



Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

It was a peaceful Sunday morning in north Florida. The people followed their usual routine of getting up an hour late, dressing their families and driving to church. Sunday school was as usual. Department superintendents held their opening assemblies and then the group broke up into classes. The class secretaries collected the record slips, dutifully recording how many were present, how many were on time and how many read their Bibles every day the week before. The small children were busy with crayons, scissors and Bible pictures. Juniors fidgeted in their cane bottom chairs and teenagers whispered, giggled and passed notes while their teachers vainly tried to hold their attention. In the adult classes the teachers waded through the Bible lessons, stumbling over the long words and difficult names listed in the "begats." Everything was the same as it had been for years.

At 10:45 a.m. a bell sounded dismissing Sunday school. The women rounded up their children while the men gathered in front of the building for a last minute smoke before entering the sanctuary. Inside the organist began her prelude, trying to drown out the friendly buzz of conversation that rose from the pews as the people gathered for worship. Gradually the talking ebbed to a whisper and then ended completely as the robed choir made its entrance. The preacher followed, taking his place on the platform in one of the high-backed, uncomfortable chairs that had been occupied by several pastors over the preceding years. The choir sang a call to worship, then the pastor rose and motioned for the congregation to join in singing the doxology — "Praise God from whom all blessings flow."

Everything was routine, just as it had been for

years. Little did the congregation realize they were about to receive one of those "blessings" which causes one to re-think everything he's ever done.

There was a hymn, announcements, then another hymn — "Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold." Next the ushers came forward with the offering plates — the routine continued — quarters and dollar bills for the glory of God. Finally the pastor stood to preach.

Suddenly the back doors burst open and three masked men with shotguns appeared. One man held his shotgun on the pastor's wife and said, "Just keep on preachin', Reverend, and no one will get hurt. We've come to take up the collection."

The people sat in horrified silence. And while the pastor tried to choke out meaningless words, the bandits fleeced the terrified sheep. They took everything. Watches. Rings. Cash. Billfolds. Jewelry. Everything of value. Then without saying another word, they backed out the door and roared off in a waiting car.

Of course, there was no sense in trying to finish the service. It was the first time in 50 years anything different had happened and the people were too excited to wait for a benediction. It was up to a police detective to sum up the matter.

Looking at the offering plates which the robbers had missed because the organist had pushed them under the organ bench with her foot, the detective preached the real sermon of the morning. Shaking his head he said sadly, "All they had left was what they had given away."

~~Ouch!~~