

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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"THE RIVER OF LIFE"

Man has long shown his respect for water. He has long depended upon it and has built his dwelling place beside the rivers and the lakes and the springs. All through the Bible, man's spiritual welfare is associated with water scenes. The Psalmist pictured spiritual safety by saying: "Beside the still waters" (Psalm 23:2). Christ promised water that would spring up into everlasting life (John 4:14). Furthermore, we read of the river of life in Revelation 22:1.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:9-11, we find three great factors of life which might well be compared to the river of life. "For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him. Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do."

Every River Has A Source

Every river has a source. This may be a spring, springs, or tributaries which combine to form a beginning. God is the source

of the river of life. God is the one who has appointed the saved to salvation (1 Thess. 5:9). John 3:16 makes it plain that the point of the origin of salvation is God. Man cannot originate spiritual life (Eph. 2:8,9). All of man's hope comes from God from whom all blessings flow.

Every River Has A Channel

Every river has a channel which carries the water. Christ is the channel of the river of life (1 Thess. 5:9). The life is in Christ. "In him was life; and the life was the light of men." (John 1:4). Christ is the giver of the water of life. "But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." (John 4:14). Christ is the one who leads into the fountains of living waters. "For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." (Rev. 7:17). Truly, Christ is the channel through whom all hope comes. This life is brought through the gospel (2 Tim. 1:10). These, at Thessalonica had heard and received the gospel (1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Thess. 2:13-15). God is the source. Christ, through the gospel, is the channel. But the final decision is with man. He must choose to follow the gospel to be a part of this wonderful provision.

Every River Has An End

Every river has an end. This may be one of several different things. It may be a lake. It may be another river. It may be the sea. The river of life has heaven as its end. The channel ends in heaven with Christ (1 Thess. 5:10).

That is where the hope is which is extended in the gospel. "For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel." (Col. 1:5). This is the prepared place which was promised to the apostles (John 14:1-4). This is the place of the heirs (1 Peter 1:3-5).

You?

Are you a traveler on the river of life? God has provided it. You enter the channel, where the waters of life flow, when you enter Christ (Rom. 6:3,4). While man provides neither the source nor the channel, he does have to enter and he does have to continue to travel to reach the desired end.

- Curtis E. Flatt, Gospel Guide, Nov., 1980

Determined Not to Miss Out

"Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it" (Hebrews 4:1).

Reaching the goal of heaven requires a healthy measure of old-fashioned determination. When we're choosing what kind of inner character we're going to have, we must choose to have traits like single-mindedness and stick-to-itiveness. We must be tenacious. When it comes down to it, we must be so determined not to miss out on heaven that we refuse to be deterred.

Our assurance of heaven should rest primarily on our confidence in God. There is no doubt as to His faithfulness. But since heaven is only for those who choose to receive it from Him on His terms, there is the question of who will make that choice and who will not. Satan is in the business of persuading as many people as possible to accept his offer rather than God's, and even after we make our choice to go God's direction, Satan continues to discourage us, in the hope that we'll change our mind. Unfortunately, many do change their minds, and the Hebrew writer was right to warn his readers: "Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it."

Not only do we have an adversary who's intent on discouraging us, the world we live in presents its own share of discouragement. Our environment is a sad one, seriously damaged by sin; there is no shortage of circumstances that tend to dishearten us and dash our hopes. This world is a far cry from what it would have been had sin not entered the picture, and it's a far cry from what we'll enjoy later, when God has fully restored our created nature and removed the effects of our sin. Are we willing to wait for what's ahead? There's more than a little truth to the old Latin maxim: "Endure, and save yourself for happier times" (Virgil).

Only those will enjoy heaven who have enough character to be patient, and patience comes down to what the old-timers used to call "grit." But mark it well: grit is not something some people are born with and others are not. It's a matter of choice on the part of every person. Furthermore, it's not a choice that can be made

once and then forgotten. While the world still stands, each new day will ask us for another decision. Are we determined to see God?

"He that can't endure the bad, will not live to see the good" (Jewish Proverb).

- Gary Henry

The Severity of God

It is in man's best interest to know about God. He is the one "with whom we have to do." (Heb. 4:13). Jesus prayed that men might know God (John 17:3). God is both good and severe (Rom. 11:22).

God has abundantly exemplified His severity in His Word. He was good in giving Adam and Eve wonderful things to enjoy in the Garden (Gen. 2:7-9), but as He had forewarned, He was severe when they disobeyed (Gen. 3:16-24). God was good to Moses and Aaron (Ex. 3:27-31), but severe when they failed to sanctify Him at the waters of Meribah (Num. 20:12). God dealt in fury against the heathen when their cup of iniquity was full. They were defiled by their immoralities and the land itself vomited out her inhabitants (Lev. 18:20-30).

All those things were written that we might profit and take heed. God is a God to be revered and feared. The whole duty of man is to fear Him and keep His commandments (Eccl. 12:13). Jesus solemnly warned us to fear God (Lk. 12:4, 5). Those that fear Him and work righteousness are the ones accepted with Him (Acts 10:34,35). Thus, "Fear God." (1 Pet. 2:17).

I once worked with a man that didn't believe in the eternal hell. He said, "I wouldn't take my son and cast him into a burning fire, and it is wrong to think that God will do that to men." I answered, "What we would or would not do has no bearing on what God will do. He has stated that He will do it to the disobedient and we need to respect what He says."

There is no fear of God in the hearts of men today. Many live in hope of somehow getting by at the judgment. They have ignored the severity of God as revealed in His Word and have deceived themselves into thinking that God is only a God of love and mercy and, thus, they continue to live a life of religious error and sin. They are willfully ignorant of the fact that God's mercy will be only on those that fear Him (Lk. 1:50).

Just as the reward will be great the punishment will be great. If we can't trust that the punishment will be great, neither could we trust that the reward will be great for the same God is author of both. The severity of God ought to compel us to a faithful service.

— David J. Riggs

Can You March Without Music?

It is said that Benedict Arnold was a better general than George Washington. He was a more handsome man and a more interesting conversationalist. But he had one conspicuous weakness -- he was unable to "MARCH WITHOUT MUSIC." Whenever General Benedict Arnold performed a task in a competent manner, he expected praise and acclaim, and if these were not forthcoming, he sulked and became morose.

In the hurry and scurry of the war there were times when the feats of General Arnold went unnoticed. This hurt in his most vital spot - his vanity. So he committed a terrible act -- he quit his job and placed the secrets of his country in the hands of the enemy.

Many people in the world, and some of them in the Lord's church, are a lot like Benedict Arnold. If things don't go to suit them, or if they feel that they have been neglected or slighted, or that their talents are not appreciated, they sell out to the devil. It is evident that such people will not work unless they are "IN THE LIMELIGHT."

Now we all like the sweet music of applause and we should "Give honor to whom honor is due," but let's always remember when the applause does not come promptly and when people seem not to notice, the real man, the worthy man, marches on -- without music.

- A. W. Criswold

THIS WEEK'S LESSONS: Sunday morning: *"Why We Sing and Do Not Play!"* (Text: Col. 3:16); Sunday evening: *"Characteristics of the Mature!"* (Text: Eph. 4:11-15).