

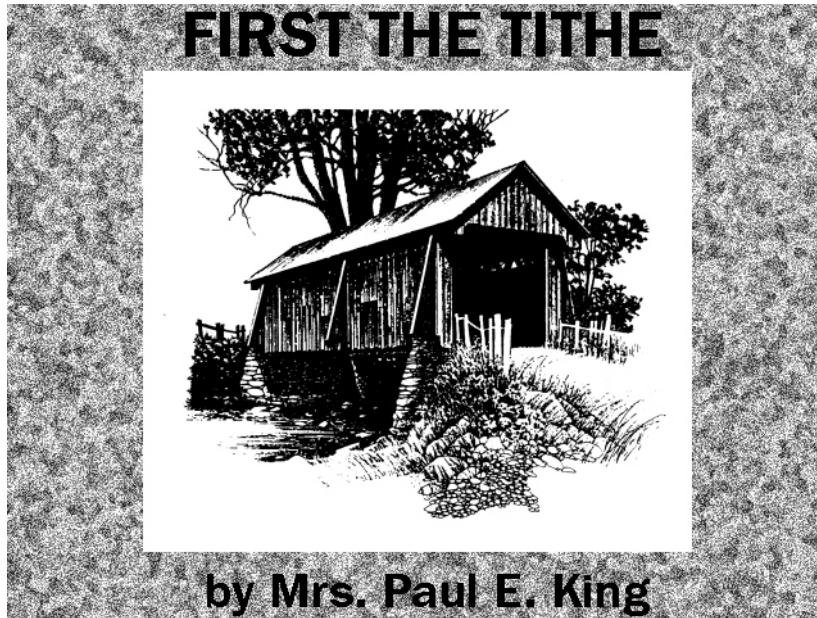
Copyright 2001 By Lucille King
All Rights Reserved and Duplication
Of This Publication Is Forbidden,
Except For Personal Use

* * * * *

Digital Edition 10/22/2001
By Holiness Data Ministry

* * * * *

The Sunday School Beacon
April 7, 1991



FIRST THE TITHE
By Mrs. Paul E. King

Dust swirled and spun around her feet in dizzy-like circles and the sun, though barely topping the eastern horizon, already felt like a blistering, burning orb of fire as it beat down mercilessly upon her bonneted head. Lifting her apron up she used it as a fan to stir what fragments of cool air there might be to cool her face and brow, already wet with dripping

perspiration; then she let the apron fall limply back into place over her faded blue dress and resumed her hoeing.

A tear slid from her eye and beat a path saltily down her dust-covered cheek. It was followed by another; then still more. How many tears had she shed? she wondered as she saw the long row's end almost before she realized that she was there. But there were many more rows to hoe, she realized, if her parents were to get even the barest harvest of vegetables, so vital to their subsistence during the long, hard, cold winter months.

They had had droughts before, but never any so severe. At least that was what her father had said. And while most everything else wilted, burned, and dried up, the weeds did not. If anything, Grace Miller was sure they thrived and challenged her and her hoe to annihilate, exterminate and destroy them. They seemed almost indestructible.

With renewed determination and will the pretty blondehaired sixteen-year-old dug her hoe into the water-starved ground, purposing secretly that not a single weed would be seen by the time she was finished in the one-acre vegetable and fruit plot. She prayed as she worked, imploring the Lord to give the necessary harvest.

The sun, by now, was well out of its cradled eastern position and on its westerly journey across a sky as clear and devoid of rain-bearing clouds as the other days had been for the past six weeks. Had it not been for the water they had brought from the house to water the plants there would be no need for her to hoe even; every single plant would long ago have been burned up. But they had pampered the tender plants, watering them carefully late evening after the sun had disappeared. Her father and older brothers had hauled the water to the vegetable and fruit garden in huge metal drums from which the garden plot was watered, until the summons was issued that all unnecessary watering had to be stopped; the small town's water supply was dwindling rapidly.

Grace drew a large square of cotton fabric from the apron pocket and wiped her dripping-wet face and forehead; then she removed the wide brimmed calico bonnet and dried the perspiration from her neck and temples, longing for the feel of a cool breeze, the likes of which she hadn't felt for weeks and weeks. Even the nights were hot and muggy and stuffy, feeling almost suffocating at times.

"Where is God?" her father had asked of her one evening, recently, as he returned home from work and tossed his lunch bucket on the kitchen table with such fierceness and intensity that she feared it would spin off the table's edge. And it would have done so had she not rushed over and caught the demented looking, swirling, spinning thing up in her hands just as it was at the very edge of the table, above her little sister's body.

"Elwood!" her mother had cried, looking reproachfully at her husband as she gathered the baby up in her arms and pressed her close to her heart.

"Where is God?" Again he had asked the question as he stood facing her.

"In His heavens, Father" she had replied softly.

"You!" he exclaimed caustically. "You and your God! It's time you got some sense in your head. Since you've been down to that altar you have nothing but nonsense in your brain. If God is everything you try to make us believe He is why isn't He doing something about this drought? Why? Where is God anyway?"

She knew better than to reply when her father was in a state of such extreme anger and agitation, so she said nothing. She sensed the gaze of her mother and two younger sisters upon her and knew her attitude and actions, or re-actions, were being carefully watched, observed and scrutinized. Ever since her conversion and subsequent sanctification some better than eight weeks ago, this had been the case. It was almost like she was in a fish bowl and was being observed carefully but constantly. How she prayed for Divine wisdom and help lest she disappoint her family by speaking when silence would be the greater, more powerful weapon.

Grace's thoughts went to her mother, who said nothing either for or against her new-found faith in Christ. There were times when she thought her dear, sweet, gentle-natured parent was near to the gate of repentance and the door of confession and of faith in Jesus Christ; then there were other days when the opposite appeared to be quite obvious. Still, the teenager felt sure that the day was fast approaching when her mother would become converted and would know the joy of sins forgiven and experience the glorious reality of a pure, holy, and cleansed heart.

She thought of the money she had recently earned by cleaning house for a sick neighbor and how her heart had thrilled and rejoiced to put her tithe and an offering into the collection plate on Sunday morning. She knew what was coming, however: her father made it his business to "oversee" everything, finances particularly and especially. He knew their neighbor had paid her for the work she did, even though she had insisted they not do so. She knew, too, that he would demand an accounting for that small sum of money, wanting to know where it had gone and for what.

She sighed, and asked the Lord to help her to have needed grace for the time of reckoning, which she knew would be coming. Just when, she had no knowledge; but it would come. Yes, without a doubt, she would have to give account for the seven dollars and fifty cents. And the last time, when he had asked her what she had done with the five dollars he had given her when she went shopping with her mother, he literally exploded verbally when she told him she had kept fifty cents out for tithe and fifty cents for offering.

"I gave that to you for spending!" he bellowed, his face livid with anger and rage." Now you forget all this nonsense about tithing. God doesn't need your money, do you hear, Alice Grace? I forbid you to tithe, ever! You are under my roof; you will do as I say. The next time I give you any money, you must not tithe it. This is a command from me."

She had nearly trembled beneath those fierce looking steel gray eyes, the dilating nostrils, and the extreme closeness of her father's frightening, imposing figure.

"Did you hear me, Alice Grace?" he shouted, when she made no reply.

"I heard you, Daddy. But I must obey God's command. My Bible says it is better to obey God than man"

He stood before her small, thin frame, looking more giant-like and frightening than ever.

"You will obey me; do you understand, Alice Grace?"

"Whenever possible, Daddy dear," she replied gently and softly.

He had walked away then, mumbling something she hadn't understood, and she went about the work she was doing, knowing only too well that he was very, very angry. He never called her Alice Grace unless he was angry and wanted her to realize that what he had ordered or commanded must be obeyed implicitly and carried out exactly as stated. Her mother's name was Alice Grace; her father said that, although he had named her after her mother, she must be called Grace, since he, and all their close friends and relationship, always addressed his wife by her first name -- Alice

Hoing away at the stubborn, earth-bound weeds now, Grace sent another prayer up to Heaven for help. The Lord had promised to be a refuge and a shield for her, hadn't He? She was afraid of her father; fearful that someday in a fit of rage and anger he would hurt her. She had never known him to be anything but good and kind to his family, until her conversion. Then he had had an instant and abrupt change toward her, until, now, she could scarcely correlate this fierce-looking, roughspeaking, unkind man with the man she had known all her years as her dear, kind, loving father.

The way was still so new to her and she had ever so many things to learn, she realized. Her friends at the little holiness church were all so kind and helpful to her. How she thanked God for this. Marissa Leigh, the minister's daughter and her closest friend, had wanted her to come and live with them. But she belonged to her parents and, tempting though the invitation sounded, she knew her place was in her very own home. Jesus needed a candle to burn and shine for Him where she lived. One couldn't run away from problems and hardships, she knew. No, it was the cross-bearing ones who became strong in the faith and were strengthened by God. Furthermore, the Lord had promised grace sufficient for her so long as she walked with Him and obeyed His Divine will.

How she wished it would be permissible, and that it were possible, for her to give the first-fruits of the fruit and vegetable garden when it came into production. Her child-like trust and faith in God was strong and confident that her family would have fruit and vegetables enough for their every canning and freezing need, and some to spare and share with others in their dire needs. The testimonies of the people and the minister's sermon on paying the tithes and giving offerings had served as added stimulus to her already strong faith in the same.

She finished the hot, hard, back-breaking work and, looking down row after row to make sure each was weed free, she knelt down in the middle of the patch and asked the Lord to bless the garden-patch with unusual blessing and productivity in spite of the extreme hot and dry conditions. Hearing an urgent voice, she opened her eyes. "Grace! Grace, come quickly!"

She was on her feet in an instant. Hurrying to her mother's side, she took a frightened looking Janine from her arms and cuddled the tiny bundle of joy to her dustsprinkled aproned breast, asking anxiously, "What's wrong, Mother? Here," she said, drawing from her pocket the piece of cotton cloth which had served as an enormous handkerchief. "Dry your tears" she said comfortingly. "Then tell me what's wrong."

"Your father, Grace; he's injured. I must go immediately."

"Go where? What happened?" the teen asked, putting an arm around her mother's shoulder.

"To the hospital. Oh, Grace," she cried, casting appealing eyes upon her daughter, "I do wish you could go along. I'm so frightened. You . . . you have such peace and joy all the time. I . . . wish I had it. I need it now. I'm scared!"

"Jesus is ready and waiting, Mother. You receive this peace and joy by asking Him to come into your heart and forgive your sins"

"Pray, Grace; I need Him. Oh how I need Him! I've been so miserable ever since you became converted; but I was too proud to admit my need and to humble myself. Now, regardless of what your father may think and say, or how he feels about it, I'm ready" and the mother wept unashamedly as she cried out in deep soul anguish for mercy.

The sun beat down mercilessly upon the trio but the mother seemed not to notice, for the Sun of Righteousness filled and thrilled her happy, forgiven soul. All she could do was weep and rejoice.

"Now I must go," she said, after a while. "And Grace, I'll be needing your prayers; for I'm going to tell your father what has just happened to me."

He needs God so desperately. He had a serious accident where he works . . ."

"Will he live, Mother?" Grace asked tearfully. "The hospital personnel, I can't recall the caller's name, said he was in critical condition and for me to get there as quickly as possible. Take care of the baby, honey. Dinner's almost finished. Be the mother till I return." Placing a quick kiss on Grace's face, she turned and hurried back to the house, calling over her shoulder, "Thanks for praying for me I'm counting much on your prayers now for strength to face your father."

The hours seemed to drag by after her mother had gone. Grace had long since bathed and changed into fresh, clean clothing. Her brothers and sisters had been fed, the dishes were washed and dried and put away, and Janine was napping peacefully and sweetly in her little bed; still no word from the hospital. Her one concern was her father's salvation. By all means, he must be converted: he dare not die with his sins unforgiven!

With the household settled down to an unusual quiet, Grace slipped into her bedroom and called upon God for her father's salvation, wrestling, interceding and agonizing for God to have mercy upon him and to come into his heart at any cost.

Much later, with the loud jangling of the telephone sounding in her ears, she got up from her knees and picked up the receiver. Her mother's first words were like musical notes ringing in her heart: "Gracie dear," her mother's voice seemed to be exploding with joy, "I have some wonderful news for you, honey. Your father is saved. Saved! Before I got here, he prayed through. He realizes his condition is serious, and he knew he wasn't in any fit shape or condition to meet a just and allrighteous God; so he began praying and confessing his sins and repenting and the Lord saved him. Oh, Grace, I love you so much. Your father said you had made it easy for him to know what to do to get to God by shining so brightly for Jesus."

"Oh, Mother! Mother, I'm so happy."

"Your father will be here a long time unless God performs a real miracle, honey. He is indeed in critical condition. But he whispered something to me just before going to sleep that will make you very happy . . ."

What did he say, Mother?"

"He said, Tell our lovely daughter to forgive me for being such a brute of a father, and tell her, first the tithe out of our carefully tended, much prayed-over vegetable-fruit garden patch."

Grace could do nothing but cry.

"Are you there, dear?" her mother asked.

"I'm here, Mother. I'm crying for joy. And I'm sure God's going to send Daddy home in plenty of time for him to give first the tithe. Everything's going well here. Send Daddy love from all of us. Tell him we love him and need him and we're praying for him"

"I will, Gracie dear. And, honey, I'm expecting God to speed up the healing and recovery time for your dad. Keep praying."

As quickly as her mother hung up, Grace went to tell her brothers and sisters the wonderful news of household salvation. Everything would be changed now, she knew. They would go to church as a family and precious indeed would it be to see her father drop his tithe and offering envelope into the offering plate.

She was fairly skipping for joy and gladness and her heart sang a heavenly song -- salvation and honor and all glory to God. And first the tithe.