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NARRATIVE OF RICHARD LEE

Conclusion

I return to make some general observations on my life, under my religious profession. As I was brought into the kingdom of grace (as I trust) praying openly as well as secretly, and exhorting in public and in private, concerning the kingdom of our Lord, my soul rested in peace as a reward of obedience to Jesus Christ. But shunning the doctrine of the cross, seeking ease to the flesh, and pleasing the world, I fell into darkness, poverty of mind, stupidity and death, which caused me sorrow and bitter reflections on myself. But it pleased God not wholly to forsake me; but while I ruminated on my dropping public speaking, praying and exhortation, it looked like unfaithfulness and ingratitude, neither could my mind be answered before God in neglecting of it as duty: for it was not the great knowledge I was depriving the world of, that caused me pain, but neglecting to hold up the light which God had opened my eyes to behold, even the glory of God's free grace, which all by nature refuse, and many to their eternal destruction. And this light in me pressed upon my spirits, out of love to God and to their poor souls, to *warn them to flee from the wrath to come*. But while I thought thereon a thousand excuses would arise, against my going forward in duty: — You are poor, in debt, ignorant, and your family will suffer, and bring a reproach on the cause of God. Can it be that the Lord calls such a poor, ignorant unlearned creature as I to labor publicly in his vineyard? Lord what shall I do? was my cry. The answer was at hand: Do your duty and trust in the Lord: that is the way to honor God, find peace in your conscience, and pay your debts. Neither was I left without a joyful hope that the Lord would help me in my path of duty, for *in keeping his commands there is great reward*.

I desire to bless God for enabling me once more to devote myself and all I have to his service; desiring to spend the remainder of my short life, for the glory of God and the good of souls. Lord here am I, send me where thou pleasest, and use me as seemeth good in thy sight, only be with me, and make me willing and obedient at all times.

O my God, I pray for Jesus' sake, that thou wouldst bless these

few lines, which are written in much weakness, for the good of souls: May they be like the rams' horns which were blown in obedience to thy command, until the walls of Jericho fell: even so, O Lord, let the walls of mystical Jericho fall. May the traditions of men which agree not with thy word be laid aside — and enable us all to search the scriptures that we may clearly see what thy will in all things is.

O Lord God of my master Abraham! on thee my hopes depend. O that thou wouldst still be the guide to the youth, a stay to the aged, and eyes to the blind, and ears to the deaf, as food to the hungry, as water to the thirsty: a comfort to those who mourn; a physician to the sick; as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. I know all things are possible with God: and that thou canst use this little book for the same purpose as thou didst the clay and spittle.

I was one day talking to a bad boy for his disobedience, and telling him the bad effects thereof; that if he persisted in his disobedience and obstinacy, every body would hate him and besides this he must have a guilty conscience, which would render him very unhappy. But if he was obedient, and attentive to his duty, every body would respect him, and this would render his situation pleasant and happy. As I thus addressed myself to the boy, my attention was suddenly arrested with these words, "Physician heal thyself." It seemed as if the words were spoken with an audible voice. O thought I, what meaneth this? I seemed to be questioned thus — Have you not been living in disobedience to God a great while, in refusing to perform those services which he required. This led me to a view of the awful sin of disobedience, and that I had been bringing all these troubles and trials upon myself by my disobedience, and yet had been murmuring against the good hand of God, as the children of Israel did while in the wilderness. I was led to a view of the distressed situation of Jonah, in consequence of his disobedience. I was then led to a view of the disobedience of Adam, and its awful effects, and to the rebellion or disobedience of the fallen angels, and the consequence thereof. Thus being led to reflect with uncommon solemnity on those cases, I felt a very sensible conviction upon my mind that the Lord required me to improve the gift he had given me to speak in his name wheresoever a door might be opened in the kingdom of his providence, for that purpose; and I think that I feel the approbation of God's spirit and the testimony of a good conscience, that I am practising in the line of my duty towards God, and my own soul, and the souls of my fellow men.

In the year of our Lord 1802 on the 12th day of May, the Lord took my second wife out of this transitory world but I hope to a better one after which I returned to Springfield, in Vermont, where I had formerly lived about three years, in order to reside with my children who lived there. And being poor, and in debt, I undertook to carry out pewter and brass ware to sell, for my oldest son, for a while. After which I set out for the eastward, and expected to have been gone about three weeks; but the Lord had ordered it otherwise, as I hope, for the better, so that I was gone nineteen weeks, and never heard from my children during the whole time of my absence. And sometimes I thought I never should get home again, for there was a great deal of goodly work of reformation in a number of towns round about in those parts; and the Lord was pleased to open a large number of doors, in different towns, for even the weakest talents to improve; and that to my great astonishment, so that I found full employment, both early and late, during the whole of the nineteen weeks. And the Lord was pleased to bless my weak labours, and earnest desires of love, that glowed with fervency in my heart towards my fellow mortals, and to answer the requests of my prayers for the eternal welfare of immortal souls.

It was with trials and much difficulty that I could get home, for many of the brethren and friends thought it would be all for the best that I should keep travelling all my time as a missionary, which I should have been perfectly willing with all my heart and the desires of my soul to have done the remainder of my life, had I been free from debt, and able to furnish myself with a horse and clothing, and wherewith to defray my necessary expenses on the road while travelling. But I am in debt; and it is my full belief that it is the duty of every man to pay his debts, and to support his family; for St. Paul says, "he that provideth not for his own house, denieth the faith and is worse than an infidel."

I have thought a great many times that, were I free from debt, I should be perfectly willing to spend and to be spent wholly in so good a cause, were I to fare ever so hard for food and lodging, for it is my meat and drink, my life and happiness and my soul's delight. Ah, it is far sweeter to my soul than the most delicious food or drink that ever I tasted. And O, how often does my soul lament and mourn my folly, that I ever shrunk from the cross, since Christ in his blessed gospel hath declared to us, that there is no other way whereby we can be happy, only by bearing the cross day by day; when our Saviour was

so willing even to die on the cross, that we might be brought to life by the virtue of the same; or in other words by being renewed by his holy spirit, or by being born again, and thereby be enabled to deny ourselves and take up our cross daily, and follow him through good and evil report. In so doing there is a great reward; a sure promise of an hundred fold in this world, and life everlasting in that which is to come.

I shall now revert back to the time when I was at the eastward, as before mentioned.

In the time of the reformation, while I was there, there were two certain men that were very much enraged, and often wished me dead, because I was an unlearned baptist and held meetings in their minister's parish, as they called it. And they thought it a great crime, for they believed that no one had any right to preach except those who had college learning. I was informed by a number of their congregational brethren that their ministers had a salary of seven or eight hundred dollars a year for preaching, together with a good settlement. That their ministers but very seldom visited any of the poor brethren; and whenever they did, they hardly ever said any thing respecting religion, or of those things that concern their immortal souls: but their whole conversation was about their farms, their merchandize, and the common avocations of life: and those that were very poor they never visited at all. And that their ministers told the people that it was a very wrong thing for preachers to spend more than one day in seven for public worship. I then asked them how it happened that our Saviour came to make such a gross mistake, for he was with his disciples three days at a time. But, however, the Lord was pleased to bless my labours of love and concern for their poor souls in a very remarkable manner.

The next Sunday, I recollect, after the great snow storm on the ninth day of October, in the year of our Lord 1804, I held a meeting in a large dwelling house down near the sea side where had assembled a goodly number of people. And as the blessed Lord was pleased to send one of my most embittered enemies into the meeting, and as he was pleased also to send an arrow of conviction into his hard heart, as likewise into a number of others, we had a good meeting. One of his sisters, after meeting, came and invited me to go to their house the next day in the forenoon to visit them; and when I had got there, her brother and about twenty more people were assembled there, to my great surprise; and we had a blessed meeting. It

was but a few days after this, early one morning, where I had tarried the night before, we got up and I had been praying very earnestly to the Lord that he would direct my mind that day, and lead it where it might be most for his glory, honour and praise, when, to my great surprise who came in but this man before mentioned, and began very humbly to acknowledge his faults to me, and said he, "O how often have I wished you dead;" and said that he had come four miles that morning on purpose to see me; and that he would have gone ten miles but that he would find me. He then begged me to forgive him; but I told him that it was not me that he had offended, and therefore I had nothing to forgive him. He then wished me to go directly home with him to his house, which I very cheerfully did; and his heart seemed to be melted, and his eyes flowing with tears. While on our way to his house, he told me his views of Christ; that he seemed at a great distance, and that he wanted him to be near him. When we had got to his house there were assembled about twenty people; and the spirit of the Lord appeared among us and blessed us together; and it was one of the most happy meetings, I think, that I ever experienced in my life. Like St. Paul, this man was directly turned about; and those of his religious neighbors, whom he before hated and despised, now became his chosen company; and he was frequent at meeting and brethren, how much this looks like christianity, or like the work of our Lord Jesus Christ; or like that of old father Paul, when he was converted; and like the conversion of many others who have been renewed by the holy ghost. It brings to my mind the language of David: "Come unto me, all you that fear the Lord, and hark, and I will tell you what the Lord has done for me; for he has taken my feet out of the horrible pit and mirey clay, and set them on a rock, and established my goings, and put a new song in my mouth, even praises to the Lord." And I am fully persuaded that this is the language of all saints in the world.

When I came from the eastward I intended to have returned back there again; but my debts pressed so hard that I could not leave my business at home, and in consequence of which, have never been there since. But I still pray to the Lord to bless them in this world, and to receive them into celestial glory in the world of spirits, and that which is to come.

Now I would note that in the year 1805, November 14th I was married to the widow Hannah Starr, of Guilford, Vermont; (which was just three years six months and two days after my second wife

died;) and I removed her and two of her children to Springfield, Vermont, on the twentieth day of the same month: and I went to live with my son, and sell pewter and brass ware for him again, and I lived with him one year and a half; but the next May I went to Colchester and Burlington, took the fever and ague, and was sick all that summer. So I lived with him till the next summer, when I bought me a small piece of land; then I went to clearing up my land, and built me a small house on it, and I worked very hard; and the next June, 18th day, 1807, I moved into my house; and thanks be to God, for he has been pleased to bless my labours and the fruit of the earth, so that we have been enabled to live comfortably ever since, with prudence and care; and thanks be to God for it. I am sensible that I cannot praise his name enough for his blessing to me, both of a spiritual and temporal nature. But I have great reason to bless the Lord for his great goodness and mercy; for in the year of our Lord 1807, the Lord was pleased to open a door in a part of Chester for my small talents to be improved, as I hope and believe, and to his glory and honor, which was marvelous in our eyes, for he was pleased to bless the weakest means, so that there were fourteen souls wrought upon and hopefully converted in a short time; and blessed be the name of the Lord; for it is marvelous in our eyes that the Lord should make use of clay to open the eyes of the blind; but it is the Lord's work — and bless his name, O my soul, for I am confident that the Lord never fails in blessing his people in obedience.

While I was labouring in Chester, some of my old acquaintance, that had moved from my former place of residence into Londonderry, hearing of the reformation in Chester sent for me to come and hold some meetings among them I accepted the invitation and went, and the Lord blessed us in the first meeting with the outpouring of his spirit; to our great astonishment; for there were a number struck under conviction at our first meeting, so that the good work of the Lord was plain to be seen. The Lord carries on his work in such ways and by such means as he sees fit; and he will take the foolish things of this world to confound the wise, and the things which are not to bring to nought the things that are; or as seemed good in his own way and manner, even by the least of his servants on the face of the earth. — And it was made as manifest as ever I saw it in all my travels during my life. For there was a certain man that came on purpose to pick flaws and make game for himself and others, as it was his custom to do. And as I was at prayer, my mind was led to cry

mightily to the Lord, that if there was any that had come there that night as spies, the Lord would be pleased to let down a spy-glass from heaven, that they might look right into their own hearts, see the awful distance they were from God, by reason of their sins, and be enabled to repent and believe in the Lord. And the Lord was pleased to set it home upon his heart as a nail in a sure place: as he told in his own confession afterwards, that he had come purposely with that intent, and had been strong in the belief of universal doctrine. And I staid in that town eight days, and had a number of meetings there. The next first day, in the evening, I heard him cry, O Lord have mercy on my poor soul; and he called for the prayers of all that had an interest at the throne of grace, for he said, you all know that I have been as great a sinner as ever lived in this world. And the Lord saw fit that his wife should be struck under conviction at the same meeting, with a number more; and the blessed work of the Lord spread in that neighborhood, so that we had a good time. And the 7th day after Mr. Wright was struck, the Lord was pleased to bring him out of darkness into his marvellous light, and blessed be the name of the Lord for it; and the Lord made him a good and faithful soldier in his service, and so he lived and so he died in the full assurance of faith.

I have had many happy meetings with them since, as well as in Chester. And may the Lord carry on his glorious work, and cause it to spread till the whole earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. For I always found that when I am willing to deny myself and to take up my cross and follow Christ's commands, I found peace in my own soul; for I find in doing his will there is great peace: but in disobedience there is nothing better than the rod of God; and blessed be the name of the Lord for it, for I find the Lord's way is the best way for men to be happy in this world and I believe in that which is to come. And as the Lord has always blessed me when I was obedient to his command I had a great many scattering blessings in my travels in the world; and I do believe he would have given me abundantly more, had I been more faithful in his vineyard, and I am heartily sorry and mourn from day to day for my disobedience to the Lord.

On the 5th September, 1809, I undertook a long journey, to Swanzey, Rehoboth, Dighton, Taunton, and Dartmouth, to see all my brothers and sisters living in these places, these being the place of my nativity, and where I had formerly lived; wishing to see them

once more, and take my farewell of them, as I had got to be an old man — And I had a very good time with my friends, and many good meetings with them. But as I was returning home, when I got to Gloucester, in the State of Rhode Island, where I had lived many years before, I met with a bad hurt, by my horse kicking me very badly, so that I was very lame, and in great pain, but I made out to get home, although I took a bad cold.

On the 2d day of November, 1809, I set out with my wife to go to her father's, at Guilford, a distance of about forty-five miles; and I was so lame that it took us two days and a half to get there. We staid there three days and a half. On the morning of the fourth day, we set out for home; and as her mother was to accompany us a little way to one of the neighbor's, I sat on a box in the fore part of the wagon; and being very lame, my wife's father sent his boy to let down some bars. In going over a rough piece of meadow which we were obliged to pass before we could come into the road, I slipped from my box as suddenly as though I had been shot through the heart, and my right foot caught under the tongue of the waggon, and my right ham was hanging or twisted over the iron that the near horse draws by, and the wheel run over my right side and broke my ribs, with my right foot fast under the tongue; and some how or other, in the struggle, I flung myself under the waggon, on my face; and the horses drawing me by the legs, I over on my face, with my leg twisted up under the waggon tongue and iron, had not the boy run back and stopped the horses, I must have been torn all in pieces in a few minutes, and I should have been dead, and should have changed worlds. I was past making any noise, so that when they had got out of the waggon, they thought I was dead, for my hat was off, and the cape of my great coat was over my head, and the hind wheel on the cape of my great coat, so that they lifted up the wheel several times, and they thought that my head was mashed all to pieces; but when I got so that I spoke and asked them to relieve my foot, they were all surprised to hear me speak again, but they did not know where my foot was. They were very much put to it to get my foot loose from the entanglement, and time seemed very long to me, for the pain seemed like the racking of the drawing of a tooth, and my leg and thigh was swollen very bad. But they got help and carried me back to her father's house again; and I was not able to have my clothes on again for eighteen days. I was very sick, for it had strained all the cords and racked the bones all on that side, so that I was unable to undress myself for

more than two years; and I am still very lame to this day, which is more than ten years.

But it seems my time had not quite come, for the Lord knows best what is best for his children to pass through, for he had more troubles for me to go through. When I was brought home, I found my oldest daughter was very sick; and in two months she was dead. She died the 26th of January, 1810, and left eight children, one of them but one hour old when she died. The Lord has seen fit to take away all three of my daughters, who have all left families, so that I have had trouble upon trouble and breach upon breach; but after all I have great reason to bless and praise the name of the Lord, for I have reason to believe that our loss is their gain: and I find that troubles are like April showers, as one passeth another cometh. And the Lord has taken away my oldest son's wife and two of his children, and many of my other grand-children and great-grandchildren. But as David said, Before I was afflicted I went astray, but afterward I learnt thy righteous precepts; O, so may I learn to praise the name of the Lord, even in the midst of trouble and in adversity, really believing that our God knows what is best for all his children; for he has told us that "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord will deliver him out of them all;" and I believe that he will do it, for he knows best what we can bear. I believe that it is our sins that bring our trouble and trials upon us; for when I have been called to hold up that little light that God had given me, or that one talent, I was ready to shrink at the cross, and to say, like Gideon of old, O Lord, my family is poor in Manassah, and I am the least in my father's house; and so shrunk at the cross, brought great trials on my mind, and so laid myself almost useless in his vineyard for a long time, yea I may say many a time; but I have never found any peace in disobedience, for there is no peace to the wicked; they are like the troubled sea, which casts up mire and dirt: but in denying myself and taking up my cross and obeying his commands, there is always peace to be found. For to obey is better than sacrifice, and to partake than the fat of rams.