

THE REASON FOR OUR HOPE

by

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

OLD TRUTHS FOR NEW TIMES

WHAT IS THE ASSUMPTION underlying this statement by Clifford Kirkpatrick, who is one of the leaders of contemporary liberalism?

“It is amazing that primitive conceptions of the universe, developed some three thousand years ago in Arabia, are spoken with greater conviction than ever into a tiny microphone and sent winging their way into thousands of homes.”

That indirect reference to Christianity assumes that simply because the gospel is antique it has no value for the twentieth century. That same assumption underlies this statement by Harry Elmer Barnes:

“In a truly scientific age a man would be as much humiliated and disgraced to defend the literal inspiration of the Bible . . . as he would be today if he were compelled to travel daily down Fifth Avenue, New York, in an ox-cart or to use stone implements in consuming his soup at a metropolitan banquet.”

According to Dr. Barnes, the progress of knowledge compels mankind to scrap completely the religious heritage passed down through the ages before the invention of the telescope and microscope and airplane.

Now, to be sure, science has revolutionized the world; but although man's world has been changed, man himself is still what he always was and what he will be. As Goethe aptly expressed it, “Mankind is always changing but man is always the same.” Kingdoms may topple and dictatorships arise; ox-carts may give place to airplanes; huts may evolve into skyscrapers with elevators; flickering candles may vanish in the blaze of electric lights; but regardless of all this, human nature with its wants and needs is still the same. The sophisticated New Yorker who zooms to his luxurious apartments on the twenty-second floor is essentially no different from the nomad who wandered over the plateaus of the Holy Land in the age of Abraham. The New Yorker and the nomad share the same emotions of fear and joy and sorrow; they have the same hopes and longings; they are beset by the same passions and lusts; they know the same hunger of heart. Is man in the twentieth century so different from what men used to be that he no longer does wrong and then confesses with burning shame as the Psalmist did?

“Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight” (Psalm 51:2-4).

The development of science has not changed our experience of sin and our anguish to be cleansed from its guilt.

Is man in the twentieth century so different from what men used to be that he no longer stands on the brink of a new grave and laments as David did?

“O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!” (II Samuel 18:33b).

The invention of the telescope or microscope in no way alters our experience of heartbreak in the hour of death.

Is man in the twentieth century so different from what men used to be that in the face of suffering and war and life’s major mysteries he no longer inquires as Gideon did

“Why then is all this befallen us?” (Judges 6:13)

The erection of lofty buildings and the construction of smoother highways cannot touch our experience of bewilderment as we ponder the why and wherefore of human life.

Is man in the twentieth century so different from what men used to be that he no longer knows the inner thrill and ecstasy which flamed in the heart of Jacob, as Genesis puts the story with exquisite simplicity:

“And Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her” (Genesis 29:20).

Is man in the twentieth century so different from what men used to be that he no longer hungers and thirsts after God, crying with Job, **“Oh that I knew where I might find him!”** or exclaiming with the Psalmist, **“As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God”**?

Has the multiplication of conveniences and comforts done anything at all to satisfy this hunger or slake this thirst?

- Is man in the twentieth century so different that he no longer yearns for **“joy unspeakable and full of glory”**?

- Is he so different that he no longer desires **“peace which passeth all understanding”**?

- Is he so different that he no longer wants to have **“full assurance”** concerning the untraveled country beyond the doorway of death?

- Is twentieth-century man with all his impressive array of gadgets happy and contented?

No, he is not; as author Will Durant writes:

“We move about the earth with unprecedented speed, but we do not know, and have not thought, where we are going, or whether we shall find any happiness there for our harassed souls. We are being destroyed by our knowledge, which has made us drunk with our power.”

So, then, if man is essentially the same as he always has been, Christianity is not yet superfluous and meaningless. For man in his sin needs God’s pardoning grace, and only the gospel can supply that. Man in his heartbreak needs a healing consolation, and only the gospel can supply that. Man in his bewilderment needs a satisfactory explanation of life’s mysteries. In his hunger of heart he needs the fellowship and friendship of the everlasting God. If the good news of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ brought joy and peace and certainty to needy souls in all the days gone by, it can do so now in these chaotic days of the twentieth century. God has not changed. The gospel has not changed. Humanity has not changed. The old gospel will still do if men will but accept and believe it.

Long generations ago the Lord God reproached the Israelites because they foolishly fancied that a change of the circumstances around them necessitated a new religion. This was the burden of His complaint:

“Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods? but my people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit . . . For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water” (Jeremiah 2:11, 13).

The world today is copying the Israelites of old; it is turning away from the fountain of living water; it is abandoning the gospel of God’s grace, simply because twentieth-century man has a phobia for anything old-fashioned and a mania for anything novel. The world, its soul burningly athirst, is frantically hewing out cisterns of philosophy, speculation and pseudo-religion. But alas, all of these are broken cisterns and hold no water. Not until the world returns to Jesus Christ, the fountain of living water, will its intolerable thirst at last be slaked.

I know, of course, that this can be dismissed as “putting the clock back.” But listen to what C. S. Lewis of Oxford University has written on this score:

“Would you think I was joking if I said that you can put a clock back, and that if the clock is wrong it’s often a very sensible thing to do? But I would rather get away from that whole idea of clocks. We all want progress. But progress means getting nearer to the place where you want to be. And if you’ve taken a wrong turning, then to go forward does not get you any nearer. If you’re on the wrong road, progress means doing an about-turn and walking back to the right road; and in that case the man who turns back soonest is the most progressive man. We’ve all seen this at our jobs, haven’t we? When I have started a bit of work the wrong way, the sooner I admit this and go back and start over again, the faster I shall get on.

“There’s nothing progressive about being pigheaded and refusing to admit a mistake. And I think if you look at the present state of the world, it’s pretty plain that humanity has been making some big mistake. We’re on the wrong road. And if that is so, we must go back. Going back is the quickest way on.”

Yes, in our phobia for anything which might be out-of-date, we have been going wrong, dead wrong. And, therefore, we must turn back to the old-fashioned gospel, the gospel of atonement for sin by substitutionary sacrifice, the gospel of grace and glory, the gospel of judgment and justification, the gospel of Golgotha with its blood-stained cross and the Garden with its empty tomb. We must turn back to that gospel, for only in that gospel will the unchanging hunger of our souls be satisfied.

In this twentieth century you need God’s old-fashioned salvation with its new joy, new peace, new hope, new power and new life; you can have it all through faith in Jesus Christ.

~ end of chapter 13 ~

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