

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction 8

CHRISTMAS

Christmas 12

Merry Christmas! 15

His Unspeakable Gift 17

Christmas All Year Long 19

Not to . . . But to 21

Refrigerator Art 23

My Son, My Son 25

Go Away, Gabriel 28

Christmas and Convenience 30

The Fulness of Time 33

Merry Christmas! 36

The Christmas Story 38

God was Manifest in the Flesh 40

Christmas Time 43

A Faithful Saying 46

“Click” on Jesus! 48

NEW YEAR'S DAY

The History of New Year Celebrations 50

Happy NEW Year 52

Out of Egypt 55

Liberty to the Captives 58

Don't Worry in the New Year! 61

Focus 64

Happy New Year! 66

The Road of No Regrets 68

Do It! 71

VALENTINE'S DAY

Too Wonderful 74

God Does It Better 77

God Can Give You a New Heart 79

The Love Slave 82

The Mystery of Marriage	85
God is a Jealous God	87

PALM SUNDAY

Palm Sunday	90
The Symbols of Palm Sunday	93
Jesus Wept	96
He Steadfastly Set His face	98
Jesus Didn't Quit!	101

EASTER

Do Not Be Afraid!	104
A Corn of Wheat	107
The Six Miracles of Calvary	110
.Abraham and the Resurrection	113
The Power of His Resurrection	116
Dead	119
A Hope That Maketh Not Ashamed	121
The First Resurrection	124

<i>"Do" or "Done"</i>	127
No Martyrs for a Hoax	130
I Know That My Redeemer Liveth	133
Incredible?	136
The Sign	139

MOTHER'S DAY

Luxurious Living	142
Unconditional Love	145
The Work of a Mother	147
A Stork or an Ostrich	149
A Tribute to Mothers	151
Mothers and Love	153
The Making of a Mother	156
Mother Teresa	158
His Mother and Mine	160
Jesus Had a Mother	163
The Mother of Sisera	165

FATHER'S DAY

Father's Day	167
Reverence For Father	168
God Wants to be Our Father	171
What the Father is Doing	173
Family Troubles?	176
Honor Thy Father	179
Adam Was Not Deceived	181
An Attack on Adam	184
Not Many Fathers	187
Long Distance?	190
And Adam Gave Names	192
The Responsibility of Fatherhood	195
Joash Remembered Not!	197

MEMORIAL DAY

Memorial Day Order	200
The Gettysburg Address	202

Lest We Forget	204
Memorials	207

PENTECOST

Out of Control	210
Discerning the Body	213
I Can Do That!	216
There is One Body	218
Followers	220
The Curse of Ritualistic Religion	222
The Open Church	224
The Body	226
Loose Him	228
We Dream of a Church	231

JULY 4TH

Declaration of Dependence	232
A Famous Prayer	234
A City Upon a Hill	236
In God We Trust	238

DAY OF PRAYER FOR THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

Prayer for the Persecuted Church 240

A Lesson from F. Kefa Sempangi 245

Rwanda 248

Out of Prison 251

Two Letters 254

THANKSGIVING

Thanksgiving 258

Neither Were Thankful 260

Ingratitude 262

Where Are The Nine? 264

Learning Contentment 266

The Guard 269

The First Thanksgiving Proclamation 271

Thanksgiving Proclamation 273

Introduction

This is a book of messages about special days. It is written primarily for citizens of the United States of America. Every American knows that it’s great to be “home for the holidays.” Our eyes grow moist with emotion when we dream of a “white Christmas,” or a Thanksgiving turkey.

We must face the fact, however, that the observance of “special days” was a source of controversy and concern in the early church. Paul wrote to the Galatians: **“Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain”** (Galatians 4:10-11).

The special days observed by the Galatians were those mentioned in the Law of Moses. The observance of these days kindled a fear in Paul that the Galatians were going to abandon Christ and seek to be justified by the Law. If they did so, they would be severed from Christ and fall from grace (Galatians 5:4).

The uniting of Jews and Gentiles was perhaps the greatest challenge faced by the early church. The Jews had over 1,500 years of sacred history and tradition. It was not easy for them to abandon this rich heritage. Unity was achieved by a remarkable strategy. The apostles and elders met with the church in Jerusalem and concluded that it was not necessary for the Jews to give up their heritage. They could continue to observe their Jewish laws as long as they did not bind them upon the Gentiles.

Paul himself was a Jew. Throughout the entirety of his life he continued to observe the traditions of his earthly fathers. He circumcised Timothy (Acts 16:3). He sheared his

head in Cenchrea because he had taken a vow (Acts 18:18). He didn't spend time in Asia so he could be in Jerusalem for the Day of Pentecost (Acts 20:16). He went into the Temple to worship for the specific purpose of showing that he walked "orderly" and "kept the law" (Acts 20:24).

While Paul was free to observe these Jewish laws, he never tried to bind them upon the Gentiles. He was fully aware that salvation was in Jesus Christ alone. The Jerusalem Council concluded that only four tenets found in the Jewish faith were universally binding upon all men. They are: (1) To abstain from the pollution of idols, (2) From fornication, (3) From things strangled, (4) And from blood (Acts 15:20). It seems that these four universal prohibitions have been in place since the days of Noah and consequently are incumbent upon all men. Circumcision, and Jewish laws, however, came much later and involved only one special segment of society. All men are descendants of Noah, but not all are descendants of Abraham.

This strategy, sanctioned by the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:28), brought unity to the divided people of God. When Paul wrote to the Ephesians he spoke of unity as a present reality. God had broken down the wall of partition and made Jews and Gentiles one (Eph. 2:14). Their unity was not a result of agreeing on special days, their unity came because they agreed on Christ (I Cor. 3:11). When Paul wrote to the Romans: **"Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand. One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks"** (Romans 14:4-6).

WHY WRITE A BOOK ON SPECIAL DAYS?

However ill advised some may think it to be, it is an attempt to be like Jesus. Jesus, the Master Teacher, took advantage of what people were thinking about to teach them spiritual truth.

- When the Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus took advantage of what she was already thinking about and told her that if she drank of the water that He could give she would never thirst again (John 4:14).
- After feeding the multitudes with five loaves and two fish, Jesus took advantage of what they were already thinking about and taught them: **"I am the bread of life"** (John 6:35).
- When someone wanted Jesus to help him receive his inheritance, Jesus took advantage of the situation and taught to take heed and beware of covetousness (Luke 12:15).
- While Mary and Martha were mourning for their dead brother Jesus took advantage of what they were already thinking about and taught that He was the resurrection and the life (John 11:25).
- By the sea shore He taught that the Kingdom of Heaven was like a great net cast into the sea (Matt. 13:47).
- While observing the Passover Jesus took bread and said **"Take, eat; this is my body"** (Matt. 26:26).
- Etc.

Is it not wise to do what Jesus did in this regard? Is it not common sense to capitalize on what people are already thinking about to teach them spiritual reality? Everything that happened in the presence of Jesus became a door of opportunity for teaching. It can be the same for us.

In rural communities, farming can present many

opportunities to teach spiritual reality. The planting, the weeds, and the harvest are all excellent examples which Jesus used to teach about evangelism and judgment.

A drought, flood, or storm can be used to focus on the Sovereignty of God and our need of His divine protection.

This is the reason why this book on special days is being put into print. On special days, almost every mind in your community is already focused on the same thing. Perhaps this book will help you to capitalize on that situation for Christ.

“Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.” (II Thess. 2:16-17).

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CHRISTMAS

Christmas

We begin our book on special days with Christmas. This is indeed a happy time for most people. It provides a wonderful opportunity for believers to share their faith and to help others to know Christ. Since you will be using Christmas as a teaching tool for truth, let us begin by saying:

- There is no commandment to observe the birth of Christ in the Bible.
- We do not know on what month or day Christ was born, but it was probably not in the winter (the emperor could collect more taxes when it was easier to travel, and flocks are not normally in the fields during the winter).
- Our modern observance of Christmas has pagan roots.
- We are commanded, however, to observe the death of Christ (I Cor. 11:23-26).

CHRISTMAS IS STILL A WONDERFUL TIME OF THE YEAR AND PRESENTS MANY OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE TEACHING OF TRUTH! As long as people are already thinking about the birth of Christ, doesn't it make sense to take advantage of that fact and teach them more?

Since some, however, are convinced that the observance of Christmas is unchristian, let us reflect upon the history of Christmas. The following "facts" have not come from original sources, but paint a picture which is generally accepted.

- The First Century Church did not observe the birth of Jesus.
- By the third century some were observing the birth of

CHRISTMAS

Christ.

- December 25 was selected by Julian I in 353 A.D.
- Some say this day was selected because it was a day when the Romans observed the winter solstice and the church was eager to replace pagan festivals with Christian ones.
- A fourth century bishop from Turkey, St. Nicholas, was said to be the original Santa Claus. According to legend, he dropped a bag of gold coins down a chimney. The coins fell into a stocking which a poor girl had hung by the fireplace to dry.
- The name “Christmas” comes from combining “Christ” and “Mass.”
- The decorating of “Christmas Trees” began in Northern Europe in the eighth century. Supposedly, St. Boniface convinced the pagans of the area to stop worshipping Odin’s sacred oak, and to decorate a fir tree in honor of Jesus Christ.
- Christmas carols date back to the Thirteenth Century when people danced joyously around a nativity scene.
- Many of the early pilgrims who came to America refused to observe Christmas. They considered it a piece of “Popish frivolity.”
- On May 11, 1659, in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, the colonial legislature set a fine of five shillings for anyone caught observing Christmas. The laws forbidding Christmas caused widespread discontent and were abolished in 1681.
- The exchanging of Christmas cards is said to have begun in England in 1840.
- Christmas is today a very popular holiday in the United States, and also in many other countries of the world.

CHRISTMAS

NOTE THIS VERY IMPORTANT PRINCIPLE! ALL TRUTHS ARE EQUALLY TRUE, BUT NOT ALL TRUTHS ARE EQUALLY IMPORTANT.

There were Ten Commandments written in stone by the finger of God, and over 600 other commandments found in the writings of Moses. Jesus, however, gave priority to two commandments.

Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. (Matt. 22:35-40).

Suppose I tell you that your car has a scratch on the fender and no oil in the crankcase. Both statements may be equally true, but both statements are not equally important. Successful drivers must establish the right priorities, and so must everyone else.

Please take a close look at the church in your community. In all probability, there are many things wrong with it. Surely, in our pecking order of priorities, stopping Christmas should not be very high on the list.

Now let us, having dutifully addressed the concerns of some, focus on the needs of many. May God help you to use the Christmas Season for evangelism and growth!

Merry Christmas!

MERRY CHRISTMAS! This is among the most famous and familiar phrases in the English language. It brightens the eyes of children, it brings cheer to those imprisoned on beds of suffering, and it gives hope to those whose lives are in deep despair. It is spoken in every city, village and hamlet in America. It has been learned by thousands of people who do not live in America, and who do not read, speak, or understand the English language.

MERRY CHRISTMAS! These words are music to the ears of our service men in foreign countries. Their fathers heard the same words at Guadalcanal and Iwo Jima. Their grandfathers heard them on the blood stained battlefields of Verdun. They dream of a White Christmas! They know that it would be great to be home for the holidays. Their sense of duty, however, compels them to fight and die over there, so that Christmas can be merry over here.

MERRY CHRISTMAS! These are the magic words that put a smile on the face of Ebenezer Scrooge. Before he learned to speak these words, his life was miserly, and miserable. Scrooge was the proverbial small package of conceit. His philosophy of life was puny and pathetic. Then he learned the message of Christmas. Suddenly his life was filled with happiness and generosity. His selfishness vanished like a vapor. The happiness he found in helping Tiny Tim was greater, and more satisfying, than any he had ever known. The miracle of Christmas involves a paradox. The best way to have a Merry Christmas, is to give one.

MERRY CHRISTMAS! Sometimes these words are

difficult to say. Many children have had nightmares instead of dreams. Their treasure chest of memories is filled with monsters. They have survived by being hard. They did not give up and quit, they developed callouses. Now they have to learn another important lesson of life. Loving not only makes us vulnerable, it enables us to live. The seeds of happiness that seemed to die, can bring forth new life when they are exposed to the sunlight of selfless generosity. Christmas is "tailor made" for loving others.

MERRY CHRISTMAS! This is a talisman phrase that transforms a cottage into a castle, and a pauper's home into a palace. Our happiest memories of Christmas Past have nothing to do with the price of our home. When we hear the words, "Merry Christmas," it helps us forget our headaches and heartaches. It makes the rough road a little smoother, the long journey a little shorter, and the heavy load a little easier to bear.

MERRY CHRISTMAS! No matter who you are, or where you are, please have a Merry Christmas! You can do it, if you will. True happiness is a state of mind and not a state of events. If Christ is your King, you can be happy, regardless of your circumstances. The man who "will" not see, is more to be pitied than the man who "cannot" see.

MERRY CHRISTMAS! From me to you. From our family to your family. From all of us to all of you. You are in our hearts and prayers. May this Christmas find you prospering in every good word and work. May the Spirit of the Great Giver fill your life with sunshine and flow through you to others.

His Unspeakable Gift

Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift” (II Cor. 9:15)

The Scripture before us touches the heart and opens the mind in ways too wonderful for words. The Jews and Gentiles had been bitter enemies for centuries. At this time, however, both Jews and Gentiles had become Christians. The Jewish people in Judea were starving, and their Gentile brothers sent relief. It was not merely a "token" gift, but a generous one. They gave "beyond themselves" in an extravagant display of love.

Such generosity not only would save people from starvation, it would result in spiritual growth and thanksgiving. It would cause embittered enemies to pray for one another. It would melt their hearts together and break down barriers of division. It would heal the hurts of estrangement and prove that the Gospel really does work.

Such generosity reminded Paul of Jesus. It caused him to thank God for His unspeakable gift. It flooded his mind with memories of the Christmas Story. "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (II Cor. 8:9).

Rich people have choices. We can decide what food we will eat, what clothes we will wear, and what car we will drive. We can decide where we will go, and when we will go there. Rich people have choices.

Poor people do not have choices. They are fortunate to have anything to eat or anything to wear. The thought of owning an automobile does not seriously enter their minds. Many poor people have never traveled over fifty miles from

the place of their birth.

Jesus was rich. He had choices. He could go anywhere and do anything. Legions of angels surrounded Him to do His bidding. For our sakes, however, he became poor. He was born in a manger. The Sovereign of the Universe condescended to become a man. At the time of His birth he could not even hold His head erect. Wrapped in swaddling clothes He was incapable of moving anywhere without help. For an extended period of time He had virtually no choices. He ate only what He was given, and went only where He was taken.

His condescension resulted in our exaltation. His self denial resulted in our self fulfilment. He gave up choice that we might have an alternative. His poverty enables us to become rich. Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift!

The example of Jesus is contagious. His unspeakable gift inspires generosity. The Christmas Spirit provides a cure for the miserly and miserable. Ebenezer Scrooge became hilarious when he reached out a helping hand to others. "Hilarious" is precisely the Greek word used in II Cor. 9:7. It is translated as "cheerful" in the King James Version. "God loveth a CHEERFUL giver." God loves those who are "hilarious" in their generosity.

God's unspeakable Gift is the Reason for the Season. God so loved that He gave. When our hearts are captured by His contagious love, we cannot help but give. May the generosity of Christ inspire each of us to break down barriers of division with love and kindness. May hurts be healed at Christmas. May homes find happiness at Christmas. May souls be saved at Christmas.

Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift! This is my message to you at Christmas! On behalf of my family, and staff, thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift. It has made us brothers and sisters in the same family. It has given us

CHRISTMAS

happiness here and hope hereafter. It provides us with power to dream the incredible and do the impossible.

THANKS BE TO GOD FOR HIS UNSPEAKABLE GIFT!

Christmas All Year Long

Mr. Average American spends eleven months of the year fighting to keep pace with his competition. He gets up early and goes to bed late determined to make a profit. He falls to sleep dreaming of deals and planning for the future. Someone has jokingly described the ambitious American as having “his ear to the ground, his shoulder to the wheel, and his nose to the grindstone. Distortion has become a way of life.

Sometime in December, however, something changes. Instead of only thinking about “making” money, we start thinking about “giving.” The work schedule remains the same, but the emphasis is different. Christmas tends to make us more emotional than practical. We want to show our love so much that we may buy gifts that someone doesn’t even need. We lavish our loved ones with presents, and sometimes even contribute to charity. It’s interesting to note that many people are happier at Christmas time than at any other time of the year.

Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we could have that “Christmastime attitude” all year long? It isn’t the weather, or the calendar, that makes us happy. It’s our attitude that makes the difference. It seems silly to endure eleven months of a “rat race” and one month of happiness. Why not have twelve months that are dominated by selflessness and love?

Christmas is a happy time! It delivers us from the doldrums of self pity and encourages us to think of others. It is therapy for wounded spirits and a healing balm for troubled

CHRISTMAS

minds. Christmas is the catalyst that moderates the noxious poisons that estrange family and friends. It heals the heart, paints a smile, and provides a respite from resentment and revenge. It leads us to wistfully wander down memory lane and relive the happiness of the “auld lang syne.”

There may also be some very profound theological implications to our observance of Christmas. If nothing else, it provides us with an interesting commentary on the way that people interpret the life of Jesus. Regardless of your views about religious holidays, isn’t it interesting to see such an emphasis on love. Though the man on the street may not darken the door of a Christian chapel, he still embodies the essence of God incarnate when he manifests a genuine concern for others. This, it seems, is more prominent at Christmas than at any other time of the year.

Napoleon in exile and defeat was said to have mused: “Alexander the Great, Caesar, Charlemagne, and myself all tried to build kingdoms with force, and we have failed. Jesus Christ founded His Kingdom on love and it yet endures.”

What about you? Why not plan to extend the Christmas Spirit beyond the Holidays. Every day ought to be a holy day for believers. Every day ought to be a day when we let the mind of Christ dominate our lives and consider others better than ourselves. It is more blessed to give than it is to receive. Let’s have a Merry Christmas . . . all year long!

Not to . . . But to

I am indebted to my friend, Doug Williams, for pointing out this simple, but profound principle of Scripture. Nature abhors a vacuum. Therefore, every time something bad is removed from our lives, it needs to be replaced with something good. If it is not, evil spirits may come in profusion to fill this void (Lk. 11:24-26). Jesus said: "I came down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him that sent me" (John 6:38). Note that His divine mission was something positive. Ours should be too!

Paul put it like this in Ephesians 4:

Be no more children . . . but grow up into him in all things.

Put off the old man . . . and put on the new man.

Put away lying . . . and speak every man truth with his neighbor.

Don't steal . . . but work and give to the needy.

Don't speak corrupt things . . . but speak that which edifies.

Let bitterness depart . . . and be kind and tenderhearted to one another.

The works of the flesh require energy. The Christian is not to cease activity, but to redirect negative energy into something positive. The boundless energy of children at play, is to become the productive work of an adult. The liar is not to quit talking, but to focus his energies in speaking the truth. 'Etc.

Such a positive message is the very essence of Christmas. What Jesus did NOT do is not a source for singing. Christmas Carols are not composed to honor what

Jesus avoided. It is what Jesus did that inspired both angels and men. When we do something that is positive, it will do the same.

Jesus did not curse the fig tree because it produced poison ivy. The tree was condemned because it had no fruit. People will be condemned for the same reason. Every branch that does not bear fruit will be cut down and cast into the fire.

Jesus promised that someday all nations would be gathered before Him in Judgment. We will be separated like sheep and goats. Some will be saved. Some will be lost.

Salvation is the result of doing something positive. Jesus said: "I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat. I was thirsty, and ye have me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in. Naked and ye clothed me. I was sick, and ye visited me. I was in prison and ye came unto me."

The unrighteous will find no solace in what they did not do. The fact that they did not lie, steal, or kill, does not mean that they would be saved. A dead branch does not lie, steal, or kill either. All anyone has to do to be condemned, is NOTHING!

Christmas is a wonderful time to do something positive. Jesus said: "When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbors; Lest they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. And thou shalt be blessed: for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just (Lk. 14:12-13).

There is someone this Christmas that needs you. Therefore, you are not to think only of yourselves, but to think of others; not to be selfish, but generous; not lazy, but industrious; not complaining, but praising; not sad, but glad; not frowning, but smiling; not harmful, but helpful; not stealing, but working. "Be ye therefore followers of God as dear

children; and walk in love as Christ also hath loved us . . . (Eph. 5:1-2). MERRY CHRISTMAS!

Refrigerator Art

The most popular art in America, if not the world, is the type hanging on refrigerators. Quite often it is done with crayons. The creatures pictured there are often strange and misshapen, and so are the people. I once saw a cartoon depicting a school activity. Everyone in the picture looked normal but Mrs. Jones. Mrs. Jones had sticks for arms and legs, dots for eyes, and hair like a frazzled mop. The teacher said: "Welcome, Mrs. Jones, I recognized you from your daughter's picture."

This art, which is so precious to us, is of no value to anyone else. Don't try to sell it at an art auction. No one will buy it. Even if you gave it to your best friend they probably would discard it. The value of this art, you see, is not universal. It is worth something to you because it came from someone you love. It is a confirmation of your relationship. Its value cannot be appraised in terms of dollars and cents. You love them, they love you, and their art is an expression of this love. How simple! How profound!

The love of God is like the love of parents, only deeper and more profound. Jesus said: "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good things unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him" (Matt. 7:11). God is the ultimate manifestation of love. This leads me to believe that He appreciates the same kind of art which we do. God, the perfect Father, can even love and appreciate the efforts of His retarded children.

Quite frankly, it is depressing for me to compare what

I have done for Jesus with the better and more mature work of others. Perhaps this is the reason why the Scriptures teach that it is not wise to measure and compare ourselves with one another (II Cor. 10:12). Earthly fathers appreciate the sincere efforts of a six year old, just as much as the more experienced work of his twelve year old brother. God does the same!

These thoughts are especially relevant at Christmas. We can present to the Christ an acceptable gift no matter how inept we are. If we do our best, He will be pleased. It doesn't matter what anyone else thinks, because we're not doing it for them. It doesn't matter what anyone else does, because God does not compare us with them. God has a perfect understanding of every person's ability. To some people He gives five talents, and to others only one. Every person, however, can win the game of life with the help of Christ.

There is an old story about the little boy who was saying his prayers at bed time. His father said: "Speak up son, I can't hear you!" The little boy responded: "I wasn't talking to you daddy." Such focus is an integral part of Christianity. Whatever we do, we are to do "heartily as to the Lord" (Col. 3:23). We are not to give "eye service, as men pleasers," but are to do the will of God from the heart as though we were doing it for the Lord, and not for men (Eph. 6:7).

Therefore I am determined to pick up my crayons and do my best for Jesus. Others may laugh at my efforts, or make fun of the clumsy and awkward things I do. That's all right, I'm not doing it for them!

I Cor. 3:18 has played a pivotal role in my commitment to Christ. May the Holy Spirit teach you from this verse a special truth for Christmas.

"Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a

CHRISTMAS

fool, that he may be wise" (1 Cor. 3:18).

CHRISTMAS

My Son, My Son

“ . . . O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son! (II Sam. 18:33).

Absalom was the third son of David born at Hebron to his third wife, Maacah (II Sam. 3:3). Absalom had been mad at his father for many years. His anger, perhaps, dated back to the day that Ammon raped his sister, Tamar. Perhaps you remember the story. Ammon pretended to be sick, and asked David to have Tamar take care of him. The King ordered her to do so, not knowing that Ammon was about to do.

After two years went by, and David had not punished Ammon, Absalom took matters into his own hands. He invited all the king's sons to a party. There Ammon was murdered, and the princes were forced to witness Absalom's revenge. After several years of banishment, David was tricked into reinstating Absalom (II Sam. 14:4-33).

Now Absalom was emboldened to usurp his father's throne. He prepared chariots and horses, and had fifty men run before him. He rose up early and sat at the gate to steal the heart of the people. He constantly criticized his father and promised that if only he were king, things would be much better. He sent spies throughout the land and proclaimed himself the king in Hebron (II Sam. 15:10.) He went to Jerusalem and violated his father's harem in public (II Sam. 16:22). He planned the death of his father with cold hearted cruelty (II Sam. 17:1-14). He gathered an army and descended upon David as the "dew falleth to the ground."

David divided his troops into three groups under Joab, Abishai, and Ittai (II Kl. 18:1-2). He gave specific instructions

CHRISTMAS

to **“deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom” (II Sam. 18:5)**. In the course of the battle, Absalom rode his mule under an oak tree. His massive hair became entangled in the boughs of the tree and he was suspended between heaven and earth. It was at this point that Joab took three darts and thrust them through Absalom’s heart (II Sam. 18:14).

In the meanwhile, David sat waiting for news of the battle. Joab sent Cushie to tell the king the good news. Later, Ahimaaz was also allowed to run. Ahimaaz outran Cushie and brought David the news of victory. David’s concern, however, was still for his son. **“Is the young man Absalom safe?”** he inquired.

When Cushie arrived, David asked the same haunting question: **“Is the young man Absalom safe?”** (II Sam. 18:32).

At this point David was informed of Absalom’s death and cried out his bitter lament! **“O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son.”**

It is important to remember that Saul was rejected as king, and David was chosen to be king, because of their hearts. (I Sam. 13:14.) David was a man after God’s own heart. When David’s brother was rejected as king, the Lord told Samuel: **“Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart”** (I Sam. 16:7).

What a wonderful insight David gives us into the heart of God! It doesn’t matter that all have sinned and fallen short of His glory . . . He still loves us! It doesn’t matter that we have profaned His Holy Name and sought to usurp His Throne . . . He still loves us! It doesn’t matter that cruel men drive

CHRISTMAS

nails into His hands and feet. He still loves us, and prays “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do!”

This is the message of Christmas! A message of undeserved love and sacrifice. It was God who put it into the heart of David to want to die for his wayward son. This is the same God who did not count Deity a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself to become a slave and assume the likeness of men. And being found in fashion as a man God humbled Himself unto death, even the death of the cross.

David desired to do what God did, and God did what David desired to do! He who knew no sin, was made to be sin that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. Joab was outraged by such undeserved love (II Sam. 19:5-6). So also the heavens were filled with wonder and amazement that God Himself would die for the sins of mankind. God’s gift was not under the tree, but on the tree. The gift God gave was Himself!

Go Away, Gabriel

What if Mary had said, "Go away Gabriel! Can't you see how busy I am? I don't have time to even think about a baby, let alone have one. I have a life of my own to live. I have plans for today, I have plans for tomorrow, and I have plans for my whole life. Those plans do not include a baby, so please go away."

I know some girls who are not as ambitious as I am. Let them have the baby. Let them have the stretch marks on their stomach, and the sagging breasts. Let them do the dirty diapers and sing the childish songs. I have plans that are more important than this. I want my life to count for something. I want to use my energy and influence to impact the lives of people who will change the world. Let someone else have the baby, and let me do something that is important.

You don't seem to understand how much time a baby takes. You don't seem to care that this child will take hours every day that I could be spending upon myself, my plans, and my future. I'm sorry, but I'm not about to be saddled with that kind of responsibility. Please go away!

Some of my friends have babies. Now they never have time for the things that really matter. Their whole lives are wrapped up in insignificant little things, for insignificant little people. I dream of dining with royalty, and of carrying on important conversations with those who move and shake the world. That's why I think you've come to the wrong person. Please go away!

Now don't get me wrong. I don't have anything against babies. I think it's wonderful for some women to have them if they want to. I am convinced, however, that this must be a personal decision. They should have the right to choose their

future, and I should have the right to choose mine. If you are commanding me to have this baby, you are infringing upon my right of choice."

Mary, as you know, did not have the right of choice. The Sovereign of the Universe did not ask her if she wanted to have a baby. He sent the angel Gabriel to tell her what had already been decreed in heaven. The power the Almighty would overshadow her, and she would conceive a child in her womb. She did not really have a choice before she got pregnant, or after. Neither, in a sense, do we. Jesus will be Lord of all, or not Lord at all! Mary didn't want Gabriel to go away. She delighted in the miracle of motherhood and said:

"My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden; For behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done great things; and holy is his name. And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation. He hath showed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away. He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy; As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed forever" (Lk. 1:47-55).

One mother wrote: "I'm tied down by clothes lines on which I hang baby clothes. I'm tied down by the thread I use to sew on buttons and mend little pockets. I'm tied down by jumping ropes and other ropes that pull little toys. I'm tied down by strips of gauze that I use to bind a bleeding knee. I'm tied down by tiny arms around my neck. Oh yes, I'm tied

CHRISTMAS

down, and it has become the greatest joy of my life.”

CHRISTMAS

Christmas and Convenience

I am indebted to Given Blakely for reminding me that God cares little for human convenience.

This principle is easily illustrated by the Christmas story. Let's start with John the Baptist. He played a crucial role in preparing the way for Christ. Israel had been waiting for John since the days of Isaiah (Is. 40:3). He was the "Elijah" predicted by Malachi (Mal. 4:5-6; Matt. 11:14). Among those born of women there was not a greater prophet than John (Matt. 11:11). There was, however, nothing convenient about his birth, life, ministry, or death.

John's parents, as you know, were "well stricken in years" (Lk. 1:7). How utterly inconvenient! No church, or adoption agency would dare to place a new born baby with such elderly people. Raising John was made more difficult by the fact that he was never to taste wine or strong drink. Those who live in king's houses may have a convenient life, but John grew up in the desert and ate locusts and wild honey. His garment was rugged and uncomfortable. This prophet of principle was not like a reed blown by the wind. He dared to rebuke the king and died for doing so by the treachery of a wicked woman. God certainly did not design his life to be convenient in any way, shape, matter, or form.

Neither was there anything convenient about the birth of Jesus. Mary was single when she became pregnant. Joseph was poor. They had to journey 75 miles to Bethlehem when she was "great with child." There was no room for them in the inn. Jesus was born in a manger. Wicked King Herod tried to kill him. The

CHRISTMAS

family then fled to Egypt. Was there anything convenient about the first Christmas?

The wise men came from the East with gifts. Was that convenient?

The shepherds left their flocks and came to Bethlehem in search of Christ. They were only told that he was wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. Was that convenient?

Egypt was a long way off where they spoke a different language and had different customs. Was that convenient?

When Herod died, Joseph and Mary were directed by God to go back to Nazareth. This was the very city where rumors were rampant about Mary. It was a city filled with unbelief (Mark 6:6). Was that convenient?

God may not care about convenience, but the modern American church is obsessed with it. We want to start at a convenient time. We want convenient parking, and comfortable pews. The “sanctuary” must not be too hot, or too cold. The “service” must not be too boring or too long. The sermon must not be too demanding, or too loud. We must be careful when asking people to stand, or kneel, because such efforts might not be convenient. It is also important to conclude at a convenient time. We know that if we do not cater to the consumer mentality of our clients, the church down the street will. Convenience therefore becomes the star by which we steer. It is the god to whom we give priority, and offer the first fruits of our labors.

Certainly God does not think as we think! I cannot find a single example in Scripture where God placed anyone’s convenience above His sovereign will. It was not convenient for Moses to go to Egypt, or Amos

CHRISTMAS

to Israel, or Jonah to Nineveh. God never intended it to be convenient. When the people in ancient times repented, they symbolized their submission to God by exchanging their comfortable clothes for the inconvenience of sackcloth and ashes.

When the fair weather disciples wanted to follow Jesus He warned them of His austere life. The birds had nests, and the foxes had caves, but the Son of Man did not have a place to lay down His head. How utterly inconvenient!

Crosses are not convenient and Jesus demanded that if any one would follow Him, they **MUST DENY THEMSELVES AND TAKE UP A CROSS!**

What about you? If you are waiting for a convenient season to surrender to Christ you will never become a Christian. Satan will see that it is never convenient to do the will of God. Convenience is man centered. Obedience is God centered. May God be the center of your life, and may all of your activities revolve around Him. Whatever you do in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him.!

The Fulness of Time

"When the fulness of time was come, God sent forth His Son" (Gal. 4:4)

The timing of God is perfect. Every prophecy which focused on the advent of Christ into the world had been fulfilled. Every event in human history had already been orchestrated by God to enhance the miracle of the incarnation. Every angel was poised to observe this manifestation of God in the lives of men. There were no mistakes!

From the human standpoint, however, it must have seemed much different. Mary was forced to make the long journey to Bethlehem when she was nine months pregnant. At the time Jesus was born there was no room for them in the inn. No one came to celebrate that great occasion but the lowly shepherds. Joseph did not have enough money to buy an animal for sacrifice. Herod sought to kill the baby Jesus. Wise men from the East, had to return to their homes in secret. Joseph, Mary, and Jesus had to flee into Egypt.

It is obvious that God sees things differently from men. As the heavens are higher than the earth, His thoughts and ways transcend our thoughts and ways. The process of conversion, however, enables us to "sit with Christ in heavenly places" (Eph. 2:6.) It gives us the perspective of God. It enables us to have the mind of Christ (I Cor. 2:16, Phil. 2:5, etc.) Things appear differently to those who have the mind of Christ.

The Bible is filled with crises. Catastrophic events have taken place in every age. When we read about Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, or anyone else, we read

about predicaments. In retrospect, we know that everything always turned out the way God wanted it to. There never was a time when worry was appropriate, or anxiety was required. All things, were always under the control of our Sovereign God.

But now, let us extrapolate this principle into our own lives. Our problems may not be as great as those of Moses, or as critical as those of Joseph and Mary. Nevertheless, they have a way of dominating our thinking. Even small objects can shut out sunlight when they are held too closely to the eyes. The solution to our problem is not to be found in worry, care, or anxiety, but in faith. Our perspective is broadened, not by drawing closer to our problem, but by drawing closer to God. No matter how much trouble Joseph and Mary went through, their story is not negative. The Christmas Story is the most wonderful story in the world.

How vividly I recall a conversation with the late Robert Morse. He was recounting his resentment for the years he spent in Hidden Valley. His missionary family was being expelled from Burma. Some children were sick, and one of the women was about to have a baby. These "unfortunate" circumstances forbade them from flying to America in luxury. Instead, they had to hike over the Himalayan Mountains and live in the jungle. This "temporary inconvenience" lasted six long years.

In retrospect, however, this was a very important and productive time. During these years, Robert completed his translation of the Rawang New Testament. First converts were also made among a tribe of headhunters known as the "Naked Nagas." When the Reader's Digest published a book about the Morse family, they focused on this one six-year period that Robert had resented. The book was titled, "Exodus to a

CHRISTMAS

Hidden Valley."

Robert smiled and confessed that God was right all of the time. There was no need to worry, and no need for anything to be done differently.

Perhaps it is time for us to smile and come to the same conclusion. God is still in control, and in the "fullness of time," everything is going to be okay.

CHRISTMAS

Merry Christmas!

Some years ago I came across this beautiful poem:

WORTHY OF MY FRIENDS

If I could have but just one plea
I think that that one prayer would be,
With all that such a prayer portends,
"Lord, make me worthy of my friends.

Help me to be the kind of man
That loyal friends believe I am.
Help me to be as true and fine
As they believe, these friends of mine.

Give me the courage under stress
That they expect me to possess;
And when they smile and look at me,
Oh, let me be, Lord, what they see!

Help me all pretense to forego,
And simply, without pomp or show,
Repay with true sincerity
The loyal faith they have in me.

And if, sometimes, I may have erred,
In any thought or deed or word,
Then help me, Lord, to make amends,
Lord, make me worthy of my friends."

Helen Lowrie Marshall

CHRISTMAS

These words have a special meaning for me at Christmas. I do not send Christmas cards, yet, invariably I receive them. Consistently, I receive more gifts than I give. My bountiful blessings are without number. In my heart I know that I am not worthy of my friends, but . . . I want to be. That's why this poem is so special.

The late Jim Rutherford used to paraphrase the words of Jesus - "What is a man profited if he gain the whole world and lose his friends." How miserable our lives would be if we had no friends.

Mike Pratt once observed that a 'joy shared is doubled, and a sorrow shared is cut in half.'

These words will be read by hundreds of people who are special to me. Perhaps, over the course of time, it will be passed on to others whom I do not know. At the risk of being presumptuous, this seems to be a wonderful prayer for everyone.

So from our church, to your church . . . From all of us to all of you . . . Lord, make all of us worthy of our friends!

CHRISTMAS

The Christmas Story

The story of Christmas is beautiful beyond compare. It so staggers the imagination that it is almost beyond the scope of human comprehension. This remarkable story reminds us that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son to redeem it. God not only created man, He became a man.

He was born in a manger. His relatives were poor and inconspicuous. During His brief life He accumulated no earthly possessions or wealth and was buried in a borrowed tomb.

Though He had no formal education His teachings challenge the intellect of the world's most prodigious minds. While worldly wisdom blossoms and withers like the seasonal flowers, the teachings of Jesus remain fresh and beautiful for every generation.

Though His earthly life lasted but thirty-three years, His influence has flooded every succeeding century, and His words have been translated into more languages and dialects than those of any other.

Though He never preached over 100 miles from the place of His birth, His words today are being heard around the world.

He healed the multitudes without medicine and yet has inspired the building of hospitals and clinics. His selfless concern for others has inspired doctors and nurses to sacrifice and humanitarian service.

The influence of His Spirit has dried the tears of orphans, brought sympathetic care to the afflicted, and offered comfort and hope to those beset by the withering

CHRISTMAS

hand of time.

After the passing of nineteen long centuries we may say with confidence that no man, or group of men, has so changed the course of human history as this lowly Carpenter from Galilee.

The date lines of the world bend around the manger of His birth.

Though He wrote no book, He reigns supreme in the world of literature.

Though He composed no music, He has put more melody in human hearts, and inspired more songs than any other man in history.

Though He marshaled no army, He numbers more volunteers, more prisoners, and more martyrs, than any empire the world has ever known.

Fishermen dropped their nets to follow in His steps. His calloused hands brought cleansing to the lepers and healing to those with blinded eyes. His mercy reached out to the corrupt. His forgiveness brought hope to those in despair. His healing power transformed lives. Even the winds and the waves obeyed His voice. When He died at Calvary the earth shuddered and the sun hid its face in amazement.

His name was Immanuel, and His name is Immanuel. The story of Christmas is alive and well. When Jesus ascended into heaven He did not leave us like orphans. He promised to return in the person of His Spirit and dwell in every heart where He is invited.

Would you invite Him in and make the Christmas story a reality in your life?

CHRISTMAS

God Was Manifest in the Flesh

"And without all controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." (I Timothy 3:16)

In the beginning...God! There were no angels...no atoms...only God. With creation came rebellion. Angels revolted in heavenly places and earth became a battlefield of opposing forces. Ultimately God will prevail and He will again be "all in all" (I Cor. 15: 28).

The activities of earth in the meanwhile, are of intense interest to the spirit world. Paul was made a spectacle unto angels (I Cor. 4:9). Women were to be properly attired "because of the angels" (I Cor. 11:10). The Church is to make known the manifold wisdom of God unto the "principalities and powers in heavenly places" (Eph. 3:10). The fulfillment of Biblical prophecy is something which "the angels desire to look into" (I Peter 1:12). We are surrounded by a "great cloud of witnesses" (Heb. 12:1).

The plan of God, or "mystery" was kept secret since the foundation of the world. No one had the faintest idea what God would do. Paul quoted Isaiah in this regard that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him..." (I Cor. 2:9).

This incredible mystery involved the Incarnation. The Infinite and Omnipotent Creator of the vastness of

CHRISTMAS

the universe would be "manifest in the flesh." His name would be "Immanuel," which means "God with us." Shock waves of amazement must have reverberated through the spirit world as Mary gave birth in a manger. God emptied Himself and became a man.

As amazing and incredible as this must have been, there was an even more incredible part of God's plan. Not only would God be manifest in Jesus...He also would be manifest in us. Jesus was without sin...we are not! Jesus was a perfect manifestation of God...we are not! None-the-less He has condescended to be identified with us whom He has rescued from the garbage dump of life. The night before Calvary, Jesus promised His disciples that He and the Father would make their "abode" in those who loved Him and kept His words (Jn. 14:23). Paul wrote to the Colossians that God would make manifest the riches of the glory of this mystery which is "Christ in you" (Col. 1:27). To the Ephesians He explained that they could be "strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man"...that Christ could "dwell in their hearts by faith"...and that they could be "filled with all the fulness of God" (Eph. 3:16-19).

The prophets searched and inquired diligently to understand the full import of their prophetic utterances. They could not do it! They had to be content with the understanding that their words would be fulfilled in a future generation (I Peter 1:10-12).

God was not only "manifest in the flesh" in Jesus...there is also a sense in which He is still manifest in the flesh today. The blessing of His presence is not the result of any human cleverness or ability...it is totally the result of divine grace. We are not sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves. Our sufficiency is of God (II Cor. 3:5). Among them that are

CHRISTMAS

born of women there hath not risen a greater prophet than John the Baptist...but Jesus promised that even the least in the Kingdom would be greater than John. John lived and died under a different dispensation and covenant. Today it is not necessary for devout worshipers to journey up to Jerusalem to worship the Father...we worship Him in Spirit and in truth. His covenant is in our mind and in our hearts and our bodies are temples of His Holy Spirit.

One more incredible aspect of this amazing "mystery" is that God has chosen to enter our hearts only by invitation. He has the power to speak the universe into existence or to destroy it all with the breath of His Power, but He has chosen to lovingly stand at the door of our hearts and patiently knock. When you choose to open that door, God will again be "manifest in the flesh."

Christmas Time

Christmas has always been a happy time for me. As a small boy I can remember the thrill of presents under the tree with my name upon them. In particular, I remember the year that my father bought me a sled. It was the nicest one in the neighborhood. When the snows came, the city blocked off Brady Street and we were able to slide all the way to Roosevelt School. As a parent I remember the joy of giving to our children. One year, when our funds were particularly low, I simply painted up and repaired their old toys so that they looked like new. It was a great Christmas! While these observations seem simple they contain an element which is quite theological and possibly even profound.

From Moses to Malachi the prophets of God foretold the coming of the Christ. The final prophecy is found in the last two verses of the Old Testament Scriptures. "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." To a certain extent it is true all year long...but especially at Christmas time the hearts of the fathers are turned to the children...and vice versa. Such sentiment is somewhat unique to Christianity. When James Russell Lowell was Minister of State to England, he challenged a group of skeptics to find a place on the globe ten miles square "...where a man can live in comfort, security, and decency, where he can find education for his children, reverence for infancy and old age, honor for womanhood

or any sacred regard for human life, where the gospel of Christ has not gone and cleared the way for such a condition of affairs."

He then suggested that if such a place could be found the unbelievers ought to emigrate there and advocate their unbelief. It seemed obvious to him that scoffers against religion were dependent upon the very religion they discarded for every privilege they enjoy as citizens of a Christian Community." Before the Gospel came to the Auca Indians of Equador, the parents would laugh when their children stepped barefooted upon a hot coal. Children, growing up in such a society, could dispassionately bury their parents alive. Both concepts are inconceivable in a Christian Community.

Elijah was to prepare the way for Jesus. He was to straighten out the crooked highways and make the rough roads smooth. He was to demand visible signs of repentance. Those who had more clothing than they could wear were to share with those who had none. Those in positions of power were not to take advantage of those without power. Even soldiers were admonished to avoid violence and false accusations...and to be content with their wages. (see Luke 3:10-14) A part of this package would naturally involve interpersonal relationships in the home and community. There always has been a "generation gap." The young and the old think differently. We like different kinds of music...different kinds of clothing...different kinds of recreation. When each segment of society is selfish, Malachi predicted that God would come and smite the earth with a curse.

Elijah would see to it that the curse did not come. He would turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to the fathers. He would

CHRISTMAS

help us to bridge the generation gap with thoughtfulness and love. He would cause us older folks to scratch our heads and ponder how to make the little ones happy and the little ones would reciprocate with crayon pictures embellished by a profusion of hugs and kisses. Such love would not only prepare the way for Jesus...but it still follows today as a beautiful manifestation of His presence in the lives of His people.

As remarkable as it might seem, I have experienced the fulfillment of that prophecy in my own family. I have seen it fulfilled in the lives of literally hundreds of people in many years of ministry. It always is true in a Christian community, but especially so at Christmas.

CHRISTMAS

A Faithful Saying

"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief" (I Timothy 1:15).

The "chief of sinners" was an old man when he wrote these inspired words. In the long night the sins of his youth came back to haunt him like the Ghost of Christmas Past. During those days he was a "blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious..." (I Timothy 1:13). He had guarded the garments of those who stoned Stephen (Acts 7:58). He shut up the saints in prison and when they were put to death he gave his voice against them. He punished them in every synagogue, compelling them to blaspheme, and persecuted them even unto strange cities (Acts 26:10-11).

HOW BEAUTIFUL TO REMEMBER THAT CHRIST JESUS CAME INTO THE WORLD TO SAVE SINNERS!

The early church did not enjoy the luxury of the completed Scriptures. At that time, the Bible was just in the process of being written. Manuscripts were few and far between and the printing press, as we know it, would not be developed for over one thousand years. For this reason the Christians of the First Century repeated certain "sayings." These sayings were the slogans of their faith which epitomized, and capsulized their convictions. One of the most beautiful of their "sayings" was that CHRIST JESUS CAME INTO THE WORLD TO SAVE SINNERS.

Jesus once told of two men who went up into the temple to pray. One of them thanked God that he was not an extortioner, unjust, or an adulterer. Blinded by his

CHRISTMAS

own pride he went back to his house unforgiven. The other man, by contrast, did not attempt to hide the fact that he was a sinner. Deeply ashamed of his life, he would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but smote his breast, saying: "God be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:13). This was the man whom Christ forgave, for **CHRIST JESUS CAME INTO THE WORLD TO SAVE SINNERS!**

Christmas time is indeed a happy time. It is a time for giving gifts and remembering old friends. It is a time for feasting, and family reunions, and Christmas carols by the fireside. But perhaps no part of the Christmas story is so widely known and deeply appreciated as the irrefutable fact that **CHRIST JESUS CAME INTO THE WORLD TO SAVE SINNERS!**

The older I grow, the more easily I can identify with "Paul the aged" (Philemon 9). I, too, can remember the sins of my youth and I am grateful beyond words that **CHRIST JESUS CAME INTO THE WORLD TO SAVE SINNERS!**

Paul, however, did not just think of his sins in days gone by. He saw himself at that very moment as the "chief of sinners." Not to worry! Everything in heaven and earth is on track and under His control. **MERRY CHRISTMAS! CHRIST JESUS CAME INTO THE WORLD TO SAVE SINNERS!**

Every thinking person is aware of their own glaring faults and imperfections. Not only have we fallen short of God's Law, we have even fallen short of our own standards and expectations. For this reason it is indeed "Good News" to know that God did not become incarnate to "condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." **CHRIST JESUS CAME INTO THE WORLD TO SAVE SINNERS!**

CHRISTMAS

MERRY CHRISTMAS AND HAPPY NEW YEAR!

“Click” on Jesus!

“Who is the *image* of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15)

Almost everyone with a computer knows what an “icon” is. It is that little image on the screen which identifies a program in your computer. When you “click” on the icon, the program opens up.

It is interesting that the word translated “image” in Col. 1:15, is the Greek word “eikon.” Though we spell it differently in English, it is still the same word. Jesus is the Icon of God!

No man has seen God an any time (John 1:18.) God is eternal, immortal, and invisible (I Tim. 1:17). But Jesus is the “image” of the invisible God. Jesus is the “icon” that opens up God to man. When we “click” on Jesus, we can see God (John 14:9). Through Jesus we can be filled with all the fulness of God (Eph. 3:19). In Jesus dwells all the fullness of the Godhead in a body, and we are complete in Him (Col. 2:9-10).

Grasping this reality is no trivial matter. It is the essence of the Gospel message. It is the mystery kept secret since the world began (Rom. 16:25). It is the eternal plan of God which both prophets and angels desired to look into, but were not permitted to do so (I Peter 1:10-12). It is the focus of a faith which no eye had seen, no ear had heard, and which had never entered into the hearts of men (I Cor. 2:9-10). It prompted Paul to cry out: **“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!”**

Isn't it remarkable how easily children adapt to computers? They seem to learn more quickly than older

folks. They are fearless as they experiment and learn. Perhaps you have heard the joke about the child who said: “This program is so simple that even my parents can understand it.”

We should not be surprised, therefore, that children “Click on Jesus” more readily than others. Most decisions for Christ are made in childhood. Moreover, Jesus taught us that we **MUST** become like little children in order to be saved. It is not an option, it is an indispensable requisite for entrance into His Kingdom. Note again these familiar words: **Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven** (Matt. 18:3).

While we debate some theological theory, the children “click” on Jesus are saved. It really isn't all that hard. It is not necessary to ascend into heaven and bring God down, nor descend into the deep and bring Him up. The reality of God is instantly available to any and all who will believe with the heart, and confess with the mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord (Rom. 10:6-13). The secret to salvation, of course, is Jesus. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and no one comes unto the Father but by Him. He is the Icon of the Invisible God, and through Him we have access to the infinite reality of our Heavenly Father.

What about you? Eternal Life is described by Jesus as knowing “the only true God” (John 17:3.) Do you know Him? Do you want to know Him?

**You can know Him, if you will only
“click” on Jesus!!!**

The History of New Year Celebrations

The earliest known record of New Year festivals dates back to Mesopotamia in 2,000 B.C. Their year began with the new moon closest to the spring equinox. This was usually in the month of March. In Assyria the year began in the fall near the autumnal equinox. This was usually in the month of September. The Egyptians, Phoenicians, and Persians all began their new year on the autumnal equinox. This usually fell on September 23rd. The Greeks began their year in December at their winter solstice and the early Romans selected March 1st. After 153 B.C., however, the date was changed to January 1st, a date which was kept in the Julian Calendar.

The Jewish calendar was given by divine revelation. In preparation for the Passover, God told his people **“This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you”** (Exodus 12:2). That month was known as Abib, or Nisan. The Scriptures, however, say nothing about the celebration of the new year.

Modern Jews celebrate the new year in the fall at the Feast of Trumpets and call it Rosh Hashana. Just how and when this emphasis was given to the Feast of Trumpets is hotly debated by the scholars. Some have suggested that the Jews had two calendars: one religious, and the other secular. The religious year began in the spring as we have said, and the civil year began in the month of Tishri.

Such technical arguments, however, are beside the point. The fact is that most people to whom we minister celebrate the new year. It is a time for reflecting on the past and making promises for the future.

God help us to take advantage of this opportunity to teach eternal truths from the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Happy NEW Year

Have you noticed how many “new” things are mentioned in the Bible. Here are a few examples: new wine, new bottles, new cloth, new garment, new commandment, new testament, new doctrine, new man, new name, new creation, new way, new song, new Jerusalem, new heavens, and a new earth. In fact, the Lord promised to make “**all things new**” (Rev. 21:5).

The “new doctrine” of the Bible was so revolutionary that Isaiah predicted that since the beginning of the world “**men have not perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him**” (Is. 64:4). Paul quoted this in I Cor. 2:9 and applied it to the Gospel. The “Gospel” is the most revolutionary “new” thing in the universe. The prophets searched and inquired diligently to understand this message, but they were not permitted to do so.. Even the angels desired in vain to look into these things. They too were forced to wait for the fulness of time when the transcendent plan of God would become reality.

This “new thing” that God was about to do is sometimes called a “mystery.” Here is what the Bible says about this mystery: It was “**kept secret since the world began**” (Rom. 16:5). It is the “**hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world unto our glory**” (I Cor. 2:7). Now, God wants all men to see “**what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ** (Eph. 3:9). God also wanted to

“**make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory**” (Col. 1:27). It is now possible for us to have the “**full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ** (Col. 2:2).

“**And without all controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory**” (I Tim. 3:16).

The world has been bombarded by a great many new ideas. We smile condescendingly at the lever, the wheel, and the invention of writing. These were, however, earth shattering discoveries in their day. Only a few short centuries ago the world was again transformed by the movable type printing press. In all the thousands of years before Gutenberg, Europe had only accumulated 30,000 books. All, of course, laboriously transcribed by hand. Fifty years after Gutenberg, the total had swelled to over nine million, and most of these were devoted to religious themes.

Today, the magnificent books made possible by Gutenberg are being rendered obsolete by the computer. Today, a school child with a computer and modem, can access more information than that which was found in the world’s largest library just a few short years ago. Even more remarkable, he or she can do it without leaving home. This World Wide Web, no doubt, will itself be obsolete in a few short years.

The first man made computers, as you know, were massive and cumbersome.. As our technology advanced they became increasingly smaller and more efficient. Man’s technology, however, will forever pale

NEW YEAR'S DAY

into insignificance by comparison with the miracle of Christmas. The God of the universe, so vast that the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him, condescended to become a baby in the manger at Bethlehem. The spirit world was aghast with amazement. In that tiny baby was the fulness of the Godhead in a body. Our Invisible God had become manifest in a manner that no one ever dreamed would ever come to pass.

Jesus is the ultimate expression of Deity. The fact that He is the same yesterday, today, and forever, means that He is forever new. Today He wants to fill your life with His fulness. He lovingly stands at the door of your heart with new power for the New Year! If you will open your heart and let Him in, you can be a new creation, with a new name, a new song, and a new hope. You can live in the New Jerusalem and enjoy the blessings of a new heaven and a new earth.

PLEASE LET JESUS BE YOUR LORD IN THE NEW YEAR!

NEW YEAR'S DAY

Out of Egypt

“When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt” (Hos. 11:1)

The first mention of Egypt in the Bible is in Gen. 12:10. There was a famine in the land and Abram went down to Egypt. Why not? Egypt was the richest country on earth. The wealth of their Pharaohs was legendary. The “Great Pyramid” was reckoned as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Their supremacy in art, culture, medicine, and science was well known. Egypt had food when everyone else was starving.

It is remarkable that Egypt, with all of its wealth, is symbolic of slavery! Egypt gained its wealth on the backs of the poor. Things were more important than people. Their stunning achievements were realized at the expense of their own populace. Not only is Egypt symbolic of physical slavery, but also of spiritual slavery. Remember, Hagar, was an Egyptian (Gen. 16:1). She and her son, Ishmael, are an allegory of a religious system that kept the people of God in bondage (Gal. 3:23, 4:21-25).

Our text has at least two different fulfillments. The first took place in the days of Moses when God called Israel out of Egyptian bondage. The second refers to Jesus who was also called out of Egypt 1,500 years later (Matt. 2:15). Jesus was tempted in all points like as we are. God also called Him out of bondage to earthly things.

As we prepare for a brand new year, it is interesting to think of deliverance from Egypt. I Corinthians 10:1-13 indicates that the liberation of the

NEW YEAR'S DAY

Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt is illustrative of our liberation from sin. At their most discouraging time, God came with deliverance. He not only delivered them from slavery, but gave them a new calendar, a new identity, and a new land. Our deliverance from sin is quite similar. Jesus is our Passover Lamb who has made our escape possible. Christians also go through a baptismal experience and are journeying to the "Promised Land."

Every day I encounter a wide variety of people who need deliverance. I just spoke with a dear friend who is facing a career change in mid life. He needs help. I just tried to phone a second person who is trapped by sexual lust. They too need help. Earlier today we were prayerfully discussing a third person who is enslaved to alcohol. Yesterday I helped our local Fire Dept. contact a fourth family who had nothing to eat. Last week I asked for special prayer for someone who has been institutionalized with an eating disorder. We are planning to leave on Christmas Day for a mission trip to Old Mexico and a church member just came in with gifts to help them in their poverty. We face an endless list of human needs.

The passage in I Corinthians assures us that God never tempts us beyond what we are able. When the going gets too tough for us, He steps in with deliverance. This is not just a promise for people many years ago, it is a promise for us today!

God told the Hebrews: "**This month shall be for you the beginning of months**" (Ex. 12:2). It didn't matter what month or year the Egyptians said it was, from the perspective of God it was time to start over. He gave His people a new beginning. He brought them out of Egypt with a high hand. They started counting time from the very moment that God gave them the Good

NEW YEAR'S DAY

News. Everything that happened to them afterward was counted from "day one."

The same can happen to you and me. The God of eternity is in complete control of time. He can blot out all the mistakes of yesterday and let you start over right now.

A proximity to the New Year provides us with a psychological advantage. Many people are dreaming dreams and making resolutions. Believers in Christ, however, have much more than a psychological advantage. The resources of heaven are at our disposal. The Red Sea may be an inescapable barrier to others, but not to us. Our God can part such waters and lead us to victory on dry ground.

Liberty To The Captives

“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound” (Isaiah 61:1).

There is a natural inclination for captive people to long for liberty. Washington said: “Interwoven is the love of liberty with every ligament of the heart.” Jefferson considered it an inalienable right endowed upon us by our Creator. Patrick Henry said: “Give me liberty, or give me death.” These men helped found a nation symbolized by the Statue of Liberty. A nation for tired and hungry people yearning to breathe free. There is, however, a greater freedom than political freedom.

Jesus tried to tell His neighbors in Nazareth about this freedom (Luke 4:16-30). He stood up in their synagogue and read from Isaiah the words of our text. Israel, at the time, did not have political freedom. Roman soldiers were stationed everywhere. A Roman garrison was positioned by the Jewish temple to prevent religious fervor from becoming political dissent. On one occasion Pilate dispatched these troops into the Temple and mingled the blood of Galilean worshipers with the animals they brought for sacrifice (Luke 13:1). When Jesus read about liberty for captives He was striking a responsive chord in every heart. But their more serious bondage, of course, was spiritual. Those who sat in the

synagogue that day were also slaves of sin. They were, however, blinded to this reality.

On that occasion Jesus used two illustrations which so enraged His audience that they tried to take His life. First, He told them that there were many widows in Israel when God decided to care for a Gentile widow in Serapta, a city of Sidon. Next He reminded them that there were many lepers in Israel when God decided to heal a hated Syrian named Naaman. In each instance their national pride blinded them to the reality of true spiritual freedom. There is a liberty which transcends all the physical boundaries of earth and time and makes us free for all eternity. It is so majestic and wonderful that human words are not adequate to describe it.

Paradoxically, this true freedom can only be found in slavery. Paul said it like this: “. . . **you are slaves to the one whom you obey - whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience which leads to righteousness**” (Rom. 6:16 NIV).

What about you? Do you feel trapped and enslaved by circumstances around you? Do you resent your daily schedule? Do you long for the freedom to run your own life and be free to do the things you have always wanted to do? If so, please take careful note of this warning!

The devil promises freedom and gives slavery, the Lord promises slavery and gives freedom.

The unconverted heart is deceitful and desperately wicked (Jer. 17:9). A person with this kind of heart should never do what he wants to. This would be a disaster and would certainly lead to slavery of the worst kind. The secret to true freedom is to become a slave to Jesus. Those who are weary and heavy laden

NEW YEAR'S DAY

should bow down before Jesus in total surrender. We need to take His yoke and learn from Him., We need to let Him teach us to pray "not my will but thine be done." When this is done a miracle will take place you your life. You will become a "new creation." God will give you a new heart, and a new mind. You will have new desires and aspirations. It will no long be you that lives, but Christ will be alive in you. **Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty!**

NEW YEAR'S DAY

Don't Worry in the New Year!

A few moments ago I happened upon this beautiful poem which I had scribbled on a small piece of paper. I do not remember where, or when, I made these notes. I'm not sure that every word is accurately transcribed, but here is a poem that ministered to me.

GOD ANSWERS PRAYER

I know not by what methods rare, but this I know,
God answers prayer-
Which tells me prayers are always heard, when
in my heart or spoken word,
And will be answered, soon or late, and so I pray
and calmly wait.
I know not if the blessing sought, will come in just
the way I thought,
But I leave my prayer with Him alone, Whose will
is wiser than my own,
Assured that He will grant my quest, and send
some answer far more blest.
I know that prayers are always good, If I present
them as I should.

Eliza Hickok

Eliza Hickok has tapped into a rich vein of Biblical truth. Jesus wanted His followers to place total confidence in God and not worry about anything. This is the way the Living Bible translates Matt. 6:25-34:

NEW YEAR'S DAY

“Don’t worry about things- food drink, money, and clothes. For you already have life and a body- and they are far more important than what to eat and wear. Look at the birds! They don’t worry about what to eat- they don’t need to sow or reap or store up food- for your heavenly Father feed them. And you are far more valuable to Him than they are. Will all your worries add a single moment to your life? And why worry about your clothes? Look at the field lilies! They don’t worry about theirs. Yet King Solomon in all his glory was not clothed as beautifully as they. And if God cares so wonderfully for flowers that are here today and gone tomorrow, won’t He more surely care for you, O men of little faith? So don’t worry at all about having enough food and clothing. Why be like the heathen? For they take pride in all these things and are deeply concerned about them. But your heavenly Father already knows perfectly well that you need them. And He will gladly give them to you if you give Him first place in your life. So don’t be anxious about tomorrow. God will take care of your tomorrow too. Live one day at a time.”

There is an old story about the elderly woman crossing Lake Michigan on a boat. When the ship was beset by storm, the Captain went to her cabin to calm her fears. To his amazement, she was quietly reading her Bible, and was totally unafraid. When he inquired about her confidence she replied: “Young man, I have one daughter in heaven, and another in Chicago. I’m going to see one of them tonight, and it doesn’t matter to me which one.” This dear soul was practicing what Jesus preached.

NEW YEAR'S DAY

What about you? Do you really trust God? Can you pray with Christ, ***“Not my will, but Thine be done?”*** Do you believe God will hear and answer your prayers even when you do not understand?

Let’s make the New Year a proving ground for our faith. Let’s re-commit ourselves to trusting God, even when we do not understand Him! Let’s pray more and worry less!

**AIM HIGH!
THE SIZE OF YOUR GOAL
REFLECTS THE SIZE OF YOUR GOD!**

Focus

"This one thing I do . . ." (Phil. 3:13.)

Seven or eight years ago I purchased a watch for about twenty dollars. It keeps excellent time, and I feel lost without it. Twenty or thirty times each day I look at the watch to see what time it is. This watch, however, also has the date in the upper right-hand corner. When I am focusing on the time I never see the date, and vice versa.

Now, I am looking at the same watch with a different focus. This time I am not looking for the time, or date, but the manufacturer. The word "Timex" is now quite obvious. It is written in gold letters on a black background. I didn't see it, however, until I looked for it. Changing my focus a fraction of an inch informs me that this watch is water resistant to a depth of 100 meters. Changing my focus again, reveals four buttons. Each is clearly labeled. Even though these labels are less than an inch apart, I can only focus on one at a time. One button is labeled "mode," another "set," another "al. on," and the fourth "light." With a different focus, the word "quartz" can also be clearly seen. Though I have owned the watch for years, this is the first time I remember reading that. A jeweler might look at the same watch and see several blemishes where the plastic has been scratched. With a different focus he would note that four screws must be removed to replace it, etc.

I have a good friend who can see everything, but cannot focus on anything. He is legally blind!

The ability to focus is an integral part of success in every area of life. Take athletics, for example. The quarterback may have a sore foot, a sick child, and bills

that are past due. When the ball is snapped, however, he needs to have total focus on the play at hand. If he throws the ball, his receiver also needs the same type of concentration. The receiver must not be distracted by the fear of a hard tackle, or anything else.

Many mistakes in life come as the result of a distracted focus. When we try to do too many things at the same time is when we wreck the car, break the dish, or drop the ball.

But now let us focus on a spiritual application of this obvious truth. We cannot serve two masters. We cannot focus on both God and mammon. We cannot plow a straight furrow while looking back. If our eye is clouded by sin our whole lives will be filled with darkness. If our eye is single, our whole body will be full of light.

Paul wrote to the Philippians that he was going to focus on only **ONE THING** (Phil. 3:13). He was going to focus on Christ! He was going to forget the distractions of the past and press for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. When the time of his departure was at hand he had finished his course, kept the faith, and was expecting a crown (II Tim. 4:7.) Paul's inspired philosophy of life is particularly appropriate while we are making New Year's resolutions. Let's all focus on pleasing Christ in the coming year!

Each of us, of course, will be doing different things, at different times. We are different parts of His Body, with different functions to perform. Whatever we do, however, we can **"do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men"** (Col. 3:23). He wrote the same truth to the Ephesians. We are not to work with "eye service" as "men pleasers," but **"with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men"**: (Eph. 6:7.)

LET'S FOCUS ON CHRIST IN THE NEW YEAR!***Happy New Year!***

"This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you" (Ex. 12:2).

The calendar is one of the oldest forms of applied science. Nomadic hunters needed a calendar so they could prepare for the migration of animals and birds. Farmers needed a calendar to determine the best time to plant their crops. Traders needed a calendar as a basis for contracts and payments.

The Egyptians had a calendar. Their year began at the flooding of the Nile and was divided into four seasons. It was also marked by the heliacal rising of Sirius. "Sirius" is the Greek word for "scorching." This name was given to the brightest star in the heavens, located in the constellation Canis Major. It is also called the Dog Star.

The exodus of God's people from Egypt occurred about 1500 B.C. This was during the 18th dynasty of Egypt, which is dated from 1551 - 1315 B.C. Historians call this the "New Kingdom," and describe it as the zenith of Egypt's political power and wealth.

Focus your mental and spiritual energies on this remarkable fact: God disregarded the Egyptian calendar, and gave His people a new calendar of their very own! This happened at a time when Egypt was the strongest, and the Hebrews were the weakest. Hallelujah! When things were not going well, God gave His people the privilege of starting over.

The Hebrew people had no power. They were slaves to the Egyptians. They were forced to do the

Pharaoh's work. Their little boy babies were being put to death. At this time in history, God stepped in. He announced that it was time to start over. He not only gave them a brand new calendar, He gave them a brand new life. It didn't matter what the Pharaoh said. It didn't matter what the Egyptian calendar said. God set the stage for His own New Year. He didn't just put a period on the past, He tore up the page and started over.

As we said before, this new year involved far more than merely a new calendar. Everything became new! They had a new leader, a new power, a new law, and a new direction in life. They began their new year with a journey. They started out for the Promised Land. They said goodbye to the slavery of their former life and breathed the air of freedom.

The Gospel proclaims the good news that God controls the calendar in our lives too! We can start over, just like the Hebrews did. We can escape slavery and find freedom. We can have our past erased and turn over a new leaf in life. Here is something "new" for your own "New Year".

A new creation - I Cor. 5:17

A new birth - John 3:3-5

A new life - Rom. 6:4

A new man - Eph. 4:24

A new heart - Eze. 36:26

A new spirit - Eze. 11:19

A new name - Is. 62:2

A new song - Ps. 144:9

New wine - Matt. 9:17

A new covenant - Jer. 31:31

A new commandment - John 13:34

A new way - Heb. 10:20

A new Jerusalem - Rev. 3:12

NEW YEAR'S DAY

A new heaven and a new earth - II Pet. 3:13
HAPPY NEW YEAR!

NEW YEAR'S DAY

The Road of No Regrets

Dr. Wayne Bigelow once spoke to a group of college students on "The Road of No Regrets." During this lecture he spoke of the first three patients he was assigned as a young intern. All three patients died. The first was an alcoholic who died from the dissipating effects of his addiction. The second died of lung cancer as the consequence of a life time of smoking. The third also died as a result of a life style decision. He died from a sexually transmitted disease.

Dr. Bigelow was a capable and conscientious physician. He approached each patient with the confidence that his training and medical science could help. He was wrong! The illnesses he faced were beyond the help of medical science.

The good doctor then told the students that if they would follow Christ they would be traveling down a road of no regrets. This simple advice deserves consideration. There are many things in life that we regret, but none of them can be blamed on Jesus. The Good Shepherd never causes us to do wrong or to lie down in bad pastures. Those who follow Him find happiness both here and hereafter.

Dr. Charles Crane tells the sad story of a young man getting drunk for the first time. He wrecked his car and wandered into a strange house at 3:00 a.m. He was so disoriented that he had no idea where he was. The next day he looked at Dr. Crane through steel bars of the local jail. There was no lecture or sermon that day, only a radiant smile and the reminder that when we

NEW YEAR'S DAY

do what Jesus wants us to do we have no regrets.

Adam regretted his disobedience. Achan regretted his disobedience. David regretted his disobedience. Judas regretted his disobedience. But those who obediently follow Christ are walking down a road of no regrets.

Each day we make many decisions. We decide where we will go, and what we will say and do. Many of us will have regrets at the end of the day, but no one ever regrets following Jesus.

The decisions we make assume a new significance as we face a brand new year. It offers to us both opportunity and danger. The devil walks around like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, but those who follow Jesus have no reason to fear. The zoo is a fun place to be if you go where you are supposed to go. The devil is bound by the power of the gospel. He that is within us is greater than he that is in the world. When we rebuke him through the power of Christ he will flee. Those who decide to follow Christ in the New Year will be walking down a road of no regrets.

The poet said it like this:

My father's way may twist and turn,
My heart may throb and ache;
But in my heart I'm glad I know,
He maketh no mistake.

My cherished plans may go astray,
My hopes may fade away;
But still I'll trust my Lord to lead,
For he doth know the way.

NEW YEAR'S DAY

Tho night be dark and it may seem
That day will never break;
I'll pin my faith, my all in Him,
He maketh no mistake.

There's so much now I cannot see,
My eyesight's far too dim;
But come what may, I'll simply trust
And leave it all to Him.

For by and by the mist will lift,
And plain it all He'll make;
Through all the way, though dark to me,
He made not one mistake.

Do It!

“Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might, for there is no work, no device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest” (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

You have, no doubt, heard of the wisdom of Solomon. The above verse is an example. How obvious! If you ever intend to do anything, do it now. Do it energetically. When you die it will be too late!

Four activities are specifically mentioned: (1) Work, (2) Device, (3) Knowledge, (4) Wisdom.

The Hebrew word for **“work”** is “mah-as-eh.” It refers to an action, transaction, or activity. A great many people come down to the close of their lives muttering “if only.” They had intended to do this or buy that, but they didn’t. To all such people Solomon says: “Do it!”

The Hebrew word for **“device”** is “khesh-bone.” It comes from a root which means “to weave.” By implication, therefore, it refers to some contrivance woven by the mind of man. There are at least a half dozen ways the word is used in Scripture. One of these ways involves an “invention.” Haven’t you heard of someone who had a great idea, or big invention that they never developed? They may brag about their brush with success in declining years, but Solomon says: “Do it!”

The Hebrew word for **“knowledge”** is “dah-ath.” It is found 93 times in the Old Testament Scriptures, primarily in the “wisdom books” (Proverbs 41, Job 10,

Ecclesiastes 9). Its primary reference is to knowledge that is of a personal and experimental nature. A friend once confessed the diabolical urge to open the emergency door on an airliner at 40,000 feet. That, of course, is lunacy. If, however, you have some hidden desire that is not contrary to the will of Christ, “Do it!”

The Hebrew word for **“wisdom”** is “khok-maw.” It refers to a skilful manner of thinking regarding the experiences of life. Some things which are done impulsively we live to regret. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. We do not always understand why God commands us to do certain things, but we will always be glad when we obey. If there is some command of Scripture that weighs heavily on your heart, “do it!”

The late W. Carl Ketcherside lectured at many colleges during the 60’s. A college student once asked him to distinguish Jesus from the Oriental gurus who were so popular at the time. Carl responded that Jesus was a man of action. He did not sit with His legs crossed and stare at His belly button. Jesus was a man on the move. He was busy touching the lepers, healing the sick, feeding the hungry, and bringing hope to those in despair. In this regard he left us an example that we should follow in His steps. Whatsoever His hand found to do, He did it mightily.

Someone has observed that rich people have choices. We choose what we will eat, what we will wear, and where we will go. Poor people do not have choices. They are often trapped in circumstances where they have nothing to eat, nothing to wear, and no way to travel. The Scriptures teach that though Jesus was rich, for our sakes He became poor, that we through His poverty might become rich (2 Cor. 8:9).

NEW YEAR'S DAY

Most of us, however, have choices. Solomon would encourage us to abandon the "paralysis by analysis" and do something. We can cogitate, speculate, meditate, and procrastinate and die without doing much of anything. The Scriptures, however, call us to a different course of action.

"Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might, for there is no work, no device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest."

VALENTINE'S DAY

Too Wonderful

"There are three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not: The way of an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent upon a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; and the way of a man with a maid" (Prov. 30:18-19).

These inspired words were written by Agur, the son of Jakeh (Prov. 30:1). An eagle in the air is absolutely amazing. On the ground it may be awkward and clumsy, but in the air it is the personification of elegance, agility, dexterity, and grace. The magnificent eagle knows how to catch those upward currents and soar above the tallest mountains.

A serpent on a rock is also amazing. It has no hands or feet, yet slithers up the side of a cliff with ease and confidence.

The third thing too wonderful for the writer was a ship in the midst of the sea. A man in the water is weighed down by the smallest object, but the marvelous ship can carry tons of cargo without a problem.

The fourth marvel which was too wonderful for Agur was the **"way of a man with a maid."** Like those other things, it was something he had always seen, but never completely understood.

The Hebrew word for "glory" is "kabod" which literally means "heavy." When the Hebrews saw the fire of God descend upon the Tabernacle, they cried "Glory!" It was a "heavy" or "weighty" experience. Consequently, it was something which was better experienced than explained.

VALENTINE'S DAY

It is not by accident that the Scriptures describe the woman as the "**glory of the man**" (I Cor. 11:7). Such a relationship is also weighty and profound. It too is like a fire from God that is better experienced than explained. Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. Our heart is like the Holy of Holies. It is the dwelling place of God. Our sexuality should therefore be expressed in such a way that we glorify God in our body, and in our spirit which belong to God (I Cor. 6:19-20).

The first time Jacob saw Rachel he kissed her, and lifted up his voice and wept (Gen. 29:11). Her father promised to give her in marriage in exchange for seven years of work. The Scriptures record: "**And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her**" (Gen. 29:20). It's just too wonderful!

A modern day poet has written: "I hear music, and there's no one there. I smell blossoms and the trees are bare. All day long I seem to walk on air. I wonder why. I wonder why!" This thing called love. Isn't it wonderful!

Someone has observed that sin is merely the misuse of good things. The beautiful love which God ordained between men and women turns ugly outside of marriage. For this reason, the very next verse in Proverbs warns of "an adulterous woman." Fire can be either good, or bad. It can warm the home, or destroy it. It can cook a meal or burn down a city. So also with flames of passion. A wrong relationship with our neighbor's wife is like a fire that burns our bosom and blisters our feet (Prov. 6:27-28).

Some who read these words are single. If God has given you that special gift of belonging to Him alone, may this Valentine's Day enrich that relationship to

VALENTINE'S DAY

accomplish exceeding, abundantly above all that you can ask or imagine.

If God has reserved some special person to be your mate, I pray that you will have the faith and patience to "wait on the Lord" to bring you together.

If you are married, I ask that this Valentine's Day will enhance and validate that beautiful commitment which you made at the marriage altar. May the light of your love burn like a beacon to show the way to others.

SUCH LOVE IS JUST TOO WONDERFUL FOR WORDS!

God Does It Better

When comparing the work of God and the works of man, there is no comparison. Everything **God** makes is better! The more closely you examine the work of **God**, the more beautiful it becomes. A snowflake, for example, is magnificent on the mountaintop, but is even more magnificent under the microscope. The works of man, by contrast, are crude and ugly under close examination. A portrait which seems beautiful from across the room, reveals many brush marks and human imperfections when examined closely. Under the microscope it has no beauty at all.

Everything man makes grows old. Only **God** can make something which grows tall. Man can make the sounds of traffic and industry. **God** can make the crickets chirp and the birds to sing. Man makes a machine to grind out merchandise. **God** makes a baby laugh. Man can make a tiny satellite to orbit the earth. **God** can make the earth for the tiny satellite to orbit. Man makes the wonders of the world, but **God** makes the world to make men wonder.

Everything which man makes is sterile and unproductive. Artificial flowers, for example, cannot reproduce. Imitation flowers do not cause a scientist to be breathless with wonder. Such flowers provide no fragrance for young lovers, and no nectar for a passing bird or bee. They have no life producing seeds and nothing from which a drop of honey can ever be produced.

Such man made flowers pale into insignificance beside the creative work of **God**. **God's** flowers are beautiful beyond description. They bring us pleasure

when seen in a meadow, and amazement when seen under a microscope. Their fragrance fills the evening breeze and their seeds will fall to the ground and grow. Even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. The flowers of the field, which today are, and tomorrow are cast into the oven, are an integral part of a living, vibrant, eco system. Without them, many species of birds and insects would disappear. **God** does it better!

Man can make a telescope to probe the heavens. **God** makes the heavens for the telescope to probe.

Man can make a baseball park, a bowling alley, and a skating rink. **God** can make a snow capped mountain with sparkling streams. Its mirrored lakes will be alive with fish. Its forests will flourish with living creatures from the tiny insect to the bounding deer.

God's creative work provides an infinite supply of living things for man to study. There are, for example, 8,800 known species of ants. Someone has estimated the ant population of the world to exceed ten million billion. After all our years of scientific study on this single subject, there are many mysteries yet to be solved and many discoveries yet to be made. **God** does it better!

Anything produced by finite men can be understood by the finite mind. This is why we can "complete" a study of that which is carnal. That which is created by **God**, however, will forever be elusive. It is too high, too wide, and too deep for the finite mind to completely comprehend. Take, for example, the study of the atom. Nothing is more basic, or foundational to understanding the universe than the atom. It is safe to say, that atomic science will be like all other science. Its

text books will be obsolete in a few short years.

God does it better!

God Can Give You A New Heart

"For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man" (Mark 7:21-22.).

The Jews criticized Jesus for eating with unwashed hands. Jesus responded that sin does not come from without, but from within. The problem of sin, is a problem of the heart, and the Scriptures are filled with examples to prove it. Laws that force us to "conform" on the outside, are powerless to "transform" us on the inside.

Take, for example, the story of Adam and Eve. They were perfect specimens, in a perfect environment. God gave them but one law, and threatened them with death if they broke it. Even the fear of immediate death, however, was not sufficient to overcome the corruption of an unconverted heart. Adam and Eve sinned, and the world has never been the same.

By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin. But sin is still a condition of the heart. Cain had murder in his heart, and that's why he killed his brother. Lamech had murder in his heart, and that's why he also committed murder. Soon the earth was filled with

violence. The world was violent, because the thoughts of men's hearts were only evil continually. Again God demonstrated his wrath against sin and brought death upon all living creatures. The only lives spared in the flood were with Noah on the ark. We learn from this that even the power of a world wide flood could not cleanse the sinful heart of man. After the flood, the Tower of Babel became a symbol of man's rebellious heart. God commanded them to scatter, but they decided to build a tower to keep from being scattered. It is obvious that man needed a "new heart."

Even commandments written in stone, and enforced on pain of death, could not change or transform the heart of sinful man. While Moses got the commandments on the mountain, the people were fornicating before a golden calf in the valley. Paul summarized Hebrew history by quoting from Isaiah 65:2: **"All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people"** (Rom. 10:21).

There never was a time in the history of the world when mankind was basically "good." Jeremiah said it like this: **"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Who can know it?"** (Jer. 17:9).

If mankind was to be transformed, God would have to do something about the heart. Please consider this beautiful promise from the Lord:

"A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them" (Ez. 36:26-27).

The Old Covenant was written in stone, but the New Covenant is written in the heart. The New

VALENTINE'S DAY

Covenant gets to the "heart" of the problem, for as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.

It is obvious that man cannot by his own will, overcome his own will. Jesus knew this! He knew that the problem of the heart was too profound and deep to be healed by anything external. Therefore, He volunteers to come into the inner chambers of our secret self with all of His healing power. He lovingly knocks at the door of our heart and patiently implores us to let Him in. He said: "**Behold, I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me**" (Rev. 3:20).

PLEASE OPEN THE DOOR OF YOUR HEART AND
LET JESUS IN!

VALENTINE'S DAY

The Love Slave

"I Love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go free" (Ex. 21:5).

A remarkable contrast between law and love is given in the Bible immediately after the Ten Commandments. As despicable as it seems today, the Law did make provisions for slavery. The word translated as "servant" in this passage is the Hebrew word "ebed." This is precisely the same word translated as "slave" in Jer. 2:14. The "law slave" was his master's property. The master could do with him, or her, as he pleased. There were only a few restrictions. He could beat his servant but could not knock out an eye or a tooth (Ex. 21:26-27). He could not beat his servant to death, but he could beat them so severely that they would die in a day or two (Ex. 21:20-21.) At the end of six years, the "law slave" was to be set free (Ex. 21:2).

At the same time we are told about law and slavery, we are exposed to another type of slavery which was far more demanding. At the end of six years the Hebrew servant was to be set free. They could, however, renounce that freedom. They could choose to be a slave without the protection of law. If they loved their master and wanted to remain in his service, they could become his slave forever. At the end of six years they would not go free. If their master knocked out an eye, or a tooth, they could not appeal to the law to gain their freedom. They were slaves forever. The impetus responsible for such self denial was not law, it was love. Only if the slave loved his master enough would he be

VALENTINE'S DAY

willing to deny self and become a slave forever.

The permanent nature of this commitment was to be marked by a public ceremony. The master and slave would come before the judges to authenticate the decision. At this time the master would bring his slave to the door, or door post, and bore his ear through with an awl, and the slave would serve him forever (Ex. 21:6).

The Greek word for slave is "doulos." This is the word used to describe the condescension of Christ. Paul wrote to the Philippians that though Christ was God, He did not consider His role as God something to be clutched at. In this remarkable passage we are told that Jesus emptied Himself and took the very nature of a "slave" (Phil. 2:7).

Slavery was an integral part of the Roman world. Gibbon estimates the number of slaves under the reign of Claudius to be no less than one-half the entire population. Schaff, the historian, points out that between the conquest of Greece in 146 B.C., and the reign of Alexander Severus (A. D. 222-235), the ratio was three slaves for every freeman. The point is, that citizens in the Roman world immediately understood the profound implications of "God" becoming a "slave."

The designation of "doulos" or "slave" was not just used of Jesus. It was a common way to describe all Christians. It was used of Paul (Rom. 1:1), Epaphras (Col. 2:14), Timothy (II Tim. 2:24), James (James 1:1), Peter (II Pet. 1:1), Jude (Jude 1:1), and John (Rev. 1:1). The Scriptures admonish us to have the mind of Christ. We are to think as Jesus thought. If Jesus gave up His role as God to become a slave, what excuse do we have?

The book of Romans puts it like this: "**Don't you**

VALENTINE'S DAY

know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey-- whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. (Rom. 6:16-18 NIV).

Certainly it is not wise or judicious to become slaves to sin. The smartest thing one will ever do, however, is to become a slave of Jesus Christ. Paradoxically, in this type of "slavery" we find true freedom.

Jesus is our Leader and Example. He has been exalted to the highest place of honour in the universe and if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed (John 8:36).

The Mystery of Marriage

God designed marriage to be the closest possible bond between two people. It was to be something unique and without parallel or precedent. This radical abandon of self and commitment to another was to transcend every other form of human union or covenant. The two were to become one. One: socially, legally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Such closeness can only be achieved at the cost of one's self. Those who experience marriage as God intended are shocked at the enormous price and the monstrous inconvenience of intimacy. There is nothing else in all human experience to compare with the lifelong cauterization of the ego that must take place in marriage. Not only can marriage be exhausting, unnerving, infuriating, and disintegrating, it can also bestow transcendent joy and indescribable happiness. Some enter into marriage with the mistaken idea that they will not have to change much. In reality it requires a radical and sweeping reformation of life. Love, of course, is the potent force which makes that possible. There is no authority more compelling, no power more hypnotically transfixing, no counsel more wise, no message more desirable to hear, and no master to whom it is easier to surrender and obey, than love.

Marriage is to human relationships what monotheism is to theology. It is a deliberate decision to put all of your eggs in one basket and to go for broke. When the devout believer makes a total commitment to God he is approximating the radical self abandon of

marriage. What is hard about marriage is what is hard about facing God. It is the constant strain of living continually under the intimate scrutiny of another pair of eyes. In marriage and in Christianity, we surrender our independence and vow to squander our entire lives on someone else. Further, we are destined to stand naked and defenseless before them, for marriage is a sacrament of openness.

Good marriages are the foundation of society, but the godless are fleeing from this commitment in droves. The decisive finality of the marriage vows was intended to free people from endless courting rituals which drain away life's energies in a constant search for "meaningful relationships." Many of those who seek to avoid the total commitment of Christian matrimony flee from one amorous union after another in a futile search for sexual fulfillment and lasting trust. Instead of growing to maturity with one partner they go over and over the same basic ground in each new liaison. The heartache of such tragedies has been described as the single most traumatic experience that a human can endure. Such grief is more prolonged and inconsolable than from a death.

But marriage is also a sacrament of discovery. It is the only relationship wherein one person may rightfully "possess" another. Consequently there is a place for jealousy. Just as God is a "Jealous God," the human possesses the capacity to be jealous over the infraction of the marriage vows.

The fourth chapter of the Song of Solomon declares: How beautiful are you, my darling! You have stolen my heart with one glance of your eyes." This the kind of love which Christ has for the church and which every husband ought to have for his own wife.

(Condensed from an article by Mike Mason in
THE CHRISTIAN READER, May/June '86)

God is a Jealous God

God is a jealous God! This truth is found in the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:5, Deut. 5:9.) It is repeated in Deut. 4:24; 6:15; Josh 24:19; Nahum 1:2, etc. It is a foundational concept toward an accurate understanding of God and a principal ingredient in Christianity.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians: **“For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ”** (II Cor. 11:2).

The Hebrew word for jealous is “kan-naw.” It comes from a root word that is found 87 times in Scripture. The Theological Workbook of the New Testament states that “zeal” is the original sense. The concept is closely associated with “envy”, which is not always used in a good sense. They continue, “The central meaning of our word, however, relates to ‘jealousy’ especially in the marriage relationship” (Vol. 2, p. 802).

God is depicted as Israel’s husband, and at the same time we are reminded that He is a “Jealous God.” The church, of course, is also the “Bride of Christ.” Thus, the image of matrimony and jealousy in association with God is consistent.

The 16th chapter of Ezekiel pictures Hebrew history by means of a profound and pathetic parable. Israel is likened unto an infant that was abandoned at birth. She was not washed, nor salted, nor swaddled.

She was cast out in an open field to die.

At this time God passed by and saw her weltering in her own blood. He washed her with water, anointed her with oil, clothed her with brodered work, fine linen and silk. He decked her with gold and silver and precious jewels. Israel, however, did not return this love to God. She grew up to trust in her own beauty and played the harlot. God’s judgment was: **“Thus saith the Lord GOD; Because thy filthiness was poured out, and thy nakedness discovered through thy whoredoms with thy lovers, and with all the idols of thy abominations, and by the blood of thy children, which thou didst give unto them; Behold, therefore I will gather all thy lovers, with whom thou hast taken pleasure, and all them that thou hast loved, with all them that thou hast hated; I will even gather them round about against thee, and will discover thy nakedness unto them, that they may see all thy nakedness. And I will judge thee, as women that break wedlock and shed blood are judged; and I will give thee blood in fury and jealousy”** (Ezek 16:36-38).

Modern man has a tendency to view God as an over-indulgent grandfather rather than a jealous husband. As the song writer said: “He’ll always hear and say ‘Well Done’.” The truth of the matter is, that God will not always say “Well Done.” Sometimes He will say “Depart you cursed, into eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”

Malachi used an interesting illustration to emphasize the wrath of God on the unfaithful. He lived in a generation when the people robbed God in tithes and offerings without either embarrassment or shame. They offered polluted bread upon the altar. They kept

VALENTINE'S DAY

the choice animals for themselves and offered God the blind, the lame, and the sick. Malachi suggested that they try this with the governor. They would not dare do that to the governor, but they tried to do it to God. Most of us have enough fear of civil government that we pay our taxes on time for fear of the I.R.S. Many of the same people, however, have no fear of God.

They should have feared God. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. He that despised Moses Law died without mercy unto two or three witnesses. How much greater punishment do you think is reserved for those who trample under foot the blood of Christ and count the blood of the covenant an unholy thing. The Lord said to the people in the days of Malachi: **"I have no pleasure in you . . . neither will I accept an offering at your hand** (Mal. 1:10).

Let us love God with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and pray that our offerings are acceptable unto Him! He is, as you know, a Jealous God!

PALM SUNDAY

Palm Sunday

- Palm Sunday
- The Sunday before Easter
- Jesus came riding into Jerusalem on a donkey
- This was predicted by Zechariah
- The people spread their garments in the way
- They also cut down branches from trees and strawed them in the way
- The multitudes cried "Hosanna to the son of David"
- The Pharisees were outraged
- Jesus beheld the city and wept

He said: **"If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! But now are they hidden from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation"** (Lk. 19:41-44).

A few days later the fickle crowd would cry out for His crucifixion. They would say "Let his blood be upon us and upon our children."

A few years later the Roman General, Titus, would cast a trench about Jerusalem and raze it to the ground. Not one stone would be left upon another.

Palm Sunday has many lessons for the student of the Scriptures. Permit me to focus on only one.

PALM SUNDAY

Earthly systems, and human government, are only temporal. The Kingdom of Christ is eternal. Palm Sunday headlines usually forget this. They may focus on major events of the day, with little or no comprehension of their eternal significance.

Look at our own newspapers. The United States is but a brief two hundred years old. Rome lasted more than three times this long. Egypt lasted thousands of years. So what!

I am told that a cathedral in Milan has three entrances adorned by three poignant works of art. One has a thorn with the inscription: "That which pains is but for a moment." Another has a rose with the words: "That which pleases is but for a moment." The main entrance has a cross, proclaiming: "That alone is important which endures forever."

Jesus was born to die. He was like a Lamb, slain from the foundation of the world. His journey to Jerusalem was not irrelevant. The prophets had described it centuries before. It was at the centerpiece of God's eternal purpose. Myriads of angels watched every event with breathless anticipation. God incarnate was about to die for the sins of the world. He was going to enter into the Holiest, and offer His own blood as a divine oblation. Death was about to be destroyed, and life and immortality were being brought to light by the Gospel.

The late W. Carl Ketcherside sarcastically pointed out the difference between the angels and us by saying: "Don't talk to me about world evangelism - who got my parking place?"

Heaven's newspapers are much different from our own. The angels rejoice when one sinner repents. They are more concerned about widows and orphans

PALM SUNDAY

than basketball games and stock market reports. We focus on the things which we see. These are only temporal. They focus on the things which we cannot see. Those things are eternal!

This year let us try to see Palm Sunday through the eyes of angels. Let us turn our eyes toward heaven. Let us try to forget what pains, or what pleases, and focus on those things which endure forever.

The Symbols of Palm Sunday

"Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass" (Matt. 21:5).

Modern man is learning to communicate with symbols. Road signs, for example, are now symbols. These symbols provide needed information to tourists who cannot read English.

We should not be surprised to discover that the Bible is filled with symbolism. The Apostle John, for example, received visions on the Island of Patmos of things which **"must shortly come to pass"** (Rev. 1:1). Much of this information was given by symbols. Alexander Campbell considered this an advantage and wrote:

"Symbols are exempt from some of the objections lying against literal descriptions. They need no translation. Sun, moon, and stars speak the same sublime language to every eye, and suggest the same devout and lofty emotions to every heart. A lion, a leopard, a bear, - an earthquake, a tempest, a swelling sea, are types of the same ideas and call forth the same thrilling sensation in every spectator."

Having said this, let us prayerfully consider the symbolism of Palm Sunday. Jesus came riding meekly into Jerusalem on a little colt which had never been ridden before. This powerful message was so important

that it had been specifically predicted centuries before by the Prophet Zechariah.

Jesus was the son of David. We are reminded of this in the opening verse of the N. T. Scriptures, and we are not allowed to forget it. Over and over we are reminded that Jesus was the "Son of David." David, as you know, was a man of war. As a young shepherd he killed a lion and a bear. As a young warrior he killed the giant Goliath. He killed two hundred Philistines as a dowry that he might marry the king's daughter. David had so much blood on his hands that God would not allow him to build the temple.

Since Jesus was the "Son of David," many expected him to also be a man of war. They expected Jesus to recruit an army as David did. They expected Jesus to defeat Rome as David had defeated his enemies.

The Maccabean revolt was a more recent example of a military victory over pagans. In 166 B.C. every village in Palestine was required by the Syrians to set up a heathen altar. Mattathias, and his five sons, refused to worship at a pagan altar. In a spontaneous display of righteous indignation they slew the king's legate and tore down the pagan altar. Mattathias cried out: "Let every one who is zealous for the law and supports the covenant come out with me." Against overwhelming odds they defeated Syria and gained freedom for the people of God.

Now the stage was set for another military revolt. The Passover was nigh. Millions of Jews had come to Jerusalem from all over the world. Roman soldiers looked down on the crowd from the Tower of Antonia. They paced nervously as a stir of excitement swept through that sea of humanity. Suddenly, the multitudes

PALM SUNDAY

began to shout "Hosanna to the Son of David!" Hosanna means "save now!" Their voices rose to crescendo and echoed back from the mountains surrounding the city. They ripped the branches from palm trees and strawed them in the way before Jesus. They also spread their clothes in the way.

There would, however, be no military revolt! The only blood that Jesus came to shed was His own! There He was, tottering on the back of a little donkey that had never been ridden before. He was the very symbol of defenselessness and vulnerability. Jesus did not come to be served, but to serve others and give His life as a ransom for many.

In this regard He left us an example that we should follow in His steps!

PALM SUNDAY

Jesus Wept

"He beheld the city, and wept over it" (Lk. 19:41)

It was the day of His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. His followers were ecstatic. Jesus was riding on a colt, exactly as Zechariah had predicted (Zech. 9:9). They ripped the branches from palm trees and cast their garments in the way before Him. They were saying: "Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest" (Lk. 19:38).

Suddenly the city of Jerusalem burst into view. From the slopes of the mountain it lay before Jesus like an open book and He began to weep. At the tomb of Lazarus He shed silent tears (Jn. 11:35 - Greek word "dakruo"). Upon this occasion, however, He wept openly like a child. The Greek word is "klaio" which refers to loud expressions of grief. The LXX used this word to describe the crying of the baby Moses when he was set adrift on the waters of the Nile (Ex 2:6). This is the word also used to describe loud lamentations for the dead. It is sometimes translated as "bewail."

The multitudes were filled with a frenzy of joy because they saw only the moment. Jesus wept because He saw the future. He knew that someday this happy city would be covered with ashes and wet with human blood. His prophetic insight opened to Him a horrible panorama of indescribable suffering and death. Their enemies would cast a trench about them and totally destroy everything. Not one stone would be left upon another that would not be cast down.

Thus we have a strange and incongruous mixture of hosannas wet with tears, a weeping Jesus

PALM SUNDAY

and a singing multitude, a wail of death surrounded by sounds of life.

The Book of Revelation indicates that Jesus walks in the midst of the churches. He who has eyes as a flame of fire is fully aware of everything that was, that is, and that will be. Jesus sees us with the same clarity that He saw ancient Jerusalem. Perhaps He is again weeping as He did in days gone by. Perhaps even now He is convulsed with anguish and overcome with grief.

Try, if you can, to see America from the vantage point of God. Some time ago the network news described a blood bath in Waco, Texas involving a false messiah. T.V. talk shows exonerate and advocate every form of deviate behavior as normal. Advertisers pour billions of dollars into sitcoms and movies that attack and belittle virtually everything which is righteous and holy. Condoms can be passed out in the same schools where the Bible is forbidden. The gurus of sexual liberation insist upon their "right" to kill unborn babies (There are 1.6 million reported abortions each year in the United States alone). Who can deny that such a sorry state must pain the heart of God?

Listen to the loving invitation of Jesus to Jerusalem: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Matt. 23:37-39).

There is a point, however, when even the long suffering of God comes to an end. Let us devoutly pray that the experience of the United States of

PALM SUNDAY

America, will be different from that of Jerusalem.
Even so come Lord Jesus!

He Steadfastly Set His face

“And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem . . .” (Lk. 9:51).

Jesus was born to die. He was a lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8.) The shadow of the cross was upon the manger of His birth. Throughout His brief ministry He told His disciples many times that He had to suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day (Lk. 8:22). He spoke with Moses and Elijah about His decease which He should accomplish in Jerusalem (Lk. 9:31). When the people marveled that He had cast out a demon He said to His disciples: **“Let these sayings sink down into your ears: for the Son of Man shall be delivered into the hands of men . . .”** (Lk. 9:44).

Jesus did not die on the cross by accident. He steadfastly set His face toward Jerusalem. As He journeyed a certain man said: **“Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest”** (Lk. 9:57). He wouldn't, and Jesus knew it! The birds of the air had nests, and the foxes had holes, but Jesus didn't have anywhere to lay His head.

Jesus said to another: **“Follow Me!”** But this man too had other priorities. He wanted to put Jesus on the “back burner” until the more important things were taken care of.

A third man said: **“Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home**

at my house” (Lk. 9:61). How modern! How absolutely in tune with our time. How much like the rest of us! He wanted to follow Jesus, as long as it was convenient. This poor soul did not understand that Jesus was on His way to the cross. Crosses are not convenient! Jesus put it like this: **“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me”** (Lk. 9:23).

Jesus steadfastly set His face toward Jerusalem. No man was going to take His life, He was going to give it (John 10:10). Solomon said that the way a man thought reflected what he was (Prov. 23:7). In this regard Jesus concentrated all of His mental energies on doing the will of God. He said explicitly: **“I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me”** (John 5:30).

The heroes of history have been people with determination. Shadrack, Meshach, and Abednego did not know what the King would do, or what God would do. They did, however, know what they would not do. They would not bow down and worship a golden image (Dan. 3:18). Esther determined to intercede for her people and said: **“If I perish, I perish”** (Esther 4:16). A den of lions could not keep Daniel from his prayers, and no force in the universe could keep Christ from Calvary. He steadfastly set His face toward Jerusalem.

When Martin Luther was threatened by King Henry VIII he responded: “But let these swine come on and burn me if they dare. Here I am and I will wait for them, and my ashes alone having been cast after my death into a thousand seas, I will persecute and harass this abominable crowd. While alive I will be the enemy of the papacy Burned, I will be twice an enemy . . .”

Savarola was offered the office of Cardinal if

PALM SUNDAY

he would but change his style of preaching. He chose instead to be strangled and burned because he said the flames of hell were redder than a Cardinal's hat.

The late W. Carl Ketcherside said it like this: "The crying need of our age is for men filled with the Spirit of God, men who dare to break with tradition, and if need be, die for the vision which they have cherished . . ."

Jesus set His face steadfastly toward Jerusalem. Others may be detracted from their duty by fear, ambition, or selfish sentiment, but Jesus was determined not to do His own will, but the will of the Father which had sent Him. He put His hand to the plow and did not look back..

The song writer said it beautifully: "Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in His wonderful face. And the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace."

PALM SUNDAY

Jesus Didn't Quit!

Sometimes I quit, but Jesus didn't quit! Nobody likes a quitter and every time I quit I like myself a little less . . . but Jesus didn't quit.

Someone said:

You remember Christopher Columbus . . . he didn't quit!

You remember Thomas Edison . . . he didn't quit!

You remember Abraham Lincoln . . . he didn't quit!

Nobody remembers George Swartz . . . he quit!

But Jesus didn't quit! When He came down to the last few days of His life He had a lot of opportunities to quit. He knew Judas was going to betray Him, but He let him do it anyhow. He could have tossed in the towel when He prayed in Gethsemane, but He didn't do it. He could have called twelve legions of angels to rescue Him, but He didn't do it. Jesus didn't quit!

"Come down from the cross" was the sarcastic challenge of those who cried out for His crucifixion, but Jesus didn't do it. Jesus didn't quit! With every sinew and nerve in His bleeding body crying out for respite and rest, He didn't quit. He was faithful until death! While the sun hid its face in amazement and the earth trembled at the awesome spectacle of Calvary, Jesus Christ was faithful and true until His last responsibility had been faithfully completed. Then He cried out with a loud voice: "It is finished!" Then, and only then could He release His grasp upon life and yield up His Spirit to God! Then, and only then was it permissible for Him to

PALM SUNDAY

relax His vigil and surrender to the shroud of death. It was finished! He had completed the work that God had given Him to do. The game of life was over and Jesus had won! But Jesus didn't quit!

When I catch a glimpse of the courageous Christ I am challenged to hang in there for another day. When my eyes are blurred with sweat and tears I am emboldened by Christ to keep on trying. I somehow want to take another step when I remember that I am following in the footprints of Jesus. When the wet blankets of discouragement and doubt threaten to overwhelm my soul and smother out the flame of what little faith I have, I take another look at Calvary and smile with the confidence that Jesus didn't quit and I don't have to quit either.

What a blessing it is to know in my heart of hearts that He that is within me is greater than he that is in the world. The Sovereign of the Universe has written me a promise that He will never leave me or forsake me. His Holy Word declares that I will never be tempted above what I am able to bear. I can be "more than a conqueror" through Him that loves me. I really don't have to quit. Every resource in heaven and earth has been marshalled by God to ensure my victory. Nothing can separate me from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus my Lord.

The crown of life is not for those who start the race, but rather for those who complete it. The race of life is run before the inquiring eyes of angelic hosts and redeemed men. Through us, the principalities and powers in heavenly places observe the manifold wisdom of God. Even the angels are vitally interested in what we do and rejoice each time a sinner is brought to repentance. Jesus didn't quit, and I don't have to quit

PALM SUNDAY

either. I can fight another round, play another inning, run another mile, teach another lesson, preach another sermon, pray another prayer, make another call, turn the other cheek, write another check . . . I DON'T HAVE TO QUIT!

The Bible has good news for us sinners. Jesus wants us to be saved. Peter denied Christ three times, but he got another chance. The prodigal son wasted his substance in a far country but he got another chance. They brought a woman to Jesus who was caught in the act of adultery, but she got another chance. God is longsuffering toward us and is not willing that any should perish but that all come to repentance. Even God, however, cannot save a quitter! If Judas had only come to the cross he could have been graciously forgiven. Whoever comes to Jesus is never cast out. Judas, however, didn't give Jesus a chance to forgive him. He gave up on God and he also gave up on himself. He quit like a coward and his name will forever be associated with infamy.

Don't quit like Judas! When the going gets tough, the Spirit intercedes with new power and strength. Be thou faithful unto death and you will receive the crown of life! Jesus didn't quit on you, don't you quit on Him! Hang in there, and have a real nice eternity!

Do Not Be Afraid!

The March/April, '97 issue of CHRISTIAN READER has the humorous but profound story of the "Jesus Film" in Bangladesh. Toward the end of the story people were craning their necks in the crowded room to see the crucifixion. Weeping, and gasps of unbelief could be heard as the Bengalis shared in the pain and agony of the cross.

Suddenly, a young boy jumped up and cried out, "Do not be afraid. He gets up again! I saw it before".

The child like faith of this little lad personifies the genius of Christianity. Fear and faith are incompatible. If we have faith we need not be afraid, and if we are afraid we need to have more faith. On the threshold of his own martyrdom, Paul reminded Timothy that God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind (II Tim. 1:7). Paul could go to his death with confidence because he knew God, and was persuaded that He was able to keep that which he had committed unto Him. Like the little lad said, don't be afraid, we're going to get up again.

Jesus spoke with boldness, and not as the scribes. He knew where He came from, and where He was going. When the daughter of Jairus died, Jesus said, "**Be not afraid**" (Mk. 5:36). When the widow's son died Jesus said "**Weep not**" (Lk. 7:13). Jesus told His friends, "**Be not afraid of them that kill the body and after that have no more that they can do**" (Lk. 12:4). On the night before Calvary Jesus told His disciples, "**Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid**" (John 14:27.) Jesus said of His life: "**No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have**

the power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again" (John 10:18). When the women came to anoint the body of Jesus, an angel told them, "**Fear not . . . He is not here, for He is risen**, (Matt. 28:5-6). When the women saw Jesus they held Him by the feet and He said, "**Be not afraid**" (Matt. 28:10). Jesus knew that He was going to "get up again." That's why He wasn't afraid. If we know we are going to "get up again," we don't have to be afraid either.

Eugene O'Neil wrote a play about Lazarus whom Jesus raised from the dead. Later in life, according to the play, Lazarus was supposed to have been threatened with death. Instead of cowering with fear, however, Lazarus laughed. Death was not a fearful experience for him. He had "been there and done that." He had died and gone to his grave. Four days later, as you know, Jesus called him out of that grave with a brand new body. The old body had already decayed. Everybody knew that. But the "sting" of death was gone, and the "victory" of the grave had been removed (I Cor. 15:55).

Webster defines "comedy" as "originally, any play or other literary composition with a non tragic ending." Little children can laugh at the cartoon as long as they know the coyote is not going to catch the road runner. We can laugh at life for the same reason. The ending of life for the Christian is "non tragic." Someday, we're going to get up again. Every device and contraption of the devil is ultimately going to be used against him. We now know that it was through death that Jesus destroyed Him that had the power of death, that is, the devil (Heb. 2:14).

Many poems and songs associate the Jordan River with death. We sing about standing on Jordan's

stormy banks and casting a wistful eye toward Canaan, or perhaps about not having to cross Jordan alone. There is some validity to such symbolism. Israel was enslaved in Egypt, but they escaped by being “baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea” (I Cor. 10:2). They wandered like strangers and pilgrims for forty years before receiving the “Promised Land.” The Jordan stood between them and their reward. In this regard it is enlightening to remember Elijah and Elisha who smote the waters of the Jordan and walked over on dry ground (II Ki. 2:8-14). Death has no fear for the Christian. To paraphrase the little boy from Bangladesh, “Don’t be afraid, we’re going to get up again!”

A Corn Of Wheat

"Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (John 12:24)

Isn't it interesting that the environment which perpetuates life in living things, will destroy the nonliving . . . and vice versa?

A grain of wheat is alive. When it is planted in the ground, the elements of earth eat away at its exterior. Instead of killing it, however, these corrosive influences only release a greater form of life which brings forth much fruit.

Any nonliving substance subjected to the same environment would be destroyed. Should you drop a pair of pliers, or a pocket knife in the garden, that inert and inanimate object would immediately begin to deteriorate. Ultimately, the very environment which released life from the living seed, would destroy that which had no life.

To protect nonliving things they must be shielded from heat, oxygen and moisture. These, as you know, are essential to life. In July 1969, Neil Armstrong planted an American flag on the moon. That flag is "frozen in time." There is no life on the moon, consequently there is nothing to rot the fabric. We can achieve something similar on earth by placing objects in a deep freeze, or a vacuum.

Living things cannot survive in a vacuum. Living things must be exposed to the sun, and the rain. A corn of wheat that is kept in a dry cold place will abide alone.

EASTER

It only produces life when it is exposed to death.

The spiritual ramifications of this principle are far reaching. Resurrection power is not experienced by those who shrink from death. Paul put it like this: "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death" (Phi. 3:10). "For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh" (II Cor. 4:10). When this inspired apostle wrote "I die daily" (I Cor. 15:31), he was expressing a principle that leads to abundant life.

Remember, that which promotes life, destroys the nonliving. Take "tribulations" for example. Tribulations can destroy a carnal person without deep spiritual roots. Jesus so stated in the parable of the sower (Matt. 13:21). Spiritual people, however, rejoice in tribulations. This is specifically stated in Rom. 5:3-5, and is directly associated with the Holy Spirit. "...we glory in tribulations also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience and patience experience, and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us."

Christians thrive in circumstances that would destroy others, and vice versa. Persecution did not stop the growth of the Jerusalem Church. It may actually have accelerated it. Perhaps no church in the First Century grew as rapidly as the Jerusalem church. The Thessalonians also experienced great growth. Their evangelistic fervor was so great the apostles did not have to say anything (I Thess. 1:8). Yet they were also suffered as did their brethren in Judea (I Thess. 2:14). Paul actually gloried in his infirmities. He discovered

EASTER

that his weakness and infirmities actually released the power of God in his life (II Cor. 12:9). After being shamefully treated in Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, he confirmed the souls of the disciples and reminded them "that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22).

As we take up our cross to follow Jesus, let us say with Paul: "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Gal. 6:14).

The Six Miracles of Calvary

(Condensed from the Book by William R. Nicholson)

1. The Miraculous Darkness

“And it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. And the sun was darkened” (Luke 23:44-45).

This is the first of the six miracles of Calvary. It could not have been an eclipse for it lasted three hours and occurred during the Passover when the moon was full. This remarkable event was referred to by Tertullian at the close of the second century, and later by Celsus. The record is credible and mankind is left to ponder the symbolism and meaning of this darkness. It came at the very time when Christ was becoming sin that we might become His righteousness (II Cor. 5:21).

2. The Rending of the Veil.

“And behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom” (Matt. 27:51).

The verse before, associates this event with the death of Jesus. He cried with a loud voice and yielded up the ghost. The latter part of this verse continues that the earth did quake, and the rocks rent. The Gospel of Mark mentions the death of Jesus, and the rending of the veil, but does not mention the earthquake. It seems that the splitting of the veil, and the earthquake are two separate miracles.. The loose hanging curtain was not destroyed by the earthquake, but by a special miracle of God. The Lord Himself, through Christ, opened the

Holiest to everyone.

3. The earthquake

“And the earth did quake and the rocks rent” (Matt. 27:51).

When Moses received the Law, the Lord descended on Mt. Sinai and the “whole mount quaked greatly” (Ex. 19:18). Now, as the Law was taken away and nailed to the cross (Col. 2:14), the Lord again manifests His presence with an earthquake.

4. The Miracle of the Opened Graves

“And the graves were opened” (Matt. 27:52).

The miraculous earthquake had both force and design. The fact that the rocks rent, shows force. The fact that the graves were opened, shows design. The opening of the graves was as the budding of coming glory. We would assume that the earthquake would be most powerful at the point of origin, and therefore conclude that the open graves were nearby to Calvary.

5. The Undisturbed Graveclothes of Jesus

“Simon Peter . . . went into the sepulcher, and seeth the linen clothes lie, and the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself. Then went in also that other disciple . . . and the saw and believed” (John 20:6-8).

The fifth miracle of Calvary was the marvelous arrangement of things in the grave of the just risen Christ. Peter and John were the first to observe the linen clothes “lie” and napkin “wrapped together.” John saw

EASTER

this and believed. Evidently, the Lord left his grave clothes intact when he arose from the dead. As He appeared in the Upper Room when the doors were shut, His body went through cloth like sunlight through a window.

6. Revivals to Life in the Calvary Graveyard

“And many of the bodies of the saints which slept, arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many” (Matt. 27:52-53).

Up to this point in history there are at least six restorations to life mentioned in the Bible. The widow's son of Serepta (I Ki. 17). The Shunammite's son (II Ki. 4). The resurrection caused by the bones of Elisha (II Ki. 13). The daughter of Jairus (Matt. 9). The widow's son at Nain (Lk. 7). Lazarus (John 11). In each instance, as well as the one before us, they were raised to life, only to die again. The resurrection of Jesus is unique. He was the “firstborn” from among the dead. Jesus was the first person to come back to life, who would never die again

EASTER

Abraham and the Resurrection

- God promised Abraham that his seed would come through Isaac - Gen. 17:19.
- God commanded Abraham to offer Isaac as a burnt offering - Gen. 22:2.
- Abraham believed that God was able to raise Isaac from the dead - Heb. 11:19.

Abraham believed in the resurrection. How did he do it? As far as we know he was the first human being in history to conceive such an idea. We have a saying that “seeing is believing.” Thomas, for example, had been present when Lazarus was raised from the dead. He had seen a resurrection. Yet he said he would not believe in the resurrection of Jesus until he had personally examined the resurrected body. How then did Abraham come to believe in the resurrection without ever seeing one?

We do not know the answer to this question. Perhaps he reflected on Springtime when the deadness of winter blossoms to new life. Perhaps he thought of seeds that seem to die and disappear, but revive again to press through the earth with freshness and beauty. I don't know how he did it, but somehow this remarkable man believed that God was able to raise his son from the dead.

New ideas are not readily received. Christopher Columbus died in obscurity. The Wright Brothers waited for years for the U.S. Govt. to recognize what they had done. Robert Goddard died in 1945. It was, of course,

EASTER

much later that the impact of his research on rockets was recognized by the world.

Daniel wrote that in the time of the end, knowledge would be increased (Dan. 12:4). The technology of our modern age staggers the imagination. The fertile mind of man is making monumental discoveries every day. The latest computer is obsolete by the time it is constructed. The latest medicinal book is out of date when it comes from the printer. The world wide web of information is growing at record pace.

Yet, in spite of our space age technology and proliferation of knowledge, we are yet to conceive anything more spectacular than the resurrection. Manned flight to Mars, for example, pales into insignificance by comparison with the resurrection. Yet the resurrection, as far-reaching and incredible as it is to us today, was in the mind of a wandering shepherd almost 4,000 years ago. Abraham not only believed that God could raise Isaac from the dead, he even believed that God could reconstruct his son from the ashes of cremation. Abraham was commanded by God to offer his son as a burnt offering. He was to put a knife to his throat and burn his body in sacrificial flames.

Abraham was to make that sacrifice in the land of Moriah, on a special mountain that God would show him. This was, no doubt, the very mountain where Jesus would die nineteen centuries in the future. As Isaac carried the wood for his own demise, so also Christ carried His cross. This remarkable story prefigured the death of Christ generations before it came to pass.

What about you? Do you share the faith of our father Abraham? Do you believe that God is able to raise someone from the dead? The doctrine of the resurrection is not some extraneous whim which we can

EASTER

accept or reject at our own pleasure. It is an essential element of the Gospel story and an integral part of our own salvation. If Christ be not raised from the dead our faith is vain, and we are yet in our sins.

“For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise”
(Gal 3:26-29).

The Power of His Resurrection

"I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death" (Phil. 3:10, NIV)

Duane Miller was at the end of his rope. He was a preacher without a voice. His strongest effort to speak only produced a raspy squeak. For three long years he had been under the care of the best voice specialists in the world. They not only concluded that his condition was incurable, but also predicted that within two years he would lose what little voice he had.

Duane had medical insurance, but they stopped paying as all his treatments were now considered "experimental." His disability income also ran out. He had tried to earn money doing legal research. His clients, however, took their business elsewhere. They realized that Duane's "voice" would not make him a good "expert witness" if he was called to testify in court. Duane tried to support his family by writing. Again he failed! He was told frankly that he had no name recognition. Even if someone published his book, he would be unable to promote it by lecturing on a book tour.

In retrospect, it seems that Duane was "sharing in the sufferings of Christ." From the human point of view, both of their situations were hopeless.

Duane, however, was about to experience the

"power of the resurrection." On January 17, 1993, he was teaching Sunday School at the First Baptist Church of Houston, Texas. Approximately two hundred people were present. He had a "headset" which projected his voice over a PA system. The lesson was from a standard Sunday School curriculum which had been planned years before.

About half way through the lesson, Duane was reading from the 103rd Psalm. **"Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits. He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases; He redeems my life from the pit . . ."** As Duane spoke those words, his voice was miraculously healed.

The First Baptist Church of Houston has a membership of around 24,000. In a matter of a few minutes Duane Miller, became the most important person in the whole church. The church service was stopped so that he might explain what happened. Others, outside of the church, were also interested in his story. Duane spoke in Joplin, Missouri in December 1995. At that time 10,000 people had received Christ under his ministry in 1995. Prominent publishers approached him for the privilege of printing his story. Promise Keepers also wanted him to speak.

Many have already heard his story. The actual tape of his Sunday School lesson has been available free for many years for those who call 1-800-993-TAPE. The story is appropriate at Easter time because the power of the resurrection was not just for Jesus, and Duane Miller, it is for every believer.

Paul specifically prayed that we might know the **"exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ when He raised**

EASTER

Him from the dead . . ." (Eph. 1:19-20).

Are you facing a crisis in your life? Do you have problems that seem to be without a solution? Perhaps you are sharing in the sufferings of Christ! Maybe God has allowed these circumstances to overwhelm you so you can "become like Jesus in His death."

Duane Miller taught a powerful Sunday School lesson. At a time when he must have felt like quitting, he continued to cling to the exceeding great and precious promises of Scripture. Like Jesus before him, he never lost hope!

**PLEASE DON'T LOSE HOPE - THIS
RESURRECTION POWER IS FOR YOU!**

EASTER

Joseph Was Not Dead!

A short while before John Lyttle passed away, he conducted a funeral in Sullivan, Indiana. I was privileged to be there. John had been in failing health for some time. He was on oxygen twenty-four hours a day, except when he was preaching. On the way to the funeral he carried a portable supply of oxygen. At the office he remained on oxygen and rested for about thirty minutes. Then he made his way to a small room just outside of the auditorium. There he continued on oxygen and gathered strength to preach.

At the appropriate time he left his oxygen, and stepped to the pulpit. It was a powerful message, about thirty minutes long. He spoke in a strong voice and without hesitation. The text was Genesis 37:32-33:

"And they sent the coat of many colors, and they brought it to their father, and said, This have we found: know now whether it is thy son's coat or no. And he knew it, and said, It is my son's coat; an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces . . . "

The brothers of Joseph, as you know, conspired against him. They cast him into a pit, and sold him as a slave. Then they endeavored to hide their sin by a clever piece of deception. They took Joseph's coat, and killed a goat, and dipped the coat in the blood.

Their father, Jacob, saw the evidence and concluded that Joseph was dead. He was wrong! It was false evidence! Joseph was not dead at all. He was

alive and well. He was filled with youth, energy, and enthusiasm. As a matter of fact, Joseph was on his way to a position of great power. Soon he would be ruling over millions of people in the most powerful nation on earth.

Then John looked down at the casket. "It would be wrong," he said, "to conclude from this evidence, that our loved one is dead. In fact, he is not only alive, he is on his way to a position of great power."

Many years later, as you recall, Jacob received testimony that Joseph was alive, but was reluctant to believe it. He had believed a lie so long, it was hard to believe the truth. Joseph helped his father to believe by sending evidence. Not just a little evidence, but wagon loads of evidence. He also gave changes of raiment to his brothers. To Benjamin he gave three hundred pieces of silver and five changes of raiment. To his father he sent ten asses laden with the good things of Egypt, and ten she asses laden with food for the journey.

Jacob's heart revived, but the best was yet to come. Not many days hence Jacob would see Joseph face to face. He would throw his arms about his neck and weep tears of great joy.

Someday, you will be told that someone you love is dead. You may be shown a fleshly garment covered with blood. Don't believe it! Jesus said:

"I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die . . ." (John 11:25-26).

A Hope That Maketh Not Ashamed

"And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us" (Rom. 5:5).

Everybody has some kind of hope. Even the atheist has hope. He hopes there is not God. Someone was supposed to have asked the late Robert Ingersoll: "Are you sure there is no God?" "Of course," was the reply. "Why do you ask?" The sad answer was, "Because I'm counting on you, Mr. Ingersoll." Someday Robert Ingersoll will hang his head in shame for such a stupid, false, and ignorant hope.

Many years ago Gary Gilmore was executed. He was different from many criminals in that he wanted to die. Since there had not been an execution for many years he actually had to insist that they put him to death. Perhaps one reason why he faced the firing squad without fear was that he believed in reincarnation. He had made a mess out of this life and obviously hoped to do better next time. What a surprise he will have when he discovers that it is appointed unto men once to die, and after this comes the judgment (Heb. 9:27).

In August of 1936 a Great Northern passenger train left Ft. Benton, Montana. On the train was the casket of a shepherd who was being shipped back East for burial. The shepherd's loyal dog maintained a constant vigil at the railroad station for five and one half years. His master, of course, never came back. The

EASTER

newspapers picked up the story and the dog became famous. When the dog died he was buried on a bluff overlooking the station. The dog was to be pitied. He was ignorant. He lacked the capacity to understand virtually anything of what was going on. Unfortunately, many people are like this dog. Whatever hope they have is based on ignorance.

The Christian hope is different in that it does not make ashamed. The Christian hope is based on God. HE is the one "constant" in a world of change. He is the same "yesterday, today, and forever." He is without variation or shadow cast by turning. He cannot lie! God will be true when ever man has been found a liar. His Word is sure! He speaks and it is done! His promises are steadfast. Those who believe in Him shall not be put to shame.

Since God dwells in eternity, time is irrelevant to Him. One day is like a thousand years and a thousand years is like a day. Finite man, however, dwells in a time conscious world. God has been gracious to us in our weakness. He knows our frame and remembers that we are dust. Therefore He has empowered us with His Eternal Spirit that we might be successful in this earthly pilgrimage. His Spirit is the "seal" of His promise and our redemption (Eph. 1:13-14). His Spirit enables us to "abound in hope" (Rom. 15:13). His Spirit empowers us to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge and to be filled with all the fulness of God (Eph. 3:19). His love is shed abroad in our hearts by the power of His Spirit within us (Rom. 5:5).

Because we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Such a privilege enables us to rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Because of what we know, we can even rejoice in

EASTER

tribulation. His victorious Spirit within us will not be overcome. The pressures and troubles of this life will only refine our faith as gold is refined by fire. In the believer, tribulation produces patience, patience produces experience, experience produces hope, and hope makes us not ashamed because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. (see Rom. 5:1-5).

"And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inheritance the promises" (Heb. 6:11-12.).

HOPE IN JESUS DOES NOT MAKE US ASHAMED!

The First Resurrection

"Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection" (Rev. 20:6).

Before we can understand the "first resurrection," we must understand the "first death." The first death was not physical. Adam and Eve were warned that they would die the very day they ate the forbidden fruit. They did! To die, means to be separated from life. That very day they were separated from God, who is the very essence of life. Adam, however, continued to live physically for 930 years.

The Bible has a great deal to say about spiritual death. Jesus told a would be follower: "Let the dead bury the dead" (Matt. 8:22). That is, let those who are dead spiritually, bury those who are dead physically. Paul warned Timothy about certain widows: "She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth" (I Tim. 5:6). Those who are separated from God are dead in the truest sense of the word.

Conversion involves coming back to God. This is the very essence of life. Christianity is "passing from death unto life." Jesus said: "He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24). In the following verses, Jesus drew a distinction between those who "pass from death unto life" spiritually, and those whose bodies are resurrected. He said: "The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God,

and they that hear shall live . . . Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth" (John 5:26-29).

Note that Jesus promised that "all" in the grave would hear his voice and come forth. This obviously refers to the resurrection of the body. The bodily resurrection will simultaneously involve everyone, good or bad. The spiritual resurrection, however, is only for those who hear the voice of Jesus and believe on Him that sent Him.

Paul wrote to the Ephesians that they were dead in sins, but made alive with Christ. Their conversion involved being raised up together in Christ to sit in heavenly places (Eph. 2:5-6). The same terminology is used in Col. 2:12-13. We were dead in sins, but raised from death in baptism, being made alive together with Him. Life from death is the very essence of resurrection.

There is a sense in which the Christian, having already participated in a spiritual resurrection, will never die. Jesus stated this specifically: "Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die" (John 11:26). That is, nothing can separate the believer from God. For the believer, to be absent from the body is not death, it is to be at home with the Lord (II Cor. 5:8). Nothing can separate the believer from the love of God, not death, or life, or angels, or principalities, or powers, or things present, or things to come, or height, or depth, or any other creature (see Rom. 8:38-39).

The "first death" occurred when sin separated us from God. The "second death," or separation, will occur at Judgment. The "second death" has no power over the Christian. Jesus bore our sins in His own body and promised us that we will never come into condemnation. He will never leave us or forsake us!

EASTER

Let the theologians debate their theories and quibble over matters that God has placed within His own power. Now is the time for believers to enjoy their new life in Christ. He has given unto us the "power of the resurrection" (Eph. 1:19-21). At this very moment the Holy Spirit, which raised Jesus from the dead and set Him on the right hand of God, can empower us to victory in Christ.

"Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years . . ."

EASTER

"Do" or "Done"

Most religions in the world focus on something to do. There are commandments to be obeyed, prayers to be said, rituals to be observed, and festivals to be kept. The "*focus*" and "*emphasis*" of these religions, is "DOING!"

Christianity, by contrast, has a different focus. Christians FOCUS on something that has already been "DONE!"

This distinction is made often in Scripture. Take, for example, the tenth chapter of Hebrews. This passage draws a distinction between the MANY sacrifices of Judaism, and the ONE sacrifice of Christ.

The Jewish people had to be very busy. They were commanded by Law to make many offerings and sacrifices. Some of these are listed in the first seven chapters of Leviticus. Chapter one, for example, gives instructions regarding Burnt Offerings. These Burnt Offerings were divided into three categories: cattle from the herd, sheep and goats from the flock, and birds. Special instructions, of course, were given for each category. Chapter two involves Grain Offerings. Grain could be presented to the Lord whole, or ground into flour. It could also be baked in an oven, fried on a griddle, or cooked in a pan. Naturally, there were special instructions for each offering. Chapter three explains the Fellowship Offering, Chapters four and five the Sin Offering, etc. Each offering, or sacrifice, was to be performed within strict guidelines, and under the watchful eye of a priest. The Jewish worshiper was very busy!

EASTER

Every week the devout Jew was required to observe the Sabbath, every month the New Moon, every seven years the Sabbath Year, and every fifty years the Jubilee. They were also commanded, by Law, to observe the Passover each year in Jerusalem. Fifty days later they were required to return to Jerusalem to observe Pentecost. Six months later they had to return for the Feast of Tabernacles. Then, there was also the Feast of Trumpets, and the Day of Atonement. Later would come Purim, and the Feast of Dedication.

In addition to these many things they were commanded to "DO," there were also many things they were commanded not to do. Hebrew Law has a long list of things not to eat, drink, or touch.

The Scriptures teach that in these sacrifices there was "A remembrance of sin" (Heb. 10:3). The devout Jew was never free to relax and enjoy a relationship with God. He was constantly "doing" something, or planning to "do" something.

At this point it is important to remember that God designed the Law for a special purpose. It was not given to make us feel good, it was given to make us feel guilty. This is stated explicitly in Rom. 3:19: "What things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, AND ALL THE WORLD MAY BECOME GUILTY BEFORE GOD." Remember, the Law was a Schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ that we might be justified by faith.

By contrast with the many things that Jewish people were to "DO," Christians are to focus on what Jesus has already "DONE." This is the message of Hebrews 10. The Jewish priests made sacrifices every day that could never take away sin (v. 11). In these sacrifices there was a remembrance of sin (v. 3). The

EASTER

more people worshiped, the more guilty they felt. God had no pleasure in these offerings and sacrifices (v. 6). Christians focus on Jesus. He is our Great High Priest, and our only hope. The more we worship Him, the happier we are.

- We are sanctified by the offering of Jesus once for all (Heb. 10:10.)
- This man hath made one sacrifice for sins forever (Heb. 10:12.)
- By one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified (Heb. 10:14.)

WE ARE NOT SAVED BY WHY WE "DO," BUT BY
WHAT JESUS HAD "DONE!"

No Martyrs for a Hoax

On October 16, 1869 Hand Nichols and Gid Emmons were digging a well on Stub Newell's farm. At about five feet down they uncovered what looked like a human foot. It was, however, about twenty inches long and hard as a rock. Further excavation revealed a 3,000 lb. "petrified giant." Since the nearest town was the obscure village of Cardiff, New York, the discovery was known as the "Cardiff Giant."

News spread like wildfire. Newell put up a tent to shield the giant from public view and began charging admission. People came by the thousands to see this amazing discovery.

Highly esteemed professors came from New York and Boston. Their opinions ran the gamut from "impossible" to "the greatest discovery of all time." Some thought it was a fossilized giant, and others pronounced it an ancient statue. A graduate student from Yale examined it with a magnifying glass and announced that the scratches on the right arm were Phoenician characters that said: "Tamur, god of gods." Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote that it was "very wonderful and undoubtedly ancient."

The controversy was good for business and as many as 3,000 per day came to see with their own eyes the Cardiff Giant. Two saloons sprang up and a cowshed was converted into a restaurant. P. T. Barnum tried in vain to buy the big fellow for his circus. When his offers were refused he had a copy of the giant made for his show and both drew big crowds.

In 1871, however, the Cardiff Giant was discovered to be a gigantic hoax. It was not an archeological discovery, it was a monument to man's gullibility.

It all began in 1866 when George Hull visited his sister in Iowa. While there he bought a five ton block of gypsum from a quarry about two miles east of Fort Dodge. He then hired horses to transport the stone to the nearest railroad which was forty miles away. The trip took twenty days. The stone was then transported by rail to Chicago.

In Chicago the stone was shaped into human likeness. The "pores" on the giant's "skin" were created with mallets and darning needles. It was sponged with water and acid to give it a "worn" appearance. Finally it was bathed in sulphuric acid to make it look old.

In November 1868 the completed giant was shipped in secret to New York and discretely buried on a dark night. The field was sown with clover and the tricksters had less than a year to wait for the miraculous discovery to be made.

Even after the giant was proven to be a hoax, people paid a second time for the privilege of seeing what had fooled them the first time. P. T. Barnum is supposed to have said, "There is a sucker born every minute, and one dies every thirty minutes. That leaves me twenty-nine to work on in the mean time."

Today the "Cardiff Giant" is on display at the Farmer's Museum in Cooperstown, N.Y.

It is both interesting and significant that nobody died to perpetrate this hoax. When the scam was brought to light, the perpetrators had a good laugh and confessed to their mischief.

The fact that the Apostles of Christ died preaching

EASTER

His resurrection immediately sets them apart from con men intent on perpetrating a hoax. The word “martyr,” as you know, means “witness.” Every Apostles was a witness of His resurrection, and not one of them changed his story no matter how severely he was persecuted.

The book of Acts reminds us that the Apostles of Christ preached Jesus and the resurrection (See Acts 1:22; 3:15; 4:2; 5:33; etc.) The small flame of Christianity could have been extinguished forever if the enemies of Christ could have produced His body and placed it on display. They could not! Neither could they illicit a single denial of His resurrection from those noble martyrs who sealed their testimony with their own blood.

There are no martyrs for a hoax, but there are plenty of martyrs for the resurrected Christ!

Hallelujah! He is risen!

EASTER

I Know That My Redeemer Liveth

“Oh that my words were now written! Oh that they were printed in a book! That they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever! For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me” (Job 19:23-27).

Most of us will never be called upon to endure the great trial of affliction that came to Job. In a single day he lost every earthly possession and all of his children. In spite of these tragedies, however, Job did not sin nor charge God foolishly. He rent his mantle, shaved his head, and fell down to the ground in worship to God.

But the trials of Job were far from being over. After losing his wealth and his family, he also lost his health. His body was covered with “sore boils” from the sole of his feet to the crown of his head. The Hebrew word translated as “sore boils” comes from the root word that means to “burn.” The pain he experienced was like his body had been pierced by arrows (Job 6:4). When the boils broke open the running sores were infested with maggots (Job 7:5). His skin was loathsome and his visage so marred that his friends did not recognize him (Job 2:12). He could not sleep (Job 3:26). His friends

EASTER

wept aloud when they saw him (Job 2:12), and his own wife told him to curse God and die (Job 2:9).

The story of Job's life has a happy ending. **“So the LORD blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning: for he had fourteen thousand sheep, and six thousand camels, and a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand she asses. He had also seven sons and three daughters”** (Job 42:12-13).

One reason Job survived the trials of his life was that he believed in the resurrection. He was so confident of this fact that he wanted everybody to be aware of his testimony. He wanted his words to be written in stone and remembered forever. He knew that his redeemer lived. He knew that after the skin worms destroyed his body he would still see God in his flesh. His own eyes would behold the Lord in spite of his earthly problems.

Some who read these words will be permanently crippled or terminally ill. Others will be facing insurmountable problems beyond the scope of human language to describe. Surrounded by critics you will be tempted to curse God and die. In times like this, remember the resurrection.

Please prayerfully consider these words from an unknown poet:

I read of a man who stood to speak at the funeral of a friend.

He noted the dates on the tombstone from beginning to the end.

First came the day of a happy birth, and the following date brought tears.

But really what mattered most, he said, was the dash between those years.

For that dash is the symbol of all the time that

EASTER

they spent alive on earth.

And only our loved ones really know how much that line is worth.

For it matters not how much we own of cars and houses and cash.

What really matters is how we live and how we spend our dash.

So think of your tombstone long and hard. Are there things that you need to change?

A more beautiful dash can be written there if priorities you rearrange.

It's time to slow down and consider what's real in the course of a life that is true.

For a relationship brings more treasure than things, be careful today what you do.

Be quick to hear and slow to speak and value the life of a friend.

Such treasures will always be there safe when your journey comes to an end.

But most of all, as you rise and fall, and struggle to win the race.

Just take your dash and give it to God and Christ will take your place.

His dash will cover the stains of yours and He'll show you the path to trod.

And your final date will be the door to eternity with God.

Incredible?

“Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?” (Acts 26:8)

- If I could raise the dead, that would be incredible.
- If you could raise the dead, that you be incredible.
- If medical science could raise the dead, that would be incredible.
- But why is it incredible that God can raise the dead?

God is all powerful, all knowing, and everywhere at the same time. Why should it be thought a thing incredible that God can raise the dead? If God can speak the universe into reality and hold all of those atoms together by the power of His might, why should it be thought incredible that God can raise the dead?

The universe in which we live is infinitely large. We have absolutely no idea how vast it is, or how many stars there really are. In fact, we don't even know how many galaxies there are. Our earthly minds are utterly incapable of comprehending how long is eternity or how far is infinity. Why should we worry about the resurrection?

The tiny planet on which we live is spinning on its axis at a thousand miles per hour. At the same time we are whirling through space in solar orbit at 16,000 miles per hour. We, however, are not aware of any motion at all. If God can care for and control such things as this, why should we sit up nights wondering if He can also

raise the dead?

Some have suggested that the creative power of God is as much beyond the reach of the microscope as it is the telescope. There may be as many mysteries in the atom as there are in the universe at large. In every scientific discipline mortal man will ultimately arrive at an impassable barrier. If we cannot understand how God can turn a caterpillar into a butterfly, or an acorn into an oak tree, why should we be slack jawed and incredulous that God can raise the dead?

Paul wrote: **“But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?”** To this question he responds: **“Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain: But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body”** (1 Cor 15:35-38).

It seems that God from the beginning of creation has given us a mechanism to help us to understand the resurrection. The first reference in the Bible to the creation of life involved seeds. Every living thing had seeds and reproduced after its own kind. Jesus said that a seed that did not die would abide alone. If it dies, however, it can bring forth much fruit (John 12:24). When a seed is placed in the ground it seems to die. It seems that the corrosive elements of earth will utterly destroy the seed. Quite the contrary. The death of the seed does not destroy life, it releases it.

This is a beautiful illustration of the resurrection. **“So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in**

weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body” (1 Cor 15:42-44).

A little child can plant a garden. The power of life is within the seed and not the hand of the one who plants it. If it is not incredible that God can cause life to come out of a dead seed, why should it be thought a thing impossible that God could raise the dead?

An evil and adulterous generation sought for a sign. No sign was given but the sign of Jonah the prophet. As Jonah came from three days in a great fish, Jesus would come forth from three days in the heart of the earth.

It is not by accident that Jesus is referred to as a “Seed.” He was the “Seed of woman,” the “Seed of Abraham,” the “Seed of David,” etc. This living “Seed” has now become the firstfruits of them that sleep and the guarantee of our own resurrection. It is not incredible that God can raise the dead!

The Sign

“But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas” (Matt 12:39).

The Creator of the universe is understanding and compassionate. He knows our frame and remembers that we are dust. He took upon Himself the nature of man. He was tempted in all points like we are, yet without sin. He created within us a streak of skepticism and is sympathetic to our need for evidence. Consequently, God has never required man to do something without providing a rational basis for his obedience.

Moses, for example, was commanded by God to return to Egypt and liberate a nation of Hebrew slaves. A number of things made Moses reluctant to do this. First, he was wanted as a criminal in Egypt. In the second place, he was a shepherd, and every shepherd was an abomination unto the Egyptians (Gen. 46:34). In the third place, he been away from Egypt for forty years and was no longer fluent in their language. God, however, gave Moses a series of signs. A bush burned but was not consumed. His rod became a serpent and his hand became leprous. Finally Moses was convinced that God was calling him to Egypt and it made more sense to have the Pharaoh mad at you than God.

Gideon was called by God to deliver Israel from the Midianites. This did not make sense to Gideon. He was from a poor family in Manasseh and he was the least

EASTER

in his father's house. He asked the plaintive question: "If God be with us, where be all the miracles our fathers told us of." A series of signs were then graciously given by God to Gideon. (1) Fire came out of a rock and miraculously consumed a sacrifice. (2) A fleece of wool was made wet with dew while all about it was dry. (3) A fleece of wool was made dry while all about it was wet. (4) A Midianite dream was related ascribing victory to Gideon. Gideon was convinced and ultimately was given a miraculous victory.

Hezekiah was promised an additional fifteen years of life as well as deliverance from the King of Assyria. It seemed impossible. The king said to Isaiah, "What shall be the sign that the Lord will heal me?" (II Kings 20:8)._ The gracious god who understands our doubts turned back the clockwork of the heavens and the shadow on the sun dial of Ahaz went back ten degrees.

The world has catalogued and condemned its doubting Thomases, but Jesus did not. HE simply said: "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side and be not faithless, but believing." The word "Didymus" means "twin." God could understand the skepticism of a man who had been mistaken for his twin brother upon many occasions. Consequently he gave to Thomas evidence that was irrefutable.

But now let us pause and consider the evidence that God has given to us. He demands that we deny ourselves, take up a cross, and follow him. He requires that we repent of our sins, confess Him before men, and be baptized. He calls upon us to gather faithfully each week with others of like precious faith. His demand upon our lives is totally intrusive and requires that whatever we do in word or deed we do in the name of our Lord Jesus

EASTER

Christ.

A doubting world demands a sign. What evidence do we have to make such a radical change in our behavior?. The sympathetic Savior replies: "Destroy this temple and in three days I will build it up." "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: for as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whales belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

Thus the sign of the resurrection is deemed sufficient by the Judge of Heaven to convince rational men to become Christians. The logic of the apostles focused on the empty tomb and reminded the world that if Christ be not risen, our faith is vain and we are yet in our sins. If Christ is still in the grave we are of all men most miserable.

The Good News, however, is that Christ is risen from the dead. Please prayerfully ponder this magnificent "sign" and surrender your life to the resurrected Christ!

Luxurious Living

Growing up in the post depression days of the late thirties brought a certain measure of austerity to our little family. We canned our own food, made our own soap, butchered our own meat, and somehow survived. My mother did our washing on a scrub board and carefully patched clothing which a future generation would casually discard.

Then came the rigors and hardships of war. My uncles went into the army, and my brother into the Navy. We planted our "Victory Garden," and carried our tin cans to school to help provide precious metal for the war. Gasoline and food were rationed and times were tough.

In retrospect, however, it seems that little children were better off then than now. Juvenile crime was low, teenage suicide unheard of, and when you lost your marbles you went to a dime store instead of a psychiatrist.

Because of my mother, I was raised in the lap of luxury. She worked seven days a week, but not outside of our home. Our family was the major focus of her life. At that point in time this was what I really needed. I did not need a new car, or expensive new carpet, I needed my mother. I needed her more than I needed a nursery school or a nanny. I profited more from her presence than from a hundred new toys or a thousand suits of expensive clothing. I never knew the loneliness of coming home to an empty house, or the sadness of finding her bed vacant in the middle of the night. I never had to explain a divorce, a new daddy, or a different name.

My heart bleeds for the millions of modern

children who have never tasted homemade bread or smelled hot rolls fresh from the oven. A wealthy friend who hunted with my father would call my mom and ask if she would fix him some corn bread and beans. It seems that no restaurant on earth can compete with meals prepared by love.

The real luxuries of life do not come from the discount store. They are not stamped out by a machine, or boxed at the end of an assembly line. The real luxuries in life are custom made. They are especially designed for someone special. In this regard I was raised in the lap of luxury. My meals were prepared by my own personal connoisseur of gourmet delights. I was diapered and dandled by my own personal doctor and diagnostician. I was the recipient of perpetual maid service. I had a custom tailor in charge of my clothing. I had my own private tutor who read me stories at bed time. When I went someplace I was accompanied by my own personal chauffeur and body guard. When I was lonely or afraid I would cling to the apron strings of my own personal companion and counselor. The fact that all of these important functions were performed by own one mother does not diminish their importance. The way that I was raised gave to me a measure of confidence and security that has shaped my life in ways too wonderful for words.

Certainly it is not wise or practical to try and turn back the clock and live in the auld lang syne. It would be folly to destroy our technology while millions are starving without a crust of bread or a bowl of rice. But isn't it also silly to sacrifice our children on a pagan altar which some call progress? Is it not insane to place more value on a new car, or piece of furniture, than on the eternal welfare of our own children? Is it not a crime against God, our

MOTHER'S DAY

society, and ourselves to place more value on money and materials than family and friends?

Socrates said it like this: "Could I climb to the highest place in Athens, I would lift my voice and proclaim: 'Fellow citizens, why do you turn and scrape every stone to gather wealth, and take so little care of your children to whom one day you must relinquish all?'"

The problem faced by Socrates lingers yet to plague our modern world. It has filled our juvenile courts and crowded the waiting rooms of psychologists and psychiatrists. It is the cancer which eats away at the church of tomorrow and the arthritic pain that has crippled the church of today. Mothers need to return to the home. They need to understand that children are more important than careers. People are more important than things, and what you have is not as important as what you are. When mothers learn to see motherhood as God sees it, perhaps little children will again learn what "Luxurious Living" is all about.'

MOTHER'S DAY

Unconditional Love

Some time ago I asked Tasci King what thought came immediately to mind at the mention of the word "mother." She responded, "unconditional love." As a young girl, Tasci was overweight. At school she felt alone and rejected. She was convinced that it was because of the way she looked. She was invited to accompany her classmates at recitals only because she was good at the piano. When they made the trip to and from those recitals, she remembers sitting rejected and alone in the back seat. She felt used. There was one person, however, who never sought to use or exploit her. There was one person who always made her feel welcome and important. There was one person who did not care what she looked like, or what kind of grades she made, or how popular she was on campus. It was her mother!

This beautiful testimony struck a responsive cord. I knew she was right! My first thought, however, was neither profound, nor theological. It was of Dumbo the elephant. Walt Disney became a multimillionaire because he possessed the uncanny ability to touch a tender place in our hearts. He told the story of a little elephant with ears so large that he became a laughingstock. His handicap, as you know, turned out to be a great advantage when he learned to fly. There was one character in the cartoon, however, who was constant in her love. It was his mother! She was as faithful when he was ridiculed, as she was when he was famous. Her love for him was unconditional! In the midst of a childhood fantasy, Disney had found a way to teach little

MOTHER'S DAY

children a fundamental truth of life. Almost everyone can relate to a mother's love.

Then I thought of Jesus on the cross. He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief (s. 53:3). He was no longer loved or popular. His fair weather friends had vanished like a vapor. Even His disciples forsook Him and fled. While scholars debate the theological significance of His words, Jesus did cry out from the cross that God had forsaken Him. His mother, however, did not.

Many years ago my friend Bill Groff took me to a small little cemetery between Carl Junction and Joplin. He showed me the grave of a murderer named Billy Cook. I had heard of him. He was hitch hiking and was picked up by the Mosser family. He rewarded their kindness by killing them and stuffing their bodies in an abandoned well. He was executed for his crimes and buried not far from that well. The point of the story, is that his grave was neatly trimmed and cared for. In a cemetery that is largely neglected and unkempt, his grave was not neglected. Someone cared, even for Billy Cook. Perhaps it was his mother.

In this regard it is significant to remember that the church of the Lord Jesus is described in Scripture as the "Jerusalem which is above . . . which is the mother of us all" (Gal. 4:26.) The Church of the Lord Jesus is like a mother. Her love for sinners is the hallmark of her existence.

Happy Mother's Day to every mother! Thank you for loving us in spite of the way we act. Your godly example is providing us with insights and understanding regarding the very nature of God.

HAPPY MOTHER'S DAY!

MOTHER'S DAY

The Work of a Mother

Mount Rushmore is 6,200 feet high. On the perpendicular side of that mountain, Gutzon Borglum carved the likeness of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and Theodore Roosevelt. This, as you know, is one of the most famous art projects in the world. Those faces, on the scale of living men, would stand fifteen feet taller than the Great Pyramid of Cheops, and can be seen from sixty miles away.

Borglum began the monumental project in 1925 and it was not yet completed when he died on March 6, 1941. The final drill and blast were done by his son Lincoln Borglum on Oct. 31, 1941. It was a lifetime labour of love as he was only paid the modest sum of about \$10,000 per year. The colossal project was achieved without proper tools, without adequate power and funds, and without any trained assistant.

But now let us compare the work of this great sculptor with the work of a mother. The sculptor works with inanimate materials like granite and clay. Mothers work with living souls and eternal spirits. The mothers of these great men certainly did more for the world than the man who merely carved their faces in stone.

There is an old joke about the doctor who took a class in carpentry. The teacher warned that he would have to really be careful with wood as it wouldn't heal when he made a mistake. The humor of the story is in its absurdity. People are obviously far more important than boards. The point of the parable is that the work of a mother is profoundly significant. Human art is temporal.

MOTHER'S DAY

The work of a mother is eternal.

The famous faces on Mt. Rushmore have been admired by millions. The first great viewing occurred on July 4, 1930. A crowd of 2,500 gathered to see the face of George Washington. Spectators gasped as a huge flag was slowly removed. Again, it is important not to forget Washington's mother. The sculptor's work pales into insignificance by comparison.

The likeness of President Jefferson was unveiled on Aug. 23, 1936, and Lincoln's likeness was dedicated Sept. 17, 1937. This was the 150th anniversary of the adoption of the Constitution. Lincoln himself once said: "All that I am, or ever hope to be, I owe to my angel mother".

It is not our intention to deprecate the noble work of Gutzon Borglum, only to exalt the work of mothers.

Sydney Harris has observed that simply having children does not make you a mother, any more than having a piano makes you a musician. There is a special work associated with the honor of motherhood. She does not work with brush and canvas, hammer and chisel, or pen and ink. She works with living souls to fashion them into the likeness of Christ.

In this regard, Mary the mother of Jesus, considered herself the most blessed woman in the world. She said: "**My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed**" (Luke 1:46-48).

What Mary did with Jesus makes the work of Leonardo Da Vinci seem utterly insignificant.

MOTHER'S DAY

A Stork or an Ostrich

Job said: "**Ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee . . .**" (Job 12:7.)

Obviously, there are some lessons in life which we can learn from such creatures. Consider, for example, the stork and the ostrich.

The Hebrew word for "stork" comes from a root word meaning "constant, loving, and loyal." In Palestine the stork became a symbol of parental loyalty and love. Perhaps this is the reason for the famous fable about storks bringing little children into the world. Every parent could profit from the examples of loyalty and faithfulness of many creatures created by God.

The "ostrich," however, is not a good parent. Maybe we could learn something from her too. The Scriptures accuse the daughters of Israel of being "cruel like the ostriches in the wilderness." "**Even the sea monsters draw out the breast, they give suck to their young ones: the daughter of my people is become cruel, like the ostriches in the wilderness**" (Lamentations 4:3). Even more explicit are the words of Job regarding how the ostrich treats her eggs. She leaves them in the earth unmindful that someone might step on them, or that a wild beast might crush them. "**She is hardened against her young ones as though they were not hers . . . God hath deprived her of wisdom, neither hath he imparted to her understanding**" (Job 39:15-17).

Today we speak of people as: "wise as an owl," "sly as a fox," or "strong as an ox." In ancient times there

MOTHER'S DAY

was a similar expression: "more foolish than an ostrich." Great collections of tamed animals and birds date back beyond 2,000 B.C. so it is possible that Job may have had tamed ostriches living around his tent.

The ostrich is by far the biggest living bird. An adult cock may stand eight feet tall and weigh 300 pounds. It can run 50 miles per hour, but has a reputation for stupidity. Many picture the ostrich with its head buried in the sand oblivious to reality. Some think that one of the Hebrew words for "ostrich" comes from a root word meaning "greedy." Ostriches do have the habit of swallowing inedible objects which sometimes proves fatal.

Remember that we are dealing with a statement of Scripture: **"GOD HATH DEPRIVED HER OF WISDOM, NEITHER HATH HE IMPARTED TO HER UNDERSTANDING."** The reason for these harsh words is that the ostrich neglects her young. First, she leaves her eggs in the dust oblivious to the fact that her unborn babies might be destroyed. Furthermore: **"She is hardened against her young as though they were not her's: her labor is in vain without fear"** (Job 39:16).

Perhaps God deprived the ostrich of wisdom to give good mothers an example to avoid. It is irresponsible and dumb not to care for an unborn baby. Every time a mother has an abortion she is behaving like an ostrich. She is burying her head in the sand and refusing to consider what she is doing.

Every expectant mother who uses alcohol and drugs is behaving like an ostrich. She refuses to consider that her selfishness might damage the health of her unborn child.

Perhaps there is a little stork, and a little ostrich in all of us. Let us learn from the beasts and the fowls to

MOTHER'S DAY

behave in such a way that our children will be blessed both here and hereafter.

A Tribute to Mothers

Dr. Benjamin Rush was the Surgeon General of the Continental Army and one of those patriots who signed the Declaration of Independence. After the war was over he delivered a speech at the Young Ladies Academy in Philadelphia. The date was July 28, 1787 and the subject of his speech was "Thoughts Upon Female Education." Dr. Rush believed that women should receive the very finest education, for it was his conviction that the moral and spiritual status of a society would be governed by the character of its women. He feared that American moral values would deteriorate like those of Europe and that the first harbingers of this dreaded possibility would be seen in women. Permit me to quote from his speech, "The first marks we shall perceive of our declension will appear among our women. Their idleness, ignorance, and profligacy will be the harbingers of our ruin. Then will the character and performance of a buffoon on the theater be the subject of more conversation and praise than the patriot or the minister of the gospel . . ."

The influence of women upon society is so utterly profound that it has been stated that the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world. Napoleon said, "The future destiny of the child is always the work of the mother." John Q. Adams once said, "All that I am my mother made me" Abraham Lincoln echoed the same sentiment: "All that I am or ever hope to be I owe to my angel mother." Henry Ward Beecher said, "The mother's heart is the child's schoolroom" and an old Spanish proverb declares,

MOTHER'S DAY

"An ounce of mother is worth a pound of clergy."

I know that my own mother has had a profound influence upon my life and I also know that words are not adequate to express my love and appreciation for all that she has done for me. An unknown author has given it a try, however, in this beautiful tribute to mothers.

"My Mother,

She carried me under her heart and loved me before I was born.

She took God's hand and walked through the valley of shadows that I might live.

She bathed me when I was helpless, clothed me when I was naked, fed me when I was hungry, rocked me to sleep when I was weary, and sang to me with the voice of an angel.

She held my hand when I learned to walk. She suffered with my sorrow and laughed with my joy. She glowed with my triumph, and as I knelt by her side she taught my lips to pray.

Through all the days of my life she has given me strength for my weakness, courage for my despair, and hope when other hope was gone.

She was loyal when others failed. She was true when tried by fire. She was my friend when my other friends were gone.

She prayed for me through all my days, whether they were flooded with sunshine or saddened by shadows.

Though we lay down our lives for her, we can never pay the debt we owe to our mother."

MOTHER'S DAY

Mothers and Love

The fact that mothers love their children is axiomatic. Isaiah 49:15 makes reference to how hard it would be for a mother to forget her sucking child. Isaiah 66:13 pictures the ultimate consolation as being comforted by your mother. The ultimate sadness is one who mourns for his mother (Psalm 35:14). King Solomon was asked to determine the custody of a little child. He easily identified the true mother because he knew she would never knowingly harm her baby (I Kings 3:24-28.) The mother of Moses risked her life to save his (Ex. 1:8 - 2:10). The mother Hannah made the ultimate sacrifice by surrendering her son Samuel to the Lord (I Sam. 1:2 - 2:11). The mother of Jesus was at the cross when others forsook Him and fled (John 19:25 - 27).

Even animals have a strong maternal instinct. "A bear robbed of her whelps," is a proverbial way to describe anger (2 Sam. 17:6). My father carried a scar to his grave because he once got between a brood sow and her pigs. Some years ago I was attacked by a cow and flipped in the air. The day before she would have eaten out of my hand. On that day, however, she had just given birth to a new calf.

It is important to remember that love is the primary message of Scripture. Jesus said that all the law and the prophets could be summarized by two brief commandments about love (Matt. 22:37-38). You can obey God without love, but you cannot love God without obeying Him (John 14:21-24). Mothers help to flesh out this eternal truth as they love and care for their children.

MOTHER'S DAY

There are some who feel that love is a limp wristed alternative to law. They feel that law is strong, and love is weak. They are wrong! Exactly the reverse is true. Love is the most powerful force in the universe. It was love that caused God to send His Only Begotten Son to the cross. Perfect love casts out fear. The police will let you get by with a lot of things your mother would not. Her love is far more demanding than law. After seventy-three years of atheism the Soviet Union discovered that a mother will take better care of her child without charge than the best baby sitter will for money. Baby sitters are controlled by law, but mothers are motivated by love. The very nature of God is to love, and the nature of love is to give. God so loved that He gave. So do mothers!

The Sermon on the Mount provides a striking contrast between the message of Law, and the message of Love.

- The Law commanded not to kill, love forbids us to get angry (Matt. 5:22-23).
- The Law required gifts, love makes those gifts meaningless unless we love (Matt. 5:23-24).
- The Law taught against adultery, love forbids even lust (Matt. 5:27-28).
- The Law taught revenge, love requires forgiveness (Matt. 5:38-42).
- The Law taught to hate enemies, Jesus taught us to love enemies (Matt. 5:43-48).
- There is a way around law, but there is no way around love!

Jesus taught us to enter in at the straight and narrow gate (Matt. 7:13-14). The way to heaven is so difficult that only a few will find it. The verse immediately before this is the Golden Rule. What God has joined together man should not put asunder. The "straightest"

MOTHER'S DAY

and "most demanding" lifestyle is not law, it is love. To love your neighbor as yourself is the law and the prophets!. This kind of love impacts every area of our life and every aspect of our being.

The essence of love is personified in motherhood. Jesus said: "**A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world**" (John 16:21). The pain she experienced is eclipsed by her overwhelming love for her precious child. How utterly simple! How utterly profound!

It goes without saying that every person on earth has a mother. Our mothers not only feed and clothe us, they personify to us the very nature of God. Their love for us helps to prepare our hearts to receive the indwelling Christ, and to know His love which passes knowledge, that we might be filled with all the fulness of God!

HAPPY MOTHER'S DAY!

The Making of a Mother

When God made the heavens and the earth, everything was good but man. The light was good (Gen. 1:4). The earth and the seas were good (1:10). The herbs and trees were good (1:12). The sun, moon, and stars were good (1:18). The creatures were good (1:21). The beasts and creeping things were good (1:25), but it was NOT good for man to be alone (2:18).

Therefore, God determined to make a woman. After creating the woman God pronounced that it was "very good" (1:31). The woman was the consummate act of creation. She was the perfect counterpart to man. Since Adam could not reproduce, the woman was designed to become the "mother of all living" (3:20). All of creation reproduced "after its kind," but the ultimate act of reproduction was to be experienced by man and woman. This union would be so profound and beautiful that it would be chosen by God to represent the relationship of Christ and the church.

Dr. James Dobson in his book "What Wives Wish Their Husbands Knew About Women," declares that the men and women are different in every cell of their bodies. The differences between men and women are not learned from culture, but are an integral part of the way we were created by an omnipotent and omniscient God.

Here are some differences that Dr. Dobson lists. Women have a different skeletal structure than men do. They have a shorter head, broader face, chin less protruding, shorter legs and longer trunk. The first finger of a woman's hand is usually longer than the third; with

men the reverse is true.

The woman can menstruate, get pregnant, and nurse her baby. She has more different hormones than does man. The same gland behaves differently in the two sexes. The woman's thyroid is larger and more active. It enlarges during pregnancy and menstruation. This makes the woman more prone to goiter, provides resistance to cold, and is associated with her smooth skin and relatively hairless body. It also contributes to emotional instability so that a woman will laugh and cry more easily than man.

A woman has a larger stomach, kidneys, liver, and appendix, but smaller lungs. Her heart beats more rapidly (80 vs. 72), her blood pressure is lower by 10 points, and she is much less tendency to high blood pressure, at least until after menopause. In brute strength she is 50% inferior to her husband but will outlive him by three to four years. Her breathing power is lower by a 7:10 ratio. Her blood contains more water but 20% fewer red cells. She tires more easily and is more prone to faint. During World War II British factories from increased from 10 to 12 hour work days. Accidents of women went up 150%, of men, not at all.

God did not create the woman for strength, speed, and combat, but for a totally different purpose. While some are single, or barren, every woman is gifted by God with those wonderful qualities associated with being a mother.

Girls cannot be taught to grow a beard, and boys cannot be taught to have a baby. We are different! Rather than rebel at this reality, it ought to be celebrated. Please do not regret or resent the way that you were created by God. No matter who you are, you have a special purpose and calling. As you present your body

MOTHER'S DAY

as a "living sacrifice," do not be "conformed" to the world, but "transformed" by the renewing of your mind.

MOTHER'S DAY

Mother Teresa

Mother Teresa was one of the most famous women in the world. Perhaps reflecting on her life will help us in our own spiritual journey. She was born in Skopje, Yugoslavia in 1910. Her original name was Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu. In 1928 she decided to become a nun and traveled to Dublin, Ireland to join the Sisters of Loreto, a religious order founded in the seventeenth century. After studying in the convent for less than a year, she left to join the Loreto convent in the city of Darjeeling, in northeast India. On May 24, 1931, she took the name "Teresa" in honor of St. Teresa of Avila, a sixteenth-century Spanish nun.

In 1929 she was assigned to teach geography at St. Mary's High School for girls in Calcutta. In 1946 she received consent from her archbishop to leave her position and minister to the poor. Her heart was touched by the children abandoned in the streets, and the millions who were dying of starvation and disease. God seemed to honor this decision and in 1948 Pope Pius XII granted her permission to live as an independent nun. That same year she became an Indian citizen. After studying for three years with American Medical Missionaries in the city of Patna, India, she returned to Calcutta and founded the Missionaries of Charity. She chose a plain white sari for her habit. It had a modest blue border and a simple cross pinned to her left shoulder.

In 1949 she was joined by her first recruit, a young girl from the city of Bengal. Many who joined her order in the next few years were former students from St. Mary's. Each recruit was expected to devote her life to serving the poor without accepting any material reward.

MOTHER'S DAY

In 1952 her order received permission to use a portion of an abandoned temple to the goddess Kali, the Hindu goddess of death and destruction. Here Mother Teresa founded the Kalighat Home for the Dying. People from the streets were brought here to be comforted during the last hours of their life.

In the mid 1950's she began a special effort to help lepers. The Indian Govt. gave the Missionaries of Charity a 34-acre plot near the city of Asansol. Here Mother Teresa founded a leper colony called Shanti Nagar (Town of Peace). In 1962 the government of India gave her the Magnificent Lotus award.

In 1965 Pope Paul VI placed the Missionaries of Charity under the direct control of the Papacy and authorized expansion of the order outside of India. Centers to treat lepers, the blind, the disabled, the aged and the dying sprang up around the world. One was opened in Rome in 1968. Her selfless spirit also spawned the formation of schools, orphanages and a male companion organization known as the Brothers of Charity.

In 1971 she was honored with the first Pope John XXIII Peace Prize. The next year the Indian Govt. presented her the Jawaharlal Nehru award for International Understanding. In 1979 she received the Nobel Peace Prize. All of the awards were accepted on behalf of the poor, and any money received was used to help those in need. At the time of her death, I am told that Mother Teresa had virtually no earthly possessions. Jesus said: **“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole**

MOTHER'S DAY

world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matt. 16:24-26)

His Mother and Mine

“Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me too”

(Rom. 16:13 NIV)

The word “mother” as it is used in Scripture does always refer to a biological parent. The disciples were promised, for example, that no one had left houses and mothers for Christ, but what they would receive a hundredfold more houses and mothers in this life (Mark 10:28-30). Perhaps the mother of Rufus was this kind of mother to Paul.

First, let us concentrate on the identity of Rufus. The name “Rufus” means “red” and is found but two times in the Bible, Mark 15:21 and Rom. 16:13. The reference in Mark seems to indicate that those who received that Gospel were familiar with Rufus. While describing the crucifixion, Mark relates that Simon of Cyrene was compelled to carry the cross for Christ. He then explained that this Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus. Thus the father who might not be known was identified by the sons who were.

It is commonly believed that Mark wrote his Gospel for the Christians in Rome. This adds weight to the idea that the Rufus of Mark 15:21 and the Rufus of Romans 16:13 were one and the same person.

But now the question arises: “How was the mother of Rufus also the mother of Paul?” There are at least two viable possibilities. They could have known one another in (1) Jerusalem, or (2) Antioch. The latter seems more plausible to me.

MOTHER'S DAY

Please consider the following possibility. Simon was a Jew from Cyrene in North Africa. It took great personal sacrifice for him and his family to make the long pilgrimage to Jerusalem to observe the Passover. While there he is forced to carry the cross for Christ. Simon and his family become Christians. Simon would logically have a certain notoriety as the “man who carried the cross.”

A short time later, Stephen is stoned and the Christian are scattered from Jerusalem (Acts 8:1). Instead of going back to Africa, however, Simon moves to Antioch to share his faith. Consider this reference from Acts 11:19-20: **“Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen traveled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus.”**

Barnabas also came to help in Antioch for a great number of people were added to the Lord. Barnabas then departed to Tarsus to seek for Saul (who later is known as the Apostle Paul.) They assembled for a whole year with the church in Antioch and taught much people (Acts 11:26.)

It seems quite plausible that Paul could have stayed with the family of Simon of Cyrene during this year. The first hand testimony of Simon about the crucifixion would have been quite helpful to Paul.

Years later, when Paul returned from his second missionary journey to Antioch, he again finds lodging in the home of Simon. Now, however, Paul is obsessed by a burning desire to preach the Gospel in Rome (see Rom. 1:132; 115:23, 24, 28, 29, 32). He prevails upon

MOTHER'S DAY

Simon to take his family to Rome and help make preparations. Remember, at the time Paul wrote to the Romans he had never been to Rome. Yet he sent personal greetings to twenty-four people in Rome with whom he had close associations (Rom. 16:3-15).

On Paul's third missionary tour he arrives at Ephesus. Aquila and Priscilla were there at the time (See 1 Cor. 16:8, 19). He also encourages them to go to Rome. Then he also sends Epaenetus, his first convert in Asia (Rom. 16:3-5). Paul's excitement is building as he has dreamed for many years of going to Rome, and then using that as a base of operations to continue on to Spain.

A short time later Paul arrived in Corinth and was told that Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cencrea, was going to Rome. He calls for Tertius the scribe and begins the dictation of the Roman Letter. As he concludes the letter his mind is flooded with memories of the great workers he has sent ahead. These were his fellow workers and fellow prisoners. These were the ones who had laid down their necks for him. Included in the list was Rufus and his mother. This godly woman had not only been a mother to Rufus, but also a mother to Paul.

Our wonderful Lord has promised that not even a cup of cold water given to help the cause of Christ will be forgotten (Matt. 10:42). Surely the mother of Rufus has many treasures laid up for her in heaven where moth and rust cannot corrupt, and thieves do not break through and steal.

Perhaps reading about this mother will inspire others to follow in her steps!

Jesus Had a Mother

Because Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit, Joseph was only His foster father. But Jesus did have a mother. It is logical to assume, therefore, that His relationship to her was no different from that of any other normal child.

This being true, on the day of His conception two microscopic cells combined in Mary's womb. Within two weeks a bubble-like sac had formed around the baby Jesus. Today we call this sac the "amnion" which is a Greek word meaning "little lamb." At only six weeks little baby Jesus could already experience pain. At two months brain waves began to flow and by the third month he was sleeping, and waking, and breathing amniotic fluid. At four months he was half as tall as he would be at birth and possessed the capacity to move with ease. He could even suck His thumb. Somewhere between His fifth and sixth month, the unborn baby Jesus could hear His mother's voice and see the difference between darkness and light. During the last three months before His birth the baby Jesus could also taste and touch and relate to the mood swings of His mother.

When he was born, the baby Jesus was cold, hungry, and unable to even hold up His head. In that moment of utter helplessness He felt the tender and loving hands of His mother. She held Him to her breast that He might find warmth and nourishment. She wrapped Him in swaddling clothes and laid Him in a manger.

Jesus had a mother. She clothed Him when He was naked, fed Him when He was hungry, and cared for Him when others did not even know He was alive. She held his hand when He learned to walk. She was His

constant companion during those formative years of His life when He advanced in wisdom, in stature, and in favour with God and man.

Thirty-three years later His beaten and mutilated body would be nailed to a cross. Most of His disciples had forsaken Him and fled. His mother, however, did not forsake Him. She was true though tried by fire. She was His friend when other friends were gone. Convulsing in agony He would find it difficult to speak. Straining on the nails He raised Himself and spoke to His mother.

The agony of her weeping face brought back thousands of precious memories. Through her eyes He gained His first human perspective of God. Through her lips He came to experience the melody and meaning of the very Psalms His Spirit had inspired.

At that moment Jesus gazed into the future and foresaw the time when Mary would be too old and feeble to care for herself. The days would come when she would need someone to clothe her when she was naked and feed her when she was hungry. Someday she would need a steady hand to help her walk and to care for her when the withering hand of time had rendered her incapable of caring for herself.

Standing by His mother's side was that disciple whom Jesus loved. Struggling to gain His breath, Jesus gasped: "Woman, behold thy son." Stretching for another breath of air He agonized again and said to His disciples, "Behold thy mother."

Then, the Scriptures teach that after this Jesus knew that all things were accomplished. Now that He had cared for His mother He could care for the rest of us. He knew no sin, but became sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God through Him.

MOTHER'S DAY

Before Jesus died, however, He provided for us an eternal reminder that He really did have a mother!

The Mother of Sisera

Sisera was the captain of the Canaanite army under King Jabin. For twenty long years the Canaanites had paralysed Israelite commerce and subjected them to intolerable oppression.

The military superiority of the Canaanites is indicated by the fact that they had 900 chariots of iron (Judges 4:13). Apparently the Israelites had none.

Under the guidance of the prophetess Deborah, the people of God gathered at Mt. Tabor to challenge the Canaanites. God promised to lure Sisera and his chariots to the River Kishon and then deliver them into the hands of the Hebrews. A sudden rainstorm played a key part in the victory (Judges 5:4). The dry river bed became a death trap for the Canaanites. Iron chariots are not an asset in deep mud. Sisera jumped down from his chariot and ran for his life. He fled for refuge to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite.

Jael went out to meet him and told him to not be afraid. She gave him milk to drink. Since his clothing must have been wet she covered him with a mantle to keep him warm, and soothed him off to sleep. It was a fatal mistake for Sisera. Jael took a hammer and fastened his head to the ground with a huge nail.

The people of God composed a song to commemorate their victory over the Canaanites. That song contains these words about the mother of Sisera: **“The mother of Sisera looked out at a window, and cried through the lattice, why is his chariot so long in coming? Why tarry the wheels of his chariots?”**

MOTHER'S DAY

(Judges 5:28).

Her wise ladies attempted to console her with possible explanations. They assume that he was busy dividing the spoils of war. They were wrong! This mother's vigil was in vain. Sisera would never come home again.

Is it not touching, however, to see this poor woman gazing through the lattice of her window? Can you not see in her face a love for her son that transcends the barriers of race or religion? Motherhood is an emotional reality that it touches the totality of the human race.

She looked out of the window as she had done so many times before. Her look of deep concern was nothing new. The wrinkles on her brow and the lines upon her face were a testament to her love. It didn't matter what kind of a son she had, she loved him just the same. “Why is his chariot so long in coming?” “Why don't I hear his car coming in the driveway?” “Why don't I get a letter from him in the mail?” “Why doesn't he call?” Such questions may not be unique to mothers, but they are certainly characteristic of them.

Each one of us have seen this kind of concern upon a mother's face. We have seen it in the court room, and the hospital. We have seen it in time of war and we have seen it in times of peace. A mother's love is so comprehensive and complete that it is used by God to illustrate the love experienced in the church. The church of our Lord Jesus Christ is called in Galatians the Jerusalem from above which is the mother of us all (Gal. 4:26).

It is exciting to know that the love of God for His people is far greater than even the love of a mother. Isaiah put it like this: **“Can a woman forget her sucking**

MOTHER'S DAY

child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee” (Isa 49:15).

FATHER'S DAY

Father's Day

The idea for Father's Day was conceived by Sonora Louise Smart. She was the eldest of six children. At least two things combined to make Sonora want to honor her father. First, her mother had passed away, and she appreciated very much the fact that her father cared for the family. In the second place, she was said to have resented the ridicule heaped upon men. In those days before prohibition it was fashionable to blame men and alcohol for all the problems of society.

On Mother's Day, 1909, Sonora went to church and listened to the sermon. She had a loving, courageous, and selfless father and longed to honor him. His name was Henry Jackson Smart. Since she lived in Spokane, Washington, she went to the Spokane Ministerial Association and asked for help. She also asked for help from the Young Men's Christian Association.

The first official Father's Day observation was in Spokane on June 19, 1910. This was Henry Jackson Smart's birthday. There is, of course, a biblical mandate to honor our fathers, and the idea caught on. The United States Congress officially recognized Father's Day in 1914 and set the observance for the first Sunday in June.

In 1924 President Calvin Coolidge proclaimed the third Sunday in June as Father's Day. Roses were designated as the Father's Day flowers: red to be worn for a living father, and white if the father had passed away.

Sonora Louise Smart married John Bruce Dodd. She never tried to "cash-in on" or commercialize her idea. She simply wanted to honor her father. Sonora

passed away March 22, 1978.

Reverence For Father

"Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits and live?" (Heb. 12:9.)

A tribute to my earthly father, Henry Boyce Mouton (July 12, 1903 - Dec. 5, 1995)

My first memories of my father are pleasant ones. I was only two or three, but I distinctly remember his heavy winter coat. It was lined with fur, and its pockets invariably held some treasure which I was permitted to find. It was usually only a stick of gum or piece of candy, but unforgettably important. Occasionally, the "treasure coat" would yield a trinket or toy purchased for a few pennies at the local dime store. A bonding was taking place between my father and me that would someday help me to understand God.

The stability which my father brought to the household enabled me to have a carefree childhood. I never worried about food, clothing, or shelter. My father provided for all of that. Beyond these necessities, I had many things which I didn't need. I had presents every birthday and Christmas and other blessings too numerous to mention. My father spent a lot of time with me. He taught me how to hunt and fish, play ball and drive a car. As Jesus said, if I asked him for an egg, he would never give me a scorpion.

Along with these many things which father did for me were certain things that I was expected to do for him.

More memorable than my household responsibilities, were the endless stream of corrections which came my way. My father never stopped correcting me. Just a short while before he died, he looked at me from his hospital bed and said: "Why don't you get rid of that paunch?"

Father's obsession with physical fitness dates back many years. On July 4, 1919, Jack Dempsey knocked out Jess Willard, and became the heavyweight champion of the world. Father was almost sixteen, and it must have made a profound impression on him. He held the champ in great admiration. Dad had only a few professional bouts, but never stopped thinking of himself as a fighter. Even in his eighties he would jokingly introduce himself as the "Wasp waisted young Hank Moutaaaaaaaaaaaaan."

So I gave reverence to my earthly father. I was afraid not to! He would take a belt to me if I dared to disobey. He tried to teach me anything that would help me in life. I was thumped on the back a thousand times and told to "straighten up!" He insisted that I take my elbows off the table and stop eating like a field hound. He never hesitated to tell me to wash my face, comb my hair, brush my teeth, or shine my shoes. Sometimes he would say, "You act like you fell out of a hickory nut tree on your head." Or worse, "You'd have to go to summer school before they'd let you in the insane asylum."

I never thought of such language as abusive. Somehow, I was always certain of my father's love. My reverence for him did not diminish through the years. On Feb. 12, 1987, father was the victim of a debilitating stroke and was bedfast for almost eight years. The fact that he was privileged to die at home is a tribute to the faith, strength and courage of my mother. She was his

FATHER'S DAY

principal care giver throughout his long illness.

I shall forever be grateful to God for my father. I revered him in youth, and this respect was deepened with the passing of time. There is, of course, an eternal purpose for earthly fathers. Our fathers in the flesh teach us how to give reverence to the Father of Spirits that we might obtain eternal life. (See Hebrews 12:9)

Let us all, as the Scriptures teach, give reverence to our fathers!

FATHER'S DAY

God Wants to be Our Father

"Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (II Cor. 6:17-18).

The city of Corinth was infamous in the ancient world. "To live as a Corinthian" was synonymous with opulence and immorality. The Athenians worshiped Athena, the goddess of wisdom, but the Corinthians worshiped Aphrodite, the goddess of love. Corinthian worship had degraded to an orgy of insatiable lust. The Temple of Aphrodite had more than a thousand prostitutes who were called "hierodouloi," or "sacred slaves." These pitiful women were used, abused, and discarded like so much human debris.

Paul knew such worship was demonic (I Cor. 10:20). The Devil is a liar and a murderer. He rewards his most ardent followers with death. Behind the thin veneer of pleasure was a Pandora's Box of horrific problems. The temple was a cesspool of physical, emotional, and spiritual contamination. Venereal disease was rampant and many worshipers became carriers. Since Corinth was a seaport city, the ancient mariners contaminated by Aphrodite, spread deadly diseases throughout the whole world.

The command of God is to **"come out . . . be separate . . . and touch not the unclean thing."** If we would do this, then God will **"receive"** us and be a **"Father"** unto us.

The ancient Jews told Jesus, **"We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man"** (John

FATHER'S DAY

8:33). Quite to the contrary, they had been in bondage many times. They had been in bondage to the Egyptians, the Amorites, the Philistines, the Moabites, the Midianites, the Canaanites, the Babylonians, and many others. In fact, at that very time they were in bondage to the Romans. Roman soldiers were garrisoned in the Tower of Antonia at the northwestern corner of the temple area. That tower rose forty cubits above the rock and was a constant reminder of Roman rule.

The Jews, however, were so steeped in satanic delusion that they were out of touch with reality. Jesus said: **"Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own; for he is a liar, and the father of it"** (John 8:44.)

The divine prescription for their problem was to "come out and be separate." They were to abandon the world and come to Christ. They needed to sever their ties with friends that were dragging them to hell. They needed to break allegiance with a failed system that was doomed for destruction. The fatherhood of God is conditioned by our conduct. If we come out from satanic activity He will receive us and be our Father. If we do not, He will not!

Today, we have the blessed opportunity to choose our father. We can be a child of Satan, or a child of God.. We must, however, choose one or the other. There are no half way Christians. We are either in the world, or in Christ. No man can serve two masters. The prodigal son had to make a choice, and so do we. He could stay in a "far country" and eat with the hogs, or he could come home to his father. God loves us and

FATHER'S DAY

longingly waits for our decision. He wants to welcome us home and be our Father. Let's let Him do it!

What the Father is Doing

"Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, the Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise" (John 5:19).

Though Jesus was God, He emptied Himself of Deity and was born as a man. He assumed the same human limitations that we have. He was willing to be tempted in all points just like we are. He took a human body that needed food and raiment just like we need. He got thirsty, tired, and sleepy just like we do. The All Powerful Sovereign of the Universe nursed the virgin's breast to survive. His infinite mind was replaced by brain of an infant. He had to learn to walk, and talk, add and subtract, work and play. It is obvious that Jesus could accomplish no more by human wisdom and energy than we can.

The secret of His amazing life and ministry, however, did not involve human wisdom and energy. Jesus said, "I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me" (John 6:38). God had a plan! It was conceived before the foundation of the world. God knew exactly what He was going to do. Jesus came to earth to help fulfill the plan of God. His earthly life and ministry had significance, only as it related to what God was doing. Jesus said: "The Son can do nothing of Himself"! (John 5:19)

Jesus, however, had such a close relationship with God, that God revealed to Him what He was going to do before it came to pass. "For the Father loveth the Son, and showeth Him all things that Himself doeth" (John 5:20). Seeing what God was about to do, enabled

Jesus to participate in the work of God.

This concept has far reaching implications for the believer. If we see what God is about to do, we can participate in it.

Take, for example, the feeding of the five thousand. Other than the resurrection, this is the only miracle that is found in all four Gospels. John observes that Jesus knew in advance what was going to happen (John 6:6). Jesus knew that God was going to feed the multitudes.

Let us take another look at this miracle. The disciples were looking at the crowd from a purely human point of view. They were in a deserted place, and the people were hungry. Therefore, the disciples said to Jesus, "Send the multitude away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves victuals" (Matt. 14:15). Jesus knew what God was about to do and said: "They need not depart; give ye them to eat." Just think, if the disciples had seen what Jesus saw, they could have done what Jesus did!

The Christians in Southern Mexico have a saying: "estamos arando." It means "we are plowing." The saying assumes significance when you know the story behind it. Someone saw a fly on the horn of a gigantic ox. They asked the fly what it was doing. It answered: "estamos arando," "we are plowing". Our Mexican brothers know that we are "laborers together with God." If we do what God is doing we plow a furrow. If not, we leave a fly speck.

Our modern world has been amazed by the collapse of atheism in Russia and a great revival in China. Historical events of such significance are not the result of human strategy and strength. God is at work. He is doing many things in our modern world. His works

FATHER'S DAY

are great and He is greatly to be praised. When we see what God is doing we too can become a participant.

When we do become co-laborers with Christ it is important that we remember to give God the glory. A dear friend said that Mother Teresa was asked how she kept the many accolades she received from going to her head. Her beautiful response was something like this: "Palm Sunday was to honor Jesus, not the little jackass who just happened to be associated with Him."

FATHER'S DAY

Family Troubles?

Do you have family troubles? It seems that most people do! Last week it was suggested to me that Jesus had family troubles. I had never thought of that before. I knew that Jesus was tempted in "all points like as we are," but somehow, I had never associated that with "family troubles."

A dear friend Gary Reed, helped me years ago to empathize with Mary. She was the world's first, and only pregnant virgin. Surely she must have had great difficulty convincing family and friends that her story was true. This may explain why she went "with haste" to visit her cousin Elizabeth in the hill country of Judea (Lk. 1:39). Elizabeth knew about the angel Gabriel, and had also experienced a miracle. She could probably understand Mary better than her own mother. Once you think about it, it seems quite plausible that unbelief in Nazareth would naturally have had a negative impact upon the family of Jesus.

While the Christian community accepts the story of the virgin birth, most others do not. This was apparently true even in Jesus' day. The Jews said to Jesus, "We be not born of fornication" (John 8:41). They probably thought that He was. Such gossip, as you know, it often harmful to a family.

When Jesus was twelve years old He became separated from his parents at the Passover (Lk. 2:42 ff). This is the last time that Joseph is mentioned in the Bible. Most believe that Joseph died, and that Jesus was raised in a single parent home. This too, is another powerful stress component.

The Scriptures teach that Jesus had four

FATHER'S DAY

brothers, and at least two sisters (Matt. 13:55-56; Mk. 6:3). John observed that during the ministry of Christ His brethren did not believe in Him (John 7:5). This incredible statement of fact is worthy of serious consideration.

As the oldest male member of the family, Jesus was in a position of leadership. Not only was He the primary provider for the family in financial matters, but spiritual matters as well. But when your brethren do not believe in you, it is hard to be a leader. Jesus may have had the same kind of trouble in His family, that you do.

Remember Joseph and his outrageous dreams of leadership. God had destined for Joseph to be a leader, but his family did not immediately accept that leadership. The Scriptures state it succinctly: **"Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told it his brethren: and they hated him yet the more"** (Gen. 37:5). Perhaps the brethren of Jesus were jealous of Him in much the same way.

Even the friends of Jesus thought He had taken leave of His senses. After choosing His twelve Apostles, Jesus was so popular that He didn't have time to eat. At this point Mark wrote: "And when his friends heard of it, they went out to lay hold on him: for they said, He is beside Himself" (Mk. 3:21).

When His family tried to interrupt His ministry, Jesus said: **"Who is my mother? And who are my brethren? And He stretched forth His hand toward His disciples, and said, Behold, my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, sister, and mother"** (Matt. 12:48-50).

The relationship of Jesus with His brethren was apparently so strained, that in the last moments of His life He turned outside of His immediate family to find help for

FATHER'S DAY

His mother. He asked John the Apostle, not His brethren, to care for Mary (John 19:25-27).

Yes, Jesus was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin. Whatever family troubles He may have encountered did not keep Him from doing the will of His Heavenly Father. Neither should ours!

It is encouraging to note that James, the brother of Jesus, repented of his unbelief and became an outstanding leader in the early church. Let us pray that unbelieving brethren will do the same.

Honor Thy Father

"Honor thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with a promise" (Eph. 6:2)

In 1907 Brother Henry Grabler was saved from a whipping by a man who handed him these words on a card. The truth of these words is especially appropriate on Father's Day.

MY CREED

Do no leave the alabaster boxes of your love and tenderness, sealed up until your friends are dead. Fill their lives with sweetness. Speak appreciating words while their ears can hear them, and while their hearts can be thrilled and made happier; the kind things you meant to say when they are gone, say before they go. The flowers you meant to send for their coffins, send to brighten and sweeten their homes before they leave them. If my friends have any alabaster boxes laid away, full of fragrant perfume of sympathy and affection, which they intend to break over my body, I would rather they would bring them out in my weary hours and open them, that I may be refreshed and cheered while I need them. I would rather have a plain coffin without a flower, a funeral without a eulogy, than a life without the sweetness of love and sympathy. Post mortem kindness does not cheer the burdened spirit. Flowers on the coffin cast no fragrance back over the weary way.

The Ten Commandments were given to the Children of Israel as they prepared to enter the Promised Land. The first commandment that had a promise involved honoring parents. If the Hebrew people would do this, they would live long in the land which the Lord their God was giving them. If they did not, their country would soon crumble from internal decay and weakness. People who do not honor their fathers and mothers are only one generation away from national disaster. Those who have never learned to take instructions, are ill equipped to give them.

These words are particularly appropriate in modern America. No unbiased observer could possibly conclude that "honoring our fathers" is a national priority. Hollywood movies, and television sit-coms focus on fathers who are failures. Traditional family values are constantly ridiculed. As if this were not bad enough, revisionist historians are even attacking our ancestors. Denigrating fathers and fatherhood does not come without a price. It is an alarming indication of national disaster.

Someone has correctly observed that it is better to light a candle than merely curse the darkness. There are many circumstances on the national and international scene which are beyond our ability to remedy or even understand. We can, however, on this Father's Day, honor our Fathers and remember that God always keeps His promises.

Adam was not deceived . . .

“Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression” (I Tim. 2:13-14).

The passage before us teaches two things about Adam. First, he was formed before Eve. Second, he was not deceived. It also teaches two things about Eve. First, she was formed after Adam. Second, she was deceived.

There may be many reasons why Eve was deceived, and Adam was not. This Scripture, however, points to only one. Adam was “first formed.”

Please prayerfully consider this list of events chronicled in Genesis 2:

- God formed Adam from the dust of the earth and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living soul (Gen. 2:7).
- God planted a garden eastward in Eden (2:8).
- God made every tree pleasant to the eyes good for food to grow in the garden (2:9).
- God also put the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden (2:9).
- God placed a river there to water the garden (2:10).
- God put Adam in the garden to dress and keep it (2:15).
- God commanded Adam to eat freely of every tree in the garden, but one (2:16).
- God forbade Adam to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil lest he die (2:17.)
- .God determined it was not good for man to be alone (2:18.)
- .God brought to Adam every beast, and fowl for

- him to name (2:19).
- Adam named all the cattle, fowl, and beasts (2:20).
- No helper was found suitable for man (2:21).
Then . . . after all this . . .
- God caused a deep sleep to come on Adam and formed Eve from his rib (2:22).

No wonder Adam was “not deceived”. He had spent so much time with God that he understood his word more clearly than his wife. Eve should have listened to him!

It is fair to ask, however, if Adam was not deceived, why did he sin? Why did Adam deliberately do something that would bring death? It is obvious that he did not do it for God, or himself, so he must have done it for his wife. Somehow, she nagged or seduced him into the denial of his own reason. This does not excuse his action. The Scriptures are explicit that by one man sin entered into the world and death by sin (Rom. 5:12). In Adam, all die (1 Cor. 15:22). The influence that Eve had over Adam does not excuse his sin, but it is more powerful than most men are willing to admit.

But it is also fair to ask why Eve sinned? Even if she was deceived she still should have submitted to the leadership of her husband. But she didn't submit to her husband. She submitted to a stranger. It is indeed incredible that the first woman on earth had more respect for a stranger than for God or her own husband.

This Scripture is worthy of serious study at any time of the year, but especially on Father's Day. In reflecting on this we approach a truth which is foundational to Christ and the church. It is a truth which can transform the home, the church, and all of society.

It is stated clearly in Eph. 5:21-33. As the church is subject unto Christ, wives are to submit to their own husbands in everything. Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it (Eph. 5:25).

What would the world be like if husbands loved their wives as Christ loved the church, and wives submitted to their own husbands in everything? It would be like paradise!

An Attack on Adam

“Did God really say, ‘ You must not eat from any tree in the garden’”? (Gen.3:1 N.I.V.)

The chronology of creation progressed from the non-living to the living, and from animals to man. God created the animals before He created man (Gen. 1:25-26), and He created man before He created woman (Gen. 2:22).

It is not clear how much time lapsed between the creation of Adam and the creation of Eve. It seems clear, however, that there was enough time for God to:

- Put man in the garden to work it and take care of it. (Gen. 2:15).
- To command man not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:17).
- To recognize that it was not good for the man to be alone (Gen. 2:18).
- And to allow Adam the privilege of naming all of the beasts and birds (Gen. 2:20).
- After all this God took one of Adam's ribs and created the woman.

Many years later, the Apostle Paul would make reference to this order of creation and remind Timothy that **“Adam was first formed and then Eve” (I Tim. 2:13)**. He reminded the Corinthians of the same thing and wrote: **“Man did not come from the woman, but the woman from the man” (I Cor.11:8)**.

This chronology is important because the woman was not present during the earlier conversations that her husband had with God. She was not there when God placed Adam in the garden to take care of it. She was not there when God commanded her husband not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. She was

FATHER'S DAY

not there when Adam named all of the beasts and the birds.

AS FAR AS THE SCRIPTURES ARE CONCERNED, ALL EVE KNEW ABOUT ALL OF THESE SUBJECTS IS WHAT HER HUSBAND TOLD HER!

The serpent was the original predator. Many animals have the capacity to exploit weakness and destroy their prey, but he was more crafty than them all. A good case can be made that he not only wanted the woman to question God, but also her husband.

“Did God really say that?” he asked. Are you sure your husband didn’t make a mistake? Like a deadly spider the devil was spinning a web of deceit. In her short and innocent life, the woman had never doubted her husband about anything. Now this tantalizing idea was placed before her with great mental dexterity and skill. Maybe Adam was wrong. The tree was good for food. It was pleasant to the eyes. It was desirable for gaining wisdom.

Once you have learned to doubt someone, it is easier to doubt everyone. Eve’s doubt may have given way to confusion. Maybe Adam did tell the truth, but what if God Himself was trying to keep them from having their eyes opened to know good and evil?

The rest, as you know, is history. Eve was deceived. She ate the forbidden fruit and gave some to her husband. Adam was not deceived, but ate anyhow. By one man sin entered into the world and death by sin.

Many years have gone by since the day of Adam and Eve, but the strategy of the wicked one is still the same. He is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44). Jesus said that when he tells a lie he speaks his native language. His malignant distortions have spread like a deadly virus throughout the earth and the focus of his

FATHER'S DAY

attack is still on fathers. Not just on our early fathers, but even on God Himself.

Some years ago actress Jodie Foster was featured on the cover of People Magazine. The headlines read “And Baby Makes Two.” The father was out of the picture. He was but a “sperm donor” and therefore considered as inconsequential. The message is much the same as that in Eden. Don’t trust a man! Don’t trust God! Trust yourself! Satisfy yourself! Paul said it like this: **“But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ”** (2 Cor. 11:3).

Not Many Fathers

“For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel” (I Cor. 4:15).

The words before our text show how little the Corinthians appreciated Paul.

- v. 9 - He felt like a man condemned to death, a spectacle to the world, angels, and men.
- v. 10 - They were wise, he was a fool. They were honorable, he was despised.
- v. 11 - Paul went without proper food, clothing, and housing.
- v. 12 - He worked hard with his hands, blessed those who reviled, and endured persecution.
- v. 13 - He was defamed and made like the filth and off scouring of all things.
- v. 14 - He did not write to shame them, but to admonish them like children.
- v. 15 - They may have had 10,000 teachers, but Paul was like their father.
- v. 16 - Of all things, he wanted them to follow, or imitate his example.

Abe Lincoln once quoted the man who was tarred, feathered, and ridden out of town on a rail. He said: “If it wasn’t for the honor, I’d just as soon have walked”. It seems that Paul could have said much the same. He was the man who brought the Gospel to Corinth, and endured much hardship to help them grow. When there was trouble in the church, he blamed himself and Apollos to spare them (I Cor. 4:6). They were rich and reigned as kings, but treated him like trash. If it were not for the honor of fatherhood, perhaps

he’d just as soon have been a teacher.

A doctor once told me: “The women complain, and the men die.” A Joplin woman helped confirm this little saying by sharing a special sorrow she had at the death of her husband. He died of a heart attack as she was recuperating from surgery. She found in his wallet a doctor’s report recommending heart surgery. He had gone to the doctor without her knowledge and was quietly waiting for her to get well before he took care of himself. Sounds like a father to me.

Jesus told of a certain man who had two sons. It seems that neither son appreciated him. The younger son asked for his inheritance and went to a far country where he wasted it in riotous living. When the prodigal son repented, the father forgave him. The older son, however, was angry with his father. He refused his invitation and rejected his love. As the saying goes: “it sounds like deja vu all over again”.

Jesus assumed that fathers would be good. If a son asked for bread the father would not give him a stone, and if he asked for a fish he would not give him a serpent (Matt. 7). Just because fathers may be good, however, does not mean that we will treat them good. Ham defiled his father, Noah (Gen. 9). Lot was like one that mocked unto his sons-in-law and his daughters also defiled him (Gen. 19). Jacob lied to his father, Isaac (Gen. 27). Jacob’s sons lied to him (Gen. 37). Absalom usurped the throne and tried to kill his father, David (II Samuel 17). When Absalom was killed David wept and said: **“My son, my son Absalom! Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!”** (II Sam. 18:33). Joash the king, remembered not the kindness of Jehoiada his father (II Chron. 24:22).

The most shocking example of disrespect,

FATHER'S DAY

however, is reserved for our Heavenly Father. God is the Creator and Sustainer of all life. In Him we live and move and have our being. We are utterly dependent upon Him for every heart beat and every breath of air, but most treat Him like the Corinthians treated Paul. God, however, loves us just the same. Just as Paul wanted his children in the faith to imitate him, let us also be imitators of God as dear children. Let us walk in love as Christ also has loved us and given Himself as an offering and sacrifice to God (Eph. 5:1-2).

FATHER'S DAY

Long Distance?

Isn't it strange that many of us didn't want to talk to our fathers when we lived at home. Later, however, we treasure their advice.

Quite often we have moved away and have to talk to our fathers "long distance." Someone wrote:

- 4 years: My Daddy can do anything.
- 7 years: My Dad knows a lot, a whole lot.
- 8 years: Dad doesn't quite know everything.
- 12 years: Oh, well, naturally Father doesn't understand.
- 14 years: Father? Hopelessly old fashioned!
- 21 years: Oh, that man is out-of-date: What would you expect!
- 25 years: He comes up with a good idea now and then.
- 30 years: Must find out what Dad thinks about it.
- 35 years: A little patience; let's get Dad's input first.
- 50 years: What would Dad have thought about that?
- 60 years: I wish I could talk it over with Dad once more.

This same principle also applies to God. How tragic that anyone should ever have to talk to God "long distance." God wants to dwell in our hearts by faith. He has designed our bodies to be temples for His Holy Spirit. He desires to be such an integral part of our existence that in Him we will live and move and have our being. He has promised never to leave us or forsake us. We ought to feel His presence every moment and be able to converse with Him in a whisper. But alas! God is so far away from many people, that if they talk to Him at all, it

FATHER'S DAY

has to be long distance.

Experts agree that most communication is "nonverbal." From 60% to 90% of what we learn from others does not come from words alone. The meaning of words is enhanced by facial expressions and body language. Close friends can say a lot without speaking at all. A smile and loving touch may be an eloquent answer to a burning question. An appropriate shrug of a shoulder, or raised eyebrow may speak volumes. Such intimate communion cannot be experienced "long distance". It is reserved for those who are there. God has given us five senses. We can hear, touch, taste, see, and smell. Those who talk "long distance", are limited only to what they can hear. How blessed it is to open the door and invite God in to share each and every experience of life. Jesus wants to share our every sensation, and to be a part of every perception. Whatever we do in word or deed, ought to be done in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

Paul prayed that God would give the Ephesians: **"The spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him"** (Eph. 1:17). He wrote to the Colossians that they might be **"filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding . . . and increasing in the knowledge of God"** (Col. 1:9-10). We need to have the **"light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ"** (II Cor. 4:6). Such intimate knowledge does not come "long distance".

The institution of marriage provides insight and understanding into the close relationship between Christ and His church. To "know", in the Biblical sense, means to become one so that a new life is produced. It isn't

FATHER'S DAY

necessary to talk to God long distance, why not open your heart now and invite Him in?

AND ADAM GAVE NAMES

“And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field” (Gen 2:19-20).

Cain and Abel had only limited sources of information. There were no schools or colleges to attend. There were no magazines or periodicals to read. There were no televisions to watch or children down the street with which to confer. There was literally no human being outside of their own immediately family from whom they could learn.

Basically, they had only three options: (1) They could learn by experience. (2) They could learn from their mother. (3) They could learn from their father.

Ideally, of course, learning should include a combination of all these sources of information. Unfortunately, Cain and Abel did not live in an ideal world. Because of sin they lived in a world of fragmentation and conflict. They did not inherit Eden, they inherited a world where the clash of ideas was a part of their daily routine. In this kind of a world, where should Cain and Abel go for advice? The answer is obvious. They should have gone to their father.

The Scriptures are explicit: **“Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression . . . ”** (1 Timothy 2:13-14). Adam had a special and unique relationship with God before Eve was even

created. He was busy dressing and keeping the Garden and communicating with his creator on a level so utterly profound that it is all but beyond our wildest imagination.

Adam had such fellowship with God that the Lord God brought every living creature into the presence of Adam for him to observe and to name. After scrutinizing each form of life Adam gave it a name, and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.

If little children in that distant era wanted to know anything about biology, or zoology, or theology, they could find no better or more accurate source of information than Adam. Adam was sinful, and fallible, and there were undoubtedly many questions which he could not answer. He was, however, the best source of information available on the face of the earth.

Even the woman was informed by God: **“And thy desire shall be unto thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.”** (Gen. 3:16).

Thus the age of the Patriarchs was born. The word “patriarch” is a compound of the words for “father” and “rule.” It refers to the age where the “fathers ruled”. The fathers were the prophets, priests and kings. When God desired to communicate to man He gave that message unto the fathers. When sacrifices were to be offered God gave that responsibility unto the fathers. When sacrifices were to be offered God gave that responsibility unto the fathers.

That which is reasonable and proper in the Christian age cannot be divorced from the historical roots of humanity. Thus the Scriptures direct woman “to be under obedience as also saith the law” (1 Cor. 14:34). Women are commanded to be in obedience to their own husbands “even as Sarah obeyed Abraham” (1 Peter

FATHER'S DAY

3:6). The aged women were instructed to teach the young women to “love their husbands . . . and to be obedient to their own husbands that the Word of God be not blasphemed.” (Titus 2:4-5).__

There is an old saying: “When all else fails, go by the instructions”. At a time when the foundations of society are crumbling, when divorce is eroding the basic fabric of civilization; when little children are caught in the vortex of a humanistic sewer, perhaps it is time to go back to the instructions.

Honoring your father and mother is the first commandment with a promise. The promise to the Hebrews for honoring their parents was that they would live long in the land which the Lord their God was giving them.

The peace and tranquillity of our own nations also hinges on this same simple truth.

FATHER'S DAY

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF FATHERHOOD

Anyone can conceive a child in an act of passion, but the Scriptures teach that the godly father must do more than that. Please prayerfully consider these inspired words of Paul to Timothy. **“But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel”** (1 Tim 5:8).

A caustic cartoon pictured three test tubes on a mantel. The mother explained to her child, “This one in the middle is your father.” Touche! An absent and impersonal father is the only kind of father that many children can relate to.

This is indeed an age of irresponsibility. Everyone seems intent on placing blame on someone else. The failing student blames the teacher. The convicted criminal blames society. The poor blame the rich. The AIDS patient blames the lack of research. Adam blamed Eve and Eve blamed the serpent.

There is, however, a sense in which God does hold fathers responsible for the activities of their children. Eli the priest, is an interesting case in point. His sons were vile, almost beyond description. Consider these words from Scripture: **“Now Eli was very old, and heard all that his sons did unto all Israel; and how they lay with the women that assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation”** (1 Sam 2:22). God, however, expected Eli to correct and restrain his sons. Consider this: **“In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house: when I begin, I will also make an end. For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for**

FATHER'S DAY

the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not. And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever” (1 Sam 3:12-14).

Edgar A. Guest said it like this:

A Father's Example

There are little eyes upon you,
And they're watching night and day;
There are little ears that listen
To every word you say.
There are little hands all eager
To do the things you do.
And a little boy who's dreaming
Of the day he'll be like you.
You're the little fellow's idol,
You're the wisest of the wise;
In his little mind, about you
No suspicions ever rise.
He believes in you devoutly,
Holds that all you say and do
He will say and do in your way
When he's grown up just like you.
There's a wide-eyed little fellow
Who believes you're always right;
And his ears are always open
As he watches day and night.
You are setting an example
Every day in all you do,
For the little boy who's waiting
To grow up just like you.

FATHER'S DAY

Edgar A. Guest

JOASH REMEMBERED NOT!

“Thus Joash the king remembered not the kindness which Jehoiada his father had done to him, but slew his son” (II Chronicles 24:22).

Joash, the king of Judah, was the son of Ahaziah. When Ahaziah was killed because of his sin, his mother, Athaliah, decided to kill all the children of the royal family that she might reign as queen. Athaliah, as you recall, was the daughter of Jezebel. This wicked woman was successful in killing all of her grandchildren but one. His name was Joash.

Joash was rescued from death by the courageous actions of his aunt Jehosheba, the wife of Jehoiada the priest (II Chron. 22:11). By comparing II Chron. 24:1 and II Chron. 24:15 we discover that Jehoiada was eighty-three years old at the time. The sacrificial service of this elderly couple not only saved the child's life, but ensured that a descendant of David would sit upon the throne of Judah as God had promised.

The dangers involved in hiding this little boy for over six long years are passed over in Scripture without a single word. In the seventh year, however, Jehoiada strengthened himself with the courage to make Joash the king at the tender age of seven. The coup was successful, the wicked Athaliah was slain, and a descendant of David was back on the throne.

Since Joash was an orphan, Jehoiada became his father. He helped save him from death, hid him for over six years, and installed him as king. Obviously, a seven year old boy did not have the wisdom to rule a nation. So, in spite of his advanced age, Jehoiada was the power behind the throne. Somehow he found the strength to insure that the reign of Joash was a godly

one. He guided him in breaking down the altar of Baal, selecting wives, repairing the House of God, and spearheading religious reform. The Scriptures teach that: **“Joash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest”** (II Chron. 24:2).

Finally, however, Jehoiada died at the age of 130 (II Chron.. 24:15). Almost immediately, the fickle King Joash reverted to idolatry. He forgot all of the spiritual lessons of Jehoiada and began the worshiping in groves. The wrath of God descended upon Judah and Jerusalem because of this trespass.

A series of prophets were sent by God to call Joash to repentance. Their message, however, was unheeded. Finally God sent Zechariah the son of Jehoiada to rebuke the idolatrous king. Zechariah was the foster brother of Joash. Surely the wayward king would listen with respect to a member of his own family. Surely the sight of Zechariah would rekindle the many fond memories of holiness and truth which both of these boys had learned from their deceased father.

The Scriptures teach: **“And the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, which stood above the people and said unto them, Thus saith God, Why transgress ye the commandments of the Lord, that ye cannot prosper? Because ye have forsaken the Lord, he hath also forsaken you”** (II Chron. 24:20).

Instead of repenting, however, the wicked king commanded that his own brother be stoned to death. The only “crime” of Zechariah was that of speaking the word of God. It is incredible, but true, that: **“Joash the king remembered not the kindness which Jehoiada his father had done to him.”**

FATHER'S DAY

Most of us are more like Joash than we would care to admit. We are not "self made" individuals. Someone else provided us with total care and protection the first seven years of our lives. During our years of adolescence someone else provided us with food and shelter. Our "maturity" did not happen in a day. It came as the fruit of many years of sacrificial service on the part of others.

Joash died for the sin of his forgetfulness and ingratitude. Surely God will not deal kindly with us if follow in his ungodly steps. LET US DAILY BE REMINDED OF THE KINDNESS SHOWN TO US BY OTHERS!

MEMORIAL DAY

Memorial Day Order

(By General John A. Logan)

I. The 30th day of May, 1868, is designated for the purpose of strewing with flowers or otherwise decorating the graves of comrades who died in defense of their country during the late rebellion, and whose bodies now lie in almost every city, village, and hamlet churchyard in the land. In this observance no form or ceremony is prescribed, but posts and comrades will in their own way arrange such fitting services and testimonials of respect as circumstances may permit.

We are organized, comrades, as our regulations tell us, for the purpose, among other things, "of preserving and strengthening those kind and fraternal feelings which have bound together the soldiers, sailors, and marines who united to suppress the late rebellion." What can aid more to assure this result than by cherishing tenderly the memory of the heroic dead, who made their breasts a barricade between our country and its foe? Their soldier lives were the reveille of freedom to a race in chains, and their death a tattoo of rebellious tyranny in arms. We should guard their graves with sacred vigilance. All that the consecrated wealth and taste of the Nation can add to their adornment and security is but a fitting tribute to the memory of her slain defenders. Let no wanton foot tread rudely on such hallowed grounds. Let pleasant paths invite the coming and going of reverent visitors and found mourners. Let no vandalism of avarice or neglect, no ravages of time, testify to the present or to the coming generations that we have forgotten, as a people the cost

MEMORIAL DAY

of free and undivided republic.

If other eyes grow dull and other hands slack, and other hearts cold in the solemn trust, ours shall keep it well as long as the light and warmth of life remain in us.

Let us, then, at the time appointed, gather around their sacred remains and garland the passionless mounds above them with choicest flowers of springtime; let us raise above them the dear old flag they saved from dishonor; let us in this solemn presence renew our pledges to aid and assist those whom they have left among us as sacred charges upon the Nation's gratitude, –the soldier's and sailor's widow and orphan.

II. It is the purpose of the Commander-in-Chief to inaugurate this observance with the hope it will be kept up from year to year, while a survivor of the war remains to honor the memory of his departed comrades. He earnestly desires the public press to call attention to this Order, and lend its friendly aid in bringing it to the notice of comrades in all parts of the country in time for simultaneous compliance therewith.

III. Department commanders will use every effort to make this order effective.

By command of:
JOHN A. LOGAN
Commander-in-Chief

N. P. CHIPMAN
Adjutant-General
(Note - May 30th was recognized as the official Memorial

MEMORIAL DAY

Day until more recent times. In an attempt to make the work week more efficient the actual day has been changed to create a three day weekend.)

The Gettysburg Address

On November 19, 1863, a cemetery was dedicated at Gettysburg for those brave souls who perished there in the Civil War. Edward Everett, the famous orator, was the main speaker. President Abraham Lincoln was among the dignitaries who were present. He was asked to speak to the assembly but no one present understood the profound significance of his remarks. Mr. Lincoln assumed that the world would little note nor long remember what he was saying. The newspapers dutifully noted: "Mr. Lincoln also addressed the assembly." The eloquent simplicity of President Abraham Lincoln is now considered among the most famous speeches in human history.

"Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth, upon this continent, a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that 'all men are created equal.'

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived, and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met upon a great battle field of that war. We come to dedicate a portion of it, as a final resting place for those who died here that the nation might live. This we may, in all propriety do. But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate it – we can not

MEMORIAL DAY

consecrate – we cannot hallow, this ground – the brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have hallowed it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here; while it can never forget what they did here.

It is rather for us, the living, we here be dedicated to the great task remaining before us – that, from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they here, gave the last full measure of devotion – that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that the nation, shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people by the people for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”

Someone has observed that the

- The Pythagorean theorem has 24 words.
- The Lord's prayer has 66 words.
- Archimedes' Principle has 67 words.
- The Ten Commandments have 179 words.
- The Gettysburg address has 286 words.
- The Declaration of Independence has 1,300 words.
- The US Government regulations on the sale of cabbage has 26,911 words.

MEMORIAL DAY

Lest We Forget

Rudyard Kipling was born in 1865, the year the Civil War was over. He became one of the most famous people in the world.

Mark Twain said of him: “He knows everything that there is to be known, and I know the rest”.

Though Kipling was born in Bombay, he was an English citizen and staunch patriot. The fact that he was widely traveled and well informed gave him keen insight into the role Great Britain would play in the history of the world.

His poem, THE RECESSIONAL, was composed in 1897 for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. The poem was considered as an insult. It was said to have embittered his enemies and did nothing to humble the nation he loved.

Please prayerfully consider these words:

God of our father, known of old.
Lord of our far flung battle line.
Beneath whose awful hand we hold
Dominion over palm and pine
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet.
Lest we forget, lest we forget.

The tumult and the shouting dies.
The captains and the kings depart.
Still stands thine ancient sacrifice.
A humble and a contrite heart.
Lord God of Hosts be with us yet.
Lest we forget, lest we forget.

MEMORIAL DAY

Far called our navies melt away.
On dune and headland sinks the fire.
Lo, all the pomp of yesterday.
Is one with Nineveh and Tyre.
Judge of the Nations spare us yet.
Lest we forget, lest we forget.

If drunk with sight of power,
We loose wild tongues that have not Thee in awe.
Such boastings as the gentiles use,
Or lesser breeds without the law.
Lord God of Hosts be with us yet.
Lest we forget, lest we forget.

For heathen heart that puts his trust
In reeking tube and iron shard.
All valiant dust that builds on dust,
and guarding calls not Thee to guard,
For frantic boast and foolish word . . .
Thy mercy on Thy people Lord.

Rudyard Kipling

Lest we forget, here is a list of those who died in defense of the United States of America.

- The American Revolution (1788 - 1783)
6,188 dead
- The War of 1812 (1812 - 1814)
4,505 dead
- The Mexican War (1846 - 1848)
4,152 dead
- The American Civil War (1861 - 1865)
498,332 dead

MEMORIAL DAY

- Spanish American War (1899 - 1902)
2,445 dead
- World War I (1914 - 1918)
116,516 dead
- World War II (1939 - 1945)
405,399 dead
- Korea (1950 - 1953)
54,246 dead
- Viet Nam (1961 - 1975)
58,167 dead; 2,266 MIA
- The Persian Gulf War (Jan. 16 - Mar. 3, 1991)
293 dead; 19 MIA

Memorials

The word “memorial” is found but three times in the New Testament Scriptures in the KJV (Matt. 26:13; Mk. 14:9; Acts 10:4). It is the Greek word “mnemosunon” and refers to that which keeps a memory alive. Twice it refers to Mary who anointed Jesus with very precious ointment. The other reference is to the prayers and alms of Cornelius. Just as we keep our own Memorial Day, let us also reflect upon those things which are specifically said to be “memorials” in the Bible.

It was six days before the Passover. Jesus and His disciples came to Bethany and dined in the home of Simon the Leper. For more than six months Jesus had been teaching repeatedly that it would be necessary for Him to go to Jerusalem, and to suffer many things of the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day (Matt. 16:21).

He had taken Peter, James, and John to the Mount of Transfiguration where he spoke with Moses and Elijah about His decease which He should accomplish in Jerusalem (Lk. 9:31). On the way up to Jerusalem Jesus said again: “Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him: and the third day he shall rise again” (Matt. 20:18-19).

Remarkably, however, the words of Jesus were not understood by His disciples. Consider, for example, Luke 9:44-45. “Let these saying sink down into your ears: for the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men. But they understood not this saying, and it was

hid from them, that they perceived it not: and they feared to ask him of that saying.” The same truth is stated in Mark 9:32. While the twelve disciples did not understand the word of Jesus, Mary did! When it dawned upon her that Jesus was about to die, she was overcome with emotion. She took an alabaster box of very precious ointment, broke it, and anointed Jesus. The value of the ointment was said to be more than three hundred days wages. It was, no doubt, her life savings. When Judas, and the other disciples criticized her, Jesus came to her defense. **“Why trouble ye the women? For she hath wrought a good work upon me. For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always. For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial. Verily I say unto you, wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her”** Matt. 26:10-13).

The fragrance of this expensive ointment filled the house. Mary poured it on the head and feet of Jesus. No doubt He carried the fragrance of her generous gift with Him to His grave. When the High Priest entered into the Holy of Holies he had to prepare the way with sweet smelling incense or he would die (Lev. 16: 13). The last breath of air inhaled by Jesus before He died was blessed by the sweet smelling incense that Mary had poured on His head just a few days before.

The other use of the word “memorial” in Scripture involves the prayers of a Gentile Centurion named Cornelius. He was a devout man, and one that feared God. He also gave much alms to the people and prayed to God always. One day as he prayed he had a vision of an angel, who said: **“Thy prayers and thine alms are**

MEMORIAL DAY

come up for a memorial before God" (Acts 10:4). This remarkable passage gives new meaning and significance to the word of Jesus about laying up treasure in heaven. The sacrificial generosity of dedicated people like Cornelius and Mary are never forgotten by God. Even a cup of cold water given in the proper way will always be remembered by God. These are eternal treasures in heaven where moth and rust cannot corrupt, and thieves cannot break through and steal.

But now, let us reflect upon the "memorials" which we can bestow upon our wonderful Lord. Let us endeavor to make the prayers we offer, the time we devote, and the money we give be a worthy "memorial" to our faith.

The late Jim Elliot said it beautifully: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose".

PENTECOST

Out of Control

Ben Merold said recently at a Church Growth Seminar: "All good growth will be out of control." Zounds! I thought. He's right!

Everyone knows that nothing is out of control to God. That's obvious! Ben evidently meant that all good church growth is out of man's control.

He further explained that in the course of teaching hundreds of students on the graduate level, he required many research projects. One such project involved studying church records. The students discovered that every six to nine years the average church experienced numerical growth. When the church tried to "control" this growth, however, it disappeared. It is not at all uncommon for some churches to stay the same size for decades. One reason for such lack of growth, involves control. Our efforts to control church growth is an indicator that we have more confidence in ourselves than we do in God.

Let's consider an example straight from the Bible. Suppose you are a part of a congregation of 120, and you had 3,000 converts in a single day. This, as you know, is precisely what happened to the church in Jerusalem. Can you not appreciate the level of discomfort this would bring to the average church board? Things would be out of their control. How would they protect their original little group from false teaching? Such a large influx of new believers would be seen as a grave danger to true doctrine. It would be the tail wagging the dog. In such a large congregation, people would be teaching without any man's approval or credentials. Even with twelve inspired apostles on the scene, such numbers are demonstrably unmanageable

PENTECOST

by man.

The problem of control was magnified, however, by the fact that these 3,000 new converts were evangelistic. Once again the fear of false teaching rears its ugly head. How can a conscientious board member tolerate anything so out of control? Soon their number was 5,000 men (Acts 4:4), and probably not one had even received a Baptismal Certificate. Based on today's mentality, many board members would be forced to resign as a matter of conscience. Since things were out of their "control", they would automatically assume that apostasy was inevitable.

It has been estimated that the Jerusalem church had grown to over 20,000 before they saw the need of deacons. And then, of all things, they only appointed seven. We have congregations today with only a hundred members that have this many deacons. These men in the Jerusalem Church, however, were not appointed to control, but to serve.

Then the problem of control by man was made even more difficult by persecution. Stephen was stoned and these thousands of uncontrolled believers were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria. From the human standpoint, the situation was manifestly unmanageable. Fortunately, Jesus never lost control of anyone or anything. No matter where believers were, or what problems they faced, Jesus was in control. It is a great relief to remember that the Head of the Body is not separated from the members of His Body.

Perhaps the greatest church growth ever is taking place in modern times. The Iron Curtain is down, and an evangelistic fervor is sweeping Eastern Europe and Russia. Parts of Africa are aflame with evangelism. Only a few short years ago there were hardly any

PENTECOST

Christians in Korea. Now the biggest churches in the world are there. The evangelism of China is even more exciting. Some have estimated that there are more evangelical Christians in China than in any country on earth. Just as in the First Century, this amazing growth has been out of control. The wind blows where it wants to. We can hear the sound, but we cannot tell where it comes from, or where it is going. This is precisely the illustration that Jesus used to describe those who are born of the Spirit.

Discerning the Body

"For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body" (I Cor. 11:29).

It is essential that we "discern the body" when partaking of the Lord's Supper. If we do not, we eat and drink condemnation to ourselves.

First, and foremost, we must discern the human body of Jesus that was nailed to the cross. We must remember that Jesus took the form of man. This is central to the Gospel message. He was born to die. He was the Lamb of God, destined to take away the sins of the world. He was tempted in all points, like as we are, yet without sin. Though He knew no sin, God made him to be sin, that we might become the righteousness of God in him (II Cor. 5:21). His body was nailed to the cross as the ultimate sacrifice for sin. Jewish priests made daily sacrifices, but we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all (Heb. 10:10). Jesus bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed (I Pet. 2:24). This is that great mystery about which the prophets searched and inquired diligently. This is the message which the angels desired to understand. It is a crime against heaven to partake of the Lord's Supper without remembering the body of Jesus that was nailed to the cross.

But the Scriptures also use the word "body" in another way. The word "body" is also used to describe the church. Jesus **"is the head of the body, the church . . ."** (Col. 1:18). The Bible affirms that God **"gave Him to be the head over all things to the church, which is**

his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:22-23). Since the Spirit of Jesus dwells in every believer, it is appropriate to say that **"by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body . . ."** (I Cor. 12:13). In a very real sense, we are **"members of His Body"** (Eph. 5:30).

We are not only to discern the body of Jesus that was nailed to the cross, we are also to discern our fellow Christians who are members of His Body. The church at Corinth was filled with contention (see I Cor. 1:11; 3:3; 6:7; etc.) This bad feeling between these brethren prevented them from partaking of the Lord's Supper. This is explicitly stated in I Cor. 11:20-21.

This emphasis is continued in the following chapter. **"For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: SO ALSO IS CHRIST!"** (I Cor. 12:12). A physical body has different members, such as eyes, ears, hands, and feet, etc. The Body of Christ has many members too. There is to be no schism in the body. The Body of Christ is to be one! When one member suffers, we all should suffer. When one member rejoices, we all should rejoice (I Cor. 12:25-26).

The way we treat our brethren not only involves the Lord's Supper, it will be a principal factor in our salvation, or condemnation. What we do to our brethren, we are doing to Jesus. The King shall answer and say: **"Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me"** (Matt. 25:40).

The Bible teaches that we are not only to love God, we are also to love our neighbor. A failure to love our neighbor has been a problem from the very beginning. Cain, the firstborn son of Adam and Eve, tried

PENTECOST

to worship God without loving his brother (I John 3:11-12). The Scriptures are explicit: **"If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?"** (I John 4:20).

**WHEN YOU PARTAKE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER,
REMEMBER TO DISCERN HIS BODY!**

PENTECOST

I Can Do That!

David Kelley, a dear Christian friend, recently sent a study that convinced me that I am more like the apostles than I thought I was. Quite frequently we see these men as so super spiritual that we could never do what they did. As I was reminded of these scriptures, however, I kept saying to myself "I can do that!"

For example, Jesus said they were fools and slow of heart to believe the prophets (Lk. 24:25). Such a thought made me feel right at home. One day as they were traveling, they forgot to take provisions. Zounds! I said, "I can do that!" On another occasion they tried to cast out a demon and failed (Mk. 9:18). Then they criticized a man who did cast out demons because he didn't follow them (Mk. 9:38). Hey! I'm starting to feel right at home.

Then there was the time the Samaritans refused them hospitality and they wanted to call down fire from heaven and destroy them (Lk. 9:54). Or what about the time they rebuked those who brought little infants to Jesus (Lk. 18:15)? Or what about the time they didn't understand Jesus and were afraid to ask (Mk. 9:32)? By this time I'm starting to think: Hey! I'm "apostolic timber" after all.

Then there are those many references to "fear" in the apostles. They were afraid in a boat (Lk. 8:25). They were afraid on a mountain (Mk. 9:6). When they saw Jesus walking on the water and were afraid (John 6:19). When Peter saw the wind and waves he also was afraid (Matt. 14:30). On the way to Jerusalem they were "amazed and afraid" (Mk. 10:32). After the resurrection they didn't say anything to any man because they were afraid (Mk. 16:8). Maybe all of us are more like the apostles than we thought we were!

The apostles disputed among themselves about which of them was the greatest (Mk. 9:34). On another occasion

they were moved with indignation against their brethren (Matt. 20:24). They criticized Mary for her generosity (Matt. 26:8). They also had wrongful indignation against her (Mk. 14:4). They slept while Jesus prayed (Lk. 9:32). They fled at the time of His arrest (Matt. 26:56). They refused to believe the testimony about His resurrection (Mk. 16:11). At the time Jesus gave them the Great Commission, some still doubted (Matt. 28:17).

Please consider these words of Scripture: **"And it came to pass in those days, that He went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, He called unto Him His disciples: and of them He chose twelve, whom also He named apostles"** (Lk. 6:12-13).

The apostles of Jesus were carefully chosen after a night of prayer. He selected men who were quite ordinary. In fact, they were just like us. We can identify with their lives. We can do many of the things they did, and we can also understand their fears and frustrations.

But wait! There were also other things which the apostles did. They denied themselves and took up a cross. They left their homes and went into all the world to preach the Gospel. They were constantly in danger, and most died as martyrs. They had thousands of converts and many remarkable answers to prayer. Is it possible that we can do these things too?

Yes we can! Apostolic power came from Jesus. These men would have been total failures on their own. That's why Jesus commanded them not to try it by themselves. He said to **"wait for the promise of the Father"** (Acts 1:4). He promised them: **"But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you . . ."** (Acts 1:8)

This same power is available to us today. **"And now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all**

that we ask or think according to the power that worketh in us. Unto Him be glory in the church . . . (Eph. 3:20-21).

There is One Body

"There is one body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling: One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all . . ." (Eph. 4:4-6).

Thomas Lindsay has written the book **THE CHURCH AND THE MINISTRY IN THE EARLY CENTURIES**. On pages 14-15 he offers a perspective of some early Christians regarding the unity of believers in the church of Jesus Christ.

"The unity of the Christian Church . . . is not confined within the bounds of space and time as merely material entities are. It can be present in many places at the same time, and in such a way that, as Ignatius says, 'Where Jesus Christ is, there is the whole Church.' The congregation at Corinth . . . was not a Body of Christ, for there is but one Body of Christ; not a part of the Body of Christ, for Christ is not divided; but the Body of Christ in its unity and filled with the fulness of His powers. It is in this One Body, present in every Christian society, that our Lord has placed his 'gifts' or charismata . . .

The Christians of the early centuries clung to this thought, and we have a long series of writers, from Victor of Rome, in the second century, down to Clement of Alexandria and Origen, who tell us that the whole Church of the redeemed with Christ and the angels, is present in the public worship of the individual congregation. The promise of the Master that where two or three were gathered together in His Name there would He be in the midst of them, was placed side by side with the thought in the Epistle to the Hebrews that believers are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses; and the combination suggested that in the simplest action of the smallest Christian

fellowship there was the presence and the power of the whole Church of Christ . . . "

The thoughts of these early disciples are worthy of serious study and contemplation. Christian worship is indeed a profound experience. Consider, for example, the contrast between Jewish worship, and Christian worship, described in Hebrews 12:18-24. In this passage we are reminded that the ancient Hebrews gathered to worship before Mt. Sinai. They were summoned by the sound of the trumpet to a mountain that quaked, and burned with fire. Anyone who dared to touch that mountain, whether man or beast, was stoned or thrust through with a spear. Even Moses was so terrified by the sight that he did exceedingly quake and fear. As awesome as that experience was, it pales into utter insignificance when compared to Christian worship. The Scriptures continue:

"Ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel" (Heb. 12:22-24).

The next time you meet with your brothers and sisters in Christ to worship God, remember that there is only One Body!

Followers

"Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ"
(1 Cor. 11:1).

The Bible word translated as "followers" is "mimetes", from which we get our English word "mimic". Some versions translate the word as "imitators." Paul used the same word in I Cor. 4:16. In this passage, he considered himself as their spiritual father, and encouraged them to "imitate him" or be his "followers".

What did Paul mean by these words? He had a unique calling as an apostle to the gentiles. Are we to imitate this? Paul was not married. Are we to imitate this? Paul was inspired to write books of the Bible. Are we to imitate this? The answer to these questions is obviously, no! What then did he mean?

Please consider! Paul wanted us to follow him, as he followed Christ. How did Paul follow Christ? The answer is obvious, he followed Him directly. In this regard there can be no misunderstanding. Paul made it crystal clear that He did not have a "second hand" relationship with Christ. He wrote to the Galatians: **"But I certify you brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ"** (Gal. 1:11-12). The focus of Paul's life and ministry was always to please God, and not man. In fact, he said that if he tried to please men, he would not be a servant of Christ (Gal. 1:10). His relationship with Jesus did not come through Peter, James, or John. It did not come through any man. Paul had a personal and direct relationship with Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted all of to have. The ultimate goal of every believer is to be **"followers of God as dear children"** (Eph. 5:1).

It has been correctly stated that God has no

grandchildren. Every child of God must have a personal and direct relationship with their Heavenly Father. Once this is understood, it is possible to do everything "as to the Lord." Please consider these Scriptures:

- **"Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eye service, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God: And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men . . ."** (Col. 3:21-23).

- **"Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord"** (Eph. 5:22).

- **"Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ. Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men"** (Eph. 6:5-7).

- **"But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts"** (I Thess. 2:4).

- **Etc.**

Everyone is familiar with using a pattern. If you are cutting boards according to a pattern, it is important that you always go back to the original pattern as a guide. No matter how careful you try to be, each copy of the original is slightly different. The same principle applies to Christianity. Jesus is our "Original Pattern". Jesus is the "ultimate example" for our lives. Paul endeavored to pattern his life after Jesus. The Corinthians were also to pattern their lives after Jesus, and so are we.

Whatever we do, in word or deed, we are to do it "as to the Lord, and not unto men." The Jewish leaders, for example, commanded the apostles not to preach or teach in the name of Jesus. Peter, and the other apostles, correctly responded:

"We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). So should we!

The Curse of Ritualistic Religion

"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves" (Matt. 23:15).

The degenerative effect of Jewish religion is obvious. Each new generation of converts became progressively worse. When Moses received the Law on Mt. Sinai the people were bad. When Jesus was born they were worse. The first High Priest was bad, and it was downhill from there on out. By the time Jesus was on trial the High Priest was perhaps the most corrupt person in the entire nation. Yet, the religion they espoused, and the rituals they observed, were divinely ordained. These laws, as you know, were not intended to make man righteous. They were a schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ that we might be justified by faith. Worship by rote and ritual is debilitating.

God has always intended to make us free. He even described His own rituals as a prison (Gal. 3:23), weak and beggarly elements which kept us in bondage (Gal. 4:9), shadows and not reality (Co. 2:17), death and not life (II Cor. 3:7). He never intended us to be restricted by ritual forever. He always wanted us to have the freedom to worship Him in Spirit and in truth. He has redeemed us from the curse of the law. He has brought us into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Max Lucado in his book "AND THE ANGELS WERE SILENT", tells the story of Hans Babbling. He lived in Ulm,

PENTECOST

Germany in the sixteenth century. He wanted to fly so he made a pair of wings and ascended the Bavarian Alps. Strong updrafts are common in the region. On that memorable day he amazed his friends by soaring safely to the ground.

When the king came to town the local Bishop wanted to impress him. He prevailed upon Hans for an exhibition of flying. This time, however, they did not ascend the high Alps. They chose instead to fly in the lowlands from the bluffs of the Danube. It was a poor choice. Without the dynamic lift from the mountain breeze, Hans fell like a rock to the river below. The next Sunday the embarrassed Bishop proclaimed from the pulpit that "Man was not meant to fly." Hans put his wings away and never tried to fly again. The Cathedral at Ulm is now empty. Most of its visitors are tourists who have traveled there in an airplane.

It was at about this time that Galileo Galilei devised a thermometer and a telescope. He became intoxicated by the thrill of learning. He challenged the traditional views of the church and espoused the teaching of Copernicus. He believed that the earth revolved around the sun, and not vice versa. On April 12, 1633 he was brought before a church tribunal and forced to kneel down and recant his views. He was sentenced to perpetual imprisonment. He died on Jan. 8, 1642. His church had succeeded in keeping him from ever tasting another breath of fresh air and freedom.

God is not the Author of confusion. He can be trusted to orchestrate and direct the members of His own Body. It is not necessary for finite man to become a Messiah in order for the church to be saved. One Savior is sufficient. Jesus has already promised that the gates of hell will never prevail against His Church.

Solomon said: "Go to the ant . . . consider her ways and be wise" (Prov. 6:6-8). The ant has no "guide, overseer, or ruler" and yet the ant hill is a model of order and design. If

PENTECOST

man should attempt to organize an ant hill, he would only interrupt the flow of God's creative design. Every attempt to create or promote worship by means of rote and ritual, is as unnecessary as attempting to organizing an ant hill.

The Open Church

(Review of the book by James H. Rutz)

If you've ever felt lonely and unimportant in church, there's a good reason: You **are** alone and unimportant.

From 11 to 12 Sunday, you're just another pretty face in the crowd.

Though surrounded by others, you're cut off. Custom walls you off in your own space and silences your voice - except for song or responsive reading.

Surrounded by an audience of trainee mutes, you can find it lonely as a solo trek across Antarctica. After you've eaten all the sled dogs.

The service would be exactly the same without you. You know that. Your impact on it is like an extra gallon of water going over Niagara Falls. This is the way that Rutz begins his challenge to "open the church". He contends that for the first three hundred years of Christianity, there were no church buildings, no pulpits, and no clergy. Therefore the church experienced "open worship, open sharing, and open ministry". "At the weekly get-together, everyone was the star of the show, everyone was needed. Spirits were lifted, problems solved, hurts healed, hearts fed, and the Lord of lords spoke to every soul". Imperial persecution only fanned the flames of evangelism. Everyone felt needed. Everyone was needed.

Then came the "triumph" of Christianity. The Emperor, Constantine, became a "Christian". Money that had been previously used to build temples to pagan deities, was now available to construct the same type of buildings for believers. Pagan priests followed the money trail and "converted" to Christianity. By A.D. 400, 80% of the Roman Empire was "Christian". Even though many of these people knew little or

nothing about Jesus. Christianity was no longer for "activists," now it was for "spectators".

This theological transformation signaled the beginning of the Dark Ages. The "priesthood of believers," was replaced by a "professional priesthood." That which had originally been the responsibility of every Christian, was now relegated to the role of specialists. Rutz believes that our modern concept of sermonizing dates back, not to the Bible, but to John Chrysostom. His name means "golden mouth." This pagan student of rhetoric was the most promising orator in the Empire. When he converted to Christianity he helped change the blunt style of the Hebrew prophet, into Greek oratorical skills. Those who had previously ministered around a kitchen table, now felt inadequate to speak from a professional pulpit. It would be impossible to adequately describe our modern church without frequent references to "clergymen." Archeologists, however, have studied 25,000 Christian documents and fragments from the first three centuries without finding a single reference to a "minister, priest, or pastor."

What would happen to a modern church if the "pastor" were suddenly prevented from performing his duties? In at least one church, it turned out to be a blessing. Chinese Pastor, M.Y. Chan, was singled out for punishment by the Communists. From 1961 to 1979 he was forced to spread buckets of human waste on the fields as fertilizer. His huge prison camp in Kiangsu province, had four main latrine areas. They all drained into one horrendous hell hole where he stood for six to eight hours every day in sludge that was sometimes up to his waist. Because his brethren knew of his suffering, they upheld him daily in prayer. He was not sick one time in over eighteen years. Meanwhile, his church of 300, had grown to 5,000. Chan, now 58, reports churches in twenty locations, each with about a thousand believers. Someone has said that there is nothing so powerful as an idea whose time has come.

Perhaps this is the time for the priesthood of all believers to become a reality, and not just a slogan.

The Body

"For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:13).

When the Soviets overran Romania in 1944, there were only 750 communists in the entire country. By deception and brutality, they proliferated like cockroaches, and Nicolae Ceausescu became the president.

Romanian soil had been called the most fertile in Eastern Europe, but under Ceausescu's evil regime the people were starving. Food staples were strictly rationed and hungry peasants stood in long lines to buy bread laced with saw dust. Government housing was only heated to 50 degrees, and light bulbs bigger than 40 watts were forbidden. Electrical power was intermittent, and many had hot water only once a week.

The Ceausescus', by contrast, lived like kings. When Elena had a birthday, the menu included: "Three kinds of caviar, pate de foie gras, filet mignon, roast beef, baby pork, pork chops and pork loin, venison, roast turkey, Cornish game hens, pheasant, lobster, frogs' legs, smoked salmon, and three kinds of trout."

The spiritual famine, however, was more serious than anything physical. Many church leaders considered that compromise was a reasonable price to pay for survival. Church publications sang the praise of the party, and all activities were cleared by communist officials. True Christianity, it seems, had all but disappeared.

In 1987, Laszlo Tokes became the pastor of the Hungarian Reformed Church in Timisoara. With fundamental faith and evangelical zeal the church grew to five thousand in two short years. New converts were being baptized and

PENTECOST

discipled to Christ, not communism.

In 1989 Tokes granted an interview to a TV station and dared to criticize Ceausescu. These remarks made their way to Radio Free Europe, the BBC, and other Western radio stations.

The government responded by denying Tokes his ration books, and ordering his eviction. His phone was shut off, and he was forbidden to talk with relatives and friends. He was also attacked and beaten.

On Sunday, Dec. 10, 1989, Tokes announced to the congregation that he had rejected the eviction notice and would be taken by force on the following Friday. Five days later, the secret police arrived to take Laszlo. Thousands of people gathered as a human shield. They were not only his parishioners, but representatives from all denominations. When night descended the people lit candles. Some began to sing the patriotic "Awake Romania" which had been banned by the communists.

Before dawn on Dec. 17th, the police finally made their move. The door was broken down and a beaten and bleeding Laszlo Tokes was taken away in the darkness.

With their pastor gone, the people moved to the central square which bristled with tanks, troops and attack dogs. The communists responded with brute force. They opened fire on the unarmed protestors. Hundreds died, but there was no turning back, and no middle ground. In a few hours, Ceausescu was dead and Romania was free.

The catalyst that brought this dramatic change was the church. It was not one denomination, but One Body. For one blessed moment in time, racial, social, and religious differences were sublimated to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Such unity did not come from human wisdom and the strategy of men. Please consider that it just might have come from God.

PENTECOST

Adapted from THE BODY, by Charles Colson

Loose Him

When Lazarus was raised from the dead he was “bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. (John 11:44). How does a man bound hand and foot “come forth” from the grave. Did he hop? Did he roll out of the tomb? Did the power of God cause him to levitate and float like a cloud?

The Scriptures do not say how Lazarus came forth from the tomb, but they are crystal clear that Jesus commanded: “Loose him, and let him go.”

Lazarus had been dead for four days. Within a few minutes after death we are told that brain tissue is “irreversibly” destroyed. Shortly thereafter the corrupting influence of death would permeate every tissue of the body. Since Lazarus had been dead four days, Martha bluntly said: “he stinketh.”

Lazarus, however, had been given new life by God. The creative power that brought Adam forth from the dust made a new man out of him. It is logical to assume that Lazarus was recreated in good condition. His resurrected body did not have disease or infection. His vision and hearing were perfect. He did not have aches and pains or digestive trouble. Yet, even though he had perfect vision he could not see anything, because his face was covered over with a napkin. His hearing was impaired by the wrappings of death. He had almost no mobility because he was bound hand and foot like a mummy. Jesus said: “Loose him and let him go”.

The application of this story to our modern world is painfully obvious. The church of our Lord Jesus Christ has also been given new life. We are new creations in Christ Jesus. We have been given eyes to see and ears to hear. We have the capacity to run and not grow weary and walk and not faint. Unfortunately, however, many are wrapped in the

traditions of death. It is sad to contemplate a freshly created Adam with his vision is restricted, his ears are covered, and his movement curtailed. Why not loose him and let him go?

In 1973 Ralph Neighbour published his book “The Seven Last Words of the Church”. Those words were: “We never tried it that way before”. Neighbour argued that every major industry needed a Research and Development staff to stay on the cutting edge of societal need and change. He did not want to change the Bible or alter any doctrine of Christianity, he only wanted to change traditions. He wanted the church to be a redemptive fellowship rather than a religious equivalent of secular promotion.

Chapter 8 of his book is titled: “The Dark Night of the Soul”. In this chapter he bared his soul with the prayer that others might profit from his discouragement. He wrote: “How can I describe the agony of walking in the fields at a nearby ranch, begging God to let me die, or the times driving around in my car when only my deep love for my family kept me from driving into a concrete wall? It seemed as though all the preparations of my life had led me to that moment when I would pastor our experimental church. Then it all came crashing in. There seemed to be no clear answer to my constant cry, of ‘Why, God, why’?”

In a matter of a few minutes Lazarus was free from his grave clothes. In only a very brief time he went from being bound hand and foot to a free range of movement. Unfortunately, the church fears such freedom. We are living B.C. lives in an A.D. world. We assume that our modern rituals are as binding as Mosaic Law, and that tampering with tradition will summon the wrath of God.

Exactly the reverse is true. We are no longer held prisoner by law, we are free. The wind blows where it wants to. We hear it’s sound but cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. This is the way people are who are born of

PENTECOST

the Spirit. Every day is a new adventure as we follow in the footsteps of our risen Lord.

Once Lazarus was free from his grave clothes, he could go back home and help his family. He could become a positive influence upon society. He could care for widows and orphans and make the world a better place in which to live.

When the church is loosed from its grave clothes, we can do the same!

PENTECOST

We dream of a church . . .

- Where Jesus is the focus.
- Where praise is a way of life.
- Where prayers are not merely formalities.
- Where the power of God is seen and not just talked about.
- Where meetings prepare the saints to minister.
- Where everyone has a ministry.
- Where others are attracted to Christ by the lives of believers.
- Where the Holy Spirit is welcomed as a source of guidance and strength.
- Where love never fails.
- Where "works" and "grace" are both esteemed.
- Where assurance does not lead to arrogance.
- Where confidence is not a source of pride.
- Where love is more important than knowledge.
- Where people judge themselves more readily than others.
- Where every member is of value.
- Where everyone is listened to and encouraged.
- Where leaders are servants.
- Where people can disagree without being disagreeable.
- Where intelligent and spiritual people can see the same verse differently.
- Where people are taught how to study more than what to believe.
- Where family life is encouraged and helped by church activities.
- Where orphans and widows are honored.
- Where needy and hungry people are never turned away.
- Where all are striving for the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

(Adapted from the thoughts of Bruce Rodda and the

A Famous Prayer

Joe Wright, minister of the Central Christian Church in Wichita, ignited a storm of protest by offering this prayer before Kansas legislators.

“Heavenly Father, we come before You today to ask Your forgiveness and seek your direction and guidance. We know Your word says “Woe to those who call evil good,” but that’s what we’ve done.

We have lost our spiritual equilibrium and inverted our values. We have worshiped other gods and called it multi-culturalism.

We have endorsed perversion, and called it an alternative lifestyle.

We have exploited the poor and called it the lottery.

We have neglected the needy and called it self preservation.

We have rewarded laziness and called it welfare.

We have killed our unborn and called in choice.

We have shot abortionists and called it justifiable.

We have neglected to discipline our children and called it building self esteem.

We have abused power and called it political savvy.

We have polluted the air with profanity and pornography and called it freedom of expression/

We have ridiculed the time-honored values of our forefathers and called it enlightenment.

Search us, O God, and know our hearts today. Try us and see if there be some wicked way in us. Cleanse us from every sin and set us free.

Guide and bless these men and women who have been sent here by the people of Kansas, and who have been ordained by You to govern this great state. Grant them Hour

wisdom to rule, and may their decisions direct us to the center of your will. I ask it in the name of Your Son, the Living Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen! "

Rep. Delbert Gross, a Democrat from Hays, went to the microphone and said: "I have never heard in 10 years as divisive, sanctimonious, self-serving, self-righteous and overbearing a prayer as I have heard this morning. The man of the cloth who spoke this morning did this body a disservice."

Reps. David Haley, from Kansas City, and Sabrina Standifer from Wichita, both Democrats, followed Gross to the microphone and said: "I took umbrage at the prayer we had to suffer through this morning." That pastor "can do that in his own church, where maybe they worship snakes," but it wasn't appropriate in the Kansas House. "It was blasphemous and it was ignorant."

censoring prayer as the answer to our problems."Gross and Haley said they were upset that the prayer equated laziness with welfare and suggested that tolerance of other creeds and cultures was the same as worshiping false gods.

The comments of these Democrats are now a part of the House's public record. None of the Republicans went to the microphone, but Rep. Tony Powell, a Wichita Republican who worships with the Central Christian Church said: "I'm glad to see our liberal friends advocate

(Condensed from releases by the Associated Press, and Harris News Service)

A City Upon A Hill

John Winthrop was the first governor of Massachusetts. He was born in Groton, England, on Jan. 22, 1588, and was forty-two years old when he came to America. On June 8, 1630 he saw New England for the first time. His heart and mind overflowed with emotion. In a rush of inspiration he went to his writing box, selected paper and quill, and wrote a document which ranks in importance with the Mayflower Compact. The earlier pilgrims wrote about a government under God, and Winthrop was about to explain why such a concept would work. He titled his thoughts: A MODEL OF CHRISTIAN CHARITY. Here are some of his thoughts:

"This love among Christians is a real thing, not imaginary . . . as absolutely necessary to the (well) being of the Body of Christ, as sinews and other ligaments of a natural body are to the (well) being of that body . . . We are a company, professing ourselves fellow members of Christ (and thus) we ought to account ourselves knit together by this bond of love . . .

Thus stands the cause between God and us: we are entered into covenant with Him for this work. We have taken out a Commission; the Lord hath given us leave to draw our own articles . . . If the Lord shall please to hear us, and bring us in peace to the place we desire, then hath He ratified this Covenant and sealed or Commission, (and) will expect a strict performance of the Articles contained in it. But if we shall neglect the observance of these Articles . . . the Lord will surely break out in wrath against us.

Now the only way to avoid this shipwreck and to provide for our posterity, is to follow the counsel of Micah, to do justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with our God. For this end, we must be knit together in this work as one man . . . We

JULY 4TH

must hold a familiar commerce together in all meekness, gentleness, patience, and liberality. We must delight in each other, make one another's condition our own, rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together, always having before our eyes our Commission and Community in this work, as members of the same body. So shall we keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace . . .

We shall find that the God of Israel is among us, when ten of us shall be able to resist a thousand of our enemies, when He shall make us a praise and glory, that men of succeeding plantations shall say, 'THE LORD MAKE IT LIKE THAT OF NEW ENGLAND.' FOR WE MUST CONSIDER THAT WE SHALL BE AS A CITY UPON A HILL . . .

It is obvious that the government envisioned by our forefathers was to be different from those tyrannies from which they fled. At the same time it was to be "One Nation Under God", it was also to be "Of the people, by the people, and for the people". Winthrop believed that the fabric of this society would be held together by Christian love. Love in this new government would be like sinews and ligaments, holding the body politic together.

He felt that to abandon love would be to summon the wrath of God. The divine prescription to avoid this tragedy was found in the words of Micah the Prophet: "to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God".

Jesus said that a city set upon a hill could not be hid. John Winthrop applied these words to America. He believed that a loving, caring, society would be so radical and different in the world, that it would merit the admiration of people everywhere. Let us live in such a way that his words will come true.

(Adapted from THE LIGHT AND THE GLORY, pages 162-163)

JULY 4TH

In God We Trust

Our Puritan forefathers were deeply religious. When they arrived in America in November 1620, they signed the Mayflower Compact stating they had come "For the Glory of God, and the advancement of the Christian Faith".

The first charter of Massachusetts, dated March 1629, reflected their desire to evangelize the natives. It stated their intentions to "wynn and incite the natives . . . to the knowledge and obedience of the onlie true God and Savior of mankinde, and the Christian fayth . . ."

Their first law regarding public education was enacted in Massachusetts in 1642. It was called the "Old Deluder Satan Law." It was designed to make children literate so they could read the Bible. The law began: "It being one chiefe project of that old deluder, Sathan, to keepe men from the knowledge of the scriptures, as in former time . . ." The law then ordered that every community with fifty householders have a teacher, and every one with one hundred householders have a grammar school. Their ancestors, in the old world, did not read the Scriptures. American schools were specifically designed to correct this problem.

The first college in America was Harvard College, also founded in Massachusetts. It was established in less than ten years after the Puritans arrived in America. The official motto of Harvard was "For Christ and the Church."

One hundred and six of the first one hundred and eight colleges in America were founded on the Christian faith.

Samuel Adams has been called "The Father of the American Revolution." He wrote that Christian rights "may be best understood by reading and carefully studying the institutes of the great Law Giver and Head of the Christian Church, which are to be found clearly written and promulgated

in the New Testament".

George Washington, our first president, is also known as the Father of our country. He considered it impossible to rightly govern the people without God and the Bible.

The Pennsylvania constitution required legislators to make the following declaration before taking his seat: "I do believe in one God, the Creator and Governour of the universe, the rewarder of the good and the punisher of the wicked, and I do acknowledge the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be given by Divine Inspiration". Other states had similar requirements.

Our elected leaders take their oath of office with their hand upon the Holy Bible.

Witnesses in court swear to tell the truth with their hand upon the Holy Bible.

The first Thanksgiving proclamation was set apart "as a day of Public Humiliation, Fasting, and Prayer".

Noah Webster has been called "America's Schoolmaster". He wrote his first speller in the 1780s. Webster wrote: "In my view, the Christian religion is the most important and one of the first things in which all children under a free government, ought to be instructed . . ."

America's most famous school book was McGuffey's Reader. Its author, William Holmes McGuffey wrote: "From no source has the author drawn more copiously than from the Sacred Scriptures".

On November 13, 1861, the Rev. M. R. Watkinson wrote to Treasury Secretary Salmon P. Chase proposing that American money be inscribed with the motto "In God We Trust." This motto became official with the Act of March 3, 1865.

God is still God! He is still worthy of our trust! LET'S TRUST HIM!

Prayer for the Persecuted Church

Nina Shea is a human rights lawyer with Freedom House. Her book "IN THE LION'S DEN" is a wake up call about Christian martyrs in our own generation. She writes:

"Millions of American Christians pray in their churches each week, oblivious to the fact that Christians in many parts of the world suffer brutal torture, arrest, imprisonment and even death - their homes and communities laid waste - for no other reason than that they are Christians. The shocking untold story of our time is that more Christians have died this century simply for being Christians than in the first 19 centuries after the birth of Christ. They have been persecuted and martyred before an unknowing, indifferent world and a largely silent Christian community".

In January 1996 the National Association of Evangelicals released a "Statement of Conscience" about the persecuted church. September 29, 1996 was designated as an "International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church".

Not only are many major denominations waking up to the persecution of Christians, politicians are at least giving lip service to it too. On Sept. 17, 1996 the U.S. Senate officially recognized the problem under Senate Concurrent Resolution 71. On Sept. 24, 1996 House Resolution 515 accomplished a similar purpose.

THE BIBLE PREDICTS PERSECUTION

Jesus not only warned His disciples that they would be

DAY OF PRAYER FOR PERSECUTED CHURCH

persecuted, He predicted that the time would come when those who put them to death would think they were doing service to God (John 16:2). Paul went so far as to write that all who live godly in Christ Jesus would suffer persecution (2 Tim. 3:12). Here are some Scriptures to get you started in your personal study.

- Matt. 5:10-12; 10:13-28; 10:34-39; 24:9-10
- Mark 10:29,30; 10:39,40; 13:9-13
- Luke 6:22,23; 6:26-30; 12:49-53
- John 14:27; 15:189-21; 16:1-4; 16:33; 17:14-18
- Acts 7:54-60; 8:3,4; 9:16; 14:22; 20:23,24; 21:11
- Rom. 5:3; 8:18; 8:35,36; 12:9-21
- 1 Corinthians 4:9-13; 15:30-32
- 2 Corinthians 1:3-11; 4:10,11; 4:16-18; 6:4,9; 11:23-228; 12:9,10
- Colossians 1:24
- 1 Thess. 2:14-16; 3:3,4
- 2 Thess. 1:4-6
- 2 Tim. 1:8, 12; 2:12; 3:12; 4:5
- Hebrews 10:32-39; 12:1-17; 13:13; (See also 2:9,10,18; 5:7-9)
- James 1:2-4; 1:12-15
- 1 Peter 2:18-23; 3:13-18; 4:1-19; 5:6-10
- 1 John 3:13
- Revelation 1:9; 2:10; 6:9-11; 12:13; 13:7,15; 17:14; 18:24; 19:2
- All of the Apostles died as martyrs with the exception of John and Judas Iscariot.

HISTORY CONFIRMS PERSECUTION

The initial persecution of Christians was instigated by the Jews. The stoning of Stephen and the persecution by Saul of Tarsus are classic examples. Later, however, the

DAY OF PRAYER FOR PERSECUTED CHURCH

Emperors of Rome opposed Christianity as a matter of government policy.

- **Nero** put Christians to death the thousands, including Paul and Peter.
- **Domitian** continued to persecute Christians. John was banished to the Island of Patmos during his reign.
- **Trajan** felt he had to oppose Christianity in order to uphold Roman Law. During his reign Ignatius was taken to Rome and thrown to the wild beasts.
- **Hadrian** was moderate in his persecution of Christians. During his reign Christianity grew in numbers, wealth, and social influence.
- **Antonius Pius** was said to have favored Christianity but executed them as a matter of law. Under his reign Polycarp suffered martyrdom.
- **Marcus Aurelius**, did not just uphold the law, but did so vigorously and encouraged the persecution of Christians. Thousands were put to death during his reign, including Justin Martyr.
- **Septimius Severus** also put thousands to death. The persecution was particularly severe in Egypt and North Africa where martyrs died daily from beheading or crucifixion. Leonidas, the father of Origen, died under his reign.
- **Maximin** also put many prominent Christian leaders to death, but Origen escaped.
- **Decius** did not just persecute believers but did everything within his power to completely exterminate Christianity.
- **Valerian** was even more severe than Decius. Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage died under his reign.
- **Diocletian** was responsible for the last and most severe Imperial persecution. In 303 A.D. he burned what he believed to be the last Bible and wrote

DAY OF PRAYER FOR PERSECUTED CHURCH

“Extincto Nomene Christianorum.” He believe He had brought to extinction the name of Christ. He was wrong!

The next Emperor was **Constantine** who professed to be a Christian. Obviously, he stopped the government from persecuting believers. One of his first official acts was to commission Eusebius, the Bishop of Caesarea, to prepare fifty Bibles for the instruction of the church.

FOXES CHRISTIAN MARTYRS OF THE WORLD

John Foxe was born in 1517 and died in 1587. His history of Christian martyrs is a classic. It not only details the death of the apostles and the Imperial persecution of Rome, it also covers persecution during the Dark Ages. While any reputable history will tell of Christian martyrs, this classic book should be familiar to all believers.

MARTYR'S TODAY

Statisticians compute that when the church began there were only 250 million people on earth. Today there are over 6 billion people on the planet. There are more believers now, than there were people then.

This helps us to understand the shocking statement of Nina Shea that *“More Christians have died this century simply for being Christians than in the first 19 centuries after the birth of Christ.”*

Not only have most of these faithful martyrs died before an uncaring world, but also an uncaring church. The Scriptures command that we **“Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body”** (Heb.

DAY OF PRAYER FOR PERSECUTED CHURCH

13:3).

Fortunately, a growing number of Christians are waking up to the reality of persecution. Here are a few resources that can help you stay informed.

- IDOP (International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church) 1-888- LETS PRAY (1-888-538-7772) Web site: www.persecutedchurch.org
- Voice of the Martyrs, P.O. Box 443, Bartlesville, Ok. 74005-0443. Ph. (918) 337-8014.
- World Evangelical Fellowship, Ph. (630) 668-0440.
- Open Doors with Bro. Andrew, Ph. (800) 788-5574.

In addition to the Bible, read THEIR BLOOD CRIES OUT by Paul Marshall and Lela Gilbert.; IN THE LION'S DEN by Nina Shea; MARTYRS, edited by Susan Bergman; THE OVERCOMERS by Richard Wurmbrand; OPERATION WORLD by Patrick Johnstone; BOUND TO BE FREE compiled by John Pit; SECRETS TO SPIRITUAL SUCCESS by Paul Estabrooks; RWANDA, and THE CHURCH IN CHINA by Carl Lawrence; and RELIGIOUS LIBERTY by Daniel Ho.

Let us **“Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body”** (Heb. 13:3).

A Lesson From F. Kefa Sempangi

F. Kefa Sempangi founded and pastored the 14,000 member Redeemed Church of Uganda, which became a target of Idi Amin's persecution. Leaders from Libya and Saudi Arabia contributed to the extermination of Christianity and attempted to turn Uganda into a Muslim state. Colonel Qadhafi's Libya alone contributed 30 million dollars. The money came from the Jihad, or "Holy Land" fund.

In the last three months of 1972 over 90,000 perished. Ultimately the number of dead would surpass 300,000. Death became so common that one day Bro. Sempangi saw soldiers kicking a man to death with a casual arrogance. No one seemed to notice or care. Public workers went on mowing, golfers played on to the next hole, and young people walked on down the street.

So many thousand died that often their bodies were strewn along the street unattended for days. No one could be certain who would be next. Each greeting and each farewell held a special significance. You never knew if you would see your friends alive again.

One day Bro. Sempangi went calling on the Okelo family. They had just visited his church. He found their plush carpet covered with blood and excrement. Broken teeth and eyes pulled from their sockets were scattered throughout the room. On a table in the center of the room were three human tongues laid out in a row, as if on public display. The only survivor was a 12 year old boy who had escaped the soldiers by hiding under a bed.

Ultimately they came for Bro. Sempangi himself. In was Easter Sunday 1973 when five Nubian assassins followed

him home from church. Their faces were scarred with the distinctive tribal cuttings of the Kawa tribe. Through a face twisted by hatred their leader said, "We are going to kill you . . . if you have something to say, say it before you die".

Trembling with fear the Holy Spirit somehow emboldened him to say: "I do not need to plead my own cause, I am a dead man already. My life is dead and hidden in Christ. It is your lives that are in danger, you are dead in your sins. I will pray to God that after you have killed me, He will spare you from eternal destruction".

Shocked and surprised by these words the assassins not only spared his life but promised to guarantee his safety. After a series of escapes by the narrowest of margins, Kefa and his family fled to America where he completed a seminary degree and became director of the Africa Foundation, Inc.

After his first year in America Bro. Sempangi noticed a difference in his Bible study. In Uganda he read his Bible without time for argument, discrepancies or doubt. In the security of his new life, however, he was able to have the luxury of analyzing and speculating about the Bible. He came to enjoy abstract theological discussions and found them intellectually refreshing.

The biggest change, however, came in his prayer life. *"In Uganda," he said, "I had prayed with a deep sense of urgency. I refused to leave my knees until I was certain I had been in the presence of the resurrected Christ. It was not just the gift I needed. I need to see the Giver. I needed to know that the God of orphans and widows, the God of the helpless, heard my prayers. Now, after a year in Philadelphia, the urgency was gone. When I prayed publicly I was more concerned to be theologically correct than to be in God's presence. Even in private my prayers were no longer the helpless cries of a child. They were spiritual tranquilizers, thoughts that made no contact with anything outside of*

DAY OF PRAYER FOR PERSECUTED CHURCH

themselves . . . “

The recognition of this dangerous lukewarmness caused Kefa Sempangi to fall to his knees and ask forgiveness for his sin of unbelief. The dangers of materialism are in some aspects more threatening to the Christian life than dangers of overt persecution. The cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches can choke the Word so that it becomes unfruitful.

This is a lesson we can learn from F. Kefa Sempangi.
(Adapted from A DISTANT GRIEF, by F. Kefa Sempangi)

DAY OF PRAYER FOR PERSECUTED CHURCH

Rwanda

(A review of the book RWANDA by Carl Lawrence)

A new round of killing in Rwanda began April 6, 1994. President Habyarimana of Rwanda was returning from a peace conference in neighboring Tanzania. Suddenly, his plane was blasted from the sky by a terrorist rocket. The President of Burundi was also on board.

The short stocky Hutus composed 84% of the population in Rwanda. They suffered a long history of oppression by the Tutsi minority. In 1959 the Hutus sparked the first of many revolts. Thousands died and 160,000 Tutsis fled to neighboring countries. By means of a U.N. sponsored election with “one man, one vote” the Hutus won a resounding victory. The Hutu regime, however, was a governmental disaster. Now, however, they seized on the death of their president as another excuse for revenge against the hated Tutsis.

Before his death, President Habyarimana had formed an elite group of well trained extremists known as the Presidential Guard. They began the massacre with cold blooded efficiency. Ten Belgian peace keepers under U.N. supervision called their military commander and asked what to do. They were told to return to their barracks, not to fight, and to surrender their weapons. The Hutu militia made quick work of the unarmed soldiers. First, they took machetes and hacked their Achilles tendons. Then, while the wounded men were writing on the ground, they hacked them to pieces.

This set the stage for a bloodbath “beyond journalism’s reach”. Tutsi’s who had money could die quickly with a bullet in the brain. Those without money were hacked to death for “free”. In previous times church buildings had been recognized as a safe haven. This time, however, there was no refuge

DAY OF PRAYER FOR PERSECUTED CHURCH

anywhere. Men, women, and children were slaughtered indiscriminately.

The militia was made up of young rebels, like Mao's Red Guard, or Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge. It is remarkable that men so young were capable of such unspeakable atrocities. Often the taller Tutsis had their legs hacked off before being thrown into the river to drown. The laughing Hutus would shout, "now you have been brought down to our size".

After two days the rivers were literally blocked with bodies. Thirty-six thousand were buried in one mass grave. Parts of Lake Victoria are still polluted by the carnage. Gary Haugen, a U.N. investigator, wrote in Christianity Today that the slaughter was not the work of a few crazed men, but rather it was done by countless ordinary individuals - "a school principal, a farmer, a merchant, a doctor, a magistrate".

Carl Lawrence observed that 80% of the people of Rwanda claimed to be Christians. He then struggled with the horrible thought that Christians were killing Christians. He concluded, however, that such was not the case. There is a difference between wheat and tares, and between true Christians and those who merely profess to be Christians. "No", he wrote, "true believers did not kill fellow Christians".

Illustrative of these faithful martyrs is the story of the militia calling a church of two hundred outside of their house of worship. When the Hutus were ordered to step out and be saved, they refused to do so. The young Hutu pastor bravely announced, "We are neither Hutu or Tusi, we are Christian. We are all brothers in the Lord Jesus Christ." With that a holy silence was shattered by the sound of machine guns and the horrible hacking of blood stained machetes. Then there was silence again. The church had given a powerful and final message.

Bro. Lawrence penned these poignant words as his interviews came to a close: "*Dear God, let it be. I cannot carry*

DAY OF PRAYER FOR PERSECUTED CHURCH

the memories without knowing that somehow I made a difference in someone's life. Even one. Even one would be worth it. For even one you died. I wonder how many people you touched with just a glance, a simple touch of souls? I wonder how many remembered the life and love they saw in your eyes while on the cross and turned to you years later in a sweat-soaked bed, their sleep plagued by dreams of the Man they crucified? Dear God, let it be . . . "

Out of Prison

“**Out of prison he cometh to reign**” (Eccl. 4:14).

The inspired writer of Ecclesiastes observed that sometimes a person can come directly out of prison to a position of power. Please consider:

- **Joseph** came out of prison to become a ruler in Egypt (Gen. 40 - 41).
- **Moses** came from obscurity to power. Not only was he considered a criminal in Egypt, he was also a shepherd. Every shepherd was considered an abomination to the Egyptians (Gen. 46:34). Moses, however, came directly from his prison of prejudice and obscurity to challenge the pharaoh and lead the Hebrew nation.
- **David** cried out in Ps. 142:7 for God to deliver him from prison. He was so beset and hounded by King Saul that he considered himself a prisoner. God answered that prayer and David became the king.
- **Jehoiachin** was released from prison and promoted to a seat of honor higher than the other kings who were with him in Babylon. (2 Kings 25:27-30)..
- **Jeremiah** also came from prison to power. He was let down by cords into a dungeon and sank in the mire. The mire was so deep that when he was lifted up they put rotten rags and worn out clothes under his arms. He went directly from that horrible dungeon to the honor of speaking the word of God to King Zedekiah (Jeremiah 38).
- **Ezekiel** received his prophetic visions while in a land of captivity.
- **Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego** were promoted from the fiery furnace to positions of power (Dan. 3:30).
- **Daniel** was delivered from the lion's den to a position

of honour and prosperity (Dan. 6).

- The **apostles** were released from prison that they might preach (Acts 5:19-21).
- **Peter** was released from prison by an angel (Acts 12:3-19). His name appears first in each list of the apostles.
- The martyred **Paul** went directly from prison to receive the crown of righteousness (2 Tim. 4:7-8).
- **John** received the Revelation while a prisoner on the Isle of Patmos.
- **Jesus** preached to the spirits in prison (1 Peter 3:19).
- **Millions of Christian martyrs** went to prison rather than deny their faith.
- **William Tyndale** was prisoner when he was burned at the stake for translating the Bible into the English language.
- **Martin Luther** was a prisoner in Wartburg Castle when he translated the Bible into German.
- **John Bunyan** was in prison when he wrote “Pilgrim’s Progress.”
- The **pilgrims** came from prison and persecution to colonize America.
- **Anne Frank** wrote her famous diary in prison.
- **Church Colson** came out of prison to become a prominent Christian leader.
- **Alexander Solzhenitsyn** honed his writing genius in a Soviet prison.
- **Nelson Mandela** came out of prison to become the president of South Africa.
- **Vaclav Havel** came out of prison to be the President of the Czech Republic.
- **Frederick Chiluba** came out of prison to become the President of Zambia.
- Jesus pictured Judgement Day as a time when He would say: “**I was in prison and you came unto me**”

DAY OF PRAYER FOR PERSECUTED CHURCH

(Matt. 25:36).

- The Scriptures teach: “**Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity as being also in the body**” (Heb. 13:3).
- Isaiah predicted that **Jesus** would be taken from prison and judgment to be cut off out of the land of the living (Is. 53:8). Jesus is now the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.
- **Jesus came to proclaim freedom to the prisoners** (Luke 4:18-19).
- Jesus said: “**If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed**” (John 8:36).

DAY OF PRAYER FOR PERSECUTED CHURCH

Two Letters

Trajan became the Emperor of Rome in A.D. 98. Shortly thereafter he conferred the government of the province of Bithynia to his ingenious and celebrated friend Pliny. Severe edicts against Christians had been issued by previous Emperors and Pliny seemed hesitant to carry them out without first consulting the Caesar himself.

The Scriptures command that we “Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body” (Heb. 13:2). Perhaps reading these letters will help us to obey the Bible and remember those who are suffering for the cause of Christ. They may be out of sight, but may they never be out of our minds.

Letter # 1 - “C. Pliny, to the Emperor Trajan.”

C. Pliny, to the Emperor Trajan, wishes health. Sire! It is customary with me to consult you upon every doubtful occasion; for where my own judgment hesitates, who is more competent to direct me than yourself, or to instruct me when uninformed? I never had occasion to be present at any examination of the Christians before I came into this province; I am therefore ignorant to what extent it is usual to inflict punishment or urge prosecution. I have also hesitated whether there should not be some distinction made between the young and the old, the tender and the robust; whether pardon should not be offered to the penitent, or whether the guilt of an avowed profession of Christianity can be expiated by the most unequivocal retraction - whether the profession itself is to be regarded as a crime, however innocent in other respects the professor may be; or whether the crimes attacked to name, must be proved before they are made liable to punishment.

DAY OF PRAYER FOR PERSECUTED CHURCH

In the mean time, the method I have hitherto observed with the Christians, who have been accused of such, is as follows. I interrogated them - Are you Christians? If they avowed it, I put the same question to them the second, and a third time, threatening them with punishment decreed by the law; if they still persisted, I ordered them to be immediately executed; for of this I had no doubt, whatever was the nature of their religion, that such perverseness and inflexible obstinacy certainly deserved punishment. Some that were afflicted with this madness, on account of their privileges as Roman citizens, I reserved to be sent to Rome, to be referred in your tribunal.

In the discussion of this matter, accusations multiplying, a diversity of cases occurred. A schedule of names was sent me by an unknown accuser, but when I cited the persons before me, many denied the fact that they were or ever had been Christians: and they repeated after me an invocation to the gods, and of your image, which for this purpose I had ordered to be brought with the statues of the other deities. They performed sacred rites with wine frankincense, and execrated Christ, none of which things, I am assured, a real Christ can ever be compelled to do. These, therefore, I thought proper to discharge. Others, named by an informed, at first acknowledged themselves Christians, and then denied it, declaring that though they had been Christians, they had renounced their profession, some three years ago, other still longer, and some even twenty years ago. All these worshipped your image and the statues of the gods, and at the same time execrated Christ.

And this was the account which they gave me of the nature of the religion they once had professed, whether it deserves the name of crime or error; namely, that they were accustomed on a stated day to assemble before sunrise, and to join together in singing hymns to Christ as to a deity; binding

DAY OF PRAYER FOR PERSECUTED CHURCH

themselves as with a solemn oath not to commit any kind of wickedness; to be guilty neither of theft, robbery, nor adultery; never to break a promise, or to keep back a deposit when called upon. Their worship being concluded, it was their custom to separate, and meet together again for a repast, promiscuous indeed, and without any distinction of rank or sex, but perfectly harmless; and even from this they desisted, since the publication of my edict, in which, agreeably, to your orders, I forbade any societies of that sort.

For further information, I thought it necessary, in order to come at the truth, to put to the torture two females who were called deaconesses. But I could extort from them nothing except the acknowledgment of an excessive and depraved superstition; and, therefore, desisting from further investigation, I determined to consult you, for the number of culprits is so great as to call forth the most serious deliberation.

Information is pouring in against multitudes of every age, of all orders, and of both sexes; and more will be impeached; for the contagion of this superstition has spread not only through cities, but villages also, and even reached the farm houses. I am of the opinion, nevertheless, that it may be checked, and the success of my endeavors hitherto forbids despondency; for the temples, once almost desolate, begin to be again frequented - the sacred solemnities, which had for some time been intermitted, are not attended afresh, and the sacrificial victims, which once could scarcely find a purchaser, now obtain a brisk sale. When I infer, that many might be reclaimed, were the hope of pardon, on their repentance, absolutely confirmed.

Letter # 2 - "Trajan to Pliny"

My Dear Pliny,

You have done perfectly right in managing as you have,

DAY OF PRAYER FOR PERSECUTED CHURCH

the matters which relate to the impeachment of the Christians. No one general rule can be laid down which will apply to all cases. These people are not to be hunted up by informers; but if accused and convicted, let them be executed; yet with this restriction, that if any renounce the profession of Christianity, and give proof of it by offering supplications to our gods, however suspicious their past conduct may have been, they shall be pardoned on their repentance. But anonymous accusations should never be attended to, since it would be establishing a precedent of the worst kind, and altogether inconsistent with the maxims of my government.

Taken from "The Gospel Restored," by Walter Scott, Cincinnati 1836

THANKSGIVING

Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving is a learned behavior. Adam and Eve were placed in a paradise, but they didn't appreciate it. Apparently, they were not thankful even after they were driven out of Eden. Paul specifically stated that the patriarchs knew God, but did not glorify Him as God, "neither were they thankful" (Rom. 1:21).

The word "thanksgiving" is not found in the Bible until the time of Moses. With reference to the law of the sacrifice of peace offerings, Moses wrote:

"If he offer it for a thanksgiving, then he shall offer with the sacrifice of thanksgiving unleavened cakes mingled with oil . . ." (Lev. 7:12).

The point is, the people of God were apparently not thankful until they were commanded to be. They had to be trained. Even though the law commanded the people to be thankful, there are not many references to thanksgiving until the time of David. For your information:

- The first use of "thank" in the Bible is - I Chron. 16:4
- " " "thanked" - II Sam. 14:22
- " " "thankful" - Ps. 100:4
- " " "thankfulness" - Acts 24:3
- " " "thanks" - II Sam. 22:50
- " " "thanksgiving" - Lev. 7:12
- " " "thanksgivings" - Neh. 12:27
- " " "thankworthy" - I Pet. 2:19

All educated people today know that the world is round. We know that the earth revolves around the sun and that it is possible to place man made satellites in orbit. Our ancestors, however, did not have this knowledge.

It now seems possible, if not probable, that men before Moses went through the motions of worship without the foundation of thanksgiving and praise. There are many

THANKSGIVING

references to altars and sacrifices during the age of the patriarchs. Cain and Abel built altars and brought sacrifices and offerings unto the Lord. This was also true of Noah, Job, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, etc.

The Hebrew word for "thank" is "yaw-daw." It comes from the root "yawd," which refers to an open hand. The ancients worshiped and thanked God with outstretched hands. This is the same word that is translated as "praise" in the Bible.

When Leah gave birth to her fourth child, she said: "Now will I praise the Lord, and she called his name Judah (Gen. 29:35.) It is interesting, if not significant, to note that Jesus came from the tribe of Judah.

We are blessed to live in the age of the Spirit. John the Baptist was as great as any prophet ever born of woman, but today, even the least in the Kingdom is greater than John. Today, our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. Today, the Holy Spirit produces in us His beautiful fruit. Even so, we still need the discipline and training of learning to be thankful.

- "In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (I Thess. 5:18).

- "Be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God" (Phil. 4:6).

- "But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints: Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks" (Eph. 5:3-4).

- "Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 5:20).

HAPPY THANKSGIVING!

THANKSGIVING

Neither Were Thankful

(Rom. 1:21)

The Scriptures point out that Patriarchal man was not thankful. When he knew God, he did not glorify Him as God, neither was thankful. His corrupted mind degenerated from the worship of the One True God, into paganism and idolatry. As if totally devoid of reason, he came to worship and serve the creature, more than the Creator.

This life of ingratitude may not have been reserved only for the ungodly. There seems to be no evidence that anyone was thankful.

Cain and Abel build altars and brought sacrifices to God (Gen. 4:). So did Noah (Gen. 8:20ff), and Abraham (Gen. 12:7, 13:4), and Isaac (Gen. 26:25), and Jacob (Gen. 28:18ff. 31:54; 33:20; etc.). Job offered burnt offerings unto the Lord (Job 1:5), and so did his friends (Job. 42:7-8), and so did Jethro (Ex. 18:12). Yet, not once are we told that any of these worshipers came to God with thanksgiving.

The Hebrew word for "thank" is "yaw-daw'." It comes from the root "yawd," which refers to a hand that is open. Hence, to thank God, is to approach God with open hands. It especially refers to revering God with extended hands. This same Hebrew word is also translated as "praise".

When Leah gave birth to her fourth child, she said "Now will I praise the Lord, and she called his name Judah" (Gen. 29:35). The word "Judah" is a derivation of the word for "praise." This is the first use of the word for gratitude that I have been able to find in the Bible.

- The first use of the word "thanksgiving" is in Lev. 7:12. The Mosaic Law was teaching people to be thankful.

- "Thank" is first found in I Chron. 16:4. David appointed Levites to thank God.

THANKSGIVING

- "Thanks" is first found in II Sam. 22:50. This is David's psalm of thanksgiving.

- "Thankful" is first found in Ps. 100:4.

- "Thanking" is first found in II Chron. 5:13. Trumpeters and singers were thanking God during the days of King Solomon.

- "Thankfulness" is found only in Acts 24:3.

All Godly people are thankful today. Our ancestors, the Pilgrims, were thankful. Many pagans, including the American Indian, have been thankful. We train our children to say "thank you". Others have also done so for thousands of years.

This, however, does not prove that men were thankful in that first age of human experience. They knew God. They should have been thankful. They saw God's hand manifest in miracle working power. They built altars. They offered burnt offerings and sacrifices. They called on the name of the Lord. Paul wrote by inspiration, that when they knew God, they didn't glorify Him as God, and they were not thankful.

More careful students of the Scriptures may find references to gratitude and praise that I have overlooked. It is obvious, however, that thanksgiving was remarkably absent in the Age of the Patriarchs. Though the Mosaic Law commanded "Thank Offerings," there are hardly any references to thanksgiving and praise until the time of David. That which was extremely rare during the first age of man, is a principal characteristic of the Christian. In everything, we are to give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning us" (I Thess. 5:17). Whatever we do, we do in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him (Col. 3:17).

THANKSGIVING

Ingratitude

There is a sense in which "ingratitude" is involved in almost every sin. Adam and Eve were not thankful. They had everything they needed but not everything they wanted. They could freely eat of every tree in the garden but one. Instead of being thankful for what they had they lusted for what they didn't have. They wanted more! They had access to the Tree of Life, perfect health, perfect food, a perfect environment, a perfect marriage, but they wanted more. Their ingratitude was exploited by the wicked one to their eternal shame. The devil is a liar and specializes in ruining the lives of all who are unthankful.

Achan was a soldier in the army of Joshua. God had given them a miraculous victory over Jericho. He should have been thankful, but he wasn't. He wanted more. He lusted after a wedge of gold and Babylonian garments. He and his family died for money he could not spend and clothing he could not wear. Their graves are a monument to ingratitude.

Ahab was the King of Israel. He had great wealth and no doubt owned thousands of acres and many vineyards. Instead of being thankful for what he had, but he wanted more. His ungrateful heart coveted the vineyard of Naboth. Mosaic Law forbade the sale of this property and Ahab's ungrateful became an open door of opportunity for sin.

King David should have been thankful for all the many wives which he already had, but he wasn't. He lusted after the wife of another man. Ingratitude is the breeding ground for a million woes. It spawns the sins that wreck and ruin our lives. It can destroy a life, a family, and a nation. Ingratitude is a powerful tool used by the devil to pry open a Pandora's Box of heartache and trouble.

The thankful person is hard to tempt. They are happy with who they are and what they have. They have joy

THANKSGIVING

unspeakable and full of glory. Their gratitude, however, is a result of the state of their mind, and not their state of events. Our attitude is a reflection of “what we are” not “where we are”. Adam and Eve were unhappy in Paradise. Paul was happy in prison. The widow with her mites can be more grateful than the king with his millions. Thanksgiving can warm the fire of a shanty and make it seem like a palace. Ingratitude can frost over a palace and make it seem like a shanty.

Probably no nation in human history has enjoyed more physical blessings and benefits than the United States of America. That fact, however, does not guarantee that we will be happy. It is possible to have all these physical blessings, and still want more. We have an alarming suicide rate. Many of the people who take their own lives are rich. They have everything to live on and nothing to live for. A growing number of others are so miserable and unhappy that they turn to alcohol and drugs to blunt the cutting edge of their misery. We have become a nation of ingrates.

What would happen if we could suddenly find ourselves in the shoes of our Pilgrim forefathers. There would be no government guarantee if our crops failed. There would be no food stamps if we killed no game. There was no Government Hospital to help in time of sickness and disease. There was no government program to help heat their homes in the winter, or cool them in the midst of summer’s blazing heat. In spite of it all, however, they were thankful. Their crude cabins were cathedrals reverberating with praise. Their coarse clothing did not smother out the flame of their gratitude. They smiled at the sunrise and sang their way through hardships. Their lives were harsh by modern standards, but they have bequeathed to us a legacy of gratitude too wonderful for words. The Pilgrims were thankful. They saw beyond the sickness and the cemetery. They saw beyond the hardship and privation. Their hope was not in a lottery ticket, it was in God.

THANKSGIVING

“In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (1 Thess. 5:18).

Where Are The Nine?

Luke 17:11-19 tells the story of ten lepers who were healed by Jesus. Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem and passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. As He entered into a certain village he met the lepers. In harmony with the instructions in Lev. 13, these men were isolated from society. They stood afar off and called to Christ: "Master, have mercy on us."

Though there are many lepers on the earth, most of us have never met one. Usually this terrible disease afflicts those in third world countries. In Bible times the lepers were required to tear their clothes, have unkempt hair, and cover the lower part of their face (Lev. 13:45). They were also to cry out "unclean, unclean", when someone approached.

The disease known as leprosy in modern times attacks the nerve trunks and sensory fibers so that the patient loses all sensation of pain. Many wear special shoes for protection as they may cut their feet without knowing it. Others awaken in the morning to discover that rats have eaten away fingers or toes. As the extremities of the body are reduced to bleeding stumps a terrible odor exudes from the rotten flesh. In the final stages the leper goes blind and loses the ability to speak. The reality of a blind leper, making grotesque guttural sounds, with his flesh rotting away is almost beyond our comprehension.

The lepers of our text were fortunate enough to be ambulatory and alert. They saw Jesus and lifted up their voices in a plea for mercy. Once the procession stopped, and their request had been understood, Jesus halloped back: "GO SHOW YOURSELF UNTO THE PRIESTS". This too, was in harmony with the teaching of Moses. A leper could not return to society until he had been pronounced "clean" by the priests and gone through the appropriate ritual for cleansing.

As they went, they were cleansed!

It is at this point that the Bible narrows our focus to only one of the lepers. When he realized that he had been healed he turned and with a "loud voice glorified God". Then he came and fell down on his face at the feet of Jesus and gave Him thanks. At this point we are informed that this thankful man was a Samaritan.

Jesus said: "**Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger. And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole.**" (Lk. 17:17-19).

The nine were doing precisely what the Law of Moses required them to do. They were avoiding contact with anyone who was not a leper until their cleansing had been legally established. The Samaritan, however, operated outside the realm of law. His faith made him whole.

The Law of Moses does not reflect the ultimate desire of God for man, it is merely a schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ that we might be justified by faith (Gal. 3:24). Jesus told a similar story in the parable of the Good Samaritan. The priest and the Levite avoided a man in need while a Samaritan disregarded his own legal purity and ministered to him. Jesus told us to go and do likewise. We are to be like the Good Samaritan, and not like those enslaved to law.

The problem of sin, as you know, is far more serious than leprosy. It contaminates us from the crown of the head to the soul of our feet. It fills our souls with wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores that cannot be bound up neither mollified with ointment (Is. 1:6). When we are cleansed of sin we fall on our faces before Him and cry: "**O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out**" (Rom. 11:33).

It matters not what others may say or do, let us fall

down before Him with eternal gratitude and praise. Let us not leave a life of thanksgiving to strangers.

Learning Contentment

“ I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content” (Phil. 4:11).

Little children are born selfish and ignorant. Initially they have little or no awareness of anyone’s needs but their own. The infant does not automatically think how tired mommy is, or how little sleep she has had. They do not automatically want to share their toys, or consider the needs of brothers and sisters. Children must be taught to think of others.

I am told that the newborn infant has only two fears, the fear of falling, and the fear of loud noises. In the course of a normal life they will learn 5,000 other fears. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. This too is something every child need to learn in order to have a happy life and a healthy future.

Christianity is itself a learning process. Paul wrote: **“This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But ye have not so learned Christ”** (Eph 4:17-20).

Paul’s “learning” of Christ enabled him to find contentment wherever he was. His letter to the church in Philippi is a “prison letter”. His bonds in Christ, however, did not deter him from happiness. He had learned in whatsoever state he was to be content. He knew how to be abased, and he also knew how to abound. He had learned to honor Christ

when he was full, and also when he was hungry. He had learned that he could do all things through Christ who strengthened him.

Acts 16 provides a personal vignette of Paul that speaks volumes. He had been unjustly beaten and cast into prison. The jailer had thrust he and Silas into the inner prison and placed their feet in the stocks for safe keeping. At midnight, however, Paul and Silas were singing praises to God (Acts 16:25). This amazing story provides clear insight into the “contentment” Paul had learned. In Christ he could die happier than others could live.

It is proverbial that we crawl before we walk, and walk before we run. There was a time when we could neither walk, nor talk, and now we can do both activities in our sleep. Life is a learning experience. We can learn contentment in much the same way. At first it will not be easy, but ultimately it can become our very nature.

Our first lessons in gratitude involve thanksgiving for food and favors bestowed upon us by others. Next we can grow to the place where we are thankful for blessings that are spiritual and eternal. Ultimately we can learn to give thanks in everything (1 Thess. 5:18). We need to be constantly reminded, however, that “learning Christ” is a spiritual experience that must be accompanied by spiritual power.

Here are several truths that are foundational to a life of gratitude:

1. First we need to learn that God is good, and all things work together for good to those that love God and are called according to His purpose.

2. Secondly, it is helpful to learn that there has no temptation taken us but such as is common to man. God is faith, and will not allow us to be tempted above what we are able, but will with every temptation also provide a means of escape that we may be able to bear it (1 Cor. 10:13).

THANKSGIVING

3. In the third place we can learn that nothing can happen to us without the specific permission of God. The story of Job is an interesting case in point. The devil could not touch his wealth, his family, or his health without permission from God. (See Job. 1-2)

4. In the fourth place we can learn that He that is within us is greater than he that is in the world (1 John 4:4), and that when we resist the devil he will flee from us.

5. Finally, we can learn that nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:38-39). Jesus Christ Himself has promised never to leave us or forsake us (Heb. 13:5).

These are just a few of the exceeding great and precious promises which we can “learn” in Christ (2 Pet. 1:4).

THANKSGIVING

The Guard

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Phil 4:6-7, NIV)

The Greek word translated as “will guard” in this passage is “phroueo.” It is a military term. W. E. Vine in his word studies defines it as “to keep under guard, as with a garrison.” It is the same word used in 2 Cor. 11:32 to describe the careful watch made by soldiers in Damascus when Aretas was seeking for Saul.

Notice how logically and beautifully this passage unfolds.

- First, the recognition of God’s presence is followed by the appropriate admonition not to worry. Why should we worry as long as God is near?
- Next, we are encouraged to take everything to God in prayer. Nothing is too insignificant, or too great for God. Two different Greek words are used to describe our prayers. First, “prosucho” is translated as “prayer.” Then “deesis” is translated as “petition.” Thayer distinguishes the two by saying that the first deals with devotional thought while the second involves personal need. The first we say in chapel, and the second by the bedside of a dying friend.
(Note that our “prayers” and “petitions” are to always be accompanied by thanksgiving.)
- Finally, the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

This simple recipe will work. First, don’t worry. Second, always pray with thanksgiving. Finally the peace of

THANKSGIVING

God will guard our hearts and mind in Christ Jesus.

The Philippian letter is evidence that Paul practiced what he preached. It was one of four letters by Paul written from prison. The others are Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon. The Philippian letter, however, is not a letter about suffering, it is a letter about rejoicing. The Greek noun for “joy” is “Xara.” It is found five times in Philippians, (1:4; 25; 2:2, 29; 4:1). The Greek verb for “joy” is “Xarein,” and it is found 11 times in the letter (1:18, 18; 2:17, 17, 18, 18, 28; 3:1; 4:4, 4, 10).

The late J. Paul Getty was a billionaire, but lived in constant fear. His fears were intensified after his grandson, J. Paul Getty III, was kidnaped and held for ransom. To prove their cruelty the kidnappers cut off the young man’s ear and mailed it to his grandfather. Grandpa Getty then had his bedroom door removed and fitted with a steel plate. When he went to bed at night there was an armed guard outside the door with an Alsatian attack dog.

The Apostle Paul had a far better protection system than J. Paul Getty. The Lord Himself stood by Paul, and one reason he did so was that Paul offered his prayers and petitions with thanksgiving. Because Paul was thankful, God protected him both mentally and emotionally. He guarded his heart and his mind in Christ Jesus.

Note how boldly Paul encourages us to follow his example: **“Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me-- put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you”** (Phil. 4:9 NIV).

May we also follow his godly example and put into practice what we learn, receive, hear, and see in his life. Especially, let us always offer our prayers and petitions with thanksgiving.

THANKSGIVING

The First Thanksgiving Proclamation

*The President of the United States of America
A proclamation:*

Whereas, it is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly to implore His protection and favour, – and,

Whereas, both Houses of Congress have by their joint committee requested me to recommend to the people of the United States a day of Public Thanksgiving and Prayer, to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many signal favours of Almighty God, especially by affording them the opportunity to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness.

Now, Therefore, I do recommend and assign Thursday, the 26th day of November next, to be devoted by the People of these States to the service of that great and glorious Being who is the beneficent Author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be — that we may then all unite in rendering unto Him our sincere and humble thanks for His kind care and protection of the people of this country previous to their becoming a nation; for the signal and manifold mercies and favourable interpositions of His providence, which we experienced in the course and conclusion of the late war; for the great degree of tranquillity, union, and plenty, which we have since enjoyed – for the peaceable and rational manner in which we have been enabled to establish Constitutions of government for our safety and happiness, and particularly the national one now lately instituted – the the civil and religious

THANKSGIVING

liberty with which we are blessed and the means we have of acquiring and diffusing useful knowledge; and in general for all the great and various favours which He hath pleased to confer upon us.

And, also that we may then unite in most humbly offering our prayers and supplications to the great Lord and Ruler of Nations, and beseech Him to pardon our national and other transgressions, to enable us all, whether in public or private stations, to perform our several and relative duties properly and punctually, to render our national government a blessing to all the peoples by constantly being a Government of wise, just and constitutional laws, discreetly and faithfully executed and obeyed to protect and guide all Sovereigns and Nations (especially such as have shown kindness to us) and to bless them with good Government, peace and concord. To promote the knowledge and practice of true religion and virtue, and the increase of science among them and generally to grant unto all mankind such a degree of temporal prosperity and He alone knows to be best.

Given under my hand at the City of New York, the third day of October in the year of our Lord 1789.

George Washington

THANKSGIVING

Thanksgiving Proclamation

(By Abraham Lincoln - 1863)

It is the duty of nations as well as of men to owe their dependence upon the overruling power of God; to confess their sins and transgressions in humble sorrow, yet with assured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon; and to recognize the sublime truth, announced in the Holy Scriptures and proven by all history, that those nations are blessed whose God is the Lord.

We know that by His divine law, nations, like individuals, are subject to punishments and chastisements in this world. May we not justly fear that the awful calamity of civil war which now desolates the land may be a punishment inflicted upon us for our presumptuous sins; to the needful end of our national reformation as a whole people?

We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of heaven; we have been preserved these many years in peace and prosperity; we have grown in numbers, wealth and power as no other nation has ever grown. But have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us, and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us.

It has seemed to me fit and proper that God should be solemnly, reverently, and gratefully acknowledged, as with one heart and one voice, by the whole American people. I do therefore invite my fellow citizens in every part of the United States, and also those who are at sea and those who are

THANKSGIVING

sojourning in foreign lands, to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November as a day of Thanksgiving and praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the heavens.