

Old Time Religion 8-5-07

Welcome to Wayside Chapel's 60th anniversary. It was 60 years ago that the group of believers in Sedona decided it was time to incorporate and begin plans to build this chapel for non-denominational worship services. The school on Brewer Road and the Assembly of God had been gracious enough to let the congregation use their facilities until they were ready to build. Just to put that in perspective, that was the year Yeager had just broken the sound barrier, Howdy Doody Time and Lassie were the big radio hits, Kraft Theater had just demonstrated that you could actually make money on television advertisements, Princess Elizabeth and Prince Philip married, and some ancient manuscripts called the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered.

That seems like ages ago, but the message we preach at Wayside Chapel hasn't changed. "Gimme that Old Time religion, It's good enough for me!" You have to be at least 50 years old to remember that one. It was sung in the 1941 Academy Award winning movie Sergeant York. Charles Tillman first heard the Negro Spiritual at a camp meeting and wrote down the words and music in 1889. We don't sing it anymore. Many have decided the old time religion is outdated.

The reason I know the song because my father was a minister and I had to go to church three times a week. We had evening meetings at church in which we'd sing that song for what I thought was hours. 15 minutes seems like hours to a five year old that is anxious to go play. They kept adding verses, and with each verse you'd sing the chorus again, but with each repetition of the chorus you would drop a word from the beginning. You knew you had sung the last verse when the only word left in the chorus was the final word, "me".

The first verse of the original version is, "It was good enough for our mothers". Maybe that's the reason we don't sing it anymore. We aren't sure if it was good enough for our mothers. After the last Great Awakening in America there was a huge missionary thrust. Many new denominations had their origins in that time. But then came the prosperity of post World War 1 and the stock market boom. There is a great little book that describes the beginning of the rat race, *Henry and the Great Society*. In the book, Henry hears about washing machines. He decides it will save his wife a lot of time and energy so he works in the evenings in addition to his full day on the farm to save enough to get her one. They are thrilled with it. Well, next it is a tractor. Then it is different farm equipment. Before long they are working night and day to keep up with the payments for all the wonderful time savers they have purchased. It was the stock market boom of the roaring 20s. Who had time for religion?

Churches began to adopt the structure of corporations. The pastor was the CEO, and the elders were replaced by a board of administration. Elections determined who would hold positions of power on the board. Instead of a group of men known for their knowledge of the Bible and holy lives seeking the heart of God in prayer, boards were filled with the best businessmen. In 1889 you could sing it was good enough for our mothers, but by the middle of the 20th century old time religion was

far from the theme of many mothers' lives. Some of you can say your mother was known for her love of the Bible and godly example. You are truly blessed but we are all painfully aware that you are in the minority. Prosperity brought diversions and distractions.

That whole cycle of possessing the "must have" inventions was repeated after World War 2. Entertainment was an added distraction with the television now as necessary as a washing machine. If you had any time to spare, it was relaxing from long hours at work in front of the entertainment box. The ever-increasing invention of time saving devices prompted predictions of a three-day workweek. What we didn't realize is we had to work so much more to purchase all the gadgets and maintain them. Old Time Religion was beginning to fade from our culture. We began to follow the path that Europe had taken before us. It was the path of denying God in our education systems and neglecting church as irrelevant. Most didn't realize the drastic turn we were taking in a long history of Old Time Religion.

Eventually, Old Time Religion was thought of as a thing of the past, relegated to a few churches that just refused to step into the modern age. Our faith does have a long history. Some would say it began in the Garden of Eden. Man rebelled against God and was destined for punishment, but God promised a Savior would redeem mankind. That is the essence of Old Time Religion, man is fallen and needs a Savior. Without God's provision of Jesus' taking our sins upon Himself, we are hopelessly lost. Old Time Religion declares that we need to humble ourselves and seek the mercy and grace of God that is offered to us through Jesus, the Son of God.

Others would say it started with Abraham almost 4000 years ago. Old Time Religion was certainly good enough for father Abraham, about whom the Scriptures declare that he believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness. He simply took God at His word and trusted in Him. Abraham declared that God would provide a sacrifice for us on Mount Moriah. He called God the great provider, not in reference to our physical needs, but for our spiritual need. That mountain was the very place Jesus would die as God's provision for our sin about 2000 years after Abraham's prediction.

It is strange to me that people are so anxious to adopt ancient religions. There is an heir of mystique about ancient Eastern writings. We have some of the most ancient, most world changing, most accepted and authenticated writings by far, so why look somewhere else? I think the answer lies in the need to be humble enough to accept the mercy of God. Instead of attaining something by our own endeavors, Old Time Religion is recognizing there is nothing we can do except to throw ourselves on the mercy of God. But then we are indebted to God, and so many don't want to go down that road.

King David had old time religion 3000 years ago. As a young Hebrew boy, he had a heart for the things of God. God chose him to be king over all of Israel. Jews today look on him as the greatest king in Israel's history. He was victorious in warfare with the enemies of Israel. His success ushered in Israel's golden age. But then he

decided not to go out to battle. He had become too important. His desire for God was pushed aside by the many demands of leading a nation.

One spring when his armies went off to war, he stayed in his palace. He saw a beautiful woman and took her even though she was married to one of his loyal soldiers. Then he arranged to have her husband killed in battle. He tried to squelch his conscience, but a war raged within him. Finally, the prophet Nathan confronted him. After his act of adultery and murder he pleaded with God to be washed clean, to be made as white as snow. Jewish laws gave no remedy for intentional sin. There was no sacrifice of animals that was sufficient. David wrote that he gave God the sacrifice of a broken and contrite heart. "The forgiven man is a blessed man," he said.

How is that possible? How can God forgive someone of such heinous crimes just because they are repentant? In the 22nd Psalm, David wrote of One whose hands and feet would be pierced. He said his executioners would cast lots for his clothes. But he also predicted that all the ends of the earth would remember this and turn to the Lord. He said that all who die would kneel before this One. He wrote that future generations would be told about the righteousness of this One. That Scripture is being fulfilled as I speak to you. David knew he was not righteous before God, but that God in His mercy could provide a righteous covering for him. 1000 years before the cross of Christ, David witnessed what Jesus would do for him.

Others would point to Pentecost 2000 years ago, when the Spirit infilled Peter. He had been hiding in fear, but now he stood in the streets telling everyone in the sound of his voice that their sin was the reason Jesus was crucified. The crowd was convicted by God's Spirit and asked what they should do. Peter said they needed to repent and be baptized. That's old time religion. But today, we don't even acknowledge that man is a sinner. Our culture has discarded that as an antiquated notion.

The second verse in the song says that the old time religion saved our fathers. It certainly saved our forefathers, Washington, Lincoln, and my ancestor Benjamin Rush, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, as well as the vast majority of the signers.

The father of our country, George Washington was as Old Time Religion as one could be. *At age 20, he wrote prayers to say each morning and evening. On Sunday mornings he prayed: "...pardon, I beseech Thee, my sins; remove them from Thy presence, as far as the east is from the west, and accept me for the merits of Thy son, Jesus Christ..."* <http://theroadtoemmaus.org/RdLb/21PbAr/Hst/US/GWFaith.htm>

Samuel Adams, the *Father of the American Revolution, Signer of the Declaration of Independence* wrote in his will: *"I ... recommend my Soul to that Almighty Being who gave it, and my body I commit to the dust, relying upon the merits of Jesus Christ for a pardon of all my sins."*

Abraham Lincoln grew up with Calvinist parents but was an independent thinker. He never joined a church and said he couldn't subscribe to any of their creeds. He said his creed was the one Jesus taught, to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and your neighbor as yourself. Though no one doubts his moral integrity, you'll find that atheists claim he was an atheist, agnostics, deists and others all cite something he said to claim him as one of their own.

What most don't like to bring up is that his friends said he appeared to have memorized Isaiah, many of the Psalms and the whole New Testament. It wasn't until late in his life that he made any kind of public confession. Lincoln wrote: *"When I left Springfield, I asked the people to pray for me; I was not a Christian. When I buried my son—the severest trial of my life - I was not a Christian. But when I went to Gettysburg, and saw the graves of thousands of our soldiers, I then and there consecrated myself to Christ."*

Benjamin Rush was one of the countries earliest and most notable physicians. He pushed to have legislative powers to not be in the hands of a single branch of the government. Kings of other countries consulted with him about how to deal with Yellow Fever epidemics. But it is rarely mentioned that he was the founder of the Philadelphia Bible society and campaigned to have the Bible as a standard textbook in all classrooms. He wrote, *"My only hope of salvation is in the infinite, transcendent love of God manifested to the world by the death of His Son upon the cross. Nothing but His blood will wash away my sins. I rely exclusively upon it. Come, Lord Jesus! Come quickly!"* Revisionists love to use the broad brush of Deism, but when you read the writings of these men, there is no denying that the vast majority of our founding fathers believed in the old time religion of the Bible.

The next verse is, "It makes me love everybody". I think of Mother Theresa and thousands of missionaries in the last century that moved to disease infested places of poverty and danger, and in the most primitive conditions gave their lives so that others might know that a personal God loves each one of us. I think of Billy Graham giving his life to proclaim the Old Time Religion of repenting and receiving the grace Jesus offers us, purchasing our pardon on the cross. But we're too educated to believe that anymore. We won't even recognize the need to repent.

The next verse is, "It will do when I'm dying." You've probably heard the saying that "there are no atheists in a fox hole". It was an observation in times of war that when the shrapnel was flying everyone wanted to be sure they were right with God. We can pretend we don't need God, but how many deathbed conversions have you heard of? I've heard of plenty. Why do we wait till the last minute? I'll tell you why. We want to be our own god, but when we think we are about to meet the real God, suddenly we decide Old Time Religion isn't so outdated.

Old Time Religion is the one solution to guilt. Psychiatrists can try to talk you out of guilt. You can pretend it isn't there, but when you are about to breathe your last, there is no denying it. Somehow we instinctively sense we will be required to give an account to God for the life He has given us. "It will do when I'm dying" is really

meant to convey the relief that peace with God brings when we have Old Time Religion.

I love the simplicity of Old Time Religion. I don't have to pay for some secret knowledge, or ascend through levels of enlightenment. I just need to believe Jesus took the punishment I deserve. It is simple because God loves the world, from the brilliant and the lowest I.Q. If it were some mental attainment, it would leave all of us who were not so brilliant behind. Old Time Religion is simple enough for a child. In fact, Jesus said you had to be childlike to receive it.

The last verse is, "It will take us all to heaven." Sedona served as the treasurer for the group of believers that became Wayside Chapel. She invested the tithes into savings bonds for the building that they hoped to one-day build. When the Jordans donated the property upon which the church stands today, plans were drawn up and the first building was erected. It was about 2/3rds of what is now the fellowship hall. Sedona taught Sunday School to the children here, and you better believe her message was that Old Time Religion.

In 1950, they were going to dedicate the building, but Sedona couldn't make it as she lay ill with cancer. Shortly after that dedication, Old Time Religion carried Sedona Schnebly to the arms of her Savior. It will one day take us too, if we'll believe the words of Jesus of Nazareth who said, "I came to give my life a ransom for many. Come to me, ... and I will give you rest." That Old Time Religion is the welcome of God into His kingdom through His Son, if we will repent. Is it good enough for you? -There is an old saying, "You can never be too bad for Jesus, only too good." Sedona knew she needed a Savior, and we all have the same need. His arms are open to all who will come to Him.

You know, it isn't just old time; it's eternal. Old Time Religion will always be as fresh and relevant as its Creator. It doesn't need to be adjusted for the ever-changing culture. Truth doesn't need to change; we do. Wayside Chapel will physically change. The people will come and go. The style of the service will change over the years. The congregation will find new ways to make the eternal Gospel relevant to our changing culture, but Old Time Religion is timeless. Do you have it? Does it have you? Have you had your guilt washed away in the forgiveness that flows from the cross of Jesus Christ? If not, why not join the long history of those who have found the Old Time Religion to be the answer to the need of their heart. Repent – change the direction of your life. Believe the words of Jesus. Trust that His sacrifice for your sins was accepted by God. Receive the forgiveness God offers you, and be born again!