

## **Fireworks Don't Last** **by Dr. Lee Roberson**

For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.  
And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity. —I Cor. 13:12,13

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;  
While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal. — II Cor. 4:17,18

And I suppose "temporal" in verse 18 is the one and only time it is found in the translation, from the original in the King James Version.

Go to now, ye that say, today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain:

Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.

For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.

But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil.

Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin. — James 4:13-17

I can still recall quite vividly the occasion back in Louisville, Kentucky when, as a young man, I would go out to the fairgrounds on July 4 and watch the display at night of the fireworks given by the city for the people to enjoy.

Some Roman candles would shoot high into the air, then burst into ten thousand glittering stars, which would quickly fade away as they fell toward the ground. At the state fairgrounds, the displays were always elaborate, as I can recall them now. Some in this city, in years past, have indeed been very elaborate. The American flag was often pictured in fireworks, in beautiful color. The crowd would stand, the band would play a very patriotic moment. Ofttimes we would see some historic places pictured by fireworks, such as Mount Vernon or "Ole Kentucky Home." Sometimes it would be the display of a galloping horse, a barking dog, or something else, each with special sound effects.

These displays always created great excitement. The people who had gathered watched with wide-open eyes. The children covered their ears when the firecrackers were too loud. You can almost see the scene, can you not?

There was always a strange unity of the people as they watched. Every eye was fastened upon the scene in front of them - the exploding machines and the building up of the pictures as they came on little by little. There was no dozing, no sleeping, but a wholesome concentration as everyone looked, marveled

and expressed pleasure.

But after a while it was all over. The fireworks ceased. The last Roman candle had been shot into the air; the last sparkler had made it's beautiful color; the last firecracker had sounded off; and the last glowing ember on the great display turned black. Then, the field became dark and dead as all the people walked away.

I can still recall that many would exclaim, including myself, "Wasn't that beautiful! Wasn't it something wonderful to see!" Then it was all over. We saw it for just a few moments, not to see it again for perhaps another twelve months. Some of the display might be given next July 4th.

Now I use that to illustrate things that fade away, things that change, and things that stand. That brings us to the portion of our message I want to emphasize this morning - the things that abide.

There are some things that do last. The fireworks of this world are gone. The firecrackers and the sound - these are over. The light made by these inventions of men have disappeared. But there are some things that stand.

## **I. GOD'S ETERNAL WORD STANDS**

Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.—Matt. 24:35  
But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you. —I Pet. 1:25

The Bible is the Book of the ages. The Word abides. The Bible is the world's best-seller, but it is also the most neglected Book in the world.

No one is smart, no one is well read without the reading of the Word of God. The Bible endures. It is God's message to man. It speaks with authority. It has the answers to all our questions. And it is ever the same.

My son-in-law mentioned this morning about his first Bible. I can recall my first one from Sears and Roebuck in Chicago, obtained by mail order at \$1.90 - a very nice buy back in that day.

The interesting thing about the Bible enduring is that the one I bought fifty-two years ago from Sears and Roebuck catalog is exactly the same in content as the one I hold in my hand now.

That leads me to say that I like the King James Version. I'm not much in favor of all the modernistic translations and the so-called interpretation worked into it by some men. The Old Bible endures.

The Bible enlightens. "The entrance of thy words giveth light. . . "(Ps. 119:130).

The way of salvation is clearly given. Christ, ..... the way, the truth, and the life. . . "(John 14:6).

The Bible points the way from paradise lost to paradise regained.

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The Bible gives us the beginning of sin and the result of sin. This penetrates the darkness of today. We see the trend of society, the behavior of men, and the behavior of nations. The Bible enlightens. We can see things from the Word. The Bible encourages. There are rough places. There are steep hills to climb. There are shadows to face. There are deep waters to cross. And the Bible encourages us when we face all of this.

The Bible encourages us in the time of death and in times of sorrow, when loved ones go from us.

Sitting here this morning is our brother, Gene Payne, who sang so beautifully with Neil Queen at the funeral service for his father last Friday. Gene said, "I felt I had to sing. I wanted to sing."

The Bible strengthens in the time of suffering. How much the Word can do for all of us. In the hour of suffering, when these bodies will fail, when things are not quite the same, rest upon God's eternal Word. It's here to help and to strengthen when suffering is our lot. We all suffer. If you haven't, you will. That is a part of this body, the breakdown of the body, that comes to us after awhile.

From her sick bed Florence Nightingale organized the hospitals of England and of London especially. Her mighty work is still remembered.

Though Louis Pasteur was partially paralyzed and suffered all the time, yet he did a monumental work that still abides today.

Francis Parkman, an American historian, suffered endlessly. He could work only about five minutes at a time. He would write with letters so large that it would take almost a half page for one single word. He would write for five minutes, stop, then pick it up again when his eyes would allow him to do so, until he wrote twenty volumes which are among the best volumes of history produced in this nation.

The Bible came out of dark hours. The Psalms came out of dark hours. Read the Psalms. You'll find much to help you. Read the prison epistles by the Apostle Paul, the Apostle Peter, John on the Isle of Patmos, and others. Greatness comes from men who have gone through suffering. The Bible strengthens in the time of suffering. So rest upon the Word of God.

The Bible strengthens in the time of disappointment. My friends, I could not tell you how many times I have had to pick up my Bible, in hours when I've been disappointed in certain situations, maybe even in this church, or around this church, or maybe in Tennessee Temple University - situations here in the operation of our work. I had to come back to the Word of God. When I was disappointed - disappointed in people, disappointed in myself, disappointed in the situations surrounding me, I had to come back to resting upon the Word of God.

What am I saying? That the Bible comforts, that it strengthens, that it encourages - all this and far more.

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"The Word of God endures forever," says the Word of God about itself. You'll always find treasures in the Word, blessed things, things that you never thought you could find. Even though you may have read your Bible for a lifetime, there are still things to be found in God's holy Word because He wrote it. So rest upon the Word of God.

A man up in New Jersey had an aunt who passed away and left him some money in the will, perhaps \$400 or \$500. Then she left him some possessions that he could keep. He put them away. Then when he got older, he had to move from his home to his son's. He began picking up what he had. Here was the Bible left by his aunt. Carelessly, and somewhat thoughtlessly, he sat down and began turning through its pages. He discovered something. Inside the pages of the Bible he found bills which amounted to more than \$5,000.00. Though he had been suffering a lack, suffering for needs in his own life, yet he had never stopped to look into the Word of God.

We may not find actual money, as he did, yet here are the promises of God, worth more than all the money of this world. You can rest upon what God has to say to you.

The Word of God stands. When all the firecrackers have displayed themselves, you still have the Word of God. Rest upon it.

## **II. GOD'S NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH**

I may surprise you by saying that, but for this age, for this time until Jesus comes again, the New Testament church will abide. I don't care what the fanatics say; I don't care what the depressing remarks may be, or what people in some forms of churchanity might think when they say, "The church will be no more," the New Testament church will abide until Jesus Comes. It may be small, it may be large, it may have to go through all sorts of persecutions, but it will abide until Jesus comes to take us home.

Persecution may come, but the church will live. Modernism may invade, but the church will live. Indifference may claim many, but the church lives. Sin may lay hold on many, but the church lives. Satan will fight and deceive, but the church lives.

This is what we want to see regarding the New Testament church. The church that stands for and preaches the pure holy Word of God is the church with the largest crowds. We see this around the whole nation. The New Testament church will stand. It will live.

Now what is our business? First, to exalt Christ, to preach Christ, to lift Him up. The world must see Him. The world must know Him. It is our business to preach Christ.

Second, we are to obey His commands. We are to do what He says. We are to win souls. The Bible says, "He that winneth souls is wise." We are to send out missionaries to the ends of the earth. We are to baptize converts. We are to do the job that God has given us to do. We are to obey His commands.

Third, we are to live righteously'. Keep your heart right. "Abstain from all appearance of evil" is our business as members of the New Testament church. We are to live righteously. We are to live so that Christ may be seen by others. Keep your emotions right. Ephesians 4:26, "Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath."

Listen; you may be angry for a righteous cause, and that is good. We ought to get upset about sin, about wrongdoing, until we express ourselves about it! Let trivialities, the meaningless things of life, pass by. But, about those things that are important, those things that are the meaningful, these are the things for which we must stand.

That is where we should always take our definite stand for righteousness. Fourth, we must worship God. Our business in the local church is worshipping God. Our empty pews cry out against us. Whether on Sunday night, Sunday morning, Wednesday night prayer meeting, or whenever, this speaks against the church, against the people of God. We need to worship God and be faithful in attending God's house.

Down through the years I've been driving home in all of my meetings, in all of my work, in every church where I've pastored, the matter of going to church Sunday morning, Sunday night, and Wednesday night prayer meeting. God has honored this. Here we've seen things happen because of the faithfulness of God's people in coming to church. That's the way it should be.

I recall holding a revival meeting years ago at the First Baptist Church in Ensley, Alabama. While there, I stayed in the home of a couple. I was put in a room near the front of the house. The bedroom for the man and wife was next to mine.

We went home after the Sunday morning service. The couple began talking. The walls were thin, so I could hear them. He said to his wife, "Now I went to church this morning, but I'm not going back tonight. I've never gone to more than one service in my life on Sunday, and that's all I'm going to now." I heard his wife say to him, "But I think you might break the habit this time and go to church. We've got the evangelist with us. He is right next door, in the next room. He's preaching and I think you ought to be there."

"I don't care if he is there. I'm not going. Once is enough for me. That's all I can take. That's all I've ever had. That's all I want."

She talked on and won the battle. That night he sat with her. I can see them now sitting in front of me. Ordinarily I'm not a lengthy preacher, but that night I put together every sermon I could think of! I had him here and I would let him

have it so he couldn't forget it. I preached something from almost every message I had. I wanted to get hold of that fellow.

Going to church and worshipping God is important. The New Testament church will abide, will stand in this age, until the coming of our blessed Saviour.

Some people say, "Well, Brother Roberson, you do so many unusual things in your Sunday school. Yes, and what we do at Highland Park will last, and it has for these forty years that I've been here.

Back in the first or second year when we started doing some new things, the folk were so fine. The Sunday school was growing and abounding. People were being saved in every service. A pastor in another Baptist church stood up on a Sunday morning and expressed himself about Highland Park, and Lee Roberson and all the rest, saying, "He's running a three-ring circus. I want to prophesy to you that it will soon be gone. A thing like that can never last."

His words came right back to me, within a few minutes after the service was over. That man was voted out of his church. Then he tried another church. After a while he failed there and then quit the ministry. He is dead now, and Highland Park is still going ahead. He was criticizing just the outward thing of attracting people to the house of God. He missed the whole point of what we are doing here - trying to get people to the Lord Sunday after Sunday.

### **III. GOD'S UNCHANGING PURPOSE**

First, God's eternal Word; second, God's New Testament church; and third, God's unchanging purpose. The purpose of God is to redeem man, to take out a people for His name (Acts 15:14).

We have been called and commissioned for God's great purpose. Jesus said, ". . . as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." We are God's messengers to proclaim the message of everlasting life through Jesus Christ, the blessed Son of God.

Our position and our job is to preach Christ. Paul said: "But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness" (I Cor. 1:23).

As we preach, we are to win souls. We are to press upon people the great need of the Saviour. We are to urge them to receive the Son of God!

This is what the Lord Jesus meant when He talked about bearing fruit. To be fruit-bearing Christians is what He demands of us.

On this day of July 4, we talk about the rights and liberties that we have in our country. This is the right given to us, and we express it.

God has some rights, too. He has the right to say to you that you are to bear fruit. You are to be a soul winner. You are to get people to Jesus. You are to so live daily that others can see Christ in you. You are to bear fruit. ". . .

we preach Christ..

We are to preach the abundant life through our Saviour. He said, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." This is ours. Not just a little skimpy life, but an abundant life in Jesus, a life that abounds, a life that brings joy and happiness hour by hour - living abundantly and living courageously.

We are to preach an eternity of joy in the presence of God. How many verses we could give on the joy in Heaven that we have through Jesus Christ our Lord. The Christian abides forever. It's not a firecracker existence. It is a matter of knowing Christ. We shall be in the presence of our eternal God and eternal Saviour forever and forever. The things of this world pass away, but the Word of God abides. Yes, it abides.

Some months ago some fellow on a motorcycle was shooting himself up into the air. His name is Evil Kneivel. He was crazy. One can have the headlines for awhile, then it is all over. But, the child of God abides. The work that God has given us to do abides.

I remember reading this past week, in one of the books that I picked up, about Thomas Edison. At one time a fire destroyed his plans, his factory - everything he had. All of his inventions seemed to be gone in just a moment's time. Edison was walking through the charred remains and wreck of the buildings. As he came to the area of his office, he looked down on the ground and saw a picture of himself, a picture that had been placed on the wall in his office. Edison bent over, picked it up and looked at his picture, untouched by the fire. It wasn't even scorched by the flames which had destroyed the entire building. He took a pen out of his pocket and wrote across the picture, "It never touched me, so I must be fireproof."

I've got something better than that. If you are in Christ Jesus, you are fireproof. If you are in the Son of God, you have nothing to fear, for Christ is your Saviour and Heaven is your home.

Modern pleasures do not bring happiness. Most amusements and pasttimes are just miserable escapes from reality. Science brings no pleasure, no joy, no salvation. Death thrives on the jet planes. Education does not have all the answers. Mental institutions are full of college graduates. Religion is an all-time failure. Followers of Baal illustrate that to us.

Honest, sensible people are looking for that which will last. They are tired of the fast disappearing fireworks of this age. They look for that which will stand. My dear friend, I have it. It's in the Word of God, this Book the Bible. God the Heavenly Father, Christ the Saviour, and the indwelling Holy Spirit - they are for all of us.

On this special day, as we think of our nation and of our needs, as we see what is happening all around us, we need to come back to the holy Word of God and rest upon its promises.

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There are three things that I have given that never change: God's Eternal Word; God's New Testament church; and God's holy purpose. I trust this morning that you know Christ as Saviour and that you can rest in Him today. I know that all things are mine for eternity through my blessed Lord. Can you, too, say that this morning? If you are a child of God, you can. If you are a child of God, you abide. You have everlasting life in Jesus Christ. You can rejoice throughout all the days to come.

I trust this morning that God will speak to your hearts and that you will say, "O God, let me use my life in the best way possible. Let me see others and their needs. Let me see the unhappiness of people around me, that I might point them to Jesus Christ, that I might be a soul winner, that people might be saved through faith in the Son of God."

Marie Antoinette was made the queen of France. With the king, she was riding down the main boulevard of the city on the day of coronation. They say that the officials of Paris took all the poor, the beggars, the ill and afflicted and shoved them into the back streets.

As the queen rode down the street, she saw the well-dressed people, the beauty of their attire. She saw the culture of their faces. But she saw none of the people of the back streets.

With the king, she went to live in the palace. And she lived there altogether blind to the needs of the people until the beginning of the French Revolution, then came the awakening to the fact that she had not seen it all, just a small part.

This is what I want you to see. This is a needy world. Don't you try to hide a thing. This is an ugly, dirty, needy world. The only answer is Jesus Christ. My friend, try any- thing or anybody you want to. There is only one answer - Christ. He is the answer to all of the illnesses, all of the afflictions, all of the ugliness that this world has.

Do you know Him as your Saviour? Can you say, "He is mine"? Have you accepted Him but turned away from following Him? Would you come back this morning and confess to Him, "I want to follow Thee and do Thy will for the rest of my days"?