

A BED, A BASKET OR A CANDLE
TEXTS: AMOS 6:1; ACTS 20:35; MATTHEW 5:14-16
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How do you look upon the Christian experience? I find there are three great attitudes Christian's have. There are those who look upon it in terms of a bed, those who look upon it as a basket, and others who view the Christian experience like a candle. A bed, a basket and a candle, we'll look at all three today.

I. MANY LOOK UPON THE LIFE IN TERMS OF A BED.

In Amos 6:1 we read: "*Woe unto them that are at ease in Zion.*" Who is Amos referring to? He is not talking about sinners because Zion is God's city. In New Testament terms, we might say "Woe unto them that are at ease in their Christian inheritance. In my terms, I would say: "Woe unto the Christians who look upon life as a bed."

Just think of these figures. 5% of church members cannot be located on earth. They leave a church where they are members and never show up again. 10% of church members haven't been heard from in years. 50% of Church members make no contribution to the church. 90% of the church members have never won a soul to Christ. We are indeed "at ease in Zion."

Let me share three observations for you.

1- Life is not a bed of ease because ease is the enemy of time. Jesus said "I must work the works of him that sent me."

2- Life is not a bed of ease because ease is the enemy of spirituality.

3- Life is not a bed of ease because ease is the enemy of progress. The Church today has made great progress. There are more missionaries in more countries than ever before. The Bible continues to be translated into most known languages. But just think how much more could be accomplished if so many of you weren't taking it easy. Typically, 70% of you came to church this morning, and that was the total involvement with the church you will have this week. Now let me ask you this, if all Christians were just like you, where would the Church be today?

II- OTHERS LOOK UPON LIFE IN TERMS OF A BASKET.

People who look upon life like a basket typically are most interested in what they can get out of life. Like the Prodigal Son, so many say: Give me what is mine and let me do as I want. Jesus said "*For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.*" (Matt. 16:25) Perhaps we could translate that in contemporary terms "He that looks upon life as a basket shall lose it." So what is wrong with a basket religion?

Here are three words starting with S to help you remember what a basket religion is.

1- Basket religion is a **Selfish** religion.

2- Basket religion is a **Separating** religion. It drives you away from God.

3- Basket religion is a **Saddening** religion. It produces no real happiness. Jesus told his disciples: "*It is more blessed to give than to receive.*"(Acts 20:35) The opposite is a basket religion. It not only saddens you, but it saddens God. He knows how dangerous it is. What would happen if you put your arm in a sling and just left it there, never moving it, never using it? In a short time your muscles will degenerate to nothing, even to the point of not being able to recover. Too many carry your hearts in a sling. Over time, your hearts have grown narrow. Left to deteriorate, eventually you will become so self-centered that you will find yourself like the character Dickens created named Scrooge. Had his life continued unchanged the future would have been so sad that the character could not stand to see it.

III- THANK GOD, THERE ARE THOSE WHO LOOK UPON LIFE IN TERMS OF A CANDLE.

Have you ever been in a large room where the light came only from a candle held by each person in the room. When the first candle is lit and the lights are turned off, there is almost total darkness. But when each person lights his candle, gradually the light increases until the room is filled with light.

In a recent Billy Graham crusade singer George Beverly Shea taught a Bible story through a song called "This Little Light of Mine" The words say "This little light of mine I'm gonna let it shine...hide it under a bushel- NO- I'm gonna let it shine."

That is the example Jesus shared with his disciples. In Matthew 5 we read:

14 *Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid.*

15 *Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.*

16 *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*

Here are two words starting with the letter S to help you remember life like a candle.

1- God calls upon us to **Spread** the light

Study the scriptures and you will see widening circles of illumination. Verse 15 speaks of a house. A Christian who forgets his faith in his house, who is gracious to strangers on the street but keeps only ill will for his home, is a poor representation of a Christian life. In verse 14, we have the city. In olden times the watchman would move through the city streets at nightfall crying: "Hang out your lights." We must let our lights shine in the community also. The same verse tells us that the world is the sphere of our light. We are to spread the light to the whole world.

2-God calls upon us to **Share** the light

Your light is not an advertising light, it is an alter light. It must be fed if it is to burn. It must be sacrificial. As you share the light, you must realize that it is your job to bring the light to peoples faces. Jesus said: "I am the light of the world". And then he said: "Ye are the light of the world." Jesus taught that "*With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.*" (Matt. 7:2) You must be a blessing in proportion to the blessings you receive. When Jesus came into your life, you received another chance. You then are required to give others another chance.

Dr. A. J. Cronin tells of his first assignment after ending Medical school. It was in a Welch town. A little girl had diphtheria. Her throat was filled with membrane. He says: "I had to take a sharp scalpel and make an incision in her windpipe and put in a tube. I was so thrilled when I saw the blackness leave her face." He continues: "Along about midnight, I decided to sleep an hour so I called in a 19 year old country girl who had just finished her nurses training. Do you think you can watch over her and let me get some sleep?" he asked. "Oh yes" she said. "Now the tube might get stopped up. If it does take it out, clean it, and slip it back in quickly." Dr. Cronin instructed. As he had predicted, the tube got stopped up. The young nurse lost her nerve, and instead of taking out the tube and cleaning it, she came running into Dr. Cronin. When he returned to the girl, the child was dead. "I was furious," he recalled, telling the girl "you should have your nurses license taken away. You ought never to be allowed to nurse again." The next morning Dr. Cronin called the girl back in. He had written a report of what she had done. "I was getting ready to send it to the board" he recalled. She sat there; chin quivering, and tears began to trickle down her young face. "Doctor, please give me one more chance" she begged. "I'll think about it" was all he could reply. "That night, I didn't sleep much" he recalls, "I just heard that pleading voice: 'give me one more chance'. I dropped off to sleep. In my dreams I kept hearing those words 'just give me one more chance'. Waking from this restless sleep, I knelt down and prayed: 'Dear Jesus, that is what I had to ask you one day. Give me one more chance. Why can't I do the same for her'" He walked over to his desk, took the report and tore it up. Said he: "She is today the superintendent of the largest children's hospital in the British Empire."

Why is Christianity not a bed, not a basket, but a candle? It is lighting up a life of someone else, it is giving to others the mercy, the forgiveness and the second chance that God has given us. It is sharing the source of light, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.