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Psalm 30  
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### THROUGH TEARS AND TELESCOPES

A few years ago on a very dark and unusually clear night I directed my telescope toward the eastern sky and located the great galaxy in the constellation of Andromeda. What I saw through the telescope that night, so the astronomers tell us, was at least two million light years from the earth, or in miles, two million times six trillion.

Certainly, anyone who has ever looked through a telescope at that galaxy nearest to our own, designated by the astronomers as M31, has looked into space a tremendous distance, a distance which by comparison makes a trip to the moon look like a walk to the corner drug store.

Astronomers looking through the 200-inch telescope at Palomar, with the aid of photographic plates, or using radio telescopes, have of course looked far beyond the great galaxy in Andromeda. Even to speak of such distances becomes almost ridiculous for the human mind is incapable of grasping them. We live in a universe so immense it is beyond all human comprehension. And it doesn't help when the scientists start talking about quasars, black holes, and anti-matter, and suggest that if only we were to travel through space at a great enough speed we would somehow grow younger instead of older. It all becomes very confusing.

But as great as is the distance which we may see into outer space with the aid of one kind of telescope or another, we would like to suggest that there is in this remarkable universe another instrument which often enables us to see more if not farther. It is a human tear! A telescope may greatly increase our sight, but a tear can increase to a much larger degree our insight.

All credit is due science and scientists for the marvelous accomplishments that have been made in the past 50 years. It is foolish to criticize science and technology for having given us all that has so completely transformed our lives. An automobile packed full with horsepower, a snowmobile which can go with ease where a man with snowshoes would even have great difficulty going, an atomic bomb, or insecticides--none of these things offer any threat to man except as they are used and misused by man.

What we need to wonder at is the brain of homo erectus that can conjure up these scientific and mechanical marvels but can't figure out how parents and their children can understand one another, how husbands and wives can live happily together, how individuals can find meaning in life without taking drugs, and how nations can settle their differences without engaging in mass slaughter.

The telescope is an instrument created by the mind of man. It has no inherent value except as man uses it to increase his knowledge and understanding. If you prefer we could discuss the microscope and come to exactly the same conclusion. Why can't that same wonderful mind that created them solve the much more basic human problems?

## II

That is about all we can or need to say about those instruments in which a piece of ground glass has so enlarged man's concept of his environment.

But a tear! Ah! That is something else again. A poet, Francis Bourdillon, once wrote:

"So often in the course  
Of life's few fleeting years,  
A single pleasure costs  
The soul a thousand tears."

And so it does. We sin in haste and repent at leisure. A few moments of pleasure can give us many years of anguish and pain, not to mention a terrible sense of guilt.

But what the poet fails to mention is that those tears can teach us much about life if we will only learn. Our tears, shed over loss, loneliness, sickness, or sin, often give us an insight into human life that can be gained in no other way, enabling us to see further and deeper into the mysteries and intricacies of the human spirit than a telescope can ever peer into the remote reaches of outer space.

I have looked through many telescopes many times. I have seen the craters on the moon, the satellites of Jupiter, the rings of Saturn, binary stars and distant galaxies, but I have not seen nearly as far as when I have sat at the bedside of a dying friend, or a sick child; or talked with a heart-broken parent, a young woman who has suddenly become a widow, a disillusioned youth. At those times I have seen deep into the human soul and I have come away having far greater understanding and knowledge and sympathy than I could ever have gained by looking through a telescope or a microscope.

I regret that so many people have had to suffer in order for me to learn to understand in some small measure the meaning and significance of life. I ask God to forgive me that I have been so slow in learning. But I am confident that there is no other way to learn. I am confident that this is the way God meant it to be. And so in the end, I am confident it will all be revealed to have been good. Not that everything that happens is good; but good can come out of everything that happens.

III

It seems indisputable that the human being, much as he seeks to avoid struggle and pain, nevertheless longs for some obstacles to overcome. He needs victories in his life, else why do men climb mountains and go to the moon?

Read one of the most inspiring and most tragic adventure stories of all time, the story of Scott at the Antarctic, and you will see this truth shining through. In the record you may read of a discussion those explorers had as to whether they would enjoy polar travel if, by the aid of modern inventions, it became quite easy and comfortable. They said no with one accord. It seems they really wanted to prove to themselves how much they could endure. There was a reward they could not forego, and new bonds of brotherhood sprang up between them.

Dr. Flinders Petrie, in his book Revolutions of Civilization, describes the same phenomena from a different point of view:

"There is no advance without strife. Man must strive with nature or with man if he is not to fall back and degenerate. The harder a nation strives, the more capable it will be... Hence, the easier life is rendered, the more easy is decay and degradation. The maximum of wealth must inevitably lead to the downfall."

Surely there is more than one message for our generation in those words, and we had better heed them.

IV

Tears, which represent our struggles with life, can enable us to see further than telescopes. They can be the lenses through which you and I can look deep within the human mind and spirit and gain new and vital understanding and insight that will enable us to live with one another on a higher and more harmonious level. Tears can give us understanding and appreciation for others available to us in no other way.

But something more needs to be said. We need a solace for our tears, a strength and support for our loneliness, our loss, our sorrow. And there is such a solace.

People have sought that solace in many ways. Some have sought it in alcohol, others in drugs, still others in keeping busy every moment so that they won't have time to think of their problems. All of these are escapes and we must finally come back and face the problem head-on.

I have never found but one way--face your problem and face it with God's help. When Jesus said, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give ye rest", this is what he was saying; "Come to me, and through me learn of our kind and gracious heavenly Father, and in Him you shall find rest and peace and solace." There is no other way. Stoicism can help a little. It can enable us to present a calm exterior to the world about us, but inside we are still a writhing mass of fear, insecurity and loneliness. It is only when God has become real to us and we put the problem into God's hands that we have finally found something big enough, and strong enough, and understanding enough, to give us the peace which we so desperately need.

Paul said it far better than I can say it:

"For this slight, momentary trouble is producing for us an everlasting weight of glory that exceeds all calculations, granted we do not fasten our eyes on the visible, but on the unseen; for the visible things are transitory, but the unseen things are everlasting." (1)

Someone has said that we do not know what the future holds, but we know who holds the future. In the same fashion, we often do not know what to do with the present, but we do know who it is that can take care of the present, even as He has taken care of the past and will take care of the future. If our tears cause us to commit ourselves to Him, they will all have been worthwhile. Amen.

(1) II Corinthians 4:17