

Turning Back From the Battle.

From a message by Lamar Garman, Valley View Mennonite Church.

May praise, honour and glory be to our most High God as we have gathered together to worship Him and may we be truly tasting of the Lord again this morning and finding that He is good. Is that your personal testimony? I hope it is that you have found that the Lord has been good to you as you have tasted of Him and done His will.

Open your Bibles to another one of the Psalms, Psalm 78.

I have chosen a passage from Psalm 78 verse nine, speaking of Israel of old, specifically of a people called Ephraim one of the tribes, verse nine Psalm 78,

“The children of Ephraim, being armed, and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle.”

Doesn't sound very positive does it? Sounds a little negative surely, but wouldn't we agree that every passage in the Bible that sounds negative is put there for our instruction to learn the lessons from it so that we do not go down the same road and depart from the living God and the Lord Jesus which saves our souls, turning back from the Bible.

In these verses we have depicted a noble scenario of a people who had every opportunity afforded them for victory and success in battle and you know what they did? They turned back, they fled and they turned the other way and ran. Why? Because they no longer trusted in God. And that verse that Brother Clarence read to us in our devotional mentioned that didn't it, that blessed are those that put their trust in Him. May we ever be a people that are trusting the Lord God, one who is great and high and holy, the One who knows all about us, the One who is well able to supply all our needs even in difficult times of life, and that we in no way turn back and begin to fear and no longer put our trust in God.

Now the reference here in verse nine referring to the children of Ephraim, we don't know exactly which incident this is pointing back to, at least I'm not sure, maybe some of you have a better idea, but some people seems to think that it refers to first Samuel chapter 4, maybe you want to turn with me there, this is an account where Israel turned back.

You remember in first Samuel four how Israel was fighting against the Philistines and Israel was routed, they were defeated and they said what are we going to do? What are we going to do and they said: We know what we'll do we will get the Ark of the Covenant and we will take that to battle with us. And they did that and when the Philistines heard that the Ark of the Covenant was in the camp of Israel, verse 17, 1 Samuel 4, it says that they were afraid for they said God is coming into the camp and they said: Woe unto us for there has not been such a thing hereto be for. Woe unto us! Who shall deliver us from these mighty Gods? These are the gods that smote the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness. And then they encouraged each other and said: Be strong and quit yourselves like men. Are you Philistines that ye be not servants to the Hebrews as they have been to you, quit yourselves like men and fight, verse 10, and the Philistines fought and Israel was smitten. What did they do? It said they fled, they fled every man to the tents, to his tent, and there was a very great slaughter for there fell of Israel 30,000 good men.

Don't you think that if Israel had really been trusting in the Lord, if they had really been right with God, if they had been obeying Him in every area God would have been with them that day too, absolutely, I believe that with all my heart and Israel would not have to flee every man to his tent and they would not have had to turn back in the day of battle. I believe that.

And then the account goes on here in first Samuel four how when, oh let's see verse 14, Eli heard the noise of crying, what meaneth all this tumult? And he asked about it and Eli was told that his two sons died in battle and the Ark of the Covenant was taken, the Philistines captured the Ark and it says he died, he fell, verse 18, when it came to pass when they made mention of the Ark of God that he fell from of his seat backward by the side of the gate and his neck brake and he died. And it goes on to speak of one of Eli's daughters-in-law and how she died in childbirth, but just before she died, verse 21, she named the child Ichabod, saying the glory is departed from Israel because the Ark of God was taken and because her father-in-law and a husband had just died, she said the glory is departed from Israel.

What do we say whenever people turn back, whenever people give up on the Christian life, when ever they start down the slippery slope of worldly accommodation and turning back? The glory is departed.

And wouldn't you agree with me that to live a holy, noble and pure life according to the Bible depicts the glory of the Lord working in the lives of individuals, of men and women, the glory of the Lord showing us how to live and many others can see it, even though many do not agree with what we espouse and live by, but yet in some ways they can see the glory of the Lord. But when we depart from that, when we turn back and begin to renege on scriptural obedience the glory is departed, absolutely.

Do you remember what Jesus said to Peter so many years ago? Simon, Simon behold Satan has desired to have you to what? Sift you as wheat. (Luke 22:31) Well the same is true today. We need to as individuals, and as a church group, to make sure that we are strong and true and steadfast so that we do not turn back and have Satan sifting us as wheat and prove that we are only chaff that the wind can blow away.

Well let's read some of these verses now and I would like to look at this message in four main areas.

1. First we will look at provisions for victory.
2. Secondly causes for turning back.
3. Thirdly the losses incurred from turning back.
4. And then last of all fortification for going forward.

Reading now Psalm 78 verse one:

Psalm 78:1-18

Give ear, O my people, to my law: incline your ears to the words of my mouth. [2] I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old: [3] Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. [4] We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done. [5] For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: [6] That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: [7] That they might set their hope

in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments: [8] And might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not stedfast with God. [9] The children of Ephraim, being armed, and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle. [10] They kept not the covenant of God, and refused to walk in his law; [11] And forgot his works, and his wonders that he had shewed them. [12] Marvellous things did he in the sight of their fathers, in the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan. [13] He divided the sea, and caused them to pass through; and he made the waters to stand as an heap. [14] In the daytime also he led them with a cloud, and all the night with a light of fire. [15] He clave the rocks in the wilderness, and gave them drink as out of the great depths. [16] He brought streams also out of the rock, and caused waters to run down like rivers. [17] And they sinned yet more against him by provoking the most High in the wilderness. [18] And they tempted God and so on.

We could keep reading but I'm going to stop.

1. Provisions for victory. What are they?

Wouldn't we say that Israel had the necessary weapons being armed and carrying bows, they had the assurance of God's presence as long as they were faithful, they had the power of God at their disposal. Yes they did! There was really no justifiable reason for turning back was there? No.

What are some of the provisions that we have for spiritual victory?

Well one is that Christ is our leader today! Christ is our leader. Yes He is, He is the captain of our salvation and I would like to turn to Romans 8 thinking about that as Christ and being our leader, absolutely, no reason to turn back and sleep before the enemy. No, we have Christ as our leader.

Romans 8:31-32

“What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? [32] He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?”

See Christ is our leader we have all things through Christ, verse 33,

Romans 8:31-35

“What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? [32] He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? [33] Who

shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. [34] Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. [35] Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?"

Who is it that can separate us from Christ? No-one! Except we ourselves if we turn back and flee before the enemy.

Do you believe that? If life seems hard, if Satan ever tempts you to turn back from the battle of Christian life just go to Romans 8 and meditate on these verses, meditate on these verses. Remember Christ will never lead you where His power cannot keep you.

Now that is not original with me I read it somewhere but I like it, Christ will never lead you where His power cannot keep you.

Think about it, it may strengthen your faith. There is absolutely no justifiable reason to turn back from the battle. Then when we talk about turning back from the battle we don't necessarily mean that everyone that leaves our specific church group is turning back from the battle, we don't believe that, we know that there are other faithful groups too, but wouldn't you agree if this person goes to this church group and that church group trying to find an easier way and begins on the path of worldly accommodation, in a sense they are turning back from the battle. And may we be strengthened and firm in our faith of what the Bible teaches and how we are to live in the scriptural practices that we espouse according to the Bible to keep us true and strong and faithful and fighting the battle. Onward Christian soldiers marching as to war.

May that be us.

Secondly being armed in carrying bows. How?

Well for us today we would say we have a priceless patrimony or a priceless legacy. Yes we do. Israel had that, we see that in Psalm 78 where it speaks of establishing a testimony and Jacob, verse five, appointed a law in Israel, commanded our fathers that they should teach it to their children and their children to their children. A priceless legacy and patrimony. Well so also do we. Hebrews 11 speaks of the unquestionable faith of many, those of whom the world was not worthy, they wandered in the Earth and hid in caves, sawn asunder, you know the account there. And then we think

of later years in the Reformation era how so many were willing to lay down their lives for the sake of the gospel because of the oppression and the wicked sinful practices of the state church. They saw that God has something better for His people and they were willing to lay down their very lives for their belief in holy righteous living.

Well we today are recipients of that legacy and I just wonder sometimes how would we fare today if persecution like that came to the Church, would we, could we stand like our forefathers did? You know what? We could, absolutely we could! The same God that gave them strength and grace and power would be able to give it to us too in times like that in that when we need to be strong, we need to be true and we need to have the determination not to turn back from the battle.

Another provision for victory is a faithful brotherhood, a faithful brotherhood.

When a blessing it is to be part of a church where we can have full confidence in our brethren and in our sisters and that together we can find a right way for us and for our little ones, it is a provision that we have for victory.

2. Well let's go on now and look at some causes for turning back.

Why would people ever turn back?

Why turn back when God has provided in so many ways for us and for the Church? It has happened, it is happening. Why?

Well one would be because of spiritual lethargy, spiritual lethargy. We see that in Psalm 78:8 at the end of the verse it says: Whose spirit was not steadfast with God. Satan is ever trying to lull the church to sleep. Verse 11 Psalm 78, they forgot His works.

Brother James read to us this morning in the Sunday school devotions that we are not to forget all that God has done for us, we will touch a little more on that in the next point how subtle our enemy is, and that is why each member of the church must stay close to the Lord and be awake spiritually. Romans 13:11: “And that, knowing the time, that now *it is* high time to awake out of sleep: for now *is* our salvation nearer than when we believed.”

Yes, it is high time to wake out of sleep and be spiritually alert and not become lethargic spiritually, because that is a cause for turning back, if we just have a nonchalant attitude, if we develop a general careless life in our relationship with the Lord we are in danger of spiritual lethargy and turning back from the spiritual battle which Jesus calls us to.

Secondly, turning back, why?

Well because of materialism and wrong priorities. Deuteronomy 8, Deuteronomy 6, verses like that, When the Lord thy God bringeth thee into a good land beware that thou forget not the Lord thy God.

The good land, the houses, the farms, the businesses, the opportunities for gain, the availability of services and even maybe we could say the availability of luxuries, all have a way of quenching spiritual interests.

Coming back to this country again a little bit ago after being away for awhile I was just impressed again with the general economic well-being. Now some say that there is a recession coming. In just this past week the Federal government decreased the interest by I believe a quarter of one percent again trying to spur economic growth, but yet when we see the sad state of economies in other countries and compares it to what we have here we had better thank the Lord and make sure that we are using these economic opportunities that God gives us in a right way and in a careful way and not allowing materialism and wrong priorities to overtake us. May it not be a snare to us, may we take to heart first Timothy 6:10: "For the love of money is the root of all evil which while some coveted after they have erred from the faith.

Turned back, yes and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."

Thirdly, turning back, why?

Well because of rebellion, outright of rebellion. Verse eight, the first part of the verse, And that they might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; verse 10 Psalm 78, at the end, They refused to walk in His law.

And Luke 19, the parable of the pounds, the noble man went to a far country to seek a kingdom and return, you remember that parable, any put his servants in his place and said: Occupy it till I come. But it says his citizens hated him and they sent a message after him saying: We will not have this man to reign over us. Today it seems some people have that attitude too, some have a dim view of the authority of Scriptures, a dim

view of scriptural church authority. Rebellion, that is what it is, yes it is. May we not be a rebellious people. First Samuel 15:23: “For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft.”

May we never rebel against God, against the scriptures, against scriptural church authority.

Fourthly, turning back, why?

Because of deception, because of deception. Jesus in Luke 21 tells us that in the end times they will be characterised by rampant deception and in verse eight then He says: Take heed that what? That ye be not deceived. Personal, personal. That ye be not deceived. That is for us today. And we dare not capitulate to the deception around us that we see in so many modernistic thinking church groups and the call to ecumenism and linking arms together. Sure it would be nice, sure in some ways, and may be especially on our mission fields the danger is more real, the call to link arms with the local churches.

I remember in the Bahamas we came under much pressure from the community because of that. Not long ago there was a community wide religious rallies sponsored by one of the churches and the Mennonites came under a lot of pressure. One of the local pastors called me to a dinner meeting, wanted me to attend a dinner meeting to drum up support for this community wide rally and well I just had to explain to him why we do not do that, why we don't link arms with other groups that do not really practice biblical separation and non-resistance and some of those Bible teachings of the scriptures. And that certain pastor accepted that very graciously, and many did not. The unity folks were very antagonistic towards us because of that and they wanted us to participate in that rally which we couldn't do.

Also to avoid deception we cannot afford to read the writings and listen to the tapes and fellowship closely with those who do not practice separation from the world and other things like that. Let's not be naive and gullible, let's not think that we can imbibe the Bible teachings of others who do not really believe in the authority of the Scriptures and come out untainted, we won't, we can't do that. So let's be careful that we be not deceived. It is a cause of turning back.

Fifthly, turning back, why?

We are looking for an easier way, we need to blend with society. That would be a cause for turning back, sure it would be.

Just about a week ago my family and I were in Western Pennsylvania at a public lake where the main attraction is thousands of fish flocking to the surface to be fed, people bring loaves of bread and they throw loaves into the fish and fish flock to the surface and it is really something to see, and it draws hundreds of people there to watch these fish feed and they came there to feed the fish. But I told my wife it seems like some of the people are more interested in watching us than the fish.

Well times like that makes you almost wish for an easier way so people wouldn't stare at you so much and think you so unique and odd, but the Bible talks about God's people becoming a gazing stock, doesn't it? Sure it does. Are we willing to bear that reproach? And we have a smile on our faces while people are staring at us and we try to help them to see that we are happy in the Lord and let it not be said of us like I heard recently one individual said to one of our people she said: "I have never seen a happy Mennonite."

Well I think that is a little bit of a reproach may be. Let's reflect and radiate joy of the Lord as we find ourselves out in the public so that others can see yes, we love the Lord, we are not looking for an easier way, we love the Bible way and living thereby, we are not looking for an easier way.

Also I believe that the casual clothes trend that we continually work against is an effort to fit in and not to be so outstanding and unique, we tend to blend in, let's not be like that.

Mark 8 Jesus talks about the need to take up the cross and follow Him and that if we are ashamed of Him, He will be ashamed of us, let's not be ashamed to be God's people and not look for an easier way.

Turning back, sixthly, why?

Well because of becoming battle weary. Maybe sometimes we just feel a little battle weary. Yes brethren we don't get finished do we? There is a lot of work to do, sisters a lot of work to do, and we keep working and we keep labouring and we keep busy in the Lord's program. But I would say one caution should be given; let's not act like there are no limits to our emotional and physical stamina. There are some limits and sometimes we need to recognise those. You remember Moses father-in-law, so many years ago when Moses seem to think there was no limits to his stamina,

why Moses father-in-law had to set him straight. But at the same time let's recognise that God gives us what we need and we do not want to be weary in well doing, we don't want to get to the point where we say: Well I just can't take it, I can't take it, and now it is too much.

I know there is a balance but let's be counting it a privilege to be engaged in the service of the church and the Lord's work and not become battle weary.

Also let's not become battle weary in maintaining the standards of the church and in trying to help our children and our teenagers go the right way. You know sometimes we feel the tug especially by the younger generation, it doesn't need to be that way but sometimes it is that way and lets not become battle weary. Parents let's keep right on promoting the right thing for the church and for our families.

Another reason for turning back, why would we do that?

Well maybe because of the few results for our efforts. We work and we labour and we preach and we teach and we hand out literature and we send out missionaries and we visit prisons and we hold street meetings and cottage meetings, but we see so few results, is it worth it? What would you say? Well sure it is. Sure it is. One soul gained is worth more than the whole world. Sure it is worth it. Every effort that we can make for the cause of Christ is well worth it and let's praise the Lord for being engaged in His program.

Another one, reasons for turning back is the desire for pleasure seeking and the ways of the world.

We looked at that in the Sunday school lesson. So let's not desire pleasure, let's not seek the ways of the world, we will be tempted to turn back from the cross of Christ if we become ensnared in that.

3. Now let's look at the loss sustained in turning back from the battle.

What are some of the losses which are sustained when people turn back from the battle for the Lord?

One would be a return to bondage, a return to bondage. Israel time and again found themselves to being in bondage to the enemy because of their turning back. And there is a verse in Galatians chapter four that I would like you to notice. Galatians 4:9, thinking about turning back from the Christian life and being found in bondage again:

"But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?"

Do you? Do I? No! Be it far from us to ever think of being back in the bondage of sin and being a servant of Satan and all the debauchery that people find themselves in, and the grief and sorrow when they turn back and find themselves estranged from God.

So often, time and again, people leave a Conservative church and they say: I won't change my practice, I will just stay the same. But you know what? It doesn't work that way, it doesn't work that way. People become like those that they associate with.

Some of you probably remember being in Guatemala in Quetzaltenango and they had this big concrete sliding board, I don't know how long it is, 75 feet? Hundred feet? You get on top of that thing and you start sliding down there. You think you can stop? Absolutely not! Before you know it you are at the bottom, you are at the bottom of the slope. And to me that is a depiction of people that start down that slope of leaving, leaving scriptural principles and practices, deviating just a little bit here, deviating just a little bit there, they begin to slide away from the scriptures and away from God and after awhile they find themselves at the bottom, a return to bondage. That is one of the losses sustained when we depart and turn back.

Another one is a loss of God's blessing.

Yes a loss of God's blessing, and that alone should cause us to cringe at the thought of turning back. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. The thought of losing God's blessing on our lives, it would be a horrible thing would it not brethren and sisters to not never having God's blessing on our lives? Well it is a loss incurred when we turn back from the battle.

Another loss sustained from turning back is discouragement to other Christians.

When we turn back, if an individual turns back, just think of the discouragement that brings to other Christians. One brother in describing how he felt when in his congregation three sisters turned back at the same time and went back into the ways of the world he said: It is a good way to

lose weight, he said I just didn't feel like eating and I couldn't sleep well, he said it was such a discouragement to me.

Well may we never be the cause of discouragement like that to other Christians. No. But we want to encourage each other and build each other up in the Lord.

Another loss sustained from turning back is becoming useless in the cause of the kingdom.

Becoming useless to the church. Oh that's a loss isn't it? How sad, how sad it is when those that have been useful to the church and to the Lord in various ways when they fall out spiritually, turn back from the ways of the Lord and they no longer are fit for service in the kingdom of the Lord. No longer useful. One writer in writing about the loss sustained like that and becoming useless, referring mostly to groups as a whole when they depart from scriptural principles, he took the song Onward Christian Soldiers and change the words to depict the loss sustained, he said:

Backward Christian soldiers, fleeing from the fight,
With the cross of Jesus clearly out of sight.
Christ our rightful master stands against the foe
But forward into battle we refuse to go.
Sit here then ye people, join in a useless throng
Blend with ours your voices in a feeble song,
Blessings, ease and comfort ask from Christ the King
With our modern thinking we won't do a thing.

Well it is a loss sustained isn't it when we turn back from the battle and we become useless to the Lord, become useless to the church and other Christians. Certainly a serious loss.

Another is the loss of testimony, a loss of testimony for the Lord.

Remember how the prophet Nathan said to David (2 Samuel 12:14) that after his turning back temporarily he said: Thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme.

May that never be said of us that we in some way by our unfaithfulness give great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme His good and holy name.

Another one, these individuals turning back may well lead to group apostasy.

When we turn back, people turn back individually, it may well lead to group apostasy, it is a loss sustained. It has happened time and time again down through the centuries and let us not think that we are different.

4. Well just quickly now yet a few fortifications for victory.

Do we need to turn back? Never, never, never, we have plenty of fortifications for victory.

What are they? Setting our hope in God. Did you see that in Psalm 78 there, one of the reasons that the parents were supposed to teach their children the Bible way so that they can set their hope in God and we need to do that too don't we? Well sure we do.

We sing the song: There is no other hope there is no other plea, salvation full, salvation free must come alone through thee.

Amen, brethren and sisters. Setting our hope in God is a fortification for victory.

Another one is, don't forget what God has done for you.

Reinforcing that thought, don't forget how good how God has been to you, in so many ways He has saved your soul, if He has saved your soul, He has led you into the paths of truth and righteousness, God has been so good and even if you are here this morning and do not find yourselves in the goodness of the Lord don't forget that God is merciful and He is longing for you to come into the fold too.

Another one, fortification for victory is spiritual obedience.

Simply obey the Bible, do what we are commanded.

And another one, keep the watchman on the walls.

What do I mean by that? Well we could go to Isaiah chapter 21 and read that call for the watchman to be on the walls of the city and to warn of danger coming, to alert the populace when the enemy is approaching. Well today we need that in the church too don't we? Yes we need the watchman on the walls, not only the ministry, not only the leadership but every faithful member too, watching out for spiritual danger for the group and sounding the alarm when something is on the horizon that threatens us as individuals and as a group spiritually.

Another fortification, let's remember that souls are being saved, I touched that before, but souls are being saved and may that be a fortification for us that we as God's representatives here upon this earth have the privilege of pointing the right way to other people, those that do not know the Lord. We have the privilege of pointing out the right way, the Bible way, and some respond to that, we know that and souls are being saved from sin.

Last of all now a fortification for victory.

There will be victory in the final battle. Yes there will. We could go to Revelation chapter 19 and some of those other verses that depict how finally Satan will be, Satan and his kingdom will be overthrown and Christ will be the ultimate victor and He will receive final glory and we will be a part of that, we will be part of all the glory that the Father has for the Son in that time.

There will be final victory in the battle that is yet to come.

May we use our Christian armour well.

May we not turn back from the battle.

May we not become battle weary.

May we not be allured by Satan.

May we not turn tail and run when Satan tempts us and wants to lead us away from God.

I will never turn back. May that be our determination.

There is a song that goes: I am too near heaven to turn back now, I am too near heaven to turn back now. It doesn't matter how young you are or how old you are, life is very, very short at its best and we are very near heaven in a very real sense, I am too near heaven to turn back now.

May that be your determination and mine.

Let us kneel for prayer.