

## The Soil of the Harvest

“The song will be a faith builder that reminds you of past victories and present possibilities. The song will lift you when your spirit begins to fail,” is what Paul Felding said of the second song that would be the spirit builder to help the farmers in the final part of the harvest saving the corporate farm and giving them enough revenue to save their own farms.

The easier, but laborious, task of harvesting the wheat that lay between the rows from the hail damage had been completed; now the more difficult job of harvesting the wheat that had been damaged but lay in the rows remained to be done. The band director/Sunday School teacher, Paul Felding, in an attempt to build esprit de corps, gave the young farmers two spirit songs. The first was their old high school fight song, *Stars and Stripes Forever*. The second song performed by the St. Louis Philharmonic was a mystery to most, but familiar to some. It was much more than a familiar song for Felding who chose the song to carry them through the most difficult challenge of the harvest. It was a song that had carried him through his spiritual journey. The band director gave the farmers CDs and cassette tapes of this song. It had a beautiful and slower cadence that would help pace the harvesters as well as provide the spirit to continue through the strenuous time involved.

As the harvesters gently lifted the half-broken wheat from their bent stalks, the verse of Scripture Felding gave came to Pat Shaughnessy’s mind, *“A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory”* (Matthew 12:20). The lovely melodic song that played in his Walkman seemed to calm him down through the tedious and tenuous effort, although he did not remember the words of the song that was sung a long time ago when he was younger and in church attendance.

As Pat came into his house for the evening, the melody was still in his head. He unconsciously hummed it as he cleaned up. Kathy was preparing supper and just as Pat came toward the table, Kathy softly sang, “Take the world, but give me Jesus, All its joys are but a name; But His love abideth ever, Thro’ eternal years the same.”

Astounded, Pat asked, “What are you singing?”

“The same song you were humming when you came in! I haven’t heard that in years. It’s pretty; thanks for the reminder!” Then Kathy continued the final touches of the evening meal as Pat fumbled through the music books until he found an old hymn book. As the family sat down for their meal, Pat said, “Hey, listen to this stanza – ‘Take the world, but give me Jesus, Let me view His constant smile; Then throughout my pilgrim journey Light will cheer me all the while.’”

Kathy brightened as she suggested, “I know it’s not good manners to sing at the table, but let me see if I can sing the chorus by heart. Tell me if I’ve got the words right. ‘Oh, the height and depth of mercy! Oh, the length and breadth of love! Oh, the fullness of redemption, Pledge of endless life above!’”

“You got it, Kathy!” And the family applauded.

Nine-year-old Amanda asked, “What’s that song about, Mommy?” There was a sadness that came over the young couple as they realized the benefit of learning hymns by heart in church as children. It dawned on the parents – their kids have never attended church except when grandparents coerced everyone to at least come for the Christmas cantata or Easter.

It was the miracle that they dreamed about - now it was the miracle they were living in. The job was done, miles of corporate farming had been saved and enough money had been earned by the two-hundred farmers to pay their debts and prepare them for a possible harvest on their own farms next year. No move-outs, no farm auctions. Again, with the permission from the high school principal, Felding told

the young farmers to get the word out to be at the celebration rally in the school gym next Friday.

The town had not seen a crowd like this since the team won the district championship, just before going all the way to state, in 1982. Every seat in the gym was taken and there was standing room only as the band came in playing *Stars and Stripes Forever*. The crowd clapped to the time of the music and jubilation was in the air. Everyone was there. The mayor, the foreman of the corporate farm, the farmers. Even the president of the largest cereal company in the world came to celebrate the miracle with the farmers that consequently saved his largest farm as well.

The principal walked to the center of the gym where there was only a twenty-five foot circumference that didn't have someone standing. He took the microphone and announced, "There is someone here this evening that had the dream for everything we are witnessing. Our band director had the vision..." The crowd began to erupt in applause and seeing his lengthy introduction was going to be overwhelmed by the spontaneous act of appreciation, the principal shouted over the building cheers with, "I introduce to you, Mr. Paul Felding!" Those in the bleachers stood to their feet and the duration of the applause was making this Sunday School teacher feel embarrassed.

Holding his hands in an earnest effort to get the crowd to cease, they finally tapered off. As Felding began to speak, the audience fell into a reverenced hush. The humble man, although accustomed to the classroom, was noticeably uneasy with what looked to be half the town in his presence. Choking back tears, Paul Felding said, "From the bottom of my heart, I thank you for the kindness you have shown to me today, but I feel unworthy of these accolades. In all honesty, these young farmers are the ones who got the job done and they are the ones to be congratulated." He waited until the clapping for the farmers died down, then continued, "There is one who deserves the highest praise and recognition for what happened in our community. He is the one that, not only gave me the ideas that I shared with the harvesters, but gave the sun, the rain, and the grain. I give all the glory to God on this great occasion! Jesus said in Luke 10:2, *'Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest.'* We were facing a grim future, but we prayed to the Lord, He answered and today and I personally give Him thanks." A sporadic applause was given, because the people didn't know whether to say Amen! which would have been new to most of the folks gathered. So, a faint, but sincere, applause for the Lord was given.

Felding, now in stronger voice continued, "My life has not always been the way it is now. My heart and life was a wasteland, until the Lord broke my heart, by His mercy, like hardened soil. An inspired seed was planted in my heart. It is found in John 6:26 through 29, which reads, *'Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled. Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed. Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.'*"

Paul was not holding a Bible; he was so well acquainted with these Scriptures, he spoke them by heart. With almost musical rhythm, the band director drove the point home, "Many of you have not yet realized that God has a greater field to harvest than your acreage beyond your houses. It is the field of your heart. Through recent events He has been breaking up your ground. For the first time many of you wondered if the livelihood of several generations of family farming was over. But you have seen it saved. Has it occurred to you that God wants to save more than your farm? The second spirit song that lifted our hearts and in turn generated a patient calmness in the final hours of the monumental harvest was a song that was sung the day my life was changed. The last stanza reflects the new life, God gave me, 'Take the world, but give me Jesus, In His cross my trust shall be; Till, with clearer, brighter vision, Face to face my Lord I see.' This coming Sunday night the pastor has asked me to share my testimony at

church. Please come to our church this Sunday night at 6:00 p.m., I'll show you a side of me most of you have never met and I'll share with you the greatest harvest of all. I love you and admire you more than you'll ever realize."

Then something happened after the principal dismissed the crowd. It even surprised Mr. Felding. As the crowd walked out of the gym, the band began to play something they had worked up on their own, *Take the World, But Give Me Jesus*. And they played flawlessly.

*"Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you"* (Hosea 10:12).

(to be continued)

- Pastor Pope -

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