

THE
WARTIME
SERMONS
OF DR. PETER MARSHALL

THE WARTIME SERMONS OF DR. PETER MARSHALL

Senior Pastor

*New York Avenue Presbyterian Church
Washington, D.C. (1937–1949)*

Chaplain

United States Senate (1947–1949)

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DALLAS, TEXAS

THE WARTIME SERMONS OF DR. PETER MARSHALL

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*To America's armed services veterans of World War II—
the men and women who served and fought and often gave their lives,
so that we, their children and grandchildren,
might live free in the land they loved—
this volume is dedicated, with respect and gratitude.
You will never be forgotten.*

*The Bush family has always had the greatest respect
for Dr. Peter Marshall.*

*His message of faith and love inspired millions. Certainly, he inspired
my mother, my father, and me.*

—GEORGE HERBERT WALKER BUSH
Forty-first President of the United States

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	ix
<i>Preface: A Message from Rev. Peter J. Marshall</i>	xi
<i>Introduction: The Tides of War</i>	xvii

WARTIME SERMONS

Why Should God Bless America? <i>September 15, 1940</i>	1
The Man with the Bowler Hat, <i>September 29, 1940</i>	21
Rendezvous in Samarra, <i>December 7, 1941</i>	37
Why Does God Permit War? <i>May 3, 1942</i>	57
The Greatest Adventure, <i>January 31, 1943</i>	75
A Text from Lincoln, <i>February 14, 1943</i>	95
The Armor of God, <i>May 2, 1943</i>	111
I've Lost My Faith in Religion, <i>April 30, 1944</i>	129
The American Dream, <i>November 19, 1944</i>	149
Are We Good Enough? <i>April 22, 1945</i>	169
Dedication, <i>V-E Day, May 8, 1945</i>	187
Our Covenant Nation, <i>November 9, 1947</i>	199

WARTIME PASTORAL PRAYERS

May 28, 1944	219
June 4, 1944	225
June 11, 1944	231
April 15, 1945	237
April 22, 1945	245
May 13, 1945	251
November 18, 1945	257
<i>Notes</i>	263

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PREFACE

A Message from Rev. Peter J. Marshall

A book of sermons—why would anybody want to read *that*? After all, even if the preacher is a good one, most sermons are usually dull reading. Sermons are meant to be heard, not read. “You had to have *been* there!” is a saying that certainly applies to preaching. An audience is inspired by a speech or a sermon because the personality of the speaker has given life to the words. Sadly, however, at this stage of American Christianity, the visitor to a main-line denominational church on Sunday morning is more likely to have to endure a sleep-inducing message than a vibrant and challenging one.

Throughout many years in the ministry, my observation of preacher colleagues is that those who cause Sunday morning naps are “head” people, instead of “heart” people. They preach to their listeners’ minds, and then ignore their hearts.

With this background, why then would I take the risk of bringing out a volume of sermons in today’s America, where it seems that the reading public is only interested in fast-paced novels?

First of all, because the preaching of my father, Dr. Peter Marshall, was radically different. I’ve never met anyone who ever slept through one of his sermons, and I have met many who said he kept them on the edge of their seats.

Born and raised in Coatbridge, Scotland, Dad immigrated to America in 1927. In the twenty-two years between the time he came ashore at Ellis Island, New York, and his untimely death in 1949 at the age of forty-six, he became one of our nation's most famous preachers and the Chaplain of the U.S. Senate. My mother, Catherine Marshall, wrote the best-selling biography of Dad, *A Man Called Peter*, which was subsequently made into a movie in 1955.

What made my father's preaching remarkable was that he had the soul of a poet, a God-given gift to make the Bible come alive for his listeners.

Consciously and deliberately, he painted word pictures for people when he preached, a style he began in seminary when he was first preparing sermons. By the grace of God, his seminary professors didn't try to change him. Instead, they encouraged him to develop his own style. And his own it was—unique in the annals of American preachers.

Dad didn't preach to people's *heads*, although his sermons had plenty of intellectual content. To use his writing style:

He wanted to grip the *hearts* of the listeners,
to help them *feel* the reality of a living Savior,
to know that Jesus loved *them*,

and understood what they were going through.

As Dad read the New Testament, that was exactly what he saw Jesus doing all the time—speaking to people's hearts:

the distraught father of the epileptic boy,
the mother weeping over her dead son,
the seeking Nicodemus,
the faithful centurion,
and countless others.

Dad was convinced that Jesus called His preachers to do likewise. As Dad put it to the students at Gettysburg Theological Seminary: "Consider . . . the needs of the people who will come to hear you preach. Use your imagination as you try to deal with the problems that are most real to them." *That* meant preaching to the heart, "getting down deep," as he put it. Which is why even grown men were often seen wiping their eyes during Dad's sermons.

My father was a man of strong emotions, but unlike some preachers who rave and rant at you until you feel like you've been fire-hosed, he never

preached that way. He used different inflections in his voice to great effect, but it wasn't calculated; it was because he was emotionally involved with what he was preaching. He preached *from* the heart as well as *to* the heart.

Gifted with near perfect diction, the few surviving live recordings of his sermons have been studied by decades of seminary and speech students. Most surprisingly, his natural preaching gifts were just that, natural gifts! He did not study techniques of preaching; it was all subconscious with him.

Rather than changing his volume, his emotional involvement with his subject would usually be expressed with adjectives. These he would send marching out in vivid colors—sometimes literally, as in his famous description of a sunset:

The sun, like a ball of fire, sinks lower and lower, until it
 meets in a blistering kiss the western horizon . . . after having set
 the heavens on fire, until they glow
 with scarlet
 crimson
 cerise
 vermilion
 pink
 rose
 blush
 and coral,
 leaving in his wake clouds, curling like nebulous dust, from under
 the chariot wheels of the sun.

My father's pictorial and imaginative style of preaching spoke to a nation literally fighting for its life in a war against the horrors of Nazi, Italian, and Japanese tyranny. A war that involved nothing less than the preservation of the values of Western civilization called for dramatic and powerful sermons. That is why these wartime sermons are so memorable, because when you read them, you feel as if you are right there, in the middle of the drama. The reader would have to be heartless and cold indeed to forget the description of the evacuation of Dunkirk, or the story of Eddie Rickenbacker's days in a life raft, adrift on the vast Pacific.

That leads to the second reason to bring out these World War II sermons. With our nation at war, we are once again sending fine young men and women “into harm’s way.” There are many American families going through the same anxieties and fears about their sons and daughters that their parents’ generation experienced about them.

And those sons and daughters are facing their own fears about going to war. Before it is over, many of them will have joined the long list of American “heroes proved in liberating strife.”

The weapons of war change over time, as it seems we human beings are always inventing new and creative ways to kill each other. Yet the basic elements of war never change—the horrors of battle,

the terrible destruction of life, limb, and property,

the searing agony of parents learning of the death of a son in combat,
or a wife and children losing a husband and father—

these things never change.

Neither do the issues change. The questions are always the same, from century to century:

“Why does a loving God permit war?”

“Why did my daddy have to die?”

“Is there such a thing as a just war?”

“Why was my buddy next to me killed,
and my life was spared?”

The sermons in this book grapple with these issues and questions. I will not promise you that reading them will resolve all your conflicts, and answer all your questions. Some questions can never be answered satisfactorily until we stand before God face to face.

But I *will* promise you that your heart will be deeply stirred. In these messages you will be challenged to discover, as my father did and as I have, that a living Savior, Jesus Christ, has the answers for your life and its problems.



Prior to this book, there have been only two volumes of my father, Dr. Peter Marshall's sermons published, both edited by my mother, Catherine Marshall. *Mr. Jones, Meet the Master* was published in 1949, and *John Doe, Disciple* was published in 1963. These two collections comprise twenty-four sermons out of a total of over six hundred.

Years before her death in 1983, my mother had given to me the complete set of my father's original sermon manuscripts. Several years into Dad's pastorate at New York Avenue Presbyterian Church, his Sunday morning sermons began to be printed in pamphlet form, and I have a set of those as well.

In the last several years, I have received many inquiries about particular sermons of Dad's, especially some of his famous ones from the years of World War II. These had never been published. After several people, including my own secretary, asked me if I had ever thought of publishing more of Dad's sermons, I did start to think about it. Yet it wasn't until after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, plunged America into war that the idea came to me: what about a book of Dad's *wartime* sermons?

So many of his unpublished, most famous, and most sought-after sermons fall in that six-year period between Germany's invasion of Poland in September of 1939 and the fall of 1945, when the GIs began coming home after the surrender of Japan.

It seems that no one who ever heard my father preach "The Man with the Bowler Hat" has ever forgotten it. The first time I copied the printed version for someone who had requested it, then stopped to read it, I discovered why.

Knowing that I would certainly include that message in this volume, I decided to read through the rest of the printed sermons Dad preached during the war and found eleven others. I found so many fine messages; in fact, it was difficult to choose among them. But I have prayerfully selected twelve that I feel will have the greatest impact at this time.

With the exception of minor editing, such as changing certain words for clarification, and the use of modern spelling and punctuation, I have not changed the sermons. They appear on the printed page almost exactly the way they were originally typed on the sermon manuscripts. Some of the manuscript pages bear the marks of my mother's editing, where she, too, occasionally

substituted a word for clarification purposes or changed the punctuation. Most of this editing took place after Dad's death, as Mom considered publishing various sermons, including some of the ones in this book.

Sometimes, however, she added sentences of her own to Dad's sermons before he preached them. As *A Man Called Peter* clearly reveals, he often asked for her help as he was preparing a sermon. One can only speculate how much of her input actually went into Dad's sermons, but it is surely present in many of them.

After the last sermon, I have included seven of my father's wartime pastoral prayers from Sunday morning services. Placed in chronological order, each of them is prefaced by a brief description of the events of the war taking place at the time, to put the prayers in context. Prayers being timeless, these prayers will not only reach out to touch the heart of God whenever they are prayed, but I believe they will also touch the hearts of readers as well.

INTRODUCTION

The Tides of War

On the leisurely Hawaiian Sunday morning of December 7, 1941, Japanese dive-bombers and torpedo planes screamed down out of the sky at Pearl Harbor to rain death and destruction on America's Pacific fleet. Five battleships were sunk, eleven other ships were sunk or crippled, and we suffered thirty-four hundred casualties. That sneak attack, which President Roosevelt called "a date which will live in infamy," plunged the nation into World War II. It would prove to be the costliest war in human history.

On the clear and sunny fall day of September 11, 2001, people were just arriving at work when Islamic terrorists flew airliners into the North and South Towers of New York City's World Trade Center. Once again, a sneak attack had thrown America into war, and the number of casualties was eerily similar to those of Pearl Harbor—just under three thousand.

In America today, however, few signs reveal that our nation is at war. Though terrorism is a global issue, most of the actual fighting has been restricted to the Middle East. This is not a world war—at least not yet.

Not so with World War II. Back then, the war was truly global. Except for Latin America and the interior of Africa, there were very few places

and countries not involved in the fighting. Younger readers may not realize how all-consuming and overwhelming this war actually was. The Japanese, Germans, and Italians were implacable foes of freedom and were armed to the teeth. Hitler, Tojo, and Mussolini—all military dictators—snuffed out human freedom in every country they conquered. For the first several years of the war, the outcome was in doubt. The future of Western civilization and its Biblical foundations hung in the balance.

In 1938, a re-armed Germany began marching into the countries of Europe. Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler first annexed Austria, and a frightened France and Britain tried to appease him by giving him parts of Czechoslovakia. Emboldened by their lack of resistance, Hitler sent Nazi jackboots into the rest of Czechoslovakia in early 1939.

Britain and France had finally drawn the line for Hitler at the Polish-German border, so when he began open warfare in Europe with the blitzkrieg (lightning war) invasion of Poland on September 1, they immediately declared war. But after easily overrunning Poland, the German advance continued with the capture of Norway and Denmark in April of 1940.

One month later, the Nazi panzer tanks swept over Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg, and the French armies collapsed. The British managed to miraculously evacuate 238,000 British, French, and Polish soldiers from the continent at Dunkirk, but German troops entered Paris on June 14.

With the United States not yet in the war, and a nonaggression pact with Russia in place, German generals stood on the French beaches and began planning the invasion of Great Britain across the English Channel.

Hitler seemed invincible, and the British were facing him alone. He would send wave after wave of German bombers to force the British to plead for peace, and if the air attack by the Luftwaffe didn't work, he would invade.

While the world held its breath from July to October of 1940, the young pilots of Britain's Royal Air Force, hopelessly outnumbered, flung their fighters against the German bombers day after day to drive them

from the skies over England. As Winston Churchill said, “Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few.”

At the same time, the British navy fought desperately against German submarine packs to keep the North Atlantic open for American supply convoys. The fate of Great Britain hung by a thread.

On September 29, in the midst of this struggle, my Scottish father, Dr. Peter Marshall, preached a memorable sermon: “The Man with the Bowler Hat.” He said:

Dark days have come before to Great Britain.
 Her enemies have dug her grave many times ere this.
 They have carved up the British Empire more than once . . .
 but still she lives on . . .
 and holds together.

By the grace of God, the British navy and air force prevailed, and Hitler’s plans were thwarted.



On this side of the Atlantic, while officially remaining neutral in the war, America sent surplus World War I munitions to Britain, along with fifty aging U.S. Navy destroyers. We began building up our armed forces. The ominous clouds of war seemed to be moving toward America. It became obvious we were going to be involved, like it or not.

But there were many American voices—some of them quite shrill, who didn’t like it. They called for us to stay isolated, *not* to get into *this* war.

The first sermon in this volume was preached during this period. Dad spoke to the conflict:

We all hate and abhor war,
 We detest it . . .

And yet . . . I feel that there are certain . . . liberties,
for which a man should be willing to fight
and even dare to die.

In one of the most obvious moves of the hand of God in my father's life, he was invited to preach at the U.S. Naval Academy Sunday service on December 7, 1941—Pearl Harbor Day. The December graduating class of midshipmen was seated before him in the chapel that day, soon to be commissioned and go on active duty. During his early morning drive from Washington to Annapolis, he felt impressed by God to change his message.

He preached on death, and how those who have put their trust in Christ need not fear it. To those young men, who would soon go to war, he began by saying:

Most of us never think of death or dying.
We act as if we had a long lease on life . . .
as though we had immunity somehow . . .

But at the end of the message he proclaimed:

These first disciples (of Jesus) knew
that human personality will survive . . .
because One who went into the grave and beyond,
had come back to say:
“Whosoever believeth in Me shall not perish
but have eternal life . . .”

The day after Japan's sneak attack on Pearl Harbor, President Franklin D. Roosevelt's speech to Congress called for a declaration of war on the Japanese; immediately afterward, Congress granted the declaration unanimously. On December 11, Nazi Germany declared war on the United States, and later that same day the President and Congress quickly reciprocated.

The voices of isolation were stilled. We were at war.

For the first few months of 1941, Americans watched helplessly as Japan ruthlessly expanded its empire in the Pacific. The Japanese quickly took Burma, Malaya, Singapore, and the Dutch East Indies. Only the Philippines held out. But on May 6, 1942, the Stars and Stripes were hauled down on the fortress of Corregidor, the last Philippine location to hold out against Japanese troops. The Rising Sun flag of Japan flew over a territory that stretched from northern Manchuria to New Guinea, and from eastern India to Wake Island. Except for Colonel Jimmy Doolittle's daring April 18, B-25 bomber raid on Tokyo from the *USS Hornet*, Americans had little to cheer about.

Unable to defeat England's bulldog tenacity, Hitler turned to the east and gobbled up Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, and Greece. He then broke his phony treaty with Soviet dictator Stalin and unleashed the power of the German war machine—120 divisions strong—on Russia. By November 1942, Germany controlled all of Europe except neutral Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland. Her armies were at Stalingrad, within striking distance of Moscow. In both Europe and the Pacific, the war was becoming a long, terrible ordeal.

Today in America, by contrast, it is hard to tell that we are at war. Life seems to go on much the way it did before the war, unless you are part of a family with people in the military. There are no hardships, no shortages of any necessary goods or services. So far, higher gas prices seem to be the only sign of the war. The economy is taking the whole thing in stride.

However, in 1942 nearly everyone in the nation became involved in the war effort. Goods essential for war were soon rationed, especially the gas, rubber, and metal needed for our planes, ships, and tanks. Used tin cans were collected and turned in. Ration books were issued, and people learned to save coupons. Rationing was a new experience for most people who, except for the Great Depression years, had been accustomed to plenty of everything. Now, very little was plentiful. Meat, butter, sugar, tea, and coffee were rationed—even paper.

As a boy during the war, I remember eating canned Spam (various pig parts mixed with ham) sandwiches for lunch.

No one could buy nylons, so many women took to painting fake nylon seams on the backs of their legs. Shoes were rationed to make sure that our soldiers would have enough. Growing kids usually consumed their parents' shoe rations, so adults often wore out their own shoes. And folks had to get used to standing in line for everything.

On the bright side, the government encouraged everyone to plant Victory Gardens, and eventually they produced 40 percent of the country's fresh vegetables!

Naturally, some people complained, and others tried to cheat the system to get extra coupons. On May 3, 1942, Dad was preaching:

They resent the shortages of this and that . . .
they resent the rationing of sugar and gasoline,
and perhaps of tea and coffee as well . . .

They do not like the increased taxation
and the bother and nuisance of black-out preparations . . .

What man refuses to learn in times of peace,
God teaches him in times of war . . .
God permits war in order that we might see what sin really is.

To confuse any possible enemy bombers, blackout curtains had to be hung over windows at night. The police and air raid wardens enforced this—no lights could be shown. On Cape Cod, where my family spent summers when I was little, the authorities were quite strict about it. As it turned out, the wartime rules were issued for good reason; in February of 1942, a Japanese submarine fired a few shells from its deck gun at oil tanks in Santa Barbara, California, but no damage was done. In June of that same year, Nazi saboteurs from German submarines came ashore on both Long Island, New York, and Ponte Vedra, Florida. In both cases, the FBI captured the invaders before they could do any harm.

Warning posters were put up in public places to remind people not

to talk about ship sailing schedules or about army units shipping out—
"Loose Lips Sink Ships!"

The war's greatest impact on the home front may have been on American work habits. Women went to work in large numbers for the first time, over 18 million of them. With so many men overseas, women were desperately needed in the factories. Appearing everywhere was the famous picture of "Rosie the Riveter," the pretty female worker flexing her biceps, under the words "We Can Do It!"

Rosie was actually the real thing! She worked in the Willow Run Aircraft Factory in Ypsilanti, Michigan, before she was discovered by the actor Walter Pidgeon. She and all her sister workers riveted aircraft wings together, made weapons parts, tanks, and candles; they became expert welders and presided over an explosion of American industrial production never equaled in world history. People worked longer hours than ever, and worked hard.

The Germans took eight years to build the war machine which overran Europe in 1940. At that time U.S. arms production was quite small. Yet, just two years later Americans were producing as much war material as Germany, Italy, and Japan—combined! In 1943, our war production became 50 percent greater than that of the enemy Axis powers; the next year it was more than twice as great. By the end of the war, our workers had produced 297,000 planes, 86,000 tanks, 6,500 naval vessels, 64,500 landing craft, 5,400 cargo ships, 315,000 artillery pieces, 4.2 million tons of artillery shells, and 17 million rifles.

Some of the changes the war created became permanent; once the women were out of the home and working, many of them never went back. The Women's Army Corps grew to 200,000, and another 88,000 women joined the navy's WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service). These women freed men for combat by driving trucks, repairing tanks, ferrying bombers across the country, and filling clerical jobs on land and sea.

The Army Nurse Corps performed heroically on battlefields. They incurred high casualties, with over 200 nurses killed in battle. Often they

had to make do when there were no stretchers. Many had to wash and reuse old bandages. They even gave their own blood when there were no blood supplies.

At home, women worked as Gray Ladies—hostesses in USO canteens—making sandwiches and dancing with lonely soldiers on leave.

Everyone did what they could for the war effort. Parents bought war bonds, and children saved up bond books with stamps. Most houses hung patriotic window banners—blue stars on a white background with a red border. Each blue star represented a family member serving in the armed services.



During May 1942, the tide of battle in the Pacific began to turn. In the wake of the tragic surrender of Corregidor, hope began to dawn at the Battle of the Coral Sea. There, the U.S. Navy stopped the Japanese advance in the South Pacific. We lost the carrier *Lexington* and several other ships, but our carrier-based planes sank an enemy cruiser and a carrier and shot down many of their planes. The enemy had to give up their battle plans and were thrown back on the defensive.

As hope began to grow, stories of God's intervention began to filter back to America from our military people who were experiencing Him in their lives. In the North Pacific, the first solid American victory of the war against the Japanese came in the Battle of Midway, June 3–6. A divine hand seemed to brush back the clouds beneath a U.S. Navy scout plane searching for the Japanese fleet, just as dwindling fuel was forcing the pilot to turn back to his ship. He sighted the enemy ships. As a result, though we lost our own carrier *Yorktown* in the fight, the Japanese carrier fleet was crushed—four carriers and a heavy cruiser were sunk.

On January 31, 1943, my father preached a message of faith and hope by recounting the miraculous rescue of Captain Eddie Rickenbacker and his bomber crew from three weeks adrift on the South Pacific.

These eight men met God out on the broad waters of
the Pacific Ocean . . .

You and I can follow the same path that these men took,
only we can do it in the privacy of our own rooms tonight
or tomorrow morning,
rather than on the trackless Pacific.

You can find Him as real and as powerful in your armchair
or on your knees in your bedroom . . . if you will.

When the First U.S. Marine Division poured ashore on the island of Guadalcanal on August 7, 1942, a series of island-hopping campaigns began that was radically different from the war in Europe. On the continent, the large German, Soviet, and American armies slugged away at each other, backed by heavy artillery and air power.

But in the Pacific, smaller armies, combined with naval power, air power, and shipping made for a different kind of war. The same month of August found American General Douglas MacArthur engaging the Japanese in combat on New Guinea. With army troops, land-based aircraft, and old battleships and cruisers, he leapfrogged his way northward to an eventual invasion of the Philippines in October of 1944.

Admiral Chester Nimitz, using U.S. Marines, army troops, and carrier-based planes, would jump from island to island across the Central Pacific from November 1943 to July 1945.

Tarawa . . . Kwajalein . . . Eniwetok . . . Guam . . . Saipan . . . Iwo Jima . . . Okinawa—these names are immortal in the proud and blood-stained history of the United States Marine Corps.

The Japanese, dug into bunkers reinforced with coconut logs, fought savagely—usually until they were all killed. The marines lost 900 killed and 2,400 wounded on Betio in the Tarawa Atoll. When the shooting stopped, they had taken a piece of coral three miles long and 800 yards wide.

For the U. S. Marines, the sands of Iwo Jima are holy ground. The battle for Iwo (a volcanic, gourd-shaped island five and a half miles in length) cost almost 7,000 marines dead and 19,000 wounded. No battalion suffered less than 50 percent casualties. Many suffered more. Two out of every three young marines who fought on Iwo were killed or wounded.

Arguably, the fight for that small piece of real estate displayed more heroism on the part of our marines than any other battle in their war. In all of World War II they received 84 Medals of Honor, America's highest individual military award for valor in action. That averaged about two per month. In their thirty-six days of fighting on Iwo Jima, the marines earned 27 out of the 84 medals.

The casualties at Okinawa were worse. Over 12,000 marines, soldiers, and sailors died during the twelve weeks of battle. United States forces suffered 36,000 wounded, lost 34 ships sunk and 368 damaged. The Japanese lost 100,000 men.



As the remains of hundreds of thousands of soldiers, marines, sailors, and airmen were returned to the United States for burial, the grief and pain mounted. The sight every family dreaded to see was the Western Union telegram boy or military officers in dress uniforms standing at the front door with the news that a husband, son, father, or brother was dead. Then the blue star in the window would be covered with a gold one, meaning the family had lost someone in the war. Often there was a mixture of blue and gold stars; sometimes there was more than one gold star in the window.

As American casualties grew, my father preached to the widows and mothers who had lost loved ones in the war:

God is not to be blamed because a Japanese torpedo sank the ship on which your husband was serving.

You can't blame God if a burst of anti-aircraft brings down the bomber in which your son is flying . . .

That does not mean that God has failed or ceased to exist.
It does not mean that there is nothing to believe in.
You still have grounds for faith and hope . . .

Your husband did not lose his life . . . he gave it.
And although you may not see him again in the form you knew and loved . . .
he will be near you in dear, strange ways . . .

As a naturalized American citizen who deeply loved and understood his newly adopted country, my father could not possibly have been more supportive of our military men and women throughout the war. There was another factor, however, that heightened his emotional and spiritual involvement in the war.

Dad had become the pastor of New York Avenue Presbyterian Church in downtown Washington, D.C., in 1937. In the four to five years of his ministry in the nation's capital before America entered the war, the youth ministry of the church had exploded. As the war escalated, many of those he had come to know as young teenagers ended up in uniform. And some of them kept up a running correspondence with their pastor. He wrote to them and prayed for them constantly.

In wartime, Washington was thronged with men and women from every branch of the military, coming and going. Many made a point of spending Sunday mornings at our church, and more than a few even came back for the Sunday evening service. I know, because in my preaching trips across America I meet them. They tell me, sometimes with tears in their eyes, what Dad's ministry meant to them during the war. Never satisfied that he had done enough for our military men and women, he even managed to persuade the church officers to have a USO canteen in the church, where those in uniform could find food and fellowship.

At the same time, as with every red-blooded Scot, my father was a true “Son o’ the Heather” to his last breath. From the time the German Stuka dive-bombers opened World War II with their attack on Poland and Britain declared war on Germany, my father was emotionally engaged in the Allies’ struggle for survival and victory over the Nazis and Japanese.

In the living room of our home in Washington, D.C., sat a large armchair—Dad’s chair. Beside it was an imposing, brown stand-on-the-floor Bendix radio with a shortwave band. Dad would often sit in that chair late at night before he went to bed and listen to the BBC news broadcasts from London. In 1942, prior to American troops landing in North Africa, when the British were fighting alone against German General Rommel’s Desert Corps, the announcer would often read the British casualty lists from the latest battle. As Dad listened in silence to the names of the Scottish regiments and the numbers of men killed in action, tears would fall silently down his cheeks.

With the fall of Tunis in May 1943, the Axis powers were cleared from North Africa. Sicily was taken by the Allies in August, but the Italian campaign would prove long and costly. After the disastrous Anzio beachhead of January 1944, it took repeated bombing of the enemy’s mountain defenses and a series of attacks by the Fifth and Eighth armies to push the Germans northward. Allied troops entered Rome on June 4, two days before the D-Day landings at Normandy.

On the eastern front, the month of November 1942 marked the farthest point of the German advance into Russia. The huge Soviet armies would lose 11 million men before the war was over, but throughout 1943 and 1944 they relentlessly drove the Germans out of Russia, through Poland, and back into Germany. At the end of April 1945, Russian troops finally entered Berlin.

The nine months between the invasion of France on June 6, 1944, and the crossing of the Rhine River in March 1945 were marked by tenacious German resistance and heavy Allied casualties, especially at Metz, the Huertgen Forest, and the surprise attacks of the Battle of the Bulge. Allied troops reached the Elbe River, sixty miles from Berlin, on

April 11. They were ordered to wait there for a linkup with the Russian troops, which occurred on April 25.

Germany finally surrendered on May 7. The drive across France, Belgium, and Germany had cost 135,000 American lives.

In the Pacific, the capture of Iwo Jima meant that our long-range B-29 bombers based in the Marianas could bomb Japan and have enough fuel to make it to Iwo on their return. In the early months of 1945, the systematic bombing of Japanese cities began preparing the way for the U.S. invasion of the homeland. But the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 6 and 9, along with the Soviet declaration of war on the eighth, led the Japanese government to surrender on August 15. The formal surrender ceremony came on September 2 on board the battleship *Missouri*, anchored in Tokyo Bay.



As the war drew to a close, my father's sermons began to focus on the future for America and the world. What had we been fighting for? Was it just to defeat Nazi Germany and imperialist Japan, or were there more universal and permanent values at stake?

On May 8, 1945, Dad quoted from Chaplain Roland Gittelsohn's dedication sermon for the Fifth Marine Division cemetery on Iwo Jima:

We memorialize those who, having ceased living with us, now live within us. . . . We consecrate ourselves, the living, to carry on the struggle they began. Too much blood has gone into the soil for us to let it lie barren. . . . We here solemnly swear this shall not be in vain! Out of this . . . will come—we promise—the birth of a new freedom for the sons of men everywhere.

And what kind of America were we becoming? What sort of country would our returning soldiers find? Would we prove to have been worth the sacrifice of 1,078,162 casualties—407,300 dead and 670,846 wounded?

In April 1945, my father noted:

Soldiers now returning from the fronts . . .
find in the land they love the same old political gangs;
they find racial intolerance, with faults on both sides;
they find scoundrels in public office,
irresponsible strikers . . .

As long as we—as individuals—remain morally unimproved,
we shall have lost both the war and the peace.

And moral improvement begins with the individual.

It is strictly personal.

It is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Toward the end of 1947, more than two years after the end of the war, both the issues of the war and the challenges of the peace had become starkly clear to Dad. The Sunday before Armistice Day, November 9, he quoted from a letter written home by a soldier killed on Okinawa:

We will win the war.

But then all will not be done.

America will need soldiers,
warriors of the spirit,
to fight, that the hearts of men may be free as well as their lands,
lest we have fought in vain.

With America in a prolonged international war against terrorists, I have found that these words, and the rest of these wartime sermons, need

In sixty seconds they had launched the life rafts... the flimsy craft in which they were to spend three weeks drifting on the eight-foot swells of the Pacific ocean.

The story of the twenty-one days is a gripping epic of human fortitude and courage. It should be read by every American and preserved with the sagas of brave men.

One cannot read it without tears. It is a moving document whether the author is Captain Rickenbacker or Lt. Whittaker.

The mere recital of the events themselves is drama, and any attempt at imagining what they went through must end in failure.

It is quite beyond any of us, well-fed over-nourished

WARTIME SERMONS

The sea was a glassy calm while the sun burned fiercely.

Faces

necks

hands

wrists

legs

and ankles burned

blistered

turned raw and burned again.

Drenched with the spray kicked up by the night winds, flesh stung and cracked and dried,

only to be burned again the next day.

They were like living creatures slowly turning on a spit over the furnace of the sun.

Captain Rickenbacker described it thus:

"The sea sent back billions of sharp splinters of light; no matter where one looked it was painful. A stupor descended upon the rafts. Men simply sat or sprawled, heads rolling on the chest, mouths half open, gasping."



Dr. Peter Marshall, his wife, Catherine, and son, Peter John, at home.



John Ferrell, photographer

Dr. Peter Marshall preaching at the Easter Service at Fort Lincoln Heights on Bladensburg Road in Washington, D.C., April 5, 1942.



John Ferrell, photographer

More than 10,000 people hear Dr. Peter Marshall preach at the Easter Sunrise Service at Fort Lincoln Heights on Bladensburg Road in Washington, D.C., April 5, 1942.



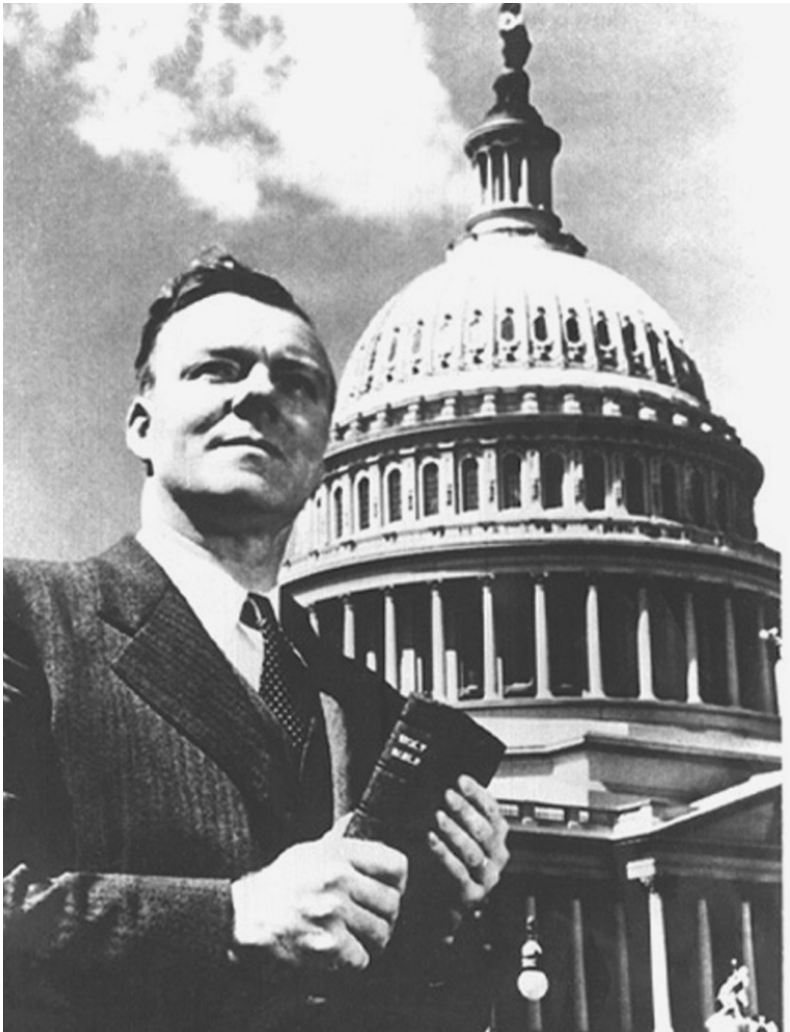
Theodor Horydczak, photographer

Crowds waiting in line to enter New York Avenue Presbyterian Church on Easter Sunday, April 5, 1942.



Theodor Horydczak, photographer

Exterior of New York Avenue Presbyterian Church at night.



Life Magazine photo © 1947

Newly elected U.S. Senate Chaplain, Dr. Peter Marshall, 1947.

Why Should God Bless America?

"Why Should God Bless America?"

The song "Why Should God Bless America?" written by Irving Berlin a little more than a year ago, has become an informal national anthem.

There is a quality in the song that has brought tears to many eyes, and has tingled the blood of many a hard-boiled citizen.

New York Avenue Presbyterian Church
Washington, D.C.

September 15, 1940

But as we have a way of doing in this country, we soon surfeited ourselves with it, because
When a song is popular, it is played everywhere.
We heard it from morning until night.
Crooners moaned its words into a hundred microphones.

Dance bands played it
 sung it
 swung it.

They danced to it.....they marched to it.....and they almost made it cheap.

Written by a Jew, Irving Berlin, the words have a deeper meaning than they could possibly have to you and I: "Let us swear allegiance to a land that's free....."

No doubt, Berlin was thinking as he wrote.....
of other lands where his people are hounded,
 persecuted
 beaten
 starved
 and killed.

He was thinking, doubtless, of concentration camps where old men and old women slowly and painfully die, surrounded by human cruelty.

He was thinking of refugees--
 homeless people turned away from frontiers.....
 denied passage across bridges that span the gulfs
between pain and pity,
 between hate and hope.

And, thinking of them, he wrote a hymn of gratitude that in this country freedom is granted to all.....
 and there are no concentration camps.

INTRODUCTION TO

Why Should God Bless America?

In the days and weeks following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, “God Bless America” signs sprouted up all over the country. They appeared on billboards; they were pasted in restaurant and store windows, taped on vans, cars, and trucks, and hung from buildings.

It was wonderful to see all these signs, to know that America was asking for God’s blessing. But a question kept nagging at me: Why *should* God bless America? Were we Americans presuming on His blessing, assuming that just because we’re Americans we are automatically entitled to His protection and favor?

And doesn’t this quick, knee-jerk response to trouble on our part treat God as some sort of celestial Vending Machine that is expected to dispense blessings because we’ve pleaded with Him to do so?

I began asking these hard questions in my preaching in the weeks following the attacks. Like the prophets of the Old Testament, I began suggesting that these attacks were a wake-up call to bring America to repent, and to shake us into dealing with the personal and corporate sins that keep us from being a just society and the example to the rest of the world that He has planned for us to be.

Several months later, when I was looking through my father’s wartime sermons, I was amazed to find that he had preached a sermon in the fall of 1940 entitled: “Why Should God Bless America?”

Irving Berlin’s song “God Bless America,” memorialized by Kate Smith, was a little over a year old at this time, but it had already become our second and informal national anthem. Constantly hearing it sung and played had raised the same questions in Dad’s mind, and he spoke to those issues in the sermon which follows.

Now, more than ever, America needs to hear what he preached that day.

Why Should God Bless America?

New York Avenue Presbyterian Church

Washington, D.C.

September 15, 1940

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which was published a little more than a year ago,
has become an informal national anthem.

There is a quality in the song that has brought tears to many eyes,
and has tingled the blood of many a hard-boiled citizen.

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we soon surfeited ourselves with it—because,
when a song is popular, it is played everywhere.
We heard it from morning until night.

Crooners moaned its words into a hundred microphones.
Dance bands played it,
sung it,
swung it.

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Written by Jewish composer Irving Berlin,
the words have a deeper meaning
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homeless people turned away from frontiers,
denied passage across bridges that span the gulfs between pain and pity,
between hate and hope.

And, thinking of them, he wrote a hymn of gratitude
that in this country freedom is granted to all
and there are no concentration camps.

But singing “God Bless America” is not enough.
Waving our flag is not enough.

A maudlin . . . sticky . . . sentimental,
pseudo-patriotism is not enough.

God is not going to bless America just because a nation sings the song.

Why *should* God bless America?

Why should we be blessed of God more than Germany,
or Poland,
or France,
or Great Britain,
or Denmark,
or China?

Have we any racial superiority,
or rare intelligence,
or moral excellence?

Are we more deserving in the sight of God?
Are we better than other nations?
Are our morals higher?

Are we Gentiles,
are we Protestants,
are we Presbyterians, any better than other peoples?

Can we show any reason why God should bless us?

Last Sunday the nation was called to

“pray to Almighty God for His blessing on our country and for the establishment of a just and permanent peace among all the nations of the world.”

The President urged

“the people of the United States of all creeds and denominations, to pray on that day, in their churches or at their homes, on the high seas or wherever they may be, beseeching the Ruler of the Universe to bless our Republic,

to make us reverently grateful for our heritage and firm in its defense,
and to grant to this land and to the troubled world a righteous,
enduring peace.”

Now it was a splendid proclamation,
and we are glad the President issued it.
But we could wish that in it the President had called us to acknowledge
our sins,
national and individual,
had urged us to repent
and to return to a humility we have lost.

We wish the President had stated openly that we, too, have our short-
comings . . .
and that we, like other nations,
have been unworthy of God’s blessings.

Ambassador Bullitt sounded a note that is urgently needed today in his
great speech at Philadelphia on August 18:

“When are we going to wake up?
When are we going to tell our government
that we want to defend our homes
and our children
and our liberties whatever the cost in money or blood?

“When are we going to give the lie to those who say
that the people of the United States no longer care about their liberties,
that they look upon the United States
just as a trough into which to get their snouts,
and not as the greatest adventure in human freedom that this earth has
known?

“When are we going to let the world know that,
in spite of all the efforts of all the propagandists
who call their propaganda ‘debunking’
and try to teach us to fear even truth,
we still know that when anyone tries to debunk the Ten
Commandments
and the Sermon on the Mount,

he prepares for himself hell in this world and the next?

“When are we going to let legislators in Washington know that
we don’t want any more politicians who are afraid of the next election
and scared to ask us to make the sacrifices
we know are necessary to preserve our liberties
and our Declaration of Independence and our Constitution?

“When are we going to tell them that we want to know what are our
duties...

not what are our *privileges*?

“When are we going to say to them that
we don’t want to hear any longer about what we can *get* from our
country,

but we do want to hear what we can *give* to our country?

“When are we going to stand before God and say that
we know a human being is worthy of freedom
only when he serves the ideals in which he believes?”

We are enjoying the greatest freedom the world has ever known—
a freedom that staggers all who will consider it—
for we are free in these days to ignore the very things that others died to
provide.

We are free to neglect the liberties we have inherited,
and surely there can be no greater freedom than that.

I am one of those who believe that there are some things worth fighting
for,
and worth dying for,
if need be.

The trouble with our age is not so much that it cannot believe there is
anything worth *dying* for,
but that it is not so sure that there is anything worth *living* for.

As a Christian—and a Christian minister—I find myself on the horns of
a terrible dilemma.

We all hate and abhor war,
we detest it.
It is contrary to all the principles and ethics of Christ.

Nothing we can say about war is too condemnatory,
no language is too strong.

And yet, at the same time, I feel that there are certain qualities,
certain principles,
certain heritages,
certain liberties,
for which a man should be willing to fight and even dare to die.

I cannot reconcile these two positions.
I will not even try.
I don't believe there *is* a reconciliation in this present,
blundering and bleeding world.

to seek supremely the public good rather than private gain.

Liberty's greatest enemy today is the old enemy—
human greed and selfishness.

John Curran, in 1790, said:

“It is the common fate of the indolent to see their rights become prey to the active. The condition upon which God hath given liberty to man is eternal vigilance; which condition, if he break, servitude is at once the consequence of his crime and the punishment of his guilt.”

A columnist in our daily press three months ago said some things that are not only timely, but true,
and need to be said over and over again. He wrote:

“America needs . . . a general disposition to rate the Ten Commandments as more important than any Eleven Radio Talks.

“America needs . . . immediate agreement on the meaning of free speech, with a view to determining if it means that a bunch of Moscow or Berlin agents enjoying the liberties of American life must be permitted to work over the radio for the destruction of the American system.

“America needs . . . a drive to convince the youth of America that the defense problem would be helped immeasurably if they had the same intense love for the Constitution and the American system as the Nazi youths have for Hitler and the Nazi system.

“America needs . . . an extension of the drive to awaken voters to the high importance of selecting representatives, senators and other

public office-holders on a basis of character,
courage,
high purpose,
and personal integrity;
and not on a matchless record for muddleheadedness,
a loud voice,
a fair radio style,
and an aversion to study.

“America needs . . . more faith in prayer than in telegrams to politicians, and a willingness to give at least as much time to church as to any double-feature movie.

“America needs . . . a wider appreciation of the relative importance of an altar in the home as compared with a de luxe radio,
portable bar,
and a rumpus room.”

The current philosophy of indifference to what is happening abroad is too shallow, and too stupid to be American.

It is too selfish to be Christian.

It is not the voice of this great republic,
but simply the superficial,
wise-cracking,
selfishness of the cynic.

Some of our intellectuals, in their concern for the fate of democracy are calling the nation back to God.

Many of our newspaper columnists are turning over new leaves in their attitude toward religion . . .

they declare that the nation can be saved only by a return to religious faith.

The idea may be abroad in some quarters that democracy is the thing that must be preserved . . .

and that God is brought in as its servant.

We must not get the cart before the horse.

The plea of the Church today is not

that people shall call upon God to return to our democracy and bless it . . .

but rather that we shall together cause our democracy to return to God and be blessed.

Let us remember that we are a republic under God . . .

let us remember that on each of our metal coins

we have stamped a statement which must not be permitted to become a lie

or an infamous blasphemy.

“In God we trust” . . . so speak the coins that rattle in our pockets.

What does it mean to trust in God?

Certainly no conception of trust in God can ever make any sense until we understand that

He will only prosper our ways and bless us

when our ways begin to be His ways . . .

and we begin to keep the conditions He has laid down for national blessing.

And thus I come to my text, 2 Chronicles 7:14:

“If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.”

These are the conditions of God’s blessing.

And these conditions were ignored by the President in his call for prayer to seek God’s blessings upon this land.

He did not call upon America to turn from its wicked ways . . .
nor has the nation shown any inclination to do so.

We were admonished by the President to ask of God

“to grant to this land and to the troubled world a righteous and enduring peace.”

Can we do that as a nation with the blood of China on our hands?

Can we ask for peace for ourselves
while we continue to supply the ingredients of war to Japan,
as we have been doing for the past three years,
assisting its pitiless assault upon a defenseless nation
whose friend we have advertised ourselves to be?

I wonder if the President would have changed the wording of his proclamation had he read the words of Isaiah in the first chapter.

“Hear the word of the Lord, ye rulers . . .
give ear unto the law of our God, ye people . . .
When ye spread forth your hands I will hide mine eyes . . .
when ye make many prayers; I will not hear;
your hands are full of blood.

Wash you, make you clean;
put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes . . .

Come *now*, and let us reason together, saith the Lord;
though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow;
though they be red as crimson, they shall be as wool.

If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land;
but if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword;
for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.”

The great heart of Abraham Lincoln expressed itself on this subject with saintly and prophetic vision:

“It is the duty of nations as well as of men to own their dependence upon the overruling power of God; to confess their sins and transgressions in humble sorrow, yet with assured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon; and to recognize the sublime truth announced in the Holy Scriptures and proven by all history, that these nations only are blessed whose God is the Lord.

“And inasmuch as we know that by His divine law, nations, like individuals, are subjected to punishments and chastisements in this world, may we not justly fear that the awful calamity of civil war which now desolates the land, may be but a punishment inflicted upon us for our presumptuous sins, to the needful end of our national reformation as a whole people?

“We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of heaven. We have been preserved these many years in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth, and power as no other nation has ever grown.

“But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand that preserved us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior virtue and wisdom of our own.

“Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God who made us.

“It behooves us, then, to humble ourselves before the offended Power, to confess our national sins, and to pray for clemency and forgiveness.”¹

And if that were true in 1863, how much more is it true now?
We can sing “God Bless America” until we are blue in the face . . .
but unless we do what God has indicated,
His blessings will be withheld.

The path of humility is not familiar to the American people.
Humility itself is a strange virtue to which we are all unaccustomed . . .

We have far too long been riding on the balloon tires of an inflated ego,
and, as Peter says:

“God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble.”

Nothing can more quickly humiliate us
than for us to reflect as we sit in this holy place
on our own personal sins . . .
to meditate upon our own shortcomings . . .
to reflect upon the meanness of our own character . . .

and to remember all the things that are wrong in our own community,
 our own city,
 and throughout the land.

The second condition is that *God's people must pray*.

The art of prayer has almost become one of the Church's lost secrets . . .
 the impotence of the Church today is expressed by the fact that
 the Church has ceased to pray . . .
 we must not wait for Presidential proclamations to have days of prayer.

The conditions must be observed by God's people everywhere . . .
 the Jew and Gentile alike . . .
 the Catholic and the Protestant . . .
 the rich and the poor . . .
 we must all pray.

And the third condition is that we *shall seek God's face*.

That means a return to God . . .
 an effort to find God's will for our lives,
 His guidance for our conduct,
 His standards for our ethics,
 and His help,
 in order that we may walk in His way and keep His commandments.

We must get rid of the idea that we can adopt a Confession of Faith . . .
 and repeat a creed . . .
 and then go out and do as we please.
 Let us not fool ourselves.

We have to turn from our wicked ways.

And we may as well confess that we *have* wicked ways—

that we do things that we know perfectly well we ought not to be doing . . .

that we say things that we have no right to say . . .

that our dispositions are not those of children of God.

We cannot fool God . . . let us not be deluded into thinking we can fool ourselves.

“While the storm clouds gather far across the sea,
Let us swear allegiance to a land that’s free.
Let us all be grateful for a land so fair,
As we raise our voices in a solemn prayer.

“God bless America, land that I love.
Stand beside her and guide her
Through the night with the light from above.
From the mountains to the prairie,
To the ocean white with foam,
God bless America, my home sweet home.”

But God says:

“If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways: then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.”

—2 CHRONICLES 7:14

The Man with the Bowler Hat

In the flimsy craft in which they were to spend three weeks drifting on the eight-foot swells of the Pacific
New York Avenue Presbyterian Church

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Washington, D.C.
It should be read by every American and preserved with the sagas of brave men.
September 29, 1940

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It is a moving document whether the author is Captain Rickenbacker or Lt. Whittaker.

The mere recital of the events themselves is drama, and any attempt at imagining what they went through must end in failure.

It is quite beyond any of us, well-fed
over-nourished
comfortable
in arm-chairs by firesides
to conceive of that experience.

The sea was a glassy calm while the sun burned fiercely.

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INTRODUCTION TO

The Man with the Bowler Hat

If I kept a list of the most often requested titles when people call or write our office to obtain copies of my father's sermons, "The Man with the Bowler Hat" would be in the top five.

The impact of this message was powerful, first on the congregation who heard it preached at New York Avenue Presbyterian Church on September 29, 1940, and then on those who afterward read the printed version. So impressed was the Honorable Sam Hobbs of Alabama, that he had it read into the Congressional Record on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives on November 11.

It fulfills at least two of the requirements of truly great preaching, and my father's sermons invariably reflected them both. First, it plunges the listener or the reader into a vivid and dramatic story. No one can experience Dad's description of the evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force at Dunkirk without being deeply moved.

Second, true Gospel preaching must speak to the hearts and lives of individual hearers or readers—they must become convinced that they are being directly and personally spoken to. And that is precisely the climactic point of this sermon! For "the man in the bowler hat" stands for those ordinary people without whom, in my father's phrase, "business would stop, [and] industry would come to a standstill." Herein lies its true and lasting impact.