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EASTER AND THE JUSTICE OF GOD

Also in this Issue:

Page 2
Forgetfulness and Dying to Self
by Shea Oakley

Page 3
10 Things about Pastors Every Church Member Should Know
by Joe McKeever

Page 10
Don’t Settle for Less
by David L. Olford

by Justin Lonas
Table of Contents:
Easter and the Justice of God - - - - - - - - - 1
Forgetfulness and Dying to Self - - - - - - - - - - 2
10 Things about Pastors - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - 3
Exegetically Speaking- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - 5
Living out the Living Word- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - 8
Points to Ponder - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - 10
The Story behind the Song - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - 12
Church Builders - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - 13
Counselor’s Corner- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - 14
Book Reviews- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - 14
News Update- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - 15
Sermon Helps - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - 16
Puzzles and ‘Toons - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - 18

Easter and the Justice of God
By Justin Lonas

At Easter, it is only proper that we as Christians focus our attention on the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the joy of salvation that His sacrifice brings. Close in the background to that rejoicing, however, is the specter of sin—the reason that God had to send His Son to die in the first place.

More often than not, we think of sin as the things that we do that go against God’s will (sins) or more generally as our unregenerate state before salvation. Even when we think about sin at a theological level, it is difficult for us to see it fully because everything in this life is so colored by it. We don’t like to dwell on sin, but without fully grasping its magnitude, we cannot fully appreciate the wonder that Easter represents.

Easter, for all its joy, makes three definitive statements about sin that serve not to cloud that joy but to magnify it.

I. Sin Demands Judgment

God doesn’t simply dislike sin or set arbitrary rules that we can’t help but break. God’s holiness demands justice for mankind’s choice to disobey Him and disregard His authority. We all deserve punishment for our sinful condition and sinful choices, and we see throughout Scripture that the punishment is death (Deut. 28, Rom. 6:23, Heb. 9:22, etc.).

The incarnation of Christ—the eternally begotten second person of the Trinity—in historical space and time serves to remind us that the price for sin must be paid. Christ’s coming in human flesh served to make Him capable of experiencing death. He was born in order to die—to take the judgment for sin. As the writer of Hebrews puts it, “But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death...” (Heb. 2:9).

II. The Judgment Was Paid by Christ

The beauty of Christ’s death is not merely that He offered Himself as a sacrifice for the penalty of sin but that He was able to do so. No created being could ever serve to pay the price for all men; only Christ, as “God from God, light from light, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father” (in the words of the Nicene Creed) was an acceptable sacrifice. Infinite sin (the rebellion against God of every human, past, present, and future) required an infinite payment.

The conclusion of that verse in Hebrews explains: “so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.” Isaiah writes, “But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed.... But the Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering...” (Isa. 53:5, 10).

Christ has offered Himself as the guilt offering, and given us the opportunity to exchange our guilt for His—that is, we can accept God’s justice throughour own death (by refusing Christ) or by participating in His death. We can die by His hand or die into Him accepting His life in return. Because He has paid the price for us, our debt has been cancelled—the penalty cannot be assessed twice.

III. The Resurrection Enables Life after Sin

Easter is the celebration of the fact that Christ’s death opens the door to life itself. Because our justly deserved death was taken by the eternal, holy, almighty Son of God, our life of obedience is made possible by His resurrection. We are never completely free of sin’s power and consequences in this life, but because of Christ in us, we are enabled to begin to reflect the holiness of God through our thoughts and actions.

Again, the author of Hebrews helps us see clearly how Christ’s work upends the stronghold of sin: “For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren” (Heb. 2:10-11). Through suffering, God made Christ able to bring us into glory as sons of God.
Through His coming also, however, Christ learned the pain of temptation, and it is by this intimate knowledge of our own condition that He strengthens us to resist sin’s power: “Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted” (Heb. 2:17-18).

Christ is both the sacrifice for our sins and the priest who pleads our case. Only through this astonishing transaction can God be both “just and the Justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Rom. 3:26). More than that, Christ is our encourager—as “one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15) He enables us by His Spirit to endure temptation and shine forth His righteousness in our resistance. It is in this that we see most clearly the whole glory of Christ’s work. The eternal life of Christ is the capstone of our redemption and shows God’s overwhelming love.

**Application**

How do we live out Easter? How do we put the payment for sin and the life of Christ in practice? I’d like to offer three suggestions.

1) **Easter applied should make us more grateful for our salvation.** Seeing the depth of our sin that necessitated such a sacrifice as Christ’s has to give us pause. There can be no going back to a life unaware of the price paid for us after we have encountered Christ. As Paul puts it, “How shall we who died to sin live in it?” (Rom. 6:2). That joy and gratitude is a far greater motivator for obedience to God’s will than any amount of guilt we can heap on ourselves.

2) **Easter applied should make us more concerned for the lost.** Once we recognize who we are in Christ (and our plight without Him), we should grow in our prayer for and outreach to those who do not yet know Him. If we don’t love the lost as He does, we should examine our hearts to discover why we are content to let them miss His atonement.

3) **Easter applied should make us more forgiving toward fellow believers.** Recognizing the depth of our sin and the price of our redemption puts forgiveness in perspective. If the sacrifice of Christ satisfies the wrath of Almighty God toward any sinner a believer might commit, what right do we as fellow sinners have to demand anything else in exchange for our forgiveness? Too many divisions within our churches and families come from our efforts to deal with the sins of others on terms more stringent than God applies to us.

Easter is God’s triumph over sin and death that separates us from Him. It is the beginning of the new creation and the herald of Christ’s love. Let us celebrate all that this year.

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**Forgetfulness and Dying to Self**

By Shea Oakley

Living out the Christian life requires dying to self. This is a recurring and primary theme in the New Testament. For many earnest believers, it is also a theme which causes some puzzlement. Just how, exactly, do we die to self?

What part of ourselves are we dying to? Does this mean that we are to somehow annihilate any consciousness of our own existence, as some Eastern religions appear to teach? Should we hate ourselves in order to die to ourselves? The entire concept seems a bit strange to our natural existence, as some Eastern religions appear to teach.

At least part of the answer to this problem can perhaps be found in something C.S. Lewis once wrote. He said that our best spiritual moments came when we forgot about ourselves in the contemplation of God. In other words, Lewis did not so much counsel annihilating oneself as losing oneself in gazing at Something. Someone infinitely greater than us. Whenever our spiritual eyes are fixed on God, we lose our natural self-centeredness in the process. It was, for Lewis, a matter of focus. Inwardness is displaced by an “outwardness” that comes with focusing on our Lord.

I would submit that this profound forgetting is, at the very least, the beginning of the dying that the Bible speaks of. As we become more and more drawn to the glory of God in Christ, our Adamic self-obsession begins to fade. Our self-centeredness becomes God-centeredness.

Of course the Christian life must be something other than a continuous rapturous gazing at the divine. In this world, at best, we seem able to have only limited experiences of “the beatific vision”. A constant knowing of God in this way will have to wait for Heaven for even the most contemplative saint.

No one can spend all their waking hours in such a state of meditation, nor should they, for our mission as sons and daughters of God on earth requires that we live out a good deal of our lives here in loving action towards others in the name of our Lord and Savior. In other words, dying...
to ourselves in times of “Godward” contemplation should result in a further dying to ourselves through the act of loving others. When the Bible speaks of this process, it is often in the context of learning to love others in very practical and sometimes very sacrificial ways.

The proverbial baby, however, should not be thrown out with the bathwater. An old Christian cliché concerns the benighted believer who is “so heavenly-minded that he is no earthly good.” The implication is that some Christians are so obsessed with spiritual visions that they have forgotten that God primarily wants them to be about the business of good works. An assumption is made here that these two things are somehow mutually exclusive.

This is, I think, rarely if ever true. Many of us try to love through sheer self-effort, accent on the self. Consciously or unconsciously relying on our flesh to provide the power to love is a tragic error. In trying to love others in this way, we find ourselves doing so for the wrong reasons and under the wrong power. Such “love” ends up being much more about us than about the supposed object of our love and the act of “loving” ends up based on the very self we are called to die to. As such it becomes narcissistic and compulsive. True love is neither of these things.

It is only through being filled with the love of Christ that we can “overflow” that love to others. An indispensable part of this happening is making the decision to spend substantial periods of time centering our consciousness on our Lord and on our Lord alone. Whether this comes through worship or biblically-congruent forms of meditation, it is absolutely necessary to becoming more genuinely loving.

Again it is largely in forgetting ourselves through focusing on the divine that we die to ourselves. In focusing on God, we open up a primary means of both loving Him and being filled with His love for others. While we will not always (or even often) be caught up into spiritual rapture through such focusing, with time we can come to almost always connect with God in a profound way. This contemplative connection serves the purpose of enabling us to better love our Creator and Redeemer because we end up experiencing His love for us in a very real sense and, as Scripture tells us, “we love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). Beyond that, this experience can more than fill us, leading to that overflowing love for others.

Through the help we receive from God in spending time with Him, we can further our self-forgetfulness and truly “die to self” in a way that does not cause fear as much as a joyful sense of expectation. The expectation that knowing and loving God will set us free to know and love others. In doing so, we find a deeper, more blessed union with Christ, the One who loves us more than we can know in our wildest imaginations—until we meet Him face to face.

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10 Things about Pastors Every Church Member Needs to Know
By Joe McKeever

I. Pastors are Human and More Like You Than You Could Ever Imagine

In a panel discussion, several pastors’ wives were talking about the uniqueness of their ministries. One lady, married to a well-known evangelist, said, “I tell my man, ‘Don’t get too uppity for me. I have seen you without your pants on!’” Some of her hearers were offended by the remark.

I wasn’t. I know the point she was making: he is a flawed, fallible human like the rest of us, and not some saintly somebody unacquainted with temptation and failings.

Here’s a test you will benefit from: find the journals of some “truly great” man or woman of God from a past generation, and read them. Notice the paradox: at the very time the world is acclaiming him for holiness and Christ-likeness, they themselves are struggling with inner conflicts of one kind or the other. They appear to have a leg up on intimacy with the Lord to the rest of the world, but to themselves, they are babies in the faith barely able to walk spiritually and completely at the mercy of a benevolent God.

Far from refuting their holiness, the journal affirms it. But not in the way most people expect. Friend, you do not want as a pastor someone who has never sinned, never messed up, and never known the mercies of God. If you get a preacher who is sinless, you may discover him to be harsh and mean-spirited toward the likes of you; you are a sinner in need of grace, whereas he meets God as an equal. As Paul said, “I speak as a fool” (2 Cor. 11:23).
II. Pastors Are Called by God to This Work, Otherwise They Never Last

I used to hear of preachers who were “mama-called and daddy-sent.” In time, I met one or two. They didn’t make it. The work was too hard, the expectations too high, the rewards too few. Pastors sometimes say, almost facetiously, “I’ve sometimes doubted my salvation, but never my call to the ministry.” I suspect that’s because, as with me, I was saved as a child but called into this work as an adult.

The work is hard. The expectations are through the roof. The rewards? To be honest, the pay is a lot better these days (as a rule) than when I started in the early 1960s. The perks tend to be more plentiful, and the resources more abundant. Even so, frustrations in the Lord’s work abound. Almost daily, I receive a phone call or email from God’s servants pouring out tales of misunderstanding, harassment, strong opposition, and even persecution. Frequently, the man of God will say to me, “If this was coming from the world, I’d expect it. But these are the Lord’s people doing this. It doesn’t make sense.”

Pastors reading this are shaking their heads. They know. Their biggest headaches come not from the tavern owners or casino managers, not from politicians or big shot business types, and not from drug pushers and drunks. The men and women who sit in the pews, on church committees, and boards tend to be the source of most headaches and heartbreaks of pastors.

Only one called by God and who knows he serves the Living God will last. And even some of them, honesty forces me to admit sadly, don’t make it.

III. Pastors Are the Point Men for Whatever Is Taking Place in the Church

They receive the blame, they get the credit. Their phone number is on speed dial for most leaders of the church, particularly the ones with a gripe.

Church staff members often forget this aspect of church ministry. In fact, an immature staffer will look at his pastor with a mixture of envy and disgust, noticing how he gets the credit and the bigger paycheck and yet his workload is no bigger than “mine.” Then, when and if that staffer takes a church and becomes the lead pastor, they suddenly come to a new awareness of their own stupidity.

Once in a while, as happened last week, a pastor will tell me his church is a dream job, that his people are wonderful, and that this is everything he ever hoped for in a congregation. I rejoice with him. In my spirit, I think, “But wait till you start making changes.”

IV. Pastors Live in a World of Unfinished Tasks

When he lays his head on the pillow at night, the preacher can think of calls he needs to return, a sermon needing planning, and someone requiring a personal visit.

The only way he can survive in the ministry is to turn it off and get his rest. If he is a perfectionist and cannot sleep until “all the children are in bed,” that is, until all the loose ends are tied up, he will not make it.

The problem is far worse when the perfectionist pastor considers leaving town for a vacation. He almost panics at the thought of people needing him and he being unavailable. Unless he gains the right perspective and realizes “these people were here before I came and they will be here when I leave,” he will sacrifice his family and his health for his congregation. And end up losing them all.

V. Pastors Learn to Function with People Angry at Them or They Do Not Survive in Ministry

I have walked to the pulpit to deliver a sermon the Sunday after nearly half my deacons tried to get me fired. I have stood there preaching while leaders met in the foyer to figure how to send me on my way. I have preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ to people sitting with arms folded across their chests and facial scowls signaling they wanted no part of anything I had to share. I venture to say my preaching on those occasions was better than normal.

There’s something exalting about knowing you are serving the Lord Jesus Christ and that it’s actually costing you something. We in this land have it so easy. Most of our people are so sweet and supportive. It can do us good to experience what Paul called “the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings” (Phil. 3:10).

VI. Pastors Are Not Sent to Make the Church Happy

I submit that the typical pew-dweller thinks that since our congregations vote on whether to call (“hire”) a man as pastor, and since his continued employment is always conditional upon the support of the membership, his number one goal should be to make the people happy. That’s a big mistake, but a common one, to be sure.

There are preachers who live by that dictate, that they will always have job security if they placate all disgruntled members and never do anything to rock the boat. They are a blight on the ministry and make things worse for the faithful. The Lord’s servant is not sent to make the congregation happy. You will not find one single verse or even part of one saying otherwise. Instead, he is sent to help the people become holy and healthy.

The other day, the endodontist up the street performed a root canal on one of my molars. I sat in his chair for 90 minutes, completely uncomfortable the entire time. At the end, my jaw numb, I handed his receptionist my debit card and watched as she withdrew from my checking account over a thousand dollars. This professional man and his staff are not there to make me happy. If they were, they’d be giving me the money instead of taking it from me. Instead, they exist to make me healthy.

If your pastor does not make people unhappy from time to time—if he does not push and probe and provoke
you, if he does not disturb and unsettle you occasionally—he is not being obedient to the One who sent him.

VII. Pastors Are Sent to Make the Lord Happy

“He serves at the congregation’s pleasure.” I’ve heard that applied to preachers, and it’s badly wrong. The man of God exists to please only one Person, the Living God who sent Him. “To his own master he stands or falls” (Rom. 14:4). Paul said, “Do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ” (Gal.1:10).

Our single prayer ought to be the one Paul offered up just outside Damascus when he first encountered the Living Christ: “What will you have me to do?” (Acts 22:10). Now, common sense says that when we please the Lord, the people around us who love the Lord and want His will above all else will likewise rejoice. But we must not confuse the two and think the pleasure of the people is the barometer of anything.

VII. Pastors Tend to Be Loners; They Shouldn’t Be

When the Lord sent forth His disciples, He sent them by twos or in even larger numbers. When the Holy Spirit called the first missionaries, He fingered Barnabas and Saul. Later, it was Paul and Silas, while Barnabas and John Mark also went forth with the Gospel. No one was sent alone.

I cannot say whether the lone-ranger syndrome in preachers is evidence of pride or sin or a lack of faith. All I know is that I’ve seen it in myself (especially when I was young) and encountered it in a sizeable portion of ministers through the years. During the five years I served the SBC churches of metro New Orleans as leader, pulling the pastors together to encourage one another was my heartbeat.

A few weeks ago, addressing a group of pastors and wives at a retreat in lower Alabama, I encouraged the younger men in particular to find a mentor. When asked what I would do differently if I had my half-century of ministry to do over, I answered, “I would have knocked at the door of some preacher and asked his help in figuring out how to prepare a sermon. I reinvented the wheel every week.”

IX. Pastors Are as Varied as the Sands on the Shore; No Two Are Alike

Why is that important? Because your search committee is trying at this very moment to find someone just like “Old Brother Hampton who served our church when I was a child” or someone “who meets all the requirements our church voted on.” Throw away your expectations and ask the Father whom He wishes to send to the flock of which you are a member. After all, Acts 20:28 says the Holy Spirit appoints them, not you.

By the way, Old Brother Hampton no longer preaches the way he did when you were a child. If he is still active in the ministry, he has grown, and that means he has changed. If he hasn’t, avoid him like the plague!

X. Pastors Live By Prayer the Way the Earth Depends on Sunlight, the Grass Counts on the Rain, the Baby Needs Its Mother

Even the great apostle said, “Pray for me” often (Rom. 15:30-32; Eph. 6:18-19; Col. 4:2-3; 1 Thess. 5:25; Philem. 22). If Paul needed prayer, and he did, how much more you and I require that God’s people intercede for us? So, why is it then, preacher that we almost apologetically ask our people to pray for us?

Remember this line and teach it to your people: “Poor preaching is God’s judgment on a prayerless congregation.”

“Father, it is to our everlasting shame that we pray for everything in the world before thinking to lift our pastors to You. Forgive us. We direct so many expectations toward them and hold them accountable when everything in church does not go to suit us. Forgive us for such foolishness, O Lord.

Our Lord, make us intercessors for Your servants who proclaim Your word. And free both them and us from our expectations and demands. Remind us repeatedly that a faithful preacher will often disturb us and provoke us, because his primary responsibility is to You and not to us. For Jesus’ sake. Amen.”

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Exegetically Speaking—by Spiros Zodhiates

The Son of Man Returns in Glory to Judge the Nations
Matthew 25:31-46


[31] The last parable in chapter 25, the parable of the sheep and the goats, brings out a third aspect of judgment in determining who goes into the millennial kingdom: actions in befriending and protecting God’s
people, which in this context indicates salvation. We now see a judgment scenario that follows the defeat of the beast and the false prophet, as recorded in Revelation 19:11-20:15:

“When the Son of man comes (éthē, the aorist active subjunctive of érchomai [2064], to come; the aorist tense denotes a crisis in human, redemptive history) in His (from autós [846], His own) glory (from dōxē [1391] from dokéō [1380], to appraise) and all the holy (from hágios [40], internally righteous) angels with Him, then He shall sit on the throne of His glory” (a.t.).

There are several glories of the Son. There is the pristine or original glory of the pre-incarnate Word: “And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was” (John 17:5). This glory was the praise of angels long before creation (Job 1:6; 38:7; Prov. 8:22-26). Then there is the glory of the incarnate Word: “And we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten (from monogenēs [3439]) of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). This glory attaches to the uniqueness (monogenēs, only begotten, one of a kind, sole member of a class) of the incarnate Word.

Finally, there is a glory that attaches to judgment; thus, the verse ends with the captivating phrase, “throne of his glory.” It is a glorious throne, a throne characterized by the glory of the One sitting on it; therefore, a glorious judgment is about to unfold. In the Gospel of John we read, “For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son... and hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man” (John 5:22, 27). The Son judges both as God and man, by deity through sinless humanity, the standard being that omniscient wisdom that redeemed people have through the perfect human life—Jesus Christ, the benchmark of all judgment.

Christ promises to share His throne, as we saw in Matthew 19:23 (cf. Luke 22:30) and also in Revelation 3:21. According to the apostle Paul, believers will “judge angels” (1 Cor. 6:3). Thus, when He returns, He comes “to be glorified in his saints” (2 Thess. 1:10), that is, His elect people.

[32-33] Holy angels will not only accompany Christ at His return but also will gather all people before Him to be judged: “And before him shall be gathered (from sunágō [4863], to lead together) all nations (from éthnos [1484]); and he shall separate (from aphorizō [873], to separate) them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep (from próbaton [4263]) from the goats (from érphos [2056]): and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.”

Though gathered as nations, people are judged as individuals; accordingly, the nations will be divided into believers (sheep) and unbelievers (goats). Judgment will be a separation, and the task is assigned to angels: “The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity” (Matt. 13:41). That is, even the gathering will include a differentiating factor, as the angels sort the wheat and the tares (Matt. 13:30; 25:31).

In God’s foreknowledge, the separation is already done: “He who believes on Him is not judged (krinētai) by the Father (2 Cor. 6:3). Thus, when He returns, He is not already (ēdē [2235]) has been judged (kēkrítai, the perfect passive tense of krinō)” (John 3:18; a.t.). The judgment was completed when Christ died on the cross, a historical event with a timeless impact on humans and angels. His death imputed judgment to all unbelievers (note in this last verse that the judgment, a perfect tense, is prior to unbelief, a present tense). Thus, Christ’s words: “For judgment I am come into this world, that...they which might be made blind” (John 9:39). Similarly, “Ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep” (John 10:26). Sheep wander without shepherds (see, e.g., Ezek. 34:6), but goats are the more wild of the two.

Note also the contrast between “his right hand” and “the left.” The “right hand of God” is the position of privilege.

[34] Jesus addressed His people: “Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, Come, you who have been blessed (eulogémēnoi, the perfect passive participle of eulogēō [2127], to speak well, to decree good) of my Father, inherit the kingdom (from basileia [932]) that has been prepared (hētoimasménēn, the perfect passive participle of hetoimázō [2090]) for you from the foundation of the world” (a.t.).

The participle and other constructions of eulogēō, blessed, are frequently used of the saints, but God is the only one who is innately eulogētōs (the descriptive adjective predicate). This adjective is used only of God the Father (2 Cor. 1:3; Eph. 1:3; 1 Pet. 1:3) and God the Son (Rom. 9:5). In the immediate context, eulogēmēnoi, “you who have been blessed,” contrasts with the parallel perfect participle katēraménoi (v. 41), “you who have been cursed.” Just as Christ’s “right hand (position of privilege)” is contrasted with “the left” (previous verse), so “you who have been blessed of My Father” is contrasted with the unqualified “you who have been cursed.” The curse rests on those God does not know personally: “I never knew you” (Matt. 7:23, cf. Amos 3:2).

The contrast between the sheep and the goats continues in the commands given to the two. The King will invite the sheep with the personal “come” (deúte [1205]), the same personal invitation given in Matthew 11:28 to the “burdened and heavy laden.” But He will command the goats to “depart” (poreūesthe, the present imperative of poreúomai [4198], to march publicly; v. 41). This command is a decree; it cannot be disobeyed. The goats will be cast into the lake of fire. The Lord doesn’t ask them to remove themselves; He commands them to leave.
The participial phrase that describes the kingdom as having been “prepared for you from the foundation of the world” is paralleled by Paul’s statement in Ephesians 1:4 that we were chosen in Christ “before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.” In other words, God prepared from the foundation of the world both a kingdom and a people to rule in it. To predetermine a specific kingdom is to predetermine particular rulers—the believers—since, by definition, there is no kingdom without rulers.

[35-36] The invitation to come and inherit is based on (gär [1063], because) the ministry of sheep to other sheep, proof of their faith in the Shepherd: “For (gär) I was hungry, and you gave Me meat: I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink: I was a stranger, and you took Me in: naked, and you clothed Me: I was sick, and you visited Me: I was in prison, and you came unto Me” (a.t.).

Jesus identifies with His sheep. When they are hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, and imprisoned, then He is (vicariously) also. The Scripture says that even now He is able “to sympathize (from sumpathēō [4834] from sún [4862], together; and páschô [3958], to suffer; ‘to suffer together with’) with our weaknesses’” (Heb. 4:15; a.t.), since He Himself was crucified because of the physical weakness He assumed in His incarnation (2 Cor. 13:4).

In general, the New Testament teaches that Jesus “suffered” (1 Pet. 2:21, 23); He “suffered in the flesh” (1 Pet. 4:1); He “suffered being tempted” (Heb. 2:18); He suffered a sorrow unto death in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:38), and spiritual and physical pain on the cross (Luke 24:26; Heb. 13:12; 1 Pet. 3:18). Jesus personally experienced hunger (Matt. 4:2) and thirst (John 19:28). He was also a “stranger” (xénos [3581]) since He had no place to lay His head (Matt. 8:20) and was “despised and rejected of men” (Isa. 53:3), as well as being rejected by “His own” (John 1:11). The Roman guards stripped Him (Matt. 27:28), so He was at least partially and temporarily naked on one occasion. He was imprisoned according to Matthew 27:2, 15. Scripture is silent concerning Christ personally suffering from illness, but the judgments that He bore in His humanity were due to the sins of others, not His own—“who knew no sin” (2 Cor. 5:21).

The remarkable identity between the Shepherd and His sheep is given elsewhere in Scripture. For example, when someone told Jesus that His mother and brothers were waiting outside, He responded, “Who is my mother and who are my brethren?” (Matt. 12:48). Immediately after, pointing to believers, He said, “Behold my mother and my brethren!” (12:49).

The indwelling Christ initiates and empowers ministry among believers. Paul tells us that coming to faith and subsequent good works are all part of the creative, saving work of God: “For we are His products (poiēma [4161]), the –ma suffix treats the “work” as a resultant product), created (from kitéō [2936], to create) in Christ Jesus for good works, which God ordained in order that (hina [2443]) we should walk (from peripatēō [4043]) in them” (Eph. 2:10; a.t.; cf. 3 John 11).

[37–39] The sheep are profoundly bewildered by these words. In true humility consistent with that displayed throughout their lives, they do not seem to be aware of the impact of their ministry: “Then shall the righteous (from dikaios [1342], justified) answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungry, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?” How different this is from hypocrites who perpetually advertise and applaud their own works and demean others. The wicked, the Scripture says, will promote their products and services even before God (Matt. 7:22), only to have them condemned as void of any compassion for the Lord’s people (1 Cor. 13:1–3).

The “righteous” are those who are justified by the meritorious life and death of Jesus Christ: “Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man’s disobedience many were constituted sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be constituted righteous” (Rom. 5:18-19; a.t.). God’s wrath is propitiated through “faith in (Christ’s) blood” (Rom. 3:25), so believers are “justified by faith” (Rom. 5:1).

[40] Jesus enlightened the sheep: “And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least (from eláchistos [1646]) of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”

Who are the brethren who are befriended here? One clue may be found in the word nations (from éthnos [1484]) in verse 32. When used in the plural with no other modifier, the Greek word éthnos usually means every nation but one’s own, in this case, every nation but the Jews. Indeed, the plural of éthnos is frequently translated as “Gentiles” in the King James Version (e.g., Matt. 6:32; Acts 4:27; etc.). If this is true here, then this is primarily a picture of the judgment of the Gentiles. One thing on which they will be judged is how they treated Christ’s brethren, the Jews. This is especially crucial during the Tribulation period when the Antichrist and his followers mount their attack against the Jews. Only born-again Christians will dare risk their lives to protect these persecuted new believers (Rom. 11:26). Here we see actions that indicate whether persons are redeemed or not.

[41] The goats are forced to hear a terrifying command: “Then shall He say also unto them on the left, Depart (poreiēste, the present imperative of poreiōmai [4198], to march) from Me, you who are cursed (from katarráōmai [2672]), into everlasting (from aiōnios [166], eternal, forever) fire (pūr [4442]) which has been prepared
(hētoimasménon, the perfect passive participle of hetoimázō [2090]) for the devil and his angels (aggélois [32])” (a.t.).

A “curse” in the Bible does not carry the connotations that the word has in today’s English. Throughout Scripture curses are identified with God’s righteous judgments on the wicked. A curse is a decree of judgment, a just punishment, the final decision of the judge. The perfect tense of kataρδομαι defines those who have already reached the mature state of liability for judgment, those who have filled up their sins (Gen. 15:16; Matt. 23:32), having given themselves over to ruin.

The ultimate destiny of unbelievers will be in an everlasting fire that God has prepared for the devil and his angels. The finality of this judgment is also supported by Revelation 20:14, which says that death (thánatos [2288]) and Hades (hładēs [86]) will be cast into the lake of fire, here defined as the “second death.” Note that unlike the kingdom, the everlasting fire is not described as “prepared...from before the foundation of the world” (Matt. 25:34).

[42-45] Jesus now gave the reason for the destiny of everlasting fire: “For I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger, and you did not take Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick and in prison, and you did not visit Me. Then shall they also answer Him, saying, Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and not minister to You? Then shall He answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me” (a.t.).

This is the other side of the coin. Interestingly, the goats did not perform a single act of compassionate ministry. Sacrificial love (agápē [26]), which God is (1 John 4:8, 16), was entirely missing. Since these goats did not respond properly to the love of God, they did not receive the love of God into their hearts. Their actions were concordant with their natures.

[46] The finality of the destinies is repeated here: “And these shall go away (from apérchomai [565] from apó [575], from; and érchomai [2064], to come or go, to depart) into everlasting punishment (from kólasis [2851]) but the righteous into everlasting life (from zōē [2222])” (a.t.). In the context, everlasting punishment is contrasted with everlasting life, which means that it cannot be life. The sheep’s sanctification will be complete in heaven. They glory in “eternal life,” that mature state of perfect love for God.

The double use of the preposition “into,” especially in conjunction with the local verb apérchomai, to depart, implies that “life” and “punishment” are places. Of course, this is given elsewhere in Scripture when, for example, hell is likened to a valley (Isa. 30:33; Jer. 7:31); a furnace (Matt. 13:42; Rev. 9:2); a lake (Rev. 19:20; 20:10); or simply “this place (tópos [5117]) of torment” (Luke 16:28). Similarly, heaven is spoken of as a house with many “mansions” that Christ has prepared for His own (John 14:2, 3).

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Living out the Living Word—by Justin Lonas

Above Reproach: Qualifications for Church Leadership
1 Timothy 3:1-7

As we’ve seen throughout this series, Paul’s focus in writing this letter to Timothy is to equip him as a young pastor to refute the false teachings of straying leaders at Ephesus and to build up the church there on a strong foundation of truth and righteousness.

In the second half of chapter 2, Paul addressed the issue of gender roles in the body, prescribing ways that men and women should conduct themselves in worship for the sake of their witness to the larger community. He also stated very clearly that women should not be placed in leadership in the church. Here at the beginning of chapter 3, Paul moves on to describe for Timothy (and for us) what those who are leaders in the church should look like.

Paul begins: “It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do” (3:1). Paul’s use of “trustworthy statement(s)” in the Pastoral Epistles generally denotes something that is accepted wisdom among church leaders, not necessarily words that he himself has coined. In essence, he is quoting proverbs. Here, that trustworthy statement is that it is indeed a good thing for men to want to serve the church as overseers. Moreover, the general blessing on seeking this office can be taken as a way of saying that the qualifications Paul lays out in the verses ahead are good guidelines for the character of all Christian men.

Paul’s term here for “overseer” is episkopos, from which we get the English word “bishop”. I tend to use “overseer” and “elder”, which in the New Testament translates presbuteros, interchangeably (as Paul does in Titus 1 and Luke does in Acts 20), but the focus of both
terms is on those men who are called to lead the church in ministry, teaching, and discipline.

Paul likely includes this encouragement for aspiring overseers in order to remind Timothy that those in leadership are answering a high calling and that he should give them the respect due their responsibility. In context, he has been deputizing Timothy to deal with certain leaders who have “gone rogue” with their teaching, and he wants to remind Timothy that the role itself is noble and good, regardless of the abuses some have undertaken.

Timothy’s task was not appointing new elders for a new church, but rather working within an established body that had overseers already in place. For this reason, Paul’s focus in this passage is on the character and qualifications of leaders rather than a description of their responsibilities. He wants Timothy to know clearly the type of character that elders should be exhibiting so that those who are not walking accordingly (and leading the church astray) can be removed.

Paul then begins delineating the character expected of church leaders: “An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money” (3:2-3). His statements here are very straightforward, requiring little exposition to be clearly understood. If we add anything to illuminate his meaning here, some of the same cultural understandings we have discussed in previous articles of this series may be brought to bear. Paul’s overwhelming focus seems to be on the reputation of the church in the wider community (which had suffered under the message and practice of the false teachers).

Overseers must be above reproach. This does not mean that they do not sin (who, then, could serve?), but rather that the direction of their life and choices must be such that they are striving to follow Christ in all things. As one commentator put it, their reputation should be such that accusations of wrongdoing against them draw disbelief from the congregation. Likewise, the prescription that they are to have “gone rogue” with their teaching, and that people resent being led by someone less experienced than them. To avoid this trap of discord, he tells Timothy to only allow mature believers to accede to the position of overseer.

Lastly, Paul explicitly reminds Timothy of the importance of a leader’s reputation outside the church. “And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil” (3:7). This is for the sake of the Gospel—if the church’s leaders (and by extension, the whole church) suffer from a bad rapport with the wider community, the whole ministry of the church is jeopardized.

In looking at the life of an overseer’s family, Paul is getting at the heart of the matter. The role of church leadership closely mirrors that of a father—both are positions of authority ordained by God with love as the operating principle. Paul wants to see men who lead their homes in love (“with all dignity”), whose children obey them willingly, not only under threat of punishment. These leaders inspire those under their care to obedience by setting an example of obedience to the Lord.

While a specific age is nowhere in scripture listed as a requirement for service as a leader in the church (though presbuteros implies some degree of advanced age), Paul does require that overseers not be too “young” in the spiritual sense. It is good for men to have walked with the Lord for many years and grown deep in their faith before they are entrusted with the care of the body. Paul knew men’s hearts, and he knew both that men given responsibility beyond their understanding are prone to pride and that people resent being led by someone less experienced than them. To avoid this trap of discord, he tells Timothy to only allow mature believers to accede to the position of overseer.
As with most straightforward passages in Scripture, the application issues are not bound up in interpretation but obedience. We know, from this and other passages, that the character and Christian walk of leaders in the church is of special importance. Applying these standards to ourselves and to those who serve as elders and overseers in our churches, however, requires patience, diligence, and moral courage to allow these qualifications (and not wealth or influence) be the determinant of who is called to serve.

Next month we will look at Paul’s prescription for deacons, and we will differentiate between these two offices within the church.

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Points to Ponder—by David L. Olford

Don’t Settle for Less

Text: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled” (Matt. 5:6).

Thought: I made a very rare visit to a department store a while back and found something called “True Religion.” The true religion I found was a line of cologne for men, I think. But it does illustrate what a touch of religion actually does; it just does something to the outside of you. It is external. It is surface. It doesn’t impact your life at an internal or deep level. It doesn’t touch the real you. This text, Matthew 5:6, calls us beyond a shallow superficial life with just a touch of religion. By God’s grace it calls us to follow Christ the King of Righteousness, and experience a dynamic relationship with God that impacts us from the inside out. Don’t settle for less! To experience the blessedness that Jesus talks about:

I. We Need a Radical Commitment to Christ and His Righteousness

These words of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 5:6 are found in the “Sermon on the Mount” in which Jesus presented basic truths for His disciples. But these basic truths challenge us to the core of our beings. These are radical words that demand us to answer the question, “who is this that speaks in this manner? What gives Him the authority to say such things?” These are clearly not just the words of a religious leader or a motivational speaker.

Matthew has already identified Jesus as the one born King of the Jews. He is the one who came to save His people from their sins. He is the promised Messiah who has come to fulfill God’s Word. Indeed, He came to fulfill all righteousness. More than that, Jesus is the very Son of God, Immanuel “God with Us.”

Matthew has already shown Him in action as well. Just before these words in Matthew 5, we see Jesus defeat the temptations of Satan, the evil one. He comes on the public scene calling for repentance, and He declares the coming of Kingdom of God. Jesus is not only preaching and teaching, though. He is healing diseases and dealing with demon-possessed people. Multitudes are following this extraordinary Man, particularly those desperate for help, physically or spiritually. Something is happening. A new movement is taking place. This Man, this miracle worker is none other than the Son of God who has come to announce the Kingdom of God. And these people who are following Jesus around are caught up in God’s new thing, true religion.

Seeing all these people, Jesus finds a place to start teaching. And as he sits down to teach, His disciples come to Him. Notice that, they come to Him. They are not in the background. They are not accidentally present. They are not distracted while he speaks. They came close as disciples to hear what the Master would say.

This passage contains the words of the very Son of God who came to live a perfectly righteous life, to teach the way of righteousness, to experience suffering and rejection at the hands of sinful people like you and me, to die on a cross for the sins of the world, to be raised from the dead, and who declares His Great commission to His disciples (Matt. 28:18-20). Now ascended on high, He calls us to Himself and to be His radical disciples. He invites us to join with Him, to learn from Him, and to find the real road to righteousness and satisfaction. He is the one who gives rest for our souls and in whom we can find rest for our souls (Matt. 11:28-30).

It is this Jesus who says, “Blessed are those that (who) hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.” Later, as Jesus comes to the end of this section of teaching, he identifies the wise person as the one who hears and does what he says (7:24).

II. We Need a Deep Desire for Christ and His Righteousness

Looking at Matthew 5:6, the first word is “Blessed”. What a great word! Jesus is announcing God’s blessing, God’s favor that brings joy. As we have seen, it must be people who come to Christ as His radical disciples who are candidates for this blessedness. But let’s go further. Jesus states nine of these “blessed” in the surrounding verses. He is revealing the character of those who are
candidates for such blessings. And in the midst of these powerful proclamations Jesus says, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled” (Matt. 5:6).

Here, Jesus is identifying His true disciples as those who have a deep desire for something. This desire is not for food and drink, which would be real longings on the part of the poor people He is addressing. No, they have a deeper desire for something for their own lives and for this world. They want to be right with God and they want God to make things right. They recognize that their own lives are in need of God, and that their circumstances were in need of the invasion of God’s righteousness and salvation.

These disciples are candidates to receive complete satisfaction, just like a hungry man would feel after the best of meals. Where or how will this satisfaction take place? Jesus doesn’t spell it out here, but to answer the question, satisfaction takes place as Jesus is followed as Lord and experiencing the salvation, the life and the righteousness that he offers. It comes in following Jesus, and experiencing the righteous work of God in our lives and in our world, and the ultimate salvation that He came to provide. But, for us to really go forward in this walk with Jesus, we must be genuine in our desire.

Jesus is describing a real heartfelt longing for something. He wants “hungry and thirsty” people, not people who are full of themselves or other passions. Jesus is addressing the core of our beings in these words. He is looking for people who want God, they want to be right with God initially and continually, they want God to clean up this world and see right and righteousness. Are these our passions?

Jesus is looking into our hearts and wanting disciples who have a heart for what He longs for: “the will of the Father,” “Right living!” People who meaningfully pray “Your Kingdom Come, O God, Your will be done in my life as it is in heaven.” They are poor in spirit, they weep over the sinfulness of their own hearts and the sinfulness of our world. They open their lives up to God meekly, and seek the righteousness that God requires, and Christ presents in his teachings right here. This is the righteousness that Christ lived, and taught. Christ died not only to provide forgiveness for our sins, but also to make it possible for us to pursue righteousness under His Lordship and with His enabling grace.

III. We need to Genuinely Pursue Christ and His Righteousness

What does it mean to be a seeker of righteousness? These original listeners were longing for God to break into their lives and into the life of their nation and to bring righteousness and justice. They wanted God to show up with His righteous power in their world. But, I believe that Jesus is going even deeper than that. He is teaching that His disciples are to be those who long for righteousness in their own lives as well as the communities around them. They want to be right with God. They want to be right with their neighbors. They want things to be made right in their communities, they want, they long for true “rightness” in our world.

Have you ever longed for things to get right after you’ve watched a few minutes of the evening news, or when you’ve tasted injustice, or when you’ve seen even people who name the name of Jesus doing insanely sinful things? I hope so, because we do live in an upside-down world. It is so sad, and we need God to break in and change things. But, God will start with us. Our real passion for “rightness” needs to start with our own lives.

We know that to be right with a holy God, we need a righteousness that is beyond us. So, as believers we understand that we need to accept the death of Christ for our sins, and receive His righteousness on our behalf. Also, we know that we are to grow, by God’s grace, in this life of righteousness. But, I want to apply this in another way that is in keeping with what Jesus is saying right here.

Jesus is talking about a level of righteousness that should be our passion and goal as well. It is a life pursuit. He is talking about a righteousness that shows itself in real life. When Jesus said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,” he was speaking specifically of God’s kind of righteousness, and He left us in no doubt concerning the type of righteousness that we must long for. It results in righteous living that flows from a pure heart and mind. He gives all sorts of examples in this Sermon on the Mount.

It is not enough to avoid murder, we are called to right relationships. It is not enough to avoid adultery, or sexual sin, our minds are to be pure as well. We are to be faithful in marriage totally. We are to be simply truthful in our speech, to not retaliate for evils and insults, to love our enemies. Ultimately we are to do all things for the pleasure and glory of God, and not just to impress people.

Jesus is referring to the reign of God in people’s lives and the resulting lifestyle of His followers. And longing for God’s kind of righteousness will be accompanied by a passion to do the will of God from the inside out.

God knows you through and through, and He is on a mission to make you more and more like His Son, Jesus Christ. This means that you are called to “take the high road” not the “low road” in this life. We are called to a higher and deeper righteousness that impacts our heart attitudes, our thoughts, our emotions, and of course, our actions.

Jesus had the strongest and harshest words for people who wanted to look righteous before others, but they would not admit that deep inside they were in desperate need of God’s forgiveness, and help. Jesus has spoken of these truly broken people as “blessed”. These are the people who are truly open to God, and want His righteousness to
rule and reign in their lives and in this world. Don’t settle for less.

We are living in a world that really is messy and mixed up when it come to right and wrong. To be concerned about Christ’s righteousness will get you labeled a hypocrite, or worse. Jesus is calling for is a real heartfelt passion for right attitudes, right relationships, right practices, and the very righteousness of God invading our lives. Radical and real followers of Jesus want to show forth His loving righteousness in all we do.

This commitment, this desire, and this pursuit lead to the blessedness that Jesus talks about. It is the one who follows Jesus with heartfelt passion for the will of God in their lives who will be truly satisfied. He or she will find Jesus to be their satisfaction as they go through life’s journeys, and they will experience the life of the Kingdom of God now and eternally.

**Thrust:** Do you want to be filled? Do you want to be satisfied deep in your heart and soul? Many people are seeking satisfaction in various ways. Jesus presents an alternative. He is the alternative. He is looking for real people who will take Him seriously. He is the Savior and Lord who ultimately is the source of our satisfaction. We cannot do this without His grace, without His mercy, we must be in relationship with Him. And He will enable us and instruct us in the way of righteousness.

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**The Story behind the Song**—by Lindsay Terry

**Playing with One Hand, Writing with the Other**

“**You Are My All in All**”

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13).

Israel, Anne, Hannah, Glory, Judah, Galen, Raina, Ezra, and Asa are the nine children of Dennis and Melinda Jernigan, with whom they share their love. Sapulpa, Oklahoma, is Dennis’s hometown. He was born there in 1959, into a family with some influence in music. Dennis’s father, Samuel, led the singing in the First Baptist Church of Boynton, Oklahoma.

Playing the piano came very easily for Dennis, and by age nine he was regularly playing for the worship services at the church. He learned to play by ear, and as a child he spent hours practicing at his grandmother Jernigan’s house. She taught him how to “chord” on the piano and was a great spiritual influence in his life.

He said of his conversion experience, “When I was nine years old, Jesus began calling me to Himself. On September 8, 1968, I asked my mother how to be saved. She explained God’s plan of salvation, and I was saved that Sunday afternoon and baptized that very evening.”

Dennis enrolled in Oklahoma Baptist University and later said of the experience: “Because of my lack of musical studies growing up, my training at OBU was like learning a whole new language. To be able to actually read and write the music I could see and hear was the opening of a whole new world. That ability would be very valuable later in life as I started to express my heart and feelings in song.”

During an interview, I asked Dennis to explain how he came to write “You Are My All in All”. Following is his description of the event:

“It all came about one morning several years ago. Each morning, Monday through Friday, I was leading a prayer group in Oklahoma City in early worship and prayer. I would sit at the piano and lead in certain aspects of worship as the people had particular needs brought to their minds. We always started with the Lord’s Prayer as a guide.

“On the particular morning in question, September 12, 1989, I was focusing on interceding for other people in general and remembering what the Lord had done for me particularly. As I thought on those things a melody began to form in my mind, and I played it on the piano. Lyrics came at the same time, and I began to sing to myself, ‘You are my strength when I am weak,’ and so on. I continued playing with my left hand and put the song on manuscript paper with my right hand. I just happened to have some paper on the piano at that time. That’s how fast it was coming. I continued until I had written the complete song, just as it exists today.”

Dennis was reminded of Psalm 45:1, “My tongue is the pen of a ready writer.” He added, “The next morning I sang it with the prayer group. They picked it up quickly and began to enthusiastically sing it with me. The whole of the song is a prayer set to music. We used it for about a year before I recorded it. By way of that recording and by word of mouth, it began to be known far and wide.”

Word, Incorporated, picked up the song and recorded it about two years later. From there it has been carried to many other places in the world and has been placed in chorus books, choir arrangements, and hymnals, thus making it more accessible to the population in general.
Dennis and his family call Boynton home, but they actually live some sixteen miles away near Muskogee, Oklahoma. A sign at the Boynton city limits announces: “Home of Dennis Jernigan, Christian Songwriter and Author.” The Jernigan family are founding members of the New Community Church where Dennis leads worship about twice each month. He also serves in the capacity of pastor to a small home community group, a part of the church.

As our own private worship should be, this song is a combination of yielding to Jesus as the Lamb of God in the midst of our failures and fears.

Church Builders—by Bernard R. DeRemer

Ralph Montanus: Blind Evangelist

Dr. Ralph Montanus (1919-86) founded the pioneering Gospel Association for the Blind to reach as many as possible of the world’s 42 million sightless. In spite of his handicap he traveled, held meetings, produced many publications and programs, all “that they might see.”

Born in New York City, he grew up in the most unlikely environment. His alcoholic parents sometimes took him to speakeasies! At an early age, doctors discovered that Ralph was blind in his right eye, probably from the struggle of his difficult birth. But his left eye appeared okay, so he began normal schooling.

Soon after Ralph’s conversion at 16 his parents also came to know the Lord. By then Ralph was an eager student of astronomy and chemistry. Then he found that glaucoma could claim his one good eye. He studied the Bible diligently, marking important passages with colored pencils. He joined the Salvation Army church and became a youth leader and Sunday school teacher. Then he took up the trumpet and cornet and served as musician at their meetings.

Ralph realized that eventually he would be totally blind and wondered what to do with his life, perhaps music or radio? He left the Salvation Army and joined the Gospel Tabernacle, where he was baptized and really began to grow in grace. He felt called to the ministry; the pastor secured papers that licensed him as an “exhorter,” the first step toward becoming a licensed minister. He enrolled at Zion Bible Institute in East Providence while he could still see fairly well. There he met Bea Butler, who helped with his studies; they were married in 1940.

He began using a white cane and attended the New York Association for the Blind, where he learned Braille. “Soon he was reading the Braille Bible, magazines, and books almost as easily as he had once read by sight.”

Then he learned to use the Braille typewriter; that would open the way later for The Gospel Messenger. But he had no experience writing or editing. The burden grew and gifts came in from time to time, confirming the call. Thus

The Gospel Messenger was born, in regular print for the sighted and Braille for the blind, free upon request. Circulation grew by leaps and bounds. It was a special thrill to hear from a blind Hindu in India—10,000 miles away—saved as a result of The Gospel Messenger. Other testimonies are legion.

Once, in the early days, they were unable to pay the rent. Ralph was greatly concerned and even worried until he realized that it was the Lord’s work and not his own. That day a $100 check came, covering the rent. Many other gifts over the years have sustained the ministry and allowed it to grow and expand.

When Ralph realized that more than 10,000 blind people were in New York City, only a fraction of whom he was reaching, he decided on a new venture—broadcasting. Blind people listen to the radio more than others, and it was a natural. Now “That They Might See” is heard on stations across the country, with fruitful results. Some have even been saved on their death beds as a result of the programs.

Ralph found that blind people are often alone and lonely, so he and Bea began visiting as many as possible to bring company, encouragement, and blessing. One hundred people showed up for the first Thanksgiving dinner Ralph sponsored. Sighted volunteers guided the blind to the tables for rich fellowship and a turkey dinner with all the trimmings—a far cry from the can of soup most would have had. Thanksgiving and Christmas gatherings, and a summer camping program, have become traditional parts of this ministry.

After Ralph went to be with the Lord, his son George, who is sighted, heads the work. The dedicated staff and volunteers continue ministering to the glory of God and the great blessing of many.

Bernard R. DeRemer chronicled the lives of dozens of heroes of the faith in more than a decade of writing for Pulpit Helps Magazine. He continues to serve in this
Counselor’s Corner—by James Rudy Gray

Mistakes

Recently I wrote a column for another publication. It was on the subject of mercy killing, and I received several encouraging responses. However, one guy in my congregation read the article and brought it to me at church. He said, “This is wrong!” He was referring to a Scripture reference in my column. I had mistakenly typed the wrong numbers. I wrote Proverbs 21:11 with the words to Proverbs 24:11. The words were right, but my reference was wrong.

This gentleman did not know the Bible that well, but he checked out every reference I had! My response was, “You are right. That is the wrong reference. It should be Proverbs 24:11.” He seemed a little shocked and simply said, “OK.”

I do not know what his motives were, and it does not matter. I did make a mistake. The more I looked for a life lesson in this; I began to think about the many mistakes I have made and the general category of mistakes. Some mistakes are bigger and more damaging than others.

Mistakes can be opportunities to grow stronger and develop better or different skills. The old adage is still sound, “The biggest mistake we make is not the mistake but the failure to learn from the mistake.”

Often, we deal with people in counseling who have made some significant and repeated mistakes. They have lost much and invariably feel like losers. The truth empowers us to do what is right. The truth is that we can fail without being a failure. We are never a failure until we stop trying and give up.

Encouragement that is real, truthful, and practical can be a powerful force for helping a struggling person move forward in the journey of life.

I recall one popular writer referring to the family of Jacob in the Old Testament as having the morals of a dog kennel! As we examine the pages of Scripture, we are met with an amazing discovery: people who make mistakes and people who failed. We are also met with supernatural testimonies where failures became successes and mistakes were used to discover great victories through God’s grace. Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.

Failures, mistakes, and sins are nothing to laugh about. They do happen and we can learn from them and move forward. Failure must be seen for what it is. Mistakes must be owned by those of us who have made them. Sin must be confessed to God. Then what? Move on!

Paul’s writing in Philippians 3:14 is a strong motivator for keeping on with our personal and spiritual growth. After the mistakes, sins, failures, have been properly dealt with, remember, “I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

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Book Reviews—3/26/12

Editor’s Note: As we sometimes do, in this issue, due to a recent influx of books (but in the absence of time and energy to read them all in depth) we are offering brief overviews of several noteworthy recent releases in lieu of our usual full reviews.


The authors of this collection of essays believe that many important aspects of Christianity are in danger of being muddied or lost as relativism takes root in our churches today. What was historically agreed upon is now readily questioned and the very essentials of the Christian faith are in jeopardy. It’s time to reclaim the core of our beliefs. To that end, D. A. Carson, Tim Keller, Kevin DeYoung, and other influential leaders have created this volume to defend the traditional Gospel and to strengthen the Church.


The latest installment in the Long Line of Godly Men, a series of brief biographical profiles of some of the
giants of the faith designed to build character in today’s Christians. Lawson’s look at the life of the “prince of preachers” shows that his ministry was not based on style or talent but on the faithful proclamation of the unadulterated Gospel of Jesus Christ. He calls believers to, like Spurgeon, avoid the twin dangers of dead orthodoxy and zeal without truth.

**Mark: He Taught Them as One Who Had Authority.**

A well-known author and theologian who has influenced Christians for decades, R. C. Sproul has filled the pulpit at St. Andrews Church in Sanford, Fla., since 1997. The St. Andrew’s Expositional Commentary series of books has developed from Sproul’s preaching ministry, setting in print his verse-by-verse teaching through various books of the Bible. This installment on Mark’s gospel shows Jesus as Lord over all.

**Mark: The Gospel of Passion.**

The second installment in Card’s excellent Biblical Imagination series on the four gospels, Card brings his songwriter’s sensibility for cadence and brevity to each chapter, opening the text of Scripture with gentle exposition that lets the words and characters of Mark’s work shine through. This approach results in a style of “devotional commentary”—insightful if not academic. Card’s goal is observation and drawing readers into a closer look at the life of Christ and a closer walk with Him.

**Witness Essentials: Evangelism that Makes Disciples.**

Part of the Essentials series of core-truth study guides, Meyer’s book attempts to guide small groups, Sunday school classes, and individuals through the biblical call to make disciples. Meyer addresses the inadequacy and uncertainty that many Christians feel in articulating the Gospel for unbelievers and encourages them through Scripture to take the burden of action off themselves and leave it with the Holy Spirit.

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**News Update—3/26/12**

**52 Killed in String of Iraq Bombings, Baghdad Church Targeted**

The Syrian Orthodox Church of St. Matthew in Baghdad was one of the targets in a string of bombings by Iraqi Muslim extremists Tuesday that killed at least 52, the Christian Post reports.

More than 30 bombs were detonated across several cities and towns, injuring an estimated 250 people—Iraq’s bloodiest day in nearly a month. “The goal of [the] attacks was to present a negative image of the security situation in Iraq,” a government spokesman said. Army and police forces are frequently targeted in Iraq, where bombings and shootings occur almost daily, and the waning Christian minority has found itself not only caught in the crossfire, but specifically targeted.

Increasing persecution, growing even worse since the withdrawal of U.S. troops in December, has reportedly led hundreds of thousands of Iraqi Christians to flee the country, and the remaining population is believed to be diminishing.

Religion Today Summaries

**Growth of Christianity in Iran ‘Explosive’**

The number of Muslims coming to Christ from Islam—often called Muslim-background believers or secret believers—is growing faster and faster in Iran, especially among young people, Open Doors USA reports. Forty years ago, an estimated 200 Muslim Background Believers were living in Iran, but today the number is around 370,000.

The growth is happening in all regions, but mostly in Iran’s larger cities, and the house church movement has triggered many secret meetings. According to Open Doors workers, the growth of Christianity “has everything to do with Iranians getting to know the real face of Islam, the official religion of Iran, and the mistrust of the people toward the government and leaders.”

Open Doors is using discipleship training to strengthen the Iranian church, and many are also coming to Christ through Christian programming on satellite TV. The government of Iran sees Christianity as a threat, but despite increasing crackdowns in attempts to stop the growth, the network of Iranian Christians has only become stronger.

Religion Today Summaries

**Supreme Court Shuns Christian College Groups Appeal**

The U.S. Supreme Court will not hear a discrimination case filed by Christian college organizations at San Diego State University, CBN News reports.
A Christian fraternity and sorority at SDSU had filed suit over a school “anti-discrimination” policy forbidding them from requiring members to follow certain standards, such as abstaining from pre-marital sex and defining marriage as between a man and a woman. The policy made Christian groups on campus ineligible for student funding and other privileges, such as reserving campus space for meetings, hanging posters and promoting their group on the university’s website, but a lower court ruled that it didn’t violate the Constitution.

David Cortman of the Alliance Defense Fund, who argued the case for the Christian groups, said the court’s decision would ensure that SDSU would “remain a stronghold of censorship.”

China: Police Raid House Church in Xinjiang, Detain 70 Christians

Police in Xinjiang, China raided a house church on Sunday and took more than 70 Christians into custody, China Aid reports. The house church, which has been meeting for nearly 20 years, was stormed by more than 10 authorities around 10 p.m.; police announced that the meeting was “unapproved” and “illegal” and ordered an immediate end to it.

After forcing each Christian there to be photographed, officials took them to local police stations for questioning, not releasing some for two days. Police also confiscated the Christians’ Bibles, hymnals, notebooks and other materials, but refused to provide a receipt for the confiscated items as required by law.

The pastor and his wife who were hosting the meeting were called into the local police station Monday for additional questioning and were threatened by police, who ordered them to stop holding meetings in their home.

Uzbekistan Tightens Grip on Unregistered Churches with Series of Raids

Uzbekistan was ranked on the Open Doors 2012 persecution watch list as the world’s No. 7 worst persecutor of Christians, and according to Mission Network News, it has been living up to its ranking so far this year. During the last few months, basic religious rights have been defied multiple times.

Last month, police raided an unregistered church, confiscating church property and fining the pastor more than $3,000—a cost of 100 times the minimum monthly wage. Just a few days before the church raid, police raided a Christian woman’s home, fining her 20 times the minimum monthly wage and handing over her Christian books to the regional Muslim Board. A few weeks later, a Baptist church was also raided and will be fined.

The increasing number of raids and fines—routinely used by authorities to confiscate religious material—has many concerned. “It really does seem like Uzbekistan is beginning to step up its campaign against unregistered churches and groups of any kind,” said Joel Griffin of the Slavic Gospel Association. He said it could be an indication of even worse persecution to come; already, numerous pastors have been arrested across central Asia.

UK Churches Soon Forced to Conduct Gay Marriages?

Church of England lawyers say a law to allow same-sex marriages in England would force Christians to conduct gay weddings in church, the Daily Mail reports.

As Parliament seems “in due course to legislate for same-sex marriage, as recently suggested by the Prime Minister,” C of E lawyers insist that existing equality laws would make churches offer weddings to gay couples if the law permitted them to marry.

The equality laws, introduced in 2007 and then enshrined in the 2010 Equality Act, have already disrupted 11 Roman Catholic adoption agencies because they are no longer allowed to decline to place children with gay couples. However, Prime Minister David Cameron has repeatedly stated that no church would be compelled to provide same-sex marriage ceremonies.

Sermon Helps—from www.sermonhall.com

Sermon Outlines
The Unique Jesus
Selected Scriptures
Intro.: When a person makes a decision about Christ, he is dealing with at least six unique offerings from Almighty God.
I. The Birth of Jesus, a Virgin Birth, Has No Duplicate in Human History (Matt. 1:21-23)
II. The Earthly Life of Jesus, a Sinless Life, Has No Duplicate in Human History (John 8:46)
A. He had no Adamic-nature taint.
B. To receive Him is to receive God; to reject Him is to reject God.
III. The Earthly Ministry of Jesus Has No Duplicate in Human History (John 14:11)
   A. Supernatural insight.
   B. Miraculous demonstration.
IV. The Redemptive Death of Jesus on the Cross Has No Duplicate in Human History (1 Cor. 15:3-4)
   A. He was God’s sacrificial Lamb (John 1:29).
   B. He paid the price once for all.
V. The Resurrection of Jesus Has No Duplicate in Human History (Rom. 1:4)
   A. God accepted His death for our sins (2 Cor. 5:21; 2 Pet. 2:24).
   B. He lives that we might live in Him.
VI. The Return of Jesus Has No Duplicate in Human History (John 14:3; Acts 1:11)
   A. Jesus is not done with this world.
   B. Jesus will return as Judge and King.
Conc.: What you do with Jesus is a decision that determines your eternal destiny.

Robert G. Witty

Not Ashamed of the Gospel
Romans 1:16
I. Pride—“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ”
II. Power—“For it is the power of God unto salvation”
   A. Plan of salvation.
   B. Price of salvation.
   C. Pleasure of salvation.
III. Prospects—“To everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also the Greek”
   A. Acceptance—changed by Christ.
   B. Effect—controlled by the Bible and Christ.

Croft M. Pentz

Illustrations
The Main Character
   Who is the dominant personage in your spiritual conversations? We’ve come to expect our leaders to fail to grasp the focal point of Easter.
   As preachers look for national recognition, they realize that the mere mention of “Jesus” will alienate the audience they so dearly covet. Some give members of Christ’s human family first place. Others have an all-inclusive “God” which allows hearers to make their own interpretation.
   Jesus once took Peter, James, and John on a field trip to the mountains. There, Jesus was joined by Moses and Elijah from heaven. The gloating disciples were at first distracted. It took God the Father’s thunderous commendation of Jesus to bring them to their knees and refocus their minds. As they looked up again, the Bible reports: “They saw no man, save Jesus only” (Matt. 17:8). What will it take to get you back on track with Jesus?

Anonymous

The Light of the World
   Christ has illuminated the world, not by what He did, but by what He was; His life is the Light of Men. We speak of a man’s life-work; the work of Jesus was His life itself…. It is good to be told that the pure in heart shall see God, but the vision of heaven in a pure man’s face outweighs it all. They tell us that the Easter morning has revealed His glory; rather would I say that His glory has revealed the Easter morning. It is not resurrection that has made Christ; it is Christ that has made resurrection. To those who have seen His beauty, even Olivet can add no certainty; the light of immortality is as bright on His Cross as on His Crown. “I am the resurrection” are His own words about Himself—not “I teach,” not “I cause,” not “I predict,” but “I am.”

George Matheson

Bulletin Inserts
On Easter
Easter says you can put truth in a grave, but it won’t stay there.

Clarence W. Hall

We live and die; Christ died and lived!

John R.W. Stott

And He departed from our sight that we might return to our heart, and there find Him. For He departed, and behold, He is here.

Augustine of Hippo

Our Lord has written the promise of the resurrection, not in books alone, but in every leaf in spring-time.

Martin Luther

These four via www.quotegarden.com

On the Gospel
The world has many religions; it has but one Gospel.

George Owen

The glorious gospel of the grace of God is the profound heritage of the Church in its ministry to a lost world.

William E. Gilroy The Book of Living Quotations

The Gospel does not consist of what we can do for ourselves, but of what God stands ready to do for us.

The Gospel is only good news if it gets there in time.

These two anonymous
Puzzles and ‘Toons

Church ‘Toons by Joe McKeever

OFFICER, WOULD YOU LIKE TO HEAR THE HIGH POINTS OF THE SERMON I PREACHED YESTERDAY?

NO ONE KNOWS BETTER THAN THE PASTOR WHEN IT WAS A GOOD SERMON.

IF A SEARCH COMMITTEE CALLS LOOKING FOR A SINCERE BUT UNEMPLOYED MINISTER, THAT’LL BE ME.

Answers to last issue’s puzzles:

ACROSTIC #46: ANSWERS

COLOSSIANS (4:6) — “Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.”

A. PEEKABOO
B. EASY
C. CHATTY
D. OUTWARD
E. LAWYER
F. OVERWHELM
G. STORY
H. SYNTYCHE
I. ITHMAH
J. AGATE
K. NEWSONG
L. SWEETWINE
M. HAUL

Father Abraham and Hidden Wisdom
By Mark Oshman
Originally published in Pulpit Helps, June 1995

Father Abraham’s Question Box

“The Jewish Feasts, the Sabbath Year, and the Year of Jubilee”

1. On what day of the Year of Jubilee were the trumpets to sound?
2. How many days during the Passover were the Jews to eat unleavened bread?
3. What feast occurred fifty days after the Passover?
4. When was the Feast of Tabernacles?
5. What was to happen after a Hebrew bondservant served a Hebrew master for six years?
6. During the Feast of Firstfruits, what was the burnt offering?
7. Why were the Israelites forbidden to glean the corners of their fields completely?
8. How long were the Israelites to live in booths during the Feast of Tabernacles?
9. What type of property was exempted from being returned to its original owners during the Year of Jubilee?
10. When did the Day of Atonement occur?

See answers on page 27.

Hidden Wisdom on next page
**HIDDEN WISDOM: BIBLE ACROSTIC # 47**

By Mark A. Oshman

Solve the acrostic by using the clues listed below to guess the words and by transferring the letter above each number to its appropriate place in the diagram. The result will be a Scripture verse of admonition, comfort, or instruction. Further, the initial letters of the answers will contain the name of the book from which the verse was taken. Happy hunting!

**HAPPY SOLVING!!**

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 1L | 2J | 3F | 4B | 5C | 6E | 7A | 8D | 9I | 10L | 11C | 12H | 13L | 14K |
| 15B | 16F | 17I | 18E | 19J | 20D | 21F | 22H | 23G | 24L | 25F | 26C | 27A |
| 28F | 29E | 30H | 31G | 32D | 33C | 34J | 35G | 36K | 37E | 38L | 39C |
| 40H | 41F | 42J | 43D | 44A | 45B | 46C | 47K | 48L | 49G | 50B | 51A |
| 52E | 53K | 54H | 55I | 56G | 57L | 58E | 59H | 60J | 61A | 62F | 63E |
| 64J | 65H | 66I | 67E | 68B | 69G | 70K | 71E | 72A | 73G | 74J |
| 75L | 76H | 77C | 78D | 79J | 80E | 81H | 82D | 83F | 84I |

**A.** How Jael came to Sisera (KJV) .......................... 72 7 51 44 61 27

**B.** Contrived (colloq.) ........................................ 45 50 4 15 68

**C.** “God hath _________ you on her” ......................... 26 77 46 33 5 39 11

**D.** This is used to capture wild elephants (alt. spelling) .......................... 82 78 8 43 32 20

**E.** David’s traitorous advisor ................................. 71 67 29 37 58 6 80 52 63 18

**F.** What the ways of the strange woman are... ........ 25 41 16 3 21 62 28 83

**G.** Polyphemus appears in this Greek epic poem ............ 69 49 23 35 56 31 73

**H.** This is of the Jews (John 4)! ............................ 54 76 40 30 59 22 65 81 12

**I.** Hyperion, among others ................................. 66 17 55 9 84

**J.** What Jacob did at Peniel ................................. 64 42 2 79 19 60 74 34

**K.** Expenditure ................................. 53 70 14 47 36

**L.** River in NW Wyoming ................................. 57 38 13 1 75 48 10 24