

I CAN'T BELIEVE WE ARE SINGING ANOTHER VERSE**THE PLEASANT VIEW PLUMB LINE**

Have you ever found yourself impatient during the invitation song? Are you ready to race out of the parking lot so you can beat the crowds at the local restaurant? Is your mind already rehearsing conversations you want to have with friends in the congregation? Are you thinking about the current sale going on at the shopping mall down the street?

If so, it must drive you absolutely crazy if the song leader sings all four verses of a song, rather than the "traditional" three. What is the value of that extra verse? There are Christians sitting in auditoriums all over the world that literally feel their blood pressure rising when a song leader elects to sing all the verses of a particular invitation song. After all, it's just a waste of time, isn't it?

Several nights ago my family arrived home from a long Labor Day weekend out-of-town. We had postponed coming home as long as possible so that we could spend every available minute visiting with family in Nashville, Tennessee. As we were getting settled in, we went through our mail and listened to our answering machine. Message #3 was a dear friend that made us put own the mail as she slowly began to tell us just how important an extra verse really is.

Twelve days earlier the congregation where we attended wrapped up their gospel meeting. Burt Jones was the featured speaker, and with him preaching the Word, 42 souls responded to the invitation. On the last night, Burt commented that he wanted to leave knowing that he had done everything he could to bring lost souls to Christ, so that his conscience would be clear when he laid his head on his pillow that night. His last effort was to add one more verse to the invitation song. There had already been many to respond that night, but Burt's love for the gospel and love for souls was strong enough to beat the "traditional" three verses. On that occasion, during the extra verse, a young man stepped out into the isle and came forward. The reaction from the congregation was clearly obvious. This young man had just graduated from high school and had yet to obey the gospel. Everyone was so excited to see him make that walk down the aisle. He was buried with Christ in baptism that very night!

The message on our answering machine went on to describe how this young man and his girlfriend were out driving around enjoying the long weekend on Sunday night. Just a few hours after evening worship this young man and his girlfriend were apparently cut-off by someone. Sadly, the man who had cut them off was not finished making his statement, so he followed them. When they came to a stop, the man pulled up behind them and shot a series of three bullets that raced through the car, through the bucket seat, and found their way tearing through the young man's body. He died at the scene, just eleven days after being baptized. Fourteen days after being buried with Christ, this young man was buried in the ground.

I only share this tragic story with you so that you will think. Often we enter worship and just go through the motions. We check our watches. We look at what others are wearing. The invitation song becomes just another song...something keeping us from "being done." Please do not be impatient; someone's soul could be at stake. The few extra minutes that it took to sing an extra verse during that gospel meeting are now priceless to this young man and his family. Remember, we are not there to be entertained, and we are not the "audience." We are there to worship and praise our Creator. We would all do well to remember the words Paul wrote:

*"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual song, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do*

*"...then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel..." (Amos 7:8)*

**DON'T GIVE UP**

Text: \_\_\_\_\_

I. Don't Give up When You're \_\_\_\_\_ Up

Notes:

II. Don't Give up When You're \_\_\_\_\_ Up

Notes:

III. Don't Give up When You \_\_\_\_\_ Up

Notes:

IV. Don't Give up When You're \_\_\_\_\_ Up

Notes:

---

**THE BURDEN OF THE WORD OF THE LORD**

Text: \_\_\_\_\_

I. He Plead for them to \_\_\_\_\_

Notes:

II. He Plead for them to \_\_\_\_\_

Notes:

III. He Plead for them to \_\_\_\_\_

Notes:

IV. He Plead for them to \_\_\_\_\_

Notes:

*in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him” (Colossians 3:16-17).*

Maybe we should all ask for one more verse!

*-Brad Harrub*

**WHAT HOWARD LEARNED IN HEARTBREAK**

Howard Rutledge, a United States Air Force pilot, was shot down over North Vietnam during the early stages of the war.

He spent several miserable years in the hands of his captors before being released at the war's conclusion. In his book “In the Presence of Mine Enemies,” he reflects upon the resources from which he drew in those arduous days when life seemed so intolerable:

“During those longer periods of enforced reflection, it became so much easier to separate the important from the trivial, the worthwhile from the waste. For example, in the past, I usually worked or played hard on Sundays and had no time for church. For years Phyllis (his wife) had encouraged me to join the family at church. She never nagged or scolded—she just kept hoping. But I was too busy, too preoccupied, to spend one or two short hours a week thinking about the really important things. Now the sights and sounds and smells of death were all around me. My hunger for spiritual food soon outdid my hunger for a steak. Now I wanted to talk about God and Christ and the church. But in Heartbreak (the name POWs gave their prison camp) solitary confinement, there was no preacher, no Sunday-school teacher, no Bible, no hymnbook, no community of believers to guide and sustain me. I had completely neglected the spiritual dimension of my life. It took prison to show me how empty life is without God.”

It took the presence of a POW camp to show Rutledge that there was a center to his private world that he had been neglecting all of his life. “*Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man*” (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

**THE BOOK OF REFORM**

The final of the writing prophets and the concluding book of the Old Testament narrative is one in which change is sought. Malachi, whose name means “the messenger of the Lord,” prophesied about one hundred years after the two preceding prophets, Haggai and Zechariah (sometime between 435 and 420 B.C.). And though he deals more generally with the people’s problems, the plea was the same. There was a great need for sweeping reform throughout the land and Malachi’s fifty-five verses sought to convince the people of the same.

There is nothing known of Malachi the man other than he was of the writing prophets, but a great deal of insight into his character and commitment is seen through the theme and outline of his book. Keep in mind that at this point the Messiah was but some four hundred years away from being born. Though Malachi likely did not know that, God who inspired him to write did, and this was His final written effort at reorganizing His people after righteousness. The topics then would be broad but bold and intended to persuade the people to once more fear God and keep His commandments (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

It is with this in mind the Malachi goes about in a three fold manner to instill faith and a thirst for righteousness within the people. First, in Malachi 1:1-5, the prophet reminds them of God’s love. It seems every prophet made God’s love a prominent theme in their books, and for good reason. A people needs the assurance and stability of His love to motivate them to do what is right even in the midst of what is wrong. That is exactly where Israel has found herself. Good changes had taken place since their return from Babylon, but there still was a sense of indifference and laxity among them. Verse two simply states, “*I have loved you..*” If the love of God was not enough to motivate these people toward action then nothing could.

Second, Malachi gets to the business at hand of assuring them that even though God loves them He would not commend their present state of unrighteousness. Sin had been committed and it need to be changed. Thus in Malachi 1:6-2:17 the prophet charges the people with sins that were religious, moral, social, and material. These sins began with the corruption of the priesthood, and with the leadership given to evil it did not take long for it to filter down to the rest of the people. Dunn cites that:

“These included marriages with heathen (2:11; Nehemiah 13:23-27); profaning the covenant of the priesthood (2:8; Nehemiah 13:29); and robbing God of tithes and offerings (3:10; Nehemiah 13:10-12). Malachi also condemned them for failing to honor God (1:6), for offering polluted sacrifices and corrupting the sabbath (1:7-8), for wearying God with their hypocrisy and vain words (1:12; 2:13,17), for priests causing others to stumble (2:8), for the people’s turning aside from God’s law (3:7), divorcing their wives (2:14-16), saying it is vain to serve God (3:14), calling the wicked happy (3:15), and other sins (3:5).”

Essentially then, there had been little change religiously, morally, socially, and materially throughout the last 1,500 years among this nation except for the worst. In response to all of these sins, Malachi tells the people God will act.

It is, then, presented in the third place, a message of hope. This too is a common theme throughout the prophets because even in the midst of sin, the people are assured that God has not forgotten His promise and that it will be fulfilled in time. The only variation between Malachi’s message of hope and that of the other prophets is that the others’ focus solely upon Christ, and Malachi promises Christ and the one who would come before Him. It is in Malachi 3:1ff that the prophet makes reference to a messenger who would be sent to prepare the way for the Lord. This would refer to none other than John the Baptist, the voice of one crying out from the wilderness saying, “*Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight*” (Matthew 3:3). John accomplished that for his cousin and Lord, whereby Christ came to take away the sins of the world. It is through John’s coming that Christ promises His coming as well. After John came, so would Christ and all things prophesied by John would come to pass. Christ’s marvelous presence in Malachi reaffirms among the children of God the promise of One who would deliver the people from their sins.

This three-fold message is one universal in application, for unto all is the love of God manifest. Sin remains a problem, but by providing the message of hope, many can and will be snatched from the fire. God utters through the ancient pages of scripture unto all “I have loved you.” Can we say the same to Him?

-Andy Brewer