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THE W.K.B.S. VOICE

"I am a voice"—John the Baptist

VOL. V

Murray, Kentucky, June, 1937

No. 48

Men Began to Pray

(Sermon preached by the Editor May 30, 1937, over WPAD, Paducah, Ky.)

Gen. 4:25-26: "And Adam knew his wife again, and she bare a son and called his name Seth; for God, said she, hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew. And to Seth, to him also there was born a son; and he called his name Enos: then began men to call upon the name of the Lord."

I. A SAD BACKGROUND. Behind our text for today is a sad background of prayerlessness. There was no public worship of God and no individual took seriously the exercise of prayer. Adam who seems to have sinned in the early morning of his existence, was 130 at the birth of his son Seth; Seth was 105 at the birth of his son Enos. That makes 235 years. Counting Enos as no more than 15 when this revival of prayer came, what a world of prayerlessness for 250 to 300 years. What rapid strides unchecked wickedness can make in a much shorter time than that!

Such a sad situation faces us today in too many quarters. Men have not yet taken seriously the matter of prayer. Lack of connection with heaven seems no cause for alarm. Let a light circuit get broken or our telephone out of fix, what a howl we raise instantly. But let the lines of prayer be so laden with worldliness and sins that we never send to God a message nor receive from Him an answer, it seems a matter of little or no concern. God grant to arouse us out of the deep stupor into which our material and mechanical age has drifted.

The world of our day is no better than that of Seth and Enos'. It thinks it can get along without God's mercy in Christ that comes when men call on the name of the Lord.

What a comment this is on the life of Adam! Not on what Adam had but what he lacked. I think Adam was saved; I think he saw the way of the cross when God clothed him and Eve with the coats of skins. But his life was never enriched by constant prayer, and he

left to his descendants no special memory of a godly life of abiding fellowship with God. Too many lives run the trodden ruts of the world and never lead men to serious prayer to God.

Yet, here is a greater miracle than this radio system by which we speak to you today. The first wireless was prayer. We speak into this dumb microphone that neither frowns with displeasure nor smiles with delight, and yet the miracle is that you hear me miles away as if I stood or sat by you! As far as human senses can tell, men cry unto God and their prayers go into thin air or carry no higher than our heads. But what marvels, what miracles! God hears and answers our wireless messages of prayer. Some one thousands of miles away feels the touch of God because we touch God in humble prayer. Some burden is lighter far beyond the reach of our hands because the hand of prayer touched the hand divine that moves the world and touches heavy hearts with tenderness.

II. A HAPPY CRISIS. It is nothing short of a crisis in a man's soul when he awakes to his need of God's mercy and begins to call on Him. Such a crisis happily came in the days of Seth and Enos. A revival of prayer, a revival of soul needs always shake a life, a home, a church, a community, a world.

Men began to pray. The icebergs of indifference melted; the altars of prayer dotted the land of darkness. The dance of worldliness turned to the daring of courageous walk before God. The unrest of life became the unwearied waitings before God. The cesspools of unbridled wickedness became houses of ardent prayer. Nature's beauties glowed with new meaning; life pulsed with a new force, even power divine. Men's hearts of drunkenness were electrified with a new consciousness of God in daily life.

"Then began men to call on the name of the LORD." They did more than call His name in mere recitation. They called on the

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JUST A REVIEW

Pastor George D. Heaton, First Baptist Church, Paducah, preached before "Temple Israel" in Paducah Jan. 15, 1937, on the theme "The Purpose of God." The Editor and Brother Heaton are the best of friends and will remain so.

Here is the opening sentence, "How can I express to you my feeling of devotion to you and your Rabbi, and how can I express to you my gratitude for this hour of worship which has lifted MY heart with YOURS into the presence of OUR Father?" Are Jews who refuse Jesus Christ children of "our Father?" "Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:26).

"God has society in view in His final intent. No man lives alone; and we cannot think of the final purpose of God as having to do with just persons as such. The conditions of society affect the individual, and so God intends to do something about those conditions which repudiate the experience for which He is creating man. All things in society which defy the sonship which He is making must be overcome. For out of God's children God intends to create God's kind of society."

Here is the nearest paragraph to the gospel of Christ that the whole message contains: "God has said to His people, 'Come, let us reason together, and though your sins be as scarlet they shall be washed white as snow.' God has shown His purpose in that redemption of sin to every heart that will come to Him and seek forgiveness." Not once is the name of Jesus Christ mentioned. Does God forgive sin unless men come through Jesus Christ? "No man cometh unto the Father but through Me," declared Jesus. No mention was made of how one must seek this forgiveness? Christians know that it comes through Christ Jesus alone.

The beautiful language of the message does not make up for what is omitted. The discussion of the purpose of God is practical and true, except it leaves out the center of God's purpose. What is the very heart and ground of all of God's purpose? "According to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself, that in the

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THE W. K. B. S. VOICE

Published Monthly in the Interest of
THE WEST KENTUCKY BIBLE SCHOOL
MURRAY, KENTUCKY

Edited By

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Subscription Price.....50c a Year

Entered as Second Class Matter, Jan. 9, 1935, at the Post Office at Murray, Ky., Under Act of March 3, 1879

MEN BEGAN TO PRAY—CON.

Lord for help, for salvation, for forgiveness, for guidance. Mentioning God's name in prayer, counting beads, saying masses, vain repetitions and the like are quite different from truly calling on the Lord. His name stands for what God is and does. Oh soul, do you truly call on Him?

Then men began to pray. They distrusted their wisdom to untie the baffling knots of unpleasant circumstances and heart-piercing afflictions. They called on the Lord. They saw human philosophy could not pierce through the darkness of death. They discounted material prosperity as the source of soul satisfaction; they called on the Lord. They leaned not on physical strength, good health, or military prowess; they called on the Lord. Stripped of everything as a means of salvation and rest, they called on the Lord.

In that day men had not learned the base practise of calling on idols or the useless habit of praying to saints. They called on the LORD.

"Then began men to call on the name of the Jehovah." Jehovah is the covenant name of God. It tells of redemption, of the Promised Deliverer, of Christ the Lord, the seed of the woman. Men may admire God as a Creator, extol Him for His power, laud Him for the beauties of nature, and yet never call on Him for His mercy and grace. Jesus said, "Ye believe in God, believe also in Me." A faith in God that leaves out Jesus as Savior cannot save the soul. "He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father who hath sent Him," Jno. 5:23. Be sure you honor and call upon God in mercy as He is made known to us through Jesus Christ alone.

The favorable mention of Seth and Abel is because they were praying men. The world may not honor men of prayer, but God does. The name of the wicked shall rot; the good deeds of the moralist be forgotten, but "then they that feared the Lord spake often

one to another; and the Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord and thought upon His name," Mal. 3:16.

III. A GLORIOUS SEQUEL. Then men began to pray, but they did not exhaust the limitless possibilities of prayer. What a story since then! What a book of striking incidents and remarkable answers to prayer since then! The Bible is full of them. Every period of revival is aglow with them. Every life of prayer burns with ardent petitions and heartfelt thanksgivings.

I think one of the tasks of semi-prayerless Christians will be in the glory world to revel in the heavenly archives of asked and answered prayer. I am sure worldly Lot has already learned the secrets of his failures in not having an altar of prayer as Abraham did almost everywhere he journeyed.

What broad stretches of unexplored territory lie ahead of him who prays conqueringly. Tennyson had it right when he wrote:

More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
For what are men better than sheep or goats,
That nourish a blind life within the brain.
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer,
Both for themselves and those who call them friend.

Men tell us the world is governed by law and scoff at the possibility of prayer. Yet, thank God, believing souls go on praying and getting answers. That is the acid test. They pray and get. Men may call the testimonies of unmistakable answers to prayer mere coincidences of circumstances, but men and women who know the blessings of prayer just go on asking for and expecting such marvelous coincidences. What do the scoffs of an unbelieving world

amount to so long as they pray and get answers?

Men may say we are wasting our breath in prayer, but what care we so long as the mountains of difficulties waste away before us, when we see the bright linings to the dark clouds, while we walk on the sunny side of threatening circumstances, as our lives are iridescent with glowing blessings God has given? And, my friends, the man who prays and gets answers wants every other man to know this undiminished fountain of blessing.

But do not the glorious possibilities of prayer shame us? How much more we might have? James says, "Ye have not because ye ask not; ye ask and receive not because ye ask amiss that ye may consume it upon your lusts" (4:2-3). There is the key to it. His storehouse is full; our baskets go empty because we do not ask or do not ask aright.

"What a Friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Ev'rything to God in prayer!"

Our little faith signs the checks of His promises as though we thought God's bank of blessings was ready for the hands of the receiver. We fearfully wade in the shallows as thought there were no deeps into which to plunge. We scantily feed from His granary as though the last grain had been given. We doubtfully roll our burdens on Him as though He were a weakling. We faintly lift our voices to him as thought He were weary of hearing. But the true story reads quite differently, Isa. 59:1-2, "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you that He will not hear."

"Then began men to call on the name of the Lord."

1. As it was with Seth and Enos, so it must be with us THE CALL OF REALIZED NEED. Why do you, my friend, not pray? You say you don't know. Fine, I can tell you from God's word. You do not see the need. Men make place in their lives for the things they feel they need and want. Men pray when the burden crushes. Men go to God's house to prayer when their souls are awake. Men like Tom Paine, who left God out of his life and reasoned against God,

prayed the shrieks of despair that could be heard almost a mile because the stern facts of death and judgment without God crowded on his poor soul. Awake, awake, O sleeping world, call on God for His mercy in Jesus Christ.

Look at thy poor soul. Clad about with its filthy rags of righteousness, but wholly naked of a fit covering before God.

Look about thy soul. Surrounded by the angry waves of temptations, cut off from escape by the pitfalls of sin, and driven in mad unrest into countless sinful pleasures.

Look above thy soul. Threatened by the frowning providences of God that call you to meet Him in Judgment.

Look ahead of thy soul. Faced with the white throne of a righteous God, the bar of flaming justice, and the bottomless pit of hell, with only the brittle thread of uncertain life to hold you out of its yawning bosom.

Look to the cross of Calvary for the salvation of thy soul. Look; look and live. Isa. 45:22, "Look unto Me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God and there is none else."

2. As it was with Seth and Enos, so it must be with us THE CALL OF TRUSTING FAITH. You say you have called on God, and He has not saved you. Hear Him, "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord, shall be saved" (Acts 2). You have not called aright. You have not despaired of all other means of escape. You have not called trustingly. Call, He will answer. I know because He heard my despairing yet believing cry. Call on the Lord Jesus. Just trust Him. Call and say, "It all depends on Jesus; I am eternally lost without Him; if I go to hell I will go there calling on Him; He must, He will hear. He has promised; He will make it good." And my friend, as you call and leave it there, He has already heard. You will have the assurance. You will not need anyone to tell you there is a God, or that Jesus saves. You will know it yourself. You can sing with David, "I love the Lord because He hath heard my voice and my supplications" (Psa. 116:1).

3. As it was with Seth and Enos, so it must be with us THE CALL OF OPEN CONFESSION. No need for you, sinner friend, to call so long as you try to cover your sins. Prov. 28:13, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whose confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." Say with the publican, "God be propitious to

me the sinner."

A Negro was praying but got no answer. His colored adviser said, "Sambo, don't jes say you have sinned; tell de Lawd you stole dat chicken." He meant, "Face sin squarely, no dodging; make definite confession without any hedging." And friends, that is the kind of call that gets the answer.

Men began in salvation to call on the Lord in confession of sin; they need to continue until their death day. That gracious promise in I Jno. 1:9 was made to Christians—there were none in that day who lived above sin—"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

The greatest hindrance to a widespread, yea worldwide, revival today is unconfessed sins in the lives of Christians. Call; yes, Brother, call, but tell the Lord you stole that chicken. He knows your strayings; He knows we so often draw near with the lips when our hearts are far away. Oh for a revival of calling on the name of the Lord.

4. As it was with Seth and Enos, so it must be with us THE CALL OF EAGER READINESS. What good will it do Christians to pray for the salvation of the world and yet hold the word of life undelivered to earth's millions? What profit is there in making prayer for the salvation of some sinner and yet refuse to witness to him of Jesus' power to save Him? What benefit is it to pray that others may give to the spread of the gospel when we hold tightly our own purse strings? What power will our prayers have to kill worldliness in others when we make excuse for or even admire the spots of the world on our Christian garments?

We need to stop fooling ourselves; we are not praying as we ought. Our hearts are not as passionately missionary, as constantly seeking the lost, as liberally giving, as fully denying the world, as daily crucifying self as they need to be. God grant us such a revival in our day that the historian can truly say, "Then began Christians to call on the Lord with a new fervor, a fresh zeal, an overflowing heart, a ready hand, a crucified and consecrated life. Then began Christians to forsake the world and its ways, to live as pilgrims and strangers here, looking for a better land, to tarry long in their closets of prayer, to seek out the lost day and night."

And the historian will tell the other side of the story: "Then be-

gan sinners to call upon the name of the Lord, confessing their sins and finding glorious pardon in the blood of Jesus Christ and giving evidence of salvation by transformed living."

THE STEALTH OF SIN

The little island of Sark, situated in the English Channel, was for a while in the Sixteenth Century occupied by the French until it was taken from them by stealth. Sir Walter Raleigh, governor of the sister island of Jersey some 50 years later, tells the details of the capture: "A Flemish vessel arrived off the coast, and the sailors pretended that their captain was dead and asked leave to bring his body ashore for burial. Permission being granted, they carried the coffin up the hill to the little old church of Saint Magloire. They opened the coffin, which was full of arms, and turned on the French garrison, killing some and taking the rest prisoners."

How deceptive and destructive is sin!

ANTICHRIST WILL COME

Some earnest souls cannot understand how this old sinful world will one day worship a man as God. In Salz, Germany, a stone, because it stopped Hitler's car, was lifted from the mud to a pedestal where it is now worshipped as a "sacred Hitler shrine." At a public dedication of the stone the burgomaster of the village said to his fellows, "It will be an eternal relic for Germans and all generations to come." Just because the tire of Hitler's car touched it! Yes, the time will come when men will deify a man and worship him. That is the characteristic trend of our troublesome day.

CHURCH BAZAARS

After discussing bazaars, sales, guessing competitions, and such like in our churches, "The Life of Faith," London, makes this wise observation, "We hope the time may come when Christian organizations may dispense with bazaars in every shape and form, and depend by prayer and faith upon the consecrated and sacrificial giving of those people whose heart the Lord has touched."

Seventh Day Adventists claim to have services in 375 countries and in 580 languages and dialects. It ought to make Baptists ashamed to think how little we do to spread the gospel of grace.

JUST A REVIEW—CONT.

dispensation of the fullness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ" (Eph. 1: 9-10). To discuss the purpose of God and leave Jesus Christ out of it is to play on the edge and to cut His purpose until it bleeds. On every occasion the preacher should make his message Christo-centric, especially when he discusses the purpose of God that has its ground, center, and goal in Jesus Christ. Loyalty to Christ preaches Him on every occasion.

I thought, "How would Christ have acted?" The parable of the Wicked Husbandman presented God's last alternative in figurative language, "but last of all he sent unto them his son." The result is, "And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard His parables, they perceived that He spake of them." They knew Jesus was telling of their rejection of Himself.

I mused again, "What did Peter, Stephen, and Paul do on similar occasions?" Do I need to tell of Peter's preaching Christ at Pentecost? That is always the result of being filled with the Spirit. Do you not know how Stephen chose the same theme, "The Purpose of God"? He traced God's purpose from Abraham to Christ. He did not lack the courage to preach Christ. I could not resist the inclination to compare Acts 7 and my Brother's sermon. I read again Paul's sermon at Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13) on the same theme, "The Purpose of God." He began with Israel in Egypt and traced His purpose to David: "Of this man's seed hath God according to His promise raised unto Israel a Savior, Jesus."

I wished my Brother had followed these divine sermonic models and pray he may do it if a next time comes.

"THE OTHER SIDE OF ERRORS"

The British Weekly, some years ago, called attention to the fact that an error, if turned around, may have a striking lesson. A little girl wrote WEST END CHURCH thus "West Inn Church." Well, well, I now know why some of my members do not work at soul-winning and other things for the Lord. They think the church is an "Inn" for food and rest alone; it is that, but with work in view. We eat the good things of grace so that we may serve; we rest the rest of faith that we may undertake.

OUR QUERY BOX

1—Is it right to say "our" or "my" Christ?

Ans. It is not. He is God's Christ or God's Anointed One, not ours. He is our Saviors, our Lord, our Jesus. he Anointed One suggests authorized for a special work. Who, does this, God or man? He is the anointed Prophet to teach us about God, to make God known to us; He is the Word. He is the anointed Priest to make a sin-offering for us, to pay the sin debt by sacrificing Himself therefor. He is the anointed King to reign in individual hearts and over the world when He comes again. Use sound words; we are admonished to do it.

2—Is it right to exhort sinners to give their hearts to the Lord?

Ans. Again, we say, "No." When the exhortation to give God one's heart occurs in the Scriptures, it is prefaced by the word "son." "Son, give Me thine heart." No one is God's son except the born again by faith in Jesus Christ.

3—Is it right to call a preacher a pastor since the word "pastor" does not occur in the N. T.?

Ans. That is where the querist is wrong. The word "pastor" does occur in the N. T. The word merely means shepherd; that is one of the most frequent designations of the pastoral office. But, from another angle, it may be seriously doubted whether many pastors are pastors, shepherds. Where is the pastor that seeks the sick and straying of his flock? Where are the pastors that cross the mountains into the wilderness seeking the lost sheep? Oh for undershepherds that follow the Chief Shepherd. Oh for the shepherd heart for our preachers. One of the greatest failures of the Baptist pastors I know is that we do not do personal work as we ought. If every Baptist preacher in West Kentucky were revived and did the private witnessing he ought West Kentucky would be swept into the kingdom and our preachers would quit fussing and carrying grudges against one another. It hurt me to say these things, but, woe to us, they are true.

(We trust the question as to whether God answers prayer today is answered in our sermon.)

The Editor and Brother Odle of East Baptist Church conducted the funeral of a good man, a noble Christian, and a true friend.—G. M. DeHaven—at Calvert City on June 22.

THREE LIVE QUESTIONS

Baptists need to discuss anew the place of deacons in church life. A pastor confessed to me that it ought not be so that no matter can come before his church until the "board" of deacons votes favorably. That is in effect a presbyterial, not a democratic form of church government. Another needy question is how far a church once a church has to go not to be a church. When does a Baptist church unchurch itself? Let us have a free discussion of this subject. We will print your answers. A third live question is whether a District Association has anything to do with determining whether a Baptist church or Baptist preacher is a church or preacher. We hold the age-long Baptist position that a District Association cannot make or unmake either a preacher or church. On the contrary, churches can make or unmake an association. Associational fellowship is optional, not necessary, to churchanity. The province of the association is for co-operation in missionary and benevolent work. It leaves its sphere and destroys its usefulness when it becomes an avenue for prejudice toward someone we do not like.

Everyone seemed to enjoy the Baptist Preachers' Picnic at Noble Park, Paducah, June 22. Near 30 were present and voted to make the picnic an annual thing. Brother Horton of Mayfield and his alternate Brother Martin of Murray being absent, Brother Hubbard of Murray who was to have spoken in the afternoon brought the morning message on, "Whereupon I Was Not Disobedient to the Heavenly Vision." This movement has great possibilities for deepening the fellowship and understanding of West Kentucky Baptists.

A NUT FOR POSTMILLENNIALISTS

Crack this one, any of you who think the age of universal peace is dawning through social and gospel efforts. Instead of weapons of war being turned into instruments of peace, Italy is talking of scrapping city fences and gates to get iron for weapons of war.

IDEALS FOR MEN

A recent survey of the University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Ind., gave these results about men's ideas about women: "Purity was the quality the majority said they desired most in a girl. Second preference was intelligence; honesty was third. Beauty didn't do better than fifth place.