

THE PLEASANT VIEW PLUMB LINE

LET GO OF THE PEW

It is Sunday morning. The sermon is almost over. You know this, not because the preacher has already filled twenty eight of his average thirty minutes in the pulpit, but because something is different this morning. You have been questioning and regretting past actions that you know to be sinful, and as a result you have paid closer attention to this sermon. You have heard scriptures from God's inspired Word that seem to be hand-selected and directly applied to an aspect of your life that you know you must change. You wonder, "Is he intentionally preaching at me? Have I missed messaged like this before when I was not paying attention?"

The preacher is now extending the Lord's invitation. He calls for all who have never submitted to the gospel to obey Christ's plan of salvation. He pleads with erring children of God to return to the One Who gave Himself to save us all. The congregation begins to sing a song of encouragement for those who would respond to the invitation. "I should go up there," you think to yourself, but your hands clench the pew in front of you. Your mind is so focused on "should I, or should I not" that you do not realize that you are staring the preacher in the eye, but he has not noticed. You avert your eyes downward, fearful that your face will reveal your thoughts. As you look down, you see your whitened knuckles as your hands grasp the waist-high wooden pew in front of you. "Wood," your mind says, "the only thing keeping here is my grip on this wood." Why is your grip so tight? Why are you gripping the pew at all? Is it fear? Do you fear the **distance** that your feet must carry you? Do you fear the **doubters** that may observe your repentance with skepticism? Do you fear the **destination**, worried about whether or not you can make the necessary changes in your life? You have two choices: you can overcome your fears and let go of the pew, or you can succumb to your fears and clench that piece of wood until the song is over and the moment is passed.

Another man once clenched another piece of wood. He did not grip the timber in order to remain in one place, but hoisted the approximately 110-lb. beam in order to carry it amid the scornful crowd and the scoffing Roman soldiers. Jesus bore His cross (Hebrews 12:2). All those who would become faithful children of God must likewise bear their own crosses (Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34). Jesus saw every soul as worth the world (Matthew 16:26), and He came to save every soul, including yours (John 3:16; I Timothy 2:4-5). Because of His love for us and His concern for our souls, Jesus was not hindered by the Distance, the Doubters, or the Destination. Are you? What keeps you from releasing the pew and taking up your cross?

Are you hindered by the **distance**? How many paces lay between you and that front pew? Twenty? Eighty? Are you too far away to respond to the gospel? It is estimated that the path beginning at the Roman Praetorium and ending atop Golgotha spanned a total distance of at least one mile, and Jesus bore His cross. Yes, Simon the Cyrenian was compelled to assist (Matthew 27:32), not because Jesus resisted bearing the load to Calvary, but because His physical body had been beaten to the point that it was not possible for Him to haul that cross by Himself. Jesus bore His cross for a mile: can you bear yours a few feet?

Are you hindered by the **doubters**? Too many pew grippers refuse to respond to the Lord's invitation because of the doubts of those who want to question the sincerity of every person who responds to the gospel. Jesus was surrounded by a crowd of doubters, scoffers, and mockers, yet He did not allow their skepticism to reduce His re-

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

WHY MAN HASN'T OBEYED THE GOSPEL

Text: _____

I. Because of _____

Notes:

II. Because of _____

Notes:

III. Because of _____

Notes:

THIS ONE THING I DO

Text: _____

I. We Must _____

Notes:

II. We Must _____

Notes:

III. We Must _____

Notes:

solve to do the will of the Father (Philippians 2:5-9). If a person can be prevented from obeying the gospel by the potential doubts of someone else, then he obviously loves something more than he loves Jesus. Why should the ungodly doubts of anyone else matter to the penitent sinner who seeks salvation in Christ? Every faithful Christian rejoices to see a soul converted to Jesus (James 5:19-20; Luke 15:7,10).

Are you hindered by the **destination**? Jesus was not. He knew that He would be crucified, yet He pressed forward to the cruel hill called Calvary. Just as Jesus carried His cross to crucifixion, so also must all those who would obey His gospel carry their crosses to the same destination. Paul recognized that faithful Christians are "crucified with Christ" (Galatians 2:20). Paul repeatedly emphasized that faithful Christians must die to sin in order to live in Christ (Romans 6:1-7,11-19). Jesus gave all that He could give in order to make salvation available (Philippians 2:5-7; Titus 2:14), and all that He expects us to abandon are those things which are sinful in our lives (John 8:11; Titus 2:11-13). Like Jesus, when we carry our crosses, we must leave them at Calvary. A cross is an instrument intended to bring inevitable death. Our destination is Calvary; we carry our spiritual crosses there and we crucify our sin filled lives (Romans 6:6). Jesus did not carry His cross *after* Calvary, and neither do we. Instead we walk in "newness of life" (Romans 6:4).

Why are you gripping that wooden pew? Are you hindered by the **distance**, the **doubters**, or the **destination**? You grip that piece of furniture in order to avoid receiving salvation, whereas Jesus bore the load of a cruel and rough Roman cross in order to make salvation available. Receive the spiritual blessings which are in Christ Jesus by obeying His gospel (Ephesians 1:3). Did Jesus love you more than you love Him? Did Jesus love you more than you love yourself?

Let go of the pew, pick up your cross, and follow Jesus.

-Scott Cain

UNANSWERED PRAYER

The preacher's 5 year-old daughter noticed that her father always paused and bowed his head for a moment before starting his sermon. One day, she asked him why. "Well, honey," he began, proud that his daughter was so observant of his messages, "I'm asking the Lord to help me preach a good sermon." How come He doesn't answer it?" she asked.

FOR THIS CAUSE I BOW MY KNEES—4

Throughout the gospel accounts, there are a multitude of situations in which Jesus found Himself. On one occasion He had just displayed a marvelous miracle in feeding in excess of 5,000 people and was shortly going to display another amazing act by walking on water. Elsewhere little children came into His midst seeking a blessing. On another occasion He was about to institute a memorial that would span the ages. And He even faced the specific knowledge and anguish of His impending death. But while these each represent an event that invoked different emotions and presented different challenges, there is one strand of similarity that draws them together—on each of these occasions and in each of these conditions, Jesus prayed.

A challenge that many face in life, that seems unusual but is very real, is not knowing when it is appropriate to pray, or what conditions of life should be present before we pray. For some reason the thought has been emblazoned in the minds of the masses that prayer is really only a final resort or a last straw for only the direst of situations. Prayer, to many, represents a precious tool, but one that can only be used in extreme conditions. That, though, is not at all the picture of prayer that the Bible paints. If one thing could be stated about the life of Jesus, it could be said that Jesus was committed to prayer at all times and for all reasons. Jesus knew prayer was not something reserved for special occasions, but was a lifestyle to which we must be committed if we are ever going to have a proper relationship with Jehovah God. Consider what the avenue of prayer represents. It is a direct line of communication between yourself as a Christian and God your Father. It is an opportunity to rejoice, weep, plead, thank, and praise the glory of God. And it is that communication that is vitally important to the strength of that relationship. What would happen if the lines of communication between a husband and wife were never used in conversation? The relationship would deteriorate and eventually die. Such is the end of the Christian's relationship with God who does not pray. Without that communication the relationship builds no strength and eventually leads to absolute apostasy. It is with all of this in mind, though, that the question is posed, "in what conditions of life should I pray?"

Should I pray when times are bad? Absolutely! Prayer was designed to be a time at which our hearts could be poured out completely unto God. There is nothing that could happen in life that is bad enough to make prayer ineffective. When disasters strike, many immediately turn to prayer. I remember years ago being in attendance at an area wide youth devotional, when in the middle of the service a young lady fell into the floor in a seizure. The shock obviously took many several minutes to overcome, but what impressed me was, that while others attended to her needs, I looked around and saw many of the Christians assembled bowed in private prayer on her behalf. Jesus was facing His inevitable death that would prove to be terrible physically, spiritually, and emotionally. And yet in the midst of what had to be the most trying time in His life, His instinct was to pray (Matthew 26:36ff). It was in prayer that He found the strength He needed to get Him through this most difficult time. Thus, we should absolutely turn to prayer when times are bad.

However, should I also pray when times are good? Without a doubt! As much as seeking God's strength and guidance in the bad times is encouraging and uplifting, how great is it to be able to spend time in prayer thanking God for all of the goodness we enjoy? However, to understand this point, we must understand a point that James would make in his epistle. "*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning*" (James 1:17). If things are well in our lives, they are well because of the marvelous blessings of God. Times are good and we should definitely spend time in prayer to God thanking Him for it.

But then the question should be asked, what about all of the other times? Life is not always given to extremes. The great majority of our lives is represented by times that are not great but are not really disastrous either. Still, though, we should be given to prayer. There were times in Jesus' life when He was not necessarily facing times of distress but was not necessarily facing times of plenty either, but He still devoted Himself to prayer. Why? Because He knew that prayer strengthened His bond with the Father. John 17:1-5 represents a prayer spoken on His own behalf where the text indicates He was seeking the favor of and a strengthened bond with the Father. Yes, prayer is reserved not only for the good time and for the bad times, but also for all times in between and full advantage should be taken.

Many of the problems and misunderstandings people face regarding prayer come from this fact—they have depended upon the world to set the parameters for prayer. What we must instead do is turn to the pages of Holy Writ to give us that information, which in short suggests that we should "*pray without ceasing*" (I Thessalonians 5:17)

-Andy Brewer
to be continued