

LIVING LIFE TO THE FULLEST—WHAT A GREAT EXPECTATION

Colossians 3 : 1-4

“I’ve Got Troubles! -

In Cincinnati, Ohio there is a large skyscraper called Carew Tower, All who have visited Cincinnati have noticed that skyscraper. At the top of Carew Tower there is an observation platform where visitors can go and view the always fascinating sights. You can look, on the one side, at the Ohio River flowing down carrying the busy river traffic. Barges and small ships are always on the Ohio River. Then, as you let your eyes roam around from the observation platform, you can see that great city of Cincinnati laid out on seven hills, just like Rome, Italy. It is a marvelous beautiful sight to go out there on a clear day. Some time back, there was a young man who went to the observation platform of this great skyscraper that towers above the city of Cincinnati. He was a troubled young man. He had no peace of heart and he tried to leap over from the top of that platform and commit suicide. Fortunately, someone restrained him and the police came and he was taken down to police head- quarters and there he was questioned. One of the policemen, who was on duty, put to the young man this simple question and it was reported by a newspaper reporter in our papers. The policeman simply asked the young man, “Why did you do such a terrible thing?” The young man bowed his head and tears streamed down his cheeks as he said, “I’ve got troubles. I’ve got troubles.”

Everyone Has Troubles

As I read that story in the papers and thought about that troubled young man, it seemed to me that this was a picture of this entire world of ours in 2008. Every place that you go and every direction that you look, people have troubles. I would not expect sinners to have peace at heart. I would not expect the man who drinks alcohol to find any peace of heart and I would not expect liars to have any peace of heart and I would not expect those who indulge in illicit, adulterous affairs to find any peace of heart. I would not expect the drug users and the drug pushers to find any peace of heart. Frankly, the thing that really troubles me is this; I find many Christians, who are really dedicated to Christ and the church, who seemingly have not found any peace of heart. At the best, they express it like this; “Life is an up and down experience.”

An Airplane Ride

As I am a Private Pilot I have often compared life to an airplane ride on a hot and sultry day. If you have ever had the experience of being depressed, discouraged, down on the ground where it is hot and sultry and then getting into a light plane and climbing up above the clouds where it is cool and delightful and then from that place of peace and solitude looking down on the white, fleecy clouds below and then a few moments later landing and being back in the hot, sultry conditions once again, then perhaps you can appreciate those who describe life as an “up and down” experience, I wonder how many of you have ever thought of your own life as an up and down experience? Maybe one day you are up in those clouds in a cool, refreshing air, that God provides, where everything is delightful and then the very next day you find yourself down, defeated and discouraged and perhaps you have asked yourself the question, “What is the secret of having peace of heart? How could we so live that we might have this peace that the Bible talks about here in Colossians 3 : 15?” Notice that it says, “This is your responsibility as a Christian.” It is our responsibility to so live that we will have this peace of heart that comes from Jesus Christ. It is not only a responsibility, but notice that it is also your privilege as members of His body,

The Secret?

What is the secret of having peace of heart? Some people would tell you that it is:

A . Political Freedom. There are lots of people in Haiti, who would say, “Let us elect our own government like you do in the U.S. and then we would have peace of heart.” If political freedom would bring peace of heart, then every American would have it. We elect our own officials from the mayor to our president, and yet right here in America, you will find just as many unhappy, afraid people as you would in any other country

of the world.

Some people would say:

B. "Give us education and then we would be happy." In India education is highly prized and the average Indian would move Heaven and earth to get an education. Here in the U.S. we have one of the finest educational systems in the entire world. The average high school student in America knows more about science than the greatest scientist did in the days of Aristotle. Our heads are crammed full of knowledge, but our hearts are empty. If we have knowledge and nothing in our hearts then we will find that education by itself will not bring peace of heart.

Some people would say:

C. "Give us a higher standard of living." I remember an African preacher who once told me that if he just had a motorcycle, he would be happy. That would be real living. Recently that same African preacher, who now has a motorcycle, wrote me a letter and it was a tear jerker. "My motorcycle is broken and my tires are worn out", he said, "I can't pay the insurance, the gasoline is too expensive. Can you help me, because I can't use the motorcycle." He has more troubles now that he has the motorcycle than when he was walking and he has found out, just like we found out here in this country, that higher standards of living, having a "push button economy", doesn't necessarily bring us happiness.

Some people would say that:

D. Fame and Fortune "would do it" or "pleasure and power" will do it. Yet, frantic, frightened Americans spent 125 million dollars on fortune tellers last year. They could not face tomorrow. They had the fortune, fame, pleasure, and power, but they had no peace of heart, so they had to go to the fortune teller to find if they were going to live or die or what was going to happen.

Jesus Is the Secret! Col. 3:4

I am sure that all of us that are Christians agree that Jesus Christ is the secret to peace of heart. We know that Christ is the answer, we know that Christ is the secret to this peace of heart, but how are we going to obtain this peace of heart in our lives? The Bible says this is your responsibility. There are 3 things that we are going to do if we are going to have this peace of heart that comes from Jesus Christ.

RETREAT Col. 3:5-9

I. First of all we are going to have to retreat from those things that are wrong. Please notice verse 8 of Colossians 3, "But now is the time to cast off and throw away all of these rotten garments of anger, hatred, cursing, and dirty language. Don't tell lies to each other. It is your old lives with all that wickedness that did that sort of thing now it is dead and gone.

General Timinshinko of the Russian army will probably go down in history as the greatest general of strategic retreat of all times. Perhaps some of you may remember that during WWII, it was General Timinshinko that led the armies of Russia all the way from the Polish border clear back to Stalingrad and yet in all of this time of retreating, retreating, retreating for hundreds of miles, he managed to keep his forces together so that when the time came to attack and go forward, he was able to drive them straight in the heart of Berlin. He obtained that tremendous victory for Russia because he knew when to retreat. Now there comes a time in our lives when, if we are going to have peace of heart, that peace that comes from Jesus Christ, we must then know what to retreat from.

A. We are to flee from pride. Dr Stuart Holden, the great golfer, was once asked this question, "Holden, what is your handicap?" Without any hesitation he responded, "Myself", Well, it was not the answer that the questioner had expected, but nevertheless it was a true answer. I am my own handicap and you are your worst handicap. Proverbs 6:17 says, "These six things dost God hate yea seven are an abomination unto Him." Number one on the list of things that God hates, is a proud look.

B. We are to flee from strife. Do you get angry easy? Are you ready to blow your top because somebody disagrees with you? Are you ready to kick down the door? Are you ready to put up your dukes and fight? If you

are going to get angry every time something doesn't go to suit you, naturally you are not going to have peace of heart.

Some years back, I remember a revival meeting that I was called to conduct at a place near Springfield, Illinois. I found a real nice preacher and a preacher's wife that I was to work with during that revival meeting, but I couldn't help notice, as I first met them that they were terribly unhappy. They had no peace of heart. It was very obvious and I wondered why, because I found that this preacher and his wife loved God. They studied His word every day and they had a prayer time together and while I was there, they invited me to share in the prayer time with them, It was obvious that they both loved the church and both of them worked hard for the church. It didn't take me very long to find out why they had no peace of heart. I was awakened the first morning that I was there and they were quarreling about who was going to get up and warm the baby's bottle and feed the baby. When the quarrel died down, they had another one about who is going to fix breakfast. When that quarrel died down, they started quarreling about who we were going to visit that day and that continued on for two or three hours as they looked over the prospect cards and they debated it back and forth. I noticed that even as we walked up the church steps into the service, they quarreled about what songs we were going to sing during the song service that night. Strife was robbing that husband and wife of the joy that they would have otherwise had known in the service of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul plainly says to the Christians at Colossae, "Away with these things", meaning retreat from these things, get away from these things or as it states, "Cast off and throw away these rotten garments of hatred, anger, cursing, and dirty language." We have no time in Christian life for pride and no place in the Christian life for strife.

C, Then there is that green eyed monster that always rears his ugly head in the church, **envy**. Isn't it astounding that any member of the body of Christ could be envious of anybody else! Some are envious because someone can play the piano better than they can play the piano or because someone can sing solos better than I can sing solos or because somebody gets the leading part in the choir cantata and I didn't get the leading part or because this member gets to do such and such in the Christmas play and I didn't get to do it and it goes on and on and on.

D. If we are going to have peace of heart we must flee gossip. Every place that you go there is always someone ready to bend your ear. "Have you heard the latest about so and so? Now whatever you do, don't repeat this because it might not be true, but oh it's so awful?" It is no wonder that people don't have peace of heart if they repeat gossip or listen to gossip, One great evangelist said that "every gossipier should be hung by his tongue, but all who listen ought to be hung by their ears." Don't do either one. Don't tell it, don't listen to it because if you do, you won't have any peace of heart!

E.. In the 5th verse it plainly names, "sexual sin, impurity, lust, and shameful desires." Cast off and throw away these rotten garments because you will never have peace of heart if you allow your mind to be down in the gutter. In other words, guard your thoughts, Be careful of what you read, be careful of what you hear, and be careful of what you see.

"Advance to the Rear!"

I heard a rather amusing story about a fellow who was over in the trenches during WWII. He was very frightened and I suppose most people were frightened who were in the trenches. The sergeant gave the order to charge. Everybody knew that if they came up out of those trenches and charged against the Germans they were going to be mowed down by machine gun fire. This one fellow was very much a coward anyway. When the sergeant said, "Charge", the boy came up out of the trench and he was retreating. The sergeant caught a glimpse of him over his shoulder and he said, "Where are you retreating to?" The buck private shouted out, "Sarge, I'm not retreating nowhere, I am just advancing to the rear!" The frightened private may have had the right idea after all. In the Christian life there comes that time that we must retreat. In the Christian life retreat from these old, rotten garments is the same thing as advancing.

STAND Vs. 8-10

. There is another word that comes out of this text that spells out the secret of having real peace of heart and that is the word “stand”. Verse 10, “You are living a brand new type of life that is continually learning more and more of what is right and trying constantly to be more and more like Christ who created this new life within you.” If we’re learning more and more about what is right and we are trying to be more and more like Christ, if we find out that somebody doesn’t like us, then we’ll just pray for them. We won’t tell anybody. Somebody slaps you down on your right cheek, so you get up and knock their block off? If you are trying to learn more and more about what is right and you are trying more and more to be like Christ then you turn your other cheek. So, we forgive our enemy and forgive those that speak against us and those that spitefully use us and persecute us. In other words, we take a stand for that which is right and we refuse to compromise.

A Football Game

It reminds me of something that happened back when I was a senior in high school at Miami, Oklahoma. Our Miami “War Dogs” won the football championship that season for the northeastern section of Oklahoma and never will I forget that final game. It was played on Thanksgiving day afternoon before 2,000 Miami fans who came out to cheer, We were playing Sand Springs, Oklahoma and there came that point in the game where they were right down on our goal line. At that crucial moment of the game, the cheerleaders began leading the Miami fans in that familiar chant, “Hold that line, hold that line, hold that line” and as the cheerleaders cheered and jumped up and down and shouted and yelled at the top of their voices, they led the Miami fans in that chant until it seemed that the very ground beneath our feet was quivering. Every player took heart, every player determined to stand like a brick wall. Consequently, Sand Springs failed to make that crucial touchdown because not a player would give an inch.

The Game of Life

Since then, I have often pictured myself out in the “game of life” playing on the “Christian team” for the Lord Jesus Christ, There comes that crucial time in the game of life when the devil is right there tempting and pushing and suggesting, “just give an inch.” We cannot! We must take our stand for that which is right.

A Furnace of Fire

It makes me think about those 3 Hebrew children in the Old Testament, Shadrack, Meshack, and Abednego. The king put up a gold idol and announced that everybody had to bow down and worship the idol. Shadrack, Meshack, and Abednego said, “We will not bow to the idol.” The king said, “If you don’t bow to the idol I will throw you in a furnace of fire and you will be burned to a crisp.” Shadrack, Meshack, and Abednego gave one of the most courageous answers of all time, they said, “GO ahead, throw us in the fire. Maybe we will burn, maybe God will save us. We don’t know what will happen to us but there is one thing we know and we want you to know, we will never bow to the idol.” Because they would not compromise, because they took their stand, God protected them miraculously from the flames. A fourth man walked with them in that furnace of fire and He was the Son of God and not even a hair of their head was singed.

A Compromiser?

May I suggest that if your life has been an up and down experience and if you have not found this peace of heart which comes from Jesus Christ then perhaps you have been a compromiser. Maybe your feet have been taking you places that you should not go. Maybe your mind has been thinking thoughts that you should not think. Maybe your hands have been touching things that you should not handle. Maybe your ears have been listening to things that you should not hear. Maybe your tongue has been speaking things that you should never say.

ADVANCE Vs. 15-17

It seems to me that section of scripture is saying that you must GO FOR WARD in Christ if you are going to have peace of mind,

Riding a Bicycle

Learning to go forward is often a difficult lesson. It must have been very difficult for me when I first learned to ride a bicycle. I learned when I was 5 years old. I just begged and begged for my daddy to teach me to ride a bicycle and he kept telling me I was too small. But I had an aunt who was several years older than I and she had a girl's bicycle. So, daddy got me up on the bicycle and gave me a great big shove. I was able to balance that bicycle perfectly, but I just stood there and coasted, my daddy said, "Push the pedals, Reggie", but by that time I had lost the momentum and fell over. Well, I cried and my daddy came and he dusted me off and he said, "See, I told you you are too little to ride a bicycle." After the tears were dried and the bruises and wounds quit hurting, I started in again and I said, "Daddy, I know I could do it if you would just give me one more chance", so I begged and begged and finally he tried again. He gave me another big shove and again I was able to balance that bicycle perfectly, but as soon as the momentum died down, I fell over even while he kept shouting, "Push the pedals, push the pedals." I found out that you have to keep going forward in order to keep riding a bicycle.

The Christian Life

The very same thing is true if you are going to have peace of heart in the Christian life, we must go forward in Jesus, To go forward requires:

- A. Daily Bible Study, I Tim. 2:15.
- B. Constant Prayer, I Thess. 5:17.
- C. Worship of God, Acts 2:42.

I guarantee you that it will test your Christian growth to the maximum if you practice what these two verses, 12-13, have taught us: "Tender hearted mercy. Kindness toward one another. Don't ever worry about making a big impression on anybody. If you have to suffer just suffer quietly and be patient and be gentle and be ready to forgive and don't ever hold any grudges." That is difficult but if you will learn to do it, then you will be going forward in the Christian life and it will make you strong in Jesus and you will begin to experience this peace of heart which comes from Christ.

The Angry Father and Son

It was a cold, wintery night, there was snow on the ground. A father and son sat by the fire side reading. The father was reading the evening newspaper, the son was reading a novel. The fire began to die down and the room grew chilly, so the father spoke to his son and said, "Go get a stick of wood and put it on the fire." The boy just sat there reading and pretended not to hear his daddy. [Did you ever do that? It is amazing to me how children can never hear a thing, they are deaf when you want them to do something that requires work, but when you don't want them to hear what is being spoken, if you whisper in your wife's or husband's ear they will say, "What was that?" Isn't it amazing!] The father had a quick Irish temper and he jumped to his feet and he said, "You heard me. Go get the stick of wood or get out of this house," The boy had inherited some of his dad's temper and he jumped up and grabbed for his coat and said, "Okay, if that is the way you feel about it, goodbye!" He slammed the door and the house shook and he left. Two weeks went by, two long, dreary weeks. The father sat there trying to read and the tear drops would trickle down his cheeks because he was wondering, "Where is my son? I wonder if he is warm, I wonder if he is well, I wonder if he has any food to eat? I wonder if he will ever come back? All of these thoughts were going through his mind and then he began to envision what might happen if the boy were to come back. "I'll rush and greet him and put my arms around him and hug him and I'll say, 'Son, I forgive you' and I'll never say another scolding word to him as long as I live," He thought, "No, that wouldn't be right. I have to enforce things around here. If he is going to live in this house, then he has got to live by my rules." He was debating back and forth what he would do and he thought, "If that boy comes back I am going to go get the leather strap and even though he is 19 years old, I am going to peel the hide right off his back." Just then there was a knock at the door. He jumped up and ran to the door and there stood his son, not the proud, angry, defiant, disobedient, rebellious son who had stomped out and slammed the door two weeks earlier, but a very humble boy who was sick and cold and hungry. He stood there with his head hanging low and he said, "Dad, I am terribly sorry about what I said, please forgive me. Dad, will you let me

come back home? Dad, I am hungry, I am sick, I have got a terrible fever. Would you let me come back?” For a moment the father stood there and his fatherly instincts overwhelmed him to the point that he almost reached out and grabbed that boy and hugged him, but then better judgment took hold and he straightened himself and got control of his emotions, he looked his son right in the eye and he said, “Son, nobody in the whole world knows how much I love you, only God knows, and only God knows how much I want you to come back home. But, if you really mean it and if you are sincere, that stick of wood is out there on the wood pile and as soon as you go get it and obey me then you are welcome to come home.”

A Final Appeal

Dear friends, I am suggesting, of course, that if life is an up and down experience and if you have not enjoyed that peace of heart which comes from Christ then perhaps there may be a stick of wood out on the wood pile somewhere. Maybe it is stubborn pride, maybe it is strife and anger that you keep allowing to well up and take over. Maybe it is envy, maybe it is gossip, maybe it is the love of money, maybe it is lust, but whatever it is you have to get rid of it. You have to lay it aside as our text tells us and have nothing to do with all of this rotten wickedness and then go forward in Christ to have peace.

Evangelist Reggie Thomas preached this message at the 96th National Convention of the Churches of Christ which met at Ilo Ilo, Philippine Islands in April 2008.