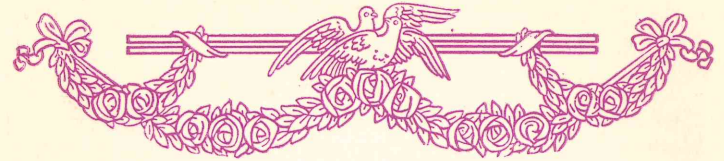



How Old
Are You
?

How Old Are You?



BY
JOSIAH HOPKINS
PARSON
COUNTRY CHURCH OF HOLLYWOOD



N January 2, 1937, the Country Church of Hollywood celebrated its fourth anniversary. For four years we have been on KFAC with a morning broadcast, and oftentimes with an extra broadcast through the day. For many months we were on the air Sunday afternoons from 2:30 to 4:00 p. m. We have had West Coast broadcasts on one of the great chains and a coast-to-coast broadcast, part of the time a sustaining and part of the time a commercial. We thank God for every opportunity that has come to us through these four years.

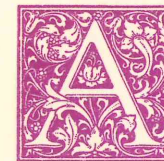
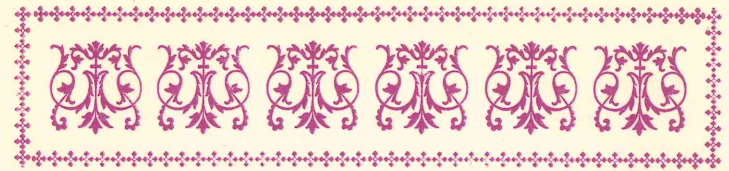
The Little Country Church has had its blue days just like you have had, but the bright days have far outnumbered the dark ones. We thank God for all! We face Nineteen Hundred and Thirty-seven with a buoyant optimism, and particularly with gratitude in our hearts for the support given the Country Church of Hollywood by all of you neighbors, and I am sure that God will put it in the heart of every one of you to keep the little bell ringing and the services going on through Nineteen Hundred and Thirty-seven. Thank God for each one of you!

One of the great things of 1937 was the coming of Dr. A. P. Gouthey to Goose Creek. It was providential, because I had to be "laid up for repairs" and rest, and God brought to us the best man available in all the world, and he has rendered a marvelous service. Thank God for A. P. Gouthey and his good wife, Ruth, who is such a wonderful helpmate.

As I write these lines, I cannot restrain my appreciation of the service that Sarah has rendered when I was in the hospital and all through the year in her beautiful ministry on both radio and in the pulpit. Thank God for her!

So, hand in hand, and heart with heart, we step into the New Year believing that God will supply all our needs, and with a fervent prayer in our hearts that God will make us a blessing to all of you throughout the year. A Happy New Year to you all!

JOSIAH HOPKINS.



NEW YEAR has just been born! Exulting crowds have greeted the lusty babe, Nineteen Hundred and Thirty-seven, with enthusiasm, but, when the thrill of the baby's advent has passed, practically every person will solemnly add another year to his age. Something within me revolts at this method of computing a person's age, that is, merely adding up the number of years in which one has been born! Life has other dimensions than mere links! The fact is that a majority of the earth's great have died without ever knowing a great length of years, and the grandest life this old planet ever knew barely reached His thirty-third birthday when His earthly life was cut short on a cross outside Jerusalem. All of us know that there are persons who eke out an existence like a crocodile, while others live gloriously for a time on the sun-kissed hills of real living. Surely there is some method of finding out how much one has really lived!

Pharaoh raised this question in Genesis 47:8, when he asked Jacob, "How old art thou?" and I think that perhaps we have found a method of computing the age of a human life in the reply that Jacob gave the ruler of Egypt. Here's Jacob's answer contained in the verse that follows:

"And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage."

Notice that Jacob raised the distinction between his "pilgrimage" and his "life." He said that the days of the years of his pilgrimage were a hundred and thirty years, but he added that few and evil had been the days of the years of his life. I

think that we have found a path here, which, if we will follow, will lead us to some quiet glade of meditation where we may discover a message of computing the real maturity of a life.

Jacob's pilgrimage was like yours and mine, a procession of new years, a passing away of old years, a panorama of common places, the wrinkling of the brow, the stooping of the shoulder, the dimming of the eye, and the slowing down of the steps to the tottering dotage of old age. But, you never would make me believe that that is the way to discover how old one is! Merely counting the wrinkles, or measuring the angle of the stooping shoulders, the slowness of the speed of the steps or the dimness of the eye, or to merely add up the succession of the years through which this process has gone on—that never tells the real age of a human soul!

In drawing a distinction between his pilgrimage and his life, Jacob raised all sorts of questions. He must have meant by the term, "life," the longings of his heart, the tears he had shed in secrecy, the moments of silent wonder, the glorious meeting places with God, the lessons his soul had learned on its pilgrimage across the years!

This grand old patriarch who had come down to Egypt to be the guest of his son, Joseph, prime-minister of Egypt, confessed to the monarch that the days of the years of his life had been few, and added that even those few days had been evil—far below their possibilities. Jacob seemed to pay little attention to the hundred and thirty years through which he had been traveling over the earth, but was much concerned about the days of his life. He evidently meant that he had seen few great days in all those one hundred and thirty years! There is an undercurrent of apology in this answer to the ruler of Egypt, and well might Jacob have been ashamed of much of his life, but he had had his great moments. How could he have forgotten when his old father, Isaac, said to him, "Behold, thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above." How could he have forgotten Bethel, where God confirmed the Abrahamic covenant to him and his descendants. The memory of Rachel, beautiful and well-favored, lingered like the perfume of the flowers in his soul.

Doubtless, his greatest moment is recorded in Genesis 32:28, where God changed his name from Jacob, "a supplanter," to Israel, "a prince with God." It was of these golden moments that Jacob was thinking, when he said to Pharaoh, "Few have been my days."

This raises the question, "How many great days of golden moments have we had?" Surely, this is the way to measure the age of a life. How many high moments have been gathered by the soul, rather than the length of years through which we have journeyed across the surface of the earth? Most of us are slaves of time. We allow it to build its barricades about us, and to narrow our lives down to a mournful procession through the years, while we chant the doleful dirge,

"The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,
All that beauty, all that wealth ere gave,
Await alike the inevitable hour,
The paths of glory lead but to the grave."

I refuse to submit passively to the enslavement of time, and allow a deathless personality to wear the handcuffs of time, and to drag through a miserable existence a ball and chain of mortality!

Our hearts have heard with gladness that great Bible promise, "He hath put eternity in their hearts." This passage enfranchises all who know God! It tears from our body the galling chains of time and death, and it makes us citizens of eternity! Of course, every soul is eternal. There is no destruction of matter. How could there be annihilation of personality? We apparently destroy an object by reducing it to smoke and ashes. Time doubtless could reconstruct the article which we burned and, in a synthetic form, hand it back to us again. How much more does the soul of man, made in the image of God, defy destruction? The difference in the eternal future of human souls is merely that one group will know God forever, and those who know Him not in this life will never know Him. So, it is an eternity with or without God! When a human soul is born again by coming into personal contact with Jesus Christ

as a Savior, he immediately throws off the shackles of the slavery of time and literally has eternity in his heart. How foolish of such a person to be whipped by a few wrinkles or a few gray hairs or stooping shoulders! And the one who has never been born again has never really lived one day!

Doubtless, the confession of each one of us when asked in the light of Pharaoh's question would also say, "Few and evil have been the days of my years." So few human beings have had a succession of golden days! Regardless of the flight of time or the passage of the years, people go through life without ever knowing its real meaning or walking on its highest levels. So few who know God ever got out of the stage which the Bible describes as "babes in Christ." Unfortunately, many of these have a false notion of the cubical content of their lives. They get lopsided, go off on all sorts of tangents, delve into the most abstruse spiritual truths and the highest levels of Biblical prophecy, and yet are suffering all the time with spiritual colic! That is, they are eating food that is too strong for them. Many folks are trying to eat solid food intended only for the most mature adult Christians when they should be drinking the goat's milk of the simplest Gospel truth. A brother recently asked me if I believed in preaching the full Gospel, but, unfortunately, he spent a half hour tearing everything and everybody to pieces, finding fault with all and offering charity to none. Therefore, when he asked me if I believed in a full Gospel, I said, "I do, but oh, the Gospel is so full—full of tenderness, full of compassion, full of forgiveness, and above all, full of love!"

No person has reached maturity of life in its reality until he has learned how to make allowances for little people! The measure of a man is not the height of his stature, nor what registers in weight on the scales, nor the size of his bank balance, nor the estimate that the public places upon him, but rather his ability to make allowances for less fortunate souls. There's a word for this—magnanimity. Oh, how magnanimous was Christ!

Among the golden days which every one has had who has really lived, there is that day when the soul met one who understood him and loved him, became acquainted with one who

understood him like a great master knows a violin, knew how to bring out the best tone and to help the soul to discover its own value. This is love or friendship in its highest form. I hope that no reader will be offended when I say that I sincerely doubt that people who do not know God are capable of such love.

As I count my few days that I call golden—my "rosary"—I find that another great day brought me to see one in whose life Christ's power had been operating. It was an old Methodist preacher, Brother Charles Downer, on the Mississippi conference. For upwards of fifty years he had walked with God. When I saw him he had come to visit his daughter in a little country village twenty-six miles from a railroad. My life crossed the path of this blessed man when I was at the point of maximum egotism and self-satisfaction, as a young student and school teacher. The old preacher was deaf, crippled, and did not know that I had walked up behind his chair as he sat on the porch of his daughter's home, looking into the sunset and singing. I watched him for some time with the strangest emotions my heart had ever known. He was singing. The song went like this,

"Dwelling together,
How happy we shall be,
Through all eternity,
Just my Lord and I."

Then, the old man in a peculiar tone that is characteristic of very deaf people, talked to the Lord as though He were there face to face with him, "Lord, our journey has been so sweet. You've been so near and real to me." Then, he would sing again and laugh and continue the conversation, "If these days of earthly fellowship have been so sweet, what will it be through all eternity?" I sank to my knees, having made a great discovery—that God could fill a life with such indescribable bliss and such infinite satisfaction. God's fullness is like the ocean, if one were to try to bore a hole up through its bottom and drain it, the great sea would sweep out through that opening, wash

everything in front of it, fill whatever cavity there was beneath, and yet the surface of the sea would never fall, even the fraction of an inch. Oh, what fullness is available for the empty soul!

I recall another great day. An evangelist was preaching in a little country town. A choir made up of untrained country folks were trying to sing. The music was sour. There were adenoid tenors and nasal altos and hesitating basses, and it was all far from artistic. The sermon was on Hell, the very opposite to the one I would have chosen, and yet I found myself at the altar, and a dear old lady whispered to me what faith in Christ could do to a life. I rose from that altar with the greatest discovery I had ever made—the knowledge of Jesus Christ as a personal Savior and Redeemer! Yes, neighbors, a far greater discovery than Columbus ever made when on approaching American shores he saw a bright light on an island. He found a continent, but I had found God! And what a night! Everything that God had made was dear to me. Down that country road I went laughing, praising God as Brother Downer had done. I had found the beginning of what he had known for fifty years. I embraced a rugged old Mississippi pine, and I wanted to climb to the top of it and tell the whole world that I had found God. When I reached our little home where mother waited for me, I embraced the moon-vine—so white, so beautiful, so fresh from the hands of God. Surely, you can't reproach me for saying that no one has ever really lived who has not met God!

Then, there came a day—another one of my few golden days—when I saw God fill a church, and all Heaven seemed to rest on earth. This was in a little country town in Tennessee. A dear old preacher had invited me to exchange meetings with him. This meant, in the vernacular of the country circuit, that I would go preach for him for a week at his revival, and he would return the favor and preach for me a week. There was no mention of any compensation. In fact, there was no money to pay anybody for evangelistic services. I demurred, telling the dear old preacher that I could only preach five sermons.

He replied by saying, "Cut them half in two! Preach half of a sermon in the morning, and half in the evening. That way we can go through five days." Then, the dear old circuit rider announced that on account of providential limitations the meeting would only last five days!

For five days he led the singing, and he was in no way accomplished. He had had his teeth extracted and had not yet gotten his plate, but he led the singing, such as it was, and I did the preaching! It came to Friday night. There had not been a groan nor an amen except from the old preacher through the five days. I had preached my last sermon, he had given the invitation, and he arose to close the meeting. It looked like the forces of evil had won another victory, but when I think of it, in this little community only a few people remained who had never made a profession of faith. There were not over four hundred souls in a radius of ten miles of this little country church, but both of us were keenly disappointed. No one had come forward, not even to request that we pray. Some of the young people had not failed to harangue us. They would back their buggies up against the windows and sit during the service laughing and talking. Then, on the steps in front of the church a group had loitered about, smoking and disturbing the meeting, and no impression had been made apparently on any one.

The old preacher arose and began to sing the strangest solo I ever heard. It could in no sense be called musical, but God took that humble old preacher with that cracked voice and used it as an instrument to tell of the Glory of God. We are told that the Lord can take the weak things and confound the mighty. Well, He did that night in the Pleasant View church in Tennessee. The old man had not sung more than one chorus and one stanza until an awe fell on that congregation of perhaps two hundred souls. It was something like a paralysis. There was no noise, not a sound save the song of this old preacher—not a groan, not an amen, not a hallelujah, but an awesome stillness and a paralysis that seemed to creep over everybody. He had asked them to stand for this song, and as he sang, their

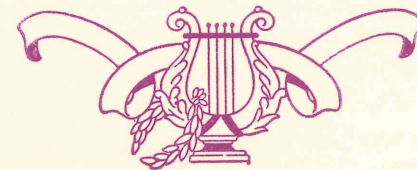
knees gave way, and they fell, many of them prostrate! I know that I sank to the floor. The first thing I can recall now is the dust in my nose and mouth as I lay prostrate on the floor, and then there seemed to come to my soul a cry out of the infinite, "Behold, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." Strange to say, in talking with the congregation later, I found that practically everybody had received that same impression and that same passage of scripture. The old man sang on, oblivious of what was going on in the church, until he was the only one left standing, and then I heard a scream, and one of the thoughtless young people, who had been annoying us so, came screaming down the aisle and fell on his face, asking God to save him. In less time than it has taken me to tell you this story, nineteen had come to the altar, and nineteen had been born again—not eighteen, not twenty, but I am as sure that nineteen were born again that night at the Pleasant View church as I am that I have five fingers on each hand. Then, a period of ecstatic praise descended from Heaven upon that little congregation, and the next thing I knew, there was a sense of gathering darkness, and I asked the old preacher what it was. He pointed to the oil lamp and said, "The oil in the lamp is about out." It was around two o'clock in the morning!

The meeting was over; I had seen God operate in power again. First, I had seen Him in the life of dear old Brother Downer; then, I had felt His power on my own soul; and now I had seen Him moving over a congregation. Three golden discoveries indeed! I had no horse and buggy then, being just a tramp preacher, wandering through the hills and valleys of western Tennessee telling the story of Jesus Christ. Some one offered to lend me a horse and buggy to drive some thirty miles to where my wife and the babies were, so I could tell them the story of what I had seen. About two-thirty in the morning I started down that country road towards Ashland City, Tennessee. I remember the buggy had a top to it. I let the top back, so that I could have room, and down the road the horse cantered, and I praised God! I remember later to have talked with one of the families that lived along that road. They said they heard me at four o'clock in the morning, praising God to

the accompaniment of my horse's hoofbeats. But, my communion with God that night was not for show. I was oblivious of the world about me. I had discovered that God could move upon a congregation, that the angels knew the way back to this old earth, just like they found it that night when the heavenly choir sang to the shepherds on the night of the nativity. There was no sense of fatigue. My soul seemed to be an artesian well of joy. Sometime the next morning I arrived at home, but not until I had gone to the courthouse, told the sheriff, the chancellor-clerk, had gone to the bank and told the banker, and then home to tell my family what I had seen. What golden moments! And I have looked through the years along which I have traveled to see that sight again, but I have never seen it since. I have never seen anything that I could classify with it. Oh, that God would let me see that once again!

Neighbors, I have told you some of the days when I have really lived, but I am ashamed, along with Jacob, that my great days have been so few. Therefore, if God lets me live through the coming year may I be able to have many golden days in this blessed New Year, and may you have that high privilege.

Don't let time enslave you. Do not let gray hairs nor wrinkles disturb you. With God in your heart, you can laugh at time and years and even death. Doubtless, this is what Paul had in mind when he cried in exultation, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"





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