

Golden Bells and Pomegranates

by Dr. J. Vernon McGee



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The first sermon that I preached on coming to California was “Golden Bells and Pomegranates.” At that time I expressed my ignorance of just what a pomegranate was. I was confident that it was not what we called the pomegranate in Texas because there it grew on a vine. I was sure the pomegranate of Scripture grew on a tree. By four o’clock that afternoon I had five bushels of pomegranates on the back patio of the manse where I lived! Everyone contributed to my education of what a pomegranate really was. By the way, have you tried to eat five bushels of pomegranates?

The Well-Dressed High Priest

Now we are going to have a Scripture fashion show. We are going to see today what the well-dressed high priest wore in Moses’ day. A male fashion show is comparatively new to us, but it is as old as the nation Israel. The matter of the dress of Christians has always been a controversial subject. You can go back to the days of the Puritans, and even move all the way back to the early church in the first century, and find that there has always been a great deal of disagreement on how a believer should dress. And that’s been especially true of the female of the species. It’s generally conceded today by spiritual and sensible believers that a Christian should dress in style but be modest in apparel so as not to attract attention to the physical. Following the injunction of Scripture in the matter of adornment, the ornament of the meek and quiet spirit is in the sight of God of great price. The Word of God puts a great deal of emphasis on the *inside* rather than on the *outside*. Candidly, the outer man is not too important if the inner man is not what it should be.

Now the garments of the priests in particular are given to us in Scripture with emphasis, and the dress of the high priest is given in great detail. His wardrobe was colorful and striking. Listen to this:

And thou shalt make holy garments for Aaron thy brother for glory and for beauty.
(Exodus 28:2)

The garments of the high priest were glamorous; they were colorful and very beautiful. It is quite interesting that in nature the male is clothed more attractively than the female. That’s especially true among the birds and fish. The male is much more colorful and ornate than the female. It’s only among homo sapiens that the male is drab, dull, and subdued in his attire, while the female is the one who goes in for color and adornments. I’m not sure that we have it right, but, nevertheless, that’s the way it is today.

In contrast, the high priest was magnificent in his clothing. No bird of paradise was ever dressed in a more colorful costume than he was, and certainly no peacock ever had more color.

The Glorious Apparel

Now I want to briefly describe his garments, and then we will pay attention to just one minor detail of the garments of the high priest. He wore a basic garment that is called in Scripture “linen britches.” Over that he wore a robe, the same kind of robe that was worn by all the priests. They all wore white robes made out of fine-twined Egyptian linen, the finest linen this world has produced—360,000 feet to the pound, while the best flax mills in Ireland have been able to make only 180,000 feet to the pound. This reveals how fine this linen was, very much like silk as we

know silk today. That then was the linen robe, the basic robe that all the priests wore. Then over that the high priest, and he alone, began to put on color. He wore a sleeveless blue robe of the ephod. Then over the robe of the ephod was the ephod itself. I'm not sure just what it was. After reading at least a dozen descriptions of it, I'm confident that the writers are as much in the dark as I am about it. We are not quite clear just how it was made. In the middle of it was an opening for the head, and half of it would drop down over the back and half of it would drop down over the front. It also had straps on each shoulder, and on each shoulder was an onyx stone in a filigree setting of gold. On each one of these stones were engraved six names of the tribes of Israel, so that the high priest carried on his shoulders all twelve tribes of the nation Israel. Above that he wore a breastplate, very much like what we call a vest, with twelve costly gems on the front of it, each stone engraved with the name of one of the tribes of Israel.

The high priest wore on his head a "miter" or a "holy crown," apparently a high crown made of linen, but on the front engraved in solid gold were the words "Holiness unto the Lord."

This then gives us a picture of the high priest and the garments that he wore. You can imagine that when he functioned, first in the tabernacle and later in the temple, how beautiful he was in appearance.

Now I want us to look more carefully at the robe of the ephod, that robe that went on over the white garment. It was blue; it was not as long as the white linen, because particular instruction was given that it should never touch the ground. The thing that interests us about it is that on its hem there were golden bells and pomegranates, and that's where we get the subject of this message. There were actually golden bells attached there interspersed with pomegranates of blue and purple and scarlet. You can well imagine what a beautiful garment that was to see. First there would be a golden bell and then a pomegranate, a golden bell, a pomegranate, a golden bell, a pomegranate—and each pomegranate running the series of the three different colors around his garment.

The Meaning of the Garments

Now this colorful attire that the high priest wore had a spiritual emphasis. The high priest primarily pictures for you and me today our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, as our Great High Priest. When the high priest went into the holy place to function, the people could not see him; but because they could hear the bells, they knew he was busy ministering on their behalf. When was the last time you heard the bells of your Great High Priest? No wonder today many believers are confused; they haven't been listening to the bells. Our Lord is in yonder at the throne of the Father, busy for us today, and the bells are on His garment. Everything about the high priest speaks to us of Him. The white linen speaks of the righteousness of Christ, and the amazing thing is that He has made that garment over to us! The only way you and I could possibly stand in God's presence is to be clothed in the robe of Christ's righteousness which He gives to those who do no more nor less than simply trust Him as Savior!

As the high priest had the names of the twelve tribes on his shoulder, so our Great High Priest is yonder in heaven for us today.

But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. (Hebrews 7:24, 25)

Even when a little lamb gets out of the fold and gets lost on the hillside, He goes out and finds the lamb. “And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing” (Luke 15:5). He brings it home on his shoulder. I love that because that’s where our Shepherd carries us today.

And like the high priest, on His heart there are the individual names. Our Savior carries on His heart those who are His own. He says He knows all His sheep by name. He says some day He is to give us a new name.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it. (Revelation 2:17)

The new name is His new name for each one of us, a very personal sort of thing. Today He carries those who are His own upon His heart.

Now the thing that interests me are those golden bells and pomegranates.

And beneath upon the hem of it thou shalt make pomegranates of blue, and of purple, and of scarlet, round about the hem thereof; and bells of gold between them round about: A golden bell and a pomegranate, a golden bell and a pomegranate, upon the hem of the robe round about. (Exodus 28:33, 34)

Pomegranates speak of fruit, if you please. We are told today that the blossom of the pomegranate is like a five–pointed star. We’ve all heard of the six–pointed star of David, but very few of us have heard of the five–pointed star of Solomon. May I say that it is quite interesting that the pomegranate blossom is like that. And then we are told concerning these golden bells:

And it shall be upon Aaron to minister: and his sound shall be heard when he goeth in unto the holy place before the LORD, and when he cometh out, that he die not. (Exodus 28:35)

Now these two things, pomegranates and golden bells, speak of sweet sounds and fragrant fruit. There is something to hear and something to taste. May I say that the bells speak of profession; the pomegranates speak of practice. The bells speak of the calling of the believer; the pomegranates speak of the conduct of the believer. The bells speak of vocalization. Paul says, “I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called” (Ephesians 4:1).

We have a vocalization and then we have a vocation down here, and the calling and the vocation should correspond.

Golden Bells

Now we are going to look at golden bells first of all. May I say that everybody is ringing a bell. I don’t care who you are, you are ringing a bell whether you like it or not. In fact everyone is really a preacher whether he likes it or not. You may recall the story I have told about an

experience I had in Pasadena. There was a mother out there who had only one child, a grown son—in fact he was in his early forties at the time. He was a drunkard, an alcoholic—a real one. The mother asked me if I would talk with him, and I did talk with him on several occasions. He never liked to talk when he was sober, but when he was drunk, he would always stop by my study. One day when he came by the study, he was really drunk. I read the riot act to him. I told him that he was a bum. I told him that he was sorry, that he was a disgrace to his mother. He bowed his head and took it all. Then I said, “You’re a preacher.” Well, he got to his feet, doubled his fist, and said, “You can’t call me a preacher!” He didn’t mind being a bum, and he didn’t mind being a no-good person, but he didn’t want to be called a preacher! I had to go over and physically put him back down in the chair and almost sit on him while I talked to him about what I meant. I said, “Everybody is a preacher. You are preaching by your life some message. You’re living your life into me and I’m living my life into you. It can’t be helped. You never rub shoulders with anyone but what somehow or another you give a message to him, and he brings a message to you.”

We are all preachers. We are preaching where we work, we’re preaching where we go to school, we’re preaching in our neighborhood. We’re preaching all the time—it’s like ringing a bell. We tell out to others all about ourselves.

You may remember how it was back on the farm when they used to bell the cow, especially if she was turned into a pasture where there was a lot of shrubbery or a lot of trees. You would have difficulty finding her in the afternoon when you’d go to bring her back to the barn for the night. You’d go down all along the branch of the creek and you’d look, but you wouldn’t see her anywhere. So you’d stop and listen, and all of a sudden you’d hear her bell. She’d been grazing, and when she’d lift her head, you’d hear the bell. You would know where the cow was by the bell. My friend, you and I tell where we are by the bell that we are ringing.

Let me mention some of the bells that believers should ring and some of the bells that we do ring whether we like it or not. I’m going to mention only a few; you could add many to this list.

Tell Your Confidence in God’s Word

The first bell that every believer rings is the bell concerning the Word of God. A real believer will ring a bell of the plenary inspiration of the Bible—that this Book that we hold is the Word of God. Now this Book has been under severe attack, and that bell is not clear today in the world, I can assure you. Someone has said concerning Dr. Julian Huxley that his chief purpose in life seemed to be to destroy faith in the Bible. He made the statement again and again that our present culture and the way the nations of the West are going today will not be after the Bible, but after Nietzsche, who said, “Christianity is the greatest of all conceivable corruptions, the one immoral blemish upon mankind.” Again this man has said that Christianity is in competition with other truer and more embracing thought organizations, that the supernatural will soon be ruled out, and the Bible will soon disappear. And the commentator who quoted him made this statement. “Christians tremble for the West as they see unbelief ensconced in high places of influence in their supposedly Christian society. Given a mushrooming of this influence through educational institutions, who could question the divine indictment of plague on both your houses.”

Again the commentator said, “The notion that much of the Bible is myth has long been held by some Protestant theologians, including the United States’ Paul Tillich and Germany’s Rudolf Bultmann.” May I say that these two men are being studied even in some of our so-called

evangelical seminaries. Instead of spending time studying the Word of God, they're putting an emphasis on men who deny the Word of God! I believe that this is the hour when we need to ring a clear bell regarding what we believe about the Bible. I think that every pulpit, every mission organization, every Christian school, and every other Christian organization needs to declare flatfootedly just what it does believe about the Word of God. We need to ring a bell; we need to let the world know today where we stand. My beloved, may I say that a weak view concerning the Word of God will not stand up in this hour in which we are living. You are either convinced the Bible is the Word of God or you have your doubts. If you have your doubts, you have no bell to ring today.

Declare the Deity of Christ

The second bell is concerning the person of Christ. It's a different bell, but it's a bell that needs to be heard today. Again may I say, there's a great deal of confusion concerning who He is. Unfortunately, most of the denominational literature follows the teaching of one leading denomination which states, "Paul would never have understood the declaration of the Nicene Council in A.D. 325 that Jesus was very God of very God." It adds, "It was the church that exalted Jesus to the rank of deity." May I say that our Lord is being dishonored. The attempt is being made to pull Him down from His throne. If there ever was a time that we needed to ring a bell concerning our belief in the deity of Christ, this is the hour. We need to be very clear that we believe that Jesus is both God and man and that Paul did know the meaning of the statement that He was "God of very God." A careful reading of his epistles reveals that to the apostle Paul Jesus Christ was God, the Lord of glory, God manifest in the flesh. Therefore, declaring the deity of Christ is a bell that every believer in this hour needs to ring.

Speak of the Redemptive Blood of Christ

Then, my beloved, the third bell I would mention is that the believer has been pardoned by the blood of Christ, that he has been saved because Christ shed His blood for his sins. This again is not quite clear today. Believe me, Paul was clear at this particular juncture. He said concerning Christ, "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace" (Ephesians 1:7).

Paul understood that the way he had been forgiven and the way he had been redeemed was not through the Mosaic law, not through ritual or through religious observance, but that he had been saved because Christ had shed His blood.

Personally I think testimonies have degenerated to the place where there is too much of personal experience—"I did this, I did that, and I did the other thing." My friend, if you've been saved, it's not because you did anything; it's because *Christ* did it all. And the thing He did was to shed His blood that you might have forgiveness of sins. I say to you, that's the bell that needs to be rung today. It needs to be sounded out among believers in a very definite way. You can't make too much of the blood.

When a new pastor went to the great Pennsylvania Avenue Church in Washington years ago, a dowager came down to him, holding a lorgnette (you know that a lorgnette is a sneer on the end of a stick), and said to this new preacher, "Oh, I hope you're not going to be like the last preacher we had who was everlastingly talking about the *blood*. I certainly hope that you're not going to make too much of the blood."

“Lady, I do not intend to make too much of the blood.”

“I’m very happy to hear that!”

He looked at her and very seriously added, “It is *impossible* to make too much of the blood.”

My friend, you can’t make too much of the blood of our Savior. That is the bell that needs to be sounded in this hour. God can forgive sins only because Christ shed His blood upon the cross.

State Your Personal Convictions

The final bell I’ll mention is the bell of personal conviction. It doesn’t make much noise today. It ought to. Personal conviction is a bell that every believer should be ringing. *Conviction* is an interesting word. We get our word *convict* from it. Everyone in a penitentiary is a convict, and he is there because he has been convicted. Paul thought of himself like that. Paul said of himself, “I, the prisoner of the Lord.” Today a great many people think that being a Christian means you stay out of jail. If that’s the requirement, Paul could never qualify; he made the jail in nearly every town in which he preached. If you had met Paul in any of these jails and said, “Who put you here, Paul?” he would have told you, “I am the prisoner of Jesus Christ. I’m here because I have convictions.”

We need today men and women with convictions. I’m of the opinion that in this hour in which we are living, Christians, as I have observed them, are able to rationalize their conduct regardless of what it is. They can explain it away somehow. I hear them say, “Well, after all, we’ve got to get along, you know.... We must cut our corners.... We want to make friends.... We want to have fellowship, and therefore we must keep silent at times.” We encounter many Christians today who lack personal conviction.

Did you know that God’s men have always been lonely men? Can you imagine Elijah giving a talk to Ahab on coexistence? Can you imagine John the Baptist talking to Herod on the subject of brotherhood? May I say to you that these men just didn’t seem to have the art of making friends and influencing people, but they certainly had the art of standing for God. They were men of conviction.

Today we need men of conviction. It is well to hear an outsider evaluate us Americans, especially *Christian* Americans. A man whom I regard as being one of the best intellects of the present time, as well as being an outstanding Christian, was interviewed. He is Dr. Charles Malek from Lebanon. This man was for a time president of the United Nations General Assembly. He is a layman, a member of the Greek Orthodox Church, and a real believer. As he looks at us, he says this:

I’m not sure your Western materialism is better than the Soviets’. If I were asked to choose between the dialectical materialism of the Soviets and the materialistic outlook on life and the practiced commercialism of the West, I’m not sure I would choose the Western brand of materialism at all. Every time I listen to an important radio broadcast which is repeatedly interrupted by an advertisement for some shoe polish or laxative or brand of marmalade, I have to say two or three prayers in order to remain human. Another sign of weakness, Christians are not speaking with conviction. Many Christians have become so worldly that one doubts whether their Christianity can resist the non-Christian and anti-Christian pressures. I could recite twenty or more signs of moral weakness in the Western world which are highly disturbing, weaknesses of people who ought to know better, people with a great tradition behind them, whose tradition alone can save them and the world ten times over if they understand it and live it and rise above their failures.

Now that is a fair and frank estimation from a man who is a great Christian statesman in this day. The thing that we need today is conviction. Oh, listen to the apostles: “Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth . . . Having done all, stand . . . Be steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.” Someone has said that silence is golden, but sometimes it’s yellow. Christians need to stand up and be counted. Believe me, friend, we are ringing a bell, but right now the bell of personal conviction is pretty weak throughout the world. Oh, how we need to take a stand for God in this hour!

Pomegranates

Now I want to leave the bells for a moment and turn to the pomegranates. The pomegranates speak of practice; they speak of the fruit of one’s life. The Lord Jesus Christ said, “By their fruits, ye shall know them” (Matthew 7:20). Also, “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit” (John 15:8). That fruit, of course, is the fruit the Holy Spirit produces in us. Note again the beautiful garment of the high priest. Right next to each bell was a pomegranate. And right next to the profession should be the practice.

The Fruit of Knowing the Book

Will you follow me now for just a moment?

We say today in our fundamental circles, “We believe in the plenary, verbal inspiration of the Bible.” Do you? Well, how about the pomegranates? What do you know about the Book? May I say, it has almost become a hideous travesty to hear a fundamentalist say today, “I believe the Bible from cover to cover,” when he doesn’t even know what is between the covers! If you are going to ring the bell that says, “I believe the Book” then, my friend, why not know it? Why not have a pomegranate along with it? Why not make the Word of God real and living in your own life? Paul wrote to a young preacher: “Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).

We who are dispensational and those who are opposed to us have spent a great deal of time arguing about “rightly dividing the word of truth,” but that does not happen to be the important phrase in this verse. In the Greek language the important word is always put first in a sentence. They could shift any word into first place, and that would make it the important word. The word that is leading the parade here is *study*, not “rightly dividing the word of truth.” I’m getting a little impatient as I keep listening to people constantly talking about rightly dividing. What I’d like to know is how much time do you spend studying the Book? It’s one thing to say, “I believe it’s the Word of God.” It’s another thing to know the Book. And believe me, in this hour even fundamentalists are woefully ignorant of the Bible. At one time a dozen preachers conferred together about going through the entire Bible in their churches, and their concern was: “Will I be able to keep ahead of the folk? Will I be able to present the entire Bible? After all, I’ve never been through it myself!” May I say to you, in our circles today we are woefully ignorant of the Word of God. It is wonderful to believe in the plenary, verbal inspiration of Scripture—let’s ring the bell! But it is nice to have a pomegranate to go along with it. On the high priest’s robe there was always a bell and a pomegranate, a bell and a pomegranate.

The Fruit of Love for Christ

Notice the next one: the person of Christ. We say we believe that Jesus was God manifest in the flesh. I have another question to ask. Do you know Him? Paul the Apostle said, “That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death” (Philippians 3:10).

I’m convinced that, not only in this life but in eternity, you and I will not fully know Him; yet I believe that our chief occupation in eternity will be to become acquainted with Jesus Christ. I can’t conceive of an occupation that is higher than to know Him. It’s one thing to believe upon Christ Jesus as your Savior; it’s another thing to know Him today as your Great High Priest up yonder, your Lord and your Master, to know Him as the One who is coming someday as the Bridegroom. It’s important to ring the bell of the deity of Christ, but is knowing Him our ambition? Is that the direction we’re moving today?

More than that, there is the question that Jesus Himself asks. After His crucifixion and resurrection, but before His ascension, Jesus met often with His disciples. What did He ask of them? Did He say to Peter, “Simon Peter, will you promise now to be true and faithful to Me? If I can count on you now, I want you to feed My sheep.” No, our Lord did not say that because He knew He couldn’t count on Simon Peter any more than He can count on me. If it were not for the Holy Spirit, I’d deny Him in the next five minutes. The only question He is asking us is the one He asked Simon Peter:

He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep. (John 21:17).

Do you love Him today? Honestly, what is your relationship to Jesus Christ? When Allen Fleece and I were in seminary, we were walking over a red clay hill when that Georgia moon was coming up. Both of us had been talking, but we became silent as we stood and watched the moon rise. For no reason in the world tears filled our eyes. Allen said, “Mac, every night when I go to bed the last thing I do when I pull the cover up is to look up, and I say, ‘Lord Jesus, I love You.’”

Do you love Him? It’s wonderful to be able to ring the bell declaring your belief in the deity of Christ, but do you have a pomegranate right next to it that tells your love for Him?

The Fruit of a Worthy Walk

As we have seen, we need to speak of the redemptive blood of Christ. You may say, “I’ve been pardoned by the fact that He shed His blood for me.” Fine, but when Paul wrote to a young preacher, he said this to him:

This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men. (Titus 3:8)

If you've been saved by the blood of Christ, what about your conduct? Is your conversion showing in your conduct? Are you different from your neighbor? Are you different from the people you go to school with and work with? Or are you telling me you've been washed in the blood of Christ, but you are not different? Paul said to the Ephesians, after having explained their exalted position in Christ, seated with Christ in the heavenlies:

I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:1-3)

“Lowliness and meekness” doesn't mean that you're to be a Mr. Milquetoast. It was said of Moses that he was the meekest man on earth, yet Moses is the one who walked into Pharaoh's court and said, “Let my people go!” Is that meekness? Yes! He is the one who came down from the mountain, saw the people worshipping a golden calf, threw down the stone tablets on which were the Ten Commandments, and broke them. Is that meekness? Yes! That's meekness. But you say, “I thought meekness means that you just get off in a corner and let everybody hit you.” No, that's not meekness, that's cowardice—and there is a lot of cowardice today among Christians. Meekness means that without putting yourself forward, you stand for God! Meekness means that you have no irons in the fire for yourself, but the stand you are taking is for God only. When Moses went into the presence of Pharaoh, he went there because God told him to. He did not do it on his own initiative, but he did what God told him to do.

The Fruit of Steadfastness

I come to the last: personal conviction. The little bell doesn't make much noise; but, my beloved, let's make sure that next to it is a pomegranate that presents evidence of our willingness to pay a price for our faith. I know that paying a price is not popular today. I find it increasingly popular in fundamental circles to join the multitudes who are compromising and cutting corners. Although I am concerned about them, I am much more concerned about Vernon McGee because I want to stand for God.

Thank God, there are some who are standing for Him today. I am thinking of a young couple in the nightclub circuit. They were at the top; they made all the big clubs. Then they were converted to Christ. I got very well acquainted with them and counseled them, but I wondered, *Oh, they are so attractive! Will they hold out?* Then he went away to a liberal seminary, and I said, “Oh boy, write him off, write him off, he'll never stand.” A number of years went by. I learned that he had taken a pastorate, then one day I met them again. He had gone before his denominational hierarchy. He gave up his standing, he gave up his pension, he gave up everything. He demitted the ministry, declaring, “I cannot compromise!” Thank God for young men like that today! They're not all gone. His wife said, almost weeping, “Dr. McGee, we couldn't go on and compromise.” Can you?

All believers are ringing a bell; some are muted and muzzled. Some of them are empty, some of them are vain, some of them are uncertain. What kind of a sound are you making today? A lot of folk are listening to you—your co-workers, your fellow students, your friends, your neighbors, your family. They don't tell you so, but they know the kind of bell you're ringing, and

they also know if there is a pomegranate to go with it. May God help us to have both profession and practice in this dark hour in which we live.