

THE BAPTIST HOUR

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THE ETERNAL WORD

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THE ETERNAL WORD

Twenty-five years ago one of America's leading preachers noted that we were entering an era of unprecedented change in civilization. Noting that every age is one of gradual change, he pointed out that this present era would be one in which old molds of life would be broken and new ones formed. Concluded the preacher, "The old age is dead. A new age is being born. What kind of child will this new age be?"

The preacher spoke more wisdom than he knew. For, since he wrote these words, the world has been ravaged by two wars. It lives in the toils of a "cold war" between two distinct and diverse ways of life. During the intervening years mankind has stumbled into the atomic age and soared into the space age.

It seems that the only constant thing in life is change. The physical and social landmarks of former years have been torn down, and nothing has been given to replace them. It is no wonder that we live in a state of uncertainty.

But need that be the case? Our present plight is due largely to the fact that we interpret our world against the background of the passing scene. We read life by the hours instead of by the centuries. We have built upon the shifting sands of time rather than upon the eternal Rock of Ages.

Within this context I ask that for the next thirteen weeks we shall consider those elements of life that are eternal. If we are to find an anchor in the storm which presently rages about our world, we must pray in truth the words of Henry F. Lyte.

*"Change and decay in all around
I see:
O Thou who changest not, abide
with me."*

Therefore, as a beginning, let us consider today the topic "The Eternal Word." It was this which Peter had in mind when he quoted from Isaiah 40:8. *"The grass withereth and the flower thereof falleth away:*

but the word of the Lord endureth for ever."

As we consider "The Eternal Word" let us note, first, the changing scene; second, the abiding Word; third, the blessed assurance.

THE CHANGING SCENE

"For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away." (I Pet. 1:24)

Is not this God's way of saying that the physical, human things of life are but temporary? In the spring the earth is carpeted with green inlaid with colorful flowers. But under the hot winds of summer and the chilling blasts of winter the grass withers, the flowers fade.

God says that life is like that. Prosperity comes only to give away the calamity. If you build your life on either you are building on the temporary. In the first decade of this century a humanistic philosophy saw man as having progressed beyond war. Then came World War I. The "roaring twenties" brought unprecedented prosperity. Then the stock market crash.

By the scores, business men leaped from their skyscraper offices to their death. The numbing years of the great depression ended in the war-fed economy of the 1940's, an economy bathed in blood.

During the post-war years "we never had it so good." But even now Wall Street has the jitters, produced by a head-on clash between big business and government. The free world continues to dance to the tune played by Khrushchev and Mao-Tse Tung.

Is this forever to be our lot? So long as we build life against the background of the changing scene, it will be. Our only hope is to lay the foundations of life in that which is eternal.

Doctor Karl Barth, a German-Swiss theologian, is best known in the theological world as the man who called modern theology back from the extremes of liberalism (a theology which discounted the Bible in favor of natural science) to a Bible-centered the-

ology. In this light a recently reported statement by Doctor Barth is most revealing. Someone quotes him as saying that he got his first theology, liberalism, under the Kaiser, and his second, Bible-centered, under Hitler. It was his way of saying that in times of prosperity one may build his life on temporal foundations. But when life goes to pieces he needs a foundation that is unshakeable and sure. Such a foundation is the eternal Word of God.

Two other bits of recent information add to the picture. For years Christendom has found satisfaction in the fact that the Bible is the perennial best seller. But recently the American Bible Society revealed that this is no longer true. The works of Lenin are first; those of Khrushchev are second; the Bible is third.

But add to this a second release from the same source. In Cuba last year the distribution of Bibles increased from 611,993 to 906,660. In the Congo the increase was 75,000 over the previous year. In releasing this story the Associated Press commented that in areas of political turmoil there is a greater demand for the Bible. The free world may well learn a lesson from the experiences of others.

THE ABIDING WORD

Literally, Peter says, "But the word of the Lord keeps on abiding unto the ages." This is in contrast to the passing scene.

Build your life on the changing scene, and it will ever be unstable. Build it on the abiding Word of God and it will be sure.

A farmer told his son that in order to plow a straight furrow he should fix his eyes on a fence post at the end of the field and plow toward it. Doing so he found that his furrow wavered from one side of the field to the other. To his dismay he found that what he thought was a post was the horn of a wandering, grazing cow. This is a parable of man's experience in every generation as he has sought to relate his life to the changing standards of man's judg-

ment rather than to God's fixed gauge of the Word which shall stand forever.

The Bible is God's written revelation of Himself and His will and purpose to man. God is eternal, and we find His eternity stamped upon His Word. Paul tells us literally that "*all scripture is God-breathed.*" (II Tim. 3:16) And as God is sure, so His Word is sure. Further Paul says that it "*is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*" (vv.16-17)

The psalmist found it to be so. "*The law of the Lord is perfect, converting [restoring] the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.*" (19:7-9)

The Bible rightly related to your life will make it richer and more meaningful. It is not a book of poetry, but it contains some of the world's greatest poems. It is not a book of philosophy, but its pages are interwoven with the only true philosophy of life. It is not a book of psychology, yet no psychology worthy of the name can ignore its teachings. It is not a text book of science, still there is no proved fact or tenable theory in science which does not find a compatible atmosphere within its pages.

The Bible is not a book of romance, but some of literature's greatest love stories are contained therein. The Bible is not a text book in history. Yet it has stood the test of every criterion of authentic history. It contains trustworthy history not found elsewhere. On occasion it even corrects the mistakes of secular historians, a fact that has been attested by the discoveries of archaeology.

The Bible has lived under every type of government and in every form of society. It has survived bad government, and produced good rule. It

has stood in judgment upon moral and social evil, and has guided man's feet into the ways of righteousness.

Truth, whether discovered in science, philosophy, or religion, is one and the same. For all is of God. Each of these three areas of man's experience is a legitimate field of inquiry. Each has its own method of pursuing truth, its own criteria for determining truth, and its own way of drawing conclusions as to ultimate reality. Each is autonomous within its own realm. Conflict between the three comes only when any one seeks to impose its authority within the realm of the other.

It is at this point that the Bible has come into conflict with science and philosophy. Neither physical science nor philosophy is capable of answering the ultimate questions of life. They are but man's efforts by investigation and reason to pursue truth. The Bible is God's revelation of Him who is Truth. And in Him alone does man find the true and abiding meaning of life.

In its deepest sense the Bible is a book of religion. It interprets both natural and personal experience in terms of the relationship of both the universe and man to God. The Bible contains mysteries which defy our finite understanding.

But we may well be like the man who said that he was not so much disturbed by the part of the Bible which he did not understand as by that part which he does understand.

Simply because I cannot understand some portion of God's Word is no reason why I should not believe it. The authority of the Bible is not merely legal or mechanical. It is spiritual and experiential. It speaks to the deepest needs of my soul with an authority and certainty which cannot be denied. Samuel Taylor Coleridge said, "I know the Bible is inspired because it finds me at a greater depth of my being than any other book."

THE BLESSED ASSURANCE

In a world which is as withering grass and a fading flower your great-

est need is that of a blessed assurance. You will find it in the Word of God which "endureth for ever."

Thomas Carlyle called it "the book wherein, for a thousand years, the spirit of man has found light and nourishment, and the response to whatever was deepest in his heart."

William E. Gladstone, one of history's greatest legal minds, said, "If I am asked what is the remedy for the deeper sorrows of the human heart, I must point to something which in the well-known hymn is called 'The old, old story,' told of an old, old Book and taught with the old, old teaching which is the greatest and best guide ever given to mankind."

I do not ask that you accept without question the experiences of others. But I do challenge you to prove it for yourself.

The secretary of one of the most powerful men in the United States government told me that on his desk at all times is a worn, much used Bible. Often when she enters his office without warning she finds him poring over the pages of God's Book as he feeds his soul on its messages. Why do you not do the same?

In your office, in your home, when you see life being shattered about you, read the ninetieth psalm. "*Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations.*" Or the twenty-third psalm. "*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.*"

As you look upon the mystery of God's universe, bathe your soul in the story of creation in Genesis 1-2. Or Psalm 19: "*The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork.*" Let the mystery and grandeur of it engulf your soul.

When sorrow comes, feed your heart on John 14. "*Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.*"

In time of bitterness turn to I Corinthians 13. "*Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity [love] . . .*"

When you are tempted turn to Hebrews 4. "*For we have not an high*

priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." (vv.15-16)

Read your Bible by chapters, by books, by the biography of its characters. Exult in the poetic and prophetic sweep of Isaiah. Find the wrath of God against sin in Amos. Feel God's love for the sinner in Hosea. Sharpen your spiritual reasoning powers with Paul in Romans. Travel the mysterious but victorious highway of the Revelation. Hear the thunders of Sinai as God reveals to you the moral and spiritual wonders of the Ten Commandments. Worship the King in Matthew. Work with the mighty Worker in Mark. Walk with the Son of Man in Luke. Wonder at the eternal Logos in John. Follow the bloody trail of Acts as with the mighty of old you subdue kingdoms and work righteousness.

Most of all follow God's redemptive will and purpose from Genesis 1 through Revelation 22. Learn that the wages of sin is death, but that the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Through the pages of the written Word come to know Him who is the living Word in whom you will find life everlasting. Then regardless of the changing scene you will have the foundation of God which standeth sure. (II Tim. 2:19).

This sermon leaflet is free. However, if you wish to share in the cost of printing and distribution our address is: THE BAPTIST HOUR, P. O. Box 12157, Fort Worth 16, Texas.

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