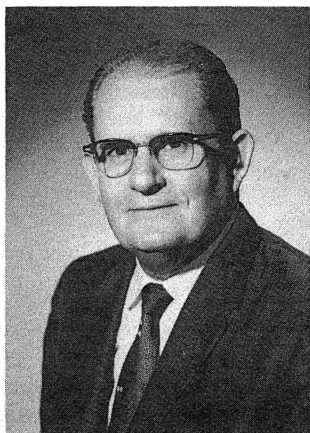


BAPTIST HOUR SERMONS

for June



By **Dr. Herschel H. Hobbs**
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THE SUBSTANCE OF SALVATION

June 7, 1959

Scripture: Acts 14:8-18

"Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein . . ." —Acts 14:15

When Paul and Barnabas came to Lystra they were in purely pagan territory. The writer Ovid relates a legendary visit of Jupiter and Mercury to this region, to commemorate which the city of Lystra had built a temple to Jupiter.

In the course of his preaching Paul healed a man crippled from birth. So astounded were the people that they reverted from their broken Greek to speak excitedly in their native tongue, "The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men." To them it was a return visit from their gods. Thus they called Barnabas Jupiter and Paul, the spokesman, Mercury.

The apostles, not understanding this

native tongue, were unaware of what was transpiring. But when the priest of Jupiter appeared with oxen to sacrifice to them, they were horrified. Seeking to dissuade them, they assured them that "we also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you . . ." Thus the apostle adapted his sermon to meet the occasion, as he sought to turn the people of Lystra from idols to the living God. In so doing he gave to them the substance of salvation.

Analyzing Paul's message we find three definite truths. First, the emptiness of their religion; second, the revelation of the living God; third, the redemptive will of God.

First, note the emptiness of their religion. In Acts 14:15 Paul exhorted these pagan people to "turn from these vanities." Thus he pointed to the emptiness of their statues and temple. In Romans I Paul points out that God has revealed Himself to all men. In the scriptures God reveals Himself as a triumphant

God, as three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—in one manifestation. But when men in their own minds seek to express the manifold nature of God, it is always in the form of idols or many gods. Man who was made in the image of God, sought to make God in the image of man, or worse.

The ancients worshipped the deification of their own passions and powers. For instance, the Greeks and Romans worshipped Aphrodite or Venus, the goddess of beauty and love; Diana, the goddess of fertility or sex, and Bacchus, the god of wine. The more idealistic Greeks made gods of their virtues, intellects, and graces. The Romans even worshipped their emperors, many of whom were devils incarnate.

To speak of pagan gods may seem a far cry to you as you listen to me. But is it so? While you do not bow down before pagan idols, many of you are guilty of idolatry nevertheless. How many of you bow down daily at the shrine of sensual beauty and love, or worship at the altar of alcoholic beverages or sex? Multitudes of you are devotees of gold, knowledge, moral achievements, or social attainments.

Perhaps the largest cult among modern men is Humanism, which is little more than the worship of man. Humanism has a big man and a little God. Its degree of salvation is measured by the accomplishments of man. It determines successful living by gadgets rather than by God.

Now Paul calls all such worship "vanities." It is empty and void of substance.

Why is such a religion empty? Because it does not meet the needs of the ultimate realities of life. It may be all right so long as your life moves along. But what about the time of crisis? One of the saddest scenes in the Old Testament pictures the test between Elijah and the priests of Baal on Mount Carmel. The issue was whether Jehovah or Baal was the true God. By prearrangement the

priests placed a sacrifice on their altar, crying for Baal to consume it. I Kings 18:26 says "*But there was no voice, nor any that answered*" (author's italics).

Such is the experience of every one of you who trusts in false gods. Sorrow comes, temptations assail your heart, a thousand devils clutch after your soul. What then? You cry to your fabricated religion, but there is no voice, nor any that answer. Your god, whatever it may be—possessions, intellect, moral righteousness, fleshy appetites, dignity as a man—is like the giant statue of Buddah. There he sits amid all the cares and heartaches of men—serene, with closed eyes, smiling face, and folded hands—and never a move to minister to man's ultimate needs. It is no wonder that Paul urges you to "turn from these vanities unto the living God."

Second, the revelation of the living God. Note that Paul does not here refer to the Hebrew scriptures which were unknown to his pagan audience. Rather he points to God's revelation in natural creation. He refers to Him as the God who "gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons" (Acts 14:17). To these pagans Jupiter was the god of rain. Mercury, as the god of merchandise, was also the dispenser of food. Thus in one statement Paul swept aside these pagan gods, ascribing their work to the one true God. These simple agricultural people could understand such language.

Thus Paul exhorts them to turn from the gods which they have made to the God who made the universe, and who orders their daily living.

That is my call to you. No matter how great your self-made concept of deity may be, God is infinitely greater. Setting aside the baser worship of the appetites of the flesh, let me ask you three questions as to that which you regard as the ultimate value in your life. *Is it your intellect?* To the Corinthians who did likewise, Paul wrote, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.

Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?" (I Cor. 1:19-20). *Is it your wealth?* God made it all. No wonder that Jesus warned of the "deceitfulness of riches" (Matt. 13:22) saying, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God" (Mk. 10:23) —not because they are wealthy, but because they trust in gold rather than in God. *Is it your self-righteousness?* Isaiah 64:6 says, "But we are all as an unclean thing, and our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away."

The truth which stands out against the background of our scriptures is that every contrivance of man to meet his ultimate needs is vanity or emptiness. I ask you to turn to a careful study of the book of Ecclesiastes, wherein Solomon relates his futile search for the real meaning of life. Said he, "I gave my heart to search out by wisdom (1:13) . . . pleas-

ure (2:1) . . . wine (2:3) . . . great works . . . houses . . . vineyards . . . gardens and orchards (2:4f.) . . . servants and maidens (2:7) . . . silver and gold (2:8)." The result? "Therefore," said Solomon, "I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me: for all is vanity and vexation of spirit" (2:17).

What a picture of our present day as we try to build a world without God! Many of you have tried all these things, yet you are bored to tears, you hate life. Solomon closes this book by saying, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole (duty) of man" (12:13). It is his way of saying what Paul said centuries later. "We . . . preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God . . ."

Third, note the redemptive will of God. It would seem at first glance that in this sermon Paul made no mention of Jesus. But when we look back to Acts 14:7 we read, "And there they preached the gospel." Where? In Lystra. And what was the gospel? In Acts 14:3 Luke speaks of "the word of his grace." We do no violence to the meaning of this phrase when we capitalize "Word." So the gospel is "the Word of his grace." This was ever the theme of Paul's preaching, "the Word of his grace."

Thus Paul did not merely point these pagan people to a God of nature but to a God of grace. He was revealed not merely in rain and fruits, but in righteousness and forgiveness. What does "the Word of his grace" include? It refers to all the facts concerning Jesus of Nazareth—His life, death, resurrection, and saving power. Here, then, is the substance of salvation.

Therefore, when Paul challenged these pagan people to "turn from these vanities," he did not leave them in a hopeless void. Instead he offered them "the living God" who reveals Himself not only in daily providence but also in eternal salvation. Actually these people

Baptist Hour Sermon Topics for July

Dr. Herschel H. Hobbs

Theme: Essentials

- July 5—More than Religion
(Acts 17:22)
- July 12—More Than Wisdom
(Acts 18:11)
- July 19—More Than Sincerity
(Acts 19:3)
- July 26—More Than Prosperity
(Acts 19:20)

Hear them on
THE BAPTIST HOUR
Read them in
THE BEAM

were groping in darkness after an experience with reality. The best which their efforts had achieved was emptiness. Paul points them to "the living God" who had revealed Himself in "the Word of his grace." (With Zacharias in Luke 1:78-79 they could now say, "The day-spring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.")

The greatest difficulty which you encounter as you try to "turn from these vanities unto the living God" is your fear that if you relinquish them your life will be empty. When I offer you Jesus I am extending to you the very substance of life. Listen to me. You live in a mad search for thrills. Christ offers you peace (Jn. 14:27). You pursue earthly knowledge. Christ would give you "the power of God and the wisdom of God" (I Cor. 1:24). You cling to your worldly wealth. Christ would "commit to your trust the true riches" (Lk. 16:11). You seek to establish your own righteousness. Christ would give to you "the righteousness of God" (Rom. 10:3). You desire the abundant life. Christ would give to you abundant life, not only in this life but in the life to come.

How do you "turn from these vanities

unto the living God"? First, you must be convicted of your sin of refusing God and trusting in these vanities. You must be convinced of their emptiness and of God's ability to supply all your needs. Second, you must repent of your empty life. Repentance means a change of mind and attitude. You must see what your serving your self-made gods has done to the living God. You must see that your sin is not against yourself but against God. Third, in faith you must turn to Jesus who is the very fullness or essence of God. You must forsake your reliance upon the vanities of your empty life, and trust in Jesus for fullness of life, for salvation. You must turn from the folly of sin to a new life in Christ Jesus. Like Moses you must choose "rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt . . ." (Heb. 11:25-26).

And this you can do this very moment. I ask you, "Will you turn from these vanities unto the living God?" If you will say, "I will" and mean it, then you can, in truth, sing, "'Tis done; the great transaction's done! I am my Lord's, and he is mine . . ."

SALVATION BY GRACE

June 14, 1959

Scripture: Acts 15:1-29

"But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they"—Acts 15:11

A problem had arisen on the mission field due to conflicting gospel messages being preached by Paul and Barnabas on the one hand and certain Jewish-Christians, or Judaizers, from Jerusalem on the other. The issue involved the very heart of the Christian gospel.

Upon hearing of the problem of the church in Antioch, which appointed Paul and Barnabas as missionaries, voluntarily requested a conference with the Jerusalem church of which the Judaizers were members. Subsequently duly appointed messengers from Antioch met with the entire Jerusalem church (Acts 15:12,22) to debate the matter in deliberative assembly.

This problem involved not only these