

Getting Glory Out of Gray Days

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Last Sunday, I began a message which I had preached more than 20 years ago to this church. And I would suppose only about a quarter or less than those who are present. It's supposed to be a new year sermon on "The Glory in the Gray. But I found as I watched the clock and heard myself talk that I was only able to get halfway through it and said that I would conclude today, though of course, both sermons were units in themselves.

The text was, they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings as eagles. They shall run and not be weary. And they shall walk and not faint. And I pointed out that these three methods of locomotion, mounting on wings, running, and walking, corresponded to three phases in our Christian life. And remember, this is not a sermon on how to become a Christian. This is assuming that you're already a Christian. And if you're not already a Christian, then what I say cannot possibly mean you.

When a lawyer calls a number of persons in to read a will to them, what he says only has significance for the persons who are included in the will. If four or five others should crash the gate and sit in and listen, it wouldn't have any significance for them at all, because their names weren't there. They weren't included. So, the sinner will not apply to himself anything that I say nor try to make this a thin philosophy for unconverted men. This is for Christians only, that life presents three phases which I called, life's highlights, mounting up, and life's dark nights, running in terror and fear, and walking, life's gray days. The days when there isn't anything much going on, when you're not afraid of anything and you're not particularly elated about anything, but you're doing what you know you should do and paying little attention to your feelings. Those are the gray days of life, the common humdrum of life.

Incidentally, when I preached this sermon twenty years ago, I remember there was present a missionary, an old missionary, Brother Andrews from India. And I used the word humdrum. And we had six sons in our home at that time, and the oldest one I imagine was around fifteen. And Brother Andrews came up and said, Brother Tozer, I understand what you mean by humdrum. He said, in your home, I imagine there's a little of both, hum and drum. That just came to my mind as being at least something I remember from that previous sermon.

Now, I said that I wanted to talk about how we could beat this gray day phase of our lives, how we could get out of it what God has in it for us, how we could live our uneventful plain, pedestrian, simple life. There would be those high moments of flying with wings as eagles. And we thank God for them. And I'm afraid there will be also a few of those days that are dark or those nights that are dark, or days that are dark as night. I hope not many, but there may be some. But mostly, there will be gray days when the sun doesn't shine and it doesn't storm. it doesn't stir you, frighten you, disturb you, nor thrill you. Then it's hard to be good, and it's hard to be spiritual, and it's hard to keep up faith, and it's hard to remember who you are and where you're going and what your plans are, what God's purposes for you are.

Now, for the remainder of the time, I want to give you some, some points as the preachers call it, about how you can get the glory from the gray, and manage to get out of that ugly, drab field, very great fruit and grain. How you can get out of the ugly mountain there, the plain drab mountain, real riches. So, I give you these nine points, and you can take them or try to remember them, or do what you will with.

The first is that every Christian must begin by, after he accepts Christ, and that's taken for granted, that he must accept the universe. You know, that we live in a world we didn't make and we're not responsible for it. The only thing I'm responsible for, is what I've put here by my deeds, good or bad. But the universe is here and I didn't make it. I didn't make the weather nor I didn't determine that it was to be cold in one place and warm in another. I can't help it about floods and earthquakes and storms. I can't help it because it gets too hot in some places and too cold in others and rarely anyplace just right. I can't help it that we're here on a moving conveyor belt traveling between the cradle and the grave. I didn't ask God and He didn't ask me.

So, here we are in the middle of the world. There are some things we don't like in the world, and I think we are tempted sometimes to say that we could improve on it. The great thinker and writer who was an unbeliever, Voltaire, said often, or at least he left the impression that this wasn't much of a world. And he wrote a whole book "Candide" in which he showed this wasn't the best of all possible worlds. And somebody said to him, well, how would you improve it? Well, he said, I'd start by making good health catching. And of course, that was very funny and I suppose he got a guffaw from the crowd about it. I don't know why sickness is catching and good health isn't. I don't know that. But I do know this, that a Christian, when he comes to the fountain and is washed, and to the throne and is accepted, he must begin by accepting God's universe and not trying to edit God's volume. Not trying to amend God's constitution. Not trying to add any lean-tos on God's palace, and not trying to fix up or change any of God's blueprints. He must accept the universe in which he lives, and say, this is my Father's world. And I am not going to irritate my own heart by kicking against the pricks, and wishing it was otherwise that it was. So, that's one thing.

Now, Brother, that's a philosophical approach, but I think also that it's quite a spiritual one, that we must begin to be thankful, be thankful for God's world. The Book of Psalms is one radiant, sunburst of thankfulness for God's world. The old man of God who wrote the Psalms or the men of God, for David wrote most of them. There were a few others that added some Psalms. Moses, for instance, one and two Hezekiah, some perhaps, and Asaph wrote a few. They were men of God and they were radiant with thankfulness. They were glad for the world in which they lived. They said God made the world and who am I to kick against the pricks? Who am I to reply to the potter and say, what makest Thou? Who am I to reply to the man and say, what begettest thou? I will accept this as the best world pro tem that I could live in. That this is it now with its stormy winds and its sleet and hail, and its earthquakes, and its accidents and death, and with its diseases and graveyards and prisons. I accept it. I can't help it.

There's much that I don't like. But apart from sin, I'm going to accept everything. And I'm going to thank God He made the world as he made it. And I'm going to believe, that in that day when it's all over, I will look back and say, He has done all things well, and this is the best of all worlds possible. And that nobody could have thought any better way to do any thing. I believe that. I can't prove that, but I believe that. This is God's world and I accept it. And you will find there's a lot of glory in it. And you will, if you trust God and believe and pray, you will find as you're thankful for God's world, that there will be a lot of glory come out of that world for you.

The second thing is, accept yourself. That is, you must not envy anybody, anything. Envy is a desire to be what somebody else is, or be somebody else, or have what somebody else has. That's envy, generally. Now, let's get rid of envy. Envy is a sin. And when God made you, he made someone different from everybody else in the world. Do you happen to think that there are 165 million people in the world and nobody else exactly like you? But you say, my son, why people say, you will never be dead as long as your son is alive. But you know, that's idiomatic expression, don't you? You know that that's merely a way of talking. There are no two people alike, not even identical twins. So there's nobody like you.

Now, I think it is an amazing and wonderful thought, that the great God Almighty is able to create new beings every day and continue to do it every day of every year, and every year of every decade and both decades and every score of years and all five score of years in every century, and keep on doing it for all the millennium and never make any two alike. So, I'm not going to wish that I was like somebody else. Now, you get that in your mind. You're just what you are and if God wanted you to be different, He would have made you different.

Now, of course I mean, when it comes to sin, that's another matter. When it comes to sin, then I am not as I should be, and I must be different. And God has the remedy. It's the Word and prayer and the blood and the fire of the Holy Ghost. But we're not talking about sin now. We're talking about who we are. You wish you were tall and blonde, and you're little and dark. All right, thank God

you're a little, dark fellow. Or your little, or thin and tall and wish that you were short, where you wish you were heavy when you're not, and you wish a dozen things. Stop wishing anything and thank God that you're just exactly what you are. I think sometimes my friend McAfee wishes he was an Englishman. If you have a little English blood in you, he'd just run shaking your hand right away. He and I have a lot of fun about that. His wonderful love for the English.

Do you wish that you had the genius of a Beethoven or the brains of an Einstein? Do you wish you had the money of some great tycoon or the beauty of some great star? Stop that. Christians can't afford to indulge in pensive wishing and dissatisfaction with themselves, murmuring about what they have in God or murmuring against what they have. No. Accept yourself, my friend. And be thankful for yourself. And that's not egotism. That's faith. Be thankful for yourself.

Well, I have little English blood in me, but I just have exactly the amount God wanted in me, no more, no less. There's a lot of German blood and I don't mind that at all. So, I'm just exactly what I think I wanted to be if I had had my own choice. Now, I believe in that. It's possible that 10 million people in this country or 164,999,000, may be greater than I, but at the same time they're not I. So, I'm not going to trade around with anybody. I wouldn't change nor be anybody else than what I am. Now, I get a lot of glory out of living in a plain life in a plain drab world if I simply say, now this is God's place for me, and I am just what God meant me to be apart from sin. I must be perfecting myself and cleansing myself always. But apart from sin, why, I haven't a complaint to make in the wide world.

And then third, accept your times. And don't bemoan your place or your times. This is the best time in the world if you know what to do it. These are wonderful times if you know how to handle them and how to approach them. We look back over the far points of yesterday, the far hilltops of yesterday and we say that must have been wonderful to live in a time of Finney. Or, it would have been a beautiful thing to live in the time of Augustine or of St. Francis. It would have been a wonderful thing to live when the Holy Ghost came at Pentecost, or when the church was starting her missionary work to the ends of the earth in those early days. Not one bit better than now. You would not have been any better a Christian then than you are now because times don't make Christians. God makes Christians.

And some of the finest Christians have been brought into being at the times when they were the lowest. Look at St. Bernard for instance. St. Bernard was a Christian in an hour when the whole world was dark. And yet he was a great Christian. God makes Christians, not the times. If you can't be a good Christian in 1956, you couldn't be a good Christian in 35 A.D. If you can't be a good Christian now, you couldn't be a good Christian in the Millennium. So, the point isn't what times I live in. The point is, do I live in faith? Do I live in Christ? Does the Holy Ghost live in me? And am I, an indwelt man. So, accept your times and stop bemoaning the good old days, some of you dear old

people have that habit. You remember the good old days when you were young and everything looked wonderful to you.

I sometimes look back upon the little Alliance Church over in Akron, Ohio. And I am suspicious that I am overrating that church, because that was my first introduction to anything spiritual. That's the first time that I ever knew spiritual singing and spiritual praying and the people knew God. That was the first time I'd ever come in contact with anything like that. And of course, I look back upon it now as being an oasis in the desert, a wonderful, little Millennium for me. But I have a suspicion now, that I know humanity better, that there was an awful lot of things wrong with that church that I in my young innocence didn't know about. And you'll find that there is a lot of things wrong back there in those good old days where you wish you were again. No, God will do anything for you now that he ever did for anybody, anytime, anywhere. Remember that. None of your father's ever had anything you can't have. God will fill you as full as He ever filled any man in the history of the world if you will meet His conditions. So, let's not bemoan the times and grieve God by being sorry that we're living in 1956. I'm not. I'm glad I'm living right now.

Well, accept your place in life. That's point number four, if you please. Your place in life, God puts you in that particular place. You're married to somebody or you're not. Or you're a certain age or you're old, or you're young, or you're middle-aged, and you're this kind of workman or that kind of professional man. And you wish you were something else. I think that humanity being what it is, there never was a man yet, whoever had a job or a profession or an occupation that somewhere he wasn't tempted to wish that he was doing something else. Have you ever met a man that was absolutely convinced this was the only job for him? No. There never was a married woman yet, now don't look at me, but there never was a married woman yet, that somewhere down the line, didn't look pensively at the young single girl going on her way at the office and saying, boy, if I could quit at 4:30 and not have anything else to think about, I'd be a happy woman. But if you were the single girl going on your way to the office, she'd be looking in at you and saying, look at that lovely family there. Those pretty kids. I wish I had that. So, everybody wants what they don't have.

I saw a cartoon one time that was supposed to represent humanity, or a picture that's supposed to represent humanity. It showed an apple tree. And on the ground lying everywhere, obviously after a heavy wind, there lay great, juicy apples, almost piled on each other. And away at the top of the tree and off far to the left of the picture, hanging alone, was a little shriveled apple. And here stood a boy with a rock looking at that apple. And all around him were bushels of all luscious, juicy, sweet, succulent fruit. But that one lonely little shriveled apple was the one that boy wanted. The artists that drew that had a sense of humor and a little knowledge of humanity, for that's exactly the way we live. We want what we don't have and what we have, were not inclined to want.

Now, that's Adam's way and a sinner's way, but it oughtened to be a Christian's way. A Christian ought to thank God for his place in life and stop complaining. And then again, remember this, that that place you're in and all this that comes to you in these gray, plain days, that's the lot of all saints. I've pointed out before here many times that it helps us when we're undergoing hard times, if we remember that we're not alone in it. Other people are undergoing hard times, too.

So, if you keep that in mind, it's the lot of all the saints. But you say, I read the life of St. Augustine and I know that he had high times. Well, you will have high times too. But Augustine had a few of those high peaks, but he had more valleys than he did peaks and more level plateaus than he did mountain tops. So did Paul. We read about Paul's shipwreck and Paul getting stoned at Lystra. We read about his being knocked down on the road to Damascus and being filled with the Spirit when Ananias came to Him. We read about his being thrown into prison and about his going out to die. We read about those things and we imagine that Paul's life consisted in one unbroken sequence of thrillers. Oh, no.

Why, Paul had long days. For instance. and he dwelt two years in his own hired house. That's all there is to that. There are two solid years telescoped into one sentence. What happened during those two years? No highlights, no dark nights, just gray days. Paul had to go on living, preach the gospel and go ahead and do the best he could. And take a few bumps and have a few victories and go right ahead now. And that's exactly the way you should do. And it's the lot of all the saints. Again, remember this, that the workshop of God is never very brightly-lighted. It's usually dimly-lighted. It's not dark, totally. And it is not bright. It's rather gray. And in that workshop God hews and cuts and chisels and builds and refines. And you're the one he's working on. So when you look around and you'd like to do something dramatic.

Do you remember when you were saved just in your teens, how you wanted to do something dramatic? I always did. When I would hear the Star-Spangled Banner, I'd get goose pimples on my wrists. I wanted to go out and die for my country, but I wanted to come home and hear the people praise me for dying from a country. It was an odd situation that I created. But we're like that, you know. We want to do the big, thrilling thing. But we don't do it that way. We don't marry the princess. We marry little Mary Smith down two blocks down there, plain looking little woman who manages to look pretty well with a little help. And they get along all right, thank God. That's the way we live. And we don't, we don't always have the big thrills. Gods workshop is dimly-lighted and their God in the half shadows, in the gray, is working and working with His people, always working.

I've often quoted and we quote brother McAfee and I often quote to each other and in prayer, what Fenelon said about the coal mine, and the gold mine. He said deep in the bowels of the earth, God is working; deep in the heart of the man, God is working like a miner in the bowels of the earth. Digging and refining and working away there. Nobody knows it, but God and the man. The man's

likely to forget it, so keep it in mind, you're in God's workshop and God's workshop is not always lighted with the finest lights. It's a little dim there. But the great God knows what he's doing. He seeth in the shadows and He's working there.

And then keep in mind also that there are rich treasures. There are more treasures in the plateau than there are up on the mountain peak. More treasures for you in living straight along and walking by faith, than there is in mounting up with wings, although sometimes you will mount up with wings too.

Could I tell again an illustration which I gave some years ago, of an old gentleman who had several sons. He noticed that those boys of his, as I think most boys, even as you and I, wasn't exactly what you'd call, wild about work. So, he came to die and he called his boys in and he said, boys that orchard down there, in that vineyard, I buried a treasure there. He said, it's buried there and it'll make you all rich. I'm got to go now, goodbye. And so, he pulled his feet into bed like Jacob and died. Soon as the funeral was over and they could get to it, why, they got their heads together and said, father said he had buried a treasure. There's a treasure buried in the vineyard. Let's dig it up. So, they dugged up the vineyard. They didn't find a thing. It took them about all summer. They didn't find a thing. They went over every inch and didn't find a thing. By that fall when it came grape-gathering time, they had so many grapes, the neighbors remarked about it. So they harvested the grapes. They said, well, we'll harvest the grapes next spring, we'll try it again.

So they harvested the grapes, and to everybody's surprise, they had made more money that year than they ever thought possible. So the next spring they said, well, we'll get going on digging for the treasure, so they dug a little deeper. And that year, they had more grapes than ever before. And they said, well, this is this wonderful. Let's harvest these grapes. So they harvested the grapes and sold them and banked the money. And they did that for three or four years, and never found the treasure they'd been digging for. And then at last, they began to look at each other and said, I wonder if the old man wasn't slipping something cross on us. Then they began to grin and said, now we know what it is. We know. The treasure that we were supposed to dig for was the cultivation of our vineyard, our orchard. And the digging around the roots and the constant digging and keeping the soil digged-up has given us so much fruit that we're practically rich and if we keep this up a few years, we'll be rich men. They stopped their effort to find gold and silver and went on digging around the roots of the tree and went on to be rich men.

So it is with our God. God has buried treasures, brothers and sisters, but they are not the treasures that are in bags or boxes. It's another kind of treasure, so that when you go ahead now, quietly living your life for God this year, God will make you rich. Not the way you expected but the way God has in mind.

And I would say, point number eight is that God put you here, and that is by providence. Our fathers used the word we seldom use, it is the word providence. We don't believe much in that now. But providence is the secret, silent working of God to an end, in which He plays us over the board, as a man plays chess pieces over a board to a predetermined end. And when we look back, we will see how He worked in our lives. Now that is what I mean by providence. And God is working providentially to bring things to pass for you. God put you here.

And last of all is that Christ is with you always. If you will remember that you won't worry very much about the light nor the dark. And when the gray day comes, you will remember the Lord is with me all the time. Lo, I am with you always even unto the end of the world.

So now, remember this, you can fly, but you can't fly always. You will be called upon to run in the dark sometimes, but not very often. Mostly you will walk by faith. And it is the walking by faith that pleases God the most. Anybody can be happy in the hour of great elevation of soul. Anybody can pray in the moment of great tragedy. But when neither one comes along and you're forced every day to live just as if you're anybody else. There's nothing to thrill you and nothing to excite you, and just go right straight ahead with God in your mind and Christ before you walking by faith. That's something else again, but that's what you called to do. So walk by faith.

Here's a stanza of a hymn. I don't care much for the hymn I admit. But the man did get something into this last verse. It was James Russell Lowell's hymn called, "Once to Every Man and Nation," and this is the way he closed it. He says, though the cause of evil prosper, yet tis truth alone that strong. Thou her portion be the scaffold, and upon the throne be wrong. Yet that scaffold sways the future and behind the dim unknown, standeth God within the shadow keeping watch above his own.

So, during this year and during all the years we have yet before us, you will find that right will be on the scaffold and wrong will be on the throne. And yet it's not the throne where wrong sits that will determine the future, but it's the scaffold. For righteousness stands with a rope around her neck. She'll sway the future. And in the shadows is God keeping watch above His own.

Now that's my faith, ladies and gentleman, that I believe in. We walk by faith and not by sight. So, if God wants to during these days ahead, if God wants to take me in a high flight, I'll be glad to go. I'll be glad with Paul to go to that third heaven and come down and keep my mouth shut about what I saw. And if God in His tender mercy sees fit to let me plunge into a dark night where I can't find my way through, I'll try to be patient and walk with him until the light returns. But in the meantime, I don't expect too much of either. I expect an awful lot of humdrum. An awful lot of just plain keeping on and serving God and keeping faithful when there's nothing to be faithful apparently about, as far as your feelings are concerned.

So, I recommend that you learn that song, May Jesus Christ be Praised, and sing it every morning when you get out of bed while you're groping blindly and more or less somnolently for the alarm clock and wishing you had five more hours to sleep. Why, began to sing, when morning gilds the skies, my heart awakening cries, may Jesus Christ be praised. And all through the day and night and darkness and light, praise Jesus Christ. You will find you will have the glory that you never dreamed was there. The rich gold of God's sweet reward will be yours because you trusted and weren't afraid and walked and believed and honored God when you couldn't see nor feel. You honored God and God in return will honor you and lift and protect and bless and keep you through the years. Amen