

IN MEMORIAM

FLETCHER C. HUTCHESON
January 24, 1924 - February 9, 1981

"And the king said to his servants, 'Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel?'" (2 Samuel 3:38)

Beloved Family and Friends, after searching the scriptures, we could find no words more adequate to express our own deep emotions than the cry of King David, at a time of crisis and loss in the Kingdom of Israel. Therefore, in his sorrow-filled words, we address you, who are shocked by the sudden translation of your loved one, your beloved pastor and spiritual leader, into the Great Church Triumphant -- "Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel?"

David's words concern his servant, Abner, who had fallen, due to the treachery of Joab, leaving the king bereft of the leadership of one who was the chief administrator and mainstay of the kingdom. It is a time of great confusion and uncertainty concerning who was to be blamed for this tragedy. It is even hinted that some of the people may have suspected David, himself, but his grief allays all such suspicions, and we have his heart rending words, expressive of deepest sorrow -- "Know ye not that there is fallen in Israel a prince and a great man?"

For us also a prince has fallen, and we make no apologies for ascribing to Fletcher qualities belonging to true royalty and greatness. Not that we speak in a worldly sense, of course, but in the New Testament sense, where worldly values are overturned and one's true worth is viewed from an eternal

perspective. How often you have heard Fletcher declare this truth, even as it was first proclaimed by the Apostle Peter. "But you are a chosen race, a Royal Priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." (1 Peter 2:9)

It should be apparent that ours is a royalty "derived" from faith in and obedience to Jesus Christ, who was no mere itinerant Jewish prophet, executed because he was offensive to church and state alike. In reality he was the eternal Son, sent by God to grapple with Satan and to break the bonds of sin and death and, by the power of his obedient death and marvelous resurrection, to be elevated in triumph to the position of king of the universe. This is the faith Fletcher proclaimed and the truth by which he lived. "Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in the new Israel, the church of Jesus Christ?"

Fletcher was fortunate to have been reared in a "Royal Christian Family" where Jesus Christ was truly present, and the high calling of servanthood was demonstrated daily in telling ways. How often we have heard him speak of the influence of his sainted father and gentle mother with words of warmest appreciation for such noble parentage. I have heard him say with deepest reverence, "My Father is the greatest man I have ever known."

From such a heritage he brought into the ministry "family emphasis", as a very high priority matter indeed. He knew instinctively that the basic problems of our culture have to do with breakdown in family relationships and values. He was acutely aware that better worlds are home-made, and he never ceased to encourage families to let Jesus Christ be the very center of their living. You could pay him no greater tribute than to respond to his earnest desire with

increasing commitment to strengthening the family fellowship.

We who knew Fletcher over the years watched the development in his own life of characteristics that were part and product of both his heritage, and his growing faith in Jesus Christ, whom he loved with all the passion of his sensitive soul. We knew of his Christian integrity through the love he gave us. He loved us not because we were lovely, but because he saw in every person an opportunity to love Jesus Christ, whom he knew so personally.

We felt the strength of his Christian character in his steadfast loyalty as a friend. We did not always agree. You would not believe me, should I say we did. Often in the heat of argument he opposed us, but we never once doubted his loyalty, even beyond our deserving.

We rejoiced in his gentleness as a shepherd. He had all the compassion that could be forced through the chambers of a loving heart. How he longed to live close to his sheep, to comfort, to protect, to feed and guide them in the way everlasting.

We heard, in his faithfulness as a preacher, the deep resonance of God's truth, as he broke to us the bread of life, and fed our souls upon the living word.

We saw in him a deep awareness of the significance of the church, not merely as an organization, but as a living organism, a spiritual entity, destined to unite all things together as one in Jesus Christ, as saviour and lord of all. He is the only preacher I have ever known to take a part of his vacation and attend a General Assembly. He did it because of an intense awareness of the importance of issues being debated, and he wanted to be there and see it happen.

We have seen in the life of the people, in whom he has invested his own

life, the fruits of his labors. You are living proof that "The word of God never returns unto him void." Because Fletcher has faithfully sown the seed of truth, you are bearing evidence of it in faithful discipleship.

We would not seek to make him greater in death than he was in life, but we solemnly declare our belief that there is fallen this day in God's new Israel a prince and a great man.

Having said these things, we would not end on the note of his having fallen. Rather we proclaim, "Know ye not that there is risen in Israel one who is victor over all things, even death and the grave, whom God has declared to be king of kings and lord of lords?"

Know ye not that the church is one body in him on earth and in heaven, and that the holy spirit is the life of the body, binding us in one eternal fellowship in the blessed communion of saints. We cannot lose those whom we love in Jesus Christ. We are a part of a spiritual fellowship that, having begun in him, shall continue forever.

Our Christian faith never ends upon the note of death. It exults in the fact of the resurrection, knowing that Jesus Christ, our risen Lord, is himself the pledge and promise of resurrection of all who receive him and love his name. What solid comfort! What glorious hope! We can put it very simply: "Because Jesus Christ lives, so does Fletcher Hutcheson!" Should not our response be, "All praise, and glory be to his holy name." Amen! Amen! Amen!

--Dr. William L. Wilson
Royster Memorial Presbyterian Church