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Going to God's Country?, 1947.

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GOING TO GOD'S COUNTRY?"

Where Lies the Way to Freedom and  
Happiness?

WRHS



By  
Dr. Abba Hillel Silver

At  
The Temple

On  
Sunday morning, December 21, 1947



The subject of my sermon this morning was suggested to me by a book of that same name, "Going to God's Country?" which was written a few years ago by a woman, Martha L. Smith. It is the story of the record of a pioneering woman and her husband and five children who lived for quite a number of years in Missouri where life was hard, and from where they were hoping to go some day to a new land where life would be easier. They heard of a new land which was opening up in Oklahoma and so after 11 years spend in Missouri where they had accumulated very little, they decided to move to the new Indian territory which was opening up in Oklahoma where they hoped to get rich and to establish a real home. They decided to go to God's country.

And after a long and wearisome journey of 33 days in covered wagons, this pioneering couple and their children finally arrived at their destination. It was a terribly hard journey and every river they crossed, and they crossed hundreds of them, seemed to be up. They came to the new country and they were very happy. They believed that at last they were in God's country.

But according to the account, the farm on which they settled was so full of centipedes they had to sleep with a butcher knife under the pillow in order to protect themselves. They encountered many hardships, but they had corn and they had a garden. They picked cotton and in the Fall they sowed wheat. And they were content.

Two years later a prairie fire swept all around them and pretty well consumed most of their meager possessions and they began to wonder whether it really was God's country any longer. A sand storm lasting 18 hours swept over all the land covering everything. All they could do was to try to keep from choking to death. Not long after an electrical storm destroyed much of their wheat and other crops which they had sown.

So some years went by. Their crops were gone. Most of their money was gone. Just when you thought you had something it would burn up or it would rain so much. And lots of the people left that country. So they too made up their minds that Oklahoma was not God's country really. Perhaps they might find it somewhere



else. So they sold their farm and moved to the new territory to the Valley on the south side of the North Camachou River. It was a beautiful Valley of 240 acres where they lived contentedly:

"When it came time for us to move I felt like I wanted to stay for we had had lots of excitement and lots of fun, lots of hardships too and lots of hard work. But it was all over now. We did like pioneering very much for you would get something out of it.

"We had <sup>not</sup> found God's Country but we were sure we would find it in our new home in the Cheyenne Country. So again we were on our way. We were going to God's Country."

When they arrived there they build themselves a house on a new farm two stories high. It was the show place of the whole country. You could see it for miles around. They were very happy at last. They were in God's Country. But after a few years, a man came around and asked whether they would sell their farm. The woman didn't want to sell. But her husband did. The man said: "If you can give me a good price, I will sell." He was offered \$6,000 and they sold this house. Then they started looking for a better place. They bought a new place not far from the old place. It was new. It was beautiful. And on the farm there were all kinds of fruits and berries growing. And they thought that in this place they would certainly stay for the rest of their lives. They were sure they were in God's country, or almost sure.

Not long after they heard of very good land selling somewhere in Texas where for a little money they could buy an awful lot of good land. So they travelled down to Texas and bought some 700 acres on the installment plan. They didn't actually settle there. They left a man there to sow wheat and to take care of the land and they undertook to pay for the land. There were few crops on the land. The installments had to be paid and their little capital began to drain away. But good fortune finally came to them. They were offered twice what they had paid for the land and they sold it. Later on they discovered that the



land they sold produced oil wells. But they had gotten a fair profit, and with that money which they had made, they bought some additional land and added to the land which they had. And for a time they were content to live happily in God's Country.

But soon another man appeared on the scene and offered to buy them out -- their old farm and their new farm. He offered them a good price. The wife didn't want to sell. The husband asked, "How much?" And he sold. And now they were all set to search for another place, to find the real God's country. And this time it was Oregon. They decided to go to Oregon. They had relatives there who told them what a wonderful country it was. It was really God's country. So they decided that they would take another chance. So they packed up bag and baggage and moved to Oregon. This time not in a covered wagon, but in a train -- husband wife, five children -- for five days.

They settled in Salem. There they build another two story house and for a time they thought they had settled in God's country. But they didn't like Oregon really, in spite of the Royal Ann cherries and the groves of tall fir trees. They didn't like it and hankered for the country they had left.

So the record reads -- and this is written by the woman pioneer herself:

"We found just about every kind of person in every part of the country we lived. We worked, made friends, helped out where we could and usually found that others were willing to help us when we had our troubles. We were commencing to wonder if there was a certain place that was God's country. Or if God's Country was everywhere? Or if God wasn't in the country -- then in what?

"My husband and I did a lot of thinking and a little talking. We had been living out on the farm in Woodward Country for three years when my husband had a stroke of paralysis. We moved back to Enid so we could be near good doctors. He lived



for two years. Then my beloved died. We had spent 48 years together hunting for God's Country. Before he died we learned something. Something terribly important.

"We learned that God's Country isn't in the country. It is in the mind. As we looked back we knew that all the time we was hunting for God's Country we had it. We worked hard. We was loyal. Honest. We was happy. For 48 years we lived together in God's Country."

The simple tale of a pioneer man and his mate, their children and of their quest for God's Country has within it a really profound lesson. Most everyone is looking for God's country. Most everyone is going somewhere all the time to find it. Most everyone is persuaded that God's Country is not here, but there. Always there, in the next town, in the next state, beyond the mountain, in another valley, across the sea. Most people are seldom content for long. Restlessly they travel on. They are looking for God's Country, the place which means or did mean for them happiness and freedom and contentment and peace. And so few find it. So few find God's country. And so few know where to look for it. So few know that they actually possess it all the time but are unaware of it like these folks are, just as man is unaware of breathing all the time, of the heart's beating all the time.

There are many roads, my friends which lead away from the center of our lives -- high roads and low roads, roads that lead to many goals -- to fame, to fortune to certain power, to position -- long winding roads, some easy to travel, some heart-breaking and terribly difficult roads to travel -- all leading away from their own highway to distant goals.

The only roads that lead to happiness are the roads which lead to freedom and the roads which lead inward -- just as they folks discovered after forty-eight years.

When you come to think of it, when you think of freedom, which everybody longs for and prizes so much -- what is freedom? Where is it to be found. Is it to be found ~~by~~ by impulsively moving all over the face of the earth? Is freedom



to be found in wandering about the country, in moving from Oklahoma to Texas? From moving from Texas to Oregon, from place, from valley to valley, from one farm to another? Is freedom to be found in going from one excitement to another, from one random chance to another. They are always sure they were shackled here, but there beyond the horizon there is freedom where the soul and mind can roam.

This isn't freedom at all. This is the very enslavement of restlessness, the very chains of vagabondage because it is aimless. And because it is aimless, it leads ultimately to decay of the spirit and mind and in time decay of the body as well.

What, then, is this so-called freedom? Why Freedom is achieved through self-discipline. It is an adventure within man's inner life. How do you make yourself free? By disencumbering yourself of all unnecessary desires, all unnecessary and unworthy ambitions. When you free yourself from hysterical seeking after things which you really don't need for happiness and well being of your life. A man grows in freedom when he learns to control his passions for anger, for hates, for suspicions, if he develops moral habits of simple living and high thinking. A man becomes increasingly free as he exerts himself in regulating his life, in directing his life, just as the great surgeon who is most successful because he has trained himself for years to do that particular thing, because he has trained and disciplined himself to do that thing. The great musician plays magnificently whatever he seeks to play because he has trained himself through long arduous days and years of discipline to perform accurately and perfectly. The poorly trained man, when he wishes to perform lacks the ability, freedom to do what he would like to do. That is freedom.

A man is free when he is free to do right, when his mind is free to think honestly, when his mind is free to think honestly and when his tongue is free to speak truthfully and his hand free to act helpfully. That is when man is free.

And the ~~road~~ road which leads to that freedom is not the road across distant terrains. It is the road that leads straight to man's own inner world to our own



heard and to our own mind. A great poet stated: "Be your own palace -- or the world's your jail."

What is this think you call happiness? that we believe that we find when we reach God's Country? Where <sup>it</sup> is/to be found? In some far off place? In some "deep meadowed country, happy, fair with orchard roads and bowery hollows crowned with summer sea?" Do you recall these lovely words of Tennyson? Is that where happiness lies?

No, happiness is achieved just as freedom is. It is an achievement of the efforts of one's inner life. Happiness is to be found ~~not~~ in human contacts to which we must contribute the cement of our own love and our own loyalty. We have got to do those things which make for our happiness. We must build for it within our own lives. Happiness comes from the confident knowledge that we are doing our best wherever we are and whatever we do. That whatever we do is linked up with something noble and significant and fine in the world. Happiness comes basically from a sense of self-worth which one doesn't find over there and over there, but which one must build over here within oneself.

I am not talking of pleasure, excitement. I am talking of a continued sense of spiritual well being and intellectual contentment which we need for sustenance and and upbuilding of our life.

This story of these simple folk is in a poetic way, in a mystic way, in a dramatic form also told by the famous Belgian Maeterlinck in his play, the "Blue Bird," who go all over the world seeking the blue bird which stands for happiness. After long and fruitless searches they return to find that the blue bird of happiness was always there in their little cottage at home.

What is true of the quest of freedom and happiness is also true as regards the quest of man's search for God. Where is God really to be found? Some seek him in distant places, in distant holy places. Some seek him in physical sanctuaries or in mystic rituals, or in symbols of one form or another. All these ~~are~~ are approximations, a groping towards the dwelling place of God. Where does God dwell?



Why God dwells within us. Every truly pious man and woman is the living sanctuary of God and God reveals himself to us in the noblest impulses of our being. Whenever we do what we should do out of integrity, out of love, pity, compassion, we are worshiping at the altar of God.

"I cannot find Thee! Still on restless pinion  
My spirit beats the void where Thou dost dwell;  
I wander lost through all Thy vast dominion,  
And shrink beneath Thy light ineffable."

"I cannot find Thee! Even when most adoring  
Before Thy shrine I bend in lowliest prayer,  
Beyond these bounds of thought, my thought upsoaring,  
From farthest quest comes back: Thou art not there."

"Yet high above the limits of my seeing,  
And folded far within the inmost heart,  
And deep below the deeps of conscious being,  
Thy splendor shineth; there, O God, Thou Art."

And so where is God's Country? And every people in every land at one time or another believed that it is in God's Country. We have called the U.S. A. in God's Country. And people living/other lands of poverty, persecution lift their eyes to us and call this God's Country. Our forefathers in ancient Judea thought they lived in God's Country. But God, my friends, is everywhere, not localized in any country. Every country where there is peace and brotherliness and neighborliness and freedom is God's Country. And it happens very often in history that such a God's country ceases to be God's Country because in place of brotherliness and peace there come war, intolerance and bigotry. Sometimes a country is filled with the richest resources. Yet such a country doesn't become God's Country unless men, by their labor and devotion, good will make it God's Country. God's country is really within the life of a people not in the territory, in the physical stretch of valleys and mountains and rivers. <sup>P</sup> When I read this simple story of the pioneer man and woman it impressed me deeply and I thought I would share it with you.



1. Martha L. Smith - 1890 - Husband + 5 children.  
Lived in Miss. 11 yrs - life hard - new land - Indian  
Terr - now Oklahoma - to get rich - a real home  
"They were going to God's Country"

2. A long, wearisome journey - 33 days - covered wagon  
Every river they crossed seemed to be up.  
Finally they arrived - destination - Were happy  
"At last they were in God's Country"

3. Place full of centipedes - Had to sleep with a butcher knife  
- to have something to protect self.

But they had their corn - Garden - Picked cotton  
and in October sowed wheat

- 2 yrs. later - a prairie fire - Began to wonder

- Then a Sand Storm - 18 hrs - covered every thing - all they  
could do was to try to keep from choking to death

- Then an electric storm - destroyed much wheat & oats

4. After 4 yrs - most of their money gone - crops bad -

"Just when you thought you had something - it would burn  
up - or it would rain so much.

A lot of people left.

So they, too, made up their mind that after all Okla.



land - to get us - a hot horn, then ours.  
- 33 days - covered wagon  
2) A very ~~weary~~ <sup>weary</sup> journey & every river they crossed  
seemed to be up. - Finally arrived at destination -  
and were happy. - "At last they were in Iowa Country"

2 yrs. later a framing swept all around them  
and nearly wiped out all their major possessions —  
began to wonder whether that was foot country?

even pay for the picking - sorted it out.  
And then came a Sand Storm & Every thing was covered  
As they could do was to try to keep from choking to  
death. And then, an Electric Storm, which destroyed  
wheat & oats. & started large areas. To keep



was not God's country - Sell their farms -  
- move to new territory - to Valley on E. side of North  
Canochan River - a beautiful valley - 240 acres  
(Josh p. 299)

Built themselves a house - 2 story house - "their house  
of the whole country" you could see it for miles -  
at last they were in God's Country."

5). But after a few years - a man asked - "Sh' want?" "H'  
\$6500 -

Started looking for a better place, to live in

Bought a new place - not far from -

It was even & beautiful - all kinds of fruits & berries

thought would be there for life.

'Saw they had landed in God's Country' - or almost saw



was killed. - I used to look ahead for better times. -  
after yrs

But after 4 yrs  
 that 1895 - most money gone - crops over bad - just when  
 Had began to wonder whether I'd hold for father - on which was  
 a lot of people left: -

9) After 2 years  
~~Went to get some land~~ made of their mind that the  
Chickasaw Nation - would fit country after all <sup>Sold the</sup> ~~therefore~~  
to <sup>very</sup> the valley on the South side, the North Canadian River.  
It was a beautiful land - some 240 acres - ~~about 1000~~  
~~as it~~ ~~Handed~~ ~~land~~ for a ~~very~~ ~~large~~ ~~farm~~ and (Jett's).

built themselves  
~~started building~~ a house - 2 story house - "their house  
the whole country" You could see it for miles - "At  
least they were a fort country"

5/ But after 4 years - a man came & asked what we would take for the place. "She wouldn't sell for she was tired of moving" - "He" would sell if he could get his price \$6500 - They sold. Started looking for a better place to live - Bought a new place not far from their old place - It was new & beautiful - with all kinds of fruit & berries - They thought that they would be there for life. Saw that they had landed in God's country! "A almost now!"



6/ <sup>a few years later</sup> ~~to 1907~~, they heard of good land selling around Urum, (3)  
Texas. Bought 700 acres - to <sup>pay</sup> for an irrigation plan  
left a man there to run wheat - in crop - but  
irrigation had the power - after a while sold it for  
\$20 a acre - ~~made \$1000~~ <sup>for a wife</sup> ~~channel~~ ~~profit~~  
but now learned that there were big irrigation oil wells  
on their land - ~~decided~~ <sup>decided</sup> to ~~buy~~ <sup>sell</sup> their land  
again <sup>now can</sup> ~~found~~ to buy - Husband - sells it for \$10,000  
And now they were <sup>all</sup> set for another search for "lost country"

7/ This time it was Oregon! Some relatives there - who  
had been writing what a wonderful country it was - "Oregon  
is really lost country". They decided they would take  
another chance. In 1908 - they traveled across the  
country again. Husband with 7 children - This  
time they were going on the train not in covered wagons,  
only 5 days on the train -

In Salem bought by 2 story house - but they did  
not like it in Oregon - if in spite of all the prices fall  
for trees of the Royal American chances - (July 30/22)

8/ The couple told of a pioneer craftsman & artist - and of  
their voyage in search of lost country -



8/ Most everyone is looking for God's Country - (4)  
Most everyone is going somewhere all the time to find it.  
Most everyone is persuaded that it is not here, but there - always  
there -

In the next town, state, beyond the bit, in another valley,  
across the sea.  
~~They~~ are seldom content for long. Restlessly they are  
driven on.

They are looking for God's country - the place where  
will meaning, happiness, <sup>and</sup> freedom, a home of content-  
ment and peace.

And so few find it - And so few know where to look  
for it. And so few know that ~~actually~~ they have  
possessed it all the time - but were unaware of it -  
just as we are unaware of breathing the <sup>fresh</sup> air, or of the  
heart-beating, ~~their~~ <sup>our</sup> hearts -

9/ There are many roads which lead away from the  
center of our life - high roads & low roads - roads  
that lead to many goals - fame and fortune,  
power and position - long winding roads - <sup>many</sup> ~~very~~  
long roads to travel - other hard, broken and ~~rough~~ <sup>uneven</sup>  
roads -

But the only roads that lead to freedom and  
happiness are the roads which lead inward!  
the homeing roads -



19. When is freedom to be found? In adventuring impulsively over (5)  
the face, the earth? <sup>by wandering?</sup> <sup>the way of open roads?</sup> <sup>as moving from</sup> <sup>Miss to Oklahoma,</sup> <sup>from</sup>  
Oklahoma to Texas, from Texas to Oregon, - from  
town to town, from valley to valley, from county to county,  
- from one excitement to another - from one random chance  
to another? - in no-end of voyaging? Personal Nomads?

This is not freedom! It is the very enslavement of  
restlessness - the shackles of vagabondage - It is aimless -  
and drives us to poverty and decay.

Freedom is achieved through self-discipline. It is an  
adventure within man's inner life.

Man makes himself free, as he discards himself  
of many unnecessary desires, <sup>as he frees himself</sup> <sup>of</sup> <sup>superfluous</sup> <sup>of</sup> <sup>luxury</sup>  
of pride,

Man finds his freedom as he learns to control  
his passions, his <sup>and</sup> <sup>his</sup> <sup>hates</sup> <sup>his</sup> <sup>unusual</sup> <sup>habits</sup>

Man finds his freedom as he develops habits  
of ~~good~~ <sup>strong</sup> living and high thinking.

Man is free - when he is free to do the right -  
when his mind is free <sup>- to quest for knowledge, for truth, for goodness</sup> <sup>to think</sup> <sup>honestly</sup> - his tongue  
to speak truthfully, his hand to act helpfully -

This is freedom and the road to it leads  
not across <sup>into the future</sup> ~~the future~~ <sup>to distant lands</sup> -



but the one that leads ~~straight~~ straight to our inner  
world - to our own heart and mind -

"Be your own palace - in the world's your jail!"

11/ And happiness?

Blue Bird

In our far-off Judea country? In any country? In any thing <sup>deep - wooded, happy</sup> <sup>place with orchard - blossoms and</sup> <sup>happily halloping? crowned with</sup> <sup>physical summer sea?</sup>  
It is in happy human contacts & relationships - to  
which we must contribute the cement of our own  
love - and loyalty - we must build for it - within!

It is in the confident knowledge & doing our best where -  
even we are - whatever we do -  
that we are linked up with what is worth in life - a cause!  
It is in a sense self-worth -

12/ It is at our door! It is the Island within!

Blue Bird

Maître Maître Link - 12 children, Tyltyl, Mytyl  
go over the world seeking the Blue Bird which stands for happiness -  
and after long and fruitless searches they return home only  
to find the Blue Bird <sup>in their own little corner</sup> there, where it has been all the time!

13/ It is so with the Dearest & good (Dearest.)

14/ Where is Judea & Judea? U.S.A.?