

# CAMPING

## *outside the gates*

BY J. WINSTON PEARCE

Have you ever observed a band of roving gypsies? If you have, you have seen them make camp just outside the city limits—not in the city but just outside.

If their camp were within the city limit, restrictions would be imposed and a certain order of life would have to be followed. Certain sanitation laws and precautions would have to be observed. Responsibilities as citizens in the way of government, taxes, and civic welfare would be imposed. But since the gypsies live outside the city limits, many of these responsibilities and obligations do not apply. At the same time, these squatters are free to come and go within the city at will. They can ply their trade during the day and

then return at night to the unrestricted and undisciplined conditions outside of the city.

The gypsies want to be close to the city. They would be unhappy and impoverished if they could not be near and have advantages that the citizens of the town enjoy.

Heaven's gates were open wide,  
But still the gypsies camped  
outside.

*The world is filled with religious "gypsies."* They seek to camp just outside the kingdom—not far outside, but still outside. They want the benefits of of kingdom living for themselves and their families. They recognize the moral, social, intellectual, and even economic advantages of the Christian church and community. They would not

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think of living in, or owning property in, a community where there were no churches, where there were no God-fearing men and women who serve as "the salt of the earth" to check the decay and putrefaction of society, making society wholesome and useful. They insist that their wives and their children must be protected by, and must benefit from, the Christian community.

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Jesus once said to a religious gypsy, "Thou are *not far* from the kingdom." Not far, close, near, on the border, but still not in—and "a miss is as good as a mile." A plane almost clears the treetops on its take-off—not quite, almost. A student almost passes an examination — not quite, almost. A businessman is placed in a spot of great responsibility and trust, and he has almost enough moral strength to withstand the onslaught of temptation—almost, not quite, and "a miss is as good as a mile."

### ALMOST, BUT LOST

What pathetic illustrations of this truth you come upon in Scripture! Paul stood one day before King Agrippa. Forgetting his own perilous position, Paul drove straight for the soul of the king. Agrippa was amazed at the boldness and brilliance of the apostle; he was astounded that Paul would dare *even to*

*convert the KING.* Agrippa stood face to face with the greatest living exponent of the gospel of Christ. The gospel was presented; the plea was made. Agrippa heard and considered, and as the King James Version has it, he said, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian" (Acts 26: 28). Almost, not quite, and "a miss is as good as a mile!"

The telephone rings: there is a request that a minister come to a certain home at a given address. There is a death in the family. "No, the family does not have local church affiliation. Could the minister, would the minister come? Of course he will. The minister goes. He talks with the family, bringing what comfort and consolation the Scriptures allow. The family is so grateful. Would the minister be willing to conduct a brief funeral service? Yes, he would.

"No, the man was not a member of any church, but he was a good man . . . No, he was not a professing Christian, but he was a good provider. He always cared for his home . . . No, I am sorry preacher, to say, he was not a professing Christian. He never got around to it, but, preacher, he was a good man. He loved his family; he was honest; he never ran around with other women; he was as good as the days are long . . . No, he never went to church. He always seemed so tired and worn out, and there were so many things he wanted to do here at home for the family. But, preacher, I don't want you

to feel that he was an infidel. Oh, no, he believed in God. Yes, he often said so."

And a good minister of the Lord Jesus bows his head as the words of James come unbidden to his mind an conscience, "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe and tremble." Not far, almost, not quite, and "a miss is good as a mile."

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And no matter how sympathetic the good minister is, no matter how anxious he is to bring comfort, no matter how well he knows that the occasion is not for preaching and lecturing and that God is the only just judge, still he is definite in his knowledge and conviction about some things.

First, let us be clear on this. Heaven's gates are open wide to salvation and the Saviour.

"He did not come to judge the world.

He did not come to blame;

He did not come to seek—

It was to save He came:

And when we call Him Saviour,

Then we call Him by His name.

"Thou shalt call His name Jesus; for He shall save His people from their sins." This is man's first concern; his religion begins with his own personal salvation through the forgiving and atoning death of Christ.

Second, the gates swing open to the constant presence of Christ as well as to His salvation. "I will not fail thee, nor

forsake thee." That is a precious promise. These gates do not swing open just to an initial meeting with the Saviour for cleansing and forgiveness and then leave the saved to "go it alone." The world is so heavy with loneliness. In the play, *Member of the Wedding*, Frankie Adams says that she is the only person that doesn't belong to a "we" and that not to belong to a "we" makes one lonesome. Did you ever hear it stated more effectively? Not to belong to a "we" does make one lonesome, and if a person belongs to the right "we," obstacles can be taken in stride and difficulties can be overcome.

### GOD'S CARE

Third, these gates swing open to the providential care of God. This is so effective at times that it may even be misleading. Think of Joseph, for instance. He was a spoiled, egotistical youth. His brothers sold him into slavery. The father's heart was broken; for years he believed that Joseph was dead. But then Joseph became a means by which the family was saved from starvation. When Joseph's brothers begged his forgiveness for what they had done, Joseph told them that they were not to blame themselves, for in reality it was God's doing; they had meant it unto him for evil, but God had meant it for good.

That would seem to be a rather dangerous doctrine. The cruelty and hardness of heart

which made them sell a brother into slavery, the lying to their father, permitting him to believe that his son had been killed by a wild animal—all this was the doing of God? No, we think not, but God is so great and so good, His providence is so real and so effective that He can take even the sin of man and bring good out of it. Given a chance God works in all. He will let nothing happen to a true child of His that the two of them cannot handle together. Heaven's gates swing open to His providential care.

### OPEN GATE

Again, Heaven's gates swing open to *wide usefulness*. Isn't it marvelous how God uses individuals, all kinds of individuals? Escaped murderers living at the back side of a desert among the sheep, forgotten by man but not forgotten by God, are sent to lead a whole nation of people. Here a cobbler, William Carey; there a tinker, John Bunyan; yonder a farmer boy, John Clough; there in the gutter, a drunk, Jerry McCauley; up there at the top of the ladder a Borden of Yale—all these and thousands of others enter Heaven's gates to a wider usefulness in His kingdom.

The only thing that really matters in the light of God's tomorrow is to be a true child of God and to find a field of usefulness in His kingdom. Gladstone, the English states-

man, was apologetic and embarrassed all of his life over not being a minister of the gospel. He said that he could have been a minister of the Lord Jesus Christ, but all he became was her majesty's prime minister!

Years ago my boyhood pastor was driving his car past a deacon's house out in the country. Seeing the deacon on top of a barn, the preacher parked his car and went to the barn for a visit. After greeting the deacon, the preacher saw that the young son of the deacon was playing by the side of the barn. The boy had a toy hammer and a handful of crooked, rusty nails. The child was trying to drive the nails into the hard, red clay. Some of the nails were so crooked and rusty that they could not be driven into the ground. "What are you doing, son?" asked the preacher. "Me and my daddy's building a barn, Mr. Howard," he said. The preacher smiled. Toy hammer, crooked, rusty nails, and hard clay? "You poor child," thought the preacher, "little help your father is getting there." But something had happened on top of the barn. The father had heard his son say, "Me and my daddy's building a barn, Mr. Howard." The heavy hammer held firmly in the strong right hand of the father paused in mid-air as the father heard and smiled at the words of his young son. Then, with a few mighty strokes that had behind them power they had not felt before, the forty-penny

nail was driven to its head in the rafters of the barn.

Presently the preacher was on his way, but not to forget the incident of the boy and his father. That night before the preacher went to sleep his pillow was wet with tears of joy and gratitude as his heart said over and over again, "Dear Father, so often my effort seems as useless as the child's. The hammer seems to be only a toy; the nails are rusty and crooked; the ground is hard and unyielding. It is hard, Father, it is hard, but by Thy love and through Thy grace You and I are building a kingdom!"

This is the wider usefulness of the children of God to which the gates swing open!

This, then, is what Heaven's gates swing open to — salvation and the Saviour. Do you know Him and the forgiveness of your sins? If not, won't you come through the gates now?

This is what Heaven's gates swing open to — the constant presence of God. Are you lonely? Do you often feel that you stand alone and no one understands? Heaven's gates are open to you — won't you come in today?

This is what Heaven's gates swing open to — God's providential care. Do you sometimes feel that life is just too much for you and that all these things are against you? He can make them all work together for good — won't you trust Him?

This is what Heaven's gates swing open to — a wider usefulness. Do you ever feel that your life is useless? Do you long to be a worthy part of some great place and purpose? Come, come within Heaven's gates today. Trust Christ; give your life to Him; obey Him in service — He will bless you *today*.

Heaven's gates are open wide,  
Let's us gypsies go inside!

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## The Baptist Hour

### SERMON TOPICS for October

#### Dr. Herschel H. Hobbs

- Oct. 2—The God of History (Amos 1-2)
  - Oct. 9—The Cycle of History (Amos 3)
  - Oct. 16—God's Judgment in History (Amos 4)
  - Oct. 23—Dedication or Desolation (Amos 5)
  - Oct. 30—The Siren Son of Synthetic Security (Amos 6)
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