

DEATH

The Sword of Damocles

In the fourth century B.C. Dionysius the Elder was the ruler of Syracuse in Sicily. There was a young courtier named Damocles, who sought the favor of the King. According to a story recounted by Roman writers he frequently made reference to the happiness and grandeur of rulers. He thus hoped to elevate himself to positions of power and wealth. Soon Damocles was invited to a banquet spread with delicacies fit for a king. The young courtier was overwhelmed with happiness as he dined in regal splendor. Suddenly, however, he was overcome by terror . . . for casting his eyes upward he saw a sharp sword suspended above his head by a single thread. Damocles thus learned that even in times of luxury, wealth, and comfort, death and destruction may only be moments away.

How practical this lesson is for the millions of America. We too dine in regal splendor. While most of our world's inhabitants go hungry we suffer from surplus. Someone said recently, that though we have but 10% of the world's population we consume 60% of the world's natural resources. We receive more money

for less work than any people who have ever walked upon this earth. We would like to believe that the banquet would never come to an end. We can hope that nothing will interrupt our felicity and prosperity . . . but the sword of Damocles sways gently above our heads.

People have a way of hearing only what they want to hear. We train ourselves to shut out unpleasant noises and thoughts. Mr. Average American can walk down a busy street oblivious to the sounds of traffic and the roar of the crowd . . . but should you drop a coin upon the pavement you would immediately arrest his attention.

It is therefore to be expected that a nation would reject its prophets of doom. The average life span of a nation is approximately 200 years. The citizens of every fallen empire had essentially the same philosophy . . . "It can never happen here". . . but they were wrong. Every nation that has risen has also fallen. There is only one Kingdom that shall not be destroyed or left to another people, and that is the Kingdom of Christ.

It is time that Christian people were shaken from their lethargy and indifference with an awareness that only what is done for Christ will last. Our nation, regardless of how great it is today, is not eternal. The signs of decay in the foundations of our society are unmistakable. Only the longsuffering of God stands between us and doom. The sword of Damocles is discernable to all who have eyes to see.

Yesterday is a cancelled check —
Tomorrow is a promissory note —
Today is the only asset you have.
Spend it wisely.

Come Before Winter

(Clarence Edward Macartney)

Clarence Edward Macartney was the famous preacher of the Arch Street Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. In 1915 he delivered there for the first time his famous address "Come Before Winter." Thereafter, he repeated the message each October for the remainder of his ministry.

Without detracting from the brilliance and eloquence of Mr. Macartney, may I suggest that the primary reason for the success of that message lay in its truth. The facts of the message are much more important than the manner of its presentation. The exposition of this section of scripture pierces the heart with the tragic and painful effects of procrastination. "Come Before Winter."

Paul was in prison. The end was near. "The time of his departure was at hand." His course was finished. Before he donned the martyrs crown he wrote one last message to mankind. In the concluding sentences of that letter he made several requests which provide an interesting insight into the austere life of an apostle. He had no large estates to dispose of or money to disperse. His final days were free from the entangling affairs of finance and commerce. He asked for his coat to be brought from Troaz, he also wanted the books . . . but especially the parchments (II Tim. 4:13). The "books" were probably early copies of the gospel and the "parchments" might well have been the Hebrew Scriptures. How utterly touching and beautiful that the apostle who labored more abundantly than they all would ask only for something to keep him warm and for the precious words of scripture.

. . . but time was of essence "Do thy diligence to come before winter" (II Tim. 4:21). In winter no ships would sail . . . the following spring no doubt would be too late. Before winter or never! The fragile strand that bound this man to earth was soon to be severed by a Roman sword . . . come before winter . . . or never!

A student at the Jefferson Medical College heard this message from Macartney and sat down to write his mother a letter that was long over-due. The very next day after the letter was mailed he received a telegram that she was dying. He left immediately for that farm so many miles away and hurrying up the stairs he found his mother still living. A faint smile of recognition swept across her face . . . and beneath her pillow was that precious letter which he had written only the Sunday night before.

The saddest sentence in English literature is felt by some to be found in the diary of Thomas Carlyle. He wrote despondently of his neglected wife. "Oh, that I had you yet for five minutes by my side, that I might tell you all." So genuine was his grief at her passing that he had these words inscribed over her grave,

For forty years she was a true and loving helpmate of her husband, and by act and word worthily forwarded him as none else could in all worthy he did or attempted. She died at London the 21st of April, 1886, suddenly snatched from him, and the light of his life as if gone out.

Those of us who treat our loved ones as though we would always have them with us should read with reverence this further admonition from Carlyle:

Cherish what is dearest while you have it near you, and wait not till it is far away. Blind and deaf that we are, O think, if thou yet love anybody living, wait not till death sweep down the paltry little dust clouds and dissonances of the moment, and all be made at last so mournfully clear and beautiful, when it is too late.

Macartney concluded his message with these words,

Once again, then, I repeat these words of the Apostle, "Come before winter," and as I pronounce them, common sense, experience, conscience, scripture, the Holy Spirit, the souls of just men made perfect and the Lord Jesus Christ all repeat with me,

COME BEFORE WINTER

"Come before winter!" Come before the haze of Indian summer has faded from the fields! Come before the November wind strips the leaves from the trees and sends them whirling over the fields! Come before the snow lies on the uplands and the meadow brook is turned to ice! Come before desire has failed! Come before life is over and your probation ended, and you stand before God to give an account of the use you have made of the opportunities which in his grace he has granted to you.

Come before winter!

Condensed from *Christian Herald*, Oct., 1972

Faithful Unto Death

(A Tribute to W. Frank Kling)

Born June 15, 1937 – Died July 3, 1975)

Faithful unto death . . . not until graduation . . . or college . . . or until you purchase property at the lake . . . or until you get that promotion at work . . . or until you retire . . . but the First and the Last, the One who was dead and is alive again, declares “. . . be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (Rev. 2:10).

The word faithful, is used in the Bible in two different ways. First of all it refers to someone who is reliable or trustworthy; secondly it describes those who believe, trust and rely on God. Both of these descriptions seem appropriate in our remembrance of Frank. He was so reliable and trustworthy that he was made the treasurer of our church. He not only kept books and made payroll for our church, but somehow managed to budget his spare time to do the same thing for several local businesses as well. His faithfulness to the doctrine of Christ is demonstrated by the fact that he became probably the youngest man to ever serve this church in the capacity of an elder.

It is a common thing for men to eulogize the dead. Once a man is gone we have a tendency to play down his faults and speak out of his virtues. I have tried to honestly assess my own feelings in this regard and I have still concluded that any objective observer would have to view the life of Frank Kling with admiration and respect. He gave his heart to Jesus back in 1958 and from then until the time of his death he was consistently striving to be acceptable to God.

Frank and Jeanne were the first persons to be married in the facilities of the Fairview Christian Church. Because he was regular in attendance and diligent in his Christian growth he became a deacon, a Bible School teacher, and then an elder. The fact that he was made the secretary of the elders is another indication of his character and dependability.

FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH

Though quiet and unassuming, his qualities of leadership were evident in every area of his life. It caused him to be promoted at work . . . to become a leader and council member in the scouting program . . . and to be highly esteemed in his community and his church.

I have never been much interested in bestowing pointless praise upon a person simply because they happened to die, but I am profoundly interested in incorporating into my own life the virtues which I have seen in Frank. I would not only like to see them in my own life but also in the church. If every member of our church was as diligent and dependable, as willing and as constructive, as generous and as humble, as Frank Kling we would shift out of neutral and move like a mighty army for God. I have, therefore the highest motive in extoling the virtues of this Godly life. May we be imitators of him, even as he was of Christ.

Members of his family have remarked upon the intensity of his life. Like a man with a deadline to meet he has burned the midnight oil for many years. The finale to his life appropriately came while Frank was in the pursuit of "true religion." His heart was burdened for the fatherless and he and his family were returning from Ft. Chaffee where they were making arrangements to care for orphaned refugees. The circumstances surrounding his death cause us to believe that God was there. Only Frank was taken. His wife and children escaped death by inches. Their car flipped upside down on the spot where a firecracker stand had been located just a short while before — someone decided to move it because they thought it might be too close to the road. The utility pole which they struck protected a small grocery store where four people were providentially spared from suffering and death.

Selfishly, we were not ready to let him go . . . but our faith leads us to trust God even where it is impossible for us to test Him. Frank died in the harness. His life was a worthy example for his children, his church, his community, and his world . . . and he was faithful unto death. Someday, may the same be said of us.

Ignaz Phillip Semmelweis **(1818-1865)**

When I with my present conviction look back upon the Past, I can only dispel the sadness which falls upon me by gazing into that happy Future when wherein the lying-in hospitals, and also outside of them, throughout the whole world, childbed fever will be no more. . . .

But if it is not vouchsafed me to look upon that happy time with my own eyes, from which misfortune may God preserve me, the conviction that such a time must inevitably sooner or later arrive will cheer my dying hour.

Thus were the words of Ignaz Phillip Semmelweis, the man who accomplished more for the mothers of this world than any individual since Jesus Christ. And, true to form, he died estranged and rejected by the society which he served. We learn so slowly . . . we have stoned and martyred the saviours of every generation. We have burned and crucified the heroes of history as they bravely trespassed traditions in a valiant quest for new horizons of truth.

Dr. Semmelweis was born in a world of dying women. A savage epidemic swept across Europe leaving millions of young mothers in its dreadful wake. The finest hospitals lost one out of six to the scourge of childbed fever. Weary surgeons labored long into the night as the shrieks and moans of the doomed and dying echoed down the corridors of every clinic. Doctors everywhere were faced with the constant transformation of a young healthy mother into a grotesque and swollen corpse. This was an era of unbelievable ignorance. Filth and putrefication abounded but no one associated such contamination with disease and infection. The doctor's daily routine began in the dissecting room where autopsies were performed on those who had died during the preceding twenty four hours. He then made his way to the hospital to make pelvic examinations upon expectant mothers

without every pausing to wash his hands. Dr. Semmelweis was the first man in history to associate such examinations with resultant infection and death. He kept careful records and instituted the practice of washing in a chlorine solution to disinfect anything that would contaminate his patients. In eleven years he supervised the delivery of 8,537 babies with the loss of only 184 mothers. An unbelievable mortality record of 0.02%. These remarkable statistics were published in medical journals and incorporated in a book entitled *The Etiology, The Concept, and the Propylaxis of Childbed Fever*. Dr. Semmelweis spent the prime and vigor of his life in lecturing and debating with his colleagues. He answered thousands of objections with statistical and scientific facts — yet virtually no one believed him. He lost his position in Vienna and was rejected in Budapest. Doctors and midwives had been delivering babies for thousands of years without washing in a chlorine solution and no outspoken Hungarian was going to change them now. His articles were the objects of scorn and his lectures derided and ridiculed.

Morton Thompson, in his book *The Cry and the Covenant* records these words from the third lecture which Dr. Semmelweis delivered to a medical society (June 15, 1848):

I have now shown, on three occasions before this body, that pureperal fever is caused by decomposed material conveyed to a wound. I have shown that it is a pyemia, a pus in the blood. I have shown that a man can infect a woman with this pyemia and that a man can infect another man with it — for so Kolletschka died. I have shown that it can arise after surgery as well as after childbirth and in the non-pregnant as well as the pregnant. I have shown that it can be prevented. I have shown how it can be prevented. I have proved all that I have said with facts, with records, with laboratory experiments, and with human beings. I have talked a great deal. But while we talk and talk, gentlemen, women are dying. And doctors are killing them. There is no lying-in hospital where women are not dying of childbed fever. And their children with them. And we talk, gentlemen. We talk and talk and talk. And it is not necessary to talk. I am not asking anything world-

PERSONAL VIGNETTES

shaking. I am asking you only to wash. In the name of pity — stop the murder of mothers, gentlemen. Wash your hands. Wash everything that contacts a patient. Stop this murder. For God's sake — wash your hands.

Ignaz Phillip Semmelweis died insane at the age of 47. His wash basins discarded, his colleagues laughing in his face, and the death rattle of a thousand women ringing in his ears. His son, Bela, committed suicide at the age of 25, despairing that his father's teachings would never be accepted.

Sir Wm. Joppa Sinclair, professor of Gynaecology and Obstetrics, from the University of Manchester wrote, "The great revolution of modern times in Obstetrics as well as in Surgery is the result of the one idea that, complete and clear, first arose in the mind of Semmelweis, and was embodied in the practice of which he was the pioneer. . . ."

God help us to learn from history. . . .

Armageddon

(In the Honor and Memory of Eugene Morain
November 6, 1912 – May 20, 1983)

. . . For they are the spirits of devils working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame. And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon . . . (Rev. 16:14-16).

The word "Armageddon" is found but one time in all the Bible (Rev. 16:16). Perhaps a more accurate spelling would be "Har-Magedon." The word *har* is the Hebrew word for "mountain." *Magedon* is generally associated with Megiddo. This association, however, is by no means certain.

First of all, there is no mountain at Megiddo. The mound at Megiddo is more of a small hill than a mountain. Mt. Tabor, however, to the North is in plain view of Megiddo.

There is also some question regarding the association of *Magedon* with Megiddo. The extra "d" and the missing "n" are sources of concern.

A wide variety of theories, both ancient and modern, have excited the inhabitants of every generation. There will be a great final battle, but the time and the location of this battle are subject to different interpretations.

If this battle is to take place near Megiddo it will be at the site of several other famous battles. It was here that Barak defeated the Canaanites (Jdgs. 5) and that Gideon triumphed over the forces of Midian (Jdgs. 7). It was here that Saul was slain in battle (I Sam. 31:8) and that King Josiah perished at the hands of the Egyptians (II Kgs. 23:29).

Some have suggested that the final battle was not to be actually fought at Megiddo, only that it would begin there. The area

is actually quite small and it has been suggested that perhaps the major battle would occur along the River Euphrates which is also mentioned in the narrative.

Since even the scholars are not quite certain about this battle, permit me to recount for you a theory which was advanced by one of the elders of our church, Gene Morain. One evening after prayer meeting he came up to me and quietly said, "I have a personal theory that the Battle of Armageddon is an individual struggle which everyone of us will face with the enemy of death." He then politely went on his way leaving me to ponder the wisdom of his words.

Quite frankly, I am impressed. Many prophetic scriptures have more than one fulfillment. Therefore, Brother Morain's concept would not negate a future fulfillment in some other part of the world.

It is a fact, however, that Eugene Morain no longer has to worry about Armageddon. He suffered a serious heart attack on Thursday, May 19. Beset by great pain and nausea he said to his family . . . "I hate to leave you but I think I am going. . . ."

Somehow he managed to survive a few hours longer. At a little after 6:00 on Friday morning he was able to have a ten-minute conversation with his doctor. "Will I make it, Doc?" he asked. The doctor responded that it was too soon to tell. Then with the doctor looking on he suffered a massive heart attack. The doctor was in the cardiac care unit of a new hospital and had everything at his fingertips which modern medical science could provide. In a few short minutes the battle was over and Eugene Morain had broken through the enemy line into eternity.

Like the Armageddon of Revelation 16 he had been expecting this battle . . . yet it still came as a thief. So, also, it is a battle which the "whole world" will be summoned to fight. Preparation for this battle involves "keeping his garments" so that the shame of our nakedness does not appear.

Gene told his doctor, "If I can live I would like to, but if this is my time to die I'm ready for that, too!"

ARMAGEDDON

Nobody who knew him has any doubt that he was prepared for his summons to Armageddon . . . and that he has now been crowned with victory.

Home At Last

(Mike Durre)

I had tentatively expected a phone call from Gerald Durre on Monday, January 9. On Tuesday I phoned him. He apologized and said, "Of course, you have heard that my oldest son, Mike, was killed yesterday." I had not. I was stunned! Mike was a preacher from a family of preachers. He died "on the way." He and his family were en route to help someone when the fatal wreck occurred. Mike and his two-year old son, Will, were killed. Erin, his wife, and their son, Damon, were in the hospital in Mt. Vernon, Ohio. I have been deeply humbled by the unswerving devotion and beautiful trust in the lives of these people who are sold out for Jesus. Here is a tribute to Mike Durre which was written by his father.

Mom doesn't have to wait up for the telephone call this time. She knows Mike and Will made it all the way home. They're safe in the arms of Jesus. Our boys have always been "front page" news in the church papers across the country where dad has been. I'm so proud of every one of our kids and their mates. Wish I could edit Heaven's Journal this edition, but I know God's got the news out loud and clear. They're home!

Our family has decided we know exactly what Mike's doing about now. He's cornering Paul and asking, "Just what IS woman's place in the church, anyhow?" And he's flooding Moses with all those questions he's always wondered about. And just in case things might get boring, he turns to say, "St. Peter, did you hear the one about. . . ."

Gene Mullins of Oklahoma City, says he knows Mike is asking, "Lord, which do you want first, the good news or the bad news?" "The bad news is that Jones isn't going to make the team tonight. And the good news is that I'm going to take his place."

One thing we know for sure: Mike's found someone up there to help. It may take food from the table or time from the family, but he'll break his back until he finds someone he can help. Praise the Lord! Isn't that great!

HOME AT LAST

Mike always seemed to go "upstream" in the river of life. Seldom did things go easy for him. Yet he had some rules he sought always to live by. First, SET YOUR GOALS . . . HIGH. At age six he was baptized into Christ. But not until he had come forward the third time in two consecutive Revival services. Dad sent him back to his seat the first two times. What difficult decisions parents do have. He determined soon thereafter to be a Preacher. But really he wanted to teach in Bible College. He "didn't want to babysit with a bunch of Elders," he used to say. And yet he soon learned to work most harmoniously with these men of God. His goal was to be the best of whatever he was doing at the time even though he generally considered himself far from this goal.

SECOND . . . STAND UP FOR YOUR CONVICTIONS!

How often he stood alone. Generally he had thought it out very thoroughly and stood right where he should have. How many of his peers have said that Mike's stand was the very stability of their own lives. Thank you, Lord, for giving him a level head. Oh, he paid a price for his stand. But he considered the end result well worth the cost. And now he has "kept the faith, he has finished the course" and there is "laid up for (him) a crown of righteousness." Yes, Mike, it's always worth it.

Again, LET GOD GIVE THE SIGNALS. I have seen Mike on his knees often, praying for God to guide. The Lord has never disappointed him. People have, but not the Lord. In 28 years Mike packed so very much into life. Unselfish in helping others, he died as he lived. His New Year's message at Killbuck was, "Lord, Come in 1978!"

Mike and his youngest son, Will, (age two) have received their promotion. They have graduated from the everyday grind of this life into the perfect peace of His presence. All because of Jesus. Thank you, Jesus.

Erin says she awoke several times in the hospital with the awful sense that Mike was carrying Will all over heaven, and she wasn't there. Her mother, Barbara, then told her that we had buried Mike and Will together in the same casket. Will's head rests on the left shoulder of Mike, and Mike's arms encircle his son. Now, Erin can remember this beautiful sight instead of the awfulness of the wreck. Praise God.

Mike is doing just what he always has wanted to do — go on ahead and get everything ready for the coming of the rest of us.

PERSONAL VIGNETTES

See you at home, Mike. Take good care of Will.

— Dad

Written by Gerald Durre upon the death of his son Mike

Shall We All Please Bow Our Heads

(Mike Pratt)

Each of us develop in life certain traits of character or personality by which we are recognized and remembered by those around us. The phrase, "Shall we all please bow our heads" will always remind me of the late Mike Pratt, for it seemed to be the hallmark of his personality and every public appearance. Mike was sensitive to any distraction that would detract from that reverence which belongs only to God. Therefore when he would stand up to sing he would invariably request that we listen to his music with bowed heads. Such an approach enabled us to focus our attention on a message instead of a man . . . a principle instead of a person. The bowed head is a beautiful symbol of submission and faith. It is used of Moses who interceded with God in behalf of a wayward nation. It is used of a publican who was so aware of his own imperfections that he would not so much as lift his eyes to God. It is used of Jesus at Calvary who "bowed his head and gave up the ghost."

On December 24, 1974, Mike Pratt and two companions perished in a plane crash two miles North of Swedeborg, Missouri. Though it is impossible for us to reconstruct all of the events which led to that rendezvous with destiny, I will always believe that Mike died as he had lived, with a head bowed in submission to God.

Many of you will remember that Mike graduated with honors from the Ozark Bible College in Joplin. He was a capable preacher and teacher and some were perhaps disappointed when he did not accept a "full time pulpit ministry" but elected instead to return to the farm. He did, however, preach and teach on the weekends as doors of opportunity were opened unto him. Mike was working in our church at the very time he was wrestling with this difficult decision and though many would misunderstand, he did what he

felt constrained by God to do . . . and to have done otherwise would have been bowing his head in the wrong direction.

Thus the Pratt farm became a sounding board for the gospel. A place where troubled teens and a disillusioned college students could find a friend. A place where Christian mottos and meaningful scriptures were plastered on the walls. A place where Christian records were played, Christian songs were sung and Christian books were read. A place where a voluminous library of cassette tapes offered a veritable treasure of sermons, lectures, and lessons regarding the Christian faith. Some of his neighbors found it difficult to understand such a strange life style, but Mike was marching to the beat of a different drum and his head was bowed in reverent submission to the authority of heaven.

Mike was possessed with a keen awareness that the body of Christ is an organism, not an organization. On various occasions he would muse on Romans 12:8 and wonder if God might not have endowed him with the sacred responsibility of distributing wealth. Perhaps this will help some of you to understand the strange paradox of a young man in ragged jeans and broken glasses writing out a check for several thousand dollars to some Christian cause.

The simple explanation for his unusual behaviour is that Mike regarded himself a slave to heaven and would therefore do virtually nothing without a prayerful consultation with his heavenly master. The purchase of every item was made by a deliberate decision after considering his role in the body and the stewardship of his life. His airplane was no exception, for he felt it would be a tool to magnify his ministry. In a similar way, each trip he took seemed to assume the role of a mission involving the happiness of others or the furtherance of the kingdom . . . his final trip was no exception.

And so dear Jesus we surrender to your will and commit him to your care . . . and though we do not understand . . . out of love for you . . . and respect for him . . . our heads are still bowed.