

"A VACATION TO REMEMBER"

A Sermon By

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INTRODUCTION

In one of his books author Bill Bryson tells of some memorable family vacations while growing up. He remembers traveling with his brother and sister in a big blue Rambler station wagon that was so big that it was almost like having his parents in another room. Of course, they were up front. There were those times when he and his brother and sister would flirt with trouble. They once discovered that they could take an apple from their picnic basket and make it look like a porcupine by sticking "strike anywhere" wooden matches into it. And it made a nice bomb when dropped out the back window of their station wagon. These home-made bombs would flash and pop with a large blue flame, amusing the children by causing the cars following behind to swerve around them.

Meanwhile, Bill's parents, miles away up in the front seats, never knew what was going on. They could never understand why cars kept zooming up alongside with the driver making funny faces and cussing at them furiously.

Stopping to eat, their picnic lunch was always an adventure in itself. Bill says that his father had an instinct for picking poor picnic sites. He remembers stopping for lunch near a truck stop and another time in a little park that turned out to be in the heart of the ghetto of a big city. He remembers how groups of children would come and stand around them silently watching them as they ate their "Hostess cupcakes" and their "Crinklecut Potato chips". As they were finishing their lunch it would always become windy so that Bill's mother would spend time chasing paper plates over the chosen area. And yellow jackets would often join them for their meal.

We've all had our share of interesting vacations. Someone once said that,

"A vacation is when you pack a car with seven suitcases, three small children, a mother-in-law, two dogs, golf clubs and say, 'It's so good to get away from it all'"

Even Jesus and His disciples took vacations, or at least they tried to...

THAT WELL-DESERVED REST

Let's look at our text. We find that the disciples had just returned from their first "solo" mission, which had been very successful. They had a lot to tell Jesus about their adventures "out on the road". But Jesus could tell that their exertions had drained them and worn them down and that they needed some "R and R". And so He said to them,

"Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest for a while..."

So Jesus and His disciples sailed off to get some time alone, quiet time away from the crowd and the press of people. Perhaps they were looking forward to having time to review their recent experiences together. But this was one vacation that just wasn't going to be. For even while they were still aboard the boat the people on shore recognized them and word spread quickly that they were there. So quickly, in fact, that by the time they disembarked there was already a considerable crowd waiting.

Now, I'm sure that most of you have experienced what it's like to have your vacation interrupted. It can be annoying and frustrating, and I'm sure that when the disciples saw the crowd waiting for them on shore, their hearts sank and their dispositions soured. They probably felt like some of our present day celebrities who have to beg reporters to leave them alone.

But notice this that Jesus didn't seem to be annoyed. He took it all in stride. In fact He stayed there with the crowd and talked to them and taught them. Why, one wonders....why didn't He just sneak away and get on with His well-deserved rest? He had a good idea why the crowd was there and let's look at this scene from their point of view for a couple of minutes.

THE CROWD'S HUNGER

First-off, let's focus on the crowd and reflect upon the "hunger", if you will, of this crowd.

Now there was something about Jesus that made people want to be near Him. There was something missing in their lives that they couldn't obtain through their day-to-day living. They were looking for something better, and they were sensing that Jesus held the "key" to what they needed. They were hungry for what He had to offer. I think that people today aren't that different. We all know of people "hungering" for something like that. We all know of people stumbling through life...looking for the road to happiness, but often looking in the wrong place. Perhaps they think they will find happiness through money or power or drugs. Yes, I think we all know of people who are hungering for what He has to offer and they may not recognize it or know where to find it.

Ruth Bell Graham writes of a conversation she had with a clerk in a store. The clerk told her of another customer who had broken her leg and had been bed-ridden for a while. One Sunday this lady was home alone...all by herself... propped up in bed...unable to get up and do anything. Bored...lonely.... impatient...she decided to call a friend, but the phone was just beyond her reach. Still, she made several attempts to get the phone closer, but all she managed to do was knock it onto the floor, completely out of reach. Then, through some sort of electronic freak, she heard the voice of Billy Graham coming from the telephone receiver...his "Hour of Decision". She really wasn't interested in listening, but she couldn't reach her phone, so she had no choice.

Well, that one freak accident did help to bring about a tremendous change in her life. As a result of hearing that broadcast, she took stock of herself, of her own life and made some resolutions and intentions and decisions that brought her closer to God, as He has come to us in Christ. There are those who would say that she "accepted Christ into her heart, her life" and now she is living on the high road, living the life of faith.

There are so many people searching for Christ and what He has to offer, even if they don't know it consciously. So these people who crowded around Him that day long ago had a real need for Him, a hunger for His word and they were aware of their need. Mark pens this line,

"They were like sheep without a shepherd"

The crowd hungered for Christ, but there is something else we need to see, so follow along...

JESUS WAS FILLED WITH COMPASSION

Secondly, we see that Jesus was filled with compassion.

"I am the Good Shepherd" Jesus says in John's Gospel. He also told some parables about sheep that we still remember. If one sheep was missing, the shepherd would go off and search for it until it was found. When Jesus saw the crowd that had gathered, He saw their hurt and He felt their longing. I'm sure there were those times when those crowds that followed Him were something of a nuisance. They would be to you and to me, but not to Jesus! Jesus saw the people and was filled with compassion for them. He loved them. The crowd was His mission and His compassion for them led Him into action.

Jacob Bronoski, in his landmark television documentary, The Ascent of Man reveals how medicine progressed in its development as a science. In the beginning, doctors would read the great classics of healing, but would never TOUCH the patient. The doctor would direct a lowly surgeon to make the necessary incision in the patient. Real healing didn't take place until one doctor had the courage to actually touch his patient. You see, in other words, you can't heal them until you touch them. Jesus reached out to people. He touched them. He had compassion.

I don't think I've ever told you the story of Red Moore. Red Moore had been out of work for almost a year when he received a letter from an old friend, a friend he hadn't been in touch with in a long time. She was writing to tell him that she had developed cancer, but things weren't looking too bad for the doctors were telling her that she had a good chance of being cured, but she didn't have the money for the necessary operation that was called for. On the down side, her husband had left her and she had several kids to take care of and she was asking Red if there was anything he could do to help her out.

Red wanted to help, but he was broke himself. He did start a campaign for her. He first went to ask his old co-workers for contributions. Then he went to some other nearby towns and cities and asked other people he knew especially those in his old company for donations. He raised some money for her.

But the hospital refused to operate. Red went so far as to speak personally to the hospital administrator. They discussed it for a while...even argued about it and then Red asked the hospital administrator if there was something that he might do personally to help nudge things along and open the door for the operation. The administrator said "yes" there was....together they would turn it into a challenge. He challenged the hospital employees to match the amount of money that Red had already collected, so that the operation could be performed.

And it happened. The challenge was quickly met. Red's friend checked into the hospital within a few days, had the operation and is now back with her family.

The point is simply this: a little compassion can go a long ways in this world of ours. It can accomplish far more than he think. Jesus knew this and that day long ago, He had compassion for the crowd that gathered..."like sheep without a shepherd". He stayed with them. He eased their spiritual hunger. And this brings us to the conclusion of this story, to the third and final point.

POWER TO SATISFY HUNGRY HEARTS

I believe with all my heart that Jesus has the power to satisfy our hungry hearts.

He has the power to feed the deep hunger of people everywhere. Back to the text for further comments.

Jesus and His disciples still hoped to get away for a while. They still longed for some quiet, restful times away from the pressures of life. So that night they took a boat and went to the other side of Lake Galilee. But again, as soon as they got out of the boat, people recognized them and flocked to them. People came from all over to see Him and to hear Him. Sick people were set out in the streets so that Jesus would heal them. And Jesus did heal them. No matter how much He needed a break, a bit of a vacation, if there were people who needed His healing, He was there for them - spiritually and physically - and He ministered to their deepest needs. And still does...

The March - April Upper Room of 1993 tells a story of a person who experienced this power of God in Christ to satisfy. It was entitled, Angry At God. Jan Lancaster lives out in Michigan. She tells of how her husband lost the job he had held for 18 years during the recession of the mid-eighties. Without income, Jan and her husband first lost their home. She admits that she was furious to think that God would ever let this happen to them. She became quite depressed and this affected her relationship with God, with the church where they had been so active. Even in the depths of her despair, however, she still had the bit of faith that somehow God would help her family turn their lives around, that God would help them find another home, but she grew quite impatient and like so many she wanted to see some evidence of God's concern... right now.

Several years later, Jan and her husband and their 19 year old daughter moved into a new home. One day as she was lining the kitchen shelves with paper she became frustrated because she just couldn't seem to get the paper to lay flat. She started again, folding and smoothing it down one small section at a time. This method proved to be successful. Standing there in the kitchen of her new home she was suddenly struck by a powerful insight. She said this,

"Suddenly it was clear to me that this was very much how the Lord had brought us through the last three years - one small step at a time, teaching and leading us day by day".

There in the kitchen, Jan began to cry. She thanked God for bringing them through some difficult times. Through that time of struggle, she says she grew closer to both her husband and her daughter. "And most important" she said,

"I could see that no matter what happens in my life, what is added on or what is taken away...God will be there with me".

This is the critical point for the day. Put this down in your life....in that place where you keep those things that are most important....we cannot wear Jesus down with our problems. He sees our hunger. He has compassion and He will respond.

SUMMARY

Let me summarize what I see in this scripture passage then. The disciples had hoped for a bit of a vacation...a breather...they needed it...a time to be alone with Jesus - their Lord, Master, Teacher, Saviour. But instead they suddenly saw another dimension of what it means to be a

follower of Jesus. There will always be people who hunger for that which Christ has to offer. The very "bread of life" - if you will. He will never grow weary in caring for those who come to Him. Day in and day out....He has the power to feed the hungry hearts of people - everywhere. Take this message along with you as you take your summer vacations and may it help you to have a vacation to remember.

PRAYER

Be with us, O God, in these coming weeks of July and August... weeks when some of us will not be here in this place of worship. But wherever we go, may we take time out on a Sunday to remember You...and that You have the power to feed hungry hearts wherever we may find ourselves...by the lakeside, in the mountains, at the shore....all this in the spirit of Christ we pray. Amen.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: Sunday, June 26, 1994

GREETING / VISITORS

- A. A word of greeting to the visitors in today's congregation. We're delighted you're here with us and we do hope that we'll have the opportunity to greet you.....be sure to fill out a visitor card or sign one of the Guest Books. Come, worship with us....come, work with us....
- B. The roots of this church go deep into the soil of this part of the city...doing the Lord's work here at this busy corner since 1837...we minister here in the name of Christ and it is in His loving spirit that....

THIS EVENING

- A. You'll note that the Chamber Chorus of the Oratorio Society will offer an a-capella concert here this evening....admission is free and we hope you'll want to return this evening to enjoy this special concert....Dr. Woodside will be conducting...
- B. Today marks the final Sunday of the choir until mid September. We thank the choir members....and Lyndon Woodside...for their many gifts to us....43 services....starting next Sunday we shall have choir members and friends providing solos for these services.

PARISH CONCERNS

- A. Parish concerns are listed for you in the bulletin and you'll note that the "HOUNDS" will be meeting on Tuesday evening.... new friends are always welcome as the group focuses on some devotional classics from across the centuries...
- B. Thursday evening the Committee on Nominations and Personnel will begin its work for the October Church Conference...looking at the various committees and reflecting on our leadership concerns. The meeting is called for 6:30 on Thursday evening....
- C. Next Sunday William Bonwitt officially begins his work among us as our Student Assistant. Some of you have already met Bill and gotten to know him....he's here today and I ask you to offer your name to him for a few Sundays until he gets to know you...more on Mr. Bonwitt next Sunday...

SUMMER MONTHS

- A. As we come to the quieter months of July and August, we'll be shooting for 100 people each Sunday across the next 10 Sundays....10 at 100 is the formula we want to follow....

- B. We come to the quieter months of the year, but they are good months and good weeks for us...new friends continue to "come in"...and I always enjoy the more relaxed pace for it give us an opportunity to get to know each other better.

OFFERING

- A. This is the last Sunday to make a special offering to the PEACE WITH JUSTICE appeal...information and an envelope is in your bulletin.....another fifty dollars would help us reach our goal.

- B. Jesus said:

"It is more blessed to give than it is to receive...." In this spirit let us worship God with our tithes and gifts...