auto races.

IV. The nation needs a Memorial Day for instruction

During the observance of every national holiday of the Bible, the Law was read, instruction given, and the people worshiped. We must teach this generation four elements of Christian patriotism, which are:

A. Freedom.

Freedom is the central idea of American life. This is "the land of the free and the home of the brave." The four freedoms started with Jesus of Nazareth and are re-emphasized in our own day.

B. Loyalty.

To God, to the ideals of the Pilgrim Fathers, to the Constitution, and to the home, the church, the community, the state, and the nation.

C. Peace.

To end war we must do away with its sources—hate, vengeance, tyranny, and power.

D. Faith.

Our national ideals are based on religious faith—a sense of God in our history and life. Illustration: The president of Argentina once asked

Roger Babson, "Why is South America so far behind in progress?" Babson answered, "What do you say?" The president replied, "The Spaniards came to South America seeking gold; the Pilgrim Fathers came to North America seeking God. That is the reason."

V. The nation needs a Memorial Day for enlistment

We must conserve the fruits of sacrifice of those gone on before by waging the tremendous battles of peace. Some of these are:

A. Starvation amidst abundance.

There have been more deaths from starvation than from all wars and epidemics of history during the last 100 years. We as a nation must live with our surpluses, but there are no surpluses in the world. Church-related organizations like CROP, Heifer Project, and CARE are doing a lot with sharing surpluses.

B. Control of nuclear weapons

Today there is grave concern among the scientists who created the atom bomb that eventually it will destroy all of us. The only way to control any power is to control human hearts. This is the task of the Christian church.

C. Housing needs for our increasing population.

Some of our trailer towns and all of our slums are a national disgrace. Practically all of our minority groups are greatly in need of better housing.

D. Public schools need buildings and facilities.

We need more and better schools for the training of our rapidly growing population.

E. Alcoholism.

This disease is homewrecker number one and killer number three in the nation. Controls

have failed; the remedy is the extermination of the liquor traffic.

F. Ending of the cold war.

War increases needless expenditures on military preparation and keeps us in "hot water" all the time.

VI. Conclusion

Memorial Day observances need rescuing from commercialism, highway killings, drunkenness, and revelry. The Christian church must project herself more and more into our national life as "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world."

THE HEAD OF A ROYAL HOUSEHOLD

(FATHER'S DAY)

"... *Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.*" —Matthew 1:16b

I. Introduction

Joseph is the forgotten man of the Christmas story. He is forgotten by the people, artists, writers, and speakers. The Bible is our best source of information concerning Joseph.

II. The ancestry of Joseph

- A. Joseph and Mary were descendants of David. Matthew traces them back to Abraham, but Luke goes back seventy-seven generations to Adam. Their family tree was loaded with kings, soldiers, and statesmen. They belonged to royalty.
- B. God is always careful of choice. He selected a peasant of royal blood to be the

stepfather of his "only begotten Son." Joseph's mission was clear in the plan of God.

III. The character of Joseph

- A. He was a just and a righteous man.
Joseph's relations with God, man, and people were righteous.
- B. He was a man of great faith.
God made a personal visit to Joseph in a dream: ". . . an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream . . ." (Matt. 1:20a).
- C. He was a man of unquestionable obedience.
He must have been sorely tested, bewildered, perplexed, and confused, but when God spoke, ". . . he did as the angel of the Lord commanded . . ." (Matt. 1:24a). Refer to his two years in Egypt and his return to Nazareth.
- D. He was a man of the Scriptures.
He found the answers to his problems in Scripture; they revealed the plan of God for him.

IV. The occupation of Joseph

He was not a member of the Sanhedrin or a Jewish Rabbi. He belonged to the peasant class. His was the honorable occupation of a carpenter. He was acquainted with timber, the saw, rulers, yokes, foundations, and buildings. Joseph and Jesus honored and dignified labor. They were in touch with human needs and were friends of the working man. Whatever degrades labor is a curse. All work is holy if the heart is holy.

V. The godly home of Joseph

- A. He gave a godly example before all.
Every father should be a good example in the home, in business, and in the church.

B. He taught in the home.

Jesus had both good teachings and good environment. Jewish boys memorized the Holy Scriptures as early as the age of five. At the age of twelve Jesus was taken to the Temple. His knowledge of the Scriptures confounded the doctors of the law.

C. His attendance at worship was regular.

When Jesus was thirty years old, it was said of him, "He went to the synagogue, as his custom was, on the sabbath day . . ." (Luke 4:16b). He had the holy habit of attendance in the house of prayer. If you are not sure about how to spend your Sundays, study about how Jesus lived on the Jewish Sabbath. This was a day of worship and positive service to God.

VI. What did Jesus think of Joseph?

God is like a father. This conception changed New Testament terminology of God—now he is regarded as a Father: "Our Father who art in heaven." A father loves, cares, chastens, provides, counsels, shares, etc.

VII. Conclusion

Like Joseph, every father has a divine mission in the world. On Father's Day that sense of mission is exalted. May it be so every day.

CHRISTIAN CITIZENSHIP

(Independence Day)

Romans 13:1-7

1. Introduction

On this July 4, we begin another year of independence of the U.S.A. This dates back to 1776.

Every American citizen should do all he can to perpetuate his religious and civic birthrights and to transmit to his posterity those free institutions under which it has been his privilege to live.

II. Love for country

A Christian citizen is a patriot as was Jesus Christ, whose mission started with his own nation.

III. Respect and obedience for the laws of the land

Laws are necessary. They promote the well-being of the people. Christianity does not destroy patriotism but develops and enriches it. If the laws are bad, the citizens will work to change them.

IV. Respect for those in public office

One of the common sins of America is to speak unfounded evil of public officials. This is both a sin and a mistake. Every Christian citizen should discourage this practice by example and word.

V. Voting intelligently and honestly

Some citizens do not vote at all. It is every citizen's duty to vote. Those who stand aloof because of bad politics worsen the situation. To know the candidates and their policies is the first duty of the voter. Exercise your franchise although your candidate may not win the election.

VI. Promoting general education of our citizenry

A republic like ours cannot exist where the people are ignorant. Such people cannot understand their duties and rights as American citizens. We must promote intelligence among foreigners, in the slums of our cities, among black, white, red, and yellow people, under all circumstances and conditions.

VII. Elevation of spiritual and moral character of the people

The heart as well as the head needs education: "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people" (Prov. 14:34). We must recognize God who gave us our nation and has guided its destiny. Let us exalt the banner of true Christianity.

VIII. Conclusion

(Very briefly recapitulate the six points.)

STEPPING UP PRODUCTION

(LABOR DAY)

*"Every one helps his neighbor,
and says to his brother, 'Take courage!'
The craftsman encourages the goldsmith,
and he who smooths with the hammer him who strikes
the anvil,
saying of the soldering, 'It is good'. . ."*

—Isaiah 41:6-7

I. Introduction

We learn from outsiders. This is a factory scene. The working force is small, equipment crude, machinery poor; the spirit of the force is ideal and wonderful. The church resembles a factory somewhat; both have buildings, equipment, resources, a schedule of operation, and both place products on a world market. Four views of this scene are taken:

II. Purposeful activity

A. Everyone is at work.

The purpose is to fortify themselves against the invader, Cyrus. The minority group is

facing a great emergency. Every wheel, belt, pulley, and motor is humming. There are no clock watchers or loafers around.

B. The production program of the church.

Jesus said, "I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18). He is the general superintendent of this program. God has a purpose for his church. If we fail him or our generation, he will raise up a people through whom he can establish the Kingdom.

C. To carry out this production program the church needs tools.

(Leadership, building, equipment, resources, an adequate working force, a challenging program, a spirit of co-operation, and a spiritual dynamic.)

III. Helpful activity

"Everyone helps."

A. Neighborly concern for all workers.

"Everyone helps his neighbor."

1. Why are we not more neighborly?

There are divisive forces at work in our society that build hedges between groups—social, political, racial, religious hedges.

2. How can we be more neighborly?

By following the teachings of Jesus. Be a good Samaritan yourself.

Hymn: "Help Somebody Today."

B. No hindrances in this factory.

No obstacles, snags, or monkey wrenches. They had the green light. Jesus was hindered by "unbelief"; Paul said, "Satan hindered us." Prayer, "Lord, thou canst work and none can hinder."

The fact is God does not work when we hinder by our stinginess, indifference, and pessimism.

C. All are helpful.

Wholehearted teamwork—no waste of time, energy, talents, or resources. All for one and one for all. Illustration: The big trees of California grow in families; hence, they stand the storms because of united roots.

IV. Courageous activity

“Everyone says to his brother, ‘Take courage.’”

A. A brotherly concern.

William Penn made a treaty with the Indians. It was never officially recorded or broken. He established the city of Philadelphia (brotherly love). Our weakness, our needs, our calling, our task, our destiny all call for “brotherhood.”

B. There are some discouraging things about the church today.

Some pastors are under the “juniper tree”; some are going into business. Some laymen are pessimistic. They exaggerate human weakness instead of magnifying God’s power.

C. We must appeal to the hero in people, not the coward.

If the church is weak and cowardly, she will be pushed to the sidelines. We must “live like heroes”; get out of the bleachers and into the arena of life.

D. It is our duty and privilege to encourage our brethren.

All of us need encouragement sometimes. It costs nothing but helps a lot. There is a difference between honest praise and flattery. Jesus always changed sick men’s outlook before healing them. “Be of good cheer.”

V. Integrated activity

(Not fragmentary, disunited, or hodgepodge.)

- A. They brought all the parts together in one whole. Each man had a different job but the same goal. The common goal of the church is to “build the body of Christ.”
- B. We differ in ages, background, tastes, and talents.
We come from all walks of life.
“. . . You have come to fullness of life in him . . .” (Col. 2:10a).

VI. Conclusion

We step up production on the local level through our purpose, helpfulness, courage, and united action.

“. . . You have come to fullness of life in him . . .” (Col.2:10a).

WE ARE ALL HERE

(RALLY DAY)

“Now therefore we are all here present in the sight of God, to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord.’ . . . While Peter was still saying this, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word.”

—Acts 10:33b, 44

I. Introduction

Recount the visions of Cornelius, a Gentile layman, and Simon Peter, a Jewish apostle. The providential meeting of these two men the next day, along with others at the home of Cornelius, provides the basis for this Rally Day message.

II. A church-going congregation

“We are all here.”

- A. A record attendance.
Invitations had gone out. The effects of such attendance on the pastor, the Sunday school, the church officials, offering, and community were inspiring and encouraging.
- B. Church attendance is a privilege and a duty.
Every Christian needs his church services regularly.
Refer to attendance examples of Jesus, the apostles, and early church. Church attendance is one of the highest and best examples parents can set before their children.
- C. Today church attendance is a problem.
One third of the Sunday school is in church; 30 per cent of the members attend the morning services regularly and only 10 per cent, the evening services. The absentee votes against the church.

III. A worshiping congregation

“Present in the sight of God” (not just before the pastor and officials).

- A. All our worship is before God.
Singing, praying, sharing, listening, and ordinances are “before God,” not the people.
- B. Why go to church?
Mixed motives and purposes. Fundamentally, people go to church “to worship God.” Fine buildings, costly instruments, large choirs, vestments, and sermons are but avenues that lead us to God in worship. We need a worship experience each Sunday.
- C. Christian worship demands preparation:
 - 1. Of church building.
 - 2. Of pastor and choir.
 - 3. Of congregation.
 - 4. Of worship program.

5. Of the awareness of the presence of the Holy Spirit.

- D. The fruits of sincere worship are:
A quiet heart, purified motives, clarified vision, and undergirded wills. (Spiritual batteries are recharged.)

IV. An attentive congregation

“To hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord.”

- A. Receptivity—listening ears.

They listened for themselves—their own welfare.
They were hearers and doers of the Word.

- B. The God-commanded message.

“God hath commanded thee.”

The pastor gets his message from God, not from the *Ladies Home Journal*. Cornelius was saying “Peter, tell us what God told you.” This is a layman’s request of his pastor. The pastor speaks for God—“a voice,” “a herald,” “an ambassador.”

He represents God. This is a great responsibility.

- C. The whole message.

“All that you have been commanded by the Lord.” The minister must not keep back anything that is profitable to his hearers and is God-commanded. Sometimes bitter medicine does the most good. The message must be given in the spirit of love—“Speaking the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15a).

V. A Spirit-filled congregation

“While Peter was still saying this, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word” (Acts 10:44).

- A. The sermon was interrupted by the Holy Spirit.

This was the climax of the message.

Peter’s statement, “God shows no partiality.”

The insider was convinced, and the outsiders were taken into the fellowship of the church.

B. Results.

1. Prayer and praise.
2. Conversions.
3. Ordinance administered.
4. Church membership.
5. Indoctrination—they asked Peter to remain for some days. The Gentiles were accepted into the faith.

VI. Conclusion

Rally Day is not just another day, but an event in the history of the church.

WHAT A FRIEND WE HAVE IN JESUS

(WORLD COMMUNION SUNDAY)

“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you.”

—John 15:13-14

“The Son of man . . . a friend of publicans and sinners.”

—Luke 7:34

I. Introduction

Jesus had a way of saying things. His words were simple, clear, and honest.

In this chapter Christianity is portrayed by two illustrations:

- A. It is a vital union with Christ, “Vine and branches.”
- B. It is a glorified friendship, “Ye are my friends.”

II. Jesus is a friend who is pure and holy

We need someone who is pure, holy, wise, eternal, and strong.

A. The person of Jesus

“For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, blameless, unstained, separate from sinners, exalted above the heavens” (Heb. 7:26).

B. We cannot work wholeheartedly with him if we are not clean in body, mind, and soul.

“Know you not that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?”

III. Jesus is a friend who is sympathetic

A. He is approachable.

He has a personal interest in everyone. He cares. (Song: “Jesus Will Remember When the World Forgets.”)

B. He understands our needs.

“For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning” (Heb. 4:15).

C. He loves all classes and peoples.

“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matt. 9:36).

IV. Jesus is a faithful friend

A. He never “lets you down.”

One of life’s bitterest experiences is to have a friend fail us. (Refer to hymn, “Just when I Need Him, Jesus Is Near.”)

B. History reveals the faithfulness of God.

God is faithful to nations, families, churches,

individuals. "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

V. Jesus is a sacrificial friend

Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

A. He gave himself for others.

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (II Cor. 8:9).

B. His sacrifice was voluntary.

"For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it up again" (John 10:17).

C. His sacrifice was for a purpose.

If applied, it will accomplish certain ends in our lives—save us from the guilt, power, and penalty of sin, to a life of service and usefulness.

VI. Jesus is the friend you need

A. To lift you out of a life of sin.

Salvation is in a person. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no man comes to the Father but by me" (John 14:6).

B. To lift you above circumstances.

Things get us down (problems, circumstances, environment, and temptations). "I can do all things in him who strengthens me" (Phil 4:13).

C. To lead us safely through the "valley and shadow of death."

"Because I live, you will live also" (John 14:19b).

VII. Conclusion

There is room for all in his friendship. He wants you to introduce him to your friends.

SEEDTIME AND HARVEST

(HARVEST HOME)

"While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease."

"Thou hast fixed all the bounds of the earth; thou hast made summer and winter."

—Psalm 74:17

I. Introduction

The regular comings and goings of the seasons are a constant reminder to us that God has made us promises and that he keeps those promises.

II. An ordered nature

A. Pattern in nature.

Seasons rotate—days follow each other.
Our stewardship of time.

B. Stability in nature.

Therefore we have faith in the future.

C. Orderer of nature.

(See Colossians 1:16.)

III. A dependable nature

While the earth remains—

A. There will always be a seedtime.

All seed is from God. It is our guarantee of the future.

B. There will always be a harvest.

Seed is productive. Illustrations: One ear of

corn has one thousand grains, one stalk of wheat stools up to twenty-five stocks.

- C. Seedtime and harvest are God's merciful promise to all the inhabitants of the earth for all time that the seasons of vegetation shall not cease.

IV. A responsive nature

- A. Nature is alive and responds to all the acts of **man**.
(Food markets and surpluses.)
- B. The material blessings of the harvest are symbols of God's unending love and faithfulness. The Christian humbly gives thanks.

V. Conclusion

What is our responsibility to God for his ordered, dependable, and responsive nature? Answer: to live righteously and godly upon the earth.

LIFE'S RICHEST OFFERING

(STEWARDSHIP SUNDAY)

“ . . . but first they gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God. . . . For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.”

—II Corinthians 8:5, 9

I. Introduction

Two matchless examples of self-giving in the text are the Macedonian churches and Jesus Christ. Paul uses these two to challenge the church at Corinth to come through with an offering.

II. Their offering of themselves

“But first they gave themselves to the Lord.” All money problems are spiritual problems.

A. The order of giving was proper.

“First themselves.” The giver before the gift. Jesus met some “me first” people. Christ is not in the secondhand business.

B. The gift—“themselves.”

It includes all we are and have. This is life’s richest offering. Such giving is our need today. We emphasize the giving of money instead of dedication.

C. Their owner—“the Lord.”

The Macedonian churches accepted the lordship of Jesus Christ. They could sing, “Bring forth the royal diadem and crown him Lord of all.”

III. Their offering of money

They begged Paul for the opportunity to share with the needy Christians.

A. Their giving was an expression of consecration—not a substitute for it. Some would rather write a check for five hundred dollars than dedicate themselves at an altar of prayer. They substitute giving for consecration.

B. They gave their money.

1. Humbly—sharing is a privilege.

2. Joyfully—making a gift to God should make us happy.

3. Sincerely—an expression of their love.

4. Largely—we share of twentieth-century abundance.

5. Sacrificially—giving more than just excess.

C. The reason for such giving was their complete dedication to the Lord. We do not say enough about dedication when raising funds.

IV. Their offering of service

“Gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.”

A. They gave themselves to their church.

Paul, Barnabas, Timothy, and Titus represented the church. We cannot give ourselves to Christ without giving ourselves to his church. These two are inseparable.

B. They placed themselves at the disposal of the church.

That is what we did when we became members of the church. Do your vows need renewing? A nominal Christian said, “I am a member of the church, but I belong to my lodge.”

C. This was God’s will for them—“by the will of God.”

He extends his Kingdom through the church. We dedicate ourselves. He consecrates us to his service.

V. Conclusion

Here we have the triangle of stewardship—self, possessions, service.

WHAT IS GOD DOING?

(VETERANS’ DAY)

“But Jesus answered them, ‘My Father is working still, and I am working.’” —John 5:17

“For we are fellow workmen for God; you are God’s field, God’s building.” —I Corinthians 3:9

I. Introduction

A. A working God.

Evidences of his work are seen in history, in the

church, in the community, in our homes, and in our own hearts.

B. A working devil.

A vicious, cunning, powerful, persistent force of evil is at work in the world. Evidences of it are seen in history, newspapers, communities, and homes.

The encouraging thing about it all is that there is a divine and human partnership at work which will ultimately triumph. "My Father worketh . . . I work." "We are fellow workmen."

II. God is working to feed and clothe all his creatures

A. The basic necessities of life are food, clothing, and shelter.

Man does not require a new car, radio, TV set, deep freeze, or home, but "daily bread." More people have died from hunger during the last one hundred years than from all wars and epidemics of history. Today, one and one half billion people experience "perpetual hunger."

B. The church has an economic responsibility.

God's primary concern for all people is "reconciliation." He also sees his children in need of food, homes, clothing, jobs, security, and so on. At the feeding of the five thousand he said, "Gather up the fragments" (John 6:12b).

C. Stewardship of natural resources is necessary.

Consider the unchristian use of soil, water, forests, minerals, and wild life.

The Christian use of these involves a partnership with God in the creation and distribution of the fruits of the "good earth" to the hungry, homeless, and distressed of our world.

D. All people of the world are hungry for:

Literacy, housing, schools, hospitals, peace, recognition, and finding a meaning to life. Jesus

said, "You give them something to eat" (Matt. 14:16b).

III. God is working for peace in the world

War is a curse which must be banished from God's earth.

- A. We have had two world wars in one generation. In these wars ninety million lives were lost, twenty millions became displaced persons, and property loss is incalculable. Our only method for establishing peace from time in memoriam has been by means of guns, armies, and slaughter. God's way is to "wage peace" through godly people. Peace does not spring up overnight like a plant. It requires, work, sacrifice, and determination.
- B. God's way is peace through reconciliation. God gave his Son for "peace on earth." The cross makes friends of enemies; it does away with hate, revenge, and suspicion; it makes men "brothers."
- C. Peace is a responsibility of the church. The church is entrusted with "the ministry of reconciliation" and "the message of reconciliation" (II Cor. 5:18, 19). She is the evangelist of peace. We must give our wealth, young people, and prayers for peace in our time.

IV. God is working for a united world

(Food, peace, unity.)

- A. Our present disunity.
On the international front there have been several major wars since VJ Day in 1945—such as the struggles in China, Greece, Indonesia, Palestine, Korea, Suez. Two irreconcilable philosophies are at work in the world: Christianity and communism.

- B. It is not all disunity on the church front.
The church must work to advance Christian unity.

“In Christ there is no East or West,
In Him no South or North,
But one great fellowship of love
Throughout the whole wide earth.”

—John Oxenham

- C. Our Lord's supreme desire for church unity.
Five times he prayed “that they may all be one” (John 17:21).
That prayer was for the disciples and the church up to now.
- D. The essentials of Christian unity are:
1. One leader—“He is the head of the body, the church” (Col. 1:18a).
 2. One message—“Christ died for our sins” (I Cor. 15:3b).
 3. One fellowship—world-wide.
 4. One strategy—the Great Commission.

V. Conclusion

A divine and human partnership working for food, peace, and unity.

PASS THE SALT PLEASE!

(COMMUNITY SUNDAY)

“You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden under foot by men.”

—Matthew 5:13

I. Introduction

Jesus started a "salty church." She had lots of spirit, edge, tang, and bite. Her radiance continued for two hundred years.

This verse warns us of a peculiar danger. Salt may lose its savor. Its savor lost, the church would stand for nothing and be good for nothing.

II. Does your church have salt to pass (saltlike qualities)?

A. Salt is savory.

Bites, keen edge, tang, flavor, radiance, fervor. In the fellowship of a salty church, cliques and snobs cannot operate.

Big handshake for all. A handshake is preaching the gospel without words in close quarters. Religion is like a steam roller: "The ground is level at the cross." Lots of spirit.

B. Salt is a preserver (keeps foods from spoiling—bacon, hams).

Christianity has preserving and counteracting qualities. Makes it easier to go right than wrong.

Who wants to live where there are no churches? Life is safer, cleaner, more progressive, and happier in a church community.

C. Salt has seasoning qualities.

Adds little to food in itself but brings out the best in it.

Christianity puts meaning into life; gives it purpose and direction. Jesus enriches everything he touches in our lives. He adds the gold of quality. (Tell story of King Midas.)

D. Salt has redeeming and purifying qualities. The "salt of God's grace" makes men "whole."

Christianity inspires men and women, boys and girls, to undertake to live the one clean life.

Does your church have this salt in abundance so that it may be passed to the entire community?

III. To whom must the church pass the salt?

A. To all homes of the community.

Home is the focal point of integration of church programs. The strength and success of any church depends upon the brand of spiritual life of the membership. When all homes are won, we will have a thoroughly Christian community. The salt can be passed by means of:

1. Visiting.
2. Letter writing.
3. Social contacts.
4. Family gatherings.

B. To the public schools.

The schools are character-building agencies; they train the mind—make good citizens. Schools are one of the pillars of democracy. They are closely linked with the home and church. The church should participate in all school activities and the school in those of the church—a co-operative task in the community.

C. To the business firms of the community.

The function of business is to serve the public. Business men and women are community builders. They are first to support all worthwhile programs and campaigns. Every community needs Christian business men and women. The church should support local firms instead of mail order houses.

D. To the newspapers.

Newspapers are community builders. They

give the news of local interest; publish church notices, programs, sermons, and parish activities. Let the church make friends of the newspaper men and firms in the community.

E. To the hospitals and health centers.

The church has the gospel of good health to proclaim; she has the Great Physician who is near. There are opportunities for Christ in visiting and praying with the sick. The church must help induce more doctors and nurses to locate in the small town community.

F. To the community agencies.

These would include the library, Farm Bureaus, 4-H clubs, co-operatives, youth groups, service clubs, etc. She must work with and through all these existing organizations. Her people belong to them, and some are leaders in them.

G. To the occupational groups.

Who are they?

1. Laborers. Members of this group, as a rule, have large families, are poor, and have only limited privileges. They need the church very much and in turn would greatly increase the church's strength.
2. Tenants. Forty-six per cent of our farmer population belongs to this group. It has been said that the tenant is like the proverbial Irishman's flea—constantly on the move. It is hard to interest tenants in the church because of short tenure.
3. Migrants. There are two and one half millions of these displaced persons right on our doorsteps. They are without normal home life, community life, school, and church life. Only 5 per cent of them have any church

affiliations whatsoever. We can invite and welcome them to our churches while they are among us. Through vacation schools and adult classes, churches can minister further to this neglected group.

IV. Conclusion

The church that reaches out into all its community with the gospel will never lose its "savor," but will increase and heighten its quality. Failure number one of many rural churches has been the failure to serve the community. As a result they have rightly been eliminated.

Keep the church strong, fervent, and progressive; keep her vision clear, her spiritual batteries recharged, and the mainspring of service well oiled.

CAUSE FOR THANKSGIVING

(THANKSGIVING DAY)

"Thus says the Lord: 'Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practice kindness, justice, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, says the Lord.'"

—Jeremiah 9:23-24

I. Introduction

Historically, Israel was on her way to the Babylonian Captivity. She had rejected God's leadership and was relying on her own resources of knowledge, power, and riches. At this time Jeremiah was

the most unpopular man in Israel. The keynote of his message was that the Jews were doomed because they ignored God and depended upon their own resources.

II. Things not to glory in

A. Wisdom.

We are thankful for our efficient educational system. Of the first 105 colleges founded in America, all but four were church colleges. God is the fountain of all wisdom.

B. Power.

We have the greatest resources of any nation on earth. We have world leadership and international influence for which we thank God. Lincoln said, "Let us have faith that right makes might and in that faith let us dare to do our duty."

C. Riches.

We thank God for financial blessings and prosperity. History shows that riches are uncertain; they "take wings." Wisdom, power, and riches are useful only when placed at God's disposal.

III. Some things to glory in

A. Understanding of God.

This includes intellectual knowledge of God, the Christian religion, the Bible, church, Christian literature, the ordinances, and so on. We never knew as much about God as we do today.

B. Knowledge of God.

Personal, experimental, practical acquaintance with God through Jesus Christ. Paul said, "I know whom I have believed . . ." (II Timothy 1:12b).

- C. Opportunities to serve God.
"Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord,
the people whom he has chosen as his heritage!"
(Ps. 33:12).

IV. The obligation of prosperity

- A. Kindness in the use of riches.
"I practice loving kindness."
God is kind to people, nations, and the world.
Illustrations: The work of Heifer Project, Church
World Service, CROP, and other humanitarian
programs.
- B. Justice.
In justice, God established a moral basis for
solutions of all problems, God has no favorites,
no pets, no box stalls in heaven for special
friends. He is a God of justice. "And what does
the Lord require of you but to do justice . . . ?"
(Mic. 6:8).
- C. Righteousness.
Not to oppress, but to uplift and encourage. Un-
selfish devotion to the service of God and man.
God delights in showing kindness, justice, and
righteousness.

V. Conclusion

Always distinguish between boasting and thanks-
giving. Be thankful for your many blessings each
day. Delight in what God delights to do—practice
loving-kindness, justice, righteousness.

THE SADDEST WORDS IN THE BIBLE

(ADVENT SEASON)

*"He was in the world, and the world was made through
him, yet the world knew him not. He came to his own*

home, and his own people received him not. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God."

—John 1:10-13

I. Introduction

The prologue (John 1:1-18) is John's Christmas story. It is a condensation of the entire twenty-one chapters. A new title is given Jesus by John: "Word." It is different from other titles and hard to understand. The *word* is God speaking through an act—a gift. (Refer to John 3:16.)

II. The great event—"He came"

A. Christianity is a historical fact.

Christ came according to the plan of God ". . . when the time had fully come" (Gal. 4:4).

His coming is the central fact of history. It divides time—B.C. and A.D. The centuries circle about Christ like rings on a tree.

B. Christ came as a man by way of the cradle (his humanity).

Child—son—man. He grew up, toiled, grew weary, was tempted, but without sin. How else could he know our needs? How else could we draw near him? He spoke of himself as "the son of man."

C. Christ came as God (his divinity):

1. To forgive our sins.
2. To comfort our hearts.
3. To restore our dead.
4. To be our perfect ideal.

He comes afresh to all our hearts during the Advent season.

III. The dark tragedy—"His own people received him not"

He was ignored and rejected by unbelief.

A. Ignored—"the world knew him not."

"Cold-shouldered," "high-hatted," "brushed aside."

He was not acknowledged as the Messiah, nor did the people accept his offer of salvation. They slammed the door in his face. John sees unbelief as man's greatest sin.

B. Rejected—"His own people received him not."

The Jews, the Holy City, the church of his day, and his home town rejected him. His ancestral religion turned against him. Everywhere he went it was either rejection or acceptance. The Jews crucified him.

IV. The bright opportunity of Christmas

"But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God." The word "but" is the bridge of the text.

A. The opportunity is for all men—"whosoever believes" (John 3:16). God's gift is to all people for all time.

B. The reception—"as many as received him."

This requires personal faith:

1. As Savior—the angel said, "you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21b).

"For to you is born this day . . . a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11). He saves from a life of sin to one of holiness and service.

2. As Lord—many church people do not accept him as "Lord of their lives." We must turn over all the keys of our life to him.

- C. Believers in Christ become “children of God.”
“But to all who received him . . . he gave power to become children of God.”
1. By regeneration—“ . . . unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3).
 2. By adoption into the family of God—take family name, have family privileges and joys. A kinship of all believers throughout the world—“Members of the household of God” (Eph. 2:19).
 3. By likeness—We resemble Christ in motive, mission, prayer, forgiveness, sacrifice, obedience, patience, devotion, and service: “Be like Jesus all day long.”

V. Conclusion

“He came.” The wonder of it all is that he would condescend to come to us. We are valuable in his sight—worth dying for. We must live for him. Bright opportunity is to “receive him.”

THE BIBLE, THE GREATEST BOOK IN THE WORLD

(UNIVERSAL BIBLE SUNDAY)

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.”

—Matthew 24:35

I. Introduction

Sir Walter Scott and the Bible. On his dying bed, Scott said, “Bring me the Book.” Knowing he had written many books, the nurse asked, “What book?”

Scott answered, "There is only one book for me—the Bible." One does not read Keats, Shelley, and Shakespeare to comfort dying people. Only the Bible can do that.

II. The Bible has the greatest author

He who created the universe and man, perfected the plan of salvation, and built a heaven for the soul has the power to inspire a book that will meet the needs of all men everywhere.

A. God is the chief author of the Bible.

It is "God-breathed."

There are many Bible writers who, as "holy men of old," heard God speak and wrote his message in the language of their day. The Bible was not dropped down from heaven. It came through human instrumentality.

B. Jesus testified of the authorship of the Bible.

"It is written . . . 'Every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'" (Matt. 4:4).

(Recount the journey on the Emmaus Road in Luke 24.)

C. The apostles testified as to the authorship of the Bible.

Refer to the statements of Peter and Paul.

III. The Bible has the greatest message

A. The culminating purpose of the Bible is to reveal God in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Take the cross from the Bible, and there is nothing left but darkness.

B. Nature reveals God.

The Bible tells us about Him whose blood was shed for our sins (I Cor. 15:3-5).

C. The Bible nourishes Christian experiences and promotes growth.

Systematic Bible study is indispensable for the Christian.

IV. The Bible alone meets the basic spiritual needs of all people

A. Man's deepest needs are spiritual.

He knows there is something wrong in his life which only God can adjust. Accepting the will and purpose of God will bring peace to the soul.

B. Some of these deep needs are:

1. Peace with God and man.
2. Forgiveness for past wrongs.
3. Fellowship with God and man.
4. Assurance of sins forgiven.
5. Hope based on the immutable word of God.
6. Comfort in the dying hour.

All of these deep needs the Bible can meet.

V. The Bible has great influence

A. On civilization.

Why are so many nations in Asia, Africa, and South America far behind other nations in progress? The missionaries take the Bible; the flag, schools, hospitals, and churches follow.

B. On our national life.

The Bible is in many ways the cornerstone of our Republic.

Our Constitution and laws reflect its principles. The Bible has stirred our consciences against national ills like slavery.

C. On society as a whole.

No sound social fabric can ever meet the needs of man that is not saturated with the word of God: "Man does not live by bread alone."

D. On education.

The Bible is the mother of the public school in America as well as most of our early colleges. We have climbed to our great educational efficiency on the ladder of religion. Let us not kick the ladder from beneath us.

E. On art.

The greatest art in the world centers about the Bethlehem manger, the Madonna, the transfiguration, the resurrection, and the ascension.

VI. The Bible is the greatest book in the world because it is eternal

“My words will not pass away.”

A. The Bible lives and sells.

It has been translated into more than 1,130 languages and dialects. Few books outlive their authors. The Bible is the all-time best seller.

B. The Bible lives because it is God's word.

Like God, it is “from everlasting to everlasting” (Ps. 90:2).

Men die, fortunes fail, nations come and go, crowns tumble, stars will rot out of their sockets, but “the Word of God endureth forever.”

VII. Conclusion

Let us believe the Bible more, trust it, teach it, and live it all the days of our lives.

A SMALL TOWN SAVIOR

(CHRISTMAS)

“Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, . . .” —Matthew 2:1

I. Introduction

Bethlehem today is a small town of four thousand people, most of whom are Christians. Dozens of workshops which manufacture souvenirs flourish there. Nothing is especially picturesque about Bethlehem or its people. It was a fitting place for the birth of Him who was to share our humanity.

II. Bethlehem in the Bible

- A. Rachel was buried there in perhaps 1729 B.C.
- B. It was the home of Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz.
- C. It was the birthplace of King David—at about 1085 B.C.
- D. Bethlehem in prophecy—Micah 5:2: “. . . O Bethlehem . . . from you shall come forth . . . one who is to be ruler in Israel, . . .”
- E. The Church of the Nativity is located in Bethlehem.

It was built in 327 A.D. by the Empress Helena, mother of Constantine.

It is used by all faiths today.

III. Jesus was born in Bethlehem

Why not in Rome, Jerusalem, or Alexandria?

- A. If Jesus were born today in New York, Philadelphia, or Chicago, there would be “no room for him.”

The holiday basketball tournament, a political convention, the world champion prize fight, the World Series, or some other big event would be on. All hotel rooms would be taken.

- B. The chief concern of large cities is not Jesus Christ.

(The chief *need* is for Him.)

Large cities are concerned about trade, sky-

scrapers, expansion, newspapers, and sports. They are not Christ-centered but “tree-centered,” “gift-centered,” and “money-centered.” We must take the Savior to the large cities.

- C. Jesus was born in the small town of Bethlehem—among tradesmen, farmers, common people, sheep, and cattle. A birth in a small town is news. In the city, babies are shelved like dolls. It was in the Judean hills where the voice echoed around the world: “There is born unto you this day a Savior.”

- D. There is more hope for a child in a small town than in a city.

In the small town there are better possibilities for a future under the loving of friends and free of much juvenile delinquency.

- E. Jesus was a small-town preacher. (Bethlehem, Capernaum, Nazareth)

In Jerusalem Christ cleansed the Temple and was crucified.

IV. Bethlehem in our lives

- A. Our common humanity with Jesus

Jesus came as a man who toiled among us, was weary, lonely, and tempted. How else could we know him or draw near to him? How else could he learn our needs?

- B. The Wise Men returned from Bethlehem another way.

Life never was the same for them after they had “. . . worshiped him. Then opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh” (Matt. 2:11).

- C. In Jesus we have a new birth, a new life, and a new way of life.

All three of these were made possible through
"Jesus who was born in Bethlehem."

V. Conclusion

"O Holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us
we pray;
Cast out our sin, and enter in; be born in us
today.
We hear the Christmas angels, the great glad
tidings tell;
O come to us, abide with us, Our Lord Em-
manuel."

—Phillips Brooks

WHY I BELIEVE IN THE 4-H CLUB MOVEMENT

*"And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in
favor with God and man."*

—Luke 2:52

I. Introduction

The 4-H Club movement is a part of the National Agricultural Extension Service. It was organized by the United States Department of Agriculture in co-operation with State College of Agriculture and County Extension Service. In 1914 members numbered 116,262; by 1950 more than 2,000,000 boys and girls were in 4-H work. That number is continuing to increase.

II. The things for which 4-H stands

A. Head—a clean mind for clear thinking and planning.

- B. Heart—a heart that is sympathetic, pure, and true.
- C. Hands—that are helpful, skillful, and useful.
- D. Health—to enjoy life, resist disease, work efficiently.
- E. Service—not only for personal development, but service to home, community, and country.

III. A training agency for rural leaders

The 4-H Club has distinctive educational approaches.

- A. The project method is employed.
Boy—a calf, an acre; girl—fruit, dress, hat. Both demonstrate what they have learned.
- B. It trains in habits of healthful living.
Health is one of God's best gifts; take care of it by eating proper foods and keeping good habits.
- C. It trains in co-operation (teamwork).
Rural and urban youth learn dependence one upon the other. Recently, city leaders invested \$350,000.00 to help one thousand farm youth come to Chicago and take part in the National 4-H Club Congress.
- D. It trains in willingness to accept responsibility.
Jobs given to boys and girls are challenging.
- E. It trains in citizenship.
Opportunities to be useful citizens are numerous.

IV. Opportunities for wholesome fellowship and recreation for rural youth

- A. The 4-H Clubs bring much needed recreation to rural youth.
A change from the normal and ordinary routine of work. "All work and no play. . . ."

- B. It provides meetings for boys and boys and girls and girls.

In some states, it is boys and girls. Sometimes a local church can make available its basement and grounds for 4-H Club work.

- C. Members participate in many group activities. Local clubs, country rallies, achievement days, trips, tours, camps.

- D. These contacts guide young people in making important choices.

Included would be choice of companions, life work, and so on.

V. A program of advance

This is indicated by its rapid growth in membership.

- A. In the home.

The 4-H Club emphasizes four fundamental institutions: home, church, school, and community organizations. The latter helps the other three to get closer together. No community is stronger than its homes.

- B. In the community.

The 4-H Club carries out the things for which it stands—HHHH. Shows products of work done. Life is cleaner, safer, more progressive, and healthier in the community.

- C. In the nation.

Nothing can go far wrong in America when we are building a citizenship such as that promoted by the ideals of the 4-H Club movement.

VI. Conclusion

I therefore base my reasons for believing in and supporting the 4-H Club movement upon the fact that I see great value in:

- A. Its purpose and ideals.
- B. Its training agency.
- C. Its fellowship and recreation program.
- D. Its over-all program.

THE MEANING AND CHALLENGE OF AN ANNIVERSARY

(CHURCH ANNIVERSARY)

"Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Jeshanah and called its name Ebenezer; for he said, 'Hitherto the Lord has helped us.'"

—I Samuel 7:12

I. Introduction

The chapter tells the story of a national revival long overdue. It records a great spiritual victory at Mizpah and the defeat of the Philistines. The monument erected ascribes the victory to the help of God. It was a milestone in the history of Israel.

II. A recognition of divine help

"The Lord has helped us."

- A. All of us need divine help constantly.

Hymn: "I Need Thee Every Hour"

- B. The unfailing source of help is God.

We must find and use it as did Moses, Daniel, Samuel, Jesus, and the disciples.

- C. The testimony of Israel was "hitherto"—to this hour.

National significance. The same can be said of our country, our national church body, and our local congregation.

III. How does God help his people?

The answer is found in this chapter.

- A. Through a leader who is divinely led.

Following Samuel, the people were safely led.

- B. Through great spiritual awakenings.

Samuel was a teacher-evangelist. It took him twenty years to re-create the nation. The awakening finally came.

- C. Through supplementation.

God supplements human weakness with divine power. He made up what Israel lacked. Israel was no match for the Philistines. It was God who "discomfited the Philistines." How fortunate to be on God's side!

- D. Through the means of grace.

These include prayer, worship, Bible meditation, public worship, ordinances, and fellowship.

IV. The challenge of an anniversary

What is your answer to an anniversary?

- A. Dedicate anew your life to Christ and his church.

Renew church vows; square your life with your Lord.

- B. Attend church services regularly.

Keep up the church-going habit; show your colors; raise your flag. The stayers-at-home are a traffic blockade on the King's highway.

- C. Support the church willingly.

With your presence, gifts, encouragement, influence, and good will.

Be a "flowing well" Christian, not a pump that constantly needs priming.

"As we give, we live."

D. Promote the whole program of the church constantly.

Don't be a fractional Christian; take the whole program and push it fifty-two weeks a year.

E. Do some pioneering yourself.

Blaze some new trails in stewardship, worship, evangelism, education, fellowship, and missions.

V. Conclusion

Make a strong appeal for rededication on this anniversary day.

BENEFITS OF THE LORD'S ACRE PLAN

(LORD'S ACRE SUNDAY)

*"Honor the Lord with your substance
and with the first fruits of all your produce."*

—Proverbs 3:9

*"The first of the first fruits of your ground you shall
bring to the house of the Lord your God. . . ."*

—Exodus 34:26

I. Introduction

The first text and following verse is an exhortation with a promise. The second text is the biblical basis for the harvest festival when the ingathering of grain, fruits, oil, and wine were celebrated.

II. Honoring the Lord with our substance

A. What is our substance?

It is all that we have—our acres, stocks, homes, machinery, sons, daughters, radio, TV sets, and so forth.

- B. God demanded the first fruits of all our inheritance.

The first-born son was to be a priest. The best of the flocks were to be a sacrifice to the lord. The best of the grain, cattle, oil, and wine were to be brought to the Lord's house.

- C. How do we honor the Lord with our substance?
1. By acknowledging his ownership of it.
 2. By setting aside the first fruits—now our “tithes and offerings.”

III. Blessings of the Lord's Acre project

- A. Spiritual growth.

Religion means more to us when it gets into our muscles, bones, and heart.

- B. A definite aid to evangelism.

Families that are not Christian are encouraged to and do participate in the project. It is a step in soul winning.

- C. Encourages stewardship practices.

It trains children and young people in stewardship. They have their own money from acres and stock. As a rule, they are quite generous.

- D. Builds community solidarity.

It is a “tie that binds our hearts in Christian love.” As we fellowship together, we live and work together. It is the “togetherness” that counts.

- E. Missionary education at the “grass roots.” Material aid, livestock, and food are sent overseas.

- F. Discovers new leadership for the church.

Dependability, self-reliance, initiative, and loyalty are good leadership qualities. (Example: Joseph became “secretary of agriculture” in

Egypt because of his ability to manage resources wisely.)

IV. Why does the Lord's Acre program continue to grow?

It is used in every state of the union and in many foreign countries.

A. It is a sound practice.

Serves as a "spiritual conditioner." Old and young enjoy fellowship with God in daily work.

B. It is highly adaptable.

Any congregation can fit it into its needs.

C. It is fruitful.

Objectives can be obtained in no other way; attracts attention in community and creates greater interest in all the work of the church.

V. Conclusion

Reread the text.

GROWING OLDER GRACEFULLY

(SENIOR CITIZEN'S DAY)

*"But they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint."* —Isaiah 40:31

I. Introduction

Two elderly men in a Dayton, Ohio, depot—a recluse and an active Christian—engaged in conversation. The recluse said, "I am sixty-eight years

old; there is nothing worthwhile in this old life." The Christian answered, "I am eighty-two years old, and today has been the happiest day of my life." (It was not a birthday, anniversary, or reunion, but just another day lived in close touch with God.) It is possible to grow older gracefully by the following formula.

II. Keep in touch with children and young people

- A. Grownups need to be linked to children.
Children have a viewpoint: they are humble, have large faith, forgive readily, and play without discrimination. Jesus said, "Except ye become as little children." Childlikeness is not childishness.
- B. Children have a way of disciplining adults.
They teach parents self-control, patience, and self-sacrifice.
Parents find great satisfaction in living for their children.
- C. Young people have the forward look.
They have the spirit of venture; they are enthusiastic and courageous.
(Age and youth are complementary; they need each other.)
Visit high schools, colleges, and camps and get the "thrill of youth."

III. Keep in touch with books

Feed the mind lest it grow stale and rusty.

- A. Good books are good companions.
"Carry a book" and be in good company.
Books are the tools of adult education.
- B. Plan mental life for continuous growth.
Avoid "ruts" and "merry-go-round" living.
We must keep our minds open to truth.

IV. Keep in touch with work

Have something to do if at all possible.

- A. This human machine was made for work, and the latest medical science tells us that it was built to last 150 years (retirement and pensions). When we are doing something, we are happy and useful.
- B. Work must be done with moderation.
"All play and no work makes Jack a play boy."
"Eager beavers" do not follow moderation. Find work for capacities, talents, and strength.

V. Keep in touch with nature

Do not be a house plant or wallflower:

- A. Nature renews her youth four times a year:
Winter, spring, summer, autumn.
God also has a gorgeous color scheme for each season.
- B. The fountains of youth are not in the drugstore or beauty parlor, but in God's out-of-doors.
There we find fresh air, good food, exercise, mountains, hills, sunshine, and streams. These are the restorers of life.
- C. Have an out-of-door hobby.
Fish, garden, travel, row a boat, go barefoot, gaze at the Great Dipper, Milky Way, Morning Star, sunrise, sunsets.

VI. Keep in touch with God

"They who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength."

- A. Personal communion with God.
There is no substitute for personal communion with God.
Keep the channels of prayer open..

B. Bible reading.

Avoid the hit and miss method of Bible study and follow the regular and systematic way.

C. Worship habits.

Many older people drop out of worship services. Reasons given are that they no longer get anything out of them, are not recognized, can make only small financial contributions, and so on. The soul needs constant irrigation from the "fountain of life"—God. "There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God" (Psalm 46:4).

VII. Conclusion

Keep these contacts, and you will grow older gracefully.

A FOUR-LEAF CLOVER BOUQUET

(WEDDING ANNIVERSARY SERMON)

"Let love be genuine; . . . Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer."

—Romans 12:9, 12

I. Introduction

The twelfth chapter of Romans is like a beautiful flower garden through which we may roam and gather the bouquets of our choice at will. These are always in season, and the supply is inexhaustible. As the subject suggests, I wish to make up a bouquet of four of these lovely, unfading flowers. They are love, hope, patience, and prayer.

II. Genuine Love

"Let love be genuine." This is the first essential in a happy marriage.

Paul here characterizes this ingredient by two statements:

A. Love has a horror for evil.

Evil destroys character and life. God hates evil, but he loves the evildoer.

Don't trifle with evil.

B. Love clings to that which is good.

One translation says "glued, cemented" to the good.

Illustration—"vulcanized" tires.

These two terms suggest complete devotion to that which is good.

III. Joyful Hope

"Rejoice in your hope." Hope is the expectation of future good.

A. We have hope chests all our days.

We hope our health may not fail, that our children will be educated, that no long illness will be ours, that we may have funds for "the rainy day," and so forth. We also hope for "a home in heaven" where we will see our loved ones who have gone before and who will follow. We hope to see Jesus.

B. Our hope is based on sure foundations.

1. The Word of God—the constitution and charter of our hope.

2. The finished work of Jesus Christ—so we sing, "My hope is built on nothing less."

C. The influence of hope.

"Hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul" (Hebrews).

An anchor digs in; it steadies; stops drifting. It gives peace of mind and heart.

IV. Immovable patience

“Be patient in tribulation.”

A. In tribulation (thrashing).

Our trials, heartaches, and frustrated plans test us severely.

Jesus said: “In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

B. Patience is a good teacher.

We learn how to suffer. Think of the patience of God when wars destroy cultures and peoples; think of the patience of a mother with her babe—someday he will be an adult; think of the patience of a farmer who plants his crops and waits for the harvest. We all need to be more patient.

C. Patience purifies our lives.

It makes us better Christians. It separates the wheat from the chaff.

V. Constant prayer

“Be constant in prayer.”

A. The strength of prayer is needed for patience.

The altar of prayer and forgiveness is needed in every home.

B. We need to do more constant praying.

It is the only way to build up a reservoir of strength for gray days.

“Praying constantly” (I Thess. 5:17).

VI. Conclusion

These four flowers not only make a beautiful bouquet, but can be a certain guide to happiness.

A CHURCH FOR OUR DAY

(CHURCH DEDICATION)

"Yet now take courage, O Zerubbabel, says the Lord; take courage, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; take courage, all you people of the land, says the Lord; work, for I am with you, says the Lord of Hosts."

—Haggai 2:4

I. Introduction

The first attempt to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem in 536 B.C. was led by Zerubbabel, Joshua, and Ezra. They restored the true worship of Jehovah, laid the foundations of the building; and then because of labor troubles and lack of funds the work ceased.

The second attempt at rebuilding was made sixteen years later. It was led by a Jewish countryman whose name was Haggai. A grave crisis had developed over these years. The people had become selfish, pessimistic, and sinful. The Jewish layman saw a great opportunity in the crisis, and so he called the nation to repentance. In a few brief months, the stone quarries in Jerusalem were reopened and the "cedars of Lebanon" were again floating down the Jordan River to Jerusalem.

The message of the text was delivered at the celebration of the Jewish Agricultural Sabbath.

The church of our day must be:

II. A courageous church

Haggai calls on three groups—the governor, high priest, and layman—to "take courage."

A. Haggai's approach was an appeal to the heroic in men's souls.

By this method he changed defeat, self-pity,

and pessimism into a winning spirit. God cannot use discouraged people.

- B. Only a courageous church can be effective today.

If the church is weak and cowardly, she will be pushed to the side lines.

Her people must live, think, pray, act, and plan courageously.

(Refer to the hymn, "Live Like a Hero.")

- C. The source of Christian courage is the Lord.
Illustration—Joshua hesitates at the banks of the Jordan River. Three times the Lord says to him, "Be strong and of good courage" (Josh. 1:6, 9, 18).

With this assurance, he leads the nation into the Promised Land.

III. A working church

"Work, for I am with you, says the Lord of Hosts."

- A. Haggai was a man of action.

His slogan was "the house of God lieth waste." Through this emphasis he changed the outlook and hearts of the people.

- B. He called his people to action.

For sixteen years they had been building their own houses and utterly forgetting God's house. The church of God has a purpose in the world. If we fail him, he will find a people through whom he will establish his kingdom.

- C. The church must have a well-defined and challenging program in order to advance.
Big undertakings, lots of teamwork, and a winning spirit are essential for success.

IV. A sacrificial church

- A. Haggai condemned the people's selfishness.

"Because of my house that lies in ruins, while

you busy yourselves each with his own house" (Hag. 1:9c). We have no right to live in fine, modern homes unless the church is beautiful, modern, and serviceable. A church that does not represent sacrifice in its erection and maintenance is not worthy of the name.

B. By sharing we live for others.

Illustrations: Jesus left only a robe; Paul left a cloak and some parchments; John Wesley left a well-worn clergyman's gown and a religious movement. Some people leave only a tombstone.

C. The people did respond to Haggai's request for gifts.

They gave themselves and their offerings.

Labor was one of their biggest contributions.

V. A victorious church

A. Haggai knew the combination of success.

The three links of his chain were courage, work, and sacrifice.

These led to certain victory. He harnessed his resources of leadership, funds, and abilities to one definite end, and that was the building of the Temple.

B. He himself was a craftsman.

He is called a minor prophet. His book of two chapters has only thirty-eight verses. Haggai has been called the "man with one idea." He had the administrative ability to "find a job for everyone" and to inspire him to do it.

C. The results of his leadership and labors are obvious.

Four years later the Temple was completed and dedicated. "And the people of Israel, the priests and the Levites, and the rest of the returned

exiles, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy" (Ezra 6:16).

VI. Conclusion

The composition of success is courage, work, and sacrifice.

SAVE OUR SUNDAY

"And he said unto them, 'The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath; so the Son of man is lord even of the sabbath.'"

—Mark 2:27-28

I. Introduction

(Describe the setting of the text.)

II. The Jewish Sabbath

A. Commemorates a finished creation — "God rested."

The Sabbath in the Old Testament was a day of rest.

B. Its faithful observance was commanded in the Decalogue.

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Exod. 20:8).

C. It is a type of heavenly rest.

III. The Christian Sabbath was made for man

The Christian "Sabbath" is not a law but a privilege and not so much a Sabbath as a "Lord's Day." The resurrection of physical, mental, and spiritual strength is its outstanding purpose. It commemorates a finished redemption. Jesus arose on "The first day of the week."

A. Man needs a physical rest.

We need one day out of seven for our bodies.

We are not made of iron, stone, or steel, but of "flesh and blood."

Machinery, animals, and the land, all need a period of rest.

Comment on the Coca Cola slogan, "The pause that refreshes.")

B. Man needs mental refreshment.

The mind needs a change of reading and a rest. Sunday is the time to read the Bible and other Christian literature.

Do not wrap yourself in a large Sunday paper.

C. Man needs social enrichment.

Sunday is an ideal time for the family to be together and worship together at home. (Slogan, "The family that worships together sticks together.") Families should fellowship together on the Lord's Day. They need each other.

D. Man needs a spiritual uplift.

The soul needs nourishment that comes through worship, prayer, and meditation. We need "the Communion of Saints." Sunday is an ideal time to cultivate the things of the Spirit. Robert Browning wrote, "Look up, not down; to look down makes one dizzy."

IV. How is Sunday being observed?

A. It is being commercialized by business, sports, movies, and recreation.

B. Much manual labor is done on this day; only some of it essential.

Repair jobs, car washings, gardening, harvesting.

C. Sunday has become almost a secular holiday.

Pleasure seekers make long trips to lakes, summer resorts, parks, games. They go away from

the church and miss its privileges and blessings. These trips are financially costly.

- D. There is much negative Sunday desecration. After a Saturday night of dissipation, people will lie in bed late on Sunday. They do not have the energy and incentive to clean up and observe the day.

V. What should be done about properly observing the Christian Sabbath?

- A. We should familiarize ourselves with the way Christ observed the Sabbath. He attended church regularly “. . . as his custom was” (Luke 4:16b). He had the church-going habit. He observed the remainder of the day in positive helpfulness to others. He performed miracles of healing on the Sabbath.
- B. Every Christian should observe this day properly. Be a full-time Christian and set a noble example before your family and community.
- C. Parents should teach their children how to observe the Lord’s Day. Do it by example and by precept. Unless parents faithfully do this, we cannot expect children to do it.
- D. The church should join with community agencies and groups to help stop unlawful practices on the Lord’s Day.

VI. Conclusion

It is up to Christian people to save our Sunday.

CAIN

THE TOWN AND COUNTRY PULPIT

Warner
Press



No. D8215