

Wells Without Water

by Dr. Manford George Gutzke

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It is now more than fifty years ago that I was led "Out of Darkness" and "Into His Marvelous Light." Coming to faith through the Gospel was an exciting and an amazing experience. Throughout these years I have been shocked and puzzled by the evidence that so much activity among professed believers produces so little fruit. I could always understand that unbelieving persons would live their lives as if there were no God; having no faith in God it made sense to me that "God is not in all their thoughts." But that believers who had accepted Christ, who were members of a church, should promote activities "in the name of the Lord," and have no converts, no souls saved, no lives changed in months and years has been astonishing and depressing.

I am not so much concerned about judging such empty activities as being unworthy, as I am burdened to think of the affect this lack of power has upon the young people and the children of the rising generation. Young people today may not know enough about the Gospel to take any intelligent part in any doctrinal or theological discussion. They may not have any idea of what is true or what is false. But they have souls in darkness: they have a void and a chaos in their own heart. Many of them want to know "Is there any balm in Gilead?" "Is there anything actually real about the Gospel?"

The following studies are based upon my recollections of what I have seen. I am sharing them with you in a spirit of protest: "These things ought not so to be." Apparently this sad state of affairs is not peculiar to our generation. Long ago the poet Milton gave classic expression to the tragic results among worshippers: "The hungry sheep look up and are not fed." It is sobering to note that Peter has warned about what can be expected in the course of the history of the people of God, when he wrote Chapter 2 of his second Epistle.

It may be true that not every person wants to know about God, but no one can deny that some souls are eager to find out about Him. And certainly they have the right to expect they could be satisfied if they came to those who profess to believe. I am sure that many, many times weary souls that are hurting in their own emptiness come to our churches in the forlorn hope they might find rest in the truth about God. They seem to me to be like thirsty travellers who are looking for the Water of Life. To me it is terrible to think that so often they find only "wells without water."

Is The Young Man Absalom Safe?

Can you appreciate the importance of road signs for cross country travel?

"Is the young man Absalom safe?" These words were spoken by David as recorded in II Samuel 18:29 and 18:32. When David heard that the young man Absalom was dead we read: "And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" (II Samuel 18:33).

This is recognized in all literature as probably the most pathetic outcry ever uttered. It was the heartrending grief of an anguished father who received the news of a great battle in which his son was fighting. Actually, Absalom was seeking to overthrow his father's throne. He was fighting against David

whose kingdom was at stake, but, David's father's heart was burdened about his son. When that battle was being fought and when it was over he asked one question: "Is the young man Absalom safe?" And when he heard the sad news of Absalom's death he gave expression to that classic cry.

How many times is that cry so full of pathos repeated by a heartbroken father or mother! Parents with a normal outlook feel very deeply about the fortunes of their children. They have in mind that their child is born into this world with no previous knowledge of this place. The world is dangerous, uncertain, a situation that has in it all kinds of elements - good and bad, vital and fatal - that which will make for life and that which will make for death. Each person has to make his own way through this world fraught with danger.

People who care about others put up road signs to guide them along the proven route so that the man who comes afterwards will know where to go. They put up traffic signs to guide him. That is very much the way it is with life so far as this world is concerned. Sometimes I think that life is very much like a drugstore: there are many different items on the shelves, some of which are poisonous, and ordinarily you will find them labelled. To neglect to put labels on such bottles or to change the labels that are on the bottles would be criminal.

Now to be sure children should not handle items they don't know about, yet we know that it is natural for them to take up things in curiosity, and that is why labels are required. Living is even more dangerous than the mixed up world itself. It isn't just that the world is mixed up and that one could make the wrong decision; more than that is true. There is an enemy who is cunning, malicious and active. We do not understand the situation people are in unless we recognize there is a devil who is working to destroy. Satan is seeking to ensnare and to entrap, even to destroy, all of those who are precious to believers. And so, we ask with David about our own young people today: is the young man Absalom safe in our churches today? What is your church doing for the young people of today?

I know the church is there. The doors are open, services are being held and young people are invited to come. Special young people's activities are going on. Do you think that will be adequate? Let me ask you something: "What about the testimony of your congregation? Who in your congregation talks out loud about the Lord? Who talks out loud about being saved? What prominent men in your church would be found standing up and telling the world that a man must be saved to go to heaven; that he must be born again? Are there people in your church who pray about the personal needs of the young people? If you hear that the young people in your church have fallen into some kind of error or in some kind of danger, who are the business men in your church who will get together and engage in special prayer for those young people? Who cares about the spiritual condition of your youth?" When you face these questions honestly you will know something about the situation today. And you will know precisely what the young people themselves see, and you will be able to understand how the young people feel about things in your church.

I remember how, some years ago, a certain man was preaching an evangelistic message in a congregation. When he was through preaching a young man came forward and said: "I have listened to what you have had to say today, and I am very sorry to have to tell you, but I feel in all honesty I should tell you that you are not telling the truth. What you said isn't true." What the preacher had stated was simply that you need to accept Jesus Christ and believe in Him or you would be lost, and that if you did not accept Jesus Christ as your Savior you were going to hell. When confronted by the young man in this way the evangelist was taken back, and he said, "Why do you say that I am not telling the truth?" The young man said, "Listen, my father is a good man. He is a member of this church and he is a real believer. I know how my father feels about me. If I were in danger of being lost and going to hell do

you mean to tell me my father wouldn't tell me? That is slander against my father." The evangelist had to say, "I am very sorry to tell you, my young man, but if your father didn't tell you what I have just preached he omitted something true, because I will tell you, just as surely as you heard me preach it, that except a man be born again he shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven." The young man still persisted, "That can't be true. If that were true, my father would have told me." Can you understand the feelings of that young man? Don't you think, deep down in your heart, that any boy or girl has a right to think that father and mother, if they knew that it is necessary to accept the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, would certainly tell them?

Let me now consider this whole question with you. What would you say you would find in the table of contents of your youth literature - the papers that are distributed in Sunday School, or the papers that are produced by your young people's work committee? What emphasis is there about conversion? About commitment? To what extent are the young people challenged to accept the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Savior, and what emphasis is actually put on spiritual living? Where do you read in those papers that except you abide in the Lord Jesus Christ you can do nothing? If the young people were to read the average material that is produced by our average church agency they would look in vain for anything that has to do with personal testimony about faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, or about the necessity of believing in Him.

Again, let me ask you about the curriculum of our youth conferences, where young people spend as much as a week to study certain courses. What do people talk about there? Is evangelism a required course? Is there anything basically required that the young person has to settle, whether or not he will accept Jesus Christ as Savior? Is praying encouraged? Do those youth conferences specialize in the matter of personal fellowship with the Lord? How often, instead, is it true that time is given over to world affairs? The young people are studying about what is going on in the international situation or between the various social groups in the world. Don't you think the young people notice that when they have gone to this conference where they were supposed to be studying about the things of God, the things of the Gospel, the things of Heaven and the things of the Lord Jesus Christ, they are actually always thinking about the things of this world?

Has anybody tried to explain the youth dropout so far as the church is concerned? Why is it that in an ordinary church service so few young people are there? The contemporary activity in youth evangelism is actually being carried on by non-church groups. One of the things to have in mind is how God is blessing the independent, community-oriented movements. One thinks about the incident in Matthew 17:14-21. You will remember when the man brought his afflicted son to the disciples that they might cast out the demons he afterwards said to Jesus of Nazareth: "I brought him to thy disciples and they could not cure him." You will remember the Lord Jesus said: "Bring him hither to me." When this was done the child was delivered from the demons that possessed him. Afterwards those disciples, honest and sincere men, but mistaken as they were, came to Him and said: "Why could not we cast them out?" He told them a very simple, plain truth: "Because of your unbelief."

One underlying thought prevails in my heart: I have a great concern for the emptiness in the hearts and minds of young people who have not heard about the Lord Jesus Christ in their own churches, in their own Sunday Schools, and in their own young people's work. They have not heard there that except a man be born again he cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Because Of Your Unbelief

Can you understand why failure to get answer to prayer causes so much shock and discouragement?

A child born into this world does not know anything. He learns all that he will ever know and starts out learning by hearing and seeing what his folks say and do. And so it is that a child in the course of time learns about God: that He is infinite, He is everywhere, He is eternal, He is all the time. He is holy, good, benevolent, kind, merciful and gracious. The child learns, too, that God is our Judge, but He has compassion on the sinner. If the child is fortunate enough to live in a community with a good church and has believing parents, he will learn that in the fullness of time God sent forth His Son to die for sinners. This is the way he can hear the Gospel. The child hearing the Gospel can believe it to be true, and so he can be saved. As a matter of fact the child still has to live, and because he is still weak he hears another wonderful word: God answers prayer. Nothing is more inspiring to the human experience than to have answer to prayer, to be able to talk to God and know that He hears.

Now I want to ask you as we think on these things: what is the situation in your own church, in your own community? At one point James writes: "Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts" (James 4:2-3).

What I have just outlined to you is common knowledge to everyone who has heard the Gospel. Why is it that generally speaking as human beings, believers live along day in and day out in distress, in discouragement and oftentimes in defeat? Is it true about them "you have not because you ask not?" And is it not also true that one of the reasons they don't ask is, frankly, because they don't believe?

Let me review the situation that would mark an ordinary person's life and I am sure we will find this to be the case all around us. Take for instance our homes. I am thinking about believing people. Isn't it a common custom with believing folks that when they get married they want to be married by a preacher? I have conducted many weddings, and I think I have done the normal thing when I pray for these people that God should bless them. And I can assure you that if the groom and the bride actually believed in God, He would bless their home. But what does believing in God involve?

If the newly married couple really and truly believed in God, would they not read their Bible? That is the Word of God. Would they not seek in the Bible what God has in mind for them? If they did not study the Bible is it not true that they would not know what God has in mind for them? If such persons would say "We have read the Bible before," that would be fine; then they would know how important it is to study it. They should read it again and again. They should read the Bible the way they breathe. After all, they have breathed before. Why do they not stop breathing? Even though they have done it before, they do not stop breathing for a very practical reason: they need the air. They need to remember they need the grace of God. And the grace of God is available for those who will read His Word and believe it.

There will also be on the part of that couple who were just married the need to set up a family altar. Together they could read the Bible and together they could pray. They could engage in certain Godly activities. They could begin to think about ways and means in which they could improve their personal acquaintance with the things of God. Why? Because they want the blessing of God.

I am writing as a preacher who has performed many wedding services when I prayed that God would bless the newly weds. In how many cases after the wedding would you expect the newly married folks to begin reading their Bible and praying together? Why don't they? Because they don't believe it. They go through the motions, they say the words, they expect the preacher to pray for them, but they don't

truly, deep down in their hearts, believe in these things.

Let us follow through with this young couple. When they have been married for awhile, they may be expecting a baby. In how many cases would you find that the prospective father and mother will pray for that child before it is born? I'm not talking about exceptional folks, I am just being practical. These parents know a child is going to be born to them, and they know that child will have their own disposition in him or her, as the case may be. With this in mind and believing in God, if they really and truly believed that God could help that child, would those parents not pray? If you would say to me, "Not everybody does," I would not be a bit surprised. I would think you would be telling the truth, and that is exactly what I am talking about. And I am saying this because of unbelief. That is why they do not do these things.

After the child has been born some action will be taken depending on which church the parents attend. Some churches have a custom of baptizing their children; others dedicate them to God; in either case the idea is that the child will be brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. In my own denomination we have baptismal services in which the minister asks the parents certain questions, such as "Do you promise before God, or do you covenant before God and these witnesses, that you will teach this child the principles of our holy religion, and that you will set before this child an example, and that you will pray with and for this child?" The minister asks these questions and the couple standing before him to have their child baptized say they will do these things. How many do you suppose will actually do this? You may say, "They took the child to be baptized (or dedicated), didn't they?" I will admit they said the words, but I am asking you how often do you think these vows are kept?

It may even be that as they are received into the church, when they come forward to make their confession of faith they may be asked, "Now that you are going to join this church, do you promise that you will be a faithful member?, that you will practice those things that have to do with the means of salvation and the means of grace?, that you will attend church services, join in prayer, and share in service?" It is not the custom to detail all these things but they are in mind when the questions are asked. The person coming into the church will say "Yes, I will." In how many cases do you think these promises actually are being kept? Now why not? I would soberly say it is because the professing believer does not really believe.

In child training how many parents take encouraging steps to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. I am not pointing out merely that omission of such action is sinful. I want to emphasize that such omission is actually a case of unbelief. Professing believers really do not believe that anything will happen. Such unbelief is basically a matter of disobedience.

I know there are many people who make no profession of faith who are unblessed. I realize that. They have trouble in their family; they have broken homes; they have disobedient, rebellious children. There is personality deterioration in the family; immorality and addiction to drugs occur. I could go on down the sad list of what is going on in our society today, and that could be accepted as par for the course.

But what shall we say when such things happen among professing believers who say they believe in God? I am reminded again of that incident recorded in Matthew 17:14-21 when the Lord Jesus came upon His disciples and saw a large company of people gathered around. He learned that a man had brought his son, afflicted by a demon, to the disciples that they should cast the demon out, but they could not. The Lord Jesus said, "Bring him here to me." They brought the young son and He cast out the demon. "Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out? And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief" (Matthew 17:19-20).

In Joshua's time, when the people of God were defeated, Joshua fell on his face before God, and his

cry was: "What shall we say when Israel turns their back to their enemies?" And so I am saying to you, "What are we going to say when professing Christians are defeated, and these things we commonly look upon as sinful conduct actually take place among Christian people?" It could be well for us to remember when Peter was walking on the water and how he began to sink when he saw the boisterous waves. He cried out, "Lord save me else I perish." This seems to be such an appropriate cry to come from our hearts as we realize the peril of unbelief.

All these observations bring to our mind a sobering fact: among believing people, generally speaking, there is a wide-spread lack of obedience to God. But it is not just a matter of lack of obedience, as such. The fact seems to be that it is basically a matter of unbelief. They do not actually believe in God. They do not really think it would make any difference if they turned to God and put their trust in Him. And the sad truth is that having no power in prayer results in a barren spiritual experience.

His Own Received Him Not

Can you see that the greatest hindrance to the Gospel is not so much opposition from unbelievers who are on the outside as it is from lukewarm support from those on the inside who should be leading all other believers to openly endorse the scriptural message?

I have been sharing with You some thoughts in my heart and mind as I look back over the years of my life. Many years ago as a young man I came to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. It was for me an astonishing revelation. It was the most remarkable thing to think that Almighty God would reveal Himself to the children of men and would make it possible for a human being on earth to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as his personal Savior and thus to become a child of God. All of this was very amazing to me. When this did come to me as a young man I could not understand why I had not heard it before. I could not understand why people did not shout this from the housetop. And because they did not shout it I was uneasy at that time, and I have been uneasy all the way along the line. It has been one of the biggest problems for me to overcome.

How could the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ be true, and how could it really be honestly a fact that Jesus of Nazareth was alive and that the people who professed faith in Him were believing in Him, but were not doing anything about it? There was no evidence that I could feel or see among these people that they were actually having any dealings with the Lord Jesus Christ, and it bothered me.

I was for a length of time a professor in a seminary and I can remember days when I would protest against the atmosphere in that very seminary among my colleagues and students. We went about our work, we applied ourselves, we tried to become proficient and all the way through one had the feeling that we were doing these things in the name of a dead Person. The Person who had died 2,000 years ago, Whose picture now hung on the wall, Whose name was in our hymns as we sang about Him, but Who was now far away and gone. When I used to ask my students what it would take if fifteen of them were standing in the hall talking, to make them realize there were sixteen there? And if three fellows were together having some little bit of conversation, what it would take to make them realize there were four there? What does it take for people to come to realize that the living Lord Jesus Christ wants to be with His disciples?

Consider, if you will, that very familiar passage: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst." I have heard that quoted over and over again, and I have had reason to ask myself very bluntly: "Do you believe it? Is it real?" I want to comment on certain thoughts I have along this line, as suggested by words of the Apostle John.

"He was in the world, and the world was made by him and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:10-12).

These words give a simple sketch of what characterized the life of the Lord Jesus Christ here on earth. We know the whole story well enough to know that God sent His own Son into the world in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, who came expressly to seek and to save the lost. He came into the world to reveal the things of God to those who believe in Him. And we know that the very persons for whom He came did not receive Him, nor appreciate Him.

When we have all that in mind we wonder about people today who profess His name; they say they believe in Him. Is it true? Do they really believe in Him? And to what extent? I need not be their judge: we can let their actions be their judge. Is it obvious to those who hear them and who talk things over with them, that they are actually in fellowship with the living Lord Jesus Christ? How many times would it be true even to this day: "He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not?"

It is very important that we remember that Jesus Christ is not simply a human being. Though He was in the form of man, He is not to be thought of as just another human being with whom we might become acquainted, whom it would be good to know, because we would be inspired if we knew Him. "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made" (John 1:3). Do these words mean anything? If they do, they mean that Jesus Christ was the Creator. He is our Maker. Jesus Christ is the Judge, just as He is the Savior of those who believe, He is the Redeemer of all those who put their trust in Him. He is a Friend of everyone who walks with Him. This is Jesus Christ. He may be a stranger to me -- I may not know Him -- but I am no stranger to Him. He knows me very well. He made me. He judges me, He died for me, He rose again for me, He called me to Himself and He prays for me even now. All of this is true about the Lord Jesus Christ and me. He came on my behalf. That person Whom we call Jesus of Nazareth, Whom Almighty God made both Lord and Christ, is my Maker.

What can make those words sound real? Do we realize that Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus Christ, is God? He is my Maker, my Keeper. He takes care of me. He is my Redeemer. He is my Lord. Why can I say such things? Who can say such things? Every believer in Jesus Christ. And who are these believers in Jesus Christ? Would you not count the elders, the deacons, the ministers and all the humble members of the church? To them He is everything I have spoken about.

In the Book of Revelation a number of revealing things are written about Him in chapters 2 and 3. "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my Voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me" (Revelation 3:20).

He wants to come into my heart. He said with reference to His coming that at such an hour as you think not the Son of Man cometh. What does it mean to receive Him? If a person were going to receive Him, what does this mean? "He came unto His own and His own received Him not." They did not receive Him for what He claimed to be. In other words, they did not recognize Him for Who He is. He is not just another person, another being. He is God. He is Creator. He is Judge. He is Savior, Redeemer, Lord, Master, King; and He is my Friend.

What would you think of a situation where a man understood that he was the husband of a certain woman and the father of her children. He supplied the money to keep the home going, but there was no room for him in that house. He was not welcome to come there. If he came to the door and knocked and those inside recognized he was there, but left him outside, what would you think of that? Now that is what is going on, when we do not recognize the Lord nor accept Him for what He comes to do. We do

not have fellowship with Him. We do not worship Him as Lord and God. To receive Him means to recognize Him, to accept Him, to have fellowship with Him, to have communion with Him, to bow down and worship Him. It was said when He came here in the flesh that He came to His own, and His own received Him not. Is it possible that this is true today? Is it possible, so far as we are concerned, that any number of people name His name who do not even claim to have personal fellowship with Him? They actually leave Him out?

Apart From Me, You Can Do Nothing

Do you realize why it is so important that Gospel teaching and preaching tell about Jesus Christ?

"Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:4-5).

These are the words the Lord Jesus Christ spoke to His own disciples, and He speaks them into our hearts. The last phrase, "Without me ye can do nothing" is probably better understood if we translate it this way: "Apart from me, ye can do nothing."

What does this mean? Back in the days before I was a believer I used to read these passages. I tried to understand them, and when I read this one it just didn't seem to make sense. Does this mean that unless I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ I cannot talk? Does this mean I cannot work? That would not make sense. A clue to the meaning of this particular statement can be found when we look at Matthew 17:16. "I brought him to thy disciples and they could not cure him." We should look carefully to note how the Lord Jesus answered:

"O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him hither to me. And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him: and the child was cured from that very hour. Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out? And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief" (Matthew 17:17-20).

There is much church activity today. I suppose that in all the history of the Christian church there never was as much activity as at present. There are Sunday School activities, young people's activities, women's meetings, and sometimes men's meetings. There are regular services and special services; and in addition, various committees and various organizations meet. I am going to raise the question that I think is proper here: why are there so few results? Isn't it true that many congregations serve a certain area: teaching, preaching and being active from one year's end to the other, yet there are people living in that community who are never brought to the Lord?

Recently I witnessed the baptism of an infant, and I was reminded that in my communion all infants are baptized. Some time ago I attended an infant dedication ceremony where the congregation belonged to a communion that does not baptize infants, but they dedicate them to God. Both services were similar; in neither case was the baby asked any questions. The parents were asked questions, and they pledged themselves to bring their child up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. They pledged themselves to live before this child as true believers, to pray with this child and for this child, and to teach this child all of the principles of their holy religion. The parents went through that ceremony and made solemn promises. But what happened in many of the cases where a child was baptized - offered to God? You would be surprised to learn how many people imagine that if you baptize the child you can close the book. It has been done. That is now a baptized child and because it has been baptized, when the time comes that child will go to Heaven. I do not know of anything that can be more misleading than what I

have just described. Baptism could be very meaningful, but it is possible to go through that service, and not really have anything happen. Let me illustrate it this way: if a person decides to have a garden in which he is going to produce beans, it will be God who makes them grow. But when I have said that, I want to ask something else. Does the person who owns the garden have anything to do? Let us be specific. What does he have to do? He has to plow the land. He has to prepare it for the seed. He has to put the seed in properly at the right time. When the plants start coming up he has to cultivate them and he has to hoe out the weeds, protect the plants, and watch over them during their growing season until the fruit is ripe. It is true God made the beans grow but the people cultivated them. They worked with them. And this is exactly what should take place in the local congregation and in any family. Certainly we should ask God for blessing; and certainly God will bless us. If anybody in that family comes to faith, it will be God who does it. But is He going to do it apart from the Word of God? That is not the way it is promised. "Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God."

Why are Sunday School programs, activities, and young people's programs so often like vacant lots? Why do they so often seem just like a bunch of weeds growing voluntarily. It may well be because we have not cultivated the ground. We did not work on it. Since we wanted the blessing of God, why did we not have His blessing? He promised it. Take another example: would you like to have a blessed home? In a home that is blessed you would have a husband and a wife who are reasonably companionable, kind and thoughtful of each other. You would see children who are obedient to their parents, and parents who are thoughtful of the children. That would be a blessed home. Can one have that apart from God? If we understand the Gospel we will know that we can't have what we want, what we are talking about, apart from the blessing of God.

Will the blessing of God be given to anyone regardless of what that person does? Can one just ask Him for a blessing upon the home and then do nothing about it? Should one not do some cultivating of the soil? Should one not plant some seed, and hoe out the weeds? A believer can have a blessed home if he will do the things that contribute to it.

Suppose a believer wants to have family unity. This would mean that the family is of one mind. But this is not natural. This is not the usual thing. The natural way would be that if there are five people in the family, they will be going in five different directions. They would come together only by mutual consent for a time, but actually, the longer they live the more apart they grow. For family unity these people should be together, especially as believers. If all believe in the Lord, could they not have family unity? Yes, they really could. They would need to do a little planting of the seed and hoeing of the weeds. To have family unity that family should worship God; in some way they should honor Him in the home. In some way or other they should get themselves together. A good way would be to read the Bible together, and another way would be to pray together. But they couldn't do that all day long, so what else could they do? They could turn to God and ask Him to bless the other members of the family. Each could yield himself. Each could take himself in hand and not act selfishly. Each could act in consideration of the other members. To do this each would have to deny himself, and for that he would need the grace of God. If a person wants the grace of God he will have to have the Lord Jesus Christ in his heart. It will be Christ in him that is the hope of glory. Then this desirable result, family unity, will come when the family does the things that point in that direction.

This truth would apply in all aspects of living. If a believer would like to have a strong character, he should do what is necessary to get it. Apart from the Lord Jesus Christ the believer cannot have the kind of character he wants. If a believing parent would like to have obedient children, they will need to be brought into some such fellowship with God, that the grace of God will be in their hearts. If parents

would like to have wise young people, they will need to be brought into fellowship with God so that the Holy Spirit can guide and lead them. If believers would like to have honest leaders in the country, if they want honest men in government and in leadership, they will have to pray for them.

If a believer wants good people around him, such people must have the blessing of God. For that there are certain things to be done. Remember that "Apart from me, you can do nothing." It is in the power of the Lord Jesus Christ that believers can have these blessings. "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them" (John 13:17).

Why Speak Ye Not A Word Of Bringing The King Back?

Do you think it would make any difference to the pupils in a school room if they had any idea the teacher was not coming back for the rest of the day?

In this series of messages I have shared with you the burden of my heart. More than fifty years ago I became a believer in Jesus Christ according to the Gospel. The last problem I had to overcome then, before I came to faith, was the stumbling block of barren church activity. It seemed to me that churches I knew were simply imitations; and the members I knew were only imitations - not the real thing. But now, after fifty years of sharing in church activity and Christian witness, I am obliged to admit that the churches I knew as a boy were probably normal. But even so I cannot accept their witness as true, when I read in the Bible of the power of the name of God, and when I call to mind the glorious results which have occurred here and there when the name of God was proclaimed in power. I am obliged to conclude that something was lacking in the procedures of those churches I knew then, and of many churches I see now.

It has been my privilege to meet and have fellowship with believers whose testimony is strong, whose witness is worthy of the Gospel. I have been in congregations where the name of Christ has power. And I have read again and again of some persons, or some group of people, who experience the power of God. I am burdened to realize the deadening effect upon everyone inside and outside the church, when that church is weak. The disturbing fact is, those who claim to be the authentic churches, the historic denominations, have dismissed these exceptions I have referred to as having strong, vivid, glorious testimony, as sects, as splinter groups, as something less than authentic. This in itself has had a profound effect on the public at large. The impression seems to be abroad that if any congregation shows notable power or effectiveness there must be something suspect in that fellowship.

I don't have any particular confidence in human beings as such, and I don't think that believers differ from one another because one is a better person than the other. But I do think there is a great deal of difference whether I am standing on a rock or whether I am standing on sand. The same person standing on a rock could be safe, whereas if he were standing on sand he could be lost. He would be sunk. The man could be the same in each case. So it is with reference to the believer. Believing in God is what saves the soul. If one is saved in a weak, sickly fashion, what is the matter? Is something wrong with his soul? His soul has nothing in it anyway. It would be in the way in which he believes. "Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God." Strength of faith comes from grasping the Word of God received as food.

This brings to my mind an idea that has lingered with me all through the years. It is a common concept today that to be healthy it is important to have a well balanced diet. I remember how, many years ago, I was interested in reading that many of ships' crews of former generations were wiped out because of a sickness called "scurvy". It seemed as though in a long cruise this sickness would eventually come upon

the crew. One day something was discovered by accident: a certain number were not only weak and sick but they were starving. It happened that in their food supply store they had kept some of the potato peelings, and when these sailors prepared those peelings and ate them, they became well. I could hardly believe it. Nowadays we would say that by being out at sea, a long way from where they could obtain fresh vegetables and fruit, by peeling potatoes and various vegetables they peeled off just under the cover of the skin some of the most important vitamins needed in the body. When those vitamins were lacking the disease of scurvy showed up.

I have been wondering what vitamins are lacking in our spiritual diet. Is something missing in what is being taught and preached that is important? For instance, if preaching did not tell about the Cross would you not agree there would be no remission of sins? Suppose preaching did not tell about the resurrection? Would you not agree there would be no salvation because if you are going to be saved you are going to have to believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead? Would it not be certainly true that you would never believe it if no one ever talked about it? In the same way if preaching does not talk about the return of the Lord, there will be no blessed hope.

"For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it" (Romans 8:24-25).

The Coming of the Lord is one of those things we have not seen as yet, and so it is one of those things we hope for. Does any believer doubt for one moment that Jesus Christ is King? Would any person who has the Bible in hand and has the Gospel in his heart doubt that Jesus Christ is King? In the life of David, the great king of Israel, there was an incident that was actually a tragedy. His own son Absalom rose up in rebellion against him. David had to flee the city of Jerusalem into the country from whence he directed his army - the loyal army - and in the tragic battles that followed Absalom was killed. But David still remained away from Jerusalem. The people had agreed with Absalom when David was run out of the city. Now Absalom was killed so David waited where he was. They ran him out and now they had to ask him to come back.

"And all the people were at strife throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, The king saved us out of the hand of our enemies, and he delivered us out of the hand of the Philistines; and now he is fled out of the land for Absalom. And Absalom, whom we anointed over us, is dead in battle. Now therefore why speak ye not a word of bringing the king back? And king David sent to Zadok and to Abiathar the priests, saying, Speak unto the elders of Judah, saying, Why are ye the last to bring the king back to his house? seeing the speech of all Israel is come to the king, even to his house. Ye are my brethren, ye are my bones and my flesh: wherefore then are ye the last to bring back the king? And say ye to Amasa, Art thou not of my bone, and of my flesh? God do so to me, and more also, if thou be not captain of the host before me continually in the room of Joab. And he bowed the heart of all the men of Judah, even as the heart of one man; so that they sent this word unto the king, Return thou, and all thy servants. So the king returned, and came to Jordan. And Judah came to Gilgal, to go to meet the king, to conduct the king over Jordan" (11 Samuel 19:9-15).

Can you feel something in this incident that is pertinent today? Those people had a king. That king was absent and there came a time when they needed him. They spoke to each other about it and finally the word came "Why don't you say something to the leaders, to the priests?" "Why speak ye not a word of bringing the king back?" Is this the missing vitamin in our spiritual food? Let me ask you some straightforward questions: When have you been in Sunday School and heard discussion there that the Lord Jesus Christ is coming back? When have you heard that from the pulpit? I know there are congregations where this truth is admitted, and if you read their statements of doctrine, they have it there

that He is coming back, but they never say anything about it in the church services. What I am interested in is this: what is being said in public is the food that the young people are getting. If there is nothing said about the coming of the Lord, can you see there would be something important omitted? Can you understand that their faith would be weaker?

There are those who rejoice in the expectation of the coming of the Lord. Why is it that they are often dismissed as being something else than desirable? I know of individual Sunday School teachers, capable ones, who have been removed from their leadership because they teach that Jesus Christ is coming back. I am asking you: isn't it true that the reality of the return of the Lord is part of our business? We read "Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come" (Matthew 24:42). Then follows a parable of that evil servant who said in his heart:

"My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to smite his fellow-servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; the lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 24:48-51).

The Lord Jesus said that.

Peter points out that there are people who will ridicule this truth.

"There shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation" (11 Peter 3:3-4).

So at this time I would solemnly raise this question with you: is it possible that a major factor in the anemic, dull apathy that features so large a proportion of the testimony of today, is actually the widespread omission of this truth of the return of the Lord?

Recollections

Have you ever considered how much a person loses when he never hears the name of Jesus Christ?

I am going to read in the book of John:

"But Mary (Mary Magdalene) stood without at the sepulcher weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulcher, and seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him" (John 20:11-13).

In my childhood I heard the name of God and sometimes the name of Jesus Christ. I gathered the impression that God was high, holy, lifted up; far, far away in Heaven in the skies above all. I gathered the impression through the Sunday School studies and experiences I had in church that Jesus Christ, who lives some 1900 years ago, worked miracles, was crucified and was raised from the dead. I understood what the record was and I understood that somehow God and Christ Jesus could see me; that my life was an open book to them and that I was a sinner in their sight. As I look back on those childhood years I can remember that the words Heaven, hell, angels and the devil and judgment were common talk around the church. I am not sure that anybody paid very much attention to it but we all respected the possibilities that were implied by those words.

Right and wrong were realities. Somehow they had a bearing on my destiny. If I did right I felt I would be blessed. If I did wrong I felt I would be in trouble. Providence could have been true. I had a real feeling for Providence but it presented problems and there were things about problems in connection with

Providence that I never figured out. As I grew older I became aware of sin and I felt condemned. I then entered into a state of darkness and deep despair because of my sin which I could not stop. I tried. About that time I became enveloped in my loneliness. I had no one to turn to but by the grace of God, when I was a young man teaching school, I came to know Jesus Christ, the living Lord, as my Savior. My heart was filled with love. I had joy; I had peace; and with great joy and peace I found in me the disposition to do His will. I wanted to please Him. I didn't get it done but I wanted to do it and I knew my heart was right before God. For a time I cherished the Bible. I was in that state of mind that if I had a Bible in my hand I felt better. If I had a Bible in my pocket, I felt stronger. To have that Book in my hands was a comfort. Soon I found that it was the presence of the Lord that gave me exceeding joy.

All of this went on mostly by myself; I had little fellowship with other people. I was studying the Bible and having fellowship with other believers. You may remember, if you have heard any of my testimony, that I did not come to know the Lord in church or in Sunday School, but in time I began to attend church and Sunday School again and there I met many professing believers. For more than fifty years now I have known the Lord, have been in fellowship with church members, and I soon found out that not all believers think alike; nor do they act alike. To my great delight and distress, I found professing believers who have talked about the Lord as a person, as their great Friend, but I have also been in churches where this was largely taken for granted, and no one said anything about it. Oh, it was true they would sing that old familiar hymn "What a Friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear," but I found it hard to find anybody in that church of whom it could be said that they carried everything to God in prayer.

Now after fifty years I must confess that there are those who want to be counted among church members who do not want to hear anything personal about Jesus Christ. They do not want to talk about the personal fellowship and communion they could have with the living Lord and this bothers me. In recent days I have felt a heavy burden about this strange and disastrous condition. Time and again I have had to go outside my church fellowship to share in spiritual joy. I am thankful to God there are people who believe in the Lord and rejoice in Him. I am thankful to God that there are companies of people here or there gathered sometimes in private meetings, sometimes in home fellowship or cottage prayer meetings, who can actually talk about the Lord. But I have to admit that so far as the churches are concerned, in the very fellowship of the big congregations where one goes into the place called the sanctuary, which is supposed to be a holy place of God, it is not unusual that from beginning to end of the entire hour of worship, the only way Christ Jesus is referred to would be as if He were a picture on the wall. He is a name in history. He is a name of a doctrine. But to find anyone there who would give the impression they had had personal dealings with the living Lord Jesus Christ, one would have to hunt. That has been my experience, I am sorry to say.

Maybe I have been unusual in this regard. Maybe I have just met a number of unusual people, a different kind of folks, but I don't think so. I have been around in many churches in different denominations; I read church papers, hear what is said, and I have been to conferences and know what people are talking about. I see the topics that men preach on and it is disturbing to think of how much goes on in the name of Jesus Christ that is not grounded in personal fellowship with Him. Can you realize the deadening affect this would have upon the souls who are in those companies who do not have personal fellowship and communion with the living Lord? When I realize all of this, I am conscious of the fact, and this is what I personally believe, it is not the fault of the rank and file. I don't think it is the fault of the church members. I will take my blame along with anyone else; if I, as a minister or pastor, have had the privilege of preaching and teaching, and I have failed to bear personal witness to the living

Lord Jesus Christ, then I would be at fault.

I am, therefore, emboldened to protest against what I am going to call such ungodly conditions. I call upon you in your own conscience to let me ask you this question: is not that pathetic plea of Mary Magdalene that we read, in order today? Am I not right in thinking that many times in churches, so far as the conversation is concerned, seldom does one hear church members talk about the living Lord. They will talk about almost everything - personal affairs, the latest sports event of the previous week, politics and oh, yes, scandal and gossip - but if you were to be there and your heart hungry, who is going to talk about the Lord? Are you going to have fellowship with Him? Do you want to grow in Him and do you really want your faith to be strengthened? How can it be strengthened if you never call upon His name and if those around you never call upon His name?

I would say that if any man was talking about his home and speaking of all that goes on there but never mentioned his wife, that would not be healthy. I think if you were the wife you would not be very happy. Think about that. Take, for instance, the discussions that take place. A group of adults get together in a class - it may be the men's class or the women's class or young people's class - and discussion is encouraged, so they talk about matters of common concern. How seldom anyone there discusses the matter of personal relationships with the living Lord! That is assumed; that is taken for granted. It is just supposed to be that way. How many will tell you what they had happen to them from the Lord in the past week? So far as their discussion is concerned, suppose they discuss politics and the nation as a whole, how many of them actually in their hearts have in mind that their nation is dependent upon God, and the individuals in that nation are responsible and dependent upon the person of the Lord Jesus Christ? This would be essential if they were talking as believers, but you will find that the discussions will go on, so that all of the time will be taken up, and anything will be talked about except a personal relationship with the Lord.

Suppose the discussion concerns world affairs. What do you think the reaction would be in the average place if someone spoke up and said, "Well, now, what is going to happen when the Lord returns?" What do you think would happen if someone in your Sunday School class in the middle of the discussion on what was going on in the nations of the world were to raise this question, "How is all of this going to be affected when the Lord Jesus Christ returns in power and glory?" I don't know what you could expect. I can tell you right now what I would expect: I would expect a great, solemn, empty calm, with nothing being said and people wondering "Who let that fellow in? Where did he come from?"

That impression is what people would get. Now just suppose a young person who has turned away from the world and is coming to the Lord comes into the church and is among Christian people and they discuss what is going on in the affairs of the world. They discuss the drug problem, we will say, and they discuss - argue about it - what drug is dangerous and whether or not there should be a law about this or whether there should be a law about that. Talk, talk. And the young person sits there and wonders when is somebody ever going to say that the Lord Jesus Christ could deliver a man from drug addiction? Who is going to openly say that even in the medical profession there is no confidence in any kind of drug rehabilitation that isn't based upon a deep spiritual experience? Some doctors will stress that unless the individual has a personal experience with the Lord Jesus Christ, even to the point of having some consciousness of the indwelling Holy Spirit of God, his profession of having been turned away from drugs is not valid.

That is the way it goes but I am coming back to what it is like so far as your church is concerned. I am interested in this: suppose you were one of the people sitting in that class and you had a son who was being taken in by drugs and your heart was heavy because of that son. How many times in that class

discussion in your own personal church would you hear people telling one another that the living Lord Jesus Christ could deliver that boy? How many times in that Bible Class would you have those people getting together and praying for the power of God to be shown in the life of some individual who belongs to that class or is a child of one of those people in that class? Do I need to press it further? I could go on - the common discussion, the common concern in the average church that I know about is concerned with everything under Heaven, everything on the face of the earth, without bringing in the living Lord Jesus Christ. "They have taken away my Lord. I know not where they have laid Him."

At this point I want to walk very softly and I speak honestly; I want to be as gracious as I possibly can be, but how many times when you listen to our preachers do you wonder what they are aiming at? I want to tell you that the best ones I know are inclined to preach along the lines they want to inspire the listener to do the right things and on what grounds? Because it is good, because it is kind and gracious; because they can help others and it will be great for the church. Our church will have a great name and they will talk and talk and preach and preach and you will listen from beginning to end and at no one time will you ever get the impression that the living Lord Jesus Christ is present; that apart from Him they can do nothing. What effect do you think that has on people? What do you think happens to a man who comes Sunday after Sunday without hearing personal testimony of what can actually be done by the Lord Jesus Christ?

Let me tell you this: there are places where that is done. There are places where people get up and say "The Lord heard this poor man and delivered him of all his troubles," and they begin to tell about the Lord Jesus Christ. I am sorry to say it will not occur in the usual standard church. It will likely be among people whom the church people look down upon. This was one of the things so hard for me to understand in my early Christian experience. I met people who actually had personal dealings with the Lord. The very man I learned the Gospel from who helped me to come to believe, was not a member of the church. I always wondered why that was but afterwards, when I did become acquainted with church people I had to admit that day after day, week after week, one seldom would hear the Gospel. You have heard my story enough to know that when I found a church where the preacher would talk about the living Lord Jesus Christ I joined it.

I want to go on to say something further about this present day in which we are living. I have talked so far only about conversation in churches, discussion classes, and preaching from the pulpit. Now let us consider the church literature. What is being discussed in it? What is the aim of the Sunday School literature? How seldom is any attempt made to bring out the truth about the Lord: that the Lord Jesus Christ is alive now and that a believer can have dealings with Him; that He has a will that He wants to have performed; and that His personal presence is what is necessary to solve the problems the believer may have. How many times do you read discussions about such things in Sunday School literature?

In the matter of praying, at its best we praise God. There are certain words and phrases we use. We thank God for His promises. We petition Him according to His promises. How seldom in that praying do we wait for His guidance! How seldom are we encouraged to think that the living Lord would have something to say to us! How often we plan our programs, prepare our activity, promote what we are doing; and after we have completed all preparations we then ask God to bless what we have done. When in praying do we actually wait in His presence with the idea that the living Lord would have something to say to us better than anything we could think of? What about the times when the people in your church gather together for prayer? Do I need to press into your heart and mind about that? How many of the people in your church come to church to pray? Ask yourself what affect this has on the young people when members of the church do not pray. I will tell you what it did to me. It made me feel the

members did not believe in God, and I felt sorry for those few people who met together in prayer meetings because, after all, they did not represent anything really significant in the congregation. These remarks may seem to be stern or harsh, but I feel desperate about the fact that in many homes there are problems, there are troubles, and fellow believers are not minded to pray about such. In some cases there may be relatives who are addicted to various forms of sin. Every now and again I have startled some people when, having been asked to speak to a men's meeting, I ask when those 150 men ever meet to pray for the church or for the community, or for people they care about? When you consider the people who are concerned about young folks, is it not usual that they talk about the youth situation and about what is going on among the young people, and how they deplore it; but they do not talk about what God would do. Have you ever known about a community prayer meeting of men who would pray for the young people of that community? Ask yourself what would happen if such were the case in any community.

In the meantime, what is happening to the young people? Many of them have gone their way into darkness without any feeling that someone has been praying for them. Occasionally there is one who may have a mother or someone who is heartbroken, but the believers in the community at their best feel sorry for those. So far as the church services are concerned it is the custom to follow tradition. Everyone knows the service will begin with a song and invocation. The congregation will then sing another hymn -- one that everyone is supposed to know. The members do not have to sing with enthusiasm because the choir will lead and so they stand there until the hymn is finished. The various parts of the service are all written out before the people. The preacher leads in prayer and no one knows whether anyone will listen to him or not. When he is finally through praying the service moves on to what comes next. I do not want to belittle these things, but I do want to recognize what is happening. Church members go through with these motions Sunday after Sunday, and in the course of it, after they have had the actual coming to the house of God, they have read His Word, they have had prayer, they have heard a sermon, and when all is finished they go home and forget it. Next week, if the weather is fine, they will be in church. Am I saying something that is untrue? I describe it as it is because that is what the young people see. That is what the children see.

There are those who have their fellowship with people outside the church, I am sorry to say. I wish this would happen in the church. When I was a pastor, I used to try to get this to happen in my own church, and our congregation made some progress along that line. I even tried to get this to happen in my own Presbytery. I remember when I would be meeting with ministers and elders I would sometimes say to them, "I appreciate your dedication in your ministry, and your attention to these things of the church which I hear you discuss so very carefully and faithfully, but there is one thing I wish I could hear. I wish I could hear other members of this Presbytery pray." I was always looked upon as strange. But before I left that Presbytery, when Presbytery was to meet on Tuesday evening the ministers would first meet on Tuesday morning and spend one day in prayer before the Presbytery meeting. I think there was blessing in that, and yet that was only one gesture. And even so, this was not all common in the church as a whole.

It was the common practice when to promote some project, whether it was to conduct some meeting, to build a church, or to launch an evangelistic campaign, that we would plan our procedure, gather the personnel and invite the right persons to lead. If we prayed at all we might have a prayer meeting in which we would pray: "Whatever we have planned, whatever we have worked out, let this be thy will, O God." How different all that would be if we were to be concerned and burdened about seeking the mind of the Lord; if we asked sincerely what does the Lord want to have done?

The same is true when we think about the expectations we have. For instance, in thinking about our own church fellowship, and about the impression we have when we have done our part, and then go home: what do we look for? How seldom do we look for results! We have gone through this same procedure Sunday after Sunday, fifty-two times a year, and at the end of the year what do we have? For many people that I have described in this unhappy way, the public services are all they ever see. We should not be surprised then if the faith of such people is weak, and if young people are wayward, and children are confused. We need to remember: "Apart from me you can do nothing." The Lord Jesus has called us all:

"Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

It is tragic to think of how much is omitted in the life of so many church members, that could strengthen their own faith, and make them a radiant witness for Christ.