“But He Died!”

The Cross and God’s Sovereignty

by Justin Lonas

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“But He Died!”: The Cross and God’s Sovereignty
By Justin Lonas

Editor’s note: This is a slightly modified version of a blog post of 4/13/11.

My dad used to say all the time that the older he got, the more convinced he was of God’s absolute sovereignty and the less sure he was of his own free choice in the developments of his life and faith. As a child (and later a brash teenager), I was disinclined to see things that way—something about our human nature always chafes against any notion that we aren’t in control of our daily lives—but now I couldn’t agree more.

We are born into this world thinking ourselves the masters of our domain, seeking every opportunity to manipulate our situation to our advantage. Paradoxically, we learn to expect that our demands will be met whenever we make them precisely because we are utterly helpless. A parent doesn’t meet the needs of a child because the child’s cries obligate action; rather they do it out of love and concern for their child. A parent, not their child, creates and sustains the proper environment necessary for growth. From this, we grow up predisposed to believe that our parents exist to serve us, and we drag that image into our understanding of God.

Immature prayer often sounds like a more polished polite version of a young child’s begging: “Lord, please give me (insert desire here);” “Lord, please take away (insert bad situation, illness, or difficulty here).” Is there anything wrong with that? Certainly not, as we are exhorted to ask God for His good gifts—even self-centered prayer acknowledges God as the source of the blessing. When the content of all our prayers is centered on such supplication, however, we are clearly missing something. A God powerful enough to give us these blessings and good enough to answer when we ask is deserving of so much more in our relationship to Him. Just as we (hopefully) grow to see our parents as so much more than providers, we should mature in our understanding of God.

Theologically, this teases itself out in debates about the nature of salvation, righteousness, and responsibility. Who is the actor when we pass from death to life? How can we do right and cease from sin? Why do bad things happen in the world if God could stop them? Most of us, at least at some point, struggle with the interplay between personal autonomy and God’s absolute authority, and the Scriptures give precious little on which to build a sound case for the unilateral triumph of either position.

To put it too simplistically, we can look at it this way. Those who see God’s authority rigidly, to the point of not allowing man responsibility for anything, view God’s sovereignty correctly—He is either sovereign over all or not at all—but they impute to Him man’s motives and attitudes in the application of that authority in such a way that misses the vastness of His love and mercy. Those who see man’s autonomy rigidly, to the point of diminishing God’s power, correctly see that we are responsible for our choices, but they impute God-like motives to us that undercut the depth, darkness, and totality of our sinfulness.

I’ve known several people who grew into belief in God’s sovereignty and then have had that confidence shattered by personal experiences or simply an overwhelming awareness of the trauma of life in a fallen world. When we witness a horrific crime or natural disaster, we can’t help but wonder how and why God would allow such things. To some, the assurance that “God is in control” is no comfort and seems a hollow brush-off of visceral suffering.

God is in control, however, just as He was in control the day His beloved, holy, innocent Son Jesus Christ was brutally beaten and crucified in Jerusalem. The cross of Christ (vís-a-vís God’s sovereignty) is not simply a lesson in how God’s plan through what appears to be abject evil is in reality an unimaginable good (a la Gen. 50:20), though it is the ultimate example of that. The cross is not just a lesson in the ways in which God’s plan is beyond our understanding, though it is that too. Though a display of His grace and power and authority to erase our sins, it is still more. Perhaps the way the cross most boldly proclaims God’s sovereignty is through showcasing His willingness to suffer.

Christ was God, the Word made flesh (John 1:14), not another created being. Christ, “who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God
a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself...humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death...” (Phil. 2:6-8). He came from a position of equality with God and yet became a man, “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” (Heb. 2:17). He came down to know the full measure of temptation (Heb. 4:15), pain, and separation from the Father: “In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety. Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered” (Heb. 5:7-8).

The suffering which culminated at the cross included 33 years of life in this broken place. Christ lived with the poor sanitation, poor health, and poor food and water quality common to all in the first century world. He lived through three decades of human strife, quarrelling, brutality, political tension, sickness, sorrow, and death. He was probably maligned all His life by those who knew His birthday and Joseph & Mary’s wedding day didn’t add up. He was probably envied and maneuvered against by His siblings and neighbors. Perhaps His carpentry shop was robbed or vandalized. In his years among us, He took into Himself the fullness of human misery so as to be unassailable in His compassion for us.

When Satan tempts us to believe that God is somehow out of touch or incapacitated by the scope of natural and moral evil in the world, we have to cling to the cross. When he tells us that God could not know our pain, could not feel our inner turmoil, and is not interested in the details of life in this world, we have to throw the battered, bloody body of Jesus in his face and shout, “But He died!”

When we are tempted to doubt God’s goodness and compassion, when we read of divinely-ordered genocide (as in 1 Sam. 15) in the same book as we discover His everlasting lovingkindness and are told to see this as a contradiction that undermines our faith, we have to fall on the cross. The justice and love of God are predicated on the finished work of Christ: He knows “everyone whose name has...been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain” (Rev. 13:8). Everything about our understanding of and relationship with God has to hold up under the power of the cross; otherwise, it is incomplete and is “no gospel at all” (Gal. 1:7).

The longer I am a Christian, the more I understand my dad’s statement. The driving factor in this shift isn’t so much that I’ve learned more about God’s sovereignty from growing in His Word (though I have), but that I am daily confronted with the magnitude of my sin. The more I recognize my own rottenness, the more I recognize that any standing I have before God is His doing alone. The less sound my case seems in the face of God’s holy justice, the more His love breaks through in all its glory. If I thought I deserved even a snippet of it, it would be cheapened to me beyond recognition. I’ve got no right whatsoever to live with God, but He died!

Charles Wesley’s words ring true: “And can it be, that I should gain an interest in my Savior’s blood? Died He for me, who caused His pain, for me, who Him to death pursued? Amazing love, how can it be, that Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?”

Amen.

Justin Lonas is editor of Disciple Magazine for AMG International in Chattanooga, Tenn.

Glory Discoveries Believers Make
By Joe McKeever

“Did I not say to you that if you would believe, you would see the glory of God?” (John 11:40).

“Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?” (John. 11:40). Martha did indeed see God at work that day. She experienced it in a way none of us ever have. Her life changed forever in those few minutes. For the rest of her days, she must have relived...
these few minutes when she saw the glory of God. That was a microcosm of the Lord showing Himself among us.

Let’s reflect on the Glory Discoveries we make when we believe Jesus and start living like it.

I. We Notice That God Is Pushing Us

A) God will ask us to do the very thing we have said we could not do. A man with a withered hand was set before Jesus. The Lord ignored the hard-hearted ones who were baiting Him, hoping He would do something on the Sabbath so they could accuse Him. Jesus looked at them with a mixture of anger and sorrow, but at the poor man before Him with compassion. Then He said the strangest thing. “Stretch forth your hand!” (Mark 3:5).

“Uh, Lord,” we think. “Not a good idea. That poor man’s hand is withered. The very thing he cannot do is stretch it forth. In fact, that’s what some of us were hoping You would do, to stretch it.” How like our Lord to identify the very area of our lives that needs growth and asking us to stretch there.

A prejudiced Christian should not be surprised when God sends him/her to minister among the very ones they have shunned (think of Jonah). The one who never studies his Bible is asked to teach a class. The joyless believer is assigned to bring a devotion on joy in the life of a Christian. The suffering disciple who has struggled to get it right is invited to speak on victory for believers.

B) God will ask us to give up the very thing we have determined we could not live without. The man we call the rich young ruler was willing to do just about anything Jesus asked. And—let’s admit the obvious—most of us would have welcomed that guy into our church as a member. But the Lord Jesus said to him, “All that wealth of yours has to go. Give it to feed the poor and come follow Me.” The fellow walked away with a heavy heart. Give his wealth away? Anything but that (Mark 10).

Sell that prized sports car to fund the mission trip. Walk away from the relationship with that man/woman which is pulling you back from complete obedience to the Lord. Give up that questionable job. End your time-consuming hobby. Quit spending your weekends on the golf course or at the hunting lodge. The Lord wants first place in your life and He will give you no peace until He has it.

C) God will send us to the very place we have said we would never go. How many times have I heard missionaries and pastors say, “I could never live there.” “Anywhere but there, Lord.” And that becomes the very place He sends them. What is He doing? He is pushing us, expanding us, growing us. Preparing us for the blessings untold He is about to pour out. To accomplish that, He will require a larger vessel with a greater capacity. So, He stretches us, sometimes, it seems, to the breaking point.

II. We Gradually Become Aware That the Lord Is Using Us

A) God will show up at the very moment we were about to throw in the towel. I have seen this happen in my own life. God is teaching us that He is present even when we do not feel Him or sense His nearness. He has been present all along, but now at the critical moment, you feel Him.

I sat in a four-hour deacons meeting once listening to myself discussed and cussed as though I were in the next county. The amazing thing, something I found so incredible I was totally unprepared for it, was how near the Lord felt and how wonderful was His peace. It was the first time in my life I had even an inkling of how Stephen must have felt when He was being stoned to death.

“They were enraged in their hearts and gnashed their teeth at him. But Stephen, filled by the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven. He saw God’s glory, with Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and he said, ‘Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God!’ ... They were stoning Stephen as he called out, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’ Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not charge them with this sin!’ And saying this, he fell asleep” (Acts 7:54-60).

B) We will find words coming out our mouths we never would have thought of on our own. Our Lord told His disciples that in time they would be brought before magistrates and put on trial because of Jesus. When that happens, He said, they were not to prepare their remarks ahead of time. “You will be given what to say at that hour, because you are not speaking, but the Spirit of your Father is speaking through you” (Matt.10:20).

Every pastor—and I assume most Bible teachers—knows that feeling, all too rare but extremely precious, when the Holy Spirit takes over a lesson or sermon and begins preaching through him. He says things he had never thought of or planned or prepared. If the preacher is presumptuous, he will begin going into the pulpit unprepared and expecting the Lord to put words into his mouth like that again. My own experience is that God prefers to bless and use the prepared spokesman, not the lazy one.

C) We will hear people praising us for things we hardly remember doing or saying. There is not a preacher on the planet who has not had people complimenting him on saying a certain thing in a sermon which he either did not say or does not recall saying. Sometimes people will remember it for years and tell him how that changed their lives. But he recalls none of it. It’s a God thing.

III. In Time, We See That the Lord Is Blessing Us

The Lord promised to use Abraham (Abram) to bless “all the peoples on earth.” But in doing so, He said, “I will bless you and make your name great.” And then, “You will be a blessing” (Gen. 12).

A) There is no greater blessing to the faithful child of God than knowing that God has designed to use a lowly...
vessel like us. The closer we get to Him, the more unworthy we feel. That is a permanent law of holiness, with no exception whatever. That He would do anything with an imperfect and flawed instrument like us fills us with awe and humility. With Sarah’s maid Hagar, we manage to mutter, “You are a God who sees” (Gen. 16:13).

B) We stand in awe at what He has done. If we pull back from the Lord, something inside us wants to take credit for our achievements. But the closer we draw to Him, the more we are overcome by His grace that He would use such a one to do great things. Jesus taught us that we should be like the servant who, at the end of the day, looks at what he has accomplished and says, “I am only an unworthy servant; I have only done my duty” (Luke 17:10). Others may not be surprised because they think more highly of us than we do. But we know what frail weaklings we are. We know how far we have come, and how far we have yet to go.

C) We long to be used of Him again and again, in any way He pleases. Somewhere in England, I expect this little scenario works out on a daily basis. A man or woman goes into a store to purchase something. A clerk across the way spots him or her and edges over closer to a customer or colleague and says, “Know who that is? That is the prince’s valet.” “That is the queen’s maid.” That is the chief custodian for Buckingham Palace.” Even though that individual is a servant, because he or she is servant to royalty, they are honored by all who encounter them.

What an honor we are given to be a servant of the Most High God, to do lowly things for the Lord Jesus Christ. That is our glory, to serve Him. To know Him and be known by Him. It doesn’t get any better here, but it shall in eternity: “There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads” (Rev. 22:3-4).

Joe McKeever is a retired Southern Baptist pastor from New Orleans, Louisiana. He blogs regularly at www.joemckeever.com.

Worthy Is the Lamb Who Was Slain
By Charles Haddon Spurgeon

“And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth” (Rev. 5:6).

Why should our exalted Lord appear in His wounds in glory? The wounds of Jesus are His glories, His jewels, His sacred ornaments. To the eye of the believer, Jesus is passing fair because He is “white and ruddy;” white with innocence, and ruddy with His own blood. We see Him as the lily of matchless purity, and as the rose crimsoned with His own gore.

Christ is lovely upon Olivet and Tabor, and by the sea, but o, there never was such a matchless Christ as He that did hang upon the cross! There we beheld all His beauties in perfection, all His attributes developed, all His love drawn out, all His character expressed.

Beloved, the wounds of Jesus are far fairer in our eyes than all the splendor and pomp of kings. The thorny crown is more than an imperial diadem. It is true that He bears not now the scepter of reed, but there was a glory in it that never flashed from scepter of gold. Jesus wears the appearance of a slain Lamb as His court dress in which He wooed our souls, and redeemed them by His complete atonement.

Nor are these only the ornaments of Christ: they are the trophies of His love and of His victory. He has divided the spoil with the strong. He has redeemed for Himself a great multitude whom no man can number, and these scars are the memorials of the fight. Ah, if Christ thus loves to retain the thought of His sufferings for His people, how precious should his wounds be to us!

“Behold how every wound of His
A precious balm distils,
Which heals the scars that sin had made,
And cures all mortal ills.

“Those wounds are mouths that preach His grace;
The ensigns of His love;
The seals of our expected bliss
In paradise above.”

Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892), “the Prince of Preachers,” was a renowned pastor and author who served as pastor of London’s Metropolitan Tabernacle for 38 years. His works are still widely read today.
Exegetically Speaking—by Spiros Zodhiates

The Parable of the Marriage Supper
Matthew 22:1-14

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Jesus continued teaching in parables aimed at the leaders of the apostate Jewish nation. In general, parables teach a single point, and we must be careful not to build side inferences from minor points. Analogies are just that: they are like, not identical to.

[1-2] This is the second parable (see Matt. 18:23) in which Jesus “likened (from homoiōō [3666]) the kingdom of God to a certain king” (a.t.). This time the king prepared royal “wedding feasts” for his son. Homoiōō derives from homoiōs (3664), meaning like or similar. A correspondence or resemblance exists between the items being compared, not an identity or equality that would be expressed by the verb eimí (1510). Jesus made frequent use of similes, but He also used metaphors. For example, when He referred to Himself as the “door of the sheep” (John 10:7).

The most natural symbolism portrays the “certain king” as the Father and the “son” as the Son of God. Everyone else is either a slave or an invited guest. The Lord Jesus elsewhere is depicted as a bridegroom and His church as the bride (Matt. 9:15; Eph. 5:25–32; etc.), and the marriage occurs in heaven. The marriage is the final revelation of whom God saves, although this exact number—like the hairs on our heads (Matt. 10:30)—is infallibly foreknown by God in eternity past. Because God’s foreknowledge is free from error, this number cannot be changed in history; it must be exactly what God foreknew, nothing more, nothing less (Eccl. 3:14). The Creator Himself is Lord of the history He foreknows: “I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it” (Isa. 46:11, cf. John 1:3). The bridegroom of Christ will encompass both Old and New Testament saints from all ages, including the final Tribulation period.

[3] In great detail, Jesus told about the original guests invited to the wedding festivities: “And [the king] sent forth his servants (from doulos [1401], bond-slave) to call them that were bidden (kekłēménous, the perfect passive participle of kalēō [2564], to call, invite, bid) to the wedding.” The perfect tense implies that they had been invited at one time, and the invitation was still valid. Because everything was now prepared, the king now requested his servants to call those who had been invited earlier.

In the Gospels, the verb kalēō does not always reflect the effectual call to salvation that it does in the Epistles, especially those of Paul and Peter (Rom. 8:30; 1 Pet. 2:9; etc.). Jesus gave a general call to all persons exhausted by their labors in Matthew 11:28—“Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” But this was not Jesus’ call of particular individuals to salvation such as He gave to Paul on his way to Damascus (Acts 9:3–9). God is not obligated to change the natural will of those who reject His standing invitation or general call.

However, on the day of judgment, no persons will be able to say they were not invited. In John 1:9, we read that the Word of God, which is God (John 1:1), was the “true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens (from phōtizō [5461]) every man” (NASB). Consequently, every person is responsible for his or her response.

Note the reaction of those invited: “And they would not come.” The verb “would” is ēthelon, “willed,” the imperfect tense of thēlō ([2309], to will in a determinative sense)—as compared with boulomai ([1014], to desire, to prefer—literally, were not determining). It is followed by ethēin, the aorist infinitive of ērchomai ([2064], to come). This is not a physical handicap; the inability is obstinacy and rejection (reflected in the imperfect tense), the inflexible attitude of a will that is not neutral. The cannot is a will not. The aorist tense indicates that these individuals did not make a single choice in favor of Christ. At the second invitation, this group made excuses for not coming.

Even though the call was indirect, that is, through the king’s servants, the refusal to come constituted a personal affront to the king and his son. Perhaps, the subjects did not identify the servants with the king as much as they should have; they did not realize who ultimately was inviting them. God’s specific call, by contrast, not only infallibly produces an effect but is direct (i.e., not mediated through servants) and is by name, as in the cases of the apostle Paul (Acts 9:4) and the sheep (John 10:27).

[4] At this point, the king clarified the incentives, implying that the invited guests had every reason to accept the offer: “Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them that are bidden, ‘Behold (idoú [2400]), I have made ready my dinner. My oxen and my fatlings (from sitístós [4619] from sítos [4621], wheat; therefore, grain-fed cattle) have been killed, and all things are ready. Come unto the marriage’” (a.t.).

“Behold” called attention to something wonderful that might otherwise be missed—here, that the food and “all things are ready (from hétoimos [2092], prepared).” The first invitation did not include this information, so the
level of accountability was now higher. Refusal at this point was absurd. “Behold” is intended to cause people to look beyond the human feast in the parable to the Divine One that celebrates not a marriage between humans but between the Messiah and His bride, the church.

In the analogy of the kingdom, preparation for this celebration is based on the king’s determination that some will attend the feast, even if the first group invited turn it down. The verb ἀφίημι ([2380], killed) is twice used in connection with the sacrifice of the Paschal Lamb, symbolic of the body of Jesus Christ (Mark 14:12; Luke 22:7) and in 1 Corinthians 5:7 for Christ’s sacrifice. “Come!” (δεῦτε [1205], an interjection) is the concluding imperative. The king invited his subjects to respond because he had planned this wonderful feast.

[5] The poor response of those first invited is detailed in these next two verses. “But having made light of it, they went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his merchandise” (a.t.). In Hebrews 2:3, the same aorist participle of ἀμελέω rendered here as “made light of” is translated by the stronger attitudinal verb “neglect”. “How shall we escape, having neglected (amelēsantes) so great salvation?” (a.t.). In general, the action of an aorist participle is most frequently prior to and causally related to a main verb. Thus, the attitude, “having made light of” something, not only comes first but determines the subsequent course of action—“went away.” Logically, attitudes precede actions, and actions result from predispositions.

The excuses offered are worldly. It is amazing how often the Gospels portray the “care of this age and the deceit of wealth” (Matt. 13:22; a.t.) as powerfully dissuasive influences against following after the things of God. Perhaps we can conclude from this that those specifically invited were financially secure, whereas those from the highways and byways were not so well off.

Those who refused could have accepted the invitation without neglecting their responsibilities. But they may have seen it as a threat. Perhaps they were hoarding wealth by defrauding laborers of proper wages or oppressing their best workers (see James 5:3–6)—vested sins for which they would have to repent if they followed Christ. In any case, they did not seek the kingdom of God as their first priority. In Matthew 19:29 Jesus had said that “every one who has forsaken (from ἀφιῆμι [863], to send away, to release, to forsake) houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for My name’s sake, shall receive a hundred times as much and shall inherit everlasting life” (a.t.).

Ἀφιῆμι indicates what our attitude ought to be when we forsake anybody or anything for Christ’s sake. It comes from the preposition ἀπό (575), away from, and the verb ἴημι (n.f.), to send. We must send away, releasing our earthly cares as we dedicate ourselves to God. We should not neglect our families or possessions (Luke 14:33), but we should never value them in such a way that prevents our service to Him.

[6] Two groups of rejecters are portrayed in this parable: the first, in the previous verse, indifferent and callous, and now a second group that is much more violent: “And the remnant, having taken hold of his servants, treated them spittily and killed them” (a.t.). It is shocking to find sin so cruel in the face of kindness—this was an invitation to a wedding feast. They both insulted kindness and then killed it. The depravity shown in this parable weighs heavily against the idea of the natural goodness of humanity. The same treatment was given to the son of the householder in the parable of the wicked vinedressers (Matt. 21:39).

[7] When the king received word of the murders, he became enraged. The Greek word translated “was wrath” in the KJV is ὀργίζομαι ([3710], to be angry). This describes God’s attitude toward those who insult and harm the servants who represent Him and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 21:40). Paul tells us that God is not unjust when He brings wrath down upon evil: “Is God unrighteous [unjust] who taketh vengeance (from ὀργῇ [3709] wrath, anger; the noun form of ὀργίζομαι)?” (Rom. 3:5). The answer of course is no!

Though aimed at the Jewish nation, this parable supports Paul’s general contention that God intends His rich goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering to lead people to repentance (Rom. 2:4). But natural persons, he notes, despise these qualities. Rather than repent, Paul observes in verse 5, “after your hardness and impenitent heart, you treasure up to yourself wrath (from ὁργῇ against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God)” (a.t.). God will not tolerate people’s ongoing rejection of His gracious kindnesses forever. Wrath will meet wrath head-on, on the day of wrath.

Judgment is inevitable and, as the parable teaches, the king’s anger is swift: “And having sent forth (from πέμψῃ [3992], to send; contrasting the verb used in verses 3 and 4, ἀποστῆλῃ, which means to send forth on a mission) his armies, he destroyed those murderers and burned up their city” (a.t.). Both individuals and their proud creations (cities) come under this judgment. The reference here is predictive of the overthrow of the people and the city of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

All this was anticipated by the Lord Jesus in His lamentation over Jerusalem, which was “left...desolate” after its final rejection—“ye would (from θέλῃ [2309], to determine, wish) nor”—of His words (Matt. 23:37–39; Luke 13:34, 35). Israel’s rejection of Christ was the apex of a long history of rebellion and murder of prophets: “Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by their hands to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in My covenant, and I neglected (from ἀμελέω) them” (Heb. 8:9; a.t.). If we consistently neglect the prophets God sends to
us, He will inevitably punish us: “How shall we escape, having neglected (amelēsantes) so great a salvation?” (Heb. 2:3; a.t.).

[8-10] Who finally came and ate the food the king prepared? Not those originally called but another group unrelated to this first one. Unhindered by rejection, the king redirected his servants: “Then he said to his servants, ‘On the one hand, the wedding is ready, but they that were bidden were not worthy (from ἀξιόλογος) [514]). Go therefore into the divisions of the roads, and as many as you shall find, bid (kalēsate) to the marriage.’ So those servants went out into the roads and gathered together all whom they found, both bad (from πονηρός [4190], malevolent) and good (from ἀγαθὸς [18], benevolent) and the wedding was filled with guests” (a.t.).

Although the servants were to invite Jews and Gentiles alike—some “bad” and some “good”—as many as the servants could find. Those who originally rejected the invitation were not “worthy”—in the positive sense of reward—of the feast. They were, however, “worthy of death” (Rom. 1:32). This accords well with what Jesus had prophesied to the Jews earlier: “The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof” (Matt. 21:43). While individual Jews continued to respond to the gospel, God judged the nation represented by the Pharisees, other leaders, and the majority of ordinary people who demanded Christ’s crucifixion. The Jews were scattered among Gentile nations following the destructive aftermath of A.D. 70.

The king commanded his servants in the parable to turn their attention from successful people to the common poor found in the “crossroads.” They were not to make moral discriminations but were to invite “both bad and good” (see above). As in other parables, the kingdom in this present church age contains good and bad fish, wheat and tares, and here “good” and “evil” that symbolize the regenerate and unregenerate.

The single “call” is effective, inasmuch as every person the servants find, they “gather together”. However, this is not God’s call for salvation for two reasons: First, the call, once again (v. 4), is mediated by servants; second, one of the “bad” subjects is found within the feast but without a wedding garment and is immediately bound and cast into outer darkness (see below). God alone “calls out” as Jesus said: “I have chosen you out (from ἐκλέγομαι [1586]) of the world” (John 15:19, cf. Mark 13:20; etc.).

[11] The “bad” guest stood out from the rest, immediately catching the eye of the king: “And when the king came in to see (θεᾶσαται, the aorist middle infinitive of theάσαται [2300], to see something; the infinitive carries the connotation of purpose, i.e., to inspect) the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment (from ἐνδυμα [1742], outer robe).” A special wedding garment was required for entry and seating at these festival occasions. In Middle Eastern custom, this piece of clothing was presented to guests as a token of the wedding garment was obvious to the king.

The verb associated with the noun ἐνδυμα—ἐνδυω ((1746) from ἐν [1722], in; and δύω or δύνα [1416], to go down)—means to cover what the Greeks called the χιτόν (5509), the undergarment worn next to the body. In the new covenant, the wedding garment is the “[array] in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints” (Rev. 19:8). The “righteousness of saints” is given metaphorically as clothing to clarify that it is the objective righteousness of Christ, not the subjective righteousness of believers. Accordingly, God commands us to “put…on (from ἐνδυω; ‘clothe yourself with’) the Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 13:14). Our righteousness can never match the pure and holy righteousness of Christ. This is why the lack of the wedding garment was so noticeable.

[12] His gaze fixed on the man, the king asked, “Friend (from hetairos [2083], selfish comrade), how did you come in here not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless” (a.t.). This is another good instance of the use of the word hetairos, which strongly contrasts with φίλος (5384) although it is commonly translated “friend” (mistakenly taken for φίλος, as in Matt. 26:50); (cf. Matt. 11:16; 20:13). Jesus called Judas “friend” (from hetairos) even at the point of betrayal, but He hardly considered him a friend. Judas was an associate, a fellow traveler, a comrade, but he had attached himself to Christ for selfish reasons.

In modern Greek, “hetaireia” is used for a corporation, and the “hetairoi” are members of the corporation who come together strictly for economic purposes and personal financial benefit. They rarely associate as “friends” when there is no profit in prospect. Similarly, this man in the banquet hall did not qualify as a true friend of the king. He was not entitled to dine or attend the festivities, and the absence of the appropriate garment was conspicuous to everyone, especially to the king.

As we mentioned, the garment represents the robe of the Christ’s righteousness (Isa. 61:10; Rom. 5:18-19; etc.), which is acquired through faith (Eph. 2:8). Symbolized by clothing, it is apparent that such righteousness is external and objective—the righteousness of Christ. The exposure among those fully clad with wedding garments was embarrassment enough, but we should not lose sight of the symbolism here. Since the man did not have a garment, he either ought to have had one or he ought not to have been at the feast. It is moral nakedness, guilt, which leaves one speechless, without any defense.

[13] Once again, the king acted promptly: “Then the king told the servants, ‘Having bound him, hands and feet, take him away and cast him into outer darkness’” (a.t.). Both binding and taking away imply resistance. From Jesus’ words that “men loved darkness rather than light” (John 3:19), at least one author has voiced the euphemistic
opinion that “the gates of hell are locked on the inside” (C. S. Lewis in *The Great Divorce*). But these words, “binding” and “casting,” work against this view. John’s words cannot possibly mean that people prefer the fires of hell to the tranquility of heaven. The wicked neither bind themselves nor cast themselves into the furnace of fire, as though it were a preference. The gates of hell are locked on the outside, if at all.

The duty of binding and casting, here assigned to the “servants,” reminds us of Jesus’ commission: “Whatsoever surely (εάν [1437]) you bind on earth has been bound in heaven” (Matt. 16:19; a.t.). But before we assume that these “servants” are saved persons in the church and that this is the church age, note that angels are also “servants” of God according to Hebrews 1:14: “ministering spirits, sent forth unto ministry (from diakonia [1248], the ministry of a diákonos [1249], servant) for them who shall be heirs of salvation?” (a.t.). Angels also will bind and burn the tares at the end of the age, according to Matthew 13:30.

This is the second time in Matthew that we find the phrase “outer darkness (exōteros [1857], the comparative of ἔξω [1854], outside; and skόtos [4655], darkness).” The expression occurs only three times in the Greek New Testament, all three in the Gospel of Matthew concerning punishment for those who displease their Lord. In Matthew 8:12, it is for those who thought they were “children of the kingdom.” Here, it is for the guest who didn’t care whether or not he was dressed appropriately for the wedding feast. And in Matthew 25:30, it is for the unprofitable servant who thought he would escape the master’s wrath by hiding the talent that had been entrusted to him to use.

In this verse, “outer darkness” is clarified as physically outside the illuminated banquet hall—evidenced by “cast outside.” Moreover, the man without the proper garment did not ethically belong among the guests who are properly dressed. Morally bankrupt, he is physically banned from the hall. Having glimpsed and perhaps even having experienced some joy of the celebration, he was not allowed to remain and participate. This would cause extreme regret and frustration, expressed by the words: “There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Consider also the threat Jesus issued to the Jews in Luke 13:28: “There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out.”

[14] Now the servants had “gathered” this man along with the rest, but he was evidently one of the “wicked”, the result of the king’s command to be indiscriminate among “as many as ye shall find.” Jesus explained this in His summary: “For many are called, but few are chosen.”

The word translated “called” is from the noun kλέτος ([2822], derived from the verb kaléō [2564], to call, which is translated “bidden” in verses 4 and 8). The class of the called in the Gospels is broader than the class of the elect. This man was called but, extracting symbols from other parables, he lived as a tare alongside the wheat, a bad fish in the net with the good. So he was “called” into the field and into the fishnet, that is, into the church, but in the end he was a bad tare and a bad fish. He had no change of heart. This invitational meaning for “called” prevails in the Gospels, but the meaning changes in the Epistles to a call that actually changes the heart (cf. Rom. 1:1, 6,-7; etc.).

A statement in verse 8 has been left for consideration now, and that is: “But they which were bidden were not worthy.” We know why they were not worthy, but what does this imply about the “good” persons gathered by the servants? Had they merited the banquet and marriage? Their worthiness is found in the wedding garment itself that they put on, the righteousness of the One who “is made unto us righteousness” (1 Cor. 1:30), meriting salvation for us in His perfect death and life. The “good,” the personal righteousness of faith, holiness, and perseverance that we attain in this life, is inseparably linked to the objective justification in Christ represented by the external wedding garment. We “put on” the robe of justification, the wedding garment by faith.

### Living out the Living Word—by Justin Lonas

**God, the Ruler of All the Earth**

Psalm 46

Whereas our first two articles on the Psalms covered chapters (Ps. 1; Ps. 15) primarily concerned with our personal righteousness before God’s holiness, the group of Psalms we turn our attention to now is more outwardly focused on God’s strength and power and His dealings with the nations of the earth.

One of the great themes of the book that emerges very clearly in Psalms 46-47 is God’s power over and desire for praise from every nation, not just the Israelites. Looking back from the perspective of a citizen of the United States and an inheritor of the work of faithful believers through the centuries to bring the Gospel to far
shores, it is easy to see such messages in the words of the psalmists and “connect the dots” to the New Testament reality of God’s love poured out for all people. When we read a passage like Psalm 67:3-4, “Let the peoples praise You, O God; let all the peoples praise You. Let the nations be glad and sing for joy; for You will judge the peoples with uprightness and guide the nations on the earth,” it is for us wrapped in the warm joy of the Church around the world praising God and yearning for the day when we will do so together in His presence.

For the Israelites under the Old Covenant, however, the notion of God’s love for the nations would have sounded like a haunting prophecy, a departure from the status quo, and (for some, at least) a threat to their special status with God. Of course, God’s plan was always for redemption of the whole world through Israel (as we see in the promise to Abram in Genesis 12, Solomon’s dedication of the temple in 1 Kings 8, and many other places), but most of the Israelites were blind to this truth. It was not until after the death and resurrection of Christ that this message broke forth under the influence of the Holy Spirit (as we see in Acts 2) and spread like wildfire.

In that context, we’ll look at Psalm 46. The heading tells us that this is a song of the “sons of Korah”, a group to whom 12 Psalms (42-49, 84-85) are attributed. Many scholars believe that they were a specific clan of Levites given the role of leading the nation in worship. Ironically, they were descended from Korah, who rebelled against God and Moses and was swallowed up by the earth in Numbers 16. His sons were spared (cf. Num. 26:11), however, apparently for the purpose of leading praise to God—if that is indeed the origin of this group, it is a testament to God’s sovereignty and desire to redeem.

The psalm begins, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change and though the mountains slip into the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains quake at its swelling pride” (46:1-3).

God as a refuge for those who trust in Him is a recurring theme through the Psalms and through the Bible as a whole. The writers of Scripture understood that God, though His plans are not always (or even often) grasped by us, is filled with love for His servants and will protect them. Christ reiterates this truth in the Sermon on the Mount and in Matthew 10:29-31: “Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But the very hairs of your head are numbered. So do not fear; you are of more value than many sparrows.” God will protect us here until He is finished using us for His glory on earth, and in death we are brought into the ultimate refuge of His dwelling place. It is interesting that He doesn’t provide a refuge, but He is the refuge. Our refuge is found in relationship with Him—He will hold us and protect us Himself.

More than just a refuge, the psalmists here describe God as our strength. Not only does He protect His people, He empowers them to do His will; He sustains us in everything we do for Him. They also write that God is “a very present help in trouble.” The image I’ve always carried with that verse is one of God standing right behind me, always ready to reach out and carry me if I would only ask. There is a sense in which that is exactly the case, as God is present everywhere at all times (see Ps. 139). No situation we encounter escapes His notice, and He delights in showing His power by rescuing His servants from the most improbable binds (as in Dan. 3; Acts 12; etc.). Even in the face of the cataclysm imagined in these verses, God is our sure hope. The man who trusts in the Lord need not fear even if the whole order of the universe were to collapse. The Lord, who created the world, commands and controls the forces of nature to serve His plan and bring Him glory (as we see in Ex. 14; Josh. 10; Ps. 107; Mark 4; etc.).

The psalmists praise God for being, of Himself, a refuge for His people, but also for carving out a place of rest for them: “There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy dwelling places of the Most High. God is in the midst of her, she will not be moved; God will help her when the morning dawns” (46:4-5). Streams and rivers in the Psalms usually allude to the nourishment and help that God provides (as in Ps. 1; Ps. 23; etc.). The city of God, where He dwells with His people, would have been understood by the first hearers of this psalm to mean Jerusalem. There is, however, a further picture of the kingdom to come, when God will bring the New Jerusalem to establish His dwelling with His people for eternity (Rev. 21:2-4).

Just as God is over and in control of the natural world, so He is over all the affairs of men. “The nations made an uproar, the kingdoms tottered; He raised His voice, the earth melted. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold. Come, behold the works of the Lord, Who has wrought desolations in the earth. He makes wars to cease to the end of the earth; He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two; He burns the chariots with fire” (46:6-9). Though the nations of the world rise up against God and one another, He is the fortress of His people. He beckons us to see how He sets up kingdoms and tears them down, and how He will ultimately bring His peace on the earth.

As the prophet writes, “Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are regarded as a speck of dust on the scales…. It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers…. He it is who reduces rulers to nothing, who makes the judges of the earth meaningless” (Is. 40:15, 22-23). The Lord will use whom He will use to accomplish His plans.

The Lord makes a declaration to the world: “Cease striving and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth” (46:10). He will
be acknowledged by all men in the end as the sovereign of the earth; for all their effort, the nations cannot overcome His plan. He beckons them to lay aside their pointless trying and follow after His way. His triumph is not contingent on their cooperation, but He offers them the opportunity to join His people and to have peace in Him instead of being brought to destruction by resisting Him. This foreshadows the sacrifice of Christ which makes possible the entrance of people “from every tribe and tongue and people and nation” (Rev. 5:9) into His kingdom—the invitation can be sent because Christ has paid the price.

The psalm concludes with a repetition of verse 7, “The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold.” The people of God have the utmost confidence if they trust in Him—He is our God! In Him alone we boast. He enables the boldness of believers to proclaim His name to the ends of the earth; He calls us to step out in faith to get into situations where we need His “very present help” to deliver us. The Lord desires to be the strength and stronghold of all men, and it is for this that He has made us “a people for His own possession” to “proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called [us] out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9).

Justin Lonas is editor of Disciple Magazine for AMG International in Chattanooga, Tenn.

Points to Ponder—by David L. Olford

Encouraging Real Christian Growth

Text: “...Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18a).

Thought: Real Christians grow! To be more precise (according to the Apostle Peter) a real knowledge of Christ and a real experience of His grace will lead to growth in Christian character. This is the Apostle’s “thesis” as he exhorts his readers in 2 Peter and confronts false teachers and teaching. Let’s consider how Peter addresses this matter of Christian growth in the first part of his Epistle.

I. The Potential for Real Christian Growth (2 Pet. 1:1-4)

The Apostle begins by affirming the real spiritual life and experience of his readers. They have a genuine “like precious faith” (1:1). His greeting indicates that it is in the context of the knowledge of God and Jesus that grace and peace are to be multiplied (1:2). These believers had real faith and real knowledge, the absolute prerequisites for true growth in the Christian life.

Peter then affirms that these believers had everything they needed for true spiritual growth, God’s provisions “for life and godliness” (1:3-4). Peter references God’s power and His promises as he speaks of these as available through the knowledge of God. These provisions of God enable these believers to be escapers and partakers (1:4). They could escape the corruption of the world and partake of the “divine nature.” In this tightly knit set of sentences, Peter makes it clear that there is a solid basis for the expectation and exhortation for his readers’ growth in Christ. The potential for growth was there, and it is there for every true child of God.

II. The Pursuit of Real Christian Growth (2 Pet. 1:5-7)

Having the resources does not guarantee that the child of God will use them. In the next section of his epistle, the Apostle affirms the need for personal diligence in matters of growth (1:5). There is a pursuit that is a part of the life of the growing and maturing believer. He says that because of what they have in their knowledge of God, “giving all diligence,” they are to “add to [their] faith....”

There is a personal responsibility and activity involved in this call for growth. Virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love are presented as seven character qualities that need to be added to faith. This is not a ladder of salvation; it is a list of essential character qualities that should be evident in the life of a true child of God. Each quality is important and they are inter-related. It is not a surprise that the list starts with faith as the foundation and ends with love. There is a wonderful pursuit that should characterize the true Christian.

III. The Prospects for Real Christian Growth (1:8-11)

In the next few verses the Apostle Peter reveals the significance of this pursuit of growth. We need to keep in mind that the Apostle will address false teaching and false teachers in chapter 2, who lack the very qualities he has presented. Their teachings, which are not real knowledge, do not encourage the type of growth in Christian character that Peter presents. The Apostle clearly states that having these qualities (referred to in verses 5-7), and abounding in them, is very important indeed. Such growth in character will result in a spiritually fruitful life, avoiding barrenness and unfruitfulness (1:8).

Not having these Christian character qualities will reveal a shortsightedness and a bad memory as far as one’s cleansing from sin is concerned. To be cleansed from “old sins” (1:9) should mean that the pursuit of holiness and maturity will follow. Indeed, there should be diligence to demonstrate through the child of God’s life one’s “calling and election” (1:10). The believer who is truly growing in grace and knowledge “will never stumble” (10). Rather, an
abundant entrance into “the everlasting kingdom” is the expectation (11). What glorious prospects for the true child of God. Note that Peter doesn’t just speak of getting into heaven, he speaks of an entrance that will be supplied abundantly.

Thrust: The Apostle Peter indicates that his death is close at hand (1:14). With this in mind, as well as the false teaching that at least could potentially influence these believers, he calls for personal diligence leading to real growth in Christian character. The last part of the letter reminds us of the “Day of the Lord” which also is an incentive for pursuing holiness and godliness (3:11).

Thus, it is safe to say that true spiritual growth is the potential of the child of God, it should be the pursuit of the child of God, and it provides wonderful prospects for the child of God. Rather than stumbling, the Christian should be fruitful as he/she grows “in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen” (3:18).

David L. Olford teaches expository preaching at Union University’s Stephen Olford Center in Memphis, Tennessee.

The Story behind the Song—by Lindsay Terry

From the Washhouse to the World

Song: “Jesus, Name above All Names”

“Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us” (Matt. 1:23).

Of the approximately twelve songs Naida Hearn wrote—she wasn’t quite sure how many when I spoke with her—only one has been published. But what a song! She wrote it as she was nearing her fortieth birthday. She was born in New Zealand in 1931.

So great was Naida’s interest in the different names of Jesus mentioned in the Bible that she began to make a list of the names. As is the case with many homes in the city of Palmerston North, she and her family had a “washhouse” behind the regular living quarters of the home. One day in the early 1970s, as she made her way to the washhouse, she carried with her the paper on which she had written the names of Jesus. According to her report to me, she placed the paper “on the windowsill against the window.” The paper was in full view as she did the family washing.

Feeling in a very worshipful mood, she suddenly found herself singing. She expressed it to me as follows:

“While I was doing the washing, the Lord just gave me the first line, ‘Jesus, name above all names’ to sing. I just started it and carried on singing. I sang the whole song just as you sing it today. I just opened my mouth and all of the words came out, the pitch and everything. I just sang.

“I thought, ‘Well, I’ll write it down.’ The Lord said ‘yes,’ so I left the washing and went down into the sitting room, found a key that was just right, and worked it out on manuscript paper. I said, ‘Lord, is that okay? Is it all right like that?’ Yes, it was all right. That was all I wrote, and then I went back to the washing. It was just that simple. It was a straight-out lead from the Holy Spirit, absolutely. I can’t say I thought about this or I thought about that; I just started on ‘Jesus, name above all names,’ and it carried on all by itself.”

Soon thereafter the song was sung in Naida’s church, New Life Church in Palmerston North. She didn’t remember who sang it, but I can guess that it was she who presented it to her congregation. (She had a beautiful singing voice. She sang her song for me on the phone, and I prize the tape on which I recorded it. It is surprisingly clear and good, even long distance from New Zealand.)

Visitors from other parts of her country who attended the church service took the song to their churches. Missionaries began to carry it overseas, where it quickly became a favorite. Soon it was being sung in several nations.

Naida reported to me: “I’ve had all sorts of people write to me asking that I add three more verses. I thought, ‘If the Lord had wanted three more verses, He would have given them to me.’ All that needed to be said was said. The Spirit impressed upon me that it was to be sung as a love song. It’s all about Jesus. You are supposed to sing it softly, slowly, and reverently, as if He were our lover. This is what He wanted.”

Naida was very active in her church, living a happy life with her Lord. She was a cheery soul and an interesting conversationalist, even on the phone. She had a most infectious laugh.

Naida told me her story in 1999. I had another visit by phone with her in April 2001. In that same month, as I interviewed another songwriter from New Zealand; I was surprised to hear his report that she had passed away just one week earlier.

She had gone to be with the one whose name is above all names and who had been her glorious Lord through so many of her seventy years. As you consider the
names given to our Savior, you, too, will be drawn closer to Him. As Naida suggested, sing “Jesus, Name Above All Names” very softly. Sing it as a love song to Him.

Church Builders—by Bernard R. DeRemer

The Sower: Michael A. Guido

Michael A. Guido (1915-2009) was a dance band leader and popular musician. After he came to know the Lord he became a widely-traveled evangelist and mighty soul winner. His publications and programs reached multitudes with the glorious Gospel message.

Born at Lorain, Ohio, Mike grew up in a devout Catholic home. He was named for two saints, Michael and Anthony, but he often said that didn’t make him saintly. His mother, saved when Mike was a child, became a faithful witness. However, his father strongly opposed Protestants and even beat family members on occasion. At 18, Mike was saved during a revival meeting though he knew he would have to give up his vocation and suffer persecution at home.

His father beat him, but Mike “was glad I could suffer a little for my Lord.” He was called to attend Moody Bible Institute in Chicago to train for Christian work. But it was 1933 and he had a terrible struggle financially. Needs were met in remarkable, almost miraculous ways.

Eventually, after much fervent prayer, his father came to know the Lord. Mike found that persecution “made me better not bitter.” After graduation Mike joined W.W. Shannon, an evangelist on the MBI Extension staff. Then Shannon became a pastor and called Mike as his assistant and music director.

Mike formed the S.O.S. (Save Other Souls) club. “We met one night a week, prayed for the lost, then selected one or two on whom to concentrate.” Many came to the Lord as a result. Next Mike joined Dr. Harry McCormick Lintz at the First Baptist Church, Lake Charles, La., to sing, direct the choir, and work with young people. “The Lord blessed with an average of 10 additions every Sunday for 52 weeks.”

Audrey Forehand, of Metter, Ga., was a determined agnostic who didn’t “want to meet any preacher.” However, Mike gently persisted and many long discussions followed. He was “no match for her brilliant arguments,” but he countered each with a Bible verse. Eventually she was saved.

Mike and Audrey were married and “they complemented each other in every way.” They traveled for years, holding evangelistic meetings for the MBI Extension Department. Audrey used “her chemical knowledge to create demonstrations that illustrated Bible truths and she became an accomplished magician.”

In 1946 at Charleston, W.Va., they awakened one cold night to find their hotel on fire! They dressed quickly, grabbed what they could, and dashed out. Then Mike remembered his sermons, which were not fireproof, so he ran back to get them. On the way out he heard a guest snoring loudly, oblivious to danger. Mike banged on the door and aroused the man, who protested, “I don’t know the way [out].” Mike said, “Come with me, I am the way.” That night Mike led him to safety and to life.

Mike and Audrey formed The Sower Ministry at Metter to proclaim the Gospel in as many ways as possible. At one time 3,500 radio, 1,500 TV, and 1,600 newspaper messages went out every week. Phone calls came from troubled souls at all hours of day and night. Mike dealt with everyone prayerfully and many were saved. Sometimes he would counsel people all day.

Mike suffered three heart attacks over the years and so needed rest. He learned to relax and “just will himself to sleep.” But after a few years of failing health, Mike went to be with the Lord he served so well and so long. He was active almost to the end, planning additional outreaches.

Audrey for years supervised office operations and contributed greatly to the publication program. But she had Alzheimer’s and, after a long illness, joined Mike in March 2010. Today Mike’s younger brother, Larry, carries on the work. The ministry’s property also contains Guido Gardens, a place of rest and celebration of Christ’s message that is visited by some 50,000 people each year.

Here is an excerpt from one of Mike’s messages: “Someone has said that there are three tablets to life: the school tablet, the aspirin tablet, and the stone tablet.

“The pessimist turns the tablets into stages: desiring, despairing, and dying. The cynic describes them as learning, lamenting, and losing. But the Christian says, ‘Living means opportunities for Christ, and dying—well, that’s even better.’ Because the Lord has given me life in all its fullness, life to me is a blessing, not a curse; and death is gain, not loss.
“It’s learning eagerly, laboring earnestly, and living abundantly. What is life to you?”

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 capacity as a volunteer contributor to Disciple. He lives in West Liberty, Ohio.

Reference: Seeds from the Sower, by Michael Guido with Sarah Coleman; excerpts used by permission.

Counselor’s Corner—by James Rudy Gray

Easter and the Culture

How do we handle Easter? Much like Christmas, there are many secular or even pagan trappings associated with this wonderful season of the year. For Christian parents this can be a touchy issue with their small kids.

My strategy has been to enjoy the flavors of the season (literally) while noting a distinction between the candy, etc., and the fact of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. I have counseled others to do the same. My wife and I followed this strategy as our girls were growing up. They enjoyed candy, baskets, treats, colored eggs, etc., but we took time as a family to emphasize the difference between this kind of stuff and the reality of Jesus Christ who came to be our perfect sacrifice for sin.

I am one of those who will still refer to Easter because the culture has embraced it for so many years, but I also refer to Sunday as resurrection day. While the games and outings can be fun for kids, the message of redemption and resurrection is too serious and important to confuse with these things.

Many counselors and psychologists believe there is nothing wrong with allowing children to believe in Santa Claus, the Tooth Fairy, the Easter Bunny, etc. They may be right, but I believe harm can come to the relationship when the kids finally realize mom and dad lied to them. Invariably, that moment comes. When it does, we are forced to rationalize why we lied or played a game with them. If however, we have simply told them the truth all along, we have engrained a great value in them—honesty.

With our kids, we enjoyed the nonessential things while we focused on the real meaning of the season. It is a great time to celebrate the week and to read the story of Jesus’ death and resurrection together as a family. It is also a powerful opportunity to discuss the meaning of the resurrection with older children while we share a meal together.

It is possible that we go too far in avoiding any of the mythical stuff. These things exist in our culture and we do not have to worship them, but we cannot avoid the reality that they do exist. We can enjoy the season without compromising the truth. When we make the two separate, we accomplish that goal.

The message of Jesus’ resurrection is full of not simply expectation but assurance. It encourages believers and even touches the lost. The words of the men in dazzling apparel in Luke 24:5-6 still rings gloriously true today, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.”

James Rudy Gray is certified as a professional counselor by the National Board for Certified Counselors, and is a member of the American Association of Christian Counselors. He serves as the pastor of Utica Baptist Church in Seneca, S.C.

Book Review—4/25/11


The current state of the Church in America is a Church in crisis, according to Aubrey Malphurs. In the early 21st century 80-85 percent of the churches in America either plateaued or declined in attendance.

David Olson, director of American Rescue Project writes, “17.5 percent of the population attended an orthodox Christian church on any given weekend in 2007. And as the population continues to grow, the Church loses ground. The number of Americans who profess no religious affiliation has practically doubled since 1990, and, more importantly, their central location has shifted from the Northwest (a region never heavily churched) to the Northeast (the region with the longest history of Christian involvement in society).

The solution to these problems that Malphurs proposes in Nuts and Bolts is twofold. First, he says that the 80-85 percent of the churches that have plateaued or declined need to undergo congregational revitalization or renewal. Second, he argues that it is imperative that our churches plant more churches. Most churches have wandered far from what Jesus called them to do—“make disciples” (Matt 28:19 and Acts 1:8).
Newly planted churches evangelize better than older established churches. Bruce McNicol, cofounder and president of Truefaced, writes that among evangelical churches, those under three years old will win ten people to Christ in America for every one hundred members. But once a church reaches fifteen years, the figure drops to three people per year for every one hundred members. In a sense, new pastors will take time to prove themselves. However, the church-planting pastor has the advantage of assuming the leadership role from the very beginning. Most members will give the pastor the necessary credibility and trust needed to lead them. A final reason church planting is an effective solution is the problem of acquired baggage. “Baggage” refers to the mistakes and mis-judgments that pastors make during their tenure that distract people from the Gospel message.

Church planting has no former pastor and thus no acquired baggage; they haven’t yet learned to focus anywhere but on Christ. Malphurs believes, therefore, that church planting is vital to the future of the church in America. However, this book isn’t an endorsement of a particular model of church, though there are many good ones out there.

Americans Still Appreciate KJV, New Poll Finds
LifeWay Research reports that, 400 years after it debuted as the first widely distributed Bible for the English-speaking world, the King James Version (KJV) still holds a place of distinction among Americans.

A recent poll by LifeWay found that more than half of all American adults (62 percent) own a KJV Bible. Among those who read the Bible regularly the percentage of KJV owners is even higher. A full 82 percent of Americans who read the Bible at least once a month own a KJV.

More than a quarter of adult Americans (27 percent) indicate they have never read the KJV for themselves. “Christians believe that God’s Word is truth and that truth is conveyed through language,” said Scott McConnell, director of LifeWay Research. “It is hard to overstate the influence of the KJV.”

He defines church planting as “an exhausting, but exciting venture of faith, the planned process of starting and growing local churches based on Jesus’ promise to build His church” and in obedience to His Great Commission. Who are the church planters? They are the men and women who have in some way committed their lives to the exhausting, exciting venture of faith that includes the planned process of starting and growing local churches based on Jesus’ promise to build His Church.

This book is a thorough guide for starting any kind of church. The text is divided into two main parts: the preparation and the process. Aubrey anticipates and discusses the possible problems—even financing—and their possible solutions. He has provided college professors with a complete curriculum for students and prospective planters with the questions to ask and the answers to those questions.

Karen Cannon

Target: Pastors/Missionaries/Visionaries
Type: Ecclesiology
Take: Recommended

Beijing Authorities Break Up Outdoor Easter Celebration
The showdown between Chinese Christians and authorities in Beijing continued on Easter Sunday, when dozens of would-be worshippers were arrested, according to Reuters.

Members of Shouwang Church have attempted to meet outdoors for the past three weeks after the 1,000-member church was evicted from their meeting place and prevented from obtaining a new one. However, the leaders have no intention of pacifying authorities by ending services, according to WORLD News Service.

Leaders said simply, “Sunday worship is the most basic necessity for Christians in their life of faith.” The church has refused to register with the sanctioned church, the Three-Self Patriotic Movement.
enormous encouragement to all those falsely accused of blasphemy.”

Religion Today Summaries

Nigeria: Post-Election Rioting Continues
Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) reports that post-election violence continues in Nigeria’s northern states following the victory of President Goodluck Jonathan. CSW received information of attacks on suburbs in the Gombe State capital and in the Kafanchan area of Kaduna State, and of continuing tension in Bauchi State.

Nigeria’s presidential elections, which took place on Saturday, are being hailed by international observers as the fairest poll in decades. However, supporters of Jonathan’s opponent, Muhammadu Buhari of the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), have accused the ruling People’s Democratic Party (PDP) of vote rigging and have taken to streets since Saturday evening in what many on the ground feel are orchestrated protests. At least 60 churches have been burned in the violence.

Religion Today Summaries

Suspected Drug Traffickers Kidnap Pastor in Mexico
Four masked gunmen interrupted a worship service in the Mexican city of Lázaro Cárdenas, Michoacan, on April 10 and forced the church’s pastor to leave with them. Compass Direct News reports that the 500 worshippers present at Christian Center El Shaddai had little time to react before the gunmen disappeared. The kidnappers have demanded $1.8 million in ransom, but have not guaranteed the pastor’s safety even if the sum is paid.

Arturo Farela, director of the National Fraternity of Evangelical Churches, has asserted that organized crime syndicates and drug cartels have targeted Christians because they view churches as revenue centers and because churches support programs for the rehabilitation of drug addicts and alcoholics. He says 100 Mexican clergymen have been kidnapped in recent years, and 15 of them have been killed.

Religion Today Summaries

Many Christians Hold Universalist Views, Barna Finds
Universalism, the belief that Christ will ultimately allow all people to enter heaven, has returned to the public spotlight following the release of Rob Bell’s Love Wins, but many who call themselves Christians held that view prior to the book’s release, according to a new survey from the Barna Group.

One in four born-again Christians hold universalist thoughts when it comes to salvation, The Christian Post reports. 40 percent of those who identify as born-again Christians said that Christians and Muslims worship the same God. According to the Barna analysis, 43 percent of Americans in general agreed with the statement, “It doesn’t matter what religious faith you follow because they all teach the same lessons,” while just 54 percent disagreed.

Religion Today Summaries

Sermon Helps—from www.sermonhall.com

Sermon Outlines

More than Conquerors
Romans 8:29-39
Intro: Assurance makes the believer more than a conqueror.
I. Assurance Is “Insurance” against Fear
   A. The policy: “in all things.”
   B. The protected “those who love him.”
   C. The premium “who have been called.”
II. Assurance Means No Hesitation (8:28-30)
   A. About the integrity of God (8:28).
   B. About the generosity of God (8:29).
   C. About the intentionality of God (8:30).
III. Assurance Means No condemnation (8:31-34)
   A. Because of futile opposition (8:31).
   B. Because of free provision (8:32).
   C. Because of frivolous accusation (8:33).
   D. Because of full representation (8:34).
IV. Assurance Means No Separation (8:35-39)
   A. Due to difficulties (8:35-37).
   B. Due to death (8:38).
   C. Due to demons (8:38).
   D. Due to duration (8:38).
   E. Due to dimensions (8:39).
Conc: Thus, every believer should become more than a conqueror through personal knowledge of the doctrine of assurance of salvation. Steve D. Eutsler

Consider Him
Heb. 12:3
Intro.: As set forth in Hebrews, Christ appears as…
I. Son (1:2, 5, 8; 6:4, 14).
II. Superior (1:1-4, 13; 3:5-6; 4:8; 5:8).
III. Prophets
IV. Angels
V. Moses
VI. Joshua
VII. Aaron
VIII. Sent (3:1).
IX. Separated (7:26-27).
X. Suffering (2:9, 14, 17, 26).
XI. Surety (7:22).
XII. Seated (8:1).
XIII. Savior (7:25).
XIV. Shepherd (13:20).
XV. Sympathizer (4:15).
XVI. Succourer (2:18).

Illustrations
Grandma’s Glasses
A young boy was overheard asking his playmate, “Wouldn’t you hate to wear glasses all the time?”
“No,” came the answer, “not if I had some like my Grandma’s. She always sees when people are tired or sad, and she knows just what to do to make them feel better. One day I asked her how she could see that way all the time. She told me it was the way she had learned to look at things as she grew older.”

After thinking for a minute, the first boy concluded, “Yeah, I guess you’re right. It must be her glasses.”

As Christians, we need to be like that grandmother. We should look at our neighbors as our Savior did. He always had compassion on the masses. Jesus Himself said that He came “not to be ministered to but to minister” (Mark 10:45), and He is the example we should follow. Paul W. Pruyser said, “Next to God, man should be the highest in [our] value scale…. It is a fact that persons who love and find fulfillment in other people will also find happiness for themselves.” Yes, being concerned for the welfare of others does bring happiness, but our highest motivation should not be to get all we can out of a relationship; rather, it should be to obey our Lord and Savior. He has commanded us to love one another, as He has loved us.

Anonymous

Where God Ain’t
He was just a little lad, and on the week’s first day was wandering home from Sunday school and dawdling along the way. He scuffed his shoes into the grass; he found a caterpillar; he found a fluffy milkweed pod, and blew out all the filler. A bird’s nest in a tree o’erhead so wisely placed and high was just another wonder that caught his eager eye.

A neighbor watched his zigzag course, and hailed him from the lawn; asked him where he’d been that day and what was going on. “Oh, I’ve been to Sunday School. (He carefully turned a sod and found a snail beneath it); I’ve learned a lot about God.”

“Yes, m’m, a very fine way,” the neighbor said, “For a boy to spend his time; if you’ll tell me where God is, I’ll give you a brand new dime.”

Quick as a flash his answer came! Nor were his accents faint—“I’ll give you a dollar, Mister, if you tell me where God ain’t.”

Anonymous

Bulletin Inserts
On Satan
The next time the devil comes to remind you about your past, remind him about his future.

Never give the devil a ride; He will always want to drive!

Give Satan an inch and he’ll be a ruler.

The devil always shows up when you’re off work, but that doesn’t mean he is on vacation too.

These four via The Old Union Reminder

The dark forces that incited a misguided mob to shout for the death of Christ are today just as evil, active, and aggressive as they were 2,000 years ago.

Igor I. Sikorsky

Henry G. Bosch

For 6,000 years, the devil has been trying to find out if God has broken His word.

D. L. Moody
Church ‘Toons by Joe McKeever

Answers to last issue’s puzzles:

**ANSWERS**

1. Bethsaida (John 1:44).
2. Jeremiah (Jer. 1:1).
3. Bethlehem (Judg. 12:8).
6. Nob (1 Sam. 21:1).
7. Amos (Amos 1:1).
8. Bethany (John 11:1).
10. Ramah (1 Sam. 7:17).

**ACROSTIC #24: ANSWERS**

JAMES (1:2,3) — “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations, knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.”

A. WONDEROUS
B. ROUTINELY
C. LOOK IN
D. TIMON
E. WINKEN
F. JETTY
G. ANTIPATHY
H. MEBPHIBOSHETH
I. EFFICACY
J. STRENGTH
K. WHOLE
L. STARVING
M. THYATIRA
N. TOTTER

**FATHER ABRAHAM’S QUESTION BOX**

**THE WORD OF GOD**

1. Who was rejected from being king because he rejected the Word of the Lord?
2. What did Jesus Christ accuse the Pharisees and scribes of using to make the Word of God of no effect?
3. With what weapon does Paul identify the Word of God?
4. Why did Agur exhort his audience not to add to God’s Words?
5. According to Ps. 119, where is the Word of the Lord forever settled?
6. “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning,”
7. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for...
8. “The law of the Lord is perfect...
9. “Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me...
10. “...Blessed are they that hear the word of God, Hidden Wisdom on next page

**Father Abraham and Hidden Wisdom**

By Mark Oshman

Originally published in *Pulpit Helps*, August 1993
HIDDEN WISDOM ACROSTIC #25
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, instruction, or promise. When read vertically, the initial letters of the answers will contain the name of the book from which the verse was taken. All quotations are from the KJV.

HAPPY SOLVING!!

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CLUES

A. Orderly procedure 31 58 22 115 6 88

B. "They have gone in the _____ Cain" (2 wds.) 47 19 98 60 110

C. A quantity differing from a standard trading unit (2 wds.) 72 50 111 67 100 28

D. Displace 10 79 69 95

E. One was portrayed on an early American flag 16 113 7 42 61 81 27 55 86 96 70

F. Such will not inherit the kingdom of God 41 14 101 24 83 68 5 90 34 97

G. Noted philanthropist (1794-1877) 91 30 45 108 13 73 57 63 38 18

H. Some had done this to angels unawares 51 107 11 33 80 93 26 39 85 112 62

I. Kiltlike garment worn by Samoans (hyph.) 25 54 75 9 108 3 40 64

J. A son of Bilhan and brother of K (below) 106 12 29 49 89 66 35 82 4

K. A son of Bilhan and brother of J (above) 37 94 44 77 17 59 8 99 32

L. One of King David’s mighty men of valor (1 Chr. 11) 15 114 23 78 52 43

M. Extemporaneously 109 71 1 102 36 20 56 84 46

N. "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a _____" 87 2 74 53 104 92

O. Female protagonist in a play written by Euripides 65 103 21 76 48