

"HIGH LIGHTS OF THE BIBLE"
Summer Season of 1943
A presentation of the
National Broadcasting Co.

No. 1

WEAF and Network
10:00 to 10:30 A.M.
Eastern War Time
SUNDAY, June 6, 1943

"THE GREATEST GIFT TO HUMANITY"

A Radio Address by DR. FREDERICK K. STAMM

I have read that in the Abbey of Mont St. Michele there is a room which, if one stands at the entrance, appears to have but one little window. The room however, is flooded with light and it seems strange that so much illumination should pour into one small opening. But move on into the room and you will discover that the walls are pierced with many windows and through them the light is pouring.

It is quite possible that the visitor standing in that room would exclaim at the beauty of the window. And who among us can be condemned for liking a beautiful window? I was taken one day by a friend into his little church. In his mind he had conceived what a window ought to be; and when he employed a worker in glass, he told him what he wanted. So he stood there and for an hour I listened to his interpretation of the various figures and designs of the window. I marveled at his genius and found myself wishing that I knew as much about art glass as he.

But it came to me that there was something more about the windows than the beauty of their design. What would the windows be without light? To rave about the windows without realizing that the light is more than the windows would be to degrade myself into a mere admirer of art glass.

It came to me also, that for a long, long time we have indulged in the foolish thought that God has revealed himself only to one people, through one window, while he left all the others to perish in darkness. Happily that idea is passing and we are learning another lesson through the bitter experiences of war. But the fact remains that the prevailing idea put into the minds of boys and girls, grown men and women, has been that upon America has dawned the great light, and that nations such as China, Japan, India, and the islands of the sea, have been sitting in complete darkness. More than that, it is not beyond the memory of every man living today, that only a short time ago we said that Russia had no God, and more recently that Germany had replaced God with Adolf Hitler.

If it were possible to project ourselves back into history, and have the privilege of visiting the lands outside our own borders, we would discover that there has never been a time when God left himself without witness, and that there is truth in every ennobling religion. And if any man will lift up his eyes today, he will discover that out of the land that he regards as heathen and blighted by superstition and the denial of God, there come some of the noblest ideals and some of the most sacrificial acts of devotion.

These are all beams of light broken from the radiant glory of Eternity. I can imagine some sensitive spirit, sitting for some hours contemplating the goodness of the God in whom he believes--in India, China, Japan, Russia, Germany--wondering what it is that enlightened countries find in Christianity which can tell them to go to war. If ever again our Anglo-Saxon nations send emissaries to carry the Gospel into so-called dark places of the earth, without love and respect, without a willingness to learn as well as to teach, with nothing but a contemptuous demand that they unlearn all they have ever known, these emissaries should be sent out and returned empty without delay.

The one thing that Christianity has to offer to the world is Jesus Christ. That is the one thing Christianity has to offer to every man. That is the one thing Christianity has offered, but in presenting Jesus, it has happened, and is happening, that no real intellectual effort is made by those who set Him forth to understand the Man on whom has been centered more of the interest and the passion of the most serious and the best of mankind than on any other.

By almost universal consent Jesus stands alone. When He was in the world many hated Him, some loved Him. Even His brethren thought Him ridiculous and demented. But no one ignored Him. He troubled men and He troubled the nation until they got rid of Him. And then He came back to plague the world some more, until finally it was compelled to make a little place for Him. Today men love Him intensely and hate Him intensely. When He wanted to sit at the peace table after the last war, He was thrown out. Men and nations went on devising their own plans which were only expedients. He was worshipped in churches but His religion was forgotten. The multitudes of common men and women who have an instinct for goodness and whose hands are always clutching at the garment of Jesus for healing, have become pawns on the checkerboard of world politics and offered as a sacrifice to the god of Mars.

Once again, when the war is over, Jesus will offer Himself as the last and best hope of mankind. For a time He has been entombed. But the best angels in men's natures will roll the stone away and Jesus will step forth amidst the greatest crisis of the world's history. Once again He will haunt men's hearts, play upon the consciences of nations, and demand His place in the parliaments of men. The question still remains to be answered as to whether our small hearts are big enough to contain Him.

There was a time when church councils argued about Him, aye, even today He is the center of many a controversy and many a debate. Men set up their notions about Him and then proceed to marshal their arguments to prove what they want to believe about Him. Whence come wars and the age-long failure at peace tables but from the inability and unwillingness of men to harmonize their thinking about Jesus, not on a theological or philosophical basis, but according to the spirit and mind of Jesus? Jesus has little need of our small arguments. He is his own credential. His power and influence do not rest on any official status which Christendom has given Him, but on what He is. He is more real than anyone who has ever lived. He is not the hope of the world because He spoke as no man ever spoke, but because no man ever was as He was--and is.

Among the many bequests which Jesus made to suffering, struggling humanity, I should like to set forth but one. Certainly He was kind, generous, forgiving. He never forgot His courtesy to sinners, to outcasts, and to "untouchables." Even though He was sometimes severe in His denunciations and strict in His demands, folk drew near to him, hung on his words, pressed upon Him when He was tired, and felt they were in the presence of a friend when He stopped and talked with them. There was kindness in His words and in His deeds and many a disappointed and hopeless individual went back to his home after seeing and hearing Him, saying, "For the first time in my life I stood in the presence of a kindly Man." That would be a marvelous testimony for you and for me if those who touch us could say, "That whereas I was down in my spirits, I have felt a new life in the presence of a Christlike man."

But that is not the greatest bequest Jesus has made to humanity. There is more to His teaching than a Gospel of organized kindness. The greatest contribution he made to struggling men was his passionate belief that God was the kind of God that Jesus pictured him to be in the story of the Prodigal Son. I've preached sermons on that Parable only to have folk come back and tell me that there is much to say about the virtues of the Elder Brother. Certainly there is, but they are all negative virtues--virtues that any pagan could cultivate. It is not required that a man be a Christian in order to make him plough a field well, stay at home, eat his father's food, and never transgress a law. God never needs enter a man's life to make him do that.

Besides it was neither the Elder Brother nor the Prodigal around whom Jesus turned the story. He turned it around the father. And just because he did is the reason why the outstanding event in history is the life and death of Jesus Christ. We've never yet been able to construct a window through which the light of that life and death can stream in all its purity and loveliness. We've got all the material for the window but a thousand imperfections of the institution called the church have found their way into that window, and we preachers and people have been such bungling artists, that instead of our lives being great luminous windows through which the light might shine, have become spotted with hate, prejudice, and unsocial attitudes that keep men from seeing and feeling the love of God.

There never has been a time in the history of the world when men did not want to believe that there is a God who does care, and that in the end love will prevail. Where, for instance, today is there a man, either in the armed forces of the world or out of it, who likes war? You can hear men say, "This war is necessary," or "We are in it, and let's get through with it as quickly as possible." But you don't hear men say, "I like war." Everywhere--in the government, in the churches, in the homes, in the minds of individuals--there is a fear that this thing may happen again. Whatever may be the self-interest of nations, and however great the possibility may be that national self-interest will wreck the peace plans, nevertheless they feel that some other way must be found, and upon some other basis than chaos and recurrent war must we erect a civilization.

Men who have looked into the face of Jesus and heard him say as he died, "Father into thy hands I commend my spirit," and know that it is only by that spirit of love for humanity which drove Jesus to the cross, will the world be saved from cruel men and cruel war. And they know more than that--they know that only that spirit is in conformity with the moral law of the universe, and that the moral law of the universe is as inexorable as are the laws of the physical world.

And so long as the spirit of Jesus lives--and it will live forever--men know that they can go on looking up and traveling the pilgrimage of life with good heart and hope.

The triumphant moment for Christianity will come when men everywhere will turn their faces toward the Rising Sun of Righteousness, and say with united sincerity, "I believe in the God and Father of Jesus Christ." That will be the window through which the Light will shine. It is only through that window that the light of the glory of God can stream upon a world that looks up sometimes despairingly, but more often, hopefully.

My appeal is to the people--people such as you. And that appeal is expressed in a poem written back in 1918 by Angela Morgan entitled, "God Prays." Someone is saying to God,

"What is thy will for the people, God?
.....
Thou who art mighty hast forgot;
And art thou God, or art thou not?
When wilt thou come to save the earth
Where death has conquered birth?"

And back from God comes the answer:

"'My people are strong',
Broad as the land, great as the sea;
They will tower tall as the tallest skies,
Up to the level of my eyes,
When they dare to rise.
Yea, all my people everywhere!
Not in one land of black despair,
But over the following earth and sea,
Wherever wrong and oppression be
The shout of my people must come to me.
.....
If the people rise, if the people rise
I will answer them from the swarming skies
Where Herculean hosts of might
Shall spring to splendor over night.
.....
They are my mouth, my breath, my soul!
I wait their summons to make me whole."

When you people speak, the politicians and self-interested diplomats will scurry to their holes and God will have a chance to bring his reign of peace to the earth.

PRAYER: God of our fathers, revealer of mercy and kindness and forgiveness, look upon us in our waywardness and sin, and pity us. We fight and kill and destroy, and then try to reconcile it all with the nature of God. We want peace, but we won't pursue the paths of peace. We walk a miserable way and try to make ourselves believe that we are happy. We build our house on the shifting sands of greed and malice and hate, rather than upon the sure foundation of faith, hope, and love. We say, "Lord, Lord, " but do not do the things for which we pray. We do not enter the fold by the strait gate, but climb up some other way.

How long wilt thou suffer us to go on our own course? Canst thou not send a word of warning so loud and so insistent as to arrest us in our headlong dash to ruin? We remember that thou hast only one way of making men know, and that the way of a bleeding cross. Lift it, O God, on high, so that it may shine against the blackness and horror and cruelty of our world. Once again may we hear thy voice, "This is the way, walk ye in it." We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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Issued by the
Department of National Religious Radio
297 Fourth Avenue - New York City