

# THE GREATNESS OF GOD

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(Scripture Reading : 2 Kings 5:1-14)

When a young man of non-Christian tribe in Mountain Province finds that he no longer believes in his wooden idol, this does not mean that he should no longer believe that there is a God. Rather, it means that God is not made of wood.

For our vesper meditation, I wish to meditate with you on this topic: "The Greatness of God".

We, who claim to be a part of the Christian Church, too often worship God as though he were inert wooden idol, not omnipotent, omnipresent everlasting God. It seems to me that as we have made great advances in our knowledge of the material world, we have not begun to make similar advances in our understanding of God. We can build beautiful church buildings, but we cannot agree on how to worship in them. New translations of the Bible are exceedingly accurate, but some do not still understand God's message to man. The Bible can be printed so cheaply today that everyone can afford a personal copy, but we do not seriously read it.

Instead of seeking to learn more about God, when we find that our faith is inadequate, we seem prone to give up our faith. One of the significant little books of J.B. Phillips entitled, "Your God is Too Small". In so far as this book is concerned we must admit that Phillips is right. In fact, we live in a time when God does not seem to be very great in the lives of men.

The Scripture text that I read a while ago is a relatively popular Old Testament story. Naaman, the commander of the great Syrian army was a leper. Apparently his form of leprosy was not considered contagious for he surely would have been sent from his post into a life of oblivion. Yet he quite naturally sought for a cure from his disease. And he found that cure only in the power of God, through the instruction of the prophet Elijah.

Naaman was both grateful to Elijah, and awed by the power of God whom Elijah worshipped. To Elijah, Naaman offered gifts which the prophet refused. Then Naaman sought to worship the true God. He concluded that his own idols in Syria were powerless compared to the greatness of God. However, when Naaman decided to worship God, he encountered some problems. He had come to know about God in Israel, where God was worshipped. Now he had to return to Syria and his job. Because how could he live in Syria and worship God who, he thought dwelt in Israel? Finally, he thought of a solution. He would take two mule loads of soil from Israel back to Syria so that he could build an altar on it and worship God.

My friends, such an act surely sounds naive to us today. We see Naaman lacked understanding of the greatness of God in thinking God was limited to the land of Israel and that by taking a little soil from Israel with him, he could take part of God. We know today that truly God is in the soil---- and He is also in the air, the plants, the stars, and the hearts and minds of men. We know that we can worship God anywhere, under any circumstances and in any society.

Yet we often live and act like Naaman. Today we live in a period of great mobility. There is no doubt of this. From towns and farms all over the nation, people are moving to the cities; to the city of Manila, Cebu, Davao, Baguio, etc. And many of these people who move to the cities are Church members who were actively working and witnessing for God in their home church and places. Then when they move to the city, they stop attending Church, and they leave their

Church membership in their old place. Why? maybe because of sentimental reasons. But, surely sentimental reasons cannot be considered adequate. Can we not worship God in the Church in a new place? Is this not the same as Naaman's thought that God could be found only where he first learned of Him?

From all over the Philippines, young people are flocking into the cities for educational purposes. They enter colleges and universities. But it is lamentable to say that when they are in the cities they leave their religion at home. Why do so many of them attend church only when they are back at home with their parents?

Cannot God also be worshipped in the new place where they moved to? My dear friends, daily devotions, and grace at mealtime, and prayer are as important for students and young people while living in the city as when they are at home. And it is my feeling that these people who leave their God at home when they come to the city are Naaman's of our day.

Perhaps we may realize that we can worship God wherever we are, but so often our actions are poorer than our beliefs. When we leave our accustomed station, we must not leave our God behind, for God cannot be limited by geography, time, or culture. The young man of the non-Christian tribe may leave his home and his wooden idol, but he does not leave God behind, for God is not made of wood!

In the book of Judges, Chapters 17 & 18, is related an accident in the life of Micah who lived in the hilly country of Ephraim. Micah had a house full of idols and even his own private priest. He had one which was most precious to him. His mother had it built for him from 200 silver coins. One day 600 men of the tribe Dan, who were looking for a place to settle, stole Micah's idols and even enticed his private priest to come away with them. When Micah saw them going, he cried after them, "You have stolen my god! What have I left?"

In our day, the drama of Micah is too often painfully re-enacted in the cities. Many young people come to the cities from Christian homes. They have learned about God in their homes and formed fixed concepts of the nature of God and how God works. Then in college they take biology. There they learned that the creation was much larger than they had ever imagined. They lost their concept of God who can care for individual people, and finding their understanding of God inadequate, they question the existence of God. Their lives cry out to science, "You have stolen my God."

My friends, science isn't the only thief who steals God, and college students aren't the only people from whom God is stolen. Money, powerful pesos, is a thief. People willingly give their time, their sense of honesty, their belief in fairness, and their moral values in order to obtain money, only to find that their grasping for money has crowded their faith in God from their lives.

Prestige is also a sneaky thief. So often we try to minimize our Protestant faith to impress our non-Protestant friends. Yet we do not fool them; we only fool ourselves-and our desire for prestige steals our God.

Fun and pleasure, too, can crowd out our worship, our witness, and our prayer. They may steal our God. There are many forces in our lives today. Some shake our incomplete understanding of the greatness of God. Others take so much of our time that they crowd God out of importance in our lives.

Science, money, prestige and idols, how unwise Micah was to think that God could be stolen from him and that he had nothing left. How equally unwise are we to follow the forces that show the inadequacy of our understanding of God to cause us to lose our faith. When the young non-Christian man finds his wooden idol inadequate for his life, this means that his concept of God is wrong, for God is not made of wood.

In the book of Isaiah, chapter 46, the prophet sees his people, the exiles from Israel, carrying the heavy images of the gods of Babylon on their weary mules. Isaiah sees Bell, the chief god of Babylon and Nebo, the son Bell, only as burdens upon his people. Isaiah calls his people from the worship of these idols to the worship of the true God. The true God is not a burden which must be painfully borne; the true God is the great God who carries His people. Instead of being a load to carry, the true religion should be a lift.

Is our religion a load or lift? Does it often seem to us to be a burden? Does the Bible seem to be a heavy and a boring book, but nevertheless a book which must be read? Does church attendance seem to be a needless restriction on our time and an inconvenience? Do the creed of our church and its moral teachings seem to cramp our freedom to believe and act as we wish? Does witnessing to our faith seem to require a forced and awkward action? Such worship cannot be true worship. The Bible does not tell us of a God who is a burden to bear. The psalmist tells us that God bears us on wings as eagle carries her young. Jesus tells us that underneath our lives are God's everlasting arms. The true Christian faith should bear us up and support our lives. And truly the Christian faith has through the age upheld people who believe in God.

On the night before His death, Jesus spoke to His disciples of the abiding presence of God. In the famous book of Donald Hanky, the title of which is, "A Student in Arms", a young wounded Englishman is pictured to be laying under the stars. There, the young man looking at those unseeing stars, he slowly began to realize that only he could see, and feel, and comprehend. For all his ineffectiveness, He was better than the stars. In him was God! Into his tired brain came over and over this idea, "Underneath are the everlasting arms."

Our Christian faith, my friends, must bear us up, not press us down. The pagan who finds his wooden god is too heavy for him in worshipping a false god, for God is not made of wood. God bears his people on wings, as the eagle carries her young.

Amen.

(Note: Taken from the Phil. Advance, September 1962, by Dr. George W. Beron)