

"ALL THE POWER WE NEED"
January 21, 1990

TEXT: Exodus 16:12 "I have heard the murmurings of the people of Israel; "Say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat flesh, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread; then you shall know that I am the Lord your God.'"

Some years ago I read about a very spectacular robbery. Six armed gunmen broke into the London branch of the Bank of America, gained entrance to the underground strongroom where the vaults and safe-deposit boxes were, and escaped with something like seven million dollars worth of valuables. One woman, a Mrs. Farida Hall, lost jewelry worth 480 thousand dollars.

Now, I have trouble even imagining that kind of money, much less tying it all up in jewelry. Still, I can sympathize with Mrs. Hall's loss. It must have been tragic. An even greater tragedy appeared, however, as she talked about the theft. "Everything I've got was in there," she said. "My whole life was in that box."

Think of it! God had given her the most wonderful and precious gift there is --LIFE. To bless that life, and make it abundant, He had sent His Son into the world to live and to die. Yet what did she do with her priceless gift? She exchanged it for a few brightly colored baubles and locked them away in a vault. Esau's short sighted folly pales by comparison. He may have traded his birthright for a mess of pottage, but at least he ate the pottage. He did not hide it away where neither he nor anyone else could use it.

Still, let us not be too quick to point the finger. Without knowing it, some of us may be doing much the same sort of thing. We may, for instance, have allowed ourselves to become so busy making a living that we have little time or energy left for life. Or we may be so concerned about providing for the future that we miss the joy and wonder of the present. We may seek the rewards of life in things to be possessed rather than occasions to be experienced or relationships to be shared. And, as if that were not enough, we devise clever, but self-defeating, ways to protect our possessions from the dangers of use.

For example, when was the last time you actually used your best china? If you are like most of us, it was probably for some special occasion or important guest. Then you probably put it away again for safe keeping as if neither you nor your family rate the really good stuff. It is not too hard to imagine the following scenario. A mother says to her son or daughter, "Dear, will you please set the table for dinner?" And, after the

necessary liturgy of complaint, the child goes over to the china cabinet and starts to get out the good china. "No, no," shouts the mother. "Not the good stuff. It's just the family tonight."

Or have you ever bought new clothes and hung them away in the closet waiting for some special occasion that was important enough to wear them? Unfortunately, such occasions may never come --at least not until that suit or dress is either out of style or no longer fits. Things are meant to be used. And hiding them away, whether in a safe-deposit box or in a clothes closet, deprives us and those around us of the pleasure which they ought to bring. That is what Jesus was trying to say in the parable of the rich fool. He said:

The land of a rich man brought forth plentifully; and he thought to himself, "What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crop?" And he said, "I will do this. I will pull down my barns and build larger ones. And there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul: 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry.'" But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?"

Things are meant to be used, but so often we want to hoard them instead --to put them away for safe keeping. And too often we do the same with life: our energies, our sympathies, our affections, our commitments. These, too we try to store away. To keep them safe against the dents and scratches of life. But, in so doing, we only smother and destroy them.

Listen again to this morning's scripture. In the wilderness the Israelites grew hungry and afraid of starvation. So God arranged to meet their needs. He said to Moses, "I have heard the murmurings of the people of Israel; Say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat flesh, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread; then you shall know that I am the Lord your God.'" And sure enough, quail fell to the ground in the evening and manna appeared in the morning. But Moses warned them to take no more than they could eat, to rely on God for each new day's supply.

There were some, however, as there always are, who thought they knew better. In what they must have considered cleverness they tried to guard against the uncertainties of life. So they collected more than they needed and hid a part of it away, but, in the morning, what they saved was foul and full of worms.

Now I tell this story, not to encourage carelessness, but to assert the wisdom of resting on the everlasting arms. A few minutes ago we prayed, "Give us this day our daily bread." In the original Greek that literally means "Give us each day one day's supplies." It may refer to the Roman practice of each evening giving a soldier his rations for the coming day. At any

rate, like the Exodus story, it teach us that life's most important things can neither be gathered in advance nor stored away against the future. It reminds us that God provides anew each day. And life --like manna-- must be constantly renewed. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German theologian martyred by the Nazis, wrote: "I believe God will give us all the power we need --But He never gives it in advance, lest we rely upon ourselves and not on Him alone."

That, you see, is our basic conflict with God. God calls us to be His people, to obey Him, to rely on Him, to fellowship with Him. But we are constantly trying to be our own persons: self-directed, self-reliant, self-sufficient. Though we sing, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow", our daily actions stem from a very different mode of thinking. Though we pray, "Give us each day one day's supply", we long for sufficient wealth to usurp God's place as the source of our fulfillment.

Perhaps we do not really trust God. Perhaps we are just too proud to depend upon Him. Whatever the reason, our lives are very different from those of Noah, Abraham, Sampson, Jesus, and Paul. They all put their trust in God and risked everything in His service. Another such man is Ruel Howe. In his book, How to Stay Young While Growing Older, he writes of a time when he was traveling by airplane. At one point the man next to him tried to strike up a conversation. Turning to Dr. Howe, he asked, "What are you?", and Dr. Howe replied, "I am a pilgrim."

"I thought they were all dead," the stranger responded.

"Oh," said Dr. Howe, "I'm another kind of pilgrim --the kind who is trying to find the way from birth to life."

"Don't you mean from birth to death?" asked his companion.

"No," said Dr. Howe. "I mean just what I said." Then he explained that he was one who takes chances and runs risks in order to have experiences which keep him alive. He likened his life to that of a homesteader --never very secure and never too certain except in faith.

Most of us, however, find uncertainty too hard to live with. Some flee it by denying the vertical dimension of life; others by laying up treasures as a protection. But God keeps calling us, just as He called Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob. Just as he called our Pilgrim fathers and mothers, He calls us to leave the secure life and set out in faith for a land which He will show us.

And to each of us He offers, day by day, all the power we need. "Do not lay up for yourselves earthly treasures where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves heavenly treasures . . . For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."