

"O, WHEN WILL THEY EVER LEARN!"

"The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field: The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever" (Isaiah 40:6-8).

Many of the songs that are being written today are sad. One of them asks: "Where have all the flowers gone? ... O, when will they ever learn, when will they ever learn?"

This reminds us of one of the songs of long ago: "A voice says, 'Cry!' and I said, 'What shall I cry?' All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field: The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it: surely the people is grass."

Much of the old optimism is gone, that is, the kind that many people voiced around the turn of this century. Then they talked about the dawn of a better day. It seemed as if science and education were going to revolutionize the world. Much of the protest today is violent reaction against a world which science has helped to produce. Much of the disillusionment of the seventies in this century has come from the failure of education to do what it was expected to do, namely, to bring about heaven on earth. Death is still around, and lots of it. Along with death, there is plenty of disappointment and a lot of despair. Where have all the flowers gone? ... O, when will they ever learn, when will they ever learn?

Every once in awhile, man gets the idea that he has the world on a string. He thinks it is his bowl of cherries; his yoyo, spinning up and down at his control. Man says "jump", and the world is supposed to jump.

Many people built towers. They thought they had arrived. They thought they had constructed a monument to themselves. But they are gone, and so is the monument. It never was finished. "A voice says 'Cry'. What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all its beauty like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it: surely the people is grass."

Believe it or not, Egypt once ruled the world. The monuments are still there, marvels of engineering skill. The pyramids are useless reminders of what is past, and now they are subjects of wry jokes about what was but is no longer.

At its peak, the Roman Empire was the ultimate. Nations trembled under the well-drilled heel of the Roman armies. Nothing could ever bring the proud Roman to his knees, so they thought. Today it is just a story in the history books.

Why go back so far? In the lifetime of many of us, a man got up in Central Europe and proclaimed he was founding a Reich that would last a thousand years. Some of you remember that speech. People trembled. Then the breath of the Lord blew upon his Reich. He lasted twelve years, and his Reich died with him.

Twenty-five years have passed since Adolph Hitler died in his bunker, and already we have entered into a new age. We call it the Atomic Age. Indeed, that is old hat now. We have entered the Space Age. We are reaching for the stars. We have touched the lesser light, the moon. The world watched on television as men from earth left their footprints in the dust of the moon. Where do we go from here?

Medical breakthroughs have robbed many diseases of their terror. Other foes of a longer life will probably disappear in years to come. Organs are being transplanted, and we haven't seen anything yet. Synthetic replacements are on their way. What will happen next?

In 1849 a man, who lived in Kentucky, was writing to his relatives and in his letter he remarked that his life was probably about over. He was an old man, he said. In the letter he mentioned the fact that he was forty-nine, and his wife was forty-eight. That's the way it was in 1849. Things are quite different for some of us in 1970.

Only a short while ago people talked about bringing the work week down to forty hours. Others thought they were crazy. Today we are talking about keeping usefully employed. Computers, automation, and advancing technological know-how have produced a whole new industry -- the great and burgeoning industry of leisure. The financial profits of leisure go into the billions today.

There are advances everywhere, in hybrid corn and in new fertilizers making for more productive farming. Bigger and faster aircraft are rapidly turning the earth into a global neighborhood. Communications-gear returns better photographs of the moon than some of us get with our cameras in our own backyards.

Look what we have done! We have organized everything, and the world is more disorganized than ever before. We are producing furiously and we are polluting the environment with all kinds of stuff that makes the future look dismal indeed. We have attempted to educate ourselves to the limit, and made a glorious mess of almost every human relationship.

With all that we have accomplished, there is a strange uneasiness in the world. Despite all of our successes, a restless wind blows across the age, disturbing our composure and jabbing at our pride.

Something is wrong with our sense of values. Bigger computers and larger gross national products are not the ultimate. We should have known that before. Now it is being brought forcibly to our attention.

With all of our affluence, there is poverty that cannot be swept underneath the rug. With the greatest food production in history, hunger abounds. Despite the magnificent technology of the production lines, no way has been found as yet to produce the one commodity people everywhere are seeking -- peace.

There is a sickness around that can be seen. It is not like a cancer that has to be discovered. This sickness can be seen on the faces of people, in their eyes, in their frozen smiles, and in the bitterness of their speech. It is the malady and tragedy of mankind. A voice says, "Cry!" and I said "What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it. Surely the people is grass."

What we see, no matter how glorious it may appear, is not permanent. It won't last. A flower comes, and a flower goes. Green leaves sprout out, and turn brown. Human endeavor is like that. In spite of all the proud talk, human life is like that. Why? The breath of the Lord blows upon it. God is the consuming fire. People have always failed to reckon with this fact. Somehow, they thought they could get around it. Now,

they think, for the first time maybe they will make it on their own, without God, ignoring God, opposing God, and despising God. That's what a lot of people think today. Nobody -- and I want to repeat that: Nobody -- is going to get away with it.

All flesh is grass. Nothing truer has ever been said. Nothing has happened to change it. There is nothing surprising about it. The only surprise is that anybody could think he could change it, that he could live without the breath of the Lord blowing upon him. Where have all the flowers gone? "O, when will they ever learn, when will they ever learn?"

When shall we ever learn, when shall we ever learn that nobody is going to run God out of His world? It is His world, He made it, and He stands behind it. Behind all the things seen and unseen, there is always God. He is behind all the scientific breakthroughs. Nobody ever discovered anything that God did not put there. The glory is His, and His alone. This is His Word. The Word of our God will stand forever.

The people are His, He made them. When will we ever learn that? We are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand. Let those people turn their faces away from Him, or even against Him, and the breath of our Lord blows upon them. Our world has found it to be a searing breath.

"The grass withers, and the flower fades; but the word of our God stands forever." It's a good word, the Word of God. In spite of everything, God's purpose is good, and His plan is good. People can turn against Him, but He has not turned against them. He is still God, and His thoughts are not our thoughts, His ways are not our ways. His disposition is still kind, and His doings gracious. He promises salvation to all who put their trust in Him, and His Word stands forever.

In Christ God speaks to our world, and in Him God acts to save those who will believe on Him. The Word was made man, and lived among men, and men saw His glory, the glory of the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. The Word of God stands forever.

Jesus Christ died for the sins of men. The Son of God offered Himself for every man, every woman, every body, and every girl. Where have all the flowers gone? They all died that day on the top of a hill when the Son of God laid His life on the line for the lives of the people in the world. He died for those whose lives are like grass withering away under the breath of the Lord. He died that they might live again by faith in Him. In Him there is life, said a man who knew Him well and that is the Word of God. When will we learn, when will we ever learn?

People want to go their own way. That is human nature, as it has come to be. The Son of God took that human nature of ours through the withering process of death, to a glowing new life by resurrection from the dead. Exercise faith in Him and know what it is to be forgiven. Have faith in Him and receive the gift of new life. Have faith in Christ and heed the call of the Word of God which stands forever.

For all the successes of modern civilization, the hearts of people are fainting with fear. Fear absorbs their days, and keeps them awake at night. Why spend your life curled up in some small corner, cling to the nearest security blanket, trying to escape the world that surrounds you?

God is near to you. Christ lives. Christ rules. He cares about you. He holds out His arms toward you and wants to forgive you. Trust Him, and be strong.

Fear comes in numerous ways. People fear growing old and being left behind as a new generation charges into a new decade. Parents are afraid that their children will grow up and leave them. Other parents are afraid that their children will never grow up. A man without a job wonders how he is going to take care of his family. The man with a job is afraid that he will be passed over when the next promotions are handed out. A mother is afraid her son won't return from the war. A father is afraid that his daughter won't return from a date. The poor fear the rich. The rich fear the poor.

I don't know what your fears are. They may have to do with health, money, family, career, or the unknown future. I am here to say to you with all the authority of Christ, "The word of God will stand forever." I know Christ, and I know God is near. He lives and He loves. He forgives, and He will give you the strength that it takes to live as He wants you to live. The Spirit of God is powerful enough to set you free for real living, meeting the hazards of life and overcoming them with confidence that overcomes fear.

I don't know what the seventies will bring, any more than you do. Wouldn't it be a great thing if the nations of the world would come to their senses in this decade, and at least find some measure of peace? Wouldn't it be wonderful if they would find some way by which men would quit killing each other?

Whatever happens, though, it will not be heaven upon earth. There is no perfection in what will one day pass away. There is no permanence in any of the things that are seen. Yet, there is always the great unseen -- the great God Whose breath blows upon the world bearing judgment and salvation. There is still the breath of His Spirit, convicting the world of sin, and bringing to the world the good news of forgiveness and life in Jesus Christ. That Word stands forever. The Word of our God will stand forever!

What's left of life as we used to know it anyway? What's left of the good old times? What's left with reference to the way things used to be? Too many of the things people used to depend upon, the things they thought made life worth living, have changed. What's left?

In August 1969 Hurricane Camille did a great deal of damage in Mississippi, and along the Louisiana Gulf Coast. A radio report told about a certain pastor down there who placed a sign on his outdoor bulletin board the next week. He said: "Thanksgiving service here next Sunday." With all of the devastation on every side, people must have thought this minister was out of his mind. Someone asked him: "Why are you going to conduct a thanksgiving service next Sunday?" He answered, "Those of us who are left are going to thank God for what's left."

What is left? The answer of the Bible comes through loud and clear: "The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever."

We had better get used to the idea that almost anything can disappear, and everything can be changed. It could happen that nothing will remain to remind people of the good old times. People alive today in other parts of the world know what it means to lose everything that they held dear, and when everything is gone, one thing remains: the Word of our God will stand forever.

A lot of young people today have taken to smoking pot, going on LSD trips, sniffing airplane glue, taking "goof balls", and fooling around with sex as if it were a toy

to be used and thrown away. One observer of the teenage drug scene has analyzed the situation this way: "Most of today's suburban youths have never wanted for anything. They've had everything and experienced everything -- liquor, cars, sex -- by the time they are in their teens. This is what's left -- drugs for kicks."

The world hasn't turned out the way people expected. This was supposed to be the most exciting age in the history of mankind. It was thought that the achievements of science would bring about the millennium. Now life is so dull and sodden that young people have to turn to drugs for kicks, while their elders try to live on booze. This is the age in which people have thought they could do without God. People have thought that they did not need God anymore to keep them going. They have thought they could go it on their own. Now, many are asking: "What's left?"

When people forget about God, the fun goes out of life. Life is completely empty for them. My life would be empty too, as would yours, if it depended entirely upon kicks for fun.

Whether it is drugs or making money or politics or anything else that engrosses a man's attention and takes him away from God, Isaiah tells us, "The grass withers." Millions of people don't know where to turn. The grass has withered, and the flower has faded. Dreams are shattered and disappointments have taken their place. Disappointments have brought disillusionment, and disillusionment has created despair. In some cases, despair has brought on degradation. What's left anyway?

In these days of despair, when everything else goes, Christ remains, the same yesterday, today, and forever. He is the center of everything. In Christ the Word of God stands sure and forever. Christ is for you. In Christ God speaks to you: "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." Friends may forsake you. Even members of your own family may forget you. God promises: I won't do it. I will remember. "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." The Word of God stands forever.

In Christ God says to you: "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." In Christ there is peace for old people, and for young people, for all people with problems to solve and loads to carry. In Christ God comforts you: "I will be with you. I will strengthen you."

When the losses come, as they will, there stands God. In that bleak moment when you lay to rest for the last time someone who is close to you, God will be with you. In that moment when you feel all alone, God is left. Life comes from God. It is to be found in Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth, and the Life. The Word of God stands forever. Let Christ live in your heart by faith, and then you yourself live by faith in Him.