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En Route

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settled back in my seat as the airplane taxied to its take-off position. Four eighteen-hour days, in the revision of a manuscript, with three typewriters in operation, had just concluded. By all counts it had been one of those frantic deadline-meeting weeks when everything else had been dropped for the sake of a publication schedule.

The plane now carried me to two meetings in Florida in behalf of our Herald of Truth radio and television ministry. The events of the past week still gripped my mind and body. My wife had typed almost continuously for the four days. Our two children, after having the problem explained to them, had cooperated wonderfully. My secretary and three other friends had helped immeasurably.

After changing planes in Dallas for the final part of my trip, I asked the stewardess for stationery and began writing notes to all those who had helped me meet the deadline. Carelessly I noted at the top of each letter the phrase “en route.” After the third such letter I looked back at what I had written and was struck forcefully by those words “en route.” “That’s what our lives are,” I thought. We are all “en route” as we live from day to day.

And that’s what I really want to talk about today. Not many of us stop to consider it. Most of us get involved and remain that way through an almost thoughtless life. Those of us who do reflect oftentimes find ourselves so overwhelmed with our own personal problems and burdens that nothing constructive occurs. But, no one can deny, we are all “en route,” going somewhere for something. The journey consumes our energies, uses up our lives, and, in the final analysis, is the summation of our existence on the earth. This is what makes our discussion today extremely important. I hope you will prayerfully consider today’s Herald of Truth study, “en route.”

First, let me suggest that there is no question but that we are all travelers; we are all “en route.” Many common experiences of life testify unanimously to this fact. David points to one of mankind’s common bonds in this question, “What man is he that shall live and not see death, that shall deliver his soul from the power of Sheol?” (Psalm 89:48). We can fairly successfully shut out the fact of impending death from our minds, especially during our periods of good health. But sooner or later all of us are forced to realize the inevitability of death. This fact alone establishes the idea of a “journey” that, if to nowhere else, at least takes us to our appointment with death. Another Old Testament writer said, “For the living know that they shall die” (Ecclesiastes 9:5).

The frenzied pace at which most of us live also suggests that we are on a journey. It doesn’t matter where you live or what you do, everybody seems hurried. The pace doesn’t slacken, rather it increases with each day and with additional responsibilities that arise. “The Preacher” of Ecclesiastes stopped and looked at this kind of living, even in his day, and expressed a very modern thought: “I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of the spirit” (Ecclesiastes 1:14). The same perceptive observer got at the heart of much of this ceaseless activity in these words: “He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity” (Ecclesiastes 5:10). All this activity and hurry says that we are “en route.”

The dreams, plans, and deadlines that we create for ourselves speak of such a direction or journey. We talk of tomorrow as if it were already here and consume days forecasting the future. James, in his New Testament epistle, chides us for much of this concern. “Come now, ye that say To-day or to-morrow we will go into this city, and spend a year there, and trade, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. What is your life? For ye are a vapor that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord
will, we shall both live, and do this or that” (James 4:13, 14). James says it isn’t the planning that is so bad. It’s the fundamental weakness that arises in any plans that leave out God and His sovereign control of His creatures’ lives. But, the point here is this; the dreams, plans and deadlines all point to the fact that we are “en route.”

In a special sense God’s people in every age have realized that they were on an important journey, that they were “en route,” for noble purposes and eternal destinations. In the early verses of Hebrews, chapter eleven, we read of Abraham and Sarah who listened to God and left home for a strange, unnamed land. We further read in this passage of their descendants Isaac and Jacob, who remained faithful to this unusual promise of God. Why did these men and women so respond to God’s strange command and promise? Here is the Bible’s answer: “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things make it manifest that they are seeking a country of their own. And if indeed they had been mindful of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly; wherefore God is not ashamed of them, to be called their God; for he hath prepared for them a city” (Hebrews 11:13-16).

The Old Testament “faithful” were “strangers and pilgrims on the earth.” The world’s schemes and ambitions were foreign to them. They had other plans and looked for a better country, God’s country. In short, they were “en route.” Peter encouraged New Testament Christians “as sojourners and pilgrims” in his First Epistle “to abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul” (1 Peter 2:1-11). The Christian’s journey through life is one of service, faith, hope and expectation of the glory to come. As many common experiences of mankind testify, so the unique nature of the Christian life requires that we see life as a journey. We are all “en route.”

This leads us, however, to talk about destinations. Our journey will ultimately end somewhere. We are “en route” to some destination. Many of us have no idea of our destinations; this is why we find the idea of being “en route” so unacceptable. Thoughtlessness, however, does not mean there is no direction in our lives.

This question of destinations may be the most disturbing one of all. As we are all headed toward physical death, so there is a certain dread of physical death which enslaves us. The author of Hebrews recognized this attitude and wrote, “Since then the children are sharers in flesh and blood, he also himself in like manner partook of the same; that through death he might bring to nought him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver all them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Hebrews 2:14, 15). Even though we know we are going to die, we often allow death to “subject” us “to bondage.” This matter of destinations is important to us, isn’t it?

The frenzy, the plans and dreams, that make our lives so full and busy also can create anxieties regarding our destination. Will I continue to prosper? Will I be able to provide for my family? Do I have enough saved for emergencies? Jesus knew of these questions and said, “Be not anxious for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than the food, and the body than the raiment?” (Matthew 6:25). These very anxieties and worries suggest that we are not only on a journey or “en route” but that we are concerned in some way or another with the destination of life’s travels.

Unfortunately, many of us do not allow this concern to express itself constructively or legitimately. We know that we are “en route,” the question of destinations creates concern, and yet, we do everything possible to avoid the question of “Where will it all finally lead?” Man is peculiar within the animal world for his ability to deliberately dodge such crucial questions.

Many extreme methods are used to reject this concern. Many men today refuse to consider the question of destination through an abandonment of all moral restraint and principle. These are men and women, in Paul’s words, “whose end is perdition, whose god is the belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things” (Philippians 3:19). The destination is no less certain, as Paul points out here, when we refuse to think about it. If one’s god is the belly or thoughtless surrender to the animal impulses of the flesh, then one’s destination is perdition.

Others have been able to escape concern for the destination of life’s journey by a perverse kind of thoughtlessness. These are like those described in Romans, chapter one, who “knowing God, they glorified him not as God, neither gave thanks; but became vain in their reasonings, and their senseless heart was darkened” (Romans 1:21). They will not consider the evidence of God’s existence, they reject His “power and divinity.” By refusing to acknowledge Him, they lose all sense of direction for their lives.

Some have refused such sober reflection through the employment of all kinds of defense mechanisms. Man’s excuse-making ability is overshadowed by his unwillingness to ask the essential questions of life. Like the men invited to the great supper in Luke 14, modern man excuses himself from any serious thought of this life and the life to come. But with those poor creatures of Jesus’ day, one must hear the King say, “that none of those men that were bidden shall taste of my supper” (Luke 14:24). The author of the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes sought life and all its glory. He amassed much wealth and many possessesions. Listen to his conclusion: “Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold all was vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 2:11).

The Christian, however, has humbly and courageously faced the question of destination because he, more than anyone else, knows the nature of life, that all men are “en route.” In his belief in God the Christian has found a “sure foundation.” He therefore heeds the counsel: “Let every one that nameth the name of the Lord depart from unrighteousness” (II Timothy 2:19). The Christian also enjoys a “living hope” based on the historical act of Christ’s resurrection (I Peter 1:3-5). This hope fortifies him for a lifelong journey to the glory and life of God. The Christian possesses a confident persuasion. He to whom the Christian has given himself is the One who is “able to guard that which is committed unto him against that final day” (II Timothy 1:12).

The all-important question then that remains is not “Are you en route?” but “Where are you going?” Sin has no answer for tomorrow. It cries, “Today, now, this is the moment.” With Moses will you not repudiate sin that can only last “for a season” (Hebrews 11:24-26)? God, on the other hand, calls for each of us to live today — really, truthfully, and honestly — in view of tomorrow. God speaks in terms of the present and His present Word has meaning for the future (Luke 12:20; II Peter 3:8; Philippians 4:4, 5).

There are ways to answer the question, “Where are we going?” The following questions provide a test that will uncover the direction of your journey through life. You may want to write these down and use them daily.

First, “To what do you give your time?” Jesus counsels us to lay up treasures in heaven instead of on the earth where they must ultimately decay and be lost (Matthew 6:19-21). He urges us, “Seek ye first God’s kingdom and God’s righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33). Your treasure is where your heart is. And your heart is where you spend your time. To
seek the kingdom is to let the kingdom of God be the center of your life.

Second, “What do you think about most?” Paul speaks of the “true, honorable, just, pure, lovely,” and of those things, that have a “good report” urging us to “think on these things” (Philippians 4:8). We become what we think. It isn’t difficult to uncover the direction of one’s life once his thoughts are known.

Third, “For what are you immediately willing to sacrifice yourself?” A divided loyalty is no loyalty at all. The Christian’s commitment is complete. “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to one, and despise the other,” Jesus explained (Matthew 6:24). You can know the direction of your life by answering the question, “For what am I immediately willing to sacrifice myself?”

Fourth, “For what do you spend your money?” This is the principle that Jesus uses in urging us to lay up treasures in heaven. The statement, “for where thy treasure is, there will thy heart be also,” can also read, “for where thy heart is, there will thy treasure be.” For what do you spend your money?

Fifth, “To whom or to what do you turn in disappointment and tragedy?” The God-directed life turns to “the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and may find grace to help us in time of need” (Hebrews 4:14-16). The selfish life has nowhere to turn but to self.

To honestly and frankly answer these five questions will help each of us to uncover the direction of our lives and to determine the destinations of our journeys. We are “en route.” We’re going somewhere for something. All of us, great and small, will stand before the throne of God to answer for the things done in the body, to be judged according to our works (II Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 20:11-13).

Those who refused the life of God offered in Christ and who persist in sin will receive the destination of that kind of journey. “En route” to hell are all who refuse to hear and answer the call of Christ (Hebrews 5:8, 9). But those who realize that “the world passeth away, and the lust thereof,” and who do “the will of God,” will receive the destination of that kind of journey (1 John 2:15-17) “En route” to heaven and eternal life with God are those who obey God.

Hear the testimony of the New Testament Gospels and believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and your Savior (John 20:30, 31). Honestly examine the direction of your life with the five questions given earlier, repenting of your sins (Acts 2:38). Openly avow your faith in Christ and your turn from sin (Romans 10:9, 10). Jesus promises those who so act today, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned” (Mark 16:16).

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