

THE PAR THREE ISLAND GREEN**THE PLEASANT VIEW PLUMB LINE**

Over the past several years, I have been given passes to the PGA tournament in Memphis. It is great—and yet humbling—to be able to go out to Southwind to watch the pros do in around seventy strokes what would take me about a hundred more. The porous nature of my golf game, however, is not why I write today. As I sat yesterday afternoon at my favorite spot on the course (the par 3 eleventh hole which has an island green similar to seventeenth at Sawgrass), I realized two important things—which I share here with you.

Over the last several years, the PGA Tour has touted its players and competition with the slogan, “THESE GUYS ARE GOOD.” I guarantee you that they are! It is amazing to see a ball hit over 300 yards with precision. It is amazing to see the way “these guys” can hit the ball out of the rough or the sand. However, on that short par 3—under 160 yards if memory serves me—the good guys were not always so. During the first two hours I was there, I saw thirty-nine players take on the eleventh. Of those thirty-nine players, thirteen—1/3 of them—hit the ball into the water and another three drove the ball into bunkers. Of those thirty-nine, there were six bogies, six double bogies, and four triple bogies; in other words, sixteen of the thirty-nine scored worse than par. “These guys are good” indeed they are among the best in the world at what they do, and yet they still make mistakes. This is true, spiritually, with every man—even the best of men! We all make mistakes. In fact, John wrote, “*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us*” (I John 1:8). When we take ourselves too seriously and think that we are above temptation and above sin and above others, then we are ripe for the falling (I Corinthians 10:12). Of Christians, like the golfers on the PGA Tour, it can be said, “These guys are good,” however, also like those golfers, we can fail—so we need to guard against sin; and, if we do sin, we need to recover with repentance and move on to the proverbial next hole.

Time allowed me to watch twenty-four more golfers play that short par 3. These twenty-four played it much more efficiently: only two ended up in the water and one in a bunker. One may wonder why these twenty-four were so much better than the thirty-nine that preceded them. Personally, I believe that the major factor for them was *when* they played the hole. So more golfers can play during a tournament in one day, one half starts on the first tee and the other half starts on the tenth tee. For the first thirty-nine golfers that I saw, the par 3 eleventh was only their second hole; while for the next twenty-four, the par three eleventh was just that: the eleventh that they played. These latter golfers had gotten a better feel for the course, the weather (winds were whipping strongly throughout the day), and for their own swing during the ten holes that preceded the eleventh than the other had during the one that preceded it. Likewise, it is good for the servant of God to prepare himself and become seasoned before he has to face the greater obstacles of life. This is what Daniel did (Daniel 1:8) and what Ezra did (Ezra 7:10) and what Joseph must have done (Genesis 39:7-12); it is, however, what those who receive the seed (God’s word [Luke 8:11]) as it were among stones or thorns do not (Matthew 13:5-7,20,22).

As the par 3 eleventh’s island green will make or break the tournament for the pro golfers, so how the Christian deals with his obstacles will make or break how judgment fares for him.”

-Dan Cates

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

A PRECIOUS POTRAIT OF GOD

Text: _____

I. It's a Picture of _____

Notes:

II. It's a Picture of _____

Notes:

III. It's a Picture of _____

Notes:

DON'T LOOSE YOUR GRIP

Growing up, I watched a lot of cartoons and it was not unusual for a character to fall over the edge of a cliff. Many times he would grab a branch of a small tree to keep from falling and then hold on until someone rescued him. The character was not going to let go of that branch no matter what happened.

We are to hold on to God like that. To let go is to give up of our hope of living with God in heaven forever. We read, *"That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil"* (Hebrews 6:18-19).

The word translated "lay hold upon" could mean "not losing your grip." We must never let go of our hope for heaven. The only way to do that is to always study our Bible and obey what it says *"study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" ... "if ye love me, keep my commandments"* (II Timothy 2:15; John 14:15).

DON'T GIVE UP

By 1989, baseball player Nolan Ryan reached an incredible 5,000 strikeouts, and all of those were no hitters. Ryan is a phenomenal baseball player. In his rookie year, 18 years earlier, Gill Hodges was the manager of the Mets, and was impatient with Ryan. Although Ryan could consistently throw the ball over ninety miles an hour, most of the time it didn't go over the plate. He was walking everybody, hitting a lot of people, too. Hodges told Ryan at the beginning of a particular game that he was to pitch better in that game or he would pull him out and trade him. He would be finished.

Ryan went into that game trying to do his best, determined that he was going to succeed. He was miserable. He walked something like seven or eight batters in four innings. Hodges took him out. Later that season he was traded to the Angels.

After the game Richard Reeves went down into the locker room to interview the players. He noticed Nolan Ryan was apart from the others, looking into a mirror, obviously having difficulty tying his tie. Reeves got closer to him and noticed that there were tears in his eyes. He was crying. He couldn't see to tie his tie because of the tears.

Reeves remembered that incident on the occasion of celebrating Nolan Ryan as one of the immortals of baseball. He remembered that this legendary man, Nolan Ryan, BEGAN his long string of success thinking he had failed. But he kept on working. He kept on practicing. He kept doing his job.

In like manner, a Christian's life will be filled with failures and disappointments. Many Christians have "thrown up their hands" in disgust and have quit the Christian race—thinking they have failed. But friends, we must be persistent! *"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord"* (I Corinthians 15:58). When failure and disappointments come our way, we need to remember the words of our Lord's brother, *"My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing"* (James 1:2-4).

Beloved don't give up—don't ever give up. Remember, the word of the apostle Paul, *"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me"* (Philippians 4:13). *"For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to be only, but unto all them also that love his appearing"* (II Timothy 4:6-8).

-from "The Old Path Bulletin"

DANIEL, WHO WAS NEVER DISAPPOINTED

One of the most beloved Bible stories known from the childhood of most is the record of Daniel being cast into the lions' den. It is a story of anger, revenge, trickery, heartbreak, deliverance, and wrath. In and of itself this account provides all of the essentials of a blockbuster hit, but unlike most movies, this story was not fiction but rather a reality. Sometimes, though, while we know, appreciate, and love this great account from the Bible we never truly put it into perspective and identify with the circumstances with which Daniel was confronted. What similarities and applications can be drawn from Daniel 6 that can strengthen the New Testament Christian?

First, notice the **root** of the problem was anger. Darius, the king of Babylon at the time, began to delegate portions of his kingdom and the responsibilities pertaining to those districts among 120 princes of the empire, and then over those princes he set three presidents who would answer directly to him. Instead of relying solely upon native Babylonians to fill those positions, the first to whom he turned was Daniel, a native Jew. In fact, Daniel 6:3 records that *"Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king thought to set him over the whole realm."* As can be imagined, this did not set well with the other presidents and the princes, and their anger and jealousy lead them to put Daniel under fire.

Similarly, Christians faithful to the charge of God are constantly under fire from the world. And it is no secret or surprise that the world's feelings toward the church are rooted in anger and in some ways jealousy. Therefore plots are developed and unleashed upon Christianity in order to do just what the Babylonian authorities wanted to do to Daniel—destroy it. With whom did the problem lie, Daniel or the others? Obviously the others were the ones with the problem, and in the same way the problem is not with Christianity but with the world. Thus, like Daniel we must remain steadfast against opposition regardless of what may betide.

Second, look at the **reason** given that their agenda might be accomplished. They could not fault him in his work over the kingdom so they looked for an ulterior motive. *"Then the presidents and princes sought to find occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find none occasion nor fault; forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him. Then said these men, We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God"* (Daniel 6:4-5). They could not raise a legitimate complaint against him so they decide to make it a matter of allegiance.

In the same way, the problem the world has with Christianity cannot be legitimately argued by disproving scriptural truth, thus you may notice that most attacks on Christianity stoop to character attacks and differences in personality. And truth be told, this is probably more irritating than simply attempting to attack truth because truth can be defended objectively. However, when an argument is lowered to the level of character attacks and personality disputes the instigators can double talk their way through it for a long time. Thus, like Daniel, sometimes we just have to suffer the hatred of our detractors with little we can do to rebut the issue and go about our business of teaching the truth, saving souls, and glorifying our God.

Third, see the **retribution** enacted upon Daniel for his "transgressions." They knew they did not have a leg to stand on with their true problem, so they went before the king and manipulated him into unknowingly passing an ordinance that would automatically touch Daniel. *"All the presidents of the kingdom, the governors, and the princes, the counsellors, and the captains, have consulted together to establish a royal statute, and to make a firm decree, that whosoever shall ask a petition of any God or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions"* (Daniel 6:7). Not even considering the fact that this was a decree specifically seeking Daniel's death, the king relented. And the retribution was outright destruction.

Is the retribution the world seeks for Christianity really any different? All around us, enemies of God are seeking the outright destruction of that upon which we base our lives. And interestingly enough, it is amazing to see the manipulation they are trying to use to accomplish their agendas as well. We, though, like Daniel must persist. The world may hate, reject, and try to destroy us, but *"if God be for us, who can be against us"* (Romans 8:31).

Then, fourth, the **result** of the events is what makes it all worth while. The authorities got their way; Daniel was thrown into the lions' den and left for the night with full faith that upon returning in the morning he would be gone. There was one thing, though, that these men had overlooked—God was with him. Daniel was saved from their trials and in the end they and their families were the ones who faced the bitter punishment (Daniel 6:24).

The fact is, this shall be the end for God's children and their enemies at the judgment as well. God is and always will be with His people (Hebrews 13:5). And the very grief that the world tries to heap upon our shoulders in this life will be theirs to suffer in the next (Romans 6:23). Thus, we, like Daniel, can look to the future with hope and assurance that God will deliver and vengeance will be His.

From Daniel there is so much that anybody can learn, but one of the greatest lessons from his life is the lesson of trust. Daniel trusted God with a faith that would never relent. We must do the same, for like with Daniel, He will never disappoint.

-Andy Brewer