

## "BALANCING OUR OUTLOOK"

INTRODUCTION Several years ago I happened to clip from the newspaper a long range weather prediction offered by a weatherman in St. Louis, Missouri. He had this to say:

"There will be days that will be fair and foul, cold and hot. There will be weather that will make you sad, and there will be weather that will make you sing. On each day, if it doesn't rain or snow, the weather will be clear...."

As I read this for the first time, I couldn't help but feel that there was something here in this weather forecast that helped to describe life in general. There are times when life is kind to us, and our days are sunny and serene. And then too there are times when the sky gets dark and cloudy, and our hearts become unhappy and helpless. If we're not careful, life can become lop-sided and twisted. We can lose our perspective, and our outlook can become unbalanced.

Most of us have a mature attitude toward the weather. To be sure, there are times when we complain about the heat, the cold, the rain, the snow. But by and large, we have learned to prepare for it - to accept it as it comes - to use it - to make the most of it. And so it is that we need to develop a mature attitude toward life. We must prepare for it. We must accept it as it comes. We must use it. We must make the most of it. We need to develop a sense of balance if we are not to be overcome by the shifting climates of life.

PAUL HAD THIS OUTLOOK We find that the Apostle Paul had this sense of balance. He experienced rough weather on more than one occasion, and yet he managed to remain poised, effective and unruffled. Somewhere along the line, he discovered the secret of a life that is balanced on a pivotal faith in God. He refers to it in the letter that he wrote to the people of Philippi.

"For I have learned to be content, whatever the circumstances may be. For I know now how to live when things are difficult. I know now how to live when things are prosperous. I have learned the secret of facing either poverty or plenty. I am ready for anything through the strength of Him who lives within me...."

These are thrilling words. We have here the spiritual biography of a man who possessed a strong and healthy mind. His outlook was balanced. And we can have the same well balanced outlook if we follow his advice. Concentrate, he tells us, on the things that are true and good and pure. Be steadfast in faith. Rejoice in the Lord. Learn to be content wherever you are. And then Paul adds this word of assurance:

"And the peace of God which passes all human understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus"

WE NEED TO GUARD AGAINST  
SELF PITY AND SELF INTEREST

For one thing, self pity and self interest often prevent people from living normal, balanced lives. They can prevent people from becoming effective, mature and balanced personalities. We need to guard against them. Self pity and self interest can be overcome by enlarging the horizons of life.

The 17th Century philosopher, Francis Bacon, in one of his works refers to three types of scientists which may well be three types of people. The first type of scientist, he tells us, is like the ant. He only collects things. The second type of scientist is like the spider. He collects things and spins them into his own little web of living. The third type of scientist is like the bee. The bee gathers material from the flowers of the field and then transforms and digests the material into something beautiful, sweet and useful for others. We all know of people who are like the ant and the spider. They live in their own little ant hill; they spin little webs of self-centeredness. Perhaps they're caught up in a web of self pity and self interest.

I think the Apostle Paul would challenge the ant people and the spider people to become bee people. He would have them discover the far flung fields of service and would have them use their talents and their treasures to sweeten the ways of men. The mind has to get off dead center if it is to be effective and well balanced.

We're told that Elizabeth Barrett injured her spine in a fall from a pony when she was fifteen years of age. She recovered from her injury, but remained an invalid for nearly twenty years. Her mother died, and her father - a harsh, puritanical tyrant - prayed earnestly for her recovery. But she received little love from him and from her brothers and sisters. And so it was that her ill health served as a convenient retreat for her. She was waited on and catered to by everyone in the family. They pitied her and she pitied herself. But then one day Robert Browning came along and fell desperately in love with her. Everything changed. She soon forgot that she was an invalid. She got married at forty. She went mountain climbing at forty one. And she had a baby at the age of forty-three, much to the amazement of her prim and proper friends. She threw away her symptoms. Her self pity and self interest disappeared as her horizon was pushed back by the power of a love that took her mind off herself.

Self pity and self interest can be dangerous and we would do well to guard against them. They can lead to unhappiness. We should be careful not to fall into the habit of feeling sorry for ourselves. One of the best things to counter balance this tendency is to develop a genuine concern for others - what others may be facing, what others may be going through. Unless we take this step, we may end up lonely and unhappy.

WE NEED TO GUARD AGAINST  
BOREDOM AND OVERCOME IT BY  
STRENGTHENING INNER RESOURCES

Self pity and self interest throw us off balance. Another factor which may throw us off balance is boredom. Life has gone stale for many people. They find little zest or flavor in their everyday

living. They're bored to death by the ordinary. They try to get some new thrills by accumulating things. They try to build their lives on outward satisfactions rather than on inner resources and spiritual values.

We all know of people like the King of Siam. When he was crowned King, he sat on a throne of figwood under a seven tiered white umbrella to receive many tokens of office from the High Priest. These are some of the things he was presented:

"The Great Crown of Victory, the Brahman Girdle, The Golden Tablet of Style and Title, The Girdle of the Nine Gems, the Scepter, The Fan, The Diamond Ring, The Whisk of a Yak's Tail, the Whisk of an Elephant's Tail, The Slippers, The Stick, The Bettel-nut Set, The Water Urn, The Hostage Sword, The Discus, The Diamond Spear, and the Long Handled Sword"

So many people today seem to enjoy decorating their lives with crowns, swords, and scepters - people whose lives are overbalanced with clothes, cars, lovers, pleasures, jobs, titles. The lives of so many people today are properly balanced. They may be rich in things, but they're poor in terms of those inner resources and spiritual values which stabilize. It must be terrifying to have the wherewithal to enjoy life and yet lack the inner resources, the capacity to cope with life. The mature person makes his own climate. He finds inner strength through the cultivation of religious habits. His mental health is not linked to outward satisfactions.

One one occasion Mark Twain made a trip to Europe with his wife and little eleven year old daughter. While they were there, kings and nobles vied with each other to entertain Mark Twain and his family. Universities conferred honorary degrees upon him. At the end of the trip, as they were on the train which was taking them to the port where they were to sail for America, Mark Twain made a list of all of the important people who had graciously entertained them. After reading the list to his family, his little girl looked up and said: "Gee daddy...you know everyone worth knowing except God".

And is not this the case with many people today. There's a sadness in that remark. There are times when you and I are tempted to leave God out of our list of acquaintances, to live as though they were no God. The material things overbalance the spiritual things in our lives. However, as we try to balance these two sides of our natures, we shall discover a richness and a deeper meaning to life. If our lives are dull and stale and empty, it's our fault. But this emptiness can be overcome by carefully cultivating and developing spiritual resources - the inner resources of faith and love and hope and service.

OVERCOMING DEPRESSION AND  
DISCOURAGEMENT BY LEARNING  
THE WAYS OF CONTENTMENT

Not all of us are caught up in the web of self pity and self interest. Few of us are finding life to be stale and empty. But there are many people who become so easily depressed and discouraged by circumstances over which they seem to have little control. Hardly a Sunday

goes by that we do not have some people in our congregation who have come here hoping above all else that some word of strength and encouragement may be found. To those of you who are burdened with worries and cares may I quietly suggest that you try to overcome these by learning the way of contentment. There are times when life seems very unreasonable. But in such situations, the mature Christian, learns as Paul had to learn, to find contentment where he is. Dr. Bertha Van Hoosen, in the Petticoat Surgeon offers this bit of advice:

"My favorite hypothesis is EVERY HOUR BRINGS LIGHT. This slogan, (she tells us), was introduced to me in medical school by two of my classmates. I remarked to them on one occasion, 'I find it difficult to make a decision'. Whereupon one of them replied: 'Never waste time in decisions. My husband and I tried for a year never to make any decisions, unless it was absolutely necessary. Our slogan was EVERY HOUR BRINGS LIGHT. During the year, I made one decision, and Jack never made any. When the decisive moment came, there was only one thing to do and I did it...'"

We don't want to push this idea of not making decisions too far, but there is something here to think about. This is not the counsel of weak submission. Rather it is the attitude of intelligent cooperation with the main currents of life. It is the mark of a fundamental trust in the loving providence of God. The trouble with some people is that they're constantly fighting life. We stew and fret and fume if things don't go our way. We want to tell God how to run things. And we think our way is the only way. No wonder our minds get sick and tired. We need to learn to listen. God may be trying to speak to us, and yet in the hustle of life we don't bother to stop to listen. Life can be unreasonable, but unless we learn to take "NO" for an occasional answer, we're likely to beat our brains out against the brick walls of life.

Victor Hugo was at the peak of his career when Napoleon III sent him into exile. It appeared to be the end of everything for Victor Hugo. But he came to discover that the possibilities of patience far outweighed the discouragements of exile. In fact, his biographer made this observation: "Books that were far stronger than anything that had gone before came from his hand". And he goes on to say that Victor Hugo became twice the size of the man that he had been before the exile.

"For I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances may be. I am ready for anything through the strength of Him who lives within me."

In this counsel of contentment, Paul is simply reminding us that we can use our full powers to great advantage wherever we are. He is reassuring us that if our motives are honest, if our efforts are sincere, if our objectives are high, that God is not going to desert us. If we trust Him, we will discover that even in the times of deepest depression, he will lead us from darkness to light, from confusion to order, unbalance to balance.

LET US PRAY:

Our Father and our God, help us to overcome our self pity by enlarging our horizons. Help us to overcome the dullness of life by developing stronger inner resources. Help us to overcome the dark moods of life by learning, as Paul once learned, the secret of contentment which rests on our faith in Thee and our belief that all things work together for good to those who love Thee and serve Thee. Amen

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Coffee and cookies will be served in Fellowship Hall following the service, and all of you are invited to share in this cheerful and delightful time of fellowship that we have every Sunday following the service.

Seldom is there a Sunday morning that we do not have visitors in our congregation. We welcome you - those of you who are visitors, and we would encourage you to introduce yourself to us either at the door following the service or at the coffee hour. May we also invite you to leave with us a record of your visit by signing one of our guest books. Should business or pleasure bring you to NYC on future occasions, we do hope you will accept this invitation to worship with us again.

The announcements are listed in the bulletin. May I underscore two of those announcements. All of you are invited to the Church Fellowship Night schedule for this evening - 7 PM in the third floor. And tomorrow evening the ladies of the church will come together under the name of the Woman's Society of Christian Service. "What Shall We Tell Our Children" is the subject of tomorrow evening's program, and Dr. Dora Chaplin will be present to speak.

JESUS SAID: It is more blessed to give than it is to receive.  
In this spirit let us worship God with our morning offering.