

SUFFERING

“When I Am Weak, Then I Am Strong”

(Elmer James)

At 4:57 p.m. on Friday, March 22, 1963, a devastating explosion occurred in the basement of the J.C. Penny store in San Jose, California. Those involved in that explosion were initiated into a new world of suffering, pain, and tears. Elmer James was one who was critically injured in that explosion. As a star shines brightest on the darkest night, this tragedy revealed the radiant faith of this most uncommon man. Bro. James carried a conscientious concern that his “left hand not know what his right hand was doing.” His primary desire in life was to bring glory to Christ. Sometimes, however, it is proper to rehearse what God has done through us in order to bring glory to Christ. It is in this vein that this story now is told. May someone, somewhere, be helped by the example of a Christ-like life.

Elmer was attending the Curtner Avenue Church of Christ in the Willow Glen district of San Jose, but his heart was set upon a new work in his own neighborhood. The city was rushing south

like water over a spill-way. A new subdivision had blossomed in his own back door and there was virtually no congregation there of any denomination. Elmer wanted to start a new church.

This man had wanted to be a preacher. He had attended Bible College and invested in Christian literature. He was both likeable and unforgettable. I consider him a giant, not so much because of his size, but because of his strength. At one time he had the world weight lifting record in the prone press. His incredible strength was a legend in those communities where he had lived and in those businesses where he had worked. But Elmer's career as a preacher was short-lived. He began to suffer from migraine headaches, a problem so serious and persistent that medical science could give him no permanent relief. When it was no longer possible for Elmer to study, he gave away the major works of his library and sought for other fields of Christian service.

Great men are invariably possessed with a singleness of heart. Elmer was a great man. Matters concerning the Kingdom of God received priority in his thinking. The consuming passion of his life at this time was to build a church in the community where he lived. He refused to be discouraged by months of fruitless effort. His labor was patient, unswerving, and tireless. It seemed as if he would start a church . . . or die trying.

Perseverance had already placed a few small dividends at his feet. The Curtner Ave. congregation now shared his dream. They encouraged families in that area to join in the work and contributed a few thousand dollars toward the purchasing of land. Property was purchased and services were already being conducted in facilities rented from a labor union. The future, however, did not appear very promising. When it was necessary for a few families to go \$40,000 to \$50,000 in debt just for a building site, the construction of a chapel seemed years away. They had trudged to the shores of a pathless sea — but where was the Moses who would stretch out his rod and provide for them a way?

Then came that fateful day, March 22, 1963. Apparently

Elmer was standing right over the boiler when it exploded. The floor blasting skyward shattered both his legs. He struck the ceiling with such impact that his face was smashed like a piece of china. A split instant later his broken body sprawled in the basement some twenty feet below.

If Elmer was a giant because of his strength, he was also one because of his faith. His spiritual development had kept pace with the remarkable growth of his body. His life was a paragon of trust and humility. Now in the hour of this crisis, he waited calmly for help, praying, "Lord, I'm ready to go if you want me." Several people were killed outright in the explosion and Elmer was near death. He had suffered compound fractures of both legs, his arm and his ribs were broken. The bones of his face were crushed. Blood ran profusely from his nose, eyes, and mouth. Though he was tottering on the brink of eternity he refused to lose either his faith, or his composure.

An ordinary man would have been crushed both physically and spiritually by the impact of the explosion, but Elmer was not an ordinary man. He was torn between two worlds, and yet he seemed indifferent about everything but the church of his dreams. He uttered his first words at the hospital by placing his finger over the tracheotomy in his throat — and his first concern was who would take his place as song leader for the little band of Christians.

Elmer had always been able to rely upon his own strength; now he was helpless. He had been a record holding weight lifter; now he was rigidly imprisoned upon a bed of suffering, unable to roll over on his side or even chew a bite of food. But God can transform tragedy into triumph. God can change the personification of weakness into transcending power. The ingredient of faith can produce a silver lining upon the blackest cloud of human suffering. There was a giant in the faith upon that bed . . . and there God enabled him to accomplish the very thing which he had been praying for. When Elmer James realized that an insurance company would give him money for his suffering, a look of joy

crossed him countenance. God had worked in a mysterious way, but now at long last the church of his dreams could become a reality. He knew that a meeting place would have its part in the saving the lost.

Insurance money cannot really compensate for excruciating agony and pain. A bookkeeper finds it difficult to translate surgery and suffering into dollars and cents for his ledger. No price tag does justice to weeks of eating food through jaws wired shut, or sores and aches accrued from months of lying in one position, or heavy weights tearing at silver pins imbedded in human flesh and bone. But Elmer did not want justice for his suffering, but a church for his community. God had answered his prayers and honored his faith.

Two long years passed before the new church building actually became a reality. Elmer by now had almost completely recovered. Everyone looked forward to Sunday, December 12, 1965, when services would be held in the new facilities for the first time.

Elmer would never have told you this story. He always preferred to stay in the background. He was concerned that no one sound a trumpet when he did his alms. He knew that for leaven to be effective it has to lose its identity and disappear. But he was the man who initiated the dream. He was the man whose faith inspired others to join in the work. It was his suffering that provided finance so critically needed. He was the Moses who braved the sea and the wilderness for the people of God.

But Moses was not permitted to enjoy the fruit of his labors here upon earth . . . and neither was Elmer. Elmer James died of a stroke at 5:25 p.m. on Friday, December 10, 1965 — just two days before the new chapel at 3167 Senter Road in San Jose, California, was used for the very first time.

It was said of righteous Abel, “. . . he being dead yet speaketh” (Heb. 11:4). The same could be said of Elmer James, who in this age of nuclear power, gives us a fresh insight into the way true strength can be made perfect in weakness.

Alone

(A Friend At An Airport)

The four-day convention was over. Even though I had only been there for three days, I had met literally hundreds of new people. We began early and stayed late and spent the entire day on the grounds.

When a friend took me to the airport he had other responsibilities to attend to and therefore left me "alone."

I didn't mind this at all for it provided me with an opportunity to reflect upon the convention and even to do some writing. As a matter of fact these very words were written in a crowded airport terminal while I was "alone."

The airport is one of the largest in the world and there are thousands of people here . . . yet I am alone. Each of us is preoccupied with his own personal problems. Some are hurrying to catch a plane or a taxi . . . others are absorbed in a magazine or a briefcase full of business . . . still others stare blankly at the mass of humanity passing by as though it was not there.

It had been a long day for me. My journey began some eleven hours before I began to write these words and home was still more than five hours away.

Suddenly, however, I became painfully aware of my own selfishness. I had spoken briefly with a lady from Guyana and practiced my limited Spanish with a man from Ecuador. Regrettably, however, up to this point I had given no real witness for my Lord.

Since I wanted to be a "fisher of men," I wrote down a prayer that I might be more sensitive and alert to the needs of those around me. Not everyone in a crowd is longing and lonely . . . but some people are. Once Jesus called Zacchaeus out of a crowd. Zacchaeus was rich, and powerful . . . but very much in need of someone to really care.

Having written the prayer I noted the time and wrote down

6:47 p.m. C.S.T.

Since I still had a couple of hours to wait for my plane I took a short walk and then casually read the daily news. Feeling a bit thirsty, I stepped across the hall for a drink and had to walk around a man who was sitting there in a wheel chair.

Our conversation began as naturally as though it had been planned. Presently his wife came to his side. I told them of my long wait and asked if I might have the privilege of pushing the wheelchair and getting some exercise. They seemed pleased.

On the way to their plane I discovered that they were just returning from a cancer hospital. During the course of his illness he had received fifteen different kinds of chemotherapy. The last five had been experimental drugs. Now his doctors had discontinued all treatment and sent him home with no hope. He said that he may only have a week yet to live.

When we sat down at Gate 24 I took some crumpled paper out of my pocket and read them the first part of this article and my prayer. She said, "You'll never know how lonely we were at this time." We wept together. God had arranged our meeting.

I gave to them a copy of *Michael's Meditations* with my address. I asked that she write down their address beneath the last words of my written prayer. (They were from the Peoria, Illinois area.)

I asked for the privilege of praying with them and then went on my way rejoicing. I looked at my watch . . . it was 7:45 p.m.

I am happy to report that Malcolm is a Christian and that he reflected no bitterness about his illness. Still, however, I humbly solicit your prayers in his behalf.

Ella said, "You know that God sent you to us." I felt that it was the other way around. God had answered my prayer and transformed a dismal delay into a dramatic and meaningful experience.

We left each other with the happy realization that we were not alone.

Sufficient Grace

A Tribute to Richard L. "Dick" Youkey
(August 24, 1934 – November 28, 1981)

The Scriptures teach that Paul had a "thorn" in the flesh. The word translated as "thorn" is the Greek word *skolops* which occurs nowhere else in the N.T. Scriptures. It originally denoted anything which was pointed and in secular Greek was used to describe a pointed stake upon which the head of an enemy could be stuck. It was used in a similar sense to the word *stauros* which means cross.

The normal word for "thorn" is *akantha* which refers to briars or brambles like the ones which were woven into a crown for our blessed Saviour. Paul's "thorn" seems to have been more serious.

He said it was a messenger of Satan to "buffet" him. The Greek word used here is *kolaphizo* which means to strike with a clenched fist.

Over and over Paul prayed to God for deliverance from this painful stake which caused him such weakness and infirmity.

The Lord responded, "My grace is sufficient for thee. . . ." (II Cor. 12:9). The word translated as "sufficient" is *arkeo* and is used 11 times in the N.T. Scriptures. It simply means "enough" and is used of the five wise virgins who refused to share their oil lest there be not "enough" for them and the foolish virgins also.

Thus, when Paul cried out for deliverance from the sharp stake that threatened him the Lord responded that His grace would be enough. It would suffice in every circumstance. It would enable Paul to take pleasure in infirmities and find spiritual strength in midst of physical weakness.

How beautifully this parallels the experience of Dick Youkey. He, too, had a "thorn" in his flesh. It was a fast moving and extremely painful type of cancer. His doctors at the Mayo Clinic thought that he might live only six months. Somehow he managed to survive more than twice that long.

I am sure that Dick joined with me and literally thousands of others in beseeching God to take away this infirmity. God did not do so. Thus, at 11:35 a.m. on Saturday, November 28, 1981 Dick Youkey breathed a final time. He has now crossed over the frontier into a better world where there is no pain and suffering and where the former things have passed away.

Though his final months were filled with pain and problems, God's grace was always adequate for every occasion. Those who were closest to him marveled that he was able to accept his illness with such peace and serenity. He even referred to his last year as the greatest year of his entire life. He had learned the priceless lesson of contentment.

"Who knows?" he would say, "perhaps God can use me more in six months with the benefit of this illness than he could in many years without it."

Dick never lost his appreciation for physical things. Up to the very end he could savor a bite of good food or enjoy the thrill of a hunting trip with family and friends. These temporal treasures, however, were never confused with the eternal values to which he had committed his life and ministry.

The poet one time said, "I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day." For those of us who were privileged to know Dick Youkey we can say with confidence that we have undoubtedly seen an eloquent sermon, and indeed His grace is sufficient. . . .

The Day Breaketh **(Jacob)**

I spoke to a friend the other night by phone. The problems which he faced defy description. Every area of his life had been invaded by incredible adversity. I tried to sympathize.

"I'm not giving up!" he responded. "Jacob wrestled all night long and he didn't get a blessing until the breaking of the day." "Too many" he continued, "give up just before they get a blessing."

How utterly beautiful. At a time when most of us would have been in total despair, he was hanging on until he got a blessing . . . I believe that it will come.

The story of Jacob's struggle has profound implications. In particular, it relates to the promises of God regarding Palestine and ultimately to the coming of the Messiah.

When Jacob left Palestine he was a fugitive from the wrath of his brother Esau. He had bargained him out of his birthright and cheated him out of his blessing and Esau therefore, purposed to kill him (Gen. 27:42). Upon the advice of Rebekah, his mother, Jacob decided to flee into Haran for a "few days" until Esau's fury was turned away.

As he journeyed he came to a certain place to spend the night. It was here that he received his famous vision of the ladder that reached to heaven with angels ascending and descending upon it. In conjunction with this vision God spoke from above the ladder:

I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: THE LAND WHEREON THOU LIEST, TO THEE WILL I GIVE IT, AND TO THY SEED; And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, . . . AND IN THEE AND IN THY SEED SHALL THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH BE BLESSED. And behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, AND WILL BRING THEE AGAIN INTO THIS LAND; for I will

not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of (Gen. 28:13-15).

Please note that as Jacob was leaving Palestine God renewed the promise which He had previously given to Abraham and to Isaac. He reminded Jacob that the fulfillment of that promise involved returning from Haran to the very land where Esau lived. The story of Jacob's dream was so significant that the name of that place was changed from "Luz" which means "nut tree", to "Bethel" which means, "House of God."

The "few days" to which Rebekah made reference turned into many years. Jacob's deceptive nature was tempered in the furnace of affliction. His father-in-law had changed his wages ten times and life became unbearable. Deep in his troubled soul was the nagging conviction that he had to go back. The closer he got to Palestine, however, the greater was his fear. When word came that Esau approached with four hundred men it was almost more than he could stand. He divided his household so that if half of them were destroyed the other half might flee to safety. Then in prayer he recalled the instructions of God,

O God of my Father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the Lord which saidst unto me, RETURN UNTO THY COUNTRY, AND TO THY KINDRED, and I will deal well with thee . . . Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother . . . for I fear him . . . and thou saidst, "I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude" (Gen. 32:9ff).

Like Jesus in Gethsemane Jacob was torn between two conflicting philosophies of life. Was he going to surrender to do God's will, or was he going to do it in his own way?

In desperation he dispatched his servants to appease the wrath of Esau with many gifts. As the night descended he sent his family sloshing across the brook Jabbok . . . and he was left alone. Throughout that long night he struggled with a man until

the breaking of day.

The confrontation was so great that Jacob thereafter "halted upon his thigh." The limp with which he walked was a reminder of his utter determination to do the will of God. Lesser men would have drifted away and followed the path of least resistance. Jacob's fear of Esau was genuine, but his loyalty to God prevailed. Esau had always been a man of the field who was cunning and capable with weapons. With him were four hundred men and Jacob had every reason to believe that murder was on their mind. Deep in his heart, however, was the commandment of God and there was no way around it.

"Let me go. . ." said the man, "for the day breaketh." "I will not let thee go," said Jacob, "except thou bless me."

"What is thy name?" said the man. The answer was "Jacob," which means "supplanter," or "deceiver."

And he said, "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and has prevailed."

The name "Israel" means "prince of God." Up to this point in his life Jacob had been characterized by his ability to manipulate men. Now he had attained to power with God. No longer would he be known as the clever operator who could conceive a plan to avoid every difficult obstacle and situation. Than night he became a man of principle. He determined to obey God regardless of the consequences. A new day had dawned in his life.

The actual confrontation with that which Jacob feared was not nearly as dramatic as his personal struggle about it on the night before. It seldom is. There is a genuine sense in which Gethsemane was more demanding than Calvary. Jesus needed the ministry of angels in Gethsemane when his sweat turned crimson and He despaired of life. At Calvary the major battle had already been won.

So also with Israel. After his victory on the night before he was ready to expose everything to that danger which he feared the most. He arranged his family in an orderly fashion and then

passed on ahead of them and bowed himself to the ground before Esau.

Such a posture reveals an absolute surrender. No provision was made for escape or self-defense. He bowed his knee and bared his neck. Should Esau draw out some weapon to do him harm no hand would be raised to restrain him. Jacob had become the "prince of God." That which he would have previously attempted to handle by himself he now surrendered to the will of God.

When that day breaks in any man's life it is the dawning of a new tomorrow.

Suffering And Hope

(In Memory of Ivan A. Lea, Sr.
September 5, 1907 – March 13, 1985)

Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance, character, and character, hope. . . ." (Rom. 5:3-4, NIV).

This beautiful passage of Scripture connects sufferings and hope through connecting links of perseverance and character.

A brief overview is:

SUFFERINGS — Greek word *Thlipsis* comes from the verb which means to press, crush, or squeeze. It is translated as "narrow" in Matthew 7:14. The "narrow" way involves the pressures of the Christian life. Our hearts are touched and burdened by circumstances which others scarcely notice.

PERSEVERANCE — Greek word *Hupomone* comes from "hupo" which means "under" and "meno" which means to "abide." The pressures of the Christian life lead us to seek refuge in God.

CHARACTER — Greek word *Dokime* refers to the process of testing and trials by which we become "approved" unto God. It was once used of metals which were tested for strength and purity.

HOPE — Greek word *Elpis* which means a favorable and confident expectation for the future. Hope is especially associated with what we cannot see with our human eyes — for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for it? (Rom. 8:24)

This hope which we have does not disappoint us because God has poured out His love into our hearts by means of the Holy Spirit.

The Christian life is a metamorphosis, or transformation. It takes us from the way we used to be to the way we ought to be.

Sometimes the steps on this journey are objectionable to us at

the time. We would prefer to avoid and evade them. Yet in retrospect, they may be the very things which have been most valuable in our development.

Ivan Lea went through a great many problems, especially during the last years of his life. He had been a Parkinson's patient for many years; his beloved wife became an invalid and died after an extended period of time; Ivan developed cancer and knew for the last months of his life that he had a terminal illness.

In each of these trials, however, Ivan refused to run or be intimidated. His bout with Parkinson's Disease resulted in literally hundreds of stocking caps which he generously gave to any who had a need. Ivan would work some five hours on each cap but the discipline of doing so kept his trembling hands from becoming totally unusable.

His faithfulness to his beloved wife Elizabeth during her long illness was an inspiration and example to everyone. It provides us with precious memories and encourages us to be faithful in "sickness and in health."

Ivan faced his own illness with the same courage, faith, and resolve. Even when he was informed that he had but a short time to live he continued to function independently as long as possible. He would even drive himself to the hospital for his cancer treatments.

His sufferings produced a patience and perseverance which caused him to depend more and more upon God. His dependence upon God produced a quality of character in him which was tested and true. His character fortified and intensified his hope in life eternal. And now this hope is shed abroad through the means of memory by all those who knew him.

One ship sails East, and the other West
 With the selfsame winds that blow.
 'Tis the set of the sail, and not the gale
 That determines the way they go.

Uriah Was A Hittite

It is remarkable how many hundreds, or perhaps how many thousands of times I had come across those words without ever pausing to actually ponder the significance of what it meant to be a Hittite in the days of King David.

The first time that Hittites are mentioned in the Bible is in Genesis 15:20. In this context God made a covenant with Abram to give him the land of the Hittites as well as the land of the surrounding tribes.

Next we find Abram purchasing a burying plot from Ephron the Hittite (Gen. 23:10) and in Genesis 26:34 we are informed that Esau married a Hittite girl named Basemath.

By the time that Israel was delivered from Egyptian bondage the Hittites no longer represented a respectful segment of society. They had seethed in pagan rebellion against God for so long that they were ripe for divine judgment.

In the light of their sin, God commanded through Moses that they be utterly destroyed (Deut. 7:2).

Recognizing that Israel would not accomplish this grisly task, God chronicled a list of severe restrictions regarding the Hittites. The Israelites were not to make a covenant with them, or show them mercy. They were not to consummate a marriage with Hittites and were to destroy every vestige of their idolatrous worship (See Deut. 7:2ff.).

Though the Hittites were not annihilated they were never able to escape or to overcome the stigma of their condemnation by God. In the days of King Solomon, for example, the Hittites became slaves. This is recorded in I Kings 9:20-21. The very next verse informs us "But of the children of Israel did Solomon make no bondmen. . . ." Thus, we are faced with a classic and inescapable case of discrimination. The Hittites were treated as inferior to the Hebrews.

During the days of the Babylonian captivity Ezekiel thought it

an appropriate insult to accuse Israel of having a Hittite mother (See Ezek. 16:3,45). This was apparently a term of derision, or racial slur, which was synonymous with accusing Israel of being shameless and immoral.

Now the stage is set for us to take another look at King David stumbling across his roof at eventide. The beautiful Bathsheba was bathing and he was overwhelmed by his lust for her. Inquiry revealed that her father was Eliam and her husband was Uriah. Both names occur in David's list of mighty men yet each came from a totally different milieu or social setting. If Bathsheba's father was the Eliam of II Samuel 23:34 which seems quite possible, he would have been the son of David's counselor, Ahithophel the Gilonite. The fact that Giloh was a town in the mountains of Judah and that Ahithophel was his trusted counselor provided a double set of happy associations with the family. This fact may also help to explain the rebellion of Ahithophel against David at a later time in history.

On the other hand, Uriah was a Hittite. The fact that he was a valiant and decorated warrior in King David's army was not sufficient reason to erase the racial stigma which would constantly be associated with his name. In the brief account of this tragic crime in II Samuel 11: and 12: we are reminded no less than seven times that Uriah was a Hittite. In spite of his honesty, his morality, his courage, his valor, and his loyalty to King David we must not forget that his racial stock would forever make him inferior in the eyes of the Hebrew people.

The obvious, but often neglected fact that Uriah was a Hittite, may be of pivotal importance in the commission of the crime. David had profound regard for the life and family of King Saul. He steadfastly refused to lay his hand upon the Lord's anointed and even executed the Amalekite who humanely dispatched the fatally wounded king (See II Sam. 1:10-16). But David was not afraid to take the wife, or the life of a Hittite. The dastardly deed may have even been performed with a measure of paternalistic concern. He may have asked himself why a girl from such a nice

family as Bathsheba had, would get mixed up with a Hittite. As Solomon would later record "Every way of a man is right in his own eyes" (Prov. 21:2).

But it is also true that there is a way which seemeth right unto a man but the end thereof are the ways of death (Prov. 14:12). In the eyes of God there was no rationale for the sin of David. The long finger of accusation was pointed inexorably in his direction. The booming voice of the prophet reverberated down the corridors of his mind with the unforgettable indictment "Thou are the man." No man can hide behind a cloak of prejudice to commit a crime. The God of heaven will not be dethroned so that sinful man can satiate his lust at the expense of some ethnic minority.

We have no reason to believe that God held a grudge against Uriah because of sins which were committed six centuries before by his ancestors. Man, however, is not always like God. Thus, in every generation we have witnessed the sad spectacle of human hearts which were raped by prejudice and robbed of virtue by the monster of discrimination.

Next time you reflect upon the story of David and Bathsheba, remember with me that Uriah was a Hittite.

Esau Wept

“And Esau lifted up his voice, and wept. . . .” (Gen. 27:38)

Surely Esau must have cried many times as a small boy. His little heart must have been tender like his little hands and feet. It is a common thing for children to cry.

But Esau grew up and became a man of the field. He learned to grit his teeth in the presence of pain. His hands became calloused and hard and his feet were toughened by the stones and hot sands of the wilderness. He learned to press on in times of inclement weather and to bury his emotions beneath years of discomfort and adversity.

The Scriptures describe him as “profane” or “irreligious” because he sold his birthright for a mess of pottage (Heb. 12:16).

In the age of the Patriarchs, the oldest male member of the family was privileged to mediate at the family altar. Upon the death of the father this honor would therefore be conferred upon his firstborn son. Esau, however, though he was the firstborn, was irreligious. He despised his birthright and sold it for a mess of pottage.

His irreligious nature was also manifest in his choice of wives. Forgetting the Covenant which God had made with Abraham and Isaac he chose to marry women from the pagan community of Hittites and this became a source of grief to Isaac and Rebekah (Gen. 26:35).

Though Esau despised his birthright, he did place some value upon the Patriarchal blessing which his father would confer. The aged Isaac sent him into the fields to hunt venison that he might prepare savoury meat like the old man loved. After this meal Isaac was then to confer upon Esau the blessing.

In the meantime, however, Jacob came with subtlety and deceived his father Isaac. Pretending to be Esau he received Esau’s blessing.

It is interesting to me that even the most hardened individual has some area of sensitivity which is capable of bringing forth tears. Esau wept! Hebrews 12:17 teaches that he sought to change his father's mind "carefully with tears." Beneath the hardened and calloused veneer of his life was a spot so tender that once it was probed it convulsed his very being.

Undoubtedly this is true of everyone. Some of us can sit stoically through the saddest movies and remain unmoved. We can remain dry-eyed through sermons about Calvary and Scripture lessons about the punishment of hell.

Conversion, however, cannot be experienced without opening our hearts and becoming vulnerable to all the tears and tribulation which inevitably will follow.

C.S. Lewis spoke to this when he wrote,

To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung, and possibly broken. If you want to make sure to keep it complete and perfectly intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully 'round about with hobbies and little luxuries, avoid all entanglements, lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken, but something far worse, it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, unredeemable. . . .

The irony, however, of even the hardest of unconverted hearts is this, that even they have that point of tenderness and emotion which will bring forth weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Just like Esau who wept at the realization of his tremendous loss, they too will weep at the ultimate realization of their fate. Every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall someday confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

The saved will then be ushered into their eternal reward . . . and those who have refused to weep will spend an eternity where there is weeping. . . .

Why Elisabeth?

Gary Reed just gave me a penetrating insight. Once suggested, it is so utterly obvious that I was embarrassed that I had not seen it before.

“Why did Mary go to visit Elisabeth?” was the question. The question was legitimate, but I didn’t know the answer.

Gary then reminded me of the unusual circumstances around her pregnancy. She had been visited by an angel and had been overshadowed by the Holy Spirit.

This is quite matter-of-fact to those of us who have almost twenty centuries of Christian history behind us, but it was not so easy for Mary to explain the first time around.

Put yourself in the position of her parents. Apparently there were no witnesses to verify the angelic visit. It was merely the word of one young woman whose personal testimony would fly into the face of all scientific knowledge and medical history.

Who would dare to believe her?

Her parents would certainly want to . . . but would find it difficult. Certainly the neighbors would not understand. Even Joseph was at this point “minded to put her away privately.”

Where else could she go to find solace and comfort than to someone else who had also had a similar experience?

And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible” (Luke 1:36-37).

The angel simply made this announcement. He did not commission or command that Mary make the long journey . . . but putting yourself in her position — where would you go?

I can see in my mind’s eye the blank stare of the local rabbi, her mother’s tears and her father’s anger. I can relate to the disap-

pointment of Joseph and the glaring disapproval of the local housewives. I can understand why she "arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste."

As a matter of fact I have seen much the same thing happen in my own generation.

I have seen preachers on the verge of total poverty drive five hundred miles for an evening of fellowship with someone who would understand. I have seen lonely and desperate individuals who were victims of some unusual experience or unpopular conviction. They didn't ask for their circumstances any more than Mary asked for hers.

What do they do next? Do they abort their ideas and live the rest of their lives with the guilt that they had not been true to their convictions? Do they deny their personal experience and conform to the cult of those who worship a God made in their own likeness and image?

Usually they will gravitate to someone . . . or perhaps even anyone who would be able to relate to and understand where they are coming from.

Actually, this is the basis genius behind the church.

Every living creature needs an appropriate environment to survive. The fish must have the right kind of water, with the right kind of temperature, and the right kind of food. Fresh water fish cannot survive in salt water, and cold water fish cannot survive in the tropics. Every living creature needs the right kind of an environment in order to survive.

If this is true in the realm of physical life . . . and it is, it is also true in the realm of spiritual life.

Those who are born from above are recipients of eternal life. We are citizens of heaven. We are strangers and pilgrims in a strange land and are fortunate indeed that God has graciously provided a fellowship of those who like Elisabeth have had an experience so similar that they will understand.

Rickenbacker's Theological School

Eddie Rickenbacker had always been conscious of the existence of a Great Power above. He had learned to pray at his mother's knee and never went to bed without first of all kneeling to give thanks. Yet his belief in God had always been a personal thing . . . he had never learned to share his faith with others.

The event that changed his life and transformed Eddie Rickenbacker into an evangelist began a few months after Pearl Harbor. In those dark and dismal days of World War II Eddie was dispatched to the Pacific with a supersecret unwritten message from Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson to Gen. Douglas MacArthur. Enroute to New Guinea they became disoriented and were forced to make a crash landing at sea. At 2:36 p.m. Honolulu time, Oct. 21, 1942 eight men were set adrift without food or water on the wide Pacific . . . twenty-four days later seven of them had lived to be rescued. Dehydrated and emaciated and some of them unconscious . . . they had all come to a faith in God.

Eddie wrote . . .

There were some cynics and unbelievers among us. Not after the eighth day, however. For on that day a small miracle occurred.

Eight days without food or water may not seem much to a man in the land of faucets and refrigerators but in a world filled only with salt water and scorching sun the situation had become desperate. One man had a Testament and twice each day they tied their rafts together for the purpose of Bible study and prayer. Their words were often halting, their grammar frequently imperfect . . . but each took his turn and uttered a prayer to God. They sang what hymns they knew and trusted in God for a miracle of deliverance. On the eighth day . . . that miracle came.

They were still 16 long days from rescue, but without this day of providential blessing not one man could have survived.

They finished with their hymn of praise and prayer for deliverance . . . small talk tapered off in the oppressive heat . . . and Rickenbacker drifted off to sleep. Suddenly he awakened . . . a sea gull had landed on his head. Slowly, slowly, a trembling hand inched upward. Eight men held their breath and prayed. A few moments later they feasted on fresh raw meat. The bird's intestines were used for bait and soon they feasted on fresh fish. After eight long days this two course meal was a surfeit . . . and every man was aware that hundreds of miles from any land the little gull had landed within their grasp . . . just after they prayed. Some might call it a coincidence . . . they called it a gift from heaven.

Eddie Rickenbacker was America's top flying ace in W.W. I. He won the Medal of Honor, designed and manufactured automobiles, managed the Indianapolis Speedway, built an airline, and his amazing life became a legend. But no experience in his many faceted life was more memorable or meaningful to him than the 24 day course in Theology which began on Oct. 21, 1942.

He wrote of this event:

But of all the changes brought about by those 24 days on the Pacific, one of the greatest was in me. I had always been quietly religious, although some of my cronies did not realize it. After our deliverance, which I attributed directly to the providence of the Lord above, I no longer had any hesitancy about expressing my true feelings.

Ray Tucker, the columnist, wrote: "Rickenbacker has become an evangelist without knowing it. . . ."

"Ray was wrong in only one respect," Rickenbacker said, "I knew from the time of the Pacific ordeal my faith in God has been an active, open part of my life."

Condensed from *Reader's Digest*, May, 1968

