

HAPPY OLD MEN

HAPPY OLD MEN (REVELATION; PSALM 17:15)

This statement was first used as the theme of an angel's message. Since that time, it has been one of the most triumphant texts of the Christian church, and has been quoted by almost every pastor, teacher and evangelist.

Dr. Schmucker, when walking in the country, met an old man who was singing. He asked: "Father Miller, why should an old gentleman like you be so cheerful?" His friend replied: "Not all are, but I belong to the Lord." The questioner continued: "Are there many others like you?" "O no," came the response, "Listen to one who knows, for you will never find any man of three-score years and ten who will deny it. The devil has no happy old men."

That simple, but truthful, statement was irrefutable. People in the twilight years of life may reminisce and be either proud or regretful, but looking into the unknown can be a frightening experience. An atheist who has no hope of eternal life can hardly be thrilled by the prospect of his imminent decease. He believes he will never again see a blue sky or a rainbow. The joys of watching flowers bloom and hearing the laughter of children remain unknown. His only assurance beyond death is that he will be buried, and his body will decay.

Stars of promise never brighten his skies, and no vestige of hope beckons his soul into eternity. He has lived a life without God, and remains a sinking human vessel without hope of rescue. To the contrary, it may be claimed that God has no miserable old people. Their terminal days on earth are bright with the assurance they are about to become young again!

Barzillai.. How Contented (2 Sam. 19:34-35)

David was astounded; his aged friend was being obstinate. Why should he refuse the greatest offer ever made by a king? They had been together through the tempestuous days of Absalom's rebellion, and had survived his insurrection. Many of David's friends became deserters during the national crisis, but the faithfulness of Barzillai would never be forgotten. He had sustained the king and his followers, and had been loyal when

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others were traitors. David never expected to be able to repay this debt of love, but Jehovah had been gracious. The usurper prince was dead; the future shone with the prospect of total victory.

David smiled when he looked at his elderly benefactor. "And the king said unto Barzillai, Come thou over with me, and I will feed thee with me in Jerusalem." The king's eyes were bright as he thought of the continuing fellowship he planned to share with his loyal friend. Patiently, he awaited the old man's reply. There was silence on the roadway; even the soldiers were pleased. They liked the idea of favoring the man who had helped them during the rebellion.

"And Barzilai said unto the king, How long have I to live, that I should go up with the king unto Jerusalem? I am this day four-score years old: and can I discern between good and evil? can thy servant taste what I eat, or what I drink? can I hear any more the voice of singing men and singing women? wherefore then should thy servant be yet a burden unto my lord the king? . . . Let thy servant turn back again, that I might die in mine own city, and be buried by the grave of my father, and of my mother" (2 Sam. 19:35, 37).

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Arguments were useless; persuasion was a waste of time; the old man had made up his mind; his decision was final. He intended to return to the peacefulness of his home, where he would await an invitation to reside in another city which was eternal in the heavens (Heb. 11:10). Almost any other man in the kingdom would have welcomed a chance to accept David's offer, but Barzillai was not just another man! The pleasure to be found in the palace no longer attracted him; the music of trained singers was uninteresting; the plaudits of appreciative people fell on deaf ears. Nevertheless, he could hear the voice of God, especially in his home in the country. As Paul would have said, he had "set his affections on things above, not on things on the earth." Barzillai was both wise and wonderful. When, a little later, God came to escort him to the heavenly mansion, he was able to say: "Lord, I have been waiting for you," and they went home together!

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Job. . . How Convinced (Job 19:25-27)

Job, as the entire world knows, had every reason to grumble. A deluge of trouble had devastated his family, and it was easy to believe God had gone on a vacation! It was perfectly natural for the man to long for death for that at least apparently would end his agony. He asked: "Why died I not from the womb?... For now should I have lain still and been quiet, I should have slept; then had I been at rest. . . There the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary be at rest" (Job 3:11-17).

When Job, an elderly farmer, spoke those words, his understanding of truth was limited. He believed death to be an escape from pain and sorrow—to be eternally asleep was better than enduring daily anguish! His misery was unprecedented and inexplicable. God's testimony concerning Job was extremely interesting. "And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God and escheweth evil?" (1:8). That statement suggested a man can be morally good even if his theological ideas remain undeveloped. At that period in his life, the patriarch had no incentive toward righteousness except an inherent love for virtue. The greatest lessons in life remained to be explained. Job was miserable—but things were about to happen.

God's greatest revelations resemble stars—they shine in the dark! As Job's daily problems accentuated and deepened, he began to think about eternity. If Jehovah were immortal, could He be satisfied if His children remained dead? He had no Bible to read; no preachers to hear, no meetings to attend. His conscience was a classroom, the Spirit of God his Teacher. Even before he realized what was taking place, Job began asking questions about immortality. He said: "If a man die, shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come" (14:14). Was this the first time heaven's light shone into Job's darkened intellect? To what change was he referring? Was he expressing a hope that after his tribulation circumstances would improve, or was he thinking about survival? Evidently he believed his days had been appointed, therefore, God was still on His throne. The darkness was not as

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intense as hitherto! A man could never ask such a question and not endeavor to find its answer. It may never be known how Job discovered the truth of immortality, but his subsequent testimony indicated his doubts had gone; his questions had been

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answered. His night of anguish led to the dawn of a most wonderful day.

Job said: "And . . . though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another, though my reins be consumed within me" (Job 19:26-27). The Amplified Version translates the text: "And my eyes shall behold him, and not as a stranger. My heart pines away and is consumed within me." His discovery made his future attractive: even his physical suffering was less consequential. Job was consumed with a desire to possess his new body, and see the Redeemer who would stand upon the earth. He had changed dramatically, and had become one of God's happy old men. Job's night of suffering terminated when the Sun of Righteousness arose with healing in His wings (Mal. 4:2).

Paul... How Confident (2 Tim. 4:7-8)

"Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."

We do not know the apostle's age when he wrote this letter to Timothy. He was nearing the end of his life, and at the time was a prisoner in Rome. Paul had succeeded in cramming four lifetimes into one. He had traversed the world of his day, and was known in almost every city, town and village; and he had become prematurely old. The record of experiences chills the human spirit, for he wrote: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day have I been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in

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the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. . ." (2 Cor. 11:23-27).

It was remarkable that the intrepid traveler never complained, and be only itemized the list of sufferings to silence critics. After years of hazardous service, Paul had grown old. Through cold and terrible winters, he traveled to reach unevangelized areas, and millions of people heard the gospel from his lips. His earthly ministry had apparently terminated in a Roman prison, but he was not discouraged, and even in a rented apartment, he continued to tell visitors about the matchless grace of God (Acts 28:30-31).

The great missionary realized his earthly career would soon terminate; he would become a martyr. He had no regrets; his spirit was about to be released from earthly bondage, and within moments, would be on the way to a heavenly home. He wrote: "The time of my departure is at hand." Paul did not say: "The time of my death is near"; neither did he say: "Henceforth there awaits me a casket, or a criminal's grave." The word translated departure was an interesting Greek word made up of two components. Analuseos was formed from a prefix and a verb, which meant to loose. The prefix added another thought to go on a journey. It was difficult for the translators to supply a word which expressed to be liberated, and to go on a journey.

My father, in the early days of his marriage, possessed eighty racing pigeons, and was well known for his trophies. As a small

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child I questioned his method of selecting a bird for a special race. When I expressed my objections, I was told I did not understand; when I persisted in interfering with my father's methods, I was physically reminded he was the boss!

I have often imagined the pigeon enclosed in a basket hundreds of miles from home, and awaiting the moment when the container would be opened. If it were possible to read that bird's thoughts, they would have been twofold: (1) I want to get out of this basket, I want to be released; (2) I want to start my journey. My babies are waiting, and the more quickly I start my flight, the sooner I shall see them again.

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The word analuseo perfectly expressed Paul's desire. He wanted to be released from his body to begin his journey to heaven; a loved one awaited his arrival. When the apostle thought of his arrival in heaven his face reflected the joy of his soul. He was anything but miserable.

An elderly man was dying in Edinburgh, Scotland. His drinking and gambling friends stood around watching their ailing comrade. One of them leaned over the bed and said: "Harry, hold on!" The sick man whispered, "What did you say?" and the message was repeated: "Hold on!" After a moment the reply came; "I have nothing to hold on to!" Father Miller was correct when he said: "The Devil has no happy old men."

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