

## THE PASTOR'S MESSAGE

## SELF-PRESERVATION OR DIVINE PROTECTION

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"Nevertheless we made our prayer unto God, and set a watch against them day and night." Neh. 4:9.

Nehemiah believed in God, and trusted Him for protection; nevertheless, he put a man on guard where he could watch for the enemy. There is no inconsistency in such a policy.

If one of our soldiers were placed in an enemy concentration camp, he might well believe that God could work a miracle to deliver him; but surely, if the chance presented itself, he would not hesitate to dig a tunnel underneath the barbed wire and thus effect his own escape.

Two men lost in a jungle infested by wild animals remembered that the Bible said "watch and pray."

"All right," said one man to the other, "you watch and I'll pray."

That incident is not all humor, for there is a nugget of truth there to be grasped. A person must watch as well as pray; but after man has done his best, there is still plenty for God to do.

But what is the meaning between man's own attempt at self-preservation and his complete trust in divine protection?

In the Final Analysis God Keeps Us  
Altogether

"For in him we live and move and have our being."

"The God in whose hand thy breath is."

Man may think that he is protecting himself, but this thought often degenerates into an unwarranted feeling of self-sufficiency and bigoted arrogance.

King Saul was carried away with a sense of his own importance. Truly he had much to boast of, being large physically, "a choice young man," and of whom it was said there was "none goodlier than he." Maybe if anyone could have taken his own part, it was Saul. But jealousy and then pride invaded his heart, and his career hastened to a despicable end. Hear him say, "I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly." Saul thought he could protect himself but ended up a failure and a suicide.

On the other hand, to a certain extent man can protect himself. He builds a house to shelter himself from the wind and rain; wears clothes to keep himself warm; obeys the laws of health and by the proper use of medicine, wards off disease; and may carry a gun as protection against wild animals.

But even here, man's efforts are very feeble and limited, and he stands helpless when the forces of nature depart from normal. A hurricane levels a forest to the ground; Vesuvius erupts and demolishes a city; the Mississippi leaves its channel and carries away a whole valley full of farm buildings.

Time and tide play havoc with the most imposing of human structures. The Tower of Babel cannot be found; the pyramids are fast joining the sand of the desert; tremendous steel bridges crash in the wind; a piece of ice sends an unmistakable ocean liner diving to the bottom.

But not only physical structures suffer the impact of time. The best thought systems ever devised by the human brain have their little period of popularity and then disappear,

to be found only in a few dusty volumes stored away in some dark recess of a university basement.

The boasted finality of eighteenth century philosophical conclusions is laughed at today.

So-called scientific enlightenment, with its vaunted claims of a new dawn for mankind, has reacted on its own head, bringing a hundredfold more suffering and misery than it ever hoped to alleviate.

Systems of humanistic ethics and morality without God have proved to be the breeding ground for social unrest and political corruption.

Noble ideals of liberty and equality in government have degenerated into communism and fascism, where the masses are exploited by the few.

What do these human failures teach us?

That after all man's endeavors, they land him nowhere unless he be in co-operation with God.

"Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it; except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain." **Under Divine Protection the Weak are as Well off as the Strong**

Sometimes the weak are better off, since they recognize more readily their complete dependence on God.

Nature seems to operate according to the "survival of the fittest," but this principle is not always applicable to nature. A few years ago in California a great pit was discovered nearly full of the skeletons of the now extinct saber-toothed tiger. This species of tiger was very ferocious and had adequate protection against his enemies; but today he is gone, while the world is full of quiet sheep and harmless deer.

In the plan of salvation, the "survival of the fittest" is never true. It would be if man had to make his own way, but his strength and support is in God. Martin Luther sang:

"Did we in our own strength confide

Our striving would be losing,

Were not the right Man on our side,

The Man of God's own choosing.

Dost ask, Who that may be? Christ Jesus,

it is He.

Lord of Sabaoth His name, from age to age

the same,

And He must win the battle."

In God's plan, not just the strong and able will succeed; the weakest child in God's kingdom has as much access to heaven's resources as the most stalwart Christian soldier. Paul prayed for deliverance from his affliction, but in his moment of trial God said, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness."

Sometimes the most faltering Christian will achieve the greatest triumph, for where there is a great battle to be fought, there follows a greater victory. The success of battle is not always due to the soldier on the front line; the man who stays behind and brings up the supplies is as indispensable as the general himself. Similarly, the credit for advance in the kingdom of God should go as well to the humble saint unable to leave his bed of sickness as to the evangelist behind the pulpit.

"Satan trembles when he sees

The weakest saint upon his knees."

Satan does not worry merely because he

sees a man in the position of prayer; rather does he tremble when that soul gets in contact with the Lord of the skies, against Whose kingdom the powers of darkness cannot prevail. Effective prayer does not depend on the size of the man, nor the length of his petition. It is the faith that counts. The prophets of Baal screamed and thrashed all day, but no answer came. Elijah uttered a quiet little prayer of about fifteen seconds' duration, and the fire fell.

**It is Better to Have Faith in the Living God Than to Trust an Army**

The Psalmist said, "Some trust in chariots and some in horses: but we will remember the name of our Lord our God."

Soon after the beginning of the present war, when the hordes of Hitler had swept through the low countries in the direction of France, the French continued to sit at ease behind their "impregnable" Maginot line. They trusted implicitly in that great wall of guns, for was not the Maginot line the mightiest system of fortifications the world had ever known? But that was ALL they trusted in. History tells us what happened.

In contrast, during the last war, when Marshall Earl Haig declared in 1918 that the British were "fighting with their backs to the wall," King George V. called a day of prayer on August 4th. Four days later, on August 8th, 1918, the Allies made an eight to twelve mile advance at Cambrai. From that date on, success attended the Allied cause until the conclusion of the war, on November 11th, 1918.

God's hand was manifest again in this present war when, on June 3rd, 1940, 335,000 British soldiers were evacuated from Dunkirk. Skeptical newspaper reporters testified that never in their memory had the English Channel been so smooth.

Well might we learn that a simple trust in God is better than the best combination of protective weapons that man has to offer. "Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit, saith the Lord of hosts."

Man, however, does have a part in caring for himself. God will not help the careless man, neither will He assist the one who refuses to help himself. Oliver Cromwell commanded his soldiers, "Put your trust in God; but mind to keep your powder dry!" God would ask us to do our best, then depend on Him for what we cannot do. A faith in God will keep us for this life and guarantee the next—a guarantee based on the irrefragable statements of Scripture and the omnipotent power of God.

"I the Lord have called thee in righteousness and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee."

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The Christian who begins to tithe will have at least six surprises. He will be surprised—

1. At the amount of money he has for the Lord's work.
2. At the ease in meeting his own obligations with the nine-tenths.
3. At the deepening of his spiritual life in paying the tithe.
4. At the ease in going from one-tenth to larger giving.
5. At the prudent disposal afforded to a faithful and wise steward over the nine-tenths that remain.
6. At himself in not adopting the plan sooner.—Christian Digest.