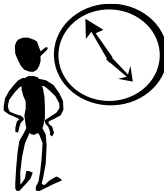


Inside this issue:

<i>Lessons from the Mamertine Prison</i>	1
<i>What Do You See in a Casket?</i>	3
<i>A.M. Sermon Outline:</i> Collective Nouns	6
Duty Rosters	7
Announcements & For the Record	8



Time of Assembly



Sunday:

Bible Study 9:00 a.m.
Worship 10:00 a.m.

Every other Sunday night:

Bible Study 4:00 p.m.
Worship 5:00 p.m.

Wednesday:

Bible Study 7:00 p. m.

Lessons from the Mamertine Prison

By Jefferson David Tant

Do you ever feel discouraged, defeated, alone, forsaken, or any other word used to describe one who is “down in the dumps?” I’m sure we have all been affected by one or more of these words in our lifetime. If you are fortunate to have escaped all these negative feelings, just be patient. They will come. But do these feelings need to define who we are? Not if we have the right perspective on life as a child of God.

Some 14 years ago my wife and I were with a group of Christians in Italy, the home of some of my ancestors. My mother’s father was Lorenzo Antonio Gotto, and that’s not Chinese. His family came from Genoa, Italy. We toured the city, including the Vatican, the Colosseum (where Christians were put to death), and we assembled with the saints on Sunday where Stephano Corazzo labored in the Word. Dee Bowman and I were honored to preach to those gathered.

One day I asked our hotel clerk if he knew where the Mamertine Prison was. He pointed to the site just two blocks away. So the group of some 15 to 20 of us walked to this prison. And what was special about it? This is most likely the prison where the apostle Paul spent time, and from which he wrote “the prison epistles.” These are probably Ephesians, Philippians, Philemon, and Colossians.

We entered the prison at street level, then went down the stairs to one level below ground, and then down to a second level below ground to the cell is where it is believed Paul was kept.

As you can see, it is a cell made of stones, and it was dark and cold. We stood there for a time in silent amazement as we thought of



Paul and the time he spent in this dark room.

Then a thought struck me, and I started singing a song that Christians are familiar with, and the others joined in.

“Faith of our fathers! Living still in spite of dungeon, fire, and sword.
O how our hearts beat high with joy whene’er we hear that glorious word! –
Our fathers, chained in prisons dark, were still in heart and conscience free.
How sweet would be their children’s fate if they, like them, could die for Thee! –
Faith of our fathers! We will love both friend and foe in all our strife,
And preach Thee, too, as love knows how, by kindly words and virtuous life.
(Chorus) Faith of our fathers, holy faith! We will be true to Thee till death.”

While our voices sang, our eyes were dampened with tears. And I’ve got tears in my eyes now as I remember that occasion.

In reflecting upon Paul’s time there and the letters he wrote, we never see a defeated attitude. Not a word of “Woe is me,” or “I don’t deserve this, Lord.”

Notice a few things from Paul’s letters.

“Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear” (Philippians 1:12-14).

“But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity. Not that I speak from want; for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:10-13).

And we remember what happened when Paul and Silas were in a prison and the resultant conversion of the jailor and his household. *“And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely; and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison, and fastened their feet in the stocks. But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them” (Acts 16:23-25).*

“Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body (which is the church) in filling up that which is lacking in Christ’s afflictions. Of [this church] I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, that I might fully carry out the [preaching of] the word of God” (Colossians 1:24-25).

“Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, to Philemon our beloved [brother] and fellow worker, and to Apphia our sister, and to Archippus our fellow

soldier, and to the church in your house: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers, because I hear of your love, and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all the saints” (Philemon 1-5).

Paul never gave up. Paul never quit. Was he discouraged at times? Obviously so, but that did not define him.

So, what are we to do when the world turns against us, and everything seems to go dead wrong? We thank God for the blessings we have in Christ. We keep a positive attitude. We pray for strength to endure. We strive to encourage others.

And we remember Paul’s words in Philippians 4:13: “*I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.*”

“Tis easy to smile when life flows along like a song, but the man worthwhile is the man who can smile when everything goes dead wrong.” [Ella Wheeler Wilcox]

What Do You See in a Casket?

By Jarrod M. Jacobs

After the loss of our sister Goldie last week, as I looked at her body in the casket (James 2:26), the question that I used in the title came to my mind. All people must face the reality of death. There is not a day that goes by that someone on this earth is not affected by the death of a friend, loved one, or acquaintance. On some occasions, when people die, we may have to comfort and console those grieving at the loss of their loved ones. At other times, we will be the ones enduring grief and loss while friends and family come to comfort us.

Generally, after one has died, there is an opportunity given for the survivors to see that person’s corpse one last time before it is buried in the earth. As people file past and view the body of a loved one that last time, many thoughts flood the mind, no doubt. In light of this, let us ask the question, “What do you see when you look in a casket?” I believe there are many things we ought to see when viewing that body for the final time. When you look into a casket to view that body, you see:

The End of a Journey on Earth

The body in that casket declares that our life is a short journey at its longest! David says, “*For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told. The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away*” (Psalms 90:9-10). Do any of these descriptions suggest that we might live forever? No! We have a temporary stay upon this earth. James said, “*For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away*” (James 4:14). Let us appreciate what we see when we look into the casket!

Scripture Fulfilled

We mentioned Psalm 90:9-10 and James 4:14, which declare the temporary nature of this life. In addition to these, remember that the Holy Spirit said, *“And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment”* (Hebrews 9:27). Appointed means, “to be reserved; fig. to await:--(be) laid up” (Strong’s). Therefore, it is a promise that all will die. It is “reserved” or “laid up” by God that this will happen. The only ones who will not experience physical death are those who are *“alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord”* (I Thessalonians 4:15). Since we do not know when this will be, the wise choice is to prepare now for death. Hebrews 9:27 is fulfilled daily. This is a fact! Let us be wise as we look into the casket and see the body of a loved one and prepare for eternity.

The End of Decision-Making

Think of all the things we put off until “tomorrow.” Yet, for some, “tomorrow” never comes. Whatever decisions they had to make are forever left undone, and the words they wanted to speak are now left unsaid.

If one has not become a Christian by the time he has died, he can no longer make the choice to turn his life over to God. It is now too late. The Bible teaches that *“now is the accepted time”* and *“now is the day of salvation”* (II Corinthians 6:2). The Hebrew writer said, *“Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts”* (Hebrews 3:7-8, 15). If we are going to decide to leave our lives of sin and live for Christ, we better make this decision now before it is too late! At death, our decision-making days are over!

The End of Earthly Work

Upon looking into the casket, we see the end of opportunities and earthly service. It is the end of teaching others the truth. It is the end of actively being a good example. (We know that Hebrews 11:4 and Revelation 14:13 apply.) A righteous person’s godly deeds have ended at death.

At the same time, if the one who has died has lived wickedly, the wickedness has stopped as well. He will no longer be actively involved in evil deeds, nor will he be saying evil things.

Looking into the casket, we see one who will do nothing more upon this earth. Once our soul slips from our body (James 2:26), this ends our earthly work.

The End of a Family Relationship

Some do not realize the fact that at death, certain relationships end. Both Christ and Paul dealt with this fact. For example, the Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection (Matthew 22:23), confronted Christ as to who a woman might be married to at the resurrection had she been married and widowed by several men (Matthew 22:24-28). Jesus answers by saying, *“In the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven”* (Matthew 22:30).

Paul taught that when a mate dies, the surviving spouse has the right to marry another (Romans 7:1-3). He said, *“For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the*

law of her husband" (Romans 7:2). When looking into the casket, we will at times witness the end of an earthly relationship and see a surviving spouse that is no longer bound in marriage to anyone. Marriage is for this earth-life only.

The End of the Ability to Change Our Eternal Destiny

It is only while we live upon this earth that we have the chance to change our eternal destiny. Only in this life can we make the choice to leave Satan and live for God. After death, we will not be able to choose to do what is right, nor will we forsake the wrong. A prime example of this is in Luke 16:19-31. After the rich man and Lazarus died, the rich man was told there was no way that he could leave the place of torment to be in Paradise with Abraham and Lazarus (Luke 16:26). After our deaths, all that remains in our future is that day of judgment where *"we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad"* (II Corinthians 5:10). Paul taught, *"Every one of us shall give account of himself to God"* (Romans 14:12).

This is why it is vital that we turn from our sins and become Christians now before it is too late! This life is the only time in which we can follow the Lord's plan for salvation (Mark 16:16) and live faithfully for Him (Revelation 2:10) so that we can see Heaven in eternity!

Ourselves in a Short Time

"The living know that they shall die" (Ecclesiastes 9:5). Looking into the casket, we see *"the end of all men"* (Ecclesiastes 7:2). We see something we need to lay to our heart (Ecclesiastes 7:2). We need to understand that looking into the casket and viewing that corpse indicates where we will all be one day. We should see ourselves in that place in just a little while, for our life is *"a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away"* (James 4:14). How carefully are we considering our ways?

Conclusion

"Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth" (Proverbs 27:1). Our Lord taught the parable of the rich fool, a man who had provided for himself but was not *"rich toward God"* (Luke 12:16-21). After providing only for his physical needs, God took him from this earth, asking, *"Who will own what you have prepared?"* (Luke 12:20, NAS). We don't know what will happen in a day. Nor do we know when the time will come for people to file past our casket for the last time.

Let us get our priorities straight! David asked God to *"Teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom"* (Psalms 90:12). How badly we need to be taught this! Let us put God's kingdom and His righteousness first (Matthew 6:33). Let us live faithfully for the Lord all of our life (Revelation 2:10). Let us appreciate the brevity of this life and make the most of every day by being the kind of person God wants us to be. Let us serve Him all the days of our lives so that at the end of this journey on earth, people will not walk by our casket and weep, but take comfort that we sleep *"in Jesus"* (I Thessalonians 4:13-14).