

THE SELFISHNESS OF DOING GOOD

A woman came out of the postal station, walking fast and adjusting a handful of receipts and assorted papers she had received from the teller. As she headed for her automobile a \$20 bill slipped from her hands and fell to the sidewalk. Unaware of the loss, she hurried on toward her car.

A young man, appearing to be in his mid teens came out, also in a hurry and a few steps behind her, stopped, picked up the bill, hesitated a brief moment as he looked at it, and then called to the woman. "Hey, Lady, you dropped this!" She accepted the money with effusive thanks and smiles. The young man went on his way, quickening his steps, rising on his toes, standing a little taller, and noticeably very pleased with the situation.

This true-to-life event illustrates an overlooked facet of the beatitudes, those pronouncements by Christ that usher in the Sermon on the Mount—that wonderful teaching that some have called "*The Constitution of the New Covenant.*" (Matthew 5-7). It is a puzzle to many how those who follow the teaching of Christ can be happier than those who choose to do otherwise.

How could it be said that those who are poor in spirit, and are meek could be happy? And it seems to be a contradiction to say, "Happy are they who mourn." And then also, in Matthew 5:10 Christ said, "Happy, or blessed, are they which are persecuted for

ENDURANCE

righteousness sake." A good example of this truth would be found in Acts 5:25-42 where the apostles were threatened and beaten by the council of the Jews. Verse 41 says "they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer for His name."

Would the young man who returned the money have had a happier day if he had kept the money? The woman would not have missed it until a later time. There is no way she could have proved who found it or when. He was clear of being caught. The only thing in her favor was the conscience of the teenager and his strength of character that moved him to return the money. The spring in his step as he walked away announced his satisfaction with himself for having made his decision.

The daily newspaper would prove our point: those who are most lacking in spiritual worth are those who are mired deepest in misery, drugs and alcohol. The least blessed!

Experience and observation, as well as God's word, should teach us the value of doing good. When Christ had asked a young ruler to follow Him, the Bible says he turned back because he was one with riches. Peter asked, "What about us; we have left all and followed thee." (Luke 18:28.) Christ explained that they would receive manifold more, and in the world to come, everlasting life. Verse 30.

It makes a great demand on our faith. We look at the total picture, like the teenager looked at the twenty and decided. Making the right decision brings joy. Try it!!!

Dogle Goodspeed

WHO DO YOU GO TO FOR ADVICE?

The local newspaper for this metropolitan area has proliferated in advice columns that are daily filled with questions regarding how to solve life's problems. Advice is freely given. We have no way of knowing if it is followed. We seem, with the passage of time, to seek answers from almost any source except the advice given in what the Psalmist called, "A lamp to my feet and a light to my path." Psalms 119:105. Read this 119th Psalm for many other beautiful descriptions of the value of God's advice in His Word.

Paul's statement, "I can do all things in Him that strengtheneth me" is often quoted from Philippians 4:13 and admired as an aspiration toward which we desire to move. But, how? How can we arrive at this firm conviction? We can imitate eight steps that Paul advises in Philippians 4. They are:

1. Minimize your needs. Verses 5 and 11. We often are like the child with his parent in the super-store. Every aisle contains numerous things he wants but would immediately discard when he gets them.
2. Pray instead of worrying. Verse 6. We reverse this and worry instead of praying.
3. Recognize God's great power. Verse 7. This is where faith comes in to play such an important part

ENDURANCE

- in your life.
4. Control (discipline) your thoughts. Verse 8. We are as we think and we can control what we think about. Remember "as a man thinketh, so is he?"
 5. Follow God's advice, freely given in His Word. Verse 9. It is not enough to know the things to do unless we do them.
 6. Learn to be content. Verse 11. We can learn to be discontented or contented. We can learn to do what we seek to do. Learning involves practice.
 7. Live by the conviction, "I can do all things in Him who strengtheneth me." Verse 13. Live in the Word that your faith may grow to accept this truth.
 8. Believe fully "And my God shall supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus." Verse 19. Imagine how content we would be if we accepted this! The child ceases to be alarmed when the parent assures him, "I'll take care of it!" This is what God tells us.

The child was stranded on a limb high in a brittle cottonwood tree. His mother said, "I can't get you down, but your father will be home from work soon. He'll get you down when he arrives." The child relaxed, no longer afraid. He patiently waited for the help he was convinced would come. Relax. God says, "Cast your cares on me." I Peter 5:7.

Doyle Goodspeed

WHAT WE CAN BECOME

His name was Esau, but they called him Edom (Red) because of the red pottage for which, in a rash moment of weakness, he sold his birthright to his twin brother, Jacob. And also, perhaps, because when he was born he came out red all over and hairy. Through the deceit of his mother and brother, he was cheated of the blessing of his father which carried the lineage to the Christ. Bitterness and hatred became his constant companions. He married foreign women, partly to spite his mother and father. He sired a nation that became a thorn in the side of the Israelites. His descendents and his brother's descendents became bitter enemies. Gen. 25:19-26; Gen. 36:1,8; Gen. 25:27-34; Heb. 12:16.

And yet in his later years, there came to Esau prosperity and a mellowness of character. A wonderful picture is given in Genesis 33 of the reconciliation with his brother that gives us a peaceable ending to an interesting account in the history of Christ.

The case of Esau is heart warming because it proves that a life can change. What begins badly can end well. And aren't we glad? Since this is the story of each of us and since, "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Rom. 3:23.

A verse that epitomizes the "good news" is found in John 1:11-14, "He came unto His own and His own received him not. But as many as received Him, to them He gave power to become sons of God, even to them that believe on His Name - children born not

ENDURANCE

of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth."

"The power to become." How important this is to us! Most of us are not well pleased with ourselves physically. That's why there is such a huge market for work-out machines, cosmetics, shoulder pads, diet products, tummy-tucks, cosmetic dentistry, perfumes, shaving lotions, and on and on the list goes. Spiritually there is an even greater and more important need to change. We are selfish, sinful, hurtful, and disobedient to our Creator. Because of this we are doomed eternally unless we change. But, tragically, we cannot change without outside help. The law of Moses proved that. The apostle Paul concluded, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this flesh?" That's why it is such good news that Christ gives us the power to become. Sinful and filthy, we can be clean and forgiven. Not only is the gospel "the good news" the gospel is the *best* news!

Doyle Goodspeed

THE TROUBLED MIND

John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim Progress* is said to be the second largest seller among books, next only to the Bible which is perennially the best seller. No doubt the reason for this may be the similarity between the Pilgrim's journey and our own life. The Pilgrim encountered Pride, Arrogance, Self-conceit, and Worldly-Glory as impediments to his progress. Is this not like the difficulties we face as we journey through life? There is a *Doubting Castle* whose keeper is the Giant Despair. One of the problems the Pilgrim encounters is the *SLOUGH of DESPOND*. The *SLOUGH of DESPOND* was a marshy bog that was a hazard on Pilgrim's journey. No doubt it contained the bones of many Christians who were not able to get through it. Despondency is also a real problem to us today.

To many of us despair is as real a problem as any other sin. In His teaching Christ equips us to handle this. He Himself went through the same temptation in regard to this as any other human being. In Hebrews 4:15 we are told "...He was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin." Christ led the way, in this as well as all other ways. He left us an example, that we should follow in His steps. 1 Peter 2:21.

At least 7 times Christ said, "Be not afraid." In the Sermon on the Mount Christ tried to prepare us for life's problems by telling us to "Take no thought for your life." (Matthew 6:25-34) He tells

us that if God takes care of the lilies and the birds, He will also take care of us.

The Holy Spirit inspires Paul to say, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." Philippians 4:13. We would do well to greet each day with the motto. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." Psalms 46:1.

Worry and despair are truly obstacles we encounter as Christians, but they are obstacles against which Christ warned and sought to prepare us to overcome through Him and with His help.

In Psalms 22 we can see that Christ Himself had a battle with despair. He begins, prophetically to say, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" but overcomes by remembering, "Our fathers trusted in thee; they trusted, and thou didst deliver them." The message is that if God delivered those in the past who were His children, He will also deliver His children today. Christ was able to bear the cross because of His great faith in His Heavenly Father. In the same way, faith in the power and love of God helps us overcome today.

Job also is an important example in overcoming worry and despair. "The Lord gave, and the Lord taketh away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Job 1:21. The next verse says that Job charged not God foolishly. No wonder God says he was a perfect and upright man in Job 1:1. May God help us to follow his example!

Doyle Goodspeed

WHEN IS A BLESSING NOT A BLESSING?

Snakes can be a problem in any garden. Adam and Eve learned that a long time ago. Most of the rest of us at least understood it as soon as we saw our first snake. If it didn't hurt us, it made us hurt ourselves as we scrambled to get out of its way! Even apart from "that old serpent, which is the Devil (Rev. 20:2)" which the Bible speaks of, snakes seem to be just naturally recognized as the enemy.

In my back yard, I had solved the raccoon and cat problem by putting netting around the edge of my koi pond and the heron problem when I put an awning over it. This was done after I had lost fish to raccoons, cats, and herons. I hadn't thought to worry about snakes. Not in our metropolis. But there he was! Big as life. Well, at least five and a half or six feet long. He (I assume it was a he) had crawled through the holes in the net and into the water and, joy of joys, he couldn't believe his sneaky eyes! There was a veritable feast of fish, each eight or ten inches long with no way to get away from him. Colorful, too! That was the bonus. Seldom had he found such a beautiful banquet, with the table already set. He had swallowed a couple before he remembered that the fish were a lot wider than he was. However, with his hinged reptile jaw, he easily swallowed them. The small holes in the mesh were another matter. Before it was over, he had entangled himself

thoroughly, with no hope of escape. He was already near self-induced death before I took him off life support and threw him into the creek. His blessings were just more than he could handle!

One thing we should pray for, but seldom remember to do, is that God will not give us more than we can handle because it often happens that when we are given too much, it can become our spiritual death rather than a true blessing. If the rich man in Luke 12:13-21 had not received so many blessings that he was able to say, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease; eat, drink and be merry", he may have placed more emphasis on God and spiritual things. Christ said of him that "he laid up treasure for himself and was not rich toward God."

A woman who missed a plane in Dallas headed for Houston felt she was being treated harshly until the news came in that it had been hit by lightning over Dawson with a loss of all life aboard. We are not able to truly assess whether what happens to us is truly best for us now. Our faith can help us accept it. What we can be assured of is that if we love God and with commitment seek His will, all things will work together for our good. Rom. 8:28. In Gen. 45:8 it took tons of faith for Joseph to see that the jealousy of his brothers, being sold as a slave, and being imprisoned because of false accusations were all blessings in the final picture. What seemed bad, proved to be good, just as sometimes what seems good can turn out to be bad. "It was not you but God who did it," he believed. And so should we.

Doglo Goodspeed

THAT'S THE WAY IT IS

Maybe it's because of the irony. Maybe it's because that's just the way life is. But the T.V. advertisement seems to have struck a resonant chord with a lot of people. The farmer starts his day by finding a skunk has gotten into his pickup. Then, when he gets to his field and is looking the pasture over, an irate bull chases him all the way back to the pickup. He gets to his barn chores only to have the barn collapse barely leaving him alive. Then, while he's working on the windmill, lightning strikes, singeing his hair and burning holes in his clothes. Back at the house, with his clothes still smoking and his hair askew, he's seated at the kitchen table eating his favorite brand of ice cream when his wife comes in. "Well, how was your day?" she asks. He grins around a mouthful of ice cream, "Everything turned out just fine!" For him, the ice cream at the end of the day made everything alright. For the Christian, it's the promise of God that "to them that love God all things work together for good." Rom, 8:28,

The book of Revelation, because of its optimistic message, is well placed in our canon of scriptures. The optimism of the message may be lost to many because of the eerily dramatic pictures of the opposition. The devil is depicted as a serpent and a dragon. The opposition is pictured as a woman clothed in purple and scarlet and decked with gold, precious stones and pearls. She

ENDURANCE

has influence over the kings of the earth "and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication." Rev. 17.

In all the pictures the people of the world appear to be on the winning side and to have the most strength and power. The people of God seem to be outnumbered, out blessed, and facing an uphill battle. Their leader is a Lamb that appears to have been slain (Rev. 5:6), hardly the kind of commander you would expect to be victorious in a battle against the opposition.

But in the final analysis, the Christian is the one who will be victorious. Seven times in chapters 2 and 3 it is said, "To him that overcometh I will give..." What the overcoming Christian is given is to eat of the tree of life, victory over the second death, power over the nations, clothing of white raiment, his name in the book of life, he will be made a pillar in the temple of God and live in the New Jerusalem, and he will be given permission to sit with Christ on His throne, even as He overcame and sat with His Father on His throne. All these promises are given in chapters 2 and 3. Take courage!

The message of Revelation is "the Lamb shall overcome them and they that are with Him." Rev. 17:14. The lesson to us is that if we get on the Lamb's side in this battle of life we find ourselves in (you are aware of a battle aren't you?) we will surely overcome!

Doyle Goodspeed

GIDEON—THE JUDGE WHO HAD TO BE SHOWN

Judges 6:1-8:32

Gideon, the fifth of fifteen judges that ruled Israel, was not a self-confident man. Israel was oppressed by the Midianites. When tapped on the shoulder by God and given the task of delivering his nation, Gideon said, "Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? Behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house." It is a theme of the Biblical account of Gideon that God does not save by the strength of man but by the hand of God working through servants who willingly serve Him. It is in rebuke of his excuse that God told Gideon and us, "Surely I will be with you!" We are reminded of God's statement to Paul: "My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness." II Cor. 12:9.

To prove his credentials the messenger of God touched his staff to the sacrifice Gideon had placed on a rock. Fire, unlit by human hands, consumed it. But Gideon demanded and got more proof. A fleece left out at night had dew upon the fleece only. The next night, the dew was on the earth only and the fleece was dry. Gideon was slow to believe but having believed he valiantly went forth to do God's bidding. God said the 32,000 men Gideon had with him were too many, that if all were allowed to fight, Israel would feel they had won the battle by their own strength.

ENDURANCE

Twenty-two thousand men who were afraid were encouraged to return home. God said the remaining ten thousand were still too many. The number was further reduced and with *three hundred* men and what appeared to be a totally unworkable plan the battle was engaged. With a pitcher, a candle inside, and a trumpet they surrounded the enemy. At the signal, they broke their pitchers exposing the lights, and blew their trumpets and shouted, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!" The Midianites were so astonished that, in their pandemonium they turned their swords against one another and Gideon, with God's help, broke the reign of the Midianites.

Gideon, as with many of the other judges, was not a perfect servant of God. In his later years he made an ephod of gold that was so magnificent that Israel worshiped before it. The Bible says, "...which thing became a snare to Gideon and his house."

From this great judge we can learn two lessons: First, with God's help we can accomplish whatever He wills. And second, with success we should give glory to God and humbly seek to continue to do His will.

Doyle Goodspeed