

“KEEP YOUR LAMPS LIT”
Isaiah 1:1, 10-20, Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16, Luke 12:32-40
August 6 & 7, 2022

I received the following story from a friend recently. It says;

“Dr. Frank Henderson Mayfield, was an American neurosurgeon and founder of the Mayfield Clinic and Spine Institute in Cincinnati, Ohio. Dr. Mayfield was touring Tewksbury Institute in Massachusetts, when on his way out, he accidentally collided with an elderly floor maid. To cover the awkward moment Dr. Mayfield started asking questions.

“How long have you worked here?”

“I’ve worked here almost since the place opened,” the maid replied.

“What can you tell me about the history of this place?” he asked.

“I don’t think I can tell you anything, but I could show you something.”

“With that, she took his hand and led him down to the basement under the oldest section of the building. She pointed to one of what looked like small prison cells, their iron bars rusted with age, and said, ‘That’s the cage where they used to keep Annie Sullivan.’

“Who’s Annie?” the doctor asked.

“Annie was a young girl who was brought in here because she was incorrigible, her mother having died and her father having abandoned her; nobody could do anything with her. She’d bite and scream and throw her food at people. The doctors and nurses couldn’t even examine her or anything. I’d see them trying with her spitting and scratching at them.”

“I was only a few years younger than her myself and I used to think, ‘I sure would hate to be locked up in a cage like that.’ I wanted to help her, but I didn’t have any idea what I could do. I mean, if the doctors and nurses couldn’t help her, what could a simple person like me do?”

“I didn’t know what else to do, so I just baked her some brownies one night after work.

The next day I brought them in. I walked carefully to her cage and said, ‘Annie, I baked these brownies just for you. I’ll put them right here on the floor and you can come and get them if you want.’

“Then I got out of there just as fast as I could because I was afraid she might throw them at me. But she didn't. She actually took the brownies and ate them. After that, she was just a little bit nicer to me when I was around. And sometimes I'd talk to her. Once, I even got her laughing.

“One of the nurses noticed this and she told the doctor. They asked me, me of all people, if I'd help them with Annie. I said I would if I could. So that's how it came about that every time they wanted to see Annie or examine her, I went into the cage first and explained and calmed her down and held her hand. This is how they discovered that Annie was almost blind.

“After they'd been working with her for about a year—and it was tough sledding with Annie—the Perkins Institute for the Blind opened its doors. She went there, and they were able to help her and she went on to study and she became a teacher herself.

“Annie came back to the Tewksbury Institute to visit, and to see what she could do to help out. At first, the Director didn't say anything, and then he thought about a letter he'd just received. A man had written to him about his daughter. She was absolutely unruly—almost like an animal. She was blind and deaf, as well as [what some called] 'deranged.'

“The father was at his wit's end, but he didn't want to put her into an asylum. So he wrote the Institute to ask if they knew of anyone who would come to his house and work with his daughter.

“And that is how Annie Sullivan became the lifelong companion of Helen Keller.

“When Helen Keller received the Nobel Prize, she was asked who had the greatest impact on her life and she said, ‘Annie Sullivan.’ But Annie said, ‘No Helen. **The woman who had the greatest influence on both of our lives was a floor maid at the Tewksbury Institute.**”¹

My friend then rightly asks, “Do you care for others? Really care? Then never miss an opportunity to sacrificially care for people. **If we don't care enough to step out of our comfort zones and serve others, we forfeit the privilege of impacting souls for eternity!** We should all aspire to be unnamed floor maids! [We need to live so] that Christ would be glorified in all the things that we do, so

¹ (Received from James Langteau, July 29, 2022, written by #MartinDBoyce [Martin Boyce])

that people, created by God, would be cared for, and that we'd be found faithful in Jesus.”

Imagine the difference we could make in the life of a person who might be considered “hopeless”, or “deranged”, or just beyond what anyone else is willing to do for them? **Just a simple act of kindness and compassion can often turn a whole situation around and bring someone the help and encouragement they need.**

But it can also go well beyond just a simple act of compassion. In our world today there are many who are unable to help themselves, and because of how they've been treated in the past, they don't trust anyone, not even the Lord. They're on a fast-track to destruction and the only thing that can help them is to reach out to them one last time before the end comes. And that is our calling as Christians.

That's the challenge that Isaiah gave the people of Judah and Jerusalem. The people had fallen away from any kind of trust or dependence upon the Lord, and they were beginning to treat each other very poorly. But the Lord called out to them one more time in an effort to bring them back to Him so that He could help them and guide them back into security as a nation.

Isaiah told them the Word of the Lord, saying that they were no longer to gather and bring sacrifices to offer without a change in their hearts. **Sacrifices by themselves did not resolve their problem with evil and sin.** The Lord said, *“Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight; stop doing wrong. Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow”* (Is.1:16-17).

The Lord was calling His people to let go of their wicked ways and return to worshipping Him again. He desired that they no longer rebel against His will and His ways, so that they could find the blessings of the Lord rather than His wrath. God tells them, *“Woe to the sinful nation, a people whose guilt is great, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption! They have forsaken the Lord; they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on Him”* (Is. 1:4).

When we abandon God's commands and when we fail to follow His ways, God gives us over to corruption and wickedness and the lights of our souls goes out. And when our lamps go out as His

servants, God allows our country to become desolate, our cities burned with fire, our fields stripped by foreigners, the land bought right out from under us because of the corruption of our leaders (Is. 1:7). We go to church, offer our tithes and offerings as sacrifices to the Lord, but we do not change our ways and we continue to live contrary to God's commands. How can God bless a people who are adamantly against Him? How can God bless a people who twist His Word to get permission to do whatever their hearts desire? How can God continue to show His favor on a people who have walked away from anything associated with Him?

The U. S. is so much like Judah and Jerusalem during the days of Isaiah. Is it any wonder then that as our corrupt leaders continue to make evil choices, that we find more and more hardship and difficulty? Is there any wonder we are in the situation we are in today? We have fallen away from the Lord. Our soul-lamps have gone out and we're just going through the motions of worshipping the Lord.

In a recent Gallup poll taken in March of 2021, it was found that only 47% of U.S. adults belonged to a church, synagogue or mosque. That's down almost 30 percentage points from turn of the century (2000) when it was about 70%. When Gallup sought the reason for this decline, it was discovered that the change was primarily due to the rise in Americans with no religious preference. We are a country turning our backs upon the Lord God Almighty, refusing to accept His commands as truth, and rebelling against following His laws. And we've taught, and are teaching, the next generation that following the Lord God Almighty is nonsense and worthless.

Our media ridicules and pokes fun at people of faith, even deriding those who serve in leadership positions who dare to follow their religious convictions. Public schools are teaching our children that there is no value in faith in Jesus Christ, even punishing them for living their convictions in the classrooms. And our government has made people of faith enemy #1 because we dare stand up against their ideas and desires. Our society today calls for us to fight and spit and claw at one another until we can get what we want. And we're seeing a whole faction of people who can be regarded as "deranged" who desire to take us as far away from God's ways as possible, even to our own destruction. They even

use the church to deceive many, proclaiming that they are people of God. But their hearts are set on their own agendas, not God's.

Yet God calls out to us through the words of Isaiah, "*Come now, let us settle the matter, ' says the Lord. 'Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the good things of the land; but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword.'* For the mouth of the Lord has spoken" (Is. 1:18-20).

You see, it is not through our own ways that we find life. It's not by human standards that we gain righteousness and peace. **When we abandon all of the Lord's ways, God allows us to suffer the consequences of His absence.** He continues to call us to be His servants, His floor maids, making a difference in the lives of those around us so that they might find Him and receive His blessing and peace. Oh, it may be quite a ride for some of those around us as we strive to reach out and help them, but we are to remain faithful, not in what we can see, but in the strength and power of the Lord that is present through us as we trust in Him and follow Him. We may not think we can do anything, but the Lord will grant us His guidance to bring about remarkable changes if we remain faithful. **When we have the light of the Lord living within us, we can do marvelous things.**

And we see the examples of the ones who lived by faith in Hebrews 11. This chapter is heralded as the roll of the faithful. It demonstrates the determination of those who have put their faith and trust in the Lord God, allowing Him to use them to impact the lives of many others, often in unknown ways, because they keep their lamps lit by following the ways of the Lord. It clearly shows the difference it makes when people hold onto their faith and then live that faith in their everyday lives.

The folks lifted up in Hebrews 11 are not there because they let their faith grow weak and become rebellious to the Lord God. They remained faithful to the Lord, kept the light of the Lord burning in their souls so that they could follow all of His laws and commands. **No matter what hardships they faced, these faithful were adamant about staying true to all they knew was right**

and good according to God's ways.

Abraham picked up his family and moved to a country that God showed him, not knowing exactly where God was going to put him. He lived in tents, all the while "*looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God*" (Heb. 11:10). He trusted that God was good on His word to provide him with heirs when Sarah was well beyond childbearing age. The light of God burned in his soul so greatly that even when challenged by God to sacrifice his promise-fulfilled son, Isaac, he did not waver, trusting that God could even raise him from the dead (Heb. 11:19).

All those listed in Hebrews 11 "*were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth*" (Heb. 11:13). Their trust in the Lord God was deeply embedded into their souls so that the light of God shown out through them as they touched the lives of those around them, bringing them to life in God's love. They followed God's guiding, and put their hope in the faithfulness of God, even if the promises would become fulfilled long after they were dead.

The whole chapter is an encouragement to us to keep our own lamps lit with the faith of Jesus Christ coursing through our veins, emanating from our mouths with every word we speak, and demonstrated daily with every action we take. **That's our call as followers of Jesus Christ, to let His light so shine in our lives that the whole world takes note of that light, and then gives praise to God for the work we are able to do through Jesus.**

And that is the encouragement that Jesus gave to all His disciples (us included) when He spoke to the 12 disciples in Luke 12:32-40. Listen to these challenging, but encouraging words. (READ Luke 12:32-40)

In His discourse about not worrying about things here on the earth, **Jesus challenges each of us to "Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning" (Lu. 12:35).** So often we look at the things around us and we become afraid of what might happen if we continue to live for Jesus, and we begin to stop working for the Lord. The stock market falls and we stop giving to organizations reaching

out to those in need. Laws are challenged, or created, seeking to manipulate us into doing something that we know is wrong and would be harmful to another. Or sometimes we're kept from doing what is right and it prevents us from helping others. We might have a job change that causes us to wonder if we can make it and still support the work of the Lord through the church. Health issues come up that consume much of our expendable income and we wonder about helping others. A recession hits and we suddenly pull back from funding life-giving organizations locally or around the world.

Jesus tells us, "*Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom*" (Lu. 12:32). God has supplied us with all that we have already, and He's not going to just drop us when something happens here in this world. His support and provision is there for the asking, and He delights for us to continue to work for Him in order to touch the lives of others with the care and encouragement they need. **We are to keep the light of Jesus Christ burning in our lives, trusting that the Lord will continue to provide for us our "daily bread" so that we can seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10).** God's provision will come as we trust in Him and remain faithfully serving Him.

That doesn't mean that we'll have the same luxuries that we once had, but God will continue to meet our needs even as we do His work. Our lives may change a bit, but we are encouraged by Jesus to not focus on the things of this world, but on the work that God has given us to do. **We are to use what we have in order to complete the work that God gives to us.**

Jesus tells us that we are to become the floor maids in our world today in order to be in such situations that we can bring help and assistance to those who are scared, lonely, hurting, or lost. We are to be ready at any time to let the Lord use us to bring hope to the hopeless, faith to the faithless, encouragement to the faint of heart, and life to those who find themselves trapped in rusty cages brought upon them because of their own blindness. You see, it's not about us! It's about us using what the Lord has given to us to make a difference in the lives of those around us so that their life is completely transformed from the darkness of this world to the light of Jesus Christ.

The question is "how do we do that?" **Jesus first tells us to be ready, to prepare ourselves for**

the possibility of God bringing someone into our lives that we could help. Oh, there are some who are masquerading as people in need who are bound to snooker us into helping them by begging for our assistance. Jesus tells us to be careful about those kind of folks. But we are to be open to allowing God to help us see the ones really in need.

Second, Jesus tells us that we are to work at what the Lord God has called us to do, patiently waiting for the one in need. It's not like we just sit back and say, "Ok, Lord. I'm ready now for the one that needs help. Bring them to me." No, the people we are to assist are right around us, and we will recognize them as we do our daily work. We are to keep doing the work of the church in our community, never losing our fervor to serve the Lord, always letting the light of Jesus Christ shine through us. It may be as simple as cutting the neighbor's grass, but it will help them in a huge way.

Third, Jesus tells us that we must be prepared at any time when God might bring that one to us. Just like the servant has to be ready for the Master to come home, whenever that may be, so we are to be ready for the ones that God puts before us, whether it is convenient or not. The more prepared we are to serve the Lord, the greater impact we have in the lives of those who need us. And as we stay ready to serve the Lord with our lamps lit with the love of Jesus Christ, God will reward us.

So keep the Light of Jesus Christ shining through you. Keep your lamps lit in preparation for the ones that the Lord brings your way. Trust that the Lord will provide all that you need to make a difference in their life, even if you are just a floor maid. **God equips those He calls. All He requires is that we remain faithful to Him.** And then we will receive our reward of thanks and praise from Him.

Let's pray. Father, there is so much that distracts us in our world today, and we lose our first love of serving You. The trials and struggles tend to make us afraid to do the work You have called us to do. However, Jesus has called each of us to serve Him. There are Annie Sullivans and Hellen Kellers all around us that need our loving care. Help us to keep our eyes focused on You so that we might be ready to give our assistance to them, thereby changing their whole lives, for Your glory. Help us to have such faith in You that we never become afraid of being in Your service. Instead, help us to step out of our own comfort zones and become willing to follow Your lead to take the light of Jesus Christ into the world, one person at a time. This we pray in Jesus' great and powerful Name. AMEN.