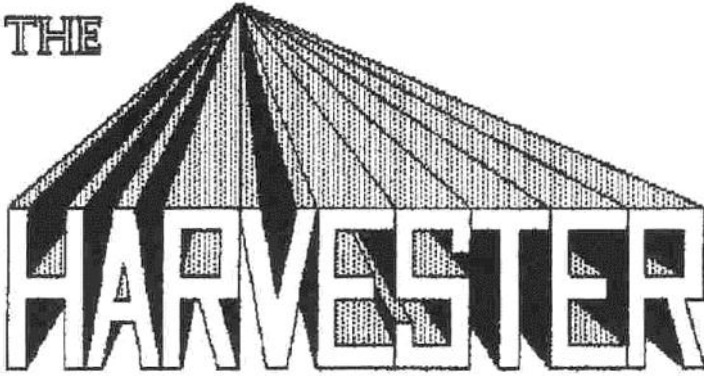


THE



"The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest" (Luke 10:2)

August 2012

No. 320

"HEAR THOU PLAINLY, I AM A CHRISTIAN"

In our nation today, Christians have the freedom to worship as they please. We are able to assemble when we choose, to worship God, to sing His praises, to offer our prayers of thanksgiving and observe the Lord's Supper. We are able to carry the banner high, declaring to the world that we are Christians. We can do all of these things without fear of persecution or molestation.

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However, this freedom did not exist for the early Christians. Their love of God and of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, was a source of great worldly pain, suffering and even death to them. Both Jews and Gentiles alike persecuted the early Christians. Paul is an example of a Christian who frequently suffered at the hands of those who did not believe in Christ. *"Of the Jews five times received forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned"* (II Cor. 11:24-25). In the later years, the Christians did not even have the freedom which Paul enjoyed. Rather, they knew with certainty, that if they were identified as a Christian their fate would be punishment and death. But they continued strong in their faith, secure in the knowledge, that Jesus Christ had suffered and died for them that they might have everlasting life.

Despite the threat of bodily harm and death, there were many everyday people, who boldly lived their lives as Christians declaring Jesus Christ as their Savior. One such Christian was a man named Polycarp. There is a considerable amount of information available concerning Polycarp through his writings as well as the writings of others. Polycarp's year of birth is uncertain but it was early in the last half of the first century. He lived to become an old man and died approximately 155 A. D.

It was a joy to read about Polycarp, to learn about the strength of his faith, to learn about the great love which he had for Jesus Christ. We can be certain about his love of Christ and his faith, because you

see, Polycarp not only lived for Christ, he died for Christ. He allowed himself to be put to death rather than denounce his Lord and Savior. It will not be possible, in this article, to discuss the life and writings of Polycarp, instead, we will look at the manner in which he died for Christ. The events surrounding his death were recorded in a letter written by the Church at Smyrna. The details were based on eye witness accounts of his death.

Both Jew and Gentile alike were calling for the death of the Christian Polycarp. To the Romans, Polycarp was an atheist because he did not believe that Caesar was a God, instead served only Christ. The search for Polycarp ended when he was located by the Roman guard. Every action taken and every word spoken by Polycarp from the time of his capture until his death demonstrated his great love of God and of Jesus his Lord. Again, the age of Polycarp at his death is uncertain but it is written that he served Jesus Christ for 86 years, so we know that he was a very old man at the time of his capture and subsequent death.

His first action upon being captured was to prepare food and drink for the Roman guard. He then asked permission to pray, which was granted. The written account states:

"He stood up and prayed, being so full of the grace of God, that for two hours he could not hold his peace, and those that heard were amazed, and many repented that they had come against such a venerable old man."

History does not tell us the contents of his prayer. However, based on his subsequent actions and words, I feel certain he did not pray that his life would be spared or that he would be delivered from the hands of those who hated the name Jesus Christ and wanted the death of those that loved Him.

At the completion of his prayer, Polycarp was taken to appear before the proconsul. Upon his appearance at the stadium where Christians were put to death, a great roar went up from the crowd when they heard that Polycarp had been captured and that they would get to witness the death of this Christian. However, when the proconsul saw that Polycarp was a man well advanced in years and no threat to anyone, he offered three times to spare his life if he would renounce Jesus Christ and acknowledge Caesar as his lord. Each time Polycarp chose Jesus Christ over life. Each time he refused in such a way that left no doubt as where his love and his loyalty lay.

The proconsul, the first time, offered to spare his life if Polycarp would "swear by the genius of Caesar and say away with the atheists" (meaning those who did not believe Caesar was a God). Polycarp waved his arm toward the assembled crowd and toward the proconsul and said "Away with the atheist." Can't you just imagine the look of dismay on the proconsul's face? He had offered Polycarp his life and in turn had been called an atheist. Certainly, it was not what he expected, but then Polycarp was plainly filled with a love of God and of

Jesus Christ, who had died for him. Polycarp told the proconsul "fourscore and six years have I been His servant and He hath done me no wrong. How then can I blaspheme my King who saved me." What a wonderful response for a Christian to be able to make as his life on earth is about to end.

Again, the proconsul wanted him to swear by the genius of Caesar. Polycarp, with his worldly life hanging on his response, gave an answer which causes a catch in my throat each time I read it:

"If thou supposes vainly that I will swear by the genius of Caesar, as thou sayest, and feignest that thou are ignorant of who I am, HEAR THOU PLAINLY, I AM A Christian"

He wanted the proconsul to know, without question, that he loved God, he loved Jesus Christ, he would willingly die rather than renounce them. What a wonderful example that should be for us today. An example which demonstrates that our love of God, the Father and Jesus, the Son should be the most powerful force in our lives and in the world. What a difference we could make for Christ.

The third time, the proconsul threatened Polycarp with being thrown to wild beasts or to cause him to be consumed by fire if he did not repent and acknowledge the genius of Caesar. His response was "Thou threatenest with fire which burneth for a season and after a little while is quenched: for thou are ignorant of the fire of the future judgment and eternal punishment, which is reserved for the ungodly.

But why delayest thou, come, do what thou wilt".

After refusing for the third time to deny Christ, Polycarp was bound to a stake, the fire was lit, he was stabbed with a dagger and he died, secure in his love of God and of Jesus Christ. Before he died, Polycarp offered up a final prayer of thanksgiving, a prayer of praise, glorifying God with his final words. What a truly sweet savor it must have been to God and to Jesus Christ.

Polycarp died for his love of Jesus Christ. As Christians, shouldn't we live, in such a manner that our actions, our words, and our deeds proclaim to the world "HEAR THOU PLAINLY, I AM A CHRISTIAN."

DWIGHT THOMAS

(Deceased June 24, 2012)

*"...and thou shalt be missed,
because thy seat will be empty."*

- I Sam. 20:18

Resource Material:

THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS - J. B. Lightfoot &
J. H. Hammer.

EARLY CHRISTIANS SPEAK - Everett Ferguson.

WILL THE REAL HERETICS PLEASE STAND UP-
David W. Bercot.

(Please note: This article originally in
TOWARD THE MARK, Volume 6, #1, January -
March 1999 Editor: T. C. E.)

APOLOGIA

QUESTION: Jesus was there during the creation of the world and is the Son of God; who was the wife of God?

ANSWER: In the spiritual realm there is no physical marriage or bearing of children. Jesus said,

"The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage; But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels" (Luke 20:34-36).

Jesus is not God's physical Son, for child bearing does not exist beyond this material world. God did not, therefore, require a wife in order to have a Son. Jesus is God's Son by God's choice. Christians are spoken of as God's children without being physically born through a wife of God. *"The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:"* (Romans 8:16); even so Jesus is God's Son without the necessity of God having a wife.

HARRY COBB
(Wedowee, AL)

Gospel Meetings

DATES	PLACE	SPEAKER
August 3 - 5	Cold Springs Bogue Chitto, MS	Wilbur Bass (Auburn, AL)
August 3 - 5	Rainsville Rainsville, AL	Sam Dick (Cave City, KY)
August 10 - 12	Junction City Junction City, KY	Joe Hill (Hager Hill, KY)
August 17 - 19	Fayetteville Road Fairburn, GA	Sam Dick (Cave City, KY)
August 24 - 26	Hopkinsville Hopkinsville, OH	Joe Hill (Hager Hill, KY)
August 24 - 26	Mt. Carmel Road Gay, GA	Wilbur Bass (Auburn, AL)
August 24 - 26	Mt. Olive Arab, AL	J.D. McDonald (Woodbury, TN)

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. Why was Shelomith's son stoned to death, according to Leviticus?
2. In Proverbs, Solomon writes that whoever is led astray by what is not wise?
3. What was Ezekiel's first vision?
4. Unlike Matthew, Mark's writing did not mention which story from Christ's life?
5. What did Paul refer to Jesus as in Colossians?

THE HARVESTER is a monthly publication intended to encourage all men everywhere to become laborers into God's harvest (Luke 10:2). This paper is mailed free of charge to anyone who wishes to receive it. Please submit name, address, address changes and all correspondence to:

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