

HEAVEN'S INTEREST IN OUR EARTHLY PILGRIMAGE

Sermon delivered before the Southern Baptist Convention, Forth Worth, Texas, May 14, 1934, by Dr. T. Holcomb, First Baptist Church, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

Text: "I am with you always" (Matt. 28:20).

Beloved, as we begin this most important session of the Southern Baptist Convention, may we like Moses take our stand in the "cleft of the rock," with a prayerful and sincere desire to behold God in His glory. May we realize something of the nearness of His holy presence. May we also understand more clearly His interest in us and His divine will and purpose for us individually and for our denomination at this particular period in the world's history.

INTEREST MANIFESTED BY WHOM

In my reading and study of the Bible, the verbal message of the Holy Spirit, it gives me great encouragement to find that God is much more vitally concerned about us and our welfare than we have ever been about him and his work. May we therefore think together this morning about the deep and abiding interest of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit in our pilgrimage. May we also think of the interest that the angels and the heavenly witnesses have in us.

God the Father—God the Father is greatly concerned about us in every relationship of life. No man ever trusted Him in vain. He is able and willing to help us meet every emergency that we face. How refreshing it is to walk up the mountain side with Abraham and Isaac and to see that in the tragic moment of anxiety and despair the arm of infinite mercy can reach from heaven to earth and provide an offering as a substitute for human life. How wonderful it is to realize that this same arm is ready to supply every need we have today.

In his early ministry, Dr. B. H. Carroll, whose influence will perhaps

be felt more definitely in this convention than any living messenger, decided that he would learn all he could about Moses, in whom God manifested such great interest and whom He led and delivered from so many dangers which he and the Children of Israel faced. As God led and protected His people then, so has He delivered and led us; and my own prayer today is that this great company of sinners saved by grace, delivered from darkness and bondage more awful than was ever felt in Egypt, may learn to sing with greater joy than ever before "The Song of Deliverance."

I heard Dr. F. B. Myer tell this story, which was supposed to have happened as the Children of Israel camped in the wilderness. A father took his son and daughter for a walk to see more of the big tent city. They were all excited and asked many questions which the father answered as they went along. He pointed out the tents of the eolders, of Aaron, of Joshua and of Moses. They they said: "Oh father who lives in that beautiful tent?" He replied: "That is the Tabernacle of God." After a moment for thought the hchildren said: "If God lives with us, we should not be afraid." "Lo, I am with you always."

One of the noble pastors here in this convention had this experience. The sweetheart of his boyhood, the wife of his young manhood and the mother of his children died. She had been his companion in poverty and in prosperity. Together they had shared life's joys and sorrows. Together they had prayed and served in God's Kingdom. The funeral was over, a night had passed, friends had gone their way. He stood facing the day--puzzled, bewildered, lonesome--when the 23rd Psalm came to him, "Yea though I walk through..." Then there came a sweet assurance. Your heavenly Father does not lead into but through the valley.

Christ the Son--A careful reading concerning the birth, life, ministry, death, resurrection, ascension and present work of Jesus Christ will prepare any company of believers for a great convention. Please review with me, therefore, some of the very familiar statements regarding our Saviour. "Thou shalt call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins." Call His name Emmanuel, God with us. "For there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." "For he Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

"But none of the ransomed ever knew
How deep were the waters crossed;
Nor how dark was the night the Lord passed thro'
Ere he found his sheep that was lost."

We were redeemed by the precious blood of Christ.

"Jesus paid it all,
All to him I owe;
Sin had left a crimson stain,
He washed it white as snow."

"They drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ." He is our smitten Rock, and as we face the problems of this convention, may each of us cry with the Psalmist: "Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I."

He is our refuge, the safety zone of the soul. He is our secure foundation, "for other foundation can no man lay." "The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose,

"I will not, I will not desert to its foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no, never, no never forsake."

God the Holy Spirit--When the earth was without form, and void, the spirit of God brooded over the face of the waters. And God said, let there be light; and there came a light that will never go out and a new life that will never end.

The Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin against God, quickens our stony hearts, and regenerates our lost souls. After you believed in Christ, you were sealed by the Holy Spirit, marked as the purchased possession of God and given continuous evidence of the perfect and complete fulfilment of every promise regarding His children.

The Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, shall teach you all things. leave
 "Peace I ~~leave~~ with you, my peace I give unto you Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

"O spread your tidings round, wherever

man is found,

Wherever human hearts and human

woes abound;

Let every Christian tongue proclaim the

joyful sound;

The Comforter has come!"

Come, even now, Holy Spirit; burn up the dross, warm our hearts, energize our lives and prepare us for a great convention.

"Come, Holy Spirit, heavenly dove,

With all thy quickening powers;

Kindle a flame of sacred love

In these cold hearts of ours."

The Angels--I have always been interested in angels, that special group of God's creation, so often spoken of in the Bible--encamping angels, guarding angels, ministering angels, warning angels, angels of the churches, rejoicing angels, trumpeting angels, singing angels, announcing angels, prophets of the return of Jesus in glory, angels who will accompany him.

Brethren, if we could only behold them, I think we would find that the angels are lingering near today, anxious to see what a blood bought throng will do for a lost ~~work~~ ^{world} in the name and for the glory of a risen Lord.

As a pastor I often sit by the bed of a dying Christian. When I see that only a few minutes remain, I feel like moving back and standing in honor of the heavenly escort, those who have come to accompany the soul of my friend into the eternal city.

Heavenly Witnesses—One of the greatest inspirations that can come to earthly pilgrims is the fact that we are being observed by heavenly witnesses, those who have gone on before, and who are certainly greatly concerned about our welfare. "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

Not all the churches in our convention territory have ever been represented in any session of this noble body, and never will be. However, all of them are represented in the cloud of witnesses. The number is rapidly increasing. New spirits have gone to join the celestial hosts from every state, every association and nearly every church since we met last year. Truly these friends in glory are beckoning us on with the Master's work.

"To the work! to the work! we are
 children of God
 Let us follow the path that our Master
 has trod;
 With the balm of his counsel our
 strength to renew,
 Let us do with our might what our
 hands find to do."

DIVINE DIRECTION AND OUR OBLIGATION

Up to the present I have discussed the fact of Heaven's interest in our pilgrimage, interest that is manifested by God the Father, God

the Holy Spirit, and also by the angels and heavenly witnesses. May I now talk with you about this interest as shown by God's direction of our pilgrimage and about the corresponding obligation that rests on us because of this interest and direction. May I point out some of the marks, characteristics and duties of the Christian pilgrim, even daring to suggest some of the things that seem to me to be of supreme importance at this time.

Under Divine Orders—God has a program for the Christian life. It is divinely planned, revealed and directed. We are marching under the orders and banner of King Emmanuel. We have a glorious message to tell, a rich fellowship to share, a royal service to render, and at the end of the journey an eternal dwelling in the Father's House. "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." It is all so wonderful, but the world does not know it.

"He has sounded forth the trumpet that
 shall never sound retreat;
 He is sifting out the hearts of men before
 His judgment seat.
 O be swift, my soul, to answer Him! be
 jubilant my feet!

Our God is marching on."

The Christian life is more than a journey or pilgrimage. We have a holy mission to perform. We are to preach the gospel, to make Christ known to the world, to win the lost to Him.

With such a mission, surely we should be faithful to the task committed to us, even unto the end of the day. In the 44th chapter of Genesis, Joseph made himself known to his brethren. They came to know that he was indeed their brother and that he had fully and freely forgiven them. All the power and influence of the realm would be used for them. ~~All~~ Their sacks were filled with corn and they were provided with

food and clothing for the journey. Joseph came to tell them goodbye and to give them this last word of Counsel, "See that ye fall not out by the way." "You are my brethren, conscious of a new relationship. Stay close together; you have precious burdens; avoid the perils of the way. Your loved ones are starving for bread. Go with haste; there is no time for delay. The disconsolate and the broken hearted are waiting for your message of good news. Go my brethren; tell of all the glory you have seen, the good news you have heard, and carry the bread to the dying. But please do not delay for any cause at all. See that you do not fall out by the way."

March of Faith--Our earthly journey should be a march of faith. We should have faith in Christ as our Saviour and Lord and faith in men as the objects of God's deep concern and redeeming love.

Last Sunday morning, in your church, you observed Mothers' Day, and I am sure it was a great hour. Your mind was filled with holy memories. You came away to this convention humming some of the old tunes mother used to sing. Why do we love our mothers? Why do we delight to honor them? Here is the answer--because they had faith in God and in us. Any individual or organization that expects to abide in the love of even one generation must look up with faith in God and look out with faith, hope and love for mankind. Such faith furnishes a lifetime romance for teachers, missionaries and preachers, because no one knows the tomorrow of any one who will trust God and serve his fellow man.

March of Conquest--With the promise of the presence of God our pilgrimage should be a march of conquest. That is God's plan for us. We are to win not only our own people, but we are also to make disciples of all nations.

Growth and progress are achieved by conquest. The ^{growth}~~growth~~ of our

country from time of its settlement to the passing of the fleet through the Panama Canal is a graphic picture of conquest, over every natural barrier, crowned with glory and success.

The history of Texas, our host state, is as fascinating as any love story ever written. The messengers to this convention came by train or by automobile. Some, perhaps, came by airplanes. You counted your time by hours and your distance by hundreds of miles each day. But the pioneers, who came to this state in the early days, spent many long and weary months covering the same distance.

However, after you know the church life of this city and state, visit the Southwestern Seminary and feel its impact and that of the Baptist colleges and universities of the state. You will declare with one accord that the patient pioneer won a victory for God and man that can never be surpassed.

The call today, as clear as any bugle blast on the morning air, is for a spiritual conquest. God is calling and the world is impatiently waiting for a great revival. The call is for a spiritual leadership, with a message so clear, a faith so simple and a spirit so self-sacrificing that God will send a revival of Holy Ghost power; yes a soul saving life redeeming, character building, faith establishing revival of old time religion.

Brethren, we have no message for a lost world, or even for one poor, dying man except the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is our message, and, only by preaching it and putting forth every effort possible to win men to Christ, may we hope to have that spiritual conquest which God expects of us.

The most encouraging message ever given a preacher was that given to the Apostle Paul on the deck of a storm torn ship. The crew had spent fourteen days in a mad effort to save the cargo and the ship.

We are facing the first summer in the history of our country with that disastrous combination of nationwide highways, fast cars and legalized liquor. It will doubtless be the fastest, the lowest and in every way the most demoralizing vacation ever experienced by the youth of America. What can we do? Plan right now to match this wild orgy of sin by increased spiritual zeal and the greatest number of revivals ever held in the same length of time. If it is not given us to win all that sail with us, may we not "by all means ave some."

Our Main Business---Jesus came "to seek and to save that which was lost," and he said: "Even so send I you." Our main business, therefore, is to win the lost, to rescue the perishing. In my humble judgment, if this is to be a recover convention, we must give ourselves even from this hour to prayer and planning so that the world may know, not by resolutions but by endeavor, that we as Southern Baptists regard soul winning as our main business in the churches, through the schools, at home, and on foreign fields.

Friends, this world is lost. We are told that in the territory of the Southern Baptist Convention, where our churches are located and where we serve, that of the 31,000,000 white people, more than 16,500,000 do not belong to any church whatever and make no pretense of religion of any kind. In my own state, Oklahoma, one of the most progressive in the union, it is said that 76 out of every 100 make no profession of faith in Christ. Men and women are dead in trespasses and sins and all of the modern conveniences and comforts cannot change the fact of death.

I want to conduct a funeral in a factory section. The people who owned the plant were Christian men and did all they could with flowers and their nice cars to help the family. The kindhearted undertaker though he would comfort the children by pointing out the lovely flowers and big cars. We rode a few blocks and then the oldest girl said: "We appreciate every-

thing the people have done for us, but mother is dead. We are following the hearse, we are on our way to the grave."

Oh, for a zeal that will consume us, a holy passion that will dominate us and cause this convention to set evangelism out as the main task of blood bought men!

I have read again and again, in these testing days, the Bible account of Rahab. She lived in a city that was doomed and there was no hope except behind the scarlet line. Her only message and mission was to "bring thy father and thy mother, and thy brethren, and all thy father's household, home unto thee," behind the blood red line. And when the strange parade began around the walls of the city, they still had peace because they were all in and safe.

The gospel is our only message, our only hope. I have no criticism to offer and no plan to suggest. I only pray God to lead us in magnifying our main business and accomplishing our chief task.

The End of the Way—My father preached the gospel in Mississippi for more than forty years. One day at an association, he fell asleep. The children went home for the funeral. Friends were kind, the messages were comforting, and the music was good. The last song was "Sweet Bye and Bye."

Immediately following the funeral I left for Oklahoma. I had nearly two days to sit alone and think of life in the light of this deep and tender experience. I asked myself the question, Is "Sweet Bye and Bye" just a song, a mere sentiment, or is it an eternal truth? I took my Bible and began to study. It was a rich experience because I found this truth at the very heart of nearly all the great promises. For example, the love of God, the death, burial, resurrection and ascension of Christ contain it. Listen to the words of Christ: "I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am there ye may be also." "In the sweet bye and bye, we shall meet on that beautiful shore."

When I came home from France it was my privilege to return on the same ship with the Rainbow Division. I had no connection with them; therefore, I can tell the story. Before our ship docked in New York harbor, representatives of the city, the state, and the nation came out to welcome those brave men home. Bands played and a great demonstration was given. Large signs were displayed reading, "Mother's here waiting for Corporal Smith" and others "Father Waiting," "Brother Waiting." One soldier remarked: "I have gone through torment and often wondered if I would ever get home. Now I am here, but I never dreamed it would be like this. This is glorious!"

"It doth not appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."

"Stand up, stand up for Jesus---stand in

His strength alone;

The arm of flesh will fail you---ye dare not

trust your own;

Put on the gospel armor, and watching

unto prayer,

Where duty calls, or danger, he never

wanting there."