

## 4 "APPRECIATING OUR HERITAGE"

INTRODUCTION Many, many years ago there lived a very handsome and eloquent prince by the name of Absalom. The Old Testament tells us that "in all Israel there was none so much to be praised as Absalom for his beauty; from the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish on him". He used to get his hair cut once a year; he was a handsome prince, the idol of the kingdom.

He was also ambitious. He wanted to make sure that the crown of his father David would one day rest on his own head. Coldblooded and treacherous, he plotted insurrection against his father, the king. He devised a clever scheme to undermine him and to win the people to his side. He would ride through the streets displaying his power. He would get up early and go and stand at the city gate watching there for the dissatisfied and disgruntled people who came to the city to place their troubles before the king. He would talk with winsome affability to everybody, and would make himself one with them.

Whenever he met a man with a grievance, he fairly oozed charm and sympathy. "Where do you come from friend?" "From such and such a town" "My name is Absalom. I have connections in the palace. Tell me your troubles". And so the unsuspecting citizen would pour out his troubles against the world in general and against the present administration in particular. "Too bad" would be the reply of Absalom. "Too bad there is nobody in this corrupt government to hear your case and help you. Ah, if only I were king. If only I had the power, I would see that you got justice". And he would put his arm around the complainer; it was all very touching.

"And on this manner" the Bible tells us, "did Absalom do to all Israel that came to the king for judgment; so Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel." It seemed good to them to have someone in a high place who would listen to their complaints. They were tiring of David who was getting old and inefficient, and they were ready to listen to this democratic charmer. And so the conspiracy grew. David was gradually undermined by this thoughtless, thankless and treacherous son, and by these thoughtless and thankless people who were charmed by Absalom.

But it's interesting to note that the record goes on to tell us how empty all of the promises of Absalom turned out to be, and how sadly the people were deceived. David had his faults, but poor David with all his faults was an angel in contrast to this young monster of a son. The people came by painful experience to understand that Absalom had put his arm around them in order to betray them, and that the cures he promised were far worse than the diseases. He had preyed on their discontent only to promote himself and to establish himself as the boss of the kingdom.

DEVELOPMENT OF THEME } What a book the Bible is. Every mood of the human soul is mirrored in it, and every experience that modern people face is written on its pages. This ancient story has familiar overtones. It reminds us of how thoughtless and thankless people can so easily and unconsciously undermine their own heritage by simply failing to appreciate the good things that are part of their heritage, and forever dwelling upon the imperfections. It's something that can happen in all areas of life. We perhaps fail to

in other lands, little by little, we let this precious heritage of the church slip by. There have been those political Absaloms in other lands who have wanted to destroy it because it has refused to serve the totalitarian ideal; economic Absaloms who have wanted to silence it because it has interfered with special interest. And whether we think of the church at large, or the little church at the cross roads where we hold our membership, the message is the same. We ought not to allow its faults to blind us to its larger worth.

CLOSING In one of his books, Fulton Oursler, introduces us to his old negro nurse whose name was Anna Maria Cecilia Sophia Virginia Avalon Thessalonians. She was born a slave on the eastern shore of Maryland, and attended not only his birth, but also the birth of his mother. Fulton Oursler pays this negro nurse a wonderful tribute for he tells us that it was this woman who first taught him the great lesson of a thankful heart.

"I remember her" he said, "as she sat at the kitchen table in our house with her hard, old brown hands folded, with her black eyes lifted to the ceiling, and the husky old voice saying, 'Much obliged Lord.. much obliged for my vittles'." "Anna" I said, "What's a vittle?" And she replied, "It's what I got to eat and drink.....that's vittles" "But Anna" "wouldn't you get your vittles whether you thanked the Lord or not" "Sure" she said, "But it makes everything taste so much better to be thankful"

Fulton Oursler goes on to tell us that there came a time when he passed through a very bitter and trying experience. He points out to us that it was the memory of Anna's thankful spirit that kept him going. It served as a source of inspiration. It gave him a handle with which to work. Finally word came to him one day that Anna was dying. He hurried to her bedside, and found her with her hands folded in prayer and pain, and wondered what she would find to be thankful for in such a time.

"She opened her eyes, smiled, and the last words she spoke were, 'Much obliged Lord....much obliged for so many fine friends.'"

I think it well for us to stop what we are doing and occasionally to say with Anna, "Much obliged Lord, for my vittles" Much obliged lord for my fine friends. Much obliged Lord for my wife, for my husband, for my family.....for my church.....for my country. We agree with Anna that things do taste so much better when we take time to appreciate riches and the blessings of our inheritance.

SHALL WE PRAY: Grant, we beseech Thee, O God, that the words which we have heard this hour with our outward ears may, through thy grace, be so grafted inwardly in our hearts that they may bring forth in us the fruit of good living, to the honor and praise of Thy Name; through Jesus Christ, Our Lord.  
Amen