

The Bible We Read

Recently I visited with my old friend, Jerry Vargo. Jerry is on staff for another friend, John Wilkerson, who is pastor of First Baptist Church of Long Beach, California. Jerry was one of my best friends in college and over the years we have kept in touch. One of the very kind things about Jerry is that he always has his eye open for books, especially old, out-of print books that he knows I will cherish. True to form, Jerry presented me with a Bible printed in 1859, just before I boarded the plane back for Houston. I have been enjoying reading my daily portion of Scripture from this one hundred forty-four year old Bible since he gave it to me.

Another thing about Jerry, he knows I'm very interested in the historical period called the Victorian period, which overlaps with the American Civil War. As I have perused the ancient volume he gave me, I have noticed several things about it. The first thing I noticed is that it is wonderfully compact, especially for an old Bible. One that a woman could place inside her purse. Well, when you open to the front you immediately discover a very elegant handwriting that says, Jane Kearsley, Christmas, 1862. As I opened its fragile pages I found three newspaper clippings, all dating weddings from 1874 to 1879. They all appeared to be her children. I did notice her husband was known as Major G.W.T. Kearsley. The towns listed were Charlestown, Knoxville, Tennessee, and Lynchburg, Virginia. From the time frame, I suppose this was a traditional southern family, whose patriarch proudly served his native land during the War Between the States. One thing you discover in the reconstruction south is that the old families never wanted to lose their sense of "southness".

First of all, you can discover from an old Bible if family is important. Family should be important because Jesus said, *"...For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder"* (Matthew 19:5,6).

As I observed the outside of the Bible, I was impressed by the intricate design sketched on the front and back. As I rolled the Bible over and looked at the spine edge, I noticed the seven raised lines of stitching that held it together. The gold print that said, "Holy Bible" was still visible on the side, but just barely, because of the wear on the Bible. You can tell the inimitable look of a Bible that had been carried around often. Mrs. Kearsley was one highly familiar with her Bible. One place the owner of this Bible frequented was church. One reason I know this is because I recognized the minister's names who officiated in the wedding ceremonies and inside her Bible are hand bracketed pencil markings beside what was probably the pastor's text, and in the margin of her Bible was the same preacher's name. Ah! Here was a lady that did not merely send her children to church, she took them. Therefore, you can tell by an old Bible if Church was important. *"I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD"* (Psalm 122:1).

There is still some gold gilt edging on the pages of Mrs. Kearsley's old Bible, but not much. This is not due to time. I have some old gold edge volumes over a hundred years old that still have a glimmer to the gold gilt edging. This dear lady's old Bible is worn because of use. I could see what areas of the Bible she frequented. I could tell by her underscoring, fragile pages, and other evidence of use that God, the author of that old Book, meant everything to her. The owner of this old Book is dead and gone. I'm sure it has quite a history. I wonder how it got from the southeast to the west coast. I can imagine a wagon train, herds of buffalo, Indians, coyotes, desert and mesa terrain to see as they traveled. Was it she and her husband, the Major? Was it one of her kids and spouse that took the old Bible west? We don't know, but what volumes an old Bible speaks. I wonder will someone one day find our old Bible and receive thought such as, the family, the Church and most importantly, God was the central part of this person's life?

I love this old poem, although the author remains anonymous, it tells a beautiful story:

The Precious Bible

Though the cover is worn
And the pages are torn,
And though places bear traces of tears;
Yet more precious than gold
Is the Book, worn and old,
That can shatter and scatter my fears.

When I prayerfully look
In the precious old Book,
Many pleasures and treasures I see;
Many tokens of love
From the Father above,
Who is nearest and dearest to me.

The old Book is my Guide,
‘Tis a Friend by my side;
It will lighten and brighten my way;
And each promise I find
Soothes and gladdens my mind
As I read it and heed it each day.

- Pastor Pope -

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