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By HERBERT E. HOHENSTEIN

NEW YEAR'S DAY

PSALM 90

You probably have mixed emotions today. Certainly you are sobered and even saddened by the fact that another year of your life has come to a close and death is just that much closer. But you are also comforted by the fact that the eternal God is your Friend and Fortress. You're probably both down and up at the same time. And that's why the psalm before us is so appropriate. For this is its theme:

Down You Go—Up You Go!

I. *Down you go*

Certainly you are sobered and humbled as you ponder the following facts:

A. You're headed for the dust (v. 3). No matter how lofty and grand your ambitions and goals, no matter how high you go, you still must come back to earth. In fact, you must become earth!

B. Please notice it is God who does this turning to the dust. There is a great comfort in this. For if God is responsible for our dying, then we know it won't be premature, it won't be overdue.

C. Please observe God turns men back to the dust. The word means "crushed particles." This is the same word used of the suffering Servant, of whom we read (Is. 53): "He was bruised for our iniquities," ground to pulp, smashed to pieces, for our sins. Who was? Why, Jesus Christ, of course! Because He died on the cross and rose again, our return to the dust, to the crushed particles, will be temporary, until Christ calls us from our coffin to eternal life.

D. You're like driftwood on a swollen, rampaging river (v. 5). The picture here is of a person caught in a rushing torrent headed, shall we say, toward the fast approaching brink of Niagara Falls. Even so we are headed for that day when we'll go plunging over the brink of life.

E. You're like a dream (v. 5). Dreams are just quick flashes. Dreams die. And so do you.

F. You're like the grass (vv. 5, 6). You, too, have your morning of freshness and vigor—your youth. And like the grass, you, too, have your evening—your old age—when you wither and fade.

G. God's wrath is like the broiling sun and a roaring river (v. 7). Just as the sun withers grass, so God's anger withers grass-like men. God's wrath is like a roaring river. You can't wade through it. It's too deep. You'll be in over your head. That's why the poet makes the statement in verse 11.

Now let's make one application. In the light of these words, how can you ever think God is an indulgent old grandfather? Don't be deceived; God is not mocked. What you sow, you reap. Whoever heard of someone sowing corn and reaping watermelon? Even so you cannot sow sin, the seeds of death, and harvest life. Don't fool with God!

H. You can't hide a thing from God (v. 8). He knows your sins as well as your sufferings.

I. Your life is like a sigh (v. 9). And how long does that last? A scant fraction of a second! The word for sigh might also mean a thunderclap! Bear in mind the next time you hear a clap of thunder. For that's the

length of your life in comparison with eternity. The Septuagint has here: your life is like a "spider's web." There's nothing very strong or enduring about that. With one sweep of a broom or your hand, you can destroy that web. So is your life.

J. At best your life is still toil and trouble (v. 10). The Hebrew word for trouble here can mean emptiness. And isn't that often just what life is for you, empty of real joy and peace, when the bottom drops out because of the death of a dear one, empty of contentment and gladness and peace because some prolonged sorrow is draining these joys away?

K. Finally, how frail, puny, and passing you are compared with the eternal, almighty God (vv. 2, 4). Who or what are you with your 60 or 80 years compared with the great God who brought forth the world and the eternal hills? God measures time like this: 1,000 years equals one day, just one fleeting night watch, just a few hours. Before such a God we are brought low indeed. Now —

II. *Up you go*

Yes, up your spirits soar when you consider the following facts:

A. The eternal God is your Refuge. In Oriental lands a man fleeing from his enemy need but touch the tent of his friend with whom he seeks refuge to be safe. Even so we have our tent of refuge. Jesus Christ, who tented among us in our very own flesh. We touch Him with the hand of faith, and we are safe from our pursuing enemies: the devil, death, hell, and all our sins.

B. On the cross Jesus died under the fierce sun of God's wrath against our sins. He was overwhelmed and swept away into death by the rushing torrent of God's anger against our guilt. Now God doesn't set your iniquities before Him, your secret sins in the light of His countenance. Instead, God throws your sins behind His back forever.

C. Because God planted some grain, you won't be like grass. Jesus once likened Himself to a grain of wheat. On Good Friday, God planted Christ in a grave. On Easter the wheat came up; Jesus rose again. By that planting and rising you aren't going to be grass forever. Of course, you'll be cut down by death's sickle.

D. God will give you what you really need — a wise heart (v. 12).

1. This wisdom comes from a sober recognition of our grasslike frailty as we number our flying days, each precious second as it falls quickly through the hourglass of our fleeting life. Such a wise heart moves and compels us to make the best possible use of each second for God and for the brother.

2. God gives us this heart of wisdom. He slows us down, detaches us through some grief or cross from a total involvement with this world's pleasures and pursuits, and thus causes us to sober up and count our passing days.

E. God satisfies His saints (v. 14). Only one thing can wholly satisfy you, give you perfect contentment. And it isn't money or fun or people — it's God steadfast love. For if God loves you, who or what can hate you? Can any sickness, sorrow, devil, death, or hell?

F. God cultivates His saints (v. 16 "afflicted"). The word translated "afflicted" here is related to a word which means "to till the ground." That's what God does when He sends you affliction. He is just cultivating you so that you can produce a bigger crop of holiness.

The year that just died reminds you that you are doomed to death, and that's a gloomy thought. But the eternal God is your Refuge, and notice, He is your Refuge from generation to generation. That means God is so strong that His power to help and protect you is just as strong for you and this genera-

tion as it was for Adam and his. That love and rescuing power of God hasn't diminished one iota — and that power is all yours! And if that fact doesn't cause your spirits to soar, nothing will.

EPIPHANY

ISAIAH 2:2-5

The encouragement of these words is

Let's Go Up to the Mountain

I. *Isaiab identifies it as the mountain of God's house*

A. Let's look at the history of God's house in the Old Testament.

First God tented among His people in a portable house carried from camping place to camping place by the desert-journeying Jews. Then God's house was built on the limestone hill called Mount Zion.

B. Now let's look at God's New Testament house.

1. It isn't a lifeless building, rather it is a living person. St. John tells us that Christ Jesus *tented* among us. You see, Jesus is God's New Testament house, His flesh-and-blood Building among men.

a. This, too, like the Old Testament tent was not stationary. Christ was constantly on the move on His errands of mercy, helping, healing, living, and loving for the sake of others.

b. This was a tent in our midst. God didn't build His New Testament house out on the fringes, the borders, of our world; nor did He suspend this human temple halfway between earth and heaven. No; He put this tent, this Christ, right in our midst, in the midst of our human trials, sorrows, and death.

2. God's New Testament house is also on a hill, not Mount Zion but Golgotha. On

that hill sinners destroyed God's New Testament temple, the temple of Christ's body. But it did not stay destroyed. On the third day God rebuilt His temple. And by this death and resurrection of Christ, God forgives your sins and gives you life with Him forever.

II. *This is the world's highest peak (v. 2)*

A. Blessings flow from this mountain. It is because of this little Calvary that God's mercy becomes a mountain, a towering mountain that reaches higher than the clouds and the sky itself. On Calvary, Jesus died that the mountain-high pile of your sins might be moved into the deep ocean of God's love and pardon and there be covered forever.

B. People flow to this mountain (v. 2).

1. The picture here is of all humanity streaming to God's mountain. Do they?

2. Your job is to see to it that the stream keeps flowing.

3. Flow this stream will, no matter what! St. Paul tells us that one day *every* knee will bow and acknowledge Christ as Lord. This will happen no matter what we do or don't do, whether we succeed or fail in our kingdom responsibilities. If we do not perform our kingdom tasks, we are the ones who suffer. We are the ones who miss our opportunity for growth and betterment.

III. *From this height God instructs us (v. 3)*

A. He teaches us His ways. God's ways! Isaiah in another place tells us that God's ways are higher than the heavens above the earth. That's how different God's ways are from ours. And wherein does this difference lie? The context clearly shows that it lies in God's constant willingness to give sinful men His abundant pardon. God's mercy, that's what makes Him different. That's what distinguishes Him from man. And this is the merciful way God surely teaches us at Cal-

vary. This is the merciful way God teaches us in His house, His flesh-and-blood house, Christ Jesus. What boundless, higher-than-the-sky mercy we see in the crucified Jesus, who prays, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." And this is the merciful way God would teach you: When men crucify you by their angry, hateful tongue and cruel deeds you, too, should learn to pray, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

B. He helps us walk in His paths.

1. Please notice, you are to walk in *His paths* — not your own.

2. You have walked in God's paths perfectly. It's a fact! God did it for you. Since you can't walk in His paths, God made a living path for you, Jesus Christ, who once called Himself the Way — your Way to pardon and eternal fellowship with God.

3. That doesn't mean, however, that you don't have to try to walk in God's paths. The fact that Jesus walked God's way for you should only inspire you to walk those divine paths with greater dedication.

C. He teaches us His law, God's one law — love.

1. What did Jesus once say? "This one law I leave with you, that you love one another as I have loved you." But Christ didn't just leave that law, He lived it. He died it. That's what we see here at Calvary, Christ obedient to the law of love to the death that we might be forgiven for our frequent and daily breaking of that divine law.

2. We sometimes ask: "God, what is Your will for me in this matter?" You know what it is. He wants you to love, to do everything in keeping with the answer to this question: "How can I best serve the temporal and eternal interests of all concerned?" After you have honestly answered that question, go ahead, and act in the full

assurance and trust that God is with you. And if you fail, Christ died and rose also for the pardon of that sin.

IV. *From this height we see wonders*

A. There we observe the exodus of God's Word (v. 3). We read, "Out of Jerusalem goes the Word of the Lord." How wonderfully true! Indeed, out of Jerusalem goes God's Word, Jesus, the fleshly Word. Out of Jerusalem He goes to a little hill to give up His life, this living Word, that God might pardon the cruel, unclean, thoughtless, blasphemous words that have so often fallen from our lips. What an exodus! What a going out this is, Christ, God's Word in our flesh, going out of Jerusalem's gates to die and rise again for our eternal blessing! And as you think and ponder more upon that exodus, you will have one of your own. As you remember and believe that Jesus left His Father's house, left Jerusalem for Calvary, left the land of the living and then returned again for your pardon and eternal life, you, too, will more and more leave your sinful, selfish ways and walk the paths of God.

B. There we see God's promise of universal peace (v. 4). Sounds wonderful, doesn't it? This evidently portrays the conditions in God's new heavens and new earth, the world He will one day create out of the ashes of this present strife-torn planet, the new earth in which Isaiah tells us, in another place, lions, lambs, and children will play together without strife when the Root out of Jesse springs forth (Is. 11:6-9). We should note that this time of peace is spoken of in connection with the Root out of Jesse. Who is He? Why Jesus Christ, of course, the little Shoot out of the apparently dead tree stump of Judah. This Christ is the Maker of peace between God and men. The war is over.

Let's go up to the mountain. Does anyone want to stay home?

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

PSALM 122

This psalm concerns itself with worship. It tells you what's involved

When You Go Up to the House of the Lord

I. *You're going up*

A. This was literally true for the Israelites. They went up to Jerusalem for their worship. Zion was a city set upon a hill. That's why this poem is called a song of ascents.

B. You, too, must go up in your worship. Rise above all that is distracting: the world, family and business plans, responsibilities and problems. In worship there must be an ascent from the world of men to the throne of God.

II. *Are you glad?*

A. The poet was. He confesses: "I was glad when my fellow worshipers said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord!'"

B. Are you? Did you bounce out of bed this morning, just bubbling over with eagerness and enthusiasm in anticipation of worshiping in God's house? Did you look forward to this hour as you do toward the hour you depart for your annual vacation? Probably not! And why?

1. Because going to church isn't at all like going on a vacation. You don't come to God's house to relax and have fun and be entertained. You come here to let God talk to you in sermon, Scripture readings; to talk to God in prayers and hymns; to talk to your fellow worshipers in the confession of faith, in the prayers and hymns. By this you are endeavoring to fill one another with the Spirit. (Eph. 5:18 ff.)

2. All this isn't easy to do (a) because it isn't natural. Worship is a spiritual endeavor and as such, it often goes contrary to our natural grain. (b) Because the devil constantly opposes good worship habits. (c) Be-

cause we comfortable, well-fed and well-pleasured Americans, have few bodily needs. It is easier to worship with regularity and sincerity when we are in trouble.

III. *Are you willing to sacrifice?*

A. The Israelites were. They didn't just get into their cars and drive blocks or miles to get to church. They packed quite a few provisions and rode a donkey or walked, some of them 60 miles or more, to worship the Lord at Jerusalem. Not every Sabbath, to be sure, but at least several times each year. Think, for example, of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus in today's Gospel. This involved some sacrifice of effort, time, and money.

B. Are you like the Israelites? Of course, your worship may cost you something: treasured sleep, some Sunday fun, time, effort, curbing of the flesh. Are you glad to pay that price?

IV. *Remember, it's to praise the Lord (v. 4)*

We don't come to God's house to complain about or compliment the preacher, the choice of hymns, the singing, or other parts of the liturgy. We don't come just because it happens to be Sunday again and we enjoy meeting and conversing with our fellow saints, although this is salutary. We don't come primarily to get something out of God as though our regular worship were a crowbar to force God to bestow upon us His customary weekly blessings. No; we come to God's house rather to praise Him, to let Him and everyone else know how grateful we are for every blessing.

V. *Remember, Sunday worship is only a means to an end*

A. It is intended to provide you with the power to live a holy life.

1. As he left God's house, the Israelite worshiper encouraged his fellow saints to spend the rest of the week or the year until

they met again within Zion's walls in constant prayer for the peace and prosperity of God's people (vv. 6—8). In addition, he promised his fellow worshipers that he would seek their good. Not goods! The good of his fellow saints would be his life's aim.

2. And so you should leave your house of worship. How does St. Paul phrase it in today's Epistle? "Present your bodies as living sacrifices, and don't be conformed to this evil world; for this is your spiritual worship." Cf. James 1:27: "Pure and undefiled worship before God is to visit widows and orphans in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained from the world." (Also see Ps. 15 for the qualifications of an acceptable worshiper.) You see, this Sunday worship is designed to supply you with the power to worship during the week as you perform the daily liturgy of love and holiness.

B. And you know how Sunday worship gives you the power to practice the worship of a sanctified life. It holds Christ before you—Christ, who became your Sacrifice, a dead sacrifice on a cross, a revived sacrifice on Easter, that your sins might be pardoned and your heavenly room assured. And as this Jesus is held before you each Sunday in sermon, hymns, liturgy, and prayer, you are getting the power of God transmitted to you, the power to worship the Lord, not just in the beauty of a church but above all in the beauty of holiness.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

ISAIAH 61:1-6

Epiphany means Christ is revealed. Today we see Him as

Jesus, the Anointed

I. *How can we be sure these words refer to Christ?* (Luke 4:16-21)

Indeed, "this day has this Scripture been fulfilled in your hearing."

II. *Jesus, the Anointed.* "The Spirit has anointed Me" (v. 1)

A. In the Old Testament, it was the custom to anoint prophets, priests, and kings—to pour oil over them in connection with their induction into office.

B. Even so Christ has been anointed with the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:38). By that outpouring God tells you

1. This Man of Galilee is your Prophet. He is God's Voice to you. Hear Him. Believe Him. Obey Him.

2. This Man of Galilee is your Priest. By the sacrifice of Himself He has brought you to God and God to you. Because of His shed blood you can stop being in terror over your sins. For they have been sent from God's sight and mind forever.

3. This Man of Galilee is your King. Over you and the universe He rules! Rules, yes—not by a club but by a cross, a cross upon which this King was killed that you with Him might rule over the devil, death, hell, and sin.

III. *Jesus, the Anointed! Consider His task*

A. He preaches good news to the afflicted.

1. What are these glad tidings? News of peace (Is. 52:7); news of victory (1 Sam. 31:9). Peace and victory—that's the news Jesus proclaims and heralds. "Unto us a Child is born . . . and His name shall be called the Prince of peace." And peace isn't just the absence of war; it's spiritual and bodily blessings in abundance. Peace meant for the Israelite health and happiness for the individual, the family, the nation.

This is the peace that Christ proclaims and brings about as He heals men's sicknesses and dies for their sins. Something is out of kilter—out of harmony with us. Germs of disease and death invade our bodies; the body puts up a fierce fight, and the war is on. And what causes this war? Why, the great

disturber of peace between God and man called sin. And it is this war that Jesus has done away with by being done away with on a cross. That's why He heralds and brings peace, God's peace, the peace of pardon for all our sins and healing for all our sicknesses.

Jesus proclaims and brings victory, a victory over that quartet of evil: death, devil, hell, and sin.

2. To whom is this good news given? To the afflicted. According to Ps. 9:13, these are the people who stand terrified and trembling before the beckoning door of death. To such afflicted people the news is given: "Christ has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light." According to Ps. 10:12, the afflicted are people who languish in suffering, with the haunting and torturing fear that God has forgotten them. To such afflicted comes the good news: "I will never leave you nor forsake you." Who are the afflicted? They are people who are poor, people who present God with nothing but their guilt. And to such afflicted comes the good news: "There's been a change of colors; the scarlet of your sins has become white through the red of Christ's shed blood."

B. He binds up the brokenhearted.

1. The brokenhearted. These are crushed people, people who pray to God with David: "Fill me with joy and gladness. Let the bones which Thou hast broken rejoice. Hide Thy face from my sin." The brokenhearted are people whose only sacrifice to God is a crushed and contrite heart. With such a sacrifice God is well pleased because of the sacrifice of Jesus, His Son.

2. Christ binds up the brokenhearted. Binds them up and heals them because He, God's Son, was willing to be bound up, wrapped in swaddling clothes, was willing to be bound by death's cords and then unbound again. By that binding and unbinding you and I have complete healing for our hearts, broken and crushed by sin and affliction.

C. He proclaimed freedom to captives.

1. For since Christ was once in the jail of death, you are out—out of the jail of your sins.

2. Because Christ broke free from His jail, the jail of the grave, you will one day escape from your prison, the prison of your shut coffin.

3. To the captives Christ proclaims freedom. The Hebrew word signifies the straight, swift flight of a swallow. Now you are like a caged bird; you are in the confining cage of your sins and death; but Christ will one day set you free. One day you will be as free as a bird from all these evils. Just as surely as Jesus died and rose again, it's a fact!

D. He proclaims the year of God's favor. A year? It's an eternity of God's favor that Christ proclaims. For since Christ suffered eternity's punishment on the cross, since Christ spent three days in a tomb, this year of God's favor, His forgiveness and love, has been stretched into an eternity.

E. He grants comfort to mourners.

1. Mourners; the Hebrew word means people with bowed heads. Not on-lookers, people looking on the sins of others; not up-lookers, people like the Pharisees with their heads held high; but down-lookers, like the tax collector, people who smite upon their breasts, look down and confess, "God be merciful to me a sinner."

2. To such people Christ gives comfort, as He shouts, "Why are your heads bowed down with shame and fear over your sins, over your sorrows? Don't you recall My thorn-crowned head was once bowed in death and pillowed for three short days in a grave so that your heads don't have to be bowed, so that you can lift those bowed heads in happiness? For My death and resurrection mean your sins are gone—and sins gone means sorrow going. Then why are your heads bowed?"

3. Christ's comfort.

a. Is for every sorrow. There is no sorrow beneath Him, beneath the dignity of His concern and help. We see that in today's Gospel. There was a wine shortage at Cana of Galilee — not a catastrophe, just an embarrassing situation. Yet, this embarrassment was not beneath the dignity of Christ's interest and help.

b. Consists of a wonderful exchange (v. 3).

aa. A garland instead of ashes. The word for garland means turban. This is a head-dress worn at happy and festive occasions. Why pour ashes over your head when you already have a crown there, a crown of eternal life gained for you by the thorn-crowned and crucified Jesus?

bb. You have the oil of gladness instead of mourning. Anointing with oil was part of the Jewish festivals of joy and was a mark of honor. Since Christ once dined here, you have been invited to, and are headed for, the banquet of eternal life and glory. And certainly you don't want to go there in black mourning clothes. Anoint yourself with the oil of gladness.

cc. You have the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. The word for faint spirit here suggests a person who is about to go out like a lamp, a person whose power and faith and hope are fading like a dimming and blurred eye, a person who is being sapped by sorrows. Cast off that faint spirit, and instead put on the clothes of praise. For in Christ God loves you with an everlasting love — and if God loves you, who or what can hate you? Can any sickness or sorrow or devil or death or sin or hell? Are the hates of any of these evils or all of them combined greater than the shielding love of the almighty? If you really believe this, then how can you ever wear anything but the mantle of praise?

c. Makes you like an oak. Christ's comfort changes us from people with faint spirits into mighty oaks, strong and valiant saints.

And please notice, we are to be oaks of righteousness. Christ's comfort is not intended to make us more comfortable in our sins but to make us more dedicated to an often uncomfortable struggle against them.

O Lord, we thank You for the comfort of Your Son Jesus, the Anointed.

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD

EX. 3:1-6 AND MATT. 17:1-9

These two Bible stories place us

At the Bush and on the Mountain

I. *There's plenty of brightness in both places*

A. At the bush we behold the fiery God.

1. Please notice that it is a thornbush in which God chooses to reveal Himself to Moses.

a. That is significant. God didn't choose a great Sequoia or a tall oak tree. Of all things He chose a small shrub, a thornbush. This is the last place in the world in which you would expect to find God, in a shrub.

b. There are those who feel that the thornbush stands for Israel. If so, we have here a real insight into God's character. God chooses to reveal Himself in Israel, that is, through Israel God lay bare His heart and essential nature. It has been said: "How odd of God to choose the Jews." Odd? That's the way God chose. He put His hand on those wretched and despised Hebrews. Why? Because thus He revealed His true nature — boundless, higher-than-the-sky mercy.

2. At the bush we behold the fiery God. So God consumes in His wrath. Fire can't be controlled. Nor can God. He is not your slave, you are His. You can't play around with fire. Nor can you play around with God. You cannot fool Him, bribe Him, dodge Him, or escape Him. Fire refines and purifies. And so does God in the furnace of suffering.

B. On the mountain we behold—

1. A blazing Man (Matt. 17:2). This time it is not a bush God appears in but a man. This is the ultimate. First, it was in a burning bush, then it was on a blazing desert mountain that God revealed Himself. Finally, it is in a man. God takes the great leap and becomes what He has made, a man, becomes a man that He might die to deliver men. The brilliance we see in Jesus Christ on the transfiguration mountain was not God's flaming anger but His flaming love, a love so great that it swallowed and embraced all of death and hell that we might be spared their horrors.

2. A blazing cloud (Matt. 17:5) reminds us of another, the fiery cloud that guided the Israelites through the desert to Canaan. It doesn't point and guide us to a country but to a Man. For from this cloud comes the voice of God: "This is My beloved Son; listen to Him." Listen—and why? Because He is going to give you many new laws to obey? No, because He is going to tell you of a life laid down, His life given, and then taken again, for your pardon and eternal gladness. Yes, listen to this Man on the mountain.

II. *We receive two orders*

A. At the bush the order is this: "Bring My people out of Egypt" (Ex. 3:7-12). God speaks these words also to us: "Bring My people, the people whom I own by the right of blood, the blood of My Son, bring My people out of Egypt, out of the slavery to sin and the devil and death. Bring them out of Egypt and into heaven."

1. Perhaps you are afraid and feel inadequate for this command. Perhaps you, too, with Moses say: "Who am I that I should go?" To you God says as He did to Moses: "But I will be with you, with you when you stammer and stutter out your witnessing

words, with you when you ring that doorbell at a prospect's home, with you when you are brave enough to talk and act in line with your Christian conscience and convictions." "I will be with you," says God. That means that no problem or suffering ahead of you is greater than the power behind you.

2. Perhaps people won't listen to you, won't believe your words. Moses gave that as his excuse to the Lord (Ex. 4:1-9). Moses had his signs and miracles, and you do, too. You can point to yourself. You are a great miracle, you a believing Christian. You can point to the sign of Christ. Jonah had his sign: three days inside the fish. Jesus had His sign: three days in the earth's bosom.

3. Perhaps you are not a good talker. Neither was Moses (Ex. 4:10-12). You have the same promise from God.

B. On the mountain the command is, "Rise and have no fear." That's what Jesus told the frightened disciples as they were flattening their faces on the ground in fear of His blazing figure and the voice from the cloud. "Rise and have no fear." Yes, rise above your tensions, your troubles, and your burdens. You can. The secret is found in this verse of the Matthew text (Matt. 17:8). That's how you can rise above your fears, see no one but Jesus.

1. This doesn't mean that you have your head in the clouds and no contact with the grim and hard facts of life.

2. Rather this is what it means: That you see Jesus in everyone, especially people in trouble. For the more time you spend on the problems of others, the less time you'll have to worry about your own. See Jesus as your Sin-Bearer and Death-Defeater. Why are you afraid anyway? Because of sin. Afraid He will punish you for your guilt. Yet Christ received that punishment for you. Then why fear? Because of death. But Christ has conquered death for you. Then why fear?

SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY

JER. 9:23, 24

The Scriptures make it unmistakably plain that God is fiercely and forever opposed to the proud. How then do you explain the words before us? For they tell us

It's All Right to Brag

I. *Provided it isn't in your wisdom* (v. 23)

A. We look up to and idolize wise men. We glorify and almost deify men of letters and science, men who probe and solve the riddles of the universe, men who devise, manipulate, and maintain the missiles and rockets that are soaring higher and faster into space.

B. We look up to ourselves. It isn't just the other person's wisdom that we idolize. We are quite proud of our own.

II. *Provided it's not in your might* (v. 23)

A. It isn't just the scholar that we idolize; it is also the athlete. Athletic hero worship is all too common among us.

B. We admire the mighty who muscle their way up the ladder of success. They have what we lack and often covet, the strength, the courage, to push people around and out of their way to get their way, to achieve their goals.

III. *Provided it's not in your wealth* (v. 23)

A. "I do not," you say. "I haven't any riches and glory to boast of. They just don't exist."

B. Perhaps they don't if you are judging your wealth by some richer fellow Americans. But when you stand alongside your counterpart in China or South America or India, you're a millionaire.

Maybe you are not rich by any standards. Yet how easy it is to glory and revel and love and trust in what little wealth you do have. Do we have to remind ourselves how

much we think of money, getting it, spending it, saving it, giving it? Do we have to remind ourselves how much time we spend thinking about working for and enjoying the goods and good things of life? What we do have to tell ourselves is that we had better remember what life really is. It is a white and foamy puff of smoke, says Saint James, that hangs for a brief moment in the sky of time only to be driven quickly away by the chill wind of death. One wonders how many Christians have forfeited heaven because of their love for earth.

IV. *Provided it is in your knowledge of God* (v. 24)

A. This is not a head awareness but a heart and life experience. The Bible word for "know" means experience. It is frequently used to describe the deepest and most intimate of loves, that of the marriage relationship. To know God is to experience His saving activities in one's life.

B. What activities? His kindness, justice, and righteousness.

1. To know God is to experience His kindness, the kindness He practiced in the earth when He came to this earth with us in Jesus, His Son. It was kindness indeed that God practiced in the earth when that Son of His was laid in the earth for three days. For by virtue of that death God forgave your sins. It was kindness God practiced in the earth when His dead Son rose from the earth on Easter. For that resurrection is the first gleam and streak of light and life which announces and assures that the dark, deep night of death must soon fade away forever. To know this kindness is to know God.

2. To know God is to experience His justice. That's not easy to do, is it, when God apparently punishes you for no good reason? You're a lot holier than so and so, and yet the holier you are, the more you suffer. God

repays your righteousness with affliction. Is that justice? Perhaps you are not so righteous as you think you are. That may be the precise thing God is saying to you in your suffering: "Repent, humble yourself. You are not so good as you think you are."

You want God to prove His love to you, don't you? You don't want just honeyed words from Him, do you? Of course not! Well, you have that treasured proof of His love in your afflictions. "For whom the Lord loves He chastens." You may have to say it with a heavy and aching heart and through gritted teeth and with wringing hands, but

say it you will: "Thanks, Lord, for these sufferings; for how You must love me! These pains prove it."

3. To know God is to experience His righteousness. God's righteousness is what He gives, the perfection of Jesus given to us who cling to Christ by faith (Jer. 23:5-7). You see, God has done it all for us. No matter how foul and evil we are, we are absolutely perfect. That's why we can lift up our heads and boast: God is our Righteousness. That's why we live life confidently and face death courageously.

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