

## “I’VE GOT A RIVER OF LIFE...”

By Rom A. Pegram (3/30/18, Good Friday)

Folks, we are *Easter People*! We are people whose lives have been changed because of what happened 2,000 years ago on the Third Day! As the old hymn says, “Once we were lost, but now we are found!” Once, we had no chance of anything—any life—beyond this one. Now, we do ... and, boy, what we have to look forward to because of what Jesus did for us! *Eternity* is a really cool thing—eternity with God, that is! It’s a gift that’s been offered to everyone—no matter what your name is or where you’ve come from or who your relatives are! We can spend eternity with God—in the presence of the One who has created all you see around you, every day. And nothing can change that ... if we’ll just keep our eyes fixed on Jesus...

In an old Gospel song, I heard life described once as *a river*. The river flows in a certain direction—the direction of the life God has given us. But, every once in awhile, that old river gets kind of independent and decides to overflow the banks and go off on its own. If you’ve ever lived in a flood zone, you’ll know what I mean when I say, “There’s nothing more destructive to the river or to those in contact with the river when those old banks decide to give way and allow the intended flow of the river to be altered.” It’s just a mess! Maybe some of you have experienced this in your lifetime!

Unfortunately, when we decide to let our banks down—to no longer guard our banks—and let the waters flow where they may ... or in a direction that we selfishly want our life to go, our lives usually end up a mess, too. In other words, they’re not headed toward God’s intended destination ... which is eternity with Him! Paradise, my friends ... *that’s God’s idea!*

This is the final day of the Season of Lent. We’ve been learning all along about what it takes to be ‘more than survivors’—to thrive spiritually. We’ve been taught by many good Bible teachers, right from the Scriptures. And today, our final Bible teacher ... is *Jesus* himself. Why the Easter story? Why did Jesus have to suffer and die? On this Easter weekend, we’re not going to talk so much about the story itself ... but *the results* of what happened on that first Easter morning! Listen as the writer of the book of Hebrews shares with us about our great fortune, our great inheritance—a result of Jesus giving *his* life for us (Hebrews 12:1-2, 14-29, NLT)...

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us.

<sup>2</sup>We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame.

Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God’s throne. ...

<sup>14</sup>Work at living in peace with everyone, and work at living a holy life, for those who are not holy will not see the Lord. <sup>15</sup>Look after each other so that none of you fails to receive the grace of God. Watch out that no poisonous root of bitterness grows up to trouble you, corrupting many. <sup>16</sup>Make sure that no one is immoral or godless like Esau,

who traded his birthright as the firstborn son for a single meal. <sup>17</sup> You know that afterward, when he wanted his father's blessing, he was rejected. It was too late for repentance, even though he begged with bitter tears.

<sup>18</sup> You have not come to a physical mountain, to a place of flaming fire, darkness, gloom, and whirlwind, as the Israelites did at Mount Sinai. <sup>19</sup> For they heard an awesome trumpet blast and a voice so terrible that they begged God to stop speaking.

<sup>20</sup> They staggered back under God's command: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned to death." <sup>21</sup> Moses himself was so frightened at the sight that he said, "I am terrified and trembling."

<sup>22</sup> No, you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to countless thousands of angels in a joyful gathering. <sup>23</sup> You have come to the assembly of God's firstborn children, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God himself, who is the judge over all things. You have come to the spirits of the righteous ones in heaven who have now been made perfect. <sup>24</sup> You have come to Jesus, the one who mediates the new covenant between God and people, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks of forgiveness instead of crying out for vengeance like the blood of Abel.

<sup>25</sup> Be careful that you do not refuse to listen to the One who is speaking. For if the people of Israel did not escape when they refused to listen to Moses, the earthly messenger, we will certainly not escape if we reject the One who speaks to us from heaven! <sup>26</sup> When God spoke from Mount Sinai his voice shook the earth, but now he makes another promise: "Once again I will shake not only the earth but the heavens also." <sup>27</sup> This means that all of creation will be shaken and removed, so that only unshakable things will remain.

<sup>28</sup> Since we are receiving a Kingdom that is unshakable, let us be thankful and please God by worshiping him with holy fear and awe. <sup>29</sup> For our God is a devouring fire.

Folks, how do we keep the water in the banks and headed in the right direction, that we end up where God wants us to end up? It's simple. V. 2 again, "... keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, on whom our faith (*our life journey with God*) depends from beginning to end." Well, if Jesus is supposed to be the focus of our lives, not just at Easter but for our *entire* lives, then what do we need to do? It's right here in this scripture—our outline for success as the ultimate 'survivors' in this world! First...

**DETERMINE TO KEEP YOUR WATER IN THE BANKS!** Verse 1 says, again: "... let us run with determination the race that lies before us." What race? Verse 2 explains: **KEEPING OUR EYES ON JESUS!** And the more we *determine* to do just that ... the easier doing *that* becomes! Did you know that? Practice does indeed make perfect!

If you look at #349 in our United Methodist Hymnal, you will see a wonderful, wonderful chorus that speaks of what this scripture is talking about. My public thanks to Helen Lemmel, who in 1922 wrote this chorus! Very clearly it's letting us know that if we determine to keep our water in the banks and our life continues to head in the direction—the one God intended, then the importance of Jesus in our lives is going to *increase*, while everything else in life *decreases*. If we keep our eyes on Jesus, that's exactly what's going to happen ... and it's a good thing! Here's how it goes...

**TURN YOUR EYES UPON JESUS,  
LOOK FULL IN HIS WONDERFUL FACE,  
AND THE THINGS OF EARTH WILL GROW STRANGELY DIM  
IN THE LIGHT OF HIS GLORY AND GRACE.**

I used to think that that was a bad thing—that Jesus would have to increase in my life and everything else would decrease. But, then I discovered the Good News of Easter and just how much God loved ME! It made all the difference in the world to know that the One who loved me more than anyone else ever could *wanted* what was best for ME! That's made following Jesus possible in my life ... so, as you sense the love of God in your life, *determine to follow him ... to keep your water in the banks that God has intended for YOU!* Then...

**LIVE PEACEFULLY WITH THE OTHER RIVERS IN YOUR AREA.** Verse 14 elaborates: "Try to be at peace with everyone, and try to live a holy life..." As Christians, we don't claim to be perfect, just forgiven (and I'm sure that you've seen that bumper sticker at some time or another). I believe that's why the author of Hebrews very deliberately uses the word 'try' here. What we need to strive for, as believers in Christ, is what John Wesley called 'Christian Perfection'—*a perfection of intention*. Do we *intend* to be at peace with everyone? Is that our goal ... and is it obvious to others, especially God? Do we *intend* to live a holy life—a life 'set apart' for God's purposes and not our own? Is that our goal ... and is it obvious to others, especially God?

Let me ask you a question, today: ***Do you want your life to count?*** I mean, *really* count in the end ... with no regrets?

When my father was growing up, on the wall above his bed was a plaque with a saying on it that has stuck with him throughout his whole life. (Parents, take heed! The little things we do for our children when they are younger *do* count. It can make a *life-long* difference!) Anyway, it meant so much to my father that he decided to pass it on to *his* children. And, the little saying that was on that plaque above his bed has stuck with us, too. As a matter of fact, it always has a place in the inside cover of my Bible. It means that much! And the saying goes like this:

*Only one life, it will soon be past.  
Only what's done for Christ will last.*

Do you want your life to *really* count? Try to be at peace with everyone. Try to live a holy 'set apart' life. That's doing something for Jesus ... that will last eternally! Why should we? Our scripture today (V. 14) tells us, "... because no one will see the Lord without it."

I have never spoken with anyone before in my life who has ever said, "I don't want to have *anything* to do with Heaven!" I've never met anyone yet who has ever said to me, "Rom, I know you talk about spending eternity with God, but I'm just not interested in

something that good!" It's never happened ... and I don't expect it ever will! So, do you want to know a secret to ending up at *that* destination? Be at peace with others—as God's word tells us to—and try and live a holy life—one set apart for God's purposes. Make that a priority ... and that'll keep your water in the banks! And, finally...

**AS YOUR RIVER FLOWS IN GOD'S DIRECTION, BE SENSITIVE TO GOD'S PRESENCE AROUND YOU.** Verse 25 tells us, "Be careful, then, and do not refuse to hear him who speaks." The next verse tells us that there's no use fighting God when he speaks; at the very least, we'll be held accountable for what God has spoken to us. I fought God, folks, for years ... and it was painful; don't do that! If you want to keep your 'river of life' flowing in the direction God wants it to go ... keep your ears open; put yourself in a place where you'll hear the Word of God (Church!); it's a part of 'determining to keep your water where it's supposed to be!'

Folks, learn to listen to God. Prayer is a two-way street; it's both about speaking AND listening. And God's desire is to 'direct your paths' or the flow of your life in the right direction ... so you'll end up in the destination God so desperately wants for you. Why? Because he loves you ... and eternity with Him is the very *best* he has to offer!

I often think of the Wisconsin River. It's a mighty river in and of itself. But, where does it flow? Into the Mississippi, right? I'd just bet that the water from the Wisconsin River never dreamt, at one time, that it would flow in such a direction so as to become a part of something so much bigger than it is! I'll never forget the first time that I saw the mighty Mississippi River as a kid. It was huge ... and still is! I was awe-struck!

Folks, if we become very aware of God's presence as we 'flow' through life—always listening for his voice of direction, I've got a feeling *we're going to end up a part of something much bigger than we could ever imagine!* As a matter of fact, I'd stake my life on it. And, it's called eternity ... with Jesus! It just doesn't get any better than that! And that's what this song speaks about, written by Bart Millard...

I can only imagine what it will be like  
When I walk, by your side  
I can only imagine what my eyes will see  
When you face is before me  
I can only imagine  
I can only imagine

Surrounded by You glory  
What will my heart feel  
Will I dance for you Jesus  
Or in awe of You be still  
Will I stand in your presence  
Or to my knees will I fall  
Will I sing hallelujah  
Will I be able to speak at all

I can only imagine  
I can only imagine

I can only imagine when that day comes  
When I find myself standing in the Son  
I can only imagine when all I would do is forever  
Forever worship You  
I can only imagine  
I can only imagine

Surrounded by Your glory  
What will my heart feel  
Will I dance for You, Jesus  
Or in awe of you be still  
Will I stand in your presence  
Or to my knees will I fall  
Will I sing hallelujah  
Will I be able to speak at all  
I can only imagine  
I can only imagine hey ya ah...

Because of God's awesome love for us, we've been given the privilege of being a part of a Kingdom that will NEVER be shaken! That's the destination God wants for *all* of our lives. That's what Jesus made possible. And we can count on *all* of God's promises for our eternity, because what God says is *always* true! "I've got a river of life flowing out of me..." Stake your life on it! It's the Good News of Easter you need to hear on this GOOD FRIDAY!