

THE FUTURE OUTLOOK

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THE FUTURE OUTLOOK

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Spring is Approaching

Spring is approaching, the winter days are fast drawing to an end. March 21st marks the official date of the beginning of Spring, which comes in with sharp, cutting winds but quickly warms to gentle summer breezes.

As we look about us and observe the beautiful flowers, the blooming shrubbery, the budding trees, and feel the balmy air, we are surely aware that Spring, the most beautiful of all seasons, is here. It is the season in which everything takes on new life . . . shrubbery and trees, stripped of their winter coat, suddenly burst into blossom. Spring . . . a new beginning, when life as well as flowering plants should take on new beauty.

Now we are observing the Lenten Season, a time when every proclaimed Christian makes some type of sacrifice in observance of the approaching Easter season. Every professed Christian sets this time aside in honor and celebration of the Crucifixion and Resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. There are dates of other occasions during this season also, such the celebration of the anniversary of the Girl Scouts. If one were to observe his home calendar, he would find that all the dates leading up to Easter carry some element of vivid thought that makes one feel that Spring is in the air and our Christ is approaching nearer. This is the only season of the year which expresses the five senses, animate and inanimate. Let's name the five senses and describe them in your way of thinking. First of all, "feeling," in one day you have that sense of feeling of the cool breezes followed by snow, rain or heat waves, where you will have to make three changes of clothing within one day. "Seeing," the birds of the trees, and the green grass peeping up and the beautiful flowers putting out their blooms, so we can see such changes in the attitude of our family, friends, and ourselves, especially during the observance of the Lenten Season. "Hearing," early in the morning sunrise, the mocking birds singing. If we pass the riverside, we will hear the water roaring, the bees humming a sweet melody in the flowers — so we are singing to drive our irritations away and welcome in the beautifully rhymed words of our hymns that we enjoy singing which drive temptation away. "Tasting," for a good balanced diet at dinner time, we taste a new sap in our vegetables that was left over from last year's garden. So we human beings, when we partake of our communion, we taste the bread and wine which is symbolic of the blood and broken body of Christ and symbolic that our Christ is near. "Smell," after one has observed all the laws of beautification around his home and the cultivation of his vegetable garden and flowers and change the old winter coat to spring, you have the scent of beautiful perfume. All of these senses going through the change from winter to spring have a sense that so vividly shows that spring is in the air.

May we again advise you that in order to enjoy this most glorious and beautiful season, visit your family doctor and have a checkup during this season when there are so many kinds of communicable diseases. Health habits are so important in the lives of all of us. In order to possess good health, we should abide by the following rules: 1. Eat the proper food, in the correct manner at the proper time. 2. Remember that a good night's rest is your rebuild and refresher. We are told that "Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise." 3. Let your mind, not your emotions, be your guide. Cultivate a friendly attitude. Take an outdoor tonic every day, taking plenty of exercise, and playing in the open spaces. Health and nature give us many treasures . . . we should cherish them all.

For those who have livestock, fowls and pets, a fence should be provided in order to keep them at home. This will protect them from diseases that spread more readily in the spring. Fencing your pets in will also avoid a disturbance among your neighbors. Let us greet the spring season by adding a little beauty to our surroundings . . . enjoy the season of beauty of nature that God hath sent forth. By doing so, one can enjoy the season at home, church, school and throughout his neighborhood.

This Week's Sunday School Lesson

GOD GAVE HIS SON

Beginning Where You Are

One evidence of the impact of Jesus upon mankind is the fact that this week, nineteen and a half centuries after his death, Christians all over the world will gather to relive in imagination the last week of his life.

With Jesus and his disciples they will enter Jerusalem with glowing hopes, they will wonder at his cleansing of the Temple; they will note the growing tension during days of controversy; with deep concern they will meet secretly for supper in an upper room; they will flee from the garden and follow afar off to the high priest's house, to Pilate's palace, and to Calvary. It is difficult to bridge the chasm of centuries, but as best we can, we too shall enter into the hopes, the frustrations, the passions, of those far-off days.

Some years ago a book (now out of print) was published with the provocative title, "Why Did Jesus Die?" This is what we would like to know. How are we to understand the events of Holy Week? As we go about our daily tasks on a continent Romans and Jews never dreamed of, with power and resources beyond their comprehension, what does it mean to us that Jesus appeared before a Roman governor and was condemned to a cruel death on a cross?

Searching the Scriptures

The Scripture for this lesson is Isaiah 53; Matthew 27; Hebrews 2. Selected verses are printed below.

Matthew 27:35-50

35 And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots; 36 then they sat down and kept watch over him there. 37 And over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus the King of the Jews." 38 Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left. 39 And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads 40 and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." 41 So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, 42 "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross and we will believe in him. 43 He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him; for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" 44 And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way.

45 Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. 46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, la'ma sabach-tha-ni?" that is, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" 47 And some of the bystanders hearing it said, "This man is calling Eli-jah." 48 And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave it to him to drink. 49 But the others said,

"Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." 50 And Jesus cried again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.

Memory Selection: God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

—John 3:16

Exploring the Questions

In the sixth century B.C. the most tragic event of Israel's history occurred. God's chosen people were defeated by Babylon; the heirs of David's throne and other leaders were taken away captive; the Temple, center of God's worship, was desecrated and destroyed. What did all this mean? Had God's promises to Abraham been withdrawn? Had God himself been defeated by more powerful gods of Babylon? Was there any hope for the future?

An unknown prophet, often called Second Isaiah or Isaiah of the Exile, wrestled with these questions and, in Chapters 40 through 55 of our Book of Isaiah, gave Israel a new understanding of her destiny.

The Gospel of Matthew describes the events of Good Friday in Chapter 27. The author does not attempt to interpret their meaning. He simply tells what happened and lets the story speak for itself. It is remarkable how these events fulfill the vision of Isaiah 53.

The Romans used crucifixion only for rebels, slaves, and criminals of the lowest class. This fact constituted a problem for the early Christians. As they preached Christ to the ancient world, how could they explain that this good man, God's Son, was executed by Rome as a criminal?

In the Letter to the Hebrews an unknown Christian thinker offered his explanation. He interpreted the death of Christ in relation to the Jewish system of sacrifices. In Chapter 2 he lays the foundation for his argument. He points out that by becoming man, Christ entered fully into our human lot. However, made "perfect through suffering," he became a suitable offering "to make expiation for the sins of the people."

Finding Help

With Questions

According to Luke 23:2, Jesus' enemies made three charges against him:

1. He was a revolutionary, "perverting our nation."
2. He advised against paying taxes to Caesar.
3. He claimed to be the king of the Jews.

All these charges were political in nature and involved the security of the Roman state. Hence, as governor, Pilate was bound to consider them. However, we know, and Pilate knew, there was so truth in them. The kingdom Jesus was proclaiming was not of this world. (John 18:36) Matthew says that Pilate "knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up." (27:18)

Why then did not Pilate set Jesus free as justice demanded? Our answer is in Matthew 27:24: "When Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather

that a riot was beginning," he delivered Jesus to the will of the mob. It is the business of a governor to maintain order. He could keep order in either of two ways—by using his troops to control the mob or by giving the mob its way. Roman justice and Roman order were in conflict, and Pilate chose to sacrifice one innocent man rather than to do justly.

The Cross and Human Sin

We cannot understand the cross until we set it in the context of human sin. The Crucifixion laid bare the human capacity for evil.

There was the moral weakness of Pilate, who chose the easy way out of a dilemma. There was the envy and greed of the high priestly party, which saw Jesus as a threat to their power. There was the callousness of the mob out for a holiday. There was the fanatic nationalism of the people who preferred Barabbas to Jesus. There was the cowardice and silence of Jesus' friends who felt themselves powerless to aid him. And back of it all was the treachery of Judas, who, for whatever twisted reason, delivered Jesus to his captors. Only the loyal women come out of the scene with credit.

Why did Jesus die? He died because of the sins of men.

The Cross and God's Love

The power of the cross lies in the fact that Jesus chose it. He did not have to "set his face to go to Jerusalem" for that Passover. Up to Thursday night, instead of going to Gethsemane, he could have slipped out of the city and across the Jordan to safety. But he did not, for it had become clear to him that his love for men and his obedience to God required this final effort to call men to repentance.

The Cross and Atonement

Christians have always known by experience that the cross has the power to restore broken relationships between man and God. How this "atonement" is accomplished has been explained in various ways.

The ransom theory was formulated by Pope Gregory (540?-604). One of his duties as bishop was to negotiate with pagan tribes for the release of Roman citizens who were being held captive. This task suggested to Gregory that man had been taken prisoner by the Devil, so God gave his Son as a ransom to secure his release.

The satisfaction theory was proposed by Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109). It was derived from the medieval practice of requiring "satisfaction" for wrongs done by one person or tribe to another. Man had sinned against God; satisfaction was made through the death of Christ.

A French theologian, Peter Abelard (1079-1142), worked out the moral influence theory of Christ's death. He objected to the idea that God "did business" with Satan for the souls of men. Neither did God need propitiation. Rather, he thought, what was necessary was a change in the disposition of men. Therefore he saw the cross as influencing man toward righteousness.

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