

# WHERE IS THY GOD?

THE BAPTIST HOUR

July 14, 1957

Sometimes God is as hard to find as uranium! But for a purpose. He has great capacity for being elusive . . . He hides with the hope that man may seek Him with all his heart. Little did Job know that he was raising a question for millions, "Oh, that I knew where to find him." Many have searched so long that they have become exhausted and abandoned the effort. To some it is useless to continue a search through every church corridor, down many boulevards and avenues, across printed page and through personal testimony.

Nothing more than a vague, indefiniteness characterizes their feeling about God, like the words of the Rubiyat of Omar Khayam, "I sent my soul through the invisible, some letter of this after-life to spell, but by and by my soul came back to me and said, "I myself, am heaven and hell." "Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself." But if one hasn't found Him down the familiar, beaten paths, there is no reason to desert the search.

## HIS ETERNAL REMOTENESS

God has great capacity for remoteness . . . of necessity He must keep his distance, what with man's quick, vulgar use of all things for his own selfish consumption, God would be no exception. What sort of God would He be if many could handle, fondle, manipulate Him for his own convenience? Even with his present distance, many a religious despot has insisted on maneuvering God to accomplish unholy purposes God hides for the good reason that He knows man's destiny is not dust; to lure him to a higher destiny necessitates God's being on a higher level than ours. Too, God hides to keep man's ego in rightful size. If, like the heathen we could have God in hand at anytime, to kiss the toes of his feet, if God could be embraced in hours of need and travail only to be summarily dismissed in the high-noon of prosperity and indulgence, then He would be no God who could rebuke, chasten and sustain.

Ancient mystics had a refreshing kernel of truth when they admitted "when God seems the farthest from you, He at that moment is closest to you."

## WHY HE IS HARD TO FIND

One reason why He is hard to find is that we search for Him in the wrong places . . . It is true that He is omnipresent . . . everywhere . . . but you are not apt to find Him everywhere. There are places where He exists only in judgment and wrath . . . where His nature is revealed in indignation more than in solicitous love.

For instance, some people are trying to find God in a test tube or on a blackboard. I mean that the whole neoscientific method which believes that God can be apprehended and worshiped through techniques and gadgets . . . that He can be measured and determined by man's mastered arts is falling miserably beside the point. Man can tract the handiwork of his creator through chemistry, mathematics and slide rules, but these are not God . . . they merely trace his footsteps. One can no more find God in a test tube than he can find the artist in a painting, or music by tearing a violin apart, or a surgeon find man's personality by the scapel.

The tragedy is that some look for him in the wrong places, and finding Him not, conclude that He does not exist. Where would you most likely find Him? Well, where would a geologist start drilling for oil? Or a diamond merchant for his costly gems? Certain strata, certain conditions must exist for oil to be struck. Just so with religion. If God is in His holy temple, then why not go to the temple?

Moreover, many fail to find Him because they are moving in the wrong direction.

Many are on the right road but going the wrong direction. Having accepted the Lord Jesus as personal Saviour and declaring allegiance to Him through a pro-

fessedly religious devotion, we sometimes find ourselves walking back on the old roads whereon we travelled before this human-divine encounter. Frequenting the old habitats, looking back with Lot's wife, retasting the soup of sin and mildly wishing to be back . . . these are the activities by which spiritual growth is stunted and direction lost.

God cannot be found by half-hearted search. The promise is that, "he who seeks Me with all his heart shall find me." A casual visit to church only when mood and mind dictate, an occasional prayer instead of real praying, tips to God instead of tithes, perfunctory service . . . these will never locate the Maker.

If they could, then what He would say to us once we found Him would be totally beyond our understanding. When one finds Him, the admonition is to yield all, to walk beyond the sluggish pace of the masses, to climb the highest mountains, traverse the widest streams, to do the impossible by faith that can do anything, to restrain one's temper, and to cutoff the offending member with "wondrous potency." So, if half-heartedness could find Him, then the whole-hearted commands would make little sense.

One fails in his search when he is looking for the wrong kind of God. Many look for an avenger in God . . . one who invades the world to punish the wicked and reward the righteous . . . to expel that which harms and hurts while coddling those who claim a knowledge of Him. Recurrent in the cry of millions today is, "why doesn't God overpower the communists and install a reign of peace and righteousness?" Why doesn't He stop the wars?

Oh, the answer is easy: He isn't stopping for the simple reason that He didn't start them. Man is given free choice and if God were to forcibly intervene, then He would be dictator himself. And more than that, He doesn't necessarily punish men in time but at the end of time.

Man can never encounter God with unconfessed sin in his life. He will not tole-

rate intentional missing of the mark. Expecting God to be a living reality in a life that is cluttered by sin is expecting something that never happens. Only as an individual confesses and repents, can the distance between us and Him narrow to handshaking dimensions.

Then where is He? God is in the search for God . . . in the very craving to find Him . . . He sings in every thrush, smiles in every violet, speaks in every sunset, rebukes through every storm. He bears a strange disguise in pain, sits beside the numbed and griefstricken. God is in history grinding out His grist through the slow mills of cause and effort, trial and error, sowing and reaping. He lives in man's conscience to goad and inspire, leaving his footprints on guilty, penitence and sorrow.

God is in yesterday erasing the past that is confessed, in today providing daily bread. He is in tomorrow, rearranging, surveying, loving; in our dreams to suffuse life with anticipation and color. In every courageous act that heroically calls man to a higher plateau above the flats of sorry living; "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself."

The chances are that you will never find Him but you can be found by Him . . . that's the glory about it all! Jesus went seeking the sheep . . . not the sheep the shepherd. Yet, do not mistake this truth: though God takes the initiative, you must be willing to be found and once found, you must be willing to respond to the finder. To remain lost is to mark one as stupid . . . as well as blind.

Last night I walked down through winding trails to a beautiful garden where a small stream kept dancing between the rocks like a whirling dervish. A full-moon overhead illuminated the sky with millions of stars like diamonds in black velvet. The air was cleanly washed by an afternoon shower and the fragrance of tea olives completed the atmosphere of Eden. There my soul was lifted on an elevator of inspiration. And someone asks, "where is God?" I simply reply, "where is God not?"