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BEFORE THE WATERGATE

By T. Pierce Brown

There are many who are interested in political events that happened before and after "Watergate". Yet, there are some special spiritual events that took place before the water gate that are far more significant. There are some eternal principles with everlasting consequences that Nehemiah revealed that should concern us.

In Nehemiah 8:1-3 we read the following words: "And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the broad place that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which Jehovah had commanded to Israel. And Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly, both men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month. And he read therein before the broad place that was before the water gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and women, and of those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law."

Notice some very important principles suggested there before the water gate. First, they came together as one man. That is, they had unity of purpose. "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity" (Psalm 133:1). Paul says in Ephesians 4:3, "Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." It is very important for us to have unity, but it just as important for us to understand the only basis on which it can be properly maintained. It must be the "unity of the Spirit." We are to make sure that what we teach and practice is authorized and approved by the Spirit of God. Without that, no unity is worth anything.

In connection with that, notice the second significant thing in the events around the water gate. "They spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses." They had not imbibed the popular idea of today that since God is a God of love, there is no law that is of any significance except to love. God's nature has not changed from the Old Testament to the New. They were saved by grace through faith, just as we are. The specific way they accepted that grace and showed their faith was different, but the principles upon which God acted have never changed and will never change. God has always been just, merciful, loving, requiring obedient faith in all ages. As there was a devout concern for the law of God then, so there should be devout concern for it now.

Third, the message was given to both men and women and all that could hear with understanding. God has never been pleased with persons who merely go through the motions of some activity without an understanding of the things God revealed about it. Those who teach that one does not have to understand anything about baptism, or the Lord's supper, or various other things God commanded are approaching very close to a sacramental idea of ritualistic religion that God never sanctioned. When Paul revealed how a person was free from sin, he said, "But thanks be to God, that, whereas ye were servants of sin, ye became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching whereunto ye were delivered; and being made free from sin, ye became servants of righteousness" (Romans 6:17-18). There is no way one can be obedient from the heart by simply going through the ritual without understanding anything about it.

Related to that thought, verse 8 is very important with enough points for

another article or sermon. "They read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading." Both young and old need to be impressed with the need of reading the scriptures distinctly. It disturbs me to hear a person who has been chosen to read a scripture, who not only mumbles so he cannot be understood beyond the first seat, but who has not learned how to pronounce the words in the text. There is a time for a young men's training class, but when young men come before the assembly to read or speak, they should have done their practice before that time.

In years past, one great distinction between gospel preachers and denominational preachers was that gospel preachers could read a passage, give the sense, and help a person to understand the meaning. Other preachers seldom did. While attending an outstanding denominational seminary (which I did because I had a chance to preach the gospel to those in the class at least four times), we were to speak on a text and give an exegesis of the text. When we all got through speaking, the professor told the class that I was the only one who did the assignment. The rest took a text, then took off like a wild goose with whatever comments came to mind, without any reference to what the text said or meant.

The only reason I mention this now is that I hear an increasing number of those who purport to be gospel preachers who do the same kind of thing. Jesus "opened up the scriptures" (Luke 24:32) until their hearts burned within them. We need to do the same thing today.

Let us summarize some great lessons we may find as we go back to the water gate. First, the word of God is the thing to which we must attend. Quoting Shakespeare, telling funny stories, philosophizing about various things may have some limited value, but a great sermon in God's sight will be concerned with expounding the word of God.

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FULTON COUNTY GOSPEL NEWS

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Eddy Gilpin EDITOR
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Before The Watergate

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Second, the word of God is not to be simply quoted at length to make an impression of the broad grasp of scriptures the preacher has. It is to be expounded upon so that it may be understood. Third, it is to be done with prayerful reverence. Fourth, it will, if heard in that fashion, lead to godly sorrow (Neh. 8:9), and to much joy and gladness (v. 12).

Whatever lessons you may get from the "Watergate" that filled the newspapers in Nixon's era, get some greater ones from before the water-gate in Nehemiah's time. As always, not only learn the principles behind the lesson, but put those principles into practice as you obey the law of the Lord. Always keep in mind that although "the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation unto all men" (Titus 2:11), that grace must be accepted on God's terms by obedient faith and respect for his commandments.

Fourth, he read therein from early morning until midday. When I was a boy, two week gospel meetings were not uncommon. After I began to preach, many ten day meetings were held. They began to drop to seven, five, four and three day meetings. Recently I believe I have heard of one day gospel meetings. It is doubtful if any of those who want to move in that direction would appreciate anyone reading from early morning until midday. We are aware that the length of time one spends in reading,

praying, etc. is not an adequate gauge of his spirituality. We are also aware that a person who can sit in a driving snow-storm for three hours to watch a football game, but is impatient with a person who expounds on the scriptures for more than 20 minutes, is not the kind of Christian with whom God can do very much.

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"I Haven't Quit, Just Because I Quit Attending"

by Eddy Gilpin

I suppose as long as one works with people he will never cease to be amazed at the things people say and do. This is especially true, I suppose, of preaching. Anyone who works with a congregation for any length of time is going to be confronted with all kinds of situations from every realm of that congregation's society. Excuses for not attending and keeping other obligations of God are usually many and varied. One gets "seasoned" at fielding such lame excuses from brethren, as if they owe the preacher the explanation for their laxity. One can be continually amazed by the things his supposed co-workers in the kingdom can devise. One such statement is the basis for this article.

The congregation with which I labor has a peg board system for keeping attendance (as do many congregations). At times, of course, names are removed and added as the need arises. Somewhere along the line, one particular lady's tag had been removed. It was and is obvious that she does not attend even on rare occasions. Somehow, she received word that her name had been removed from the board. Since that time, word has gotten back to me that she wants her name placed back on that board. The words she used were: "I haven't quit, just because I quit attending." What about that for a contradiction of terms? My initial response to such was, "Oh, really." But, in thinking about what she said let's apply it to other aspects of everyday life.

Since this nation is so addicted to sports, let's look to that realm with this kind of attitude. What do you suppose would occur if a football, baseball or basketball player, being paid millions of dollars, were suddenly to stop appearing for practices and games, sending no

word of explanation as to why, but merely saying, "I haven't quit, just because I quit attending?" There is no doubt what would occur. Such an athlete would indeed have "quit" when he quit attending. No such lame "reasoning" would be accepted by his superiors.

Further, what if one were to use this same reasoning in his job? Suppose you were simply to fail to show up for work several days in a row and send your boss a note saying, "I haven't quit, just because I quit attending." Does anyone in his right mind think for a moment that his employer would send work back to such an employee saying, "Oh, that's fine. Take as long as you like. We will continue to pay you?" Not on your life. Yet, somehow, we expect such ineffectual exemptions to be acceptable to God.

The idea of "as long as I am on the 'church roll'..." has imbedded its insipid tendencies into the mind of many members of the Lord's church. What is the thinking? Is it that Jesus, upon His return, is going to examine every "peg board" for those whose "tags have been turned?" Brethren, our Lord commands righteousness, faithfulness and godliness from His followers. While being a member of the body of Christ is essential to one's salvation (Eph. 5:23), what will matter on the day of judgment is not whether one's name is "on the church roll," but whether or not his name appears in the book of Life!

Along this same line of "reasoning," if one hasn't "quit" just because he has quit attending, what will it take for him to have quit? Attendance is usually seen as "the barometer of faithfulness" by most. One is considered by many to be "faithful" if he regularly attends most services. Little thought is given as to whether or not he has practiced "pure religion and undefiled before God" (Jas. 1:27), or done the other things God commands of him. But, one thing is for sure. Since God has commanded faithfulness in attendance (Heb. 10:25, 26), when one stops attending, in God's mind he has "quit."

Before trying to alleviate yourself of responsibility by using some such lame thought as has been mentioned, ask yourself if your employer would accept such. Ask yourself if you would accept such from someone else. But, most importantly, look at it from God's standpoint, and ask if such is acceptable to Him.

"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins (Heb. 10:25, 26).

The Task of Preaching the Gospel of Christ to the Lost

by Charlie Andrew Brown

I obeyed the gospel of Christ on Sunday morning, July 15, 1951, during the services at a small congregation, known then as the Granby St. church of Christ, in Norfolk, Virginia. I was still in the U.S. Navy at that time. I clearly understood from my study with Thomas Jefferson Mitchell, that as I responded in obedience to that gospel by faith in Christ Jesus, as I repented of my past sins and acknowledged Him as God's Son and was buried in the watery grave of baptism to arise to walk in newness of life, that these acts resulted in me being born again by the blood of Christ through the word of God. I also understood that I had just become a member of the great army of God's people that were to "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature..." Although some 39 years have come and gone and I have had to slow down, the task of preaching this precious gospel to the lost is more urgent than ever before.

The command to carry out this task was a vital part of the last will and testament of Jesus Christ Himself. A full understanding can be gleaned of that task as one harmonizes all that Jesus said in His "Great Commission" as recorded in Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, Acts 1, and how the apostles carried out this "Commission" (Acts 2).

Someone has said that these commands by Christ (contained in the "Great Commission"), "have the ring of challenge, the breath of life, the fire of compassion, the spirit of conquest, the call to sacrifice, the vision of the world and the objective of God Himself." The Apostle Paul and the Holy Spirit must have had similar feelings because of the things written in Romans 1, I Corinthians 1 and 15:1-4. Indeed the Gospel of Christ is the power of God to save mankind. It may very well seem foolish to some, but you and I must preach, teach

and present it to every creature in all nations as the power and wisdom of God.

The following article, entitled "I'M A DISCIPLE", written by one unknown to me, perhaps best explains how I feel about my role as a child of God; one that is to function in His Son's kingdom or church:

I'M A DISCIPLE

"I'm a part of the fellowship of the unashamed...the dye is cast, I've stepped over the line...the decision has been made. I'm a disciple of His. I won't look back, slow down, let up, back away or be stilled. My past is redeemed, my present makes sense, my future is secure. I am finished and done with low living, sight walking, small planning smooth knees, tame vision, mundane talking, chintzy giving, and dwarf goals.

I no longer need preeminence, position, prosperity, promotion, platitudes, or popularity.

I do not have to be right, first, tops, recognized, praised, regarded, or rewarded.

I live by presence, lean by faith, walk by patience, live by prayer, and labor by power.

My face is set, my gait is fast, my goal is Heaven, my road is narrow, my way is rough, my companions few, my guide is reliable, my mission is clear. I cannot be bought, compromised, detoured, lured away, turned back, deluded, or delayed.

I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice, hesitate in the presence of adversity, negotiate at the table of my enemies, ponder at the pool of popularity or meander in the maze of mediocrity.

I won't give up, shut up, let up, ...until I've stayed up, stored up, prayed up, paid up, preached up for the cause of Christ.

I'm a disciple of Jesus!!!

I must go till He comes, give till I drop, preach till all know, work till He stops me. And when He comes for His own, He'll have no problem recognizing me for my colors will be clear. I am a disciple."

This world is truly not our home, we're just passing through. Our treasures must be laid up, somewhere beyond the blue. Knowing that the angels beckon us to Heaven's open door, and we must not feel at home in this world anymore.

I would love to convince everyone

reading this to examine your life and see if there is any way you could teach your neighbor, friend and loved one the pure gospel of Christ. I know of no NEED greater than this. Someone has estimated that about 1800 persons die each hour that have never heard of the saving power (blood) of Jesus Christ (This says nothing about those that are living under the dogma of false teachers). I think it is safe to assume that there may be large numbers living very close to each one of us who may have never heard or understood the truth. I think if you (or I) don't teach them, they may very well close their eyes in death, unprepared to meet their God!!! How very tragic that loss will be!!! God is not willing that any should perish!! Jesus died for us all!!! I know of no child of God that wants even one of his loved ones to be lost. Surely there is a WAY!!! May God truly help us all to find that WAY now!!!

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*"Even if you cannot speak like angels;
Even if you cannot preach like Paul;
You can still tell the love of Jesus;
You can say, 'He died for all.' "*

*An earnest soul on prayer's bright wings
can soar to heaven's gate
Unhindered by an earthborn tie,
and arms of mercy wait
To bear it to the presence of
the Father wise and good
Where deepest yearnings of the heart
are known and understood.*

-Josephine Kittrell Kirk

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He Only Had Two Pence

by Bill Brandstatter

Jesus told the account of the Good Samaritan as recorded in Luke 10:30. What made the Samaritan good? He had an opportunity to help someone, and he made the most of it (Gal. 6:10). He even helped with money, although he **only had two pence**. With this small amount of help the Lord was pleased, (Matt. 25:31-46; Eph. 4:28). What better way is there to put money to use than helping a brother in need? (I John 3:17). For the Samaritan to have laid up treasures on earth would have been sinful (Matt. 6:19, 20). Money can, and often does cause all kinds of problems. Paul wrote, "**The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil,**" (I Tim. 6:10 ASV). Since we can't take our money with us when we die, we should use it to glorify God. (I Tim. 6:17). The riches of this world come from God (I Tim. 6:18).

The Good Samaritan was truly rich even though he **only had two pence**. He was richer than Rockefeller or Howard Hughes. He used what he had to glorify God and to help his fellowman. The widow's offering was equally glorious (Mark 12:41-43). If we do likewise, God will be pleased (II Cor. 8:12), even if **we only have two pence**.

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If you want to work in the kind of church
Like the kind of a church you like,
You needn't slip your clothes in a grip
And start on a long, long hike.
You'll only find what you left behind,
For there's nothing that's really new;
It's a knock at yourself when you knock
the church- It isn't the church; it's you.

Real churches aren't made by men afraid
Lest somebody else go ahead;
When everyone works and nobody shirks
You can raise the church from the dead.
And if you make your personal stake,
Your neighbor can make one too.
The church will be what you want to see;
It isn't the church; it's you.

He who never makes mistakes, never
makes anything.

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

1. The Bible is its only guide (Romans 1:16; I Thess. 2:13).
2. Wears a Biblical Name (Romans 16:16).
3. Established at the right place (Isaiah 2:2,3; Acts 2).
4. Established at the right time (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2).
5. Established on the right person (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:36).
6. Saved are in it (Ephesians 5:23; Acts 2:47).
7. Its members are enrolled in heaven (Hebrews 12:23).
8. Membership in it is obtained by obedience to God's commands including baptism (Acts 2:41-47; I Corinthians 12:13).

GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

1. Hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17; Acts 16:32).
2. Believing what is taught (Mark 16:16; Hebrews 11:6).
3. Repentance (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30).
4. Confession (Romans 10:9, 10; Acts 8:37).
5. Baptism (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; I Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3, 4).
6. After the above five steps, faithful Christian Living (I Peter 2:11, 12; Revelations 2:10).

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