People who had lived all their lives in Johnstown remarked that their little town by the Conemaugh River never looked more beautiful than it did on Decoration Day, 1889. My childhood memories provide me with a picture of flowers blooming in green lawns, bunting draped here and there, flags waving everywhere, happy laughing crowds thronging the streets, and a colorful parade of bands and Civil War veterans. The sun shone brightly, nature’s contribution to the pleasure of the day.

It was a holiday, certainly no time to think of the menace lying placidly reflecting the beauty of late spring woods and sunshine in the Allegheny hills above the town. Even the Conemaugh River gave no reminder as it flowed on well confined within its banks.

The day closed. Night brought rain. Morning dawned with the word spreading that there had been a cloudburst in the night, the river had overflowed, and Johnstown was under water up to the second story of houses.

Crowds of laughing, joking people from outlying districts followed the road along the hillside to survey the partially submerged town. Many were doubtless pleased with a second holiday. On the way, my uncle met us, and seeing my mother, exclaimed anxiously: “Sarah Jane, go back home. Word has come that the dam is breaking.”

In reply my mother said: “Oh, that’s an old story.” Turning to friends she added that many times she had been carried to the hills as a child when word came that the dam was giving way.

On we went. Finally the town came to view spread out beneath us in a sea of water. People had moved themselves and their belongings to the second story. Men were out on the roofs. The sounds of their words and laughter came to us across the water. No need to fear. The river had overflowed before. It would subside as always.

Those laughing, joking people little dreamed of the impending disaster. They could not see men working frantically to no avail to open the long-unused floodgates; but that did not concern the onlookers.

Suddenly the wall gave way and a mighty torrent of water went racing, swirling, raging on the defenseless people in the valley below. The Johnstown Flood of May 31, 1889, was on. Many hundreds of men, women, and children lost their lives. Johnstown and small towns of the valley were wiped out.

Yes, it is true, it could easily have been prevented. The people had known for years of the possibility that the dam might break. Something could have been done about it. But it is a trait of human nature to drift with the crowd, wishfully thinking that someone is taking care of things, and neglecting to face personal responsibility.

This human tendency to shirk personal responsibility is nowhere more evident than in religious matters. It requires exertion to investigate for oneself. It is easier to base one’s conclusions on other people’s thinking or on the traditions of our ancestors. In fact we have a song that runs something like this: “The old-time religion. It was good enough for father, it was good enough for mother, it is good enough for me.” All too many do not even bother to find out what the old-time religion was.

There are many lines of prophecy in the Bible. We are in the last links of every one of them. What are we doing about it? What should we do about it? Shall we drift along as the people of Johnstown did, until it is too late? The reasonable thing to do is to investigate for ourselves, get the facts, and act upon them.

In infinite love, God has revealed enough of the future for our guidance and well-being. We can avoid both present and future disaster by following the instruction of the Scriptures.—By Mary E. Little, Signs of the Times, March 8, 1949.

Quote: “You cannot smuggle yourself into the kingdom of Christ.”—Unknown, Signs of the Times, April 10, 1893.

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“Did I firmly believe, as millions say they do, that the knowledge and practice of religion in this life influences destiny in another, religion would be to me everything. I would cast aside earthly enjoyments as dross, earthly cares as folly, and earthly thoughts and feelings as vanity.

“Religion would be my first waking thought and my last image before sleep sank me into unconsciousness. I would labor in its cause alone. I would take thought for the morrow of eternity alone. I would esteem one soul gained for heaven worth a life of suffering. Earthly consequences would never stay my hand or seal my lips. Earth, its joy and its griefs, would occupy no moment of my thoughts.

“I would strive to look upon eternity alone, and on the souls around me soon to be everlastinglingly miserable or everlastinglingly happy. I would go forth to the world and preach to it in season and out of season, and my text would be 'What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?' “ (Mark 8:36).

When C. T. Studd (1860-1931), one of England’s greatest sports figures and an Oxford graduate, read these words they made such a tremendous impression upon him that he gave up a legal career to go to the dark places of the earth as a missionary. He says, “They decided me at once to live only and utterly for Christ.”

While reading his Bible one day, Studd applied the story of the rich young ruler to himself, leading him to give away his entire fortune, a half million dollars, and follow Christ in voluntary poverty as a missionary to China and India. His last term of service was in the heart of Africa for nearly 13 years without a furlough.—By Kenneth J. Holland, These Times, August 1983.

Quote: “A sermon often helps people in different ways. Some rise from it greatly strengthened; others wake from it refreshed.”—By A. W. Stinson, These Times, February 1961.

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NEW from Pacific Press—William Miller and the Rise of Adventism by George Knight. Through the years a number of books have appeared on William Miller and the Millerite movement of 1843-44; however, none has been so thoroughly comprehensive and historic as this volume. In addition to providing a broad overview of Millerism, the Dr. Knight examines the reasons for the movement’s success, and the subsequent outgrowth of Adventism.

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God has a labor union. He has always had one. Among its membership are to be found the greatest names of history. There are Jesus of Nazareth, carpenter; Paul, tentmaker; Peter, Andrew, James and John, fishermen; Matthew, tax collector; Priscilla and Aquila, tentmakers; and Lydia, saleswoman.

Some of its earlier members were Noah, shipbuilder; Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, cattlemen; Moses, David, and Amos, shepherds; Gideon and Elisha, farmers. Such names as William Carey, cobbler; David Livingstone, trail blazer; and Joseph Bates, ship captain, make the more recent roll.


What are the rules of membership, with which all the workers gladly comply? Each one must be “diligent in his business,” for “the soul of the diligent shall be made fat,” and “he that gathereth by labor shall increase.” Proverbs 22:29; 13:4, 11.

Dissension is unknown among the ranks. Among the policies of the union are: “The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men.” 2 Timothy 2:24. “Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages.” Luke 3:14. “As much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.” Romans 12:18. “Be ye also patient; establish your hearts; for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh,” James 5:8.

Is the work arduous? It may be at times, but there is always a Helper. He says: “Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. . . . For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.” Matthew 11:28-30.

Are there dues? Yes, and to some they seem high. “Sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor: . . . and come, take up the cross, and follow Me.” Mark 10:21.

Wages? Yes, members of God’s “Fellow Laborers” are paid according to the highest wage scale, one that more than makes up for the dues. “Thou shalt have treasure in heaven.” “He shall receive an hundredfold now in this time; . . . and in the world to come eternal life.” Verses 21,30.

What are the employment opportunities? In the critical labor shortage the Master bids us: “Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth laborers into His harvest.” Matthew 9:38. To every willing worker He offers a place: “Son, go work today in My vineyard.” “Whatsoever is right I will give you.” Matthew 21:28; 20:4. One day soon He will say to each conscientious laborer: “Well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.” Matthew 25:21—By Richard H. Utt, Signs of the Times, April 5, 1949.

Quote: “Music has been called the speech of angels.”—By Charles G. Bellah, Signs of the Times, November 12, 1929
A beautiful young wife and mother lay in the hospital. An older woman came one afternoon to “cheer her up.” (It is surprising how morose and mournful some people can be when they set out to “cheer” others up.) With her most pitying expression she came to the bedside of the younger woman, and laying her hand on the young wife’s hand sighed, “Honey, I’m so sorry for you, suffering as you are. I don’t know why you have to go through it, for suffering colors one’s life so much.”

The young wife and mother smiled up at her “cheerful” visitor and said, “Yes, I know. Suffering does color one’s life—and I propose to choose the color.”

And we can choose the color. We can choose indigo, if we like. But we can also choose the brighter hues. No one who has ever really suffered is a stranger to the dark colors of life, the black moods, the somber shades. But one can choose the lighter, brighter, more hopeful hues, too, and can keep on choosing them until all of life becomes a blend, a balance of all the rich, beautiful colors and shadings of life’s spectrum.—By C. William Fisher, These Times, June 1983.

Quote: “Those are red-letter days in our lives when we meet people who thrill us like a fine poem, people whose handshake is brimful of unspoken sympathy and whose sweet, rich natures impart to our eager, impatient spirits a wonderful restfulness which in its essence, is divine. The perplexities, irritations, and worries that have absorbed us pass like unpleasant dreams, and we wait to see with new eyes and hear with new ears the beauty and harmony of God’s real world.”—By Helen Keller, These Times, March 1961.

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This is the great hope Jesus’ resurrection gives us. It’s a hope that faces death with eyes wide open. And it’s a hope that can make a difference in our everyday lives.

Erasmus, that great scholar of the sixteenth century, learned this during a sea voyage. The sailing vessel in which he was traveling ran aground and began to break up. Almost everyone aboard reacted with hysteria. They begged their patron saint for help, sang hymns, or pleaded loudly in prayer.

Erasmus noticed one passenger, however, who acted very differently. “Of all of us,” he wrote, “the one who remained most composed was a young woman who was holding a baby whom she was nursing. She was the only one who did not shout, weep, or bargain with heaven. She did nothing but pray quietly to herself while clasping the baby tightly on her lap.”

This prayer, Erasmus realized, was just a continuation of her regular prayer life. She did not ask for any exceptional favors. She trusted God.

As the ship began to sink, this young mother was placed on a plank, given a spar to use as an oar, and sent out into the waves. She had to hold her baby with one hand and attempt to paddle with the other. Few thought she would survive the pounding surf.

Yet her faith and composure stood her in good stead. The woman and her child were the first to reach shore.

Erasmus never forgot that mother’s calm demeanor in the face of death. She wasn’t clinging to any masks. She didn’t rely on human effort. The only hope worth having, she knew, was the one God Himself would provide.

Do you enjoy the same hope today? Or are you still clinging to a mask, still pretending in some way about “the end”? Never forget it, Jesus’ resurrection is the only real event that can enable us to win over death in the end.

I invite you to place your trust in Him. Accept your own frailty, your own mortality. Stop looking to yourself for guarantees, and fix your hope on that great day when God Himself will raise up His children to eternal life.

Then you can have peace in any storm. Then you will have confidence even as the ship is going down. What a marvelous hope our God provides.—By George Vandeman, Signs of the Times, April 1991.

Quote: “Unless Christ is Lord of all, He is not Lord at all, to you; unless you acknowledge His right to everything, you have not owned His right to anything.”—By J. Hudson Taylor, Signs of the Times, February 25, 1889.
Senor Vasquez and Senor Miranda were sipping refreshments one afternoon in a Latin American city. Vasquez was a lawyer and Miranda a dentist. Somehow their conversation turned to the Bible.

“You know,” said the dentist with an air of great authority, “the Bible is a book of absurdities. Why, it says that a burro talked like a man. I could never get very excited about a book that tells such tall tales as that. As a dentist I’ve looked into a lot of mouths; and I know it would be impossible for a burro—with a mouth, throat, and teeth shaped like his—to talk like a man.”

Just then Rodriguez, a friend of theirs, passed by. Rodriguez, a relatively uneducated man, had accepted Christ a few years before and was well known in his neighborhood as a devout believer in, and defender of, the Bible.

“Come here a minute,” called the lawyer. “We want you to answer a question for us.”

Rodriguez obliged.

“Listen,” said the dentist; “the Bible says that a burro talked like a man, and as intelligent people we all know that a burro could never do such a thing. How do you explain it?”

Rodriguez thought a moment, then replied, “You make the burro, and I’ll make him talk!”

The lawyer, quick to see the point and delighted with such terse logic, slapped the dentist on the shoulder and guffawed, “He scoured you like a dish.”

The slow-witted dentist sat there with a puzzled look. “What does he mean, ‘You make a burro and I’ll make him talk’? I don’t get it.”

“Don’t you? He means that since God made the animal to begin with, it would be relatively simple for Him to make it talk. He scoured you like a dish!” the lawyer repeated as the dentist’s ears reddened.

What farmer would refuse to plant corn until he had solved the mystery of what makes the kernel grow? Would he say he could not believe in the corn because he didn’t understand it? He would starve long before he figured out the secret. For him it is enough that the kernel does germinate, and he is willing to leave the why and the how to nature.

What office secretary would refuse to use an electric typewriter because she doesn’t know how it works? For the secretary it is enough that it does work, and is happy to leave the why and the how of it to the mechanic.

What carpenter would refuse to lay oak flooring in a new house simply because he cannot explain how all that hardwood came from a tiny acorn? It is enough that somehow it did grow, and that the wood does make a handsome floor. He too is willing to leave the explanation to nature.

But some of these otherwise smart people abandon all their good common sense when they come to the Bible. They must understand exactly the why and the how of it all at once. They start majoring in minors. They insist on knowing just how the sun stood still for Joshua and how Jesus made the water into wine, or walked on the water, or healed a leper. In the material realm they are willing to believe in and personally use something they cannot understand, but in the realm of the spiritual they are ready to deny anything they cannot explain. They can leave nothing to anybody, even to God Himself.

Is it not just a bit ridiculous to live in a universe of marvels, about which the wisest scientist knows not the millionth part, and then question the power of the Creator of it all? Could not the Creator know of some natural law, unknown to mere men, by which He could perform what we call miracles? Can we leave nothing to Him?

Why not discard that unreasonable lack of faith now? Just assume the Bible is true; millions of others have found it so. Prove its promises and its practical philosophy in your daily life. If you find something too hard to explain, leave it to God. Accept once and for all the grand, majestic fact that God is real; that He lives, He creates, He loves, He inspired His Holy Book. Do this, and all your problems, whether personal or philosophical, will be solved; your doubts will evaporate. “Acquaint now thyself with Him, and be at peace: thereby good shall come unto thee.” Job 22:21—By Richard H. Utt, These Times, August 1951.

Quote: “I never apologize for pleading for better Christian homes, because my entire experience tells me that successful dealings between men in business, government, and social relationships are influenced for good or ill by home backgrounds.”—By J. C. Penney, These Times, April 1971.

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