

JESUS ... WHO SUPPLIED A NEW PORTRAIT OF GOD

And [Jesus] said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven. (Luke 11:2)

It was an exciting morning when Egerton Young, one of the first missionaries to the Canadian Indians, stood before a native audience in Saskatchewan. Three hundred chiefs and braves gathered to hear the paleface. They stood in a huge circle surrounding the young speaker as he explained the wonders of the redeeming love of God. At the conclusion of that initial message, several of the chiefs questioned the white man, but the last to speak was an old grizzly chief whose appearance was frightening. He said, "Once my hair was as black as a crow's wing; now it is getting white. Grey hairs on my head and grandchildren in my wigwam tell me I am getting old, and have not long to live. Yet, I have never heard such things as you have told us today. Missionary, when you spoke just now to the Great Spirit, did I hear you say 'Our Father'?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Young, "Our Father which art in heaven."

"That is very new and sweet to us," continued the Indian. "We never thought of the Great Spirit as 'Father.' We have heard Him in the thunder and have seen Him in the lightning, the tempest, and the blizzard, and were afraid. So, when you tell us the Great Spirit is our Father, that is very beautiful to us. And, Missionary, did you say the Great Spirit is your Father?"

"I did."

"And is He the Indian's father?"

"He is."

"Then we are brothers," the old man exclaimed. Mr. Young, who later described the scene, said the excitement that swept through the audience was marvelous to behold. The entire company invited him to remain so that he could explain more fully his wonderful message. They

156

had viewed for the first time a true portrait of the Great Spirit and appreciated what had been seen.

The Changing Picture ... a Heavenly Father

The Master was praying, and His watching disciples were fascinated. Serenity shone upon His face; words of grace fell from His lips; ecstasy emanated from His soul. He was communing with the Almighty and acquiring strength and encouragement from every moment. He was not of this world. His body was earthly, but His spirit belonged to a realm surpassing time.

The disciples were spellbound. It did not matter what petitions were being expressed; their Lord knew how to bridge the gap between earth and heaven. He knew how to pray. Peter and his companions, remembering how John had instructed his followers in the art of intercession, said, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples" (Luke 11:1). It was illuminating that they asked for this blessing when there were many other things to be desired. They might have said, "Lord, teach us how to perform those miracles that only you can perform." The disciples, who were destined to become the first evangelists, might have said, "Lord teach us how to preach effectively so that millions of people will learn to love Thee." They could have asked for longevity, fame, financial security, or many other things.

"And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven." If comprehension momentarily decreased in the eyes of the disciples, it would have been understandable. Throughout the ages,

JESUS ... WHO SUPPLIED A NEW PORTRAIT OF GOD

Jehovah had been the One who inhabited eternity, whose presence was to be feared. When He descended to speak with Moses on Mount Sinai, He said,

And be ready against the third day: for the third day the LORD will come down in the sight of all the people upon mount Sinai. And thou shalt set bounds unto the people round about, saying, Take heed to yourselves, that ye go not up into the mount, or touch the border of it: whosoever toucheth the mount shall be surely put to death: There shall not an hand touch it, but he shall surely be stoned, or shot through; whether it be beast or man, it shall not live (Exod. 19:11-13).

Jehovah's command filled the people with dread, which existed throughout the history of the chosen race. Inspired prophets compared

`57

Him with earthly parents and taught that the children of Israel were the offspring of the Almighty, yet God's laws were unrelenting. Therefore, the disciples of Jesus were astonished when they were instructed to address God as their Father. This opened new vistas of understanding. The revelation was strange but wonderful. The words of a modern poet would have expressed their emotions:

How Thou canst think so well of us
And be the God Thou art:
Is darkness to my intellect,
But sunshine to my heart.

The Choice People ... a Holy Family

When Jesus instructed His followers to say "Our Father," He bridged a chasm that had never been crossed. He addressed a band of chosen disciples, but the prayer would be repeated in every country of the world. Jews and Gentiles, Caucasians and Africans, Indians and Orientals, and people from every clime would ultimately pray saying, "Our Father." God, through His Son, was about to create the greatest family ever known. It would be a fellowship in which the color of a man's skin would be unimportant, where hatred would be intolerable, and the stature of human beings would be decided by virtuous conduct. That was a lesson that even the disciples of Jesus needed to learn. James and John had an inherent pride of race; they belonged to God's chosen people and were ready to destroy any man who opposed them (see Luke 9:54). During the years when it was legal to possess slaves, it was difficult for owners to believe they were no better than the people they possessed. Yet when Paul wrote to Philemon, he suggested that Onesimus, the runaway slave, should be welcomed back as a brother (see Philem. 15-16).

That the family of God included members of all races was one of the most difficult doctrines for the Hebrews to accept. They had always considered themselves superior to other people, and their laws endorsed that conclusion. They needed to be reminded that "the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). The law was given to provide direction and discipline for sinners; grace and truth were introduced to provide guidance and delight for saints. They created the atmosphere of a home filled with the divine Presence; the place where every member of the household received the continuing benediction of a heavenly Father.

158

Throughout the history of the church, the most famous converts were won in unlikely places, among hostile people. Saul of Tarsus became

JESUS ... WHO SUPPLIED A NEW PORTRAIT OF GOD

an outstanding example of that fact. It was startling when Ananias addressed the greatest enemy of the church as "Brother Saul." When the attack was launched against Pearl Harbor, the leader of the Japanese fliers was one of our enemies; yet later when he became a Christian, he was accepted into the church worldwide as a brother in God's family. He could then enthusiastically say,

I'm so glad I belong to the family of God:
I've been washed in the fountain,
Cleansed by His blood.
Joint heirs with Jesus
As I travel this sod
I belong to the familyÄthe family of God.

Paul expressed this wonderful truth when he wrote to the Christians in Ephesus saying, "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (Eph. 2:19).

The Critical Problem ... a Helpful Faith

It is not difficult to understand why the Jewish leaders detested the doctrines taught by Jesus and Paul. During the ages preceding the arrival of Christ, they believed they alone were the chosen people of GodÄ other nations were excluded. The gospel reversed that order. The Jews were outside the kingdom, while many Gentiles had already been accepted as citizens. It seemed to be an unpardonable insult when Jesus said to the proud Pharisees, "The publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you" (Matt. 21:31). His words demonstrated that in His opinion, the proud leaders of Israel were outside the kingdom of God.

As the Savior continued His ministry it became evident He had come to earth to establish a new kingdom, and He was its entrance. He claimed to be the Way, the Truth, and the Life and emphasized that approach to God was impossible unless achieved through Him (see John 14:6). The apostle John wrote, "He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name (John 1:11Ä12). The Lord spoke of a sheepfold, and said: "I am the

159

door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture" (John 10:9). The Jews expected their Messiah to establish and to extend an earthly kingdom with Jerusalem as its capital city; the inhabitants would be Hebrews, and all other nations would be subservient to them. They did not understand the Lord's desire to reign within the hearts of people whose faith destroyed barriers of prejudice, color, and creed. His rule would be based on love, not legalism, and its greatest honors would be given to those who most deserved them.

It is thought provoking that when continuing His model prayer, Jesus said, "Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth" (Luke 11:2). Eternity is enshrined in mystery. Inspired prophets were able to remove some of the difficulties, but many of the details concerning the kingdom of God were never described. Nevertheless, a glorious revelation was given when Jesus said, "Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth." At first glance it appeared that the disciples were encouraged to ask for the impossible, to reach for the unreachable. The Savior indicated that every corner of God's domain was without blemish, and every creature joyfully conformed to the will of the Almighty. The description given by John concerning the descent of the New Jerusalem reflected the glory of that celebrated place: "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death,

JESUS ... WHO SUPPLIED A NEW PORTRAIT OF GOD

neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Rev. 21:4).

The Continuing Peace... a Holy Future

One of the greatest comparisons in the Old Testament was supplied by the psalmist who said, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him" (Ps. 103:13). It is amazing to know God is great and powerful, but it is more thrilling to address Him as "Father." His creative ability, even in eternity, will be overshadowed by His love. Doubtless, redeemed sinners will be awed by His omnipotence, but they sing about His love (see Rev. 5:9).

The story has often been told how the famous British preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon received a copy of Dr. Andrew Bonar's book on Leviticus. He was so blessed by its contents that he returned it to the author requesting an autograph and a photograph. Bonar graciously acceded to the request of his friend, but he returned the volume with a note, which read, "Dear Spurgeon, here is the book with my autograph and a photograph. If you had been willing to wait a short season you

160

could have had a better likeness, for I shall be like Him. I shall see Him as He is (I John 3:2)."

During World War II, many children from London were evacuated to safer parts of the country. One small child said, as she viewed the wide-open spaces for the first time, "Wouldn't London be a nice place if it were here!" Another charming youngster said, as she looked at the sky filled with stars, "If heaven is so beautiful on the wrong side, what must it be like on the right side?"

Dr. Andrew Bonar's reply to his friend condensed all he believed. As he approached the end of his earthly pilgrimage, his faith in the hereafter remained unshaken. He did not fear death; he knew it was the beginning of a long-awaited journey into the presence of his Lord. Any uncertainty that might have been known in earlier parts of his life had been obliterated by the inflow of God's perfect peace. Serenity, confidence, and anticipation flooded his soul. He was going home and knew his heavenly Father would be there to welcome him. Soon he would be able to say, "I am home at last!"

This document was created with Win2PDF available at <http://www.daneprairie.com>.
The unregistered version of Win2PDF is for evaluation or non-commercial use only.