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A General Conference Church Ministries Publication

April-June 1987

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THE KINGDOM AMONG YOU

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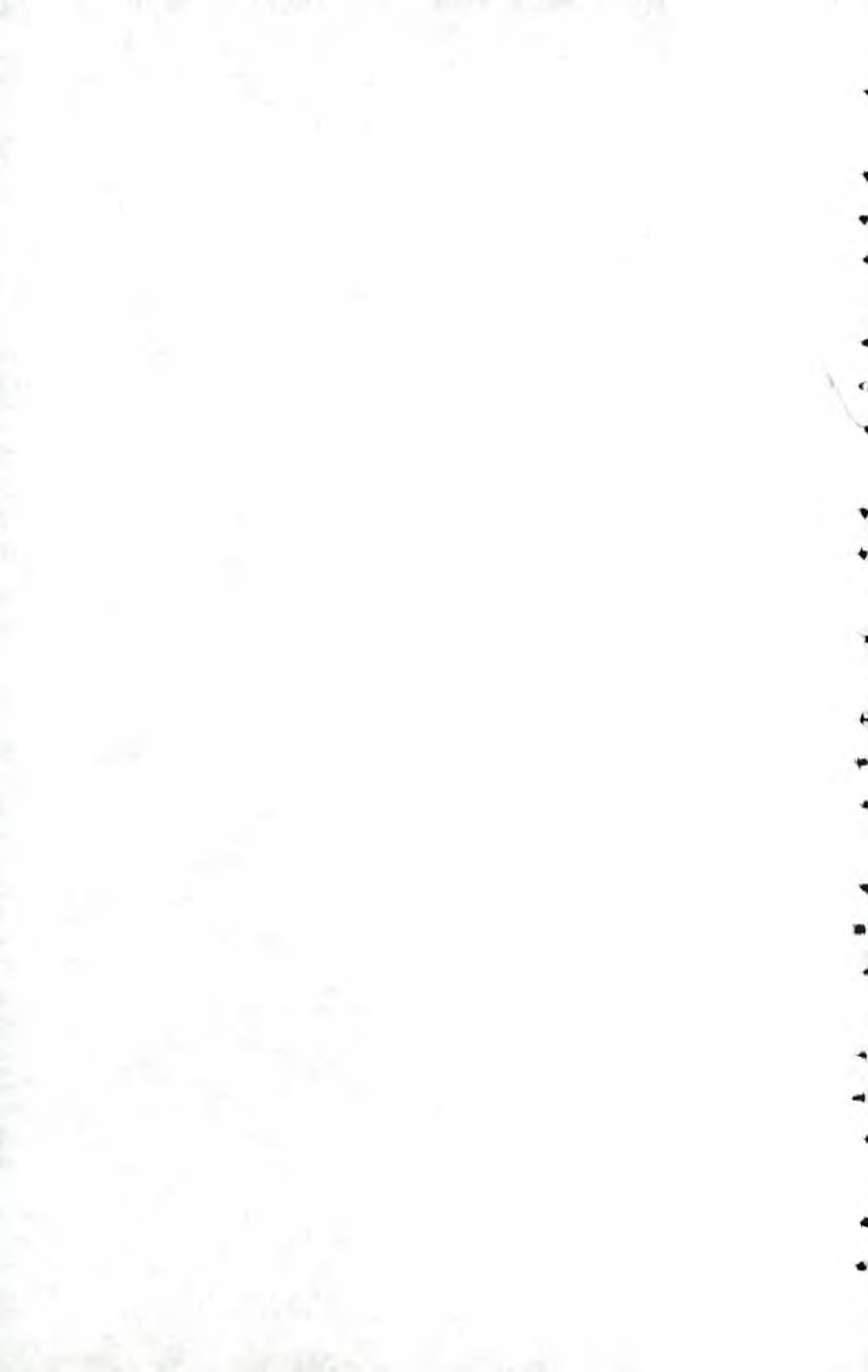
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GETTING THE MOST OUT OF THE COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY

Facts You Should Know

The COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY is based on the conviction that there is transforming power in the Word of God and that one important way of tapping into that power is through group study. It is prepared with Adventist college students and young adults particularly in mind. Its purpose is to provide this group with a resource for devotional study on mutual topics, which can then be discussed together each week in Sabbath School.

Additionally, many who use the adult quarterly find that the COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY, since it deals with the same topics as the adult, enriches lesson study and discussion as a supplemental aid.

Adventist colleges and universities, along with young adult church groups, work together in producing the quarterly. The writing at each school is coordinated by the campus chaplain's office. Approximately 200 individuals contribute to the quarterly each year.

Circulation of the COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY is about 25,000.

Pointers for Study

1. The Bible passage to be studied for each week is indicated in bold on the introduction page (Sunday's lesson). Read this entire passage in conjunction with the quarterly introduction to give you an overview of the lesson.

2. The Bible passage for the week is divided into sections on the Logos pages (Monday's lesson). When studying this section, carefully reread the Bible passages indicated in the bold headings before reading the comments beneath the heading.

3. Read the remainder of the sections for the week with the perspective you have gained by your own study of the biblical passage.

4. Keep in mind the purposes of each section of the quarterly:

Introduction (Sunday) is designed to get your attention and focus your thinking on the week's theme.

Logos (Monday), as described above, is a guide for direct study of the Bible passage for the week.

Testimony (Tuesday) presents Ellen White's perspective on the lesson theme.

Evidence (Wednesday) approaches issues raised by the lesson from a historical, scientific, philosophical, or theological perspective. It is likely to be the most "scholarly" article of the week.

How To (Thursday) discusses what the "theory" in the lesson means for day-to-day living.

Opinion (Friday) is a personal viewpoint on the lesson, meant to encourage further thought and discussion.

5. Through prayer, open your mind to the Holy Spirit's guidance as you study.

The CQ and the Church

The COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY is the General Conference-approved quarterly for the collegiate/young adult age group. It upholds the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. However, its contents should not be regarded as official pronouncements of the church. Particularly in the Evidence and Opinion sections, views are expressed which are only individual opinion, not official denominational positions.

INTRODUCTION TO LUKE

The Gospel of Luke unfolds the career of Jesus like a living picture. It begins with His ancestry and birth, lives through His ministry to the passion, and comes to a climax in the resurrection.

This Gospel is dedicated by the author to an unknown patron, the "most excellent Theophilus," but was intended for general circulation in a Gentile community. As the preface (chap. 1:1-4) shows, the author was capable of writing excellent Greek, but he adapts his style to that of his several readers.

He intended the Gospel to be the first part of a larger work, for the book of Acts is clearly a sequel to it. In Acts 1:1, RSV, he explains that "in the first book" (i.e., the Gospel) he has dealt with "all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up"—i.e., until Christ's ascension into heaven.

The common authorship of Luke and Acts is universally recognized. The Gospel was written by "Luke, the beloved physician" (Col. 4:14).

"From very early times in the history of the Christian Church there exists straightforward evidence that Luke was Paul's fellow-traveller who wrote the Gospel and Acts."*

The message of Luke's Gospel can be summarized in Jesus' words to Zacchaeus as Luke records them:

"For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (chap. 19:10).

The character and purpose of Jesus as Saviour are the main themes of this book. The activity and teaching of Jesus in Luke are focused on lifting men out of their sins and bringing them back to life and hope. The miracles, the parables, the teachings, and the acts of Jesus exemplify His redemptive power and will. For all nations and classes, Jesus is the only Saviour.

* Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), p. 17.

The King Is Born

"But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord'" (Luke 2:10, 11, NIV).



Gabriel

by Lela Gooding

Gabriel strode briskly toward the throne room. As humans reckoned time, he had been awaiting this summons for more than five hundred years—ever since he had revealed the time of Messiah's coming to the man Daniel.

He knew this was it, because six months earlier he had been sent to proclaim the coming of the Lord's Harbinger. Gabriel paused reflectively, smiling as he remembered Zacharias. How troubled the old man had been at the presence of another being in the Holy Place! Human beings always were fearful and had to be reassured before a message could be delivered. And how incredulous Zacharias had been of the message! The news of a son coming to him and his wife in their old age—a son who would be "great in the sight of the Lord," a son who would bring his parents "joy and gladness," and be a great evangelist—was almost more than the good priest could accept. Like many humans, Zacharias desired a sign. Gabriel sighed. Human beings were so faithless.

At that thought the angel quickened his pace, remembering that Michael would not leave His Father's presence until the announcement—and that was his part. Long ago, knowing the ordeal facing Michael on earth, Gabriel had ventured to offer himself in His place, but the Father explained that only Michael, the

Son, could rescue humanity from its fallen condition.

Arising from the posture of humble adoration, which all angels assume as they approach the Presence, Gabriel listened carefully to their instructions, then at the Father's nod slowly retreated, his gaze never leaving Michael's face. There was distinct eagerness in the Son's eyes, but He smiled reassuringly. "I shall return, Gabriel." And before the angel could leave His presence, He added quietly, "Remember, she will be a little frightened."

Swifter than human thought, the angel winged his way to Nazareth. Before assuming human form, Gabriel paused to survey the young woman who had been chosen by the Father to be the mother of His Son. Only a mortal, a mere girl. But she was strong, pure, and beautiful, her inner virtue shining out in clear eyes and serene face. Only a girl, yes, but the one chosen to bear and bring up the world's Messiah. From henceforth she would be special in the eyes of the universe because she had been chosen to be the mother of Jesus. All generations would call her blessed.

"*Congratulations, favored lady!*" (Luke 1:28, TLB) Gabriel began his salutation, as he noted the shadow of uncertainty creeping into her wondering eyes. "Don't be afraid, Mary," he said gently.

**INTRO-
DUCTION**
Scripture:
Luke 1:1—2:52

Lela Gooding is assistant professor of English at Oakwood College.

The King Is Born

by Clifford Goldstein

LOGOS

Theme: The birth and life of Jesus is the ultimate example of God's love for mankind. Jesus is divine love personified.

1. Introduction (read Luke 1:1-4)

"That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou has been instructed" (Luke 1:4).

Interesting, but the most detailed Gospel account concerning the early life of Jesus and John the Baptist was written by someone who most likely never met either one. The writer wasn't even a Jew and probably never lived in Israel. Yet he claimed to have a "perfect understanding of all things from the very first." How?

His mind, of course, was enlightened by the Holy Spirit. But he doesn't claim that as his source of understanding. Instead, he talks about those who "from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word," and it was these people, "these eye-witnesses," who delivered them (the teachings and truths of Christ's life) to Luke.

Luke's account is not inspired verbally. Instead the book appears to be a compilation from various sources. Among them would be Paul and the other apostles. Yet Luke doesn't seem to have qualms about this method of inspiration. Indeed, he tells Theophilus that he is going to write down all that he has heard so that Theophilus might "know the certainty of those things."

What relevance does Luke's method have to an Adventist understanding of how inspiration works?

2. Birth of John the Baptist Foretold (read Luke 1:5-25)

"Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years" (Luke 1:18).

The parents of John the Baptist, unlike the parents of Jesus, were considered among the "upper crust" of Israel. Zacharias was a priest, an elite class. Yet when the angel made the announcement to him concerning the birth of John, Zacharias expressed doubt. Here was a man, a priest, a Levite, who more than most should have known the power of God, or at least the sacred history of Israel. He should have remembered instantly the story of Abraham and Sarah, a story that so closely paralleled what was happening to him. He should have known that what God speaks will come to pass.

Perhaps all his learning and teaching caused him to doubt. Perhaps Zacharias' education, instead of helping, worked against his faith.

Does acquiring a "formal" education work for or against a simple, childlike trust in God?

How much do you think age was a factor in Zacharias' disbelief at the angel's announcement?

3. Birth of Jesus Foretold (read Luke 1:26-38)

"Be it unto me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38).

Clifford Goldstein is editor of *Shabbat Shalom*.

If anyone had reason to doubt, to question, what Gabriel had to say, it was Mary. Young, uneducated (certainly not to the extent that Zacharias was), inexperienced, she was told that she was going to be pregnant with her virginity intact. It's one thing to be an old married woman and have a baby, but it's quite another thing to be a virgin and have one.

Yet Mary's question about how it would come to pass didn't bring the censure that came to Zacharias. Her question probably wasn't one that indicated doubt, but one that indicated a sincere desire to know the means of this miracle.

What possible differences in the lives of Mary and Zacharias might help explain the different responses to the words of Gabriel?

4. The Birth of Jesus (read Luke 2:1-20)

"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11).

The sun is so large that it could contain a million earths. The star Antares is 60,000 times larger than the sun; Betelgeuse is a quarter of the size of our entire solar system; Alpha Herculis is 25 times larger than the circumference of the earth's orbit around the sun.

The earth moves around the sun in a 585 million mile orbit about eight times faster than a bullet. The earth is spinning on its axis approximately one thousand miles an hour. And we are circling the center of the galaxy at 170 miles per second.

Our galaxy contains about one hundred billion stars. Billions of galaxies exist, each containing billions of stars. Some stars are so far away that if we were traveling at the speed of light it would take millions of years to get there.

The Bible teaches that "all things created, that are in heaven," were created by Jesus. He created Antares, Alpha Herculis, and the billions of galaxies.

When the Bible says that "unto you is born this day . . . Christ the Lord," it is saying that the Power who created the sun, the Power who created Betelgeuse, the Power who spun billions and billions of galaxies into existence, is the same Power who stooped to become a tiny helpless human baby in order that humanity might be saved!

In light of what Christ has done for us, what should our response be?

Ponder the philosophical question "Who am I?" in the light of the question "Who is He?"

Lost Opportunity

by Alberta Holmon

TESTIMONY

Scripture:
Luke 2:9-14

At the time of our Lord's first advent there was no evidence that He was expected and no preparation for His coming. "The Jewish nation had been preserved as a witness that Christ was to be born of the seed of Abraham and of David's line; yet they knew not that His coming was now at hand."²

"With profound and reverent interest the elders of Israel should have been studying the place, the time, the circumstances, of the greatest event in the world's history—the coming of the Son of God to accomplish the redemption of man. All the people should have been watching and waiting that they might be among the first to welcome the world's Redeemer."³

"The angels had wondered at the glorious plan of redemption. They watched to see how the people of God would receive His Son, clothed in the garb of humanity."⁴

"In amazement the celestial messenger is about to return to heaven with the shameful tidings [that no one is prepared to welcome Jesus], when he discovers a group of shepherds who are watching their flocks by night, and, as they gaze into the starry heavens, are contemplating the prophecy of a Messiah to come to earth, and longing for the advent of the world's Redeemer. Here is a company that is prepared to receive the heavenly message. And suddenly the angel of the Lord appears, declaring the good tidings of great joy. Celestial glory floods all the plain, an innumerable company of angels is revealed, and as if the joy were too great for one messenger to bring from heaven, a multitude of voices break forth in the anthem which all the nations of the saved shall one day sing, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.' Luke 2:14."⁵

"To those who are seeking for light, and who accept it with gladness, the bright rays from the throne of God will shine."¹

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 47.
2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 44.
3. *The Great Controversy*, p. 313.
4. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 43.
5. *The Great Controversy*, p. 314.

Alberta Holmon is reference librarian at Oakwood College.

Jesus and the Holy Spirit

by Agniel Samson

EVIDENCE

Key text:
Luke 1:26-28

Informed by Gabriel that she would give birth to a son, Mary asked: "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" (Luke 1:34). The angel answered: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (verse 35).

When we analyze this statement in the double context of the annunciation and the Lukan comparison of Jesus with John, we discover that the Holy Spirit is held accountable for both Jesus' nature and ministry.

1. The Annunciation

By asking "how," Mary showed her concern for the natural process of conception and birth. The angel's answer fully stressed the supernatural character of the event:

The Holy Ghost	shall come upon	thee
The power of the Highest	shall overshadow	thee

Obviously we have here two synonymic stichs grammatically and conceptually identical. Both are constructed according to the same model: subject-verb-object. Although expressed in different ways, both subjects refer to the same person: the Holy Spirit defined "the power of the Highest." In both sentences, the object is "thee" (Mary). The verbs are different, but explain in complete formulas the intervention of the Holy Spirit.

2. Jesus and John

Luke's accounts of Jesus' and John's births are structured according to the pattern of parallel lives. Both events would take place in a mysterious way. Both had to be understood in the context of a special divine intervention. Both children would be outstanding servants of God. However, despite those similarities, Luke emphasizes the superiority of Jesus over John.

- John would be "great in the sight of the Lord" (chap.1:15), and Jesus would be "great" (verse 32; omission of the modifier). This omission shows the relativeness of John's greatness opposed to the absoluteness of Jesus' greatness.
- John would be "filled with the Holy Ghost" (verse 15) and Jesus would be "full of the Holy Ghost" (chap. 4:1). Having established this fact, Luke then proceeds to demonstrate the superiority of Jesus. As the Spirit is holy, Jesus will be holy (chap. 1:35). Because the Holy Spirit is the power of the Highest, Jesus will be the "Son of the Highest" (verse 32) or the "Son of God" (verse 35).
- All this is punctuated by the respective missions of John and Jesus. John will perform the ministry of the prophet *par excellence*, the eschatological *Elias redivivus* (Elijah coming back to life; see Mal. 4:5). Jesus will be the Son of God, the Messianic King, whose ministry will bring eternal salvation.

Dr. Agniel Samson is associate professor of New Testament and Biblical languages at Oakwood College.

He's Already Here

by Garland Dulan

HOW TO

Key text:
Luke 2:11

We thought you knew! Knew what? The King is born! What king? How tragic to discover that Jesus, the King, was among us and we did not know it. That He was born, grew up, lived in our town, and we were oblivious to the fact.

Angels foretold the birth of John the Baptist. Zacharias, though slow to believe, was thrilled that his son would prepare the way for Christ. Angels informed Mary that she had been chosen to be the mother of Jesus. Later angels proclaimed Christ's birth to shepherds watching their sheep. The shepherds dropped what they were doing, to seek the Christ child.

Imagine Christ living with us today. How exciting that would be! Actually Jesus *is* present with us in the person of the Holy Spirit. How do we know that? Who comes to our aid when no human help is available? Who answers our prayers? Who gives "every good and perfect gift" (James 1:17, NIV)?

People in Christ's day were so occupied with the cares of life that many of them missed the blessing of His presence. Many heard Him speak, watched Him walk dusty streets, and disregarded His offer of salvation. How can people today avoid making the same mistake?

1. By realizing that Christ is present in the world in the person of the Holy Spirit.

2. By accepting Christ's offer of salvation, which is still available to all (2 Cor. 6:2).

3. By ministering to others. When we minister to others we minister to Christ (Matt. 25:37-41).

It's not often that a king is born. Our task is to tell others that Jesus our King is born and to demonstrate in our lives that His kingdom is in our hearts. It's that simple.

REACT

1. What does it mean to you to live as in the presence of Jesus?
2. What makes it so difficult to render the same quality service to others as though we were serving Christ?

Garland Dulan is chairman of the department of behavioral science at Oakwood College.

A Kingdom of Love

by John A. Blake

OPINION

Key text:
Luke 10:9

Jesus' coming revealed God's true character—love. His coming was the direct intervention of God in human affairs. Jesus left sinless heaven to live among sinful men. Submitting to the baptism of John, He identified Himself with sinners. Tempted and tested in three areas—physical appetite, worldly ambition, and spiritual attainment—He proved Himself competent for His mission. Spat on, reviled, and crucified, He was willing to die “that a soul so unworthy might live.”

During His earthly ministry Jesus constantly delivered men from their sins, healed the infirmed, and raised the dead. Consider a few activities of Jesus: He converted Zacchaeus (Luke 19); He healed a dropsical man (chap. 14); he healed a blind man (chap. 18); He healed a centurion's servant (chap. 7); He cured a lunatic child (chap. 9); He raised a widow's son (chap. 7); and he raised Jairus's daughter (chap. 8).

These miracles testified not only to God's presence but to His purpose. Part of Jesus' mission was to heal. Such acts of healing opened doors for the overriding emphasis of His mission, which was establishing the kingdom of God.

We may not have known anything as dramatic as the resurrection of Jairus' daughter or the restoration of the lunatic child to his family in our personal Christian experience. But we do recall occasions when we, or a relative, came close to death, and can testify how God miraculously intervened to save. Others recall how far they had strayed from the path of righteousness when Jesus lifted them out of their sins. Where would we be without Jesus?

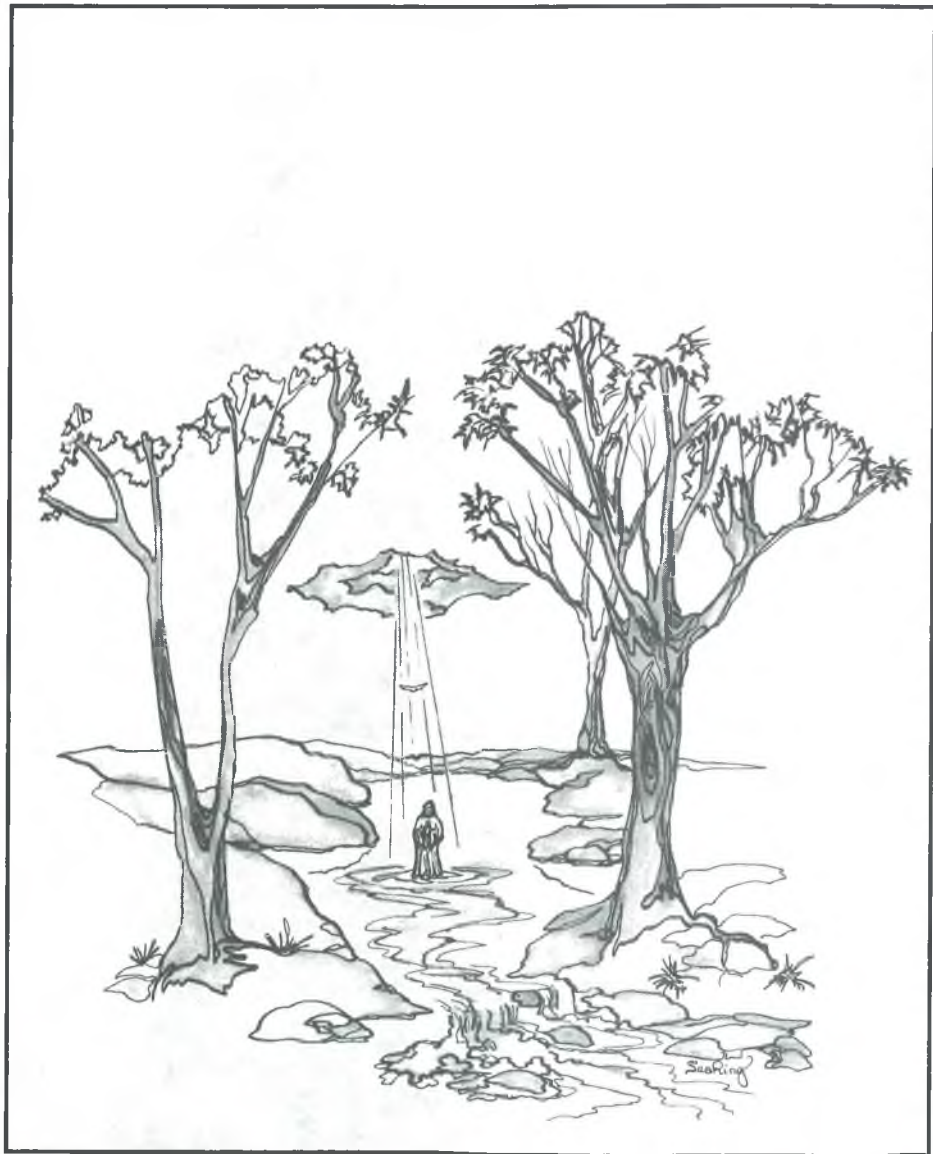
In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus indicated that certain qualities characterize the members of His kingdom. The meek, the merciful, the peacemakers, the pure in heart, are identified as belonging to His kingdom. Although the sermon was addressed to His disciples, it still is applicable today. When Jesus returns, only those who have developed the character of God will enter into His kingdom.

Life in the kingdom will be radically different from that which currently exists in this world. The song writer Elizabeth Mills puts it, “A kingdom freed from sin, from sorrow, temptation and care, from trials without and within, a kingdom of service and love.”

John A. Blake is chairman of the department of mathematics at Oakwood College.

A Kingdom of Liberation

“And the news about him spread throughout the surrounding area” (Luke 4:37, NIV).



God's Liberation Plan

by Sylvia Barnes

"But when things go well with you, if you think of me, keep faith with me and bring my case to Pharaoh's notice and help me to get out of this house" (Gen. 40:14, NEB). Things went well with the butler within three days, but it took two years for him to keep faith with Joseph. From dungeon to prime minister in a matter of weeks, such is liberation wrought out by God.

With prison doors barred, double locks in place, regular guards on duty, additional guards stationed, the messenger from heaven walks in. He speaks to the prisoner. "Quick, get up. . . . Put on your clothes and sandals. . . . Wrap your cloak around you and follow me" (Acts 12:7, 8, NIV). No effort is made to prevent doors from squeaking or iron gates from clanging. Into the street walk the two. Suddenly one disappears. With joy born of heaven's freedom, Peter acknowledges to himself that he has been delivered from the clutches of his enemies. Only those who have been held captive know the joy of release.

John, baptizing Jesus, recognizes Him as the One who would be the Liberator of all people. Following His baptism Jesus kneels on the riverbank to pray. Human beings will misunderstand His liberation plan. "He pleads with the Father for power to overcome their unbelief, to break the fetters with which Satan has enthralled them, and in their be-

half to conquer the destroyer. He asks for the witness that God accepts humanity in the person of His Son."* As He prayed, "A voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased'" (Luke 3:22, NIV). Having obtained His Father's assurance, Jesus announces in Galilee the terms of His government:

". . . to preach good news to the poor.
 . . . to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind,
 to release the oppressed,
 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor"

(Luke 4:18,19, NIV).

This multilevel liberation plan is offered by Jesus to all people. It transcends every other form of liberation, for through His dying, the inexhaustible resources of God become available to anyone who, in agreement with His form of government, decides to leave "prison" and follow the angel into the street. Acceptance of the plan is a pledge to share in prison ministry, to provide housing for "street people," food for those squatting on sidewalks, relief for the oppressed, and comfort for those bruised and battered by the devil.

With holy joy born of gratitude for release from sin, each child of the kingdom must go out to share God's liberation plan.

INTRODUCTION
Scripture:
Luke 3:1—4:37

* *The Desire of Ages*, p. 112.

Sylvia Barnes is an associate professor of English at Oakwood College.

A Kingdom of Liberation

by Clifford Goldstein

LOGOS **Theme:** John the Baptist prepares the way for Jesus with a message of repentance and reformation. At His baptism, Jesus is declared to be God's royal Son. As His ministry begins in Galilee Jesus announces the platform of His kingdom.

1. John the Baptist (read Luke 3:1-20)

"Added yet this above all, that he shut up John in prison" (Luke 3:20).

The birth and life of John was a miracle of God. He was filled with the Spirit of God, and the grace of God was upon him. John's mission was to prepare the way for the Lord. Few people ever have been given so clear and distinct a message as John the Baptist. And John was faithful to the call.

Yet what happened to John? Did he really prepare a people for the Lord? Was his mission a success? Did he lead the nation to a readiness to receive Jesus, its King?

Although some people were helped by the ministry of John, it appears that many rejected his teachings. The Jewish leaders certainly did not appreciate John. John was thrown into prison, left to rot, and finally beheaded.

As Christians awaiting the second coming of Christ, are we not each to be another John the Baptist? Do we not in a sense have the same calling as John, to prepare a people to meet the Lord? And, like John, are we not meeting with what appears to be failure? Although people do accept the warning message, are not the vast majority rejecting the call to repentance, as they did in John's day?

John the Baptist had a divine call to prepare people for the first advent of Jesus Christ. Seventh-day Adventists have a divine call to prepare people for the second advent of Jesus Christ. Like John, who faithfully performed the duty given to him, Adventists must heed the call and warn the world about what's coming, no matter how discouraging the situation.

Many people rejected John's message. His ministry seemed to have failed. He was thrown in jail and later beheaded. Was John a winner or a loser?

2. Jesus Is Baptized (read Luke 3:21-37)

"Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased" (Luke 3:22).

Jesus was human like us, except that He didn't follow the clamor of the flesh and sin. He was not baptized for the remission of sins, but as an example for us to follow.

Why did the voice of God speak at Christ's baptism? Was it not as much for Jesus' sake as for those around Him? Jesus was assailed by Satan in every manner possible. The devil tried to fill Jesus with doubt about who He was and what His mission was to be. The voice from God was to help Jesus, to give Him the courage and faith He would need for the trials ahead. Indeed, three and half years later, when He was hanging on the cross of Calvary, being separated from

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God the Father, the communion and closeness being broken as never before, all Jesus could do was to cling to His past experiences with God, including the voice that spoke to Him at His baptism. Remembering past experiences enabled Jesus to endure the pain and suffering of the cross (see Ps. 22).

Are there not times when we need to cling to past experiences with God in order to maintain faith? Are there dangers of doing this too often? In what sense is faith our "accumulated evidence" about who God is and what He is like?

3. Jesus Is Tempted (read Luke 4:1-13)

"And in those days he did eat nothing: and when they were ended, he afterward hungered" (Luke 4:2).

Have you ever gone forty hours, much less forty days, without eating?

What is so amazing about Jesus' fast is that we must remember who He was when He fasted. Jesus was the Creator. He created apples, peaches, pears, grapefruit, avocados, onions, tomatoes, almonds, peanuts, wheat, and rye. He created all the food we eat.

Yet for forty days He denied Himself the very food He created in order to gain the victory over appetite—a victory that has eluded most humans for thousands of years.

"With Christ, as with the holy pair in Eden, appetite was the ground of the first great temptation. Just where the ruin began, the work of our redemption must begin. As by the indulgence of appetite Adam fell, so by the denial of appetite Christ must overcome. . . . In man's behalf, Christ conquered by enduring the severest test. For our sake He exercised a self-control stronger than hunger or death."*

How complete was Christ's identification with us? Why is this an important question?

4. Jesus Announces His Kingdom (read Luke 4:14-37)

"No prophet is accepted in his own country" (Luke 4:24).

When Jesus announced His mission He was rejected by His own nation. One of the most difficult rejections He faced was from the people of His home town. They tried to throw Him off a cliff.

Is not the same thing happening to Jesus today? Of course, He is not here in the flesh, but there are ways in which people reject Him today. A person could be a Sabbathkeeping, tithe-paying Adventist and still be rejecting Christ. Remember, Jesus was rejected by the remnant church of His day. Israel had the most light on the Sabbath, the health message, the sanctuary, the prophecies, and the law. Yet what good did it do them in the final analysis? If anything, that light will one day condemn them.

What about us? With all the light we have, if we are rejecting

Christ He will reject us, as He eventually did His own nation. Think of all the light we have been given. We rejoice in the knowledge of a wonderful risen Saviour. We know that He is now at the right hand of the Father, interceding for us. We are aware that He gave Himself for our sins on the cross. This light will either bring us the greatest glory or the uttermost condemnation. The choice is ours.

Are there ways we can reject Christ today without even knowing it? If so, list some.

John the Baptist

by Bernard W. Benn

John the Baptist chose a life of austerity and solitude, but he did not live in monastic seclusion from the rest of the world.

"To him [John] the solitude of the desert was a welcome escape from society in which suspicion, unbelief, and impurity had become well-nigh all-pervading. He distrusted his own power to withstand temptation, and shrank from constant contact with sin, lest he should lose the sense of its exceeding sinfulness. . . .

"But the life of John was not spent in idleness, in ascetic gloom, or in selfish isolation. From time to time he went forth to mingle with men; and he was ever an interested observer of what was passing in the world."¹

Although John was chosen to be the forerunner of Christ and was called to "the greatest [work] ever committed to men,"² John himself did not fully understand the meaning of Christ's kingdom.

"Like the Saviour's disciples, John the Baptist did not understand the nature of Christ's kingdom. He expected Jesus to take the throne of David, and as time passed, and the Saviour made no claim to kingly authority, John became perplexed and troubled. . . . Like the prophet Elijah, in whose spirit and power he had come to Israel, he looked for the Lord to reveal Himself as a God that answereth by fire."³

John was a plain, fearless preacher.

"There are many professed Christians who, if they should express their real feelings, would say, What need is there of speaking so plainly? They might as well ask, Why need John the Baptist have said to the Pharisees, 'O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?' (Luke 3:7). Why need he have provoked the anger of Herodias by telling Herod that it was unlawful for him to live with his brother's wife? The forerunner of Christ lost his life by his plain speaking. Why could he not have moved along without incurring the displeasure of those who were living in sin?"⁴

John had the privilege of baptizing Jesus, but he did not see the need for Jesus to be baptized.

"When Jesus came to be baptized, John recognized in Him a purity of character that he had never before perceived in any man. The very atmosphere of His presence was holy and awe-inspiring. . . . And why should He who needed no repentance submit to a rite that was a confession of guilt to be washed away? . . .

"Jesus did not receive baptism as a confession of guilt on His own account. He identified Himself with sinners, taking the steps that we are to take, and doing the work that we must do. His life of suffering and patient endurance after His baptism was also an example to us."⁵

TESTIMONY

Key text:
Luke 3:2, 3

1. *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 101, 102.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 100.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 215.
4. *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 140, 141.
5. *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 110, 111.

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John the Baptist, a Misfit in His Time and Ours

by Larry Hasse

EVIDENCE

Key text:
Luke 3:9-14

John the Baptist's strength of character, exhibited in his life-style, is instructive to those of us who have fallen prey to the narcissistic tendencies of our time.

John the Baptist held a basic belief about life that most modern Adventists find difficult to accept. He believed that with God's help, he could live without material comforts, social status, economic well-being, and even personal safety. He abandoned personal goals to achieve the goals God had set for him. Ellen White suggests three primary purposes in John's life: "to fulfill his mission" as precursor to Christ,¹ to "rebuke the excesses of his time,"² and to be "representative of those who are to prepare a people for our Lord's second coming."³ To accomplish these ends he lived an abstemious life "in the midst of barren hills, wild ravines, and rocky caves."⁴ Somehow, the rightness of his purpose gave John personal satisfaction and fulfillment.

In contrast to John, the typical middle-class Adventist believes that with God's help he or she can achieve a life of abundance, security, and comfort. Abstemious of little except a specified list of taboos, these Adventists feast at the consumer's table of electronic and mechanical delights provided by a worldwide market. They work hard to gain a college education that will serve as the ladder to middle-class status. Enjoying both advantage and position, they expect the reward of Heaven as the ultimate consumer prize. Having put in many hours of work and sacrifice, they achieve only that which is for the benefit of the present. They choose life in the suburbs over living in "barren hills, wild ravines, and rocky caves." They live models that are in direct contrast to John's life. Surrounded by prosperity and security, they are not prepared to suffer for right principles.

Of course it is not realistic to expect modern Adventists to give up middle-class homes in order to live in "wild ravines." After all, John's behavior made him a misfit in his time and ours. Yet to contemplate the stark contrast between his life-style and ours may raise the uneasy question as to whether some of our most diligent efforts have been morally misdirected. A package of uncomfortable duties that a Christian might rightly assume would include: investing significant time in loving one's family, making a deep commitment against any racial discrimination and biases against men or women, investing effort and money in Seventh-day Adventist schools, studying to understand God's will in one's personal life, and persevering in promoting the gospel message. Contemplating the model of John's life should help middle-class Adventists redirect the self-centered aspects of their lives.

REACT

Would you agree with the author's assessment of the typical middle-class Adventist?

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 100.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 101.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*

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Watching for Satan

by Bernard W. Benn

Repentance and reformation do not free us from temptation. As a matter of fact, repentance and reformation only heighten the chances of temptation. Only the Christian who has been tempted and who has overcome can understand the true meaning of liberation from sin. Although temptation may vary from country to country and from culture to culture, the intensity of temptation remains fairly constant for today's Christian. Christ's victory in the wilderness over every possible category of temptation ensures that every Christian can be victorious too. But to be victorious we must be ever on guard. This means that we must be aware of Satan's strategies, as well as our own limitations and strengths. Some of the things we need to keep in mind concerning Satan's efforts are listed below.

HOW TO
Key text:
Luke 4:1, 2

1. Satan Will Attack in Any Form

We must dispel from our minds our childhood portrait of Satan as an ugly demon with horns. Most often he does not tempt in that form. At Christ's baptism he mingled with those who were there on the banks of the Jordan, and in the wilderness he first appeared to Christ as an angel from heaven (*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 116, 118). When Christ warns us to be watchful He is telling us to be ready to recognize Satan whether he comes in his true form as a devil or in the spirit of a church member, or lover, or counselor.

2. Satan Will Attack Us at Both Our Strong and Weak Points

What is not generally realized is that Satan will attack at our seemingly strong points, which can become our weak points through overconfidence or misperception. For example, the Christian who is a firm vegetarian may be given to snacks, late and irregular meals, or even junk food. To be watchful is to guard every avenue, even those that seem strong.

3. There Is No Hiding Place From Satan

Christ was led into the wilderness by the Spirit in order to prepare Him for the great conflict, but Satan followed Him there. We must be watchful, expecting Satan to appear at any place or at any time. He can tempt us while we are attending church or when we are preparing a Bible study to give to an unsaved neighbor.

4. We Need Help to Overcome Satan

We are no match for Satan, but Christ overcame him by the power of the Word. That same power is available to us today. Consistent study of the Word and memorization of Bible texts must be regarded as vital preparation for our conflict with Satan.

5. There Is a Way Out of Each Temptation

We have the assurance that God will not allow us to be tempted beyond that which we are able to bear and that He will provide a way out of each temptation (1 Cor. 10:13).

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Liberation From Doubt

by Emerson A. Cooper

OPINION

Key text:
Luke 7:23

"How happy are those who have no doubts about me!" (Luke 7:23, TEV). Here was Jesus' response to a provocative question of doubt and uncertainty concerning His true identity. The question was this: "Art thou he that should come? or look we for another?" (verse 19). The questioner was none other than John the Baptist, who not only was the chosen vessel to proclaim the coming of the Messiah but also had been especially privileged to witness the fulfillment of the prophetic evidence that would identify Jesus as the Messiah. In his own words he said: "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God" (John 1:32-34).

Just how doubt can persist in the presence of such overwhelming evidence is not easy to understand. Ellen White tells us that "God has never removed the possibility of doubt. . . . Those who wish to doubt will have opportunity; while those who really desire to know the truth will find plenty of evidence on which to rest their faith."*

It is interesting to note how Jesus liberated the mind of John from doubt and uncertainty by providing additional evidence. Listen to His response to John's disciples: "Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me" (Luke 7:22, 23).

What afflicted the mind of John the Baptist also afflicted many of the Jews. The earthly ministry of Christ was marked by many confrontations between doubt and faith in His identity as the Son of God. The following are but a few examples of these confrontations: "Is not this Joseph's son?" (chap. 4:22). "Physician, heal thyself" (verse 23). "Search, and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet" (John 7:52).

God in His infinite wisdom and mercy gave the Jewish nation ample evidence to support the identification of Christ as the Messiah. Speaking through the Scriptures, God had proclaimed the following:

The Place of His Birth: "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting" (Micah 5:2).

The Manner of His Birth: "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isa. 7:14).

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The Place of His Ministry: "Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee; and leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; the people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up" (Matt. 4:12-16).

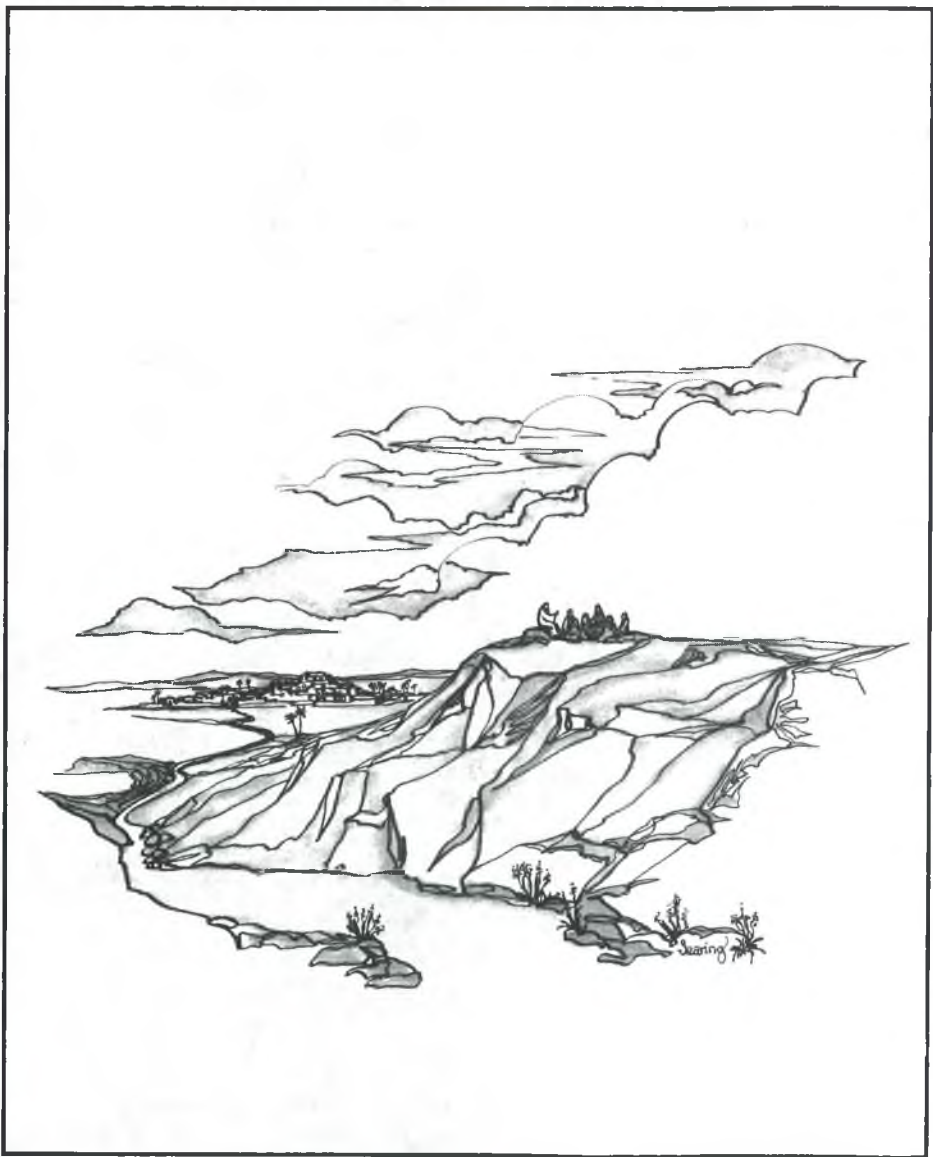
In addition to the above there was the testimony of the angels and the shepherds at His birth (Luke 2:8-18); the witness of the wise men (Matt. 2:1-12); the slaughtering of the babes in Bethlehem and the surrounding region in fulfillment of prophecy (Jer. 31:15; Matt. 2:16-18).

God constantly seeks to liberate us from doubt by providing adequate evidence upon which we can anchor our faith.

* *Steps to Christ*, p. 105.

A "Radical" Kingdom

"Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:36, NIV).



The Handwriting on the Door

by Clifford Goldstein

I came home one day to a message on my door. Literally, on my door! Someone with a pencil had scribbled across it: "If you don't move your d _____ car from alongside my room, I'm going to move it myself—piece by piece."

I gritted my teeth and threw open the door. I was dizzy with anger. I was going to find this guy and make him lick that message off!

This was six years ago. I was living near the University of Florida. I had rented a small wooden shack in an area where the impoverished students and local street people lived. The impoverished students lived inside the shacks, the street people lived under them. I had parked my car alongside a vacant shack on the corner of my block. Obviously, it wasn't vacant any more.

Fists clenched, I was ready for a fight. Then I remembered what had happened to me only days before: I had experienced a radical conversion to Christ. I had gone in less than twenty-four hours from being a worldly hedonist to a person who had given himself totally to Jesus.

I had read the Bible for the first time a few days earlier and knew I wasn't supposed to be angry. I was supposed to love my enemies. I was supposed to forgive. I was supposed to have a new life. But here I was furious! Whoever wrote that message on my door deserved a punch in the mouth!

Instead of storming out, I got on my knees and prayed: "O God, give me the power to forgive that dirty, no good . . ." I got up, moved my car, and cleaned off the door.

A few days later I met the culprit. He was built like a football player. Had I gone over and tried to get him to lick the words off the door he probably would have licked me—with his fists! Besides, we both could be arrested for fighting, which would have meant I would need money for bail (not to mention doctor bills), a lawyer, and all the other incredible hassles of being arrested. Plus, I would still have to move the car and clean the door myself anyway. Instead of blood and bail and hatred, Frank and I became friends.

I had entered Christ's "radical" kingdom.

INTRODUCTION
Scripture:
Luke 4:38—6:4

The Keys of The Kingdom

by Clifford Goldstein

LOGOS Theme: Life in the kingdom of God brings healing, forgiveness, and a radically new way of life.

1. Healing and Forgiveness (read Luke 4:38-44; 5:12-26)

When Jesus healed Simon's mother-in-law, Luke wrote that "immediately she arose and ministered unto them," (chap. 4:39). When she was touched by the healing ministry of the Son of God her first response was service to Christ and to His disciples. God heals us, in order that we can glorify God in our bodies and in our lives and help spread the message of salvation. This is the work Jesus did in His ministry, and this is to be our work, too.

Although many Christians haven't been miraculously healed, we, like the paralytic, have had our sins forgiven. After he was healed, "immediately he rose up before them, and took up that whereon he lay, and departed to his own house, glorifying God" (chap. 5:25).

He too, although in a different manner from Simon's mother-in-law, reacted to what God had done. He went out "glorifying God."

Once we are in the kingdom of God our lives are to be devoted to glorifying God.

2. Calling the Disciples (read Luke 5:1-11, 27-39; 6:12-19)

When Christ called James, John, and Simon, their nets were full of fish. Theirs was such a successful catch that the ships were about to sink. For these men catching fish was a livelihood. They had just made the greatest catch of their lives. They could sell the fish and buy their wives the latest designer fashions from Rome, and their children, John the Baptist T-shirts. Here, more than at any other time, the call of the world on these men was the greatest. Here, more than at any other time, the temptation for these men to do their own thing was the strongest. But when the Lord called: "From henceforth thou shalt catch men" (chap. 5:10), the Bible says that they "forsook all, and followed him" (verse 11).

The reason James, John, and Simon had such a successful catch was that they obeyed Christ's instruction to launch out the boats and let down their nets. Prior to meeting Jesus they had spent the entire night and caught nothing. What they did catch, they caught only because of following Jesus' instructions. The same applies to us. All that we are, could be, or have, comes from God. It is a gift from God, whether we acknowledge it or not. Like those fishermen, we merely give up what has been given us to begin with.

3. Lord of the Sabbath (read Luke 6:1-11)

Jesus, incarnated, did not introduce the Sabbath to humanity. He just introduced a new way to keep it. Or not necessarily new; it was really the old way that had been lost to a maze of human restrictions. The Mishnah is filled with an incredible amount of teaching about how the Jews should keep the Sabbath. They were burdened with laws concerning the kinds of material that may be used to light

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lamps on the Sabbath (eight sections devoted to this topic), laws concerning food on the Sabbath, laws dealing with parents' holding their children in their arms on the Sabbath, laws forbidding women to look in the mirror on the Sabbath (because she might see a white hair and try to pull it out, which would be work), laws against wearing false teeth, and numerous petty restrictions.

By sweeping these restrictions away, Jesus was considered radical. In today's secular go-get-'em world just plain old seventh-day Sabbathkeeping is radical.

4. Life in the Kingdom (read Luke 6:20-49)

Imagine having to love a person who committed adultery with your spouse and then cursed you to your face when you confronted him? Imagine not only praying for such a person but going out of your way to help him?

For a Christian such an attitude is not an option, it is a command. In the same sermon where we are told to pray for our enemies Jesus says that those who hear His words but don't do them—who don't love their enemies, or pray for those who spitefully use them—are "like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash" (Matt. 7:26, 27, NIV). Christianity that isn't radically different from the world isn't Christianity.

Fishers of Men

By Clifford Goldstein

TESTIMONY

Key text:
Luke 5:8, 9

"Everyone who in living faith follows Jesus, with an eye single to His glory, will see the salvation of God just as surely as these discouraged, despondent fishermen saw their boats filled by the miraculous draught. It was because Christ was in the ship that they were successful in their efforts to catch fish. The indwelling presence of the Saviour is equally necessary in the work of winning souls. . . .

"We may endeavor to meet the enemy's temptations in our own strength, doing the best we can to overcome; but we shall meet with disappointment after disappointment. This was the condition in which Christ found the disciples, after their night of unrewarded toil. They were annoyed and perplexed. Directing them to 'launch out into the deep,' Christ said, 'Let down your nets for a draught.'

"Long had the fishermen toiled that night; often had they been disappointed in their expectations, as time and again the net was drawn up empty. When the Divine Presence was with them, and they, at His bidding, once more cast their net into the sea, what an abundance they gathered in! They were unprepared to handle so large a draught. . . . The sight of the miraculous draught of fish swept away the unbelief of the Galilean fishermen, and they were ready to respond to Christ's invitation to follow Him, and to learn to be fishers of men. . . . However long and faithfully we may toil in our human strength, we can hope for no real results; but as soon as we welcome Christ into the heart, He will work with and through us, to the salvation of souls."¹

"All the varied capabilities that men possess—of mind and soul and body—are given them by God, to be so employed as to reach the highest possible degree of excellence. But his cannot be a selfish and exclusive culture; for the character of God, whose likeness we are to receive, is benevolence and love. Every faculty, every attribute, with which the Creator has endowed us, is to be employed for His glory and for the uplifting of our fellow-men. And in this employment is found its purest, noblest, and happiest exercise."²

1. *Reflecting Christ*, p. 237.

2. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 595.

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A Short Declaration of the True, Lively, and Christian Faith

by Thomas Cranmer

"A man may soon deceive himself, and think in his own phantasy that he by faith knoweth God, loveth him, feareth him, and belongeth to him, when in very deed he doth nothing less. For the trial of all these things is a very godly and Christian life. He that feeleth his heart set to seek God's honour, and studieth to know the will and commandments of God, and to conform himself thereunto, and leadeth not his life after the desire of his own flesh to serve the devil by sin, but setteth his mind to serve God, for God's own sake, and for his sake also to love all his neighbours, whether they be friends or adversaries, doing good to every man, as opportunity serveth, and willingly hurting no man; such a man may well rejoice in God, perceiving by the trade of his life that he unfeignedly hath the right knowledge of God, a lively faith, a constant hope, a true and unfeigned love and fear of God. But he that casteth away the yoke of God's commandments from his neck, and giveth himself to live without true repentance, after his own sensual mind and pleasure, not regarding to know God's word, and much less to live according thereunto; such a man clearly deceiveth himself, and seeth not his own heart, if he thinketh that he either knoweth God, loveth him, feareth him, or trusteth in him. . . .

"Let us therefore, good Christian people, try and examine our faith, what it is: let us not flatter ourselves, but look upon our works, and so judge of our faith what it is. Christ himself speaketh of this matter, and saith: 'The tree is known by the fruit' (Luke 6:44). Therefore let us do good works, and thereby declare our faith to be the lively Christian faith. Let us by such virtues as ought to spring out of faith shew our election to be sure and stable, as St. Peter teacheth: 'Endeavour yourselves to make your calling and election certain by good works.' And also he saith: 'Minister or declare in your faith virtue, in virtue knowledge, in knowledge temperance, in temperance patience; again, in patience godliness, in godliness brotherly charity, in brotherly charity love' (2 Peter 1:5-7). So shall we shew indeed that we have the very lively Christian faith, and may so both certify our conscience the better that we be in the right faith, and also by these means confirm other men."*

REACT

What is your reaction to Thomas Cranmer's definition of a true, lively, and Christian faith?

EVIDENCE

Key text:

Luke 6:44

* Thomas Cranmer, "A Short Declaration of the True, Lively, and Christian Faith," *Miscellaneous Writings and Letters of Thomas Cranmer* (Cambridge: The Parker Society, 1846), pp. 139-141.

In 1533 Thomas Cranmer became the first non-Roman Catholic Archbishop of Canterbury.

To, or Not to, Do

by Clifford Goldstein

HOW TO

Key text:
Luke 6:22, 23

Francis Schaeffer once asked, "How then shall we live?"

What was he really asking? Did he ask us how we are to live, in the sense of knowing what we are to do, and what not to do? Or did he know what we were to do or not to do, but was asking us how we were to do or not do such things?

We know that we're not to lie, steal, or covet. We know that we are to love our neighbor, and to do unto others as we would they do unto us. What we don't know, however, is how always to love others, or not to lie, steal, or covet.

The problem, then, is not knowing what things to do or not do; but learning how to do or not do them.

A few tips that might help:

1. Understand the Cross

Trying to work your way to heaven is like trying to lift yourself by your own suspenders. If you do not know what this means, put on a pair of suspenders and try. You'll understand then.

If anyone thinks that there is anything he/she can do to earn his way to heaven he/she does not know Jesus. We need to have assurance right from the start that "he who has the Son has life" (1 John 5:12, NIV). We must understand that justification means that we are accepted in the Beloved now. Only with assurance can anyone come to the understanding of what Jesus has done for us. When we have this understanding, our good works will be a response to what Christ has done for us.

2. Let Christ Live in You

Christianity is a supernatural religion. It is spiritual. The Bible promises that God will give supernatural power to overcome temptation and sin. Trying to overcome in our own strength is like trying to lift ourselves up by our suspenders. We might strangle ourselves trying.

How do we appropriate this supernatural power? The same way we appropriate justification—by surrendering to God. The power to overcome temptation can be yours as you surrender yourself to Christ, claiming His promises for victory, in the same way you claim His promises for salvation. "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him" (Col. 2:6).

3. Prepare to Suffer

The battle against self is the greatest battle we have to fight. Fortunately, we have all the power we need at our disposal. Sinning is often a conscious choice on our part. We choose not to claim the power of God. Why would anyone do that? Because even with God's help, the fight against sin involves suffering in the flesh, and people do not want to suffer. They give in rather than fight and suffer. But suffering in the flesh is the only way that we can have victory through Christ. "Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin" (1 Peter 4:1).

4. Never Give Up!

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Faith and Works in Christ's Kingdom

by Clifford Goldstein

OPINION

Key text:
Luke 6:46

The tension between faith and works has caused an ongoing struggle among believers. It began with Cain and Abel and their offerings to God, continued with Paul as he had to fight those who wanted more works than faith, as well as those who wanted more faith than works. The question of faith and works was the issue that spawned the great Protestant Reformation. Even today within Adventism, the questions about the nature of Christ, the Spirit of Prophecy, the sanctuary, and perfection are all really struggles in understanding righteousness by faith.

For some people the "gospel" is the doing and dying of Jesus for us; the "gospel" is only what Christ has done for us, in the person of his flesh, period. For them the "gospel" is justification alone, faith alone, the cross alone, a legal forensic declaration alone. Nothing more, nothing less, indeed there is nothing else.

For others the center of the "gospel" is overcoming sin, victory over appetite, over lust, over every besetment. The gospel is totally what Christ does *in* them.

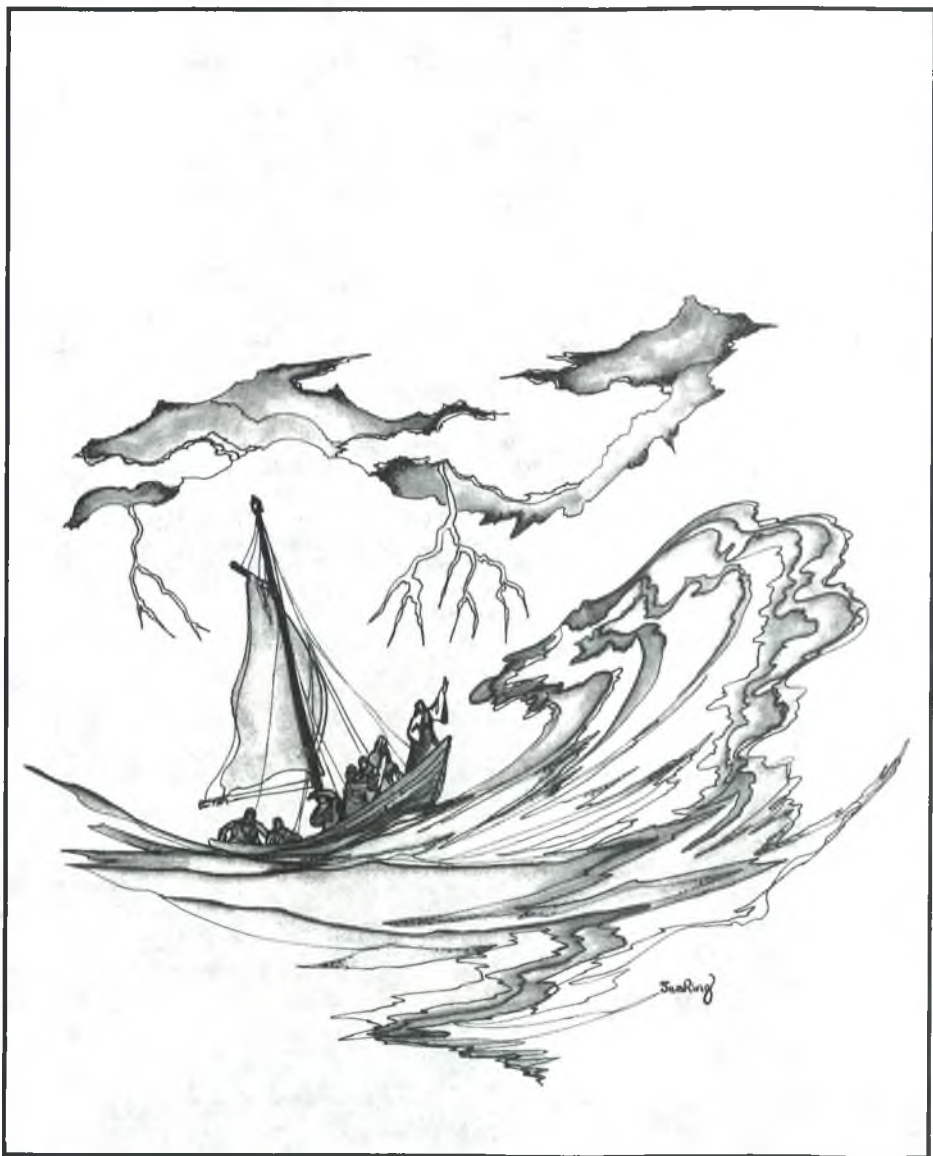
Baptism could symbolize the perfect balance between justification and sanctification. Imagine immersion in baptism as symbolic of justification, while coming up out of the water as symbolic of sanctification. You cannot have one without the other.

Justification is going under. Sanctification is coming up. For some, their gospel would immerse you in the water and leave you there; others want you to come up out of the water without having ever gone under.

To be a citizen in Christ's kingdom we need both. Justification without sanctification (faith without works), or sanctification without justification (works without faith) means you are an illegal alien in Christ's kingdom. To be a citizen in Christ's kingdom you must experience both justification and sanctification.

The Kingdom in Action

"Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little" (Luke 7:47, NIV).



How Do You Measure Faith?

by Jim Frost

An elaborate idea. A clever cover. That his 'conversion' was nothing more than a convenient method to unify an empire that was for one reason or another falling apart at the seams.

Despite Constantine's claim to the gift of enlightenment by the appearance of a flaming sword in the heavens and a dream in which he heard the voice of God,¹ historians believe they have reasonable evidence for believing that his conversion was a political ploy.² Constantine the Great, the first Christian Roman Emperor, after embracing the faith and inviting his subjects to join him in the new religion, demonstrated his Christian graces by bumping off his allegedly miscreant son Crispus, his nephew Licinianus, and his wife Fausta.³

In spite of his behavior early Christian leaders were eager to enfold Constantine in their collective and official bosoms! He is seen virtually chairing the church councils that occurred during his lifetime and set precedents in theology; enforcing the rulings of church councils;⁴ and by his influence and not-minimal power, bringing into the church many of the trappings of his previous pagan religious persuasion.

What do people of faith do, and what do they not do? Is there a way to 'measure' faith? Can so-called faith be discounted if it does not demonstrate the Christian graces? How valid is the charge, based upon his actions, that Constantine did not experience a genuine conversion? What do we expect to see in the life of a Christian?

INTRODUCTION

Scripture:
Luke 7:1—9:50

1. Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization: Part III Caesar and Christ* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1944), p. 654.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 655.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 663.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 656.

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The Pebble and the Pond

by Marsha Tuttle Frost

LOGOS **Theme:** Through teaching and action, Jesus demonstrates the character of His kingdom.

Luke 7:1 to 9:50

Have you ever noticed how intrigued people are by a calm pond? How many people can stand beside a pond and resist the allure of pebbles perched at the water's edge? Very few, if any, I suspect. Can you feel the urge, the call to stoop over and pick up a pebble, toss it into the water and study the ripples that affect the life of the entire pond? Can you toss a pebble in and there be no effect? Ah, you say, only if the water is frozen.

This illustration of a pond is a capsule of how to grasp the meaning of our passage. Let's say the kingdom of God is the pond. The pebble is God's power. The action of stooping over and tossing the pebble in is the act of faith, and the ripples are the effect God's power has in a life. If you are a part of God's kingdom you will experience positive happenings in your life. Only if you allow yourself to be frozen, out of touch, unresponsive to God's kingdom, will you not be positively affected.

Within our passage we see God's power being grasped by the hand of faith and the results that follow in the lives of individuals. The centurion who considers himself not worthy to have Jesus enter his home expresses his conviction that by a word Jesus can heal his slave, and Jesus does (Luke 7:1-10). A weeping widow mourning the death of her only son experiences the miracle of her son's resurrection (verses 11-17). The evidence of His Messiahship that Jesus sends John involves actions affecting the lives of those in need: the blind, the lame, the lepers, the deaf, the deceased, and the poor (verses 18-35). A forgiven woman's love for Jesus leads her to express that love in a gift of expensive perfume (verses 36-50). Jesus relates two parables showing that God's Word is of true value when it takes root and produces results within a life, and that those connected with Him will be lights that are willing to be shining witnesses (chap. 8:1-18). When asked to receive His family, Jesus says that those who are His true family are the ones who move beyond hearing to doing (verses 19-21). The voice of Jesus calms the violent blast of the waves, saving the lives of the disciples who lacked the faith to stop the storm (verses 22-25). A violent, naked, insane man possessed by a legion of demons is transformed into a calm, clothed, sane person (verses 26-39). Jairus is amazed by the resurrection of his daughter, and a woman who has suffered for years receives healing through a shy touch of faith (verses 40-56). The disciples are sent not only to preach but also to have power to transform lives through healing (Luke 9:1-9). Peter's confession that Christ is God is followed by Jesus pointing out that the result of confession is a daily following (verses 18-27). Moses and Elijah come to earth to encourage Christ to face His trial and death in Jerusalem (verses 28-36). A boy seized by a spirit is delivered through Christ's faith when the disciples failed to meet the challenge (verses 37-45). The dispute

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of the disciples over greatness is answered by the presence of the life of a little child (verses 46-48).

The message is clear. Those who are part of God's kingdom experience the power of God within their own lives. If the power is not a part of life, then a search for the pebbles perched on the edge of the pond needs to be made, and the hand of faith put into action. The effect of God's power in human lives is as real as the effect of the pebble in the pond.

Faith Is Trusting God

by Stephen Burnham

TESTIMONY

Key text:
Luke 7:50

"Faith is trusting God—believing that He loves us, and knows best what is for our good. Thus, instead of our own, it leads us to choose His way. In place of our ignorance, it accepts His wisdom; in place of our weakness, His strength; in place of our sinfulness, His righteousness. Our lives, ourselves, are already His; faith acknowledges His ownership and accepts its blessing. Truth, uprightness, purity, have been pointed out as secrets of life's success. It is faith that puts us into possession of these principles.

"Every good impulse or aspiration is the gift of God; faith receives from God the life that alone can produce true growth and efficiency.

"How to exercise faith should be made very plain. To every promise of God there are conditions. If we are willing to do His will, all His strength is ours. Whatever gift He promises, is in the promise itself. 'The seed is the word of God' (Luke 8:11). As surely as the oak is in the acorn, so surely is the gift of God in His promise. If we receive the promise, we have the gift.

"Faith that enables us to receive God's gifts is itself a gift, of which some measure is imparted to every human being. It grows as exercised in appropriating the word of God. In order to strengthen faith, we must often bring it into contact with the word."¹

"Prayer and faith are closely allied, and they need to be studied together. In the prayer of faith there is a divine science; it is a science that every one who would make his life-work a success must understand. Christ says, 'What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them' (Mark 11:24). He makes it plain that our asking must be according to God's will; we must ask for the things that He has promised, and whatever we receive must be used in doing His will. The conditions met, the promise is unequivocal.

"For the pardon of sin, for the Holy Spirit, for a Christlike temper, for wisdom and strength to do His work, for any gift He has promised, we may ask; then we are to believe that we receive, and return thanks to God that we have received.

"We need look for no outward evidence of the blessing. The gift is in the promise, and we may go about our work assured that what God has promised He is able to perform, and that the gift, which we already possess, will be realized when we need it most."²

1. *Education*, pp. 253, 254.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 257, 258.

Stephen Burnham is a civil engineer for the Federal Highway Department stationed in Lincoln, Nebraska.

Faith Produces Positive Results

by Jim Frost

The teaching of the Bible is that faith is an absolute necessity to experience life within God's kingdom. The question facing humanity is: "How can an individual receive the faith that produces positive results?" The answer, while appearing simple, seems to elude many Christians.

The best-known text dealing with the origin of faith is Romans chapter 10, where Paul challenges the concept that the Jews had not been given the opportunity to hear and accept the gospel of Christ. Paul asserts that they were given the opportunity because "faith comes by what is heard, and what is heard comes by the Word of God" (see Rom. 10:17). He clearly states that faith begins with exposure to the Word of God. That is the first step.

In the grouping of stories in Luke 7—9, one story involves a person who had faith that partially crumbled (chap. 7:18, 19). When John's messengers were sent to Jesus asking whether they should look for another Messiah, Jesus continued with His normal activities while the messengers observed. This time of observation was followed by Christ's comment instructing them to "go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them" (Luke 7:22, RSV).

Jesus expects John's faith to be bolstered by the evidence He provides. Jesus does not command John to develop faith, but He does demonstrate a basis on which John can establish his faith. The life of Jesus, the Living Word, is recorded in the Word of God to provide a foundation for the development of faith.

Faith-building is also demonstrated at the appearance of Jesus' family (Luke 8:19-21). Although Jesus values His next of kin, He makes use of this opportunity to describe the family of the faithful. He points out that His family consists of individuals who not only hear the Word of God but go beyond the intellectual acknowledgment to a practical involvement in their own lives.

Some assume that the activity of faith within one's life is the most important aspect of faith. It should be recognized though that often individuals fail to expose themselves to the Word of God, which in effect means a failure to unite with the source of power. If Christians have a genuine desire to live lives of faith the Living Word must be a regular reality in one's life. The Scriptures not only provide evidence on which to base one's faith but they also connect Christians with the power of God to produce in them dynamic results.

REACT

What does it mean to "hear the Word of God"? Does that imply that sound must penetrate our hearing faculties? If so, what does that say to hearing-disabled persons or what does it mean to the millions in non-Christian lands who have never had the opportunity to hear the gospel?

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EVIDENCE

Key text:
Heb. 10:38

The Kingdom in Action

by Stephen Burnham

HOW TO

Key texts:
Luke 7:22;
8:18, 21;
9:3, 13, 50

In this week's passage Jesus tells us how the kingdom of God is put into action in our lives.

1. Listen Attentively. "Take heed therefore how ye hear" (Luke 8:18), says Jesus to His disciples after telling the parable of the sower. In this parable the seed is the Word of God. The four types of ground are four methods of hearing the Word. Jesus explains that it is not a matter of chance or luck that determines an individual's response to the Word of God. Our response is determined by how we hear the Word. Jesus said to His disciples, "Take heed therefore how ye hear." Do we enter reverently into Sabbath School discussions? Do we pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit before reading the Bible? Jesus would have His followers be consciously aware of the manner in which they hear the preaching of the gospel.

2. Put It Into Practice. "Hear the word of God, and do it" (Luke 8:21). Once the Christian has heard God's Word he or she must choose to follow what God has said to do, no matter what others choose to do. Making the correct choice is often not the popular choice. But Jesus claims as His family those who do what God's Word says for them to do.

3. Tell Others. "Go your way, and tell . . . what things ye have seen and heard" (Luke 7:22). Once Christians choose to do what God's Word says, they have a responsibility to witness. Jesus does not ask Christians to develop elaborate stories to tell people. He asks only that we tell what we have seen and heard, and what Christ has done in our lives.

4. Pray for the Leading of the Holy Spirit. "Take nothing for your journey, neither staves, nor scrip, neither bread, neither money; neither have two coats apiece" (Luke 9:3). When Jesus sent His disciples out to witness they were not to make elaborate plans on how the witnessing was to be accomplished. They were to rely on the Holy Spirit for results. When the Holy Spirit directs us to witness we are to rely on Him for the results.

5. Be Practical. "Give ye them to eat" (Luke 9:13). Jesus shows His disciples that the kingdom of God in action consists of imparting to others that which we have at hand to give. God expects us to do all that we can do rather than expecting Him to accomplish it miraculously. As Jesus blessed the loaves and fishes, He will bless the efforts of the conscientious Christian.

6. Be Tolerant. "Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us" (Luke 9:50). The kingdom of God in action consists of being tolerant of differences. If someone else is doing God's work in a manner that is different from what we are used to, we are not called upon to try to change that person's method. God's kingdom will ultimately come about "not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts" (Zech. 4:6). The Holy Spirit works differently in different people, and we must be willing to allow for those differences.

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Devotion to Christ and Its Source

by D. M. Lloyd-Jones

OPINION
Key text:
Luke 7:40, 50

"Simon himself was interested in our Lord and His teaching, otherwise he would never have invited Him to his house at all. He had heard of Him, had probably heard Him himself several times. His interest and his curiosity were definitely aroused. We must say that to his credit. His attitude is definitely a great improvement on that of the majority of the Pharisees who certainly did not invite our Lord into their houses, but clearly showed their dislike and their hatred. No! this man is interested and goes out of his way to show that interest. He makes a move on the basis of that interest quite as definitely as the woman takes action on the basis of her interest. The difference here then is not between two people, one of whom is interested in Christ and the other is not.

"I make this point for the simple reason that there is a tendency today to say that nothing matters but that we should be interested in our Lord and His teaching. People do not like to be questioned today about the exact nature of that interest; they object to insistence upon certain fundamental conditions and definitions in connection with it. It seems to be taken for granted that each one can go to Christ in his or her own way and find anything they like, and that as long as each one is satisfied personally and obtains some particular experience, it ill befits anyone else to inquire into it. All this is being expressed in terms of tolerance and in talk about uniting, and we are to regard all as truly Christian who in some way or another invite Christ into their house to dine with them because they are interested in Him. But how wrong and misguided is all that in the light of this incident with its searching questions as to the nature of that interest and above all the result of that interest. Again, that is why, we chose verses 40 and 50 as our text, for they emphasize the really important distinction and show that it applies as a test, not only to those outside the church, but also to many who have been members for years, perhaps for life, and all their life-time have been 'interested' in Christ and His religion as they see it. Simon could say that he was acquainted with Christ and with His teaching and that he was very interested in both; but what he could never say was that he had been blessed by Him, that Christ had made a fundamental difference to him and to his life and that he felt that he owed all to Him. But that is what the woman *could* say, and that, after all, is what makes a true Christian. All the interest in the world cannot replace that, all the knowledge possible about His life and His teaching cannot compensate for that."^{*}

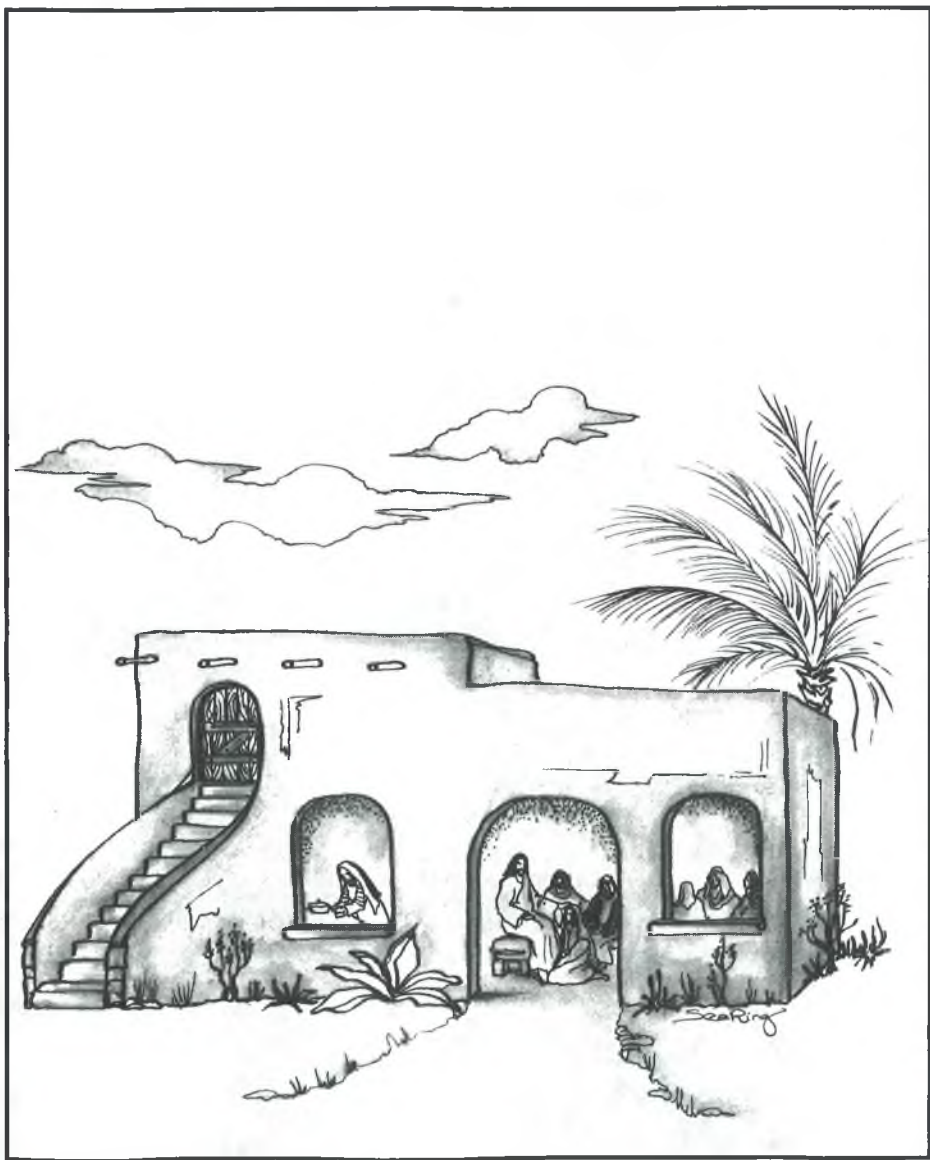
REACT

In which of the two positions are you? That of Simon or that of the woman?

^{*}D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Evangelistic Sermons at Aberavon* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1983), pp. 207, 208. Used by permission.

A Kingdom of Love

“Jesus replied, ‘No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God’ ” (Luke 9:62, NIV).



Help! Who Will Help Me?

by Linda Hoey, Ph.D.

Late one night in March 1964 Kitty Genovese was returning home from work. As she neared her front door a lone man jumped out of the shadows and attacked her. At first her screams drove the assailant off, but he quickly returned when her shouts did not bring any help. Again and again he stabbed Kitty with his knife. It took Kitty's assailant nearly 30 minutes and three separate attacks to kill her, but no one came to her aid. Twice the sound of the neighbors' voices and the sudden glow of their bedroom lights interrupted her assailant and frightened him off. When the police interviewed the area's residents, 38 people admitted hearing Kitty's screams but not one of them even bothered to call the police for help. One witness called the police after Kitty was dead.

One of the most perplexing characteristics of our modern way of life is that people seem to be apathetic about helping people in need. Incidences such as the one that happened to Kitty Genovese has spurred research on helpfulness in the area of social psychology.

Forty students studying for the ministry at Princeton Theological Seminary volunteered for a study on religious education and vocations.* After being briefed about the study in one building, each student was told to report to another building in order to deliver a sermon on the parable of the Good Samaritan. A third of the students were told

that they were early for their sermon but they might as well go on over to the other building; a third were told they were right on time, so they should go right over; the final third were told that they were already late so they should hurry.

As the students passed down an alley to the other building they came to a doorway in which a man was slumped over, coughing, groaning, head down, eyes closed. Here was the opportunity to be a Good Samaritan and help the poor victim. The seminary students delivered their sermons and then filled out a questionnaire that contained questions about helping people in need and specifically about when they had last encountered a needy person and whether they had helped. After completing the questionnaire they were debriefed, and the purpose of the study was fully explained.

The results were surprising.

Sixty percent of the subjects did not stop to help the victim. The fact that they were on their way to give a sermon on the Good Samaritan had no effect on increasing the likelihood that they would act like one. The best predictor of who would stop to help was the degree to which each student was in a hurry. Of those not in a hurry, 63 percent helped; of those somewhat in a hurry, 45 percent helped. Only 10 percent of the seminary students who were in a big hurry to deliver their Good Samaritan sermons stopped to help the man in need.

**INTRO-
DUCTION**
Scripture:
Luke 9:51—
11:54

*"From Jerusalem to Jericho: A Study of Situational Variables in Helping Behavior," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 27, pp. 100-108.

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A Kingdom of Love

by Mike Hannah

LOGOS **Theme:** Jesus continues to demonstrate the characteristics of His kingdom, and to show the privileges and responsibilities that participation in the kingdom entails.

1. The Cost of Love (read Luke 10:25-37)

"But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him" (Luke 10:33, NIV).

In this well-known parable, a man beaten and left for dead is passed by two religious leaders, before a Samaritan traveler stops to help. Upon seeing the beaten man, the Samaritan "took pity on him." At this point the man had to make a choice, would he stop and help the man or would he repress the pity, harden his heart, and keep going? The Samaritan chose to help. I would like us to focus on the results of his choosing to assist the beaten stranger. It cost our Good Samaritan in the following areas:

- a. **Time**—The Samaritan was traveling somewhere, so he had to take time to stop, bandage the man, bring him to the inn, and care for him. Notice that the Samaritan "neighbor" also makes plans to return (verse 35).
- b. **Personal Discomfort**—The Samaritan had been riding a donkey, but he now chooses to walk while a man he does not know rides his donkey.
- c. **Service**—The Samaritan spent the day and evening taking care of his unknown neighbor.
- d. **Money**—The Samaritan gave of his money to pay for the beaten man's stay at the inn.

Nowhere in this parable does Jesus say the Samaritan is rewarded, or that he will be blessed, or even that he has done anything special. He will be blessed, but the focus of the story is that love must give selflessly, and we can expect it to cost.

Could it be that what we consider going the extra mile is only what Jesus considers taking the first step?

2. The Priorities of the Kingdom (read Luke 10:38-42)

"... Mary, ... sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. ... 'Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her'" (Luke 10:39-42, NIV).

In the course of their travels, Jesus and the disciples arrive at the house of Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus. In this passage we see a contrast between the two women's behavior. While Martha is anxious and distracted about preparing for their important guest, Mary is ignoring the preparations and sits at Jesus' feet. Martha decides to confront Jesus, hoping that he will rebuke Mary's apparent lack of responsibility. Instead, Jesus says that Mary has chosen the "better way."

In this passage Jesus teaches us about priorities in the kingdom of God. Preparing for Jesus' needs is an important and excellent minis-

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try. But Jesus demonstrates that there are other priorities in His kingdom. When Jesus speaks the words of God the most important thing to do is listen and respond. Other preparations can wait. By not recognizing the priorities of the kingdom, Martha replaces the best, with its oftentimes worst enemy, the good.

In the story Jesus teaches that service for the Lord must not replace the time spent sitting at His feet. Often we are so busy doing things for the Lord that we neglect doing things with Him.

How important a priority is your devotional time with the Lord each day? Do you allow other "good things" to crowd it out?

3. The Enemies of the Kingdom (read Luke 11:37-54)

"Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness" (Luke 11:39, NIV).

Jesus must have been some dinner guest! In this passage we see Jesus doing something that is unparalleled in the Gospels. Jesus is invited to a Pharisee's house for a meal. When He arrives there He rebukes the Pharisees. Why did Jesus constantly and openly rebuke them? One reason is that the Pharisees were representative of the most dangerous enemies of the kingdom. The danger lay in the fact that while claiming to be working for the kingdom, they were actually working against it.

These leaders monopolized the civic and religious life of the people. They were so occupied with a self-made external religion and had no room for Christ's teaching. They replaced God's kingdom of love with their own bureaucracy of legalism and spiritual oppression. They were very much an antichrist power, in that they constantly opposed Jesus. While claiming to honor God, they eventually killed His Son. It is in the light of this dangerous, antichrist influence that we must understand Christ's powerful rebuke. Jesus fearlessly exposed the corruption and hypocrisy of this powerfully entrenched religious group.

Christ's Method of Reaching the People

by Linda Hoey, Ph.D.

TESTIMONY

Key text:
Luke 10:1, 2

"We are living in the midst of an 'epidemic of crime,' at which thoughtful, God-fearing men everywhere stand aghast. The corruption that prevails, it is beyond the power of the human pen to describe. Every day brings fresh revelations of political strife, bribery, and fraud. Every day brings its heart-sickening record of violence and lawlessness, of indifference to human suffering, of brutal, fiendish destruction of human life. Every day testifies to the increase of insanity, murder, and suicide. Who can doubt that satanic agencies are at work among men with increasing activity to distract and corrupt the mind, and defile and destroy the body? . . .

"The world needs today what it needed nineteen hundred years ago—a revelation of Christ. . . . Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow Me.'

"There is need of coming close to the people by personal effort. If less time were given to sermonizing, and more time were spent in personal ministry, greater results would be seen. The poor are to be relieved, the sick cared for, the sorrowing and the bereaved comforted, the ignorant instructed, the inexperienced counseled. We are to weep with those that weep, and rejoice with those that rejoice. Accompanied by the power of persuasion, the power of prayer, the power of the love of God, this work will not, cannot, be without fruit. . . .

"In almost every community there are large numbers who do not listen to the preaching of God's word or attend any religious service. If they are reached by the gospel, it must be carried to their homes. Often the relief of their physical needs is the only avenue by which they can be approached. Missionary nurses who care for the sick and relieve the distress of the poor will find many opportunities to pray with them, to read to them from God's word, and to speak of the Saviour. They can pray with and for the helpless ones who have not strength of will to control the appetites that passion has degraded. They can bring a ray of hope into the lives of the defeated and disheartened. Their unselfish love, manifested in acts of disinterested kindness, will make it easier for these suffering ones to believe in the love of Christ.

"Many have no faith in God and have lost confidence in man. But they appreciate acts of sympathy and helpfulness. As they see one with no inducement of earthly praise or compensation come into their homes, ministering to the sick, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, comforting the sad, and tenderly pointing all to Him of whose love and pity the human worker is but the messenger—as they see this, their hearts are touched. Gratitude springs up. Faith is kindled. They see that God cares for them, and they are prepared to listen as His word is opened."*

* *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 142-145.

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Mastering Your Gift of Love

by Joseph Muinos

God is love. All human beings created in His image are by nature capable of expressing love. Love can be suppressed or applied selfishly, but cannot be extinguished from the human heart.

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself" (Luke 10:27). This commandment, cited in the story of the Good Samaritan, states that the manner of loving God must be different from the manner of loving our neighbors. If you give this highest expression of love to your neighbors you are committing idolatry. The Lord declares, "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me" (Matt. 10:37). Loving the things of the world is sin. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world" (1 John 2:15).

When Jesus was in the world He gave a new commandment to His followers. He said, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; *as I have loved you*, that ye also love one another" (John 13:34). This commandment of love demands of Christians self-sacrifice for the sake of others. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (chap. 15:13).

Love is a transitive virtue and cannot exist in a vacuum. To grow and blossom it must be shared with others. Jews and Samaritans had been exchanging their rivalries and hostilities since the time of the Babylonian captivity, each claiming to be the true people of God. When Jesus came their prejudice and animosity toward each other was as strong as ever. In the parable of the Good Samaritan the Lord intended to break the barriers of prejudice and animosity that existed between Jew and Samaritan.

The essence of the question in the parable "Who is my neighbor?" can be rendered "To whom should I give my gift of love?" The answer is "To anyone in need, indiscriminately." Although the commandment of love demands love to God above everything, we cannot truly love God until we love our neighbors as ourselves.

"It is the fragrance of our love for our fellowmen that reveals our love for God."*

REACT

Why is the love of God perfected in us when we love one another?

EVIDENCE

Key text:
Luke 10:27

* *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 560.

Joseph Muinos just completed his Ph.D. in psychology while teaching mathematics at Loma Linda University, La Sierra campus.

Motivation for Service

by Linda Hoey, Ph.D.

HOW TO

Key text:
Luke 10:29

There are two basic internal motivations for offering help to others. Some people help others because they expect some type of benefit, an extrinsic motivation. People are altruistic when they provide help without expecting any benefits. The rewards that spur and maintain this behavior are self-administered; they come from inside the person rather than from the outside. Altruism, then, is a special kind of helpfulness that Christians have as their goal.

In the book *Growing in His Image*, by Bernard Bangley, p. 116, four steps are given as a way to achieve altruism.*

1. Do what pleases another rather than yourself.
2. Choose to have less rather than more.
3. Seek the lowest place and be the servant of all.
4. Pray that God's will may be accomplished in you always.

It is not possible for one person to change the whole world into a fair and equitable place to live, and God does not call us to do that. However, He would like us to make a dent in the world's evil and pain in our own little corner. This takes place when we feel a personal responsibility for our fellow humans and become willing to offer assistance without expecting any rewards. If the priest and the Levite, in the story of the Good Samaritan, had known that this story would be repeated throughout history, they probably would have stopped to help the man who had been beaten and robbed. It is natural for humans to want to be famous. However, this is not what God is asking from us. He wants us to choose to help others in an altruistic manner, just because we want to be helpful, loving people.

REACT

In the light of 1 Corinthians 13 what kind of service is acceptable in God's sight? Why?

* Bernard Bangley, *Growing in His Image* (Wheaton, Illinois: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1983), p. 116.

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Choosing the Best Part

by Jose M. Muinos

The scripture study for this week involves two interesting stories. One story concerns the good Samaritan who ignores the mission he was on, to help his neighbor. The second story concerns Mary and Martha. Mary does the opposite of the Samaritan by ignoring her sister Martha to pursue the mission she wants to be on. Mary and the Samaritan are praised by Jesus in both stories.

How can that be? One proposes to help the person nearest to him; the other proposes just the opposite, to ignore her. The difference lies in the importance of the problems both neighbors faced. The man the Samaritan helps is in a life-and-death situation. While Martha is just "troubled about many things" (Luke 10:41). What if the two previous travelers were on their way to hear Jesus speak? Would it be considered wrong if they did not stop to help the victim on the road? Or would Jesus still have congratulated Mary on her choice of listening to Him if Martha were lying in bed ill?

A church member once refused the position of usher, which involved escorting late comers to empty seats, because he felt he could not pay proper attention to the pastor's message for that Sabbath if he were involved in scouting seats, identifying late comers, and uniting the two. He was chastised for not being willing to help out. Whose story does he resemble most?

Or what about the faculty member at college who turns down his dean when requested to perform a weekend duty, because it will keep him away from his family? These and many other questions can become confusing, especially when the tried-and-true tactic of "Others are sacrificing their time, why can't you?" is used as a club.

Think about it! Martha was not just preparing food for herself, she was preparing food for the Master. Yet Jesus said that she was preoccupied with too many things. There is a big difference between hearing the Lord and getting ready with the peripherals. In the case of the Samaritan, it was a case of: "I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me" (Matt. 25:35, 36). In the case of Mary it was a matter of choosing the "good part, which shall not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:42).

The question confronting us today is: Do we always choose the good part that will not be taken away from us? Is liberation theology the good part? Is divestiture in South Africa the good part? Is nuclear disarmament the good part? Or are we just careful and troubled about too many things, and not choosing the good part that *cannot be taken away*? Martha did not choose the bad part as far as we know, but she did choose the part that would not stay.

REACT

How do social issues in the church relate to "the good part"?

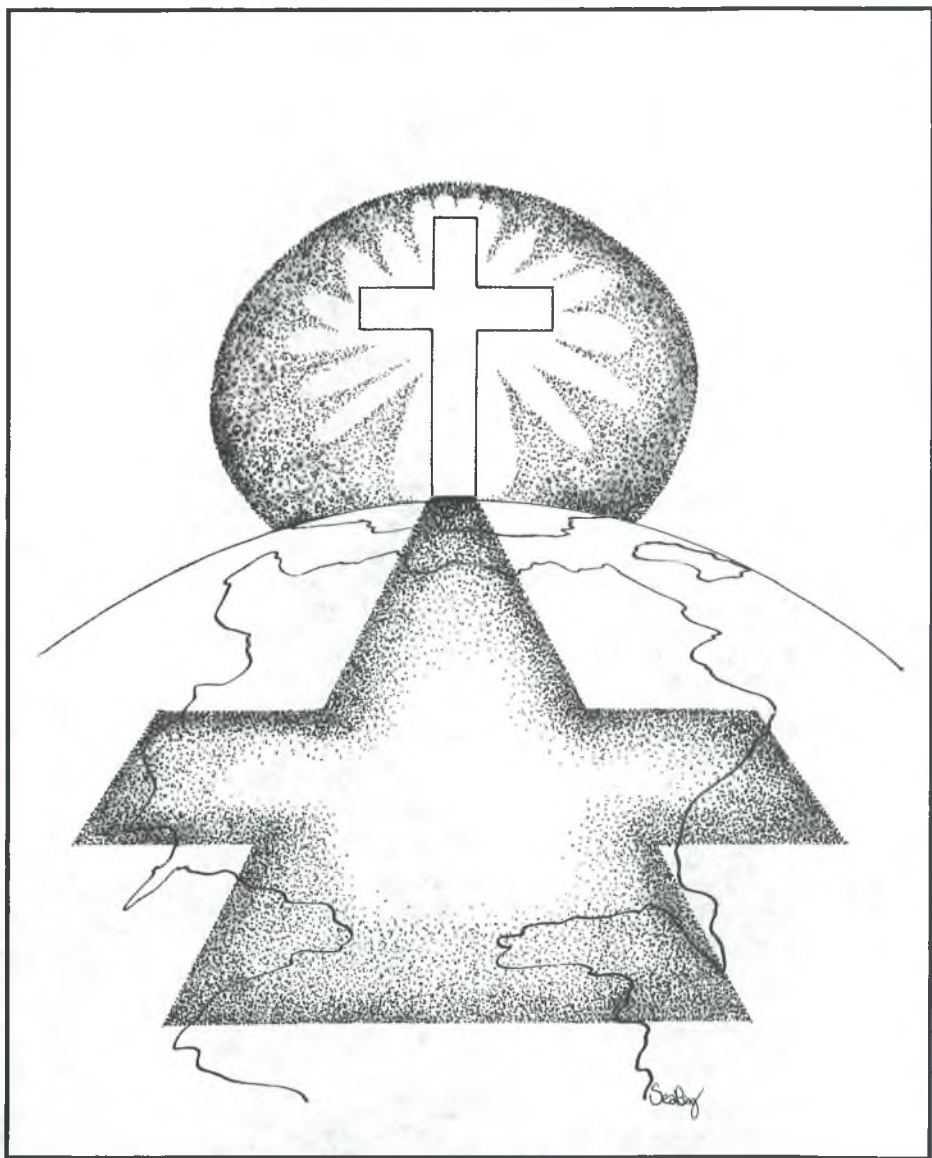
OPINION

Key text:
Luke 10:36,
41, 42

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A Costly Kingdom

"I tell you, whoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God" (Luke 12:8, NIV).



Taking the Little Things Along

by D. P. Harris

INTRO- DUCTION

Scripture:
Luke 12:1—
14:35

"Korean Airlines flight 256 departing for Los Angeles will leave in 10 minutes. All passengers holding boarding passes please board at once."

For a whole year I had lived and learned with the people of Japan as a student missionary. Now it was over. It was time to go home.

I was apprehensive, recalling that it was a Korean airliner that was shot down over Russia the year before. Since we were flying straight to Los Angeles, hopefully the U.S.S.R. would have no interest in our flight.

Adding to my concern was the knowledge that during the past four weeks there had been three bombings at international airports around the world. Checking my flight plan, I noticed we would make stops at three airports, none of which had experienced any bombing incidents yet.

"Dear God, please let the security at these airports be tight." Stepping confidently through the electronic surveillance gate, I strode over to the conveyor belt to pick up my baggage. The alarm sounded.

"*Machinasai*" (Japanese for "wait").

They were talking to me.

"Wait sir! Please step back through here!"

Me? Gladly, I carried no weapons.

Beep!

I was surrounded by three unarmed guards as one searched for the object of of-

fense. Halfway through the search, I remembered something. Just before I left the apartment, I put my pocketknife into my pants pocket.

Reaching in, I casually smiled and said, "Is this what you are looking for? It is such a little thing."

They relaxed, one of the guards taking my "little thing" from me. (The story ends here because I boarded the plane. But imagine another scenario. Just suppose I said . . .)

"Wait! Hey guys, I am not going to hurt anybody. It is only a pocketknife. I am no skyjacker."

A guard grabbed me, from the size of him, he could have been a wrestler. "If you want to ride on this plane you must give up all weapons. Read the sign! If you want to hold your weapon you cannot ride the plane."

"I just need a little protection."

"If no weapons are on board you are protected."

The pocketknife seemed so insignificant to me, but it was a potential threat.

Flight 144,000 leaving earth for heaven. My twenty-two years here are over.

As I pass through the surveillance device the beeper goes off. The angelic guard stops me and says, "If you want to ride on this plane you must surrender everything."

I begin to protest.

"Yes! Even the 'little things.'"

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A Costly Kingdom

by Mike Hannah

LOGOS **Theme:** Jesus shows that those who would be citizens of His kingdom must make the kingdom their highest priority. The consequences of putting the kingdom first include suffering, as well as reward.

1. Long-Term Investments (read Luke 12:13-21)

"And I'll say to myself 'You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry'" (Luke 12:19 NIV).

Jesus warns us about the dangers associated with wealth. What was this man's problem? Why was God displeased with him? What was wrong with building bigger barns? He needed somewhere to store his extra crops. If left outside they would spoil. The man's problem was not necessarily his planning for bigger barns, but his motivation for doing so. His purpose for storing the extra was to "take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." One of the serious problems with wealth is that a person becomes too content with life, and focuses on his or her own enjoyment, to the exclusion of God. This farmer had all he needed and more. Yet he did not consider sharing his abundance with the poor. His wealth caused him to be self-centered. In verse 21 Jesus does not say this is how it will be with everyone who has wealth. Wealth in itself is not evil. "The love of money is the root of all evil" (1 Tim. 6:10). The farmer stored up things for himself, and was not rich toward God.

Wealth often causes our awareness of our dependence on God to diminish. Why pray that God will supply our daily bread when all we need to do is run to the supermarket when the cupboards begin to look barren. Jesus warns that wealth makes us self-centered, instead of God-centered.

What are the Christian's proper priorities? Are making money, owning a nice car and getting ahead in the world a part of the Christian's life?

2. The Narrow Door (read Luke 13:22-30)

"Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to" (Luke 13:24 NIV).

When asked, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" (Luke 13:23 NIV) Jesus does not directly answer the question. He does not focus as much on the number as He does on the type of people who will enter the kingdom. This is important because many people who think they will enter will not. What are kingdom people like? Jesus tells us three things about them.

a. They enter through the narrow door. This is similar to Christ's reference to the straight and narrow way, versus the broad way. It feels more secure to travel on a wide path. You are able to stand shoulder to shoulder with your friends, and their company provides assurance. On a narrow path you often walk alone, and there are many unknown turns.

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b. They will enter at the right time. Those who enter the kingdom are prepared and waiting for their Lord's return.

c. They will be known by God. This type of knowing refers to an intimate saving relationship, because in the broadest sense of the word God "knows" all people. "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (John 17:3 NIV). It is not enough to know about Christ, or to be a member of a group where He is present ("we ate and drank with you," Luke 13: 26). It is not enough to be a church member. It is not enough to know the right doctrine. ("You taught in our streets," verse 26). We must both know Him and be known by Him to enter the kingdom.

3. The Invitation (read Luke 14:15-24)

"A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. . . . Not one of those men who were invited will get a taste of my banquet" (Luke 14:16, 24 NIV).

What would happen if God threw a party and no one came? In this parable God sends out invitations to enter His kingdom—the banquet. But those who were invited called up and graciously declined. What was it that they had to do that was more important than accepting God's invitation? Let's consider their excuses. What do you think about someone who buys a field without seeing it first? How about someone who buys a large number of oxen without inspecting them? Finally, the last person declined the invitation because he had recently married. Angered by their response, the Host of the banquet invites the crippled, the poor, the blind, and the lame.

Jesus is eating at the house of a Pharisee, when he tells this parable. It was they who refused to enter the kingdom (Luke 11:52). The Pharisees who considered themselves "respectable people" declined the invitation to the banquet. But those whom they looked down upon—tax collectors, sinners, and prostitutes—gladly accepted the invitation to the banquet.

Entering the kingdom must be our highest priority. Business and family are important, but in this parable Jesus teaches that they must not take first place in our lives. Neither job nor family must be an excuse for rejecting God's invitation to the banquet. It is not necessarily an either-or situation. God says that if we seek His kingdom first the rest will be added (see Matt. 6:28-33). As we keep God in the center the other areas of our lives will find their proper place.

How will we respond to God's R.S.V.P.?

One Thing Thou Lackest

by D. P. Harris

TESTIMONY

Key text:
Luke 18:18

Whenever the subject of salvation comes up I am usually bombarded by people offering their opinions. And because people are different, and their religious experiences are different, the answers they offer are different. But my mind always goes back to the rich young ruler.

This young man had everything this life could offer him. Now he wanted to have everything offered by the next life, as well. But he had a problem. He wanted both. When Christ told him the conditions of eternal life, total surrender of his life, he became upset.

"The ruler was to discern all that Christ's words involved, and he became sad. If he had realized the value of the offered gift, quickly he would have enrolled himself as one of Christ's followers."¹

Could it be that we today do not realize the value of the offered gift? Maybe that's why we find total surrender so hard. I find it easy to shake my head in disgust at the rich young ruler, until I look at myself.

"His claim that he had kept the law of God was a deception. He showed that riches were his idol. He could not keep the commandments of God while the world was first in his affections. He loved the gifts of God more than he loved the Giver. Christ had offered the young man fellowship with Himself. 'Follow Me,' He said. But the Savior was not so much to him as his own name among men or his possessions."²

What kinds of things are holding us back from God? Money? Cars? Family? Friends? Boy friend or girl friend?

Could church work get in the way of our relationship with God? What does it mean "he loved the gifts of God more than . . . the Giver"?

"Christ's dealing with the young man is presented as an object lesson. . . . Only those who will become co-workers with Christ, only those who will say, Lord, all I have and all I am is Thine, will be acknowledged as sons and daughters of God. All should consider what it means to desire heaven, and yet to turn away because of the conditions laid down. Think of what it means to say 'No' to Christ."³

Imagine yourself on judgment day, looking at Jesus, and saying, "No, I've enjoyed myself already, I don't want to go to heaven."

"It may seem too great a sacrifice to give up all in order to follow Christ. But this is the rule of conduct for all who would become His disciples. Nothing short of obedience can be accepted. Self-surrender is the substance of the teachings of Christ."⁴

As seen in the story of the rich young, albeit foolish, ruler, the kingdom of God is a costly kingdom. But as any businessperson can tell you the greater the investment, the greater the reward. Jesus will say to those who faithfully persevere, "Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Matt. 25:23).

1. *The Desire of Ages*,
p. 520.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*, p. 523.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 523.

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Consider This

by George Jones

When thinking about raising fruit trees the farmer is interested in two things: 1. the type of fruit, and 2. the quality of the fruit. If a farmer is interested in oranges he plants trees capable of bearing oranges. In the spiritual life God is interested in the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23). To produce this type of fruit God transforms our natures into trees that are capable of bearing good fruit. This change occurs when we commit our lives to Christ. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17).

A farmer is interested not only in the type of fruit produced but also in the quality of fruit. He or she does not just want oranges, but good oranges. To produce high-quality fruit the farmer must fertilize, irrigate, and prune the trees.

To bear fruit in our lives we do have an important part to play. Only God can change our nature, only He can change us into trees that are capable of bearing spiritual fruit. But as a "tree" we contribute by living in the sunshine of His love, by drinking the living water of His Word, and by surrendering to His pruning process in our lives.

EVIDENCE

Key text:
Galatians
5:22, 23

Cultivating Confession and Repentance

by Lonnie Williams

HOW TO
Key text:
Luke 13: 1-9

"I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:5).

All need to repent. The process of repentance can be an embarrassing and humiliating experience. Most people like to keep this activity to the bare minimum. If we look at repentance and confession as the lock and the key that separate us from total communion with Jesus, then our attitudes toward this important activity will improve.

As Christians, repentance needs to be a continuous activity in our daily walk with God. Sometimes it is believed that repentance is necessary only at the time when we accept Christ into our life, and after that everything is fine. In order for us to enter the kingdom, it is essential that our lifestyle reflect the image of Christ. This is not a process that can occur overnight. It requires a daily, earnest cleansing of the soul. A verbal heart-to-heart communion with God where we tell Him about our sins, our weaknesses, and solicit help in overcoming future temptations. Too often we forget that Jesus will carry our guilt and burden if we will allow Him. It is time to recognize that repentance through prayer is essential for spiritual growth.

Not only is repentance and confession through prayer important but also confession to our brothers and sisters in Christ is necessary. All sin is against God and needs to be confessed to Him, but often sin is against people. Christ tells us that before we come to God we must first settle our differences with other people (Matt. 5:23, 24). The number of people from whom you would need to ask forgiveness would be all those directly affected by your transgression.

Confession can be painful and embarrassing, but the eternal results far outweigh the temporary uncomfortableness. The worst that could happen is for the other person to say, "No, I will not forgive you." But if you have done your part, then at least your conscience will be clear.

Confession, repentance, and forgiveness are necessary parts of Christian growth. Make the commitment to search your life; seek forgiveness from God and those you have offended. You will discover true joy and peace.

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No Mustard on the Kingdom, Please

by Ted Mills

OPINION

Key text:
Luke 13:18-21

"You saw those drunks that crossed the street while we were passing out tracts?"

"Yeah, what about them?"

"You know, we might just meet those same people in heaven."

"You must be kidding! There is no place for drunks in heaven. They are just heathens and sinners!"

The temptation to ask who was right in that exchange would be one that most Bible teachers and theologians would find difficult to resist. The answers would provide interesting discussions and many explanations pro and con. The part that worries me is the speed with which some Christians condemn their erring fellow Christians.

Jesus told the parable of the mustard seed and the yeast for one simple reason. People were getting the wrong idea of what the kingdom of God was like and who constituted its inhabitants. In many ways, the ideas of an elitist heaven have not changed significantly from the time of the Pharisees to this time in modern religious history.

Could I be safe in saying that Jesus meant to alienate, if not alert, his listeners by using uncommon, iconoclastic images to "picture" the kingdom of God. The mustard seed itself showed such an insignificant beginning. How many of the Jewish leaders realized, at that time, that Jesus was making a direct reference to the contempt they placed upon the uneducated peasants and fishermen who followed Him? How many of the leaders saw the true and correct potential of all people, and not just a few, in the kingdom of God? Jesus was telling the leaders that even a mustard seed could grow to a size far larger than any other cultivated plant in that area. It related to the success that Christ's message and His "poor" disciples were to have.

Jesus' comment about the yeast in the bread probably caused wide-eyed glances from the Jewish leaders who were listening to Him.

"From the human viewpoint the illiterate peasants and fishermen, who at this time constituted practically the only followers of the humble Galilean, might appear most unpromising. But the critical onlooker reckoned without the transforming and elevating power of the gospel. As leaven permeates every part of the dough in which it is placed, so the teachings of Christ would penetrate the lives of those who received them and were willing to be transformed thereby."*

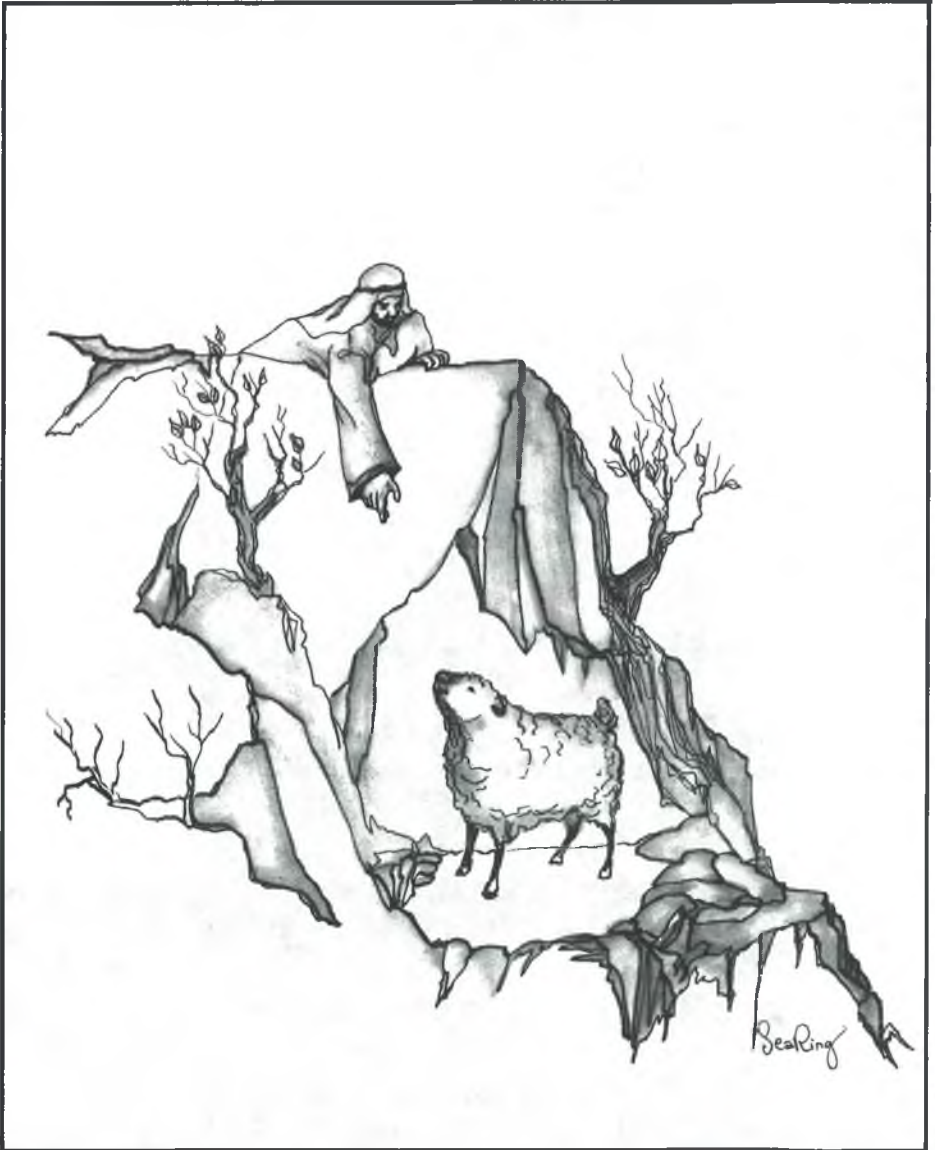
Once more Jesus tells us that we must be careful in deciding why He does what He does. Our idea of God's Kingdom is subject to personal biases and opinions. Jesus cautions us to be wary of misconceptions.

*SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 5, p. 409.

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A Kingdom of Acceptance

"I tell you that in the same way there is more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent" (Luke 15:7, NIV).



Grace and Dr. Ney

by Gary Chartier

"Think what you can accomplish if you know Russian!" my dad challenged me in sage tones. "Translator, diplomat, business titan, no calling will lie beyond your grasp once you have mastered it."

But I could not blame only my dad; I wanted to learn Russian too—or at least I thought I did.

It went OK for one quarter; I paid attention to my teacher—a saintly Estonian professor in his late eighties—and made significant progress toward understanding the language of Dostoevski and Tolstoi. But then came the summer, and the next year I just did not feel quite as enthusiastic as I had the year before. The directed-study format made it easy to goof off. So, naturally, I did. For two quarters.

Near the end of the winter quarter I came to a shocking conclusion. I had learned almost nothing in Russian since the first quarter. Final exam was imminent.

I sat shivering, my eyes glued to the Russian textbook I had ignored throughout the quarter. In the last hour, I de-

cidated, I had learned more Russian than I had throughout the past six months. One by one the other Russian students made their way into Dr. Ney's little cubicle. One by one they departed. My turn would come soon enough. John Donne's proverbial bell, I knew, was tolling for me.

Now it was time. The gracious little man ushered me into the examination room. First he asked about the one area I was familiar with—Russian names for parts of the body. So far so good, I thought.

And then he said, "OK I guess that's it. I know you have been busy this quarter, with your editorial responsibilities and all."

I gulped silently, waiting. This could not really be everything, right?

"I will give you a good grade," he announced, smiling.

As I hugged dear old Dr. Ney, and watched the impish smile light up his face, I had an inkling—just a little one—of the meaning of grace, the key ingredient in God's kingdom of acceptance.

INTRODUCTION

Scripture:
Luke 15:1—
17:10

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A Kingdom of Acceptance

by Mike Hannah

LOGOS **Theme:** Jesus makes it clear that acceptance into His kingdom is based on unconditional love extended to all people, even those rejected and despised by society and regarded as sinners.

1. The Lost Sheep, Coin, and Son (read Luke 15:1-32)

"The Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, 'this man welcomes sinners and eats with them.' Then Jesus told them this parable" (Luke 15:2, 3, NIV).

The parables of the lost sheep, coin, and son must be seen as a unit. In them Jesus teaches about three ways in which God works to bring people into His kingdom. In each story the situation of the lost is different, and consequently God responds differently.

a. The Lost Sheep. In this parable one sheep had wandered away from the fold. It knew it was lost, but it did not know the way back. The Shepherd actively sought the sheep and carried it back to safety. In the same way when people wander from the kingdom, and stray away from the paths of righteousness, they need to be brought back by the Good Shepherd (see James 5:19, 20).

b. The Lost Coin. The interesting thing about the coin is that it was lost in its owner's house. The coin did not know it was lost. God, represented by the woman, actively and carefully searches for the lost coin. There are some people who are lost within the church (the house) but do not know their condition. They fail to seek their master, because they feel no need. God comes searching for them (see Rev. 3:17, 20).

c. The Lost Son. The prodigal son is different in that he deliberately separates himself from his father. Unlike the other two, he both knew he was lost and knew the way back. In this instance the father does not go into the far country to find his lost son. Instead, he waits with a breaking heart, longing and hoping for the son's return. When he does return, the father welcomes him with open arms of acceptance (see 1 John 1:9).

These are three ways that God works to save the lost. When seeking to reconcile others to the kingdom, we need to identify their situation and then act accordingly in love and acceptance. Notice that each time there is rejoicing. The important thing is not how bad they were, but that they are found.

When people are reclaimed to the church do we rejoice, or are we apt to be judgmental about their past mistakes?

2. The Shrewd Manager (read Luke 16:1-12)

"For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light" (Luke 16:8, NIV).

The rich man did not condone his manager's dishonesty; it was for dishonesty that he was being relieved of his duties. But the cleverness with which this scheming rascal brought his career of misconduct to a climax was so amazing and the thoroughness with which he carried out his plan so worthy of more noble objectives, that the

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rich man could not help admiring his manager's sharpness.

The manager had exercised foresight by planning shrewdly for his own future. He had made for himself a host of friends who would be obligated to him in the days to come. He had wisely made use of his present opportunities while they lasted.

The point Jesus makes is that "the people of this world" often show more shrewdness in their pursuit of what life has to offer than Christians do in their service for God and others. As managers of the truth and treasures of heaven, Jesus says, we need to exhibit astuteness and sharpness in the use of all the resources God has given to advance the cause of the kingdom.

As a Christian should I wisely plan opportunities for witness or just leave it to chance? Why do you think the Bible says of Jesus, "he had to go through Samaria" (John 4:4, NIV)?

3. The Rich Man and Lazarus (read Luke 16:19-31)

"If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead" (Luke 16:31, NIV).

This parable illustrates both the importance and the permanence of our actions and decisions in this life. Jesus is continuing His teaching on the use of riches in relationship to God's kingdom; and the parable expands on the story of the shrewd manager. The shrewd manager was an example of using your wealth for positive eternal consequences. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus is an example of using riches with negative eternal consequences.

The rich man, having ignored Lazarus in this life, dies and finds himself in hades, forever separated from the kingdom. He asks that Lazarus, also dead but in "Abraham's bosom," be sent to the rich man's five living brothers to warn them of what will happen if they do as he did. Abraham refuses, saying that they already have Moses and the Prophets—the Scriptures. Knowing that his brothers, like himself, will either ignore, rationalize, or selectively read the Scriptures, he maintains that if someone from the dead goes back to his brothers they will surely believe.

In the context of the parable, Jesus makes a prophetic statement concerning His resurrection and the stubborn resistance of those who refuse to believe. "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead" (Luke 16:31, NIV).

Could this be a warning to us, when we rationalize and selectively apply scriptural principles to our lives and relationships? Perhaps the rich man felt that helping Lazarus was not his ministry, or he did not "feel God leading him that way"? Perhaps we also are guilty of waiting for a sign from heaven (Lazarus rising from the dead and giving us a message) to begin doing certain things in our own lives, when in fact all we really need to do is to search the Scriptures (Moses and the Prophets) with the purpose of obeying them.

Mercy, Not Sacrifice

by Gary Chartier

TESTIMONY

Key text:
Luke 5:31, 32

"Why eateth your Master with publicans and Sinners?" questioned the envious rabbis.

"Jesus . . . replied: 'They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.' The Pharisees claimed to be spiritually whole, and therefore in no need of a physician, while they regarded the publicans and Gentiles as perishing from diseases of the soul. Then was it not His work, as a physician, to go to the very class that needed His help?

"But although the Pharisees thought so highly of themselves, they were really in a worse condition than the ones they despised. The publicans were less bigoted and self-sufficient, and thus were more open to the influence of truth. Jesus said to the rabbis, 'Go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice.' Thus He showed that while they claimed to expound the word of God, they were wholly ignorant of its spirit."¹

"Caste is hateful to God. He ignores everything of this character. In His sight the souls of all men are of equal value. He 'hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us.' Without distinction of age, or rank, or nationality, or religious privilege, all are invited to come unto Him and live. 'Whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference.' 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free.' 'The rich and poor meet together: the Lord is the Maker of them all.' 'The same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.' Acts 17:26, 27; Gal. 3:28; Prov. 22:2; Rom. 10:11-13."²

1. *The Desire of Ages*,
p. 275.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 403.

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“The Law of Grace”

by Hans Kung

EVIDENCE

“Is the rule no longer to hold that the sinner must first make an effort, do penance, then receive grace? Is this whole system to lose its force? Must it not be made completely clear—as in the Old Testament books of Deuteronomy and Chronicles—that fidelity to the law is rewarded by God and lawlessness punished? According to this friend of tax collectors and sinners, is God, the holy God, supposed to forgive sinners as such, the unholy? But such a God would be a God of sinners: a God who loves sinners more than the righteous.

“Here, clearly, *the very foundations of religion* are being shaken. Traitors, swindlers and adulterers are put in the right as against the devout and righteous (Luke 18:10-14). The depraved good-for-nothing is preferred to his brother who has worked hard at home (Chap. 15:11-32). The hated foreigner—and, what is more, a heretic—is set up as an example to the natives (Chap. 10:30-37). And at the end then all will get the same reward (Matt. 20:1-16). What are all the great discourses in favor of the wastrels supposed to mean (Luke 15)? Are the sinful supposed to be nearer to God than those who remained righteous? It is scandalous if there is to be more joy in heaven over one sinner doing penance than over ninety-nine righteous who need no penance (Chap. 15:4-7, 8-10). Righteousness seems to be turned upside down.

“Will not someone who is so sympathetic to outlaws and lawless men also break the law himself? Will he not fail to observe both ritual and disciplinary regulations, as these are set down according to God’s commandment and the tradition of the Fathers? This is a fine purity of heart! Feasting instead of fasting! Man the measure of God’s commandments! Celebration instead of punishment! Under these circumstances it is not surprising if prostitutes and swindlers are supposed to enter God’s kingdom before the devout (Matt. 21:31), unbelievers from all parts before the children of the kingdom (Chap. 8:11-12). What kind of lunatic justice is this which in fact abolishes all sacred standards and reverses all order of rank, making the last first and the first last (Chap. 20:16)? What kind of naive and dangerous love is this, which does not know its limits. . . .

“Yes, Jesus did go so far: *we may forgive*, endlessly forgive, seven and seventy times (Chap. 18:21-22). And all sins—except the sin against the Holy Spirit, against the reality of God himself, when the sinner does not want to be forgiven (Chap. 12:31). Evidently an *opportunity* is offered to *everyone*, independently of social, ethnic, politico-religious divisions. And the sinner is accepted even before he repents. First comes grace, then the achievement. The sinner who has deserved every punishment is freely pardoned: he need only acknowledge the act of grace. Forgiveness is granted to him, he need only accept the gift and repent. This is a real amnesty—*gratis*. He need only live confidently in virtue of this grace. *Grace* then counts *before law*. Or, better, what holds is the law of grace. Only in this way is a new, higher righteousness possible.”*

* Hans Kung, *On Being a Christian* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1976), pp. 273, 274. Used by permission.

Hans Kung is a Roman Catholic theologian.

“A New Way of Seeing”

by Gary Chartier

HOW TO Key text: Luke 15:20

Face it; acceptance is not easy. It is hard to accept the outcast who has violated society's norms. It is hard to accept the resident assistant who reported you to the dean for an unbelievably minor infraction of the rules. It is hard to accept the vamp who snatched your boy friend away. It is hard to accept the college administrator who says, “Look out, kid; your days here are numbered.” Of course it is hard—but in the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son, Jesus challenges us to demonstrate the kind of acceptance He showed.

It does not help to pretend that the repulsive have become beautiful. It does not help to pretend that the arbitrary have become fair. Like true love, the kind of acceptance to which Christ calls us is not blind—rather, it involves a new way of seeing. Look at three ways of seeing that may help us accept the previously unacceptable:

1. Seeing as God sees. The words of an old hymn come to mind—“My life of scarlet, my sin and woe, Cover with His life, whiter than snow.” The grand truth of justification by faith means that when God looks at us He sees Jesus. We are not to despise “the purchase of Christ”—those for whom He died. As you think about that person you just cannot seem to accept, think of the value God places on each human life. Try, through God's grace, to see the Treasure—the holy Son of God—in the earthen vessel of an imperfect human life.

2. Seeing as you would like to be seen. Nothing hinders accepting others like self-righteousness. It is so easy to pray with the Pharisee, “Thank God, I am not a sinner like everyone else, especially like that tax collector over there” (Luke 18:10, TLB). But that is not God's way. The more we see of Jesus, the more we realize that “all our righteous acts are like filthy rags” (Isa. 64:6, NIV). We cannot legitimately claim acceptance on the basis of our merit; instead, we need grace, both from God and from our fellows. If we expect God to forgive our ten-thousand-talent debt, is it too much to accept the brother who owes us one-hundred denarii?

3. Seeing what might be. “Higher than the highest human thought can reach is God's ideal for His children.”* The potential and the actual will never be the same in this life. But each of us has undeveloped possibilities, possibilities that could blossom under the nurture of divine grace and human love. As you look at the unlovely, think about what they might become if you and God worked together for them.

REACT

Can a person's blatant disregard for God and others place him or her outside the pale of our acceptance? Beyond the reach of God's acceptance?

* *Education*, p. 18.

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If It Be of God

by Gary Chartier

His name was Gamaliel, and he is today best known as the teacher of Paul. But he has always stood out in my mind as the prime articulator of a notion central to a theology of acceptance.

You can read about it in Acts 5. Jesus' disciples had been brought before the Jewish Supreme Court. The charge: "You have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood" (Acts 5:28, NIV).

The apostles' spirited defense aroused the ire of the religious leaders, and there were those who wanted them condemned to death. But Gamaliel stepped in.

After asking that the disciples be removed from the council chamber, Gamaliel made his point. Others had proclaimed revolutionary new orders before; they had failed, clearly because God had not been with them. The same might be true here. "Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God" (Acts 5:38, 39, NIV).

The rabbi's message has something to say to us today. Truth can stand investigation. Even the truth most crucial to us, the truth on which we base our existence. If we are confident in the correctness of our beliefs, then we need not fear to have them assailed. If there is the chance they might be wrong, then everyone stands to gain if they are critically examined. If God is in the work, it will succeed in spite of us; if He's not, it will ultimately fail with or without us.

This tells us something very practical: We are to accept, not only those on the economic and social fringes of our world, nation, community, and church. Those on the ideological fringes also deserve our understanding. We can affirm the value of each person, whatever his or her belief.

REACT

How do you react when confronting someone who holds doctrinal views that are different from yours?

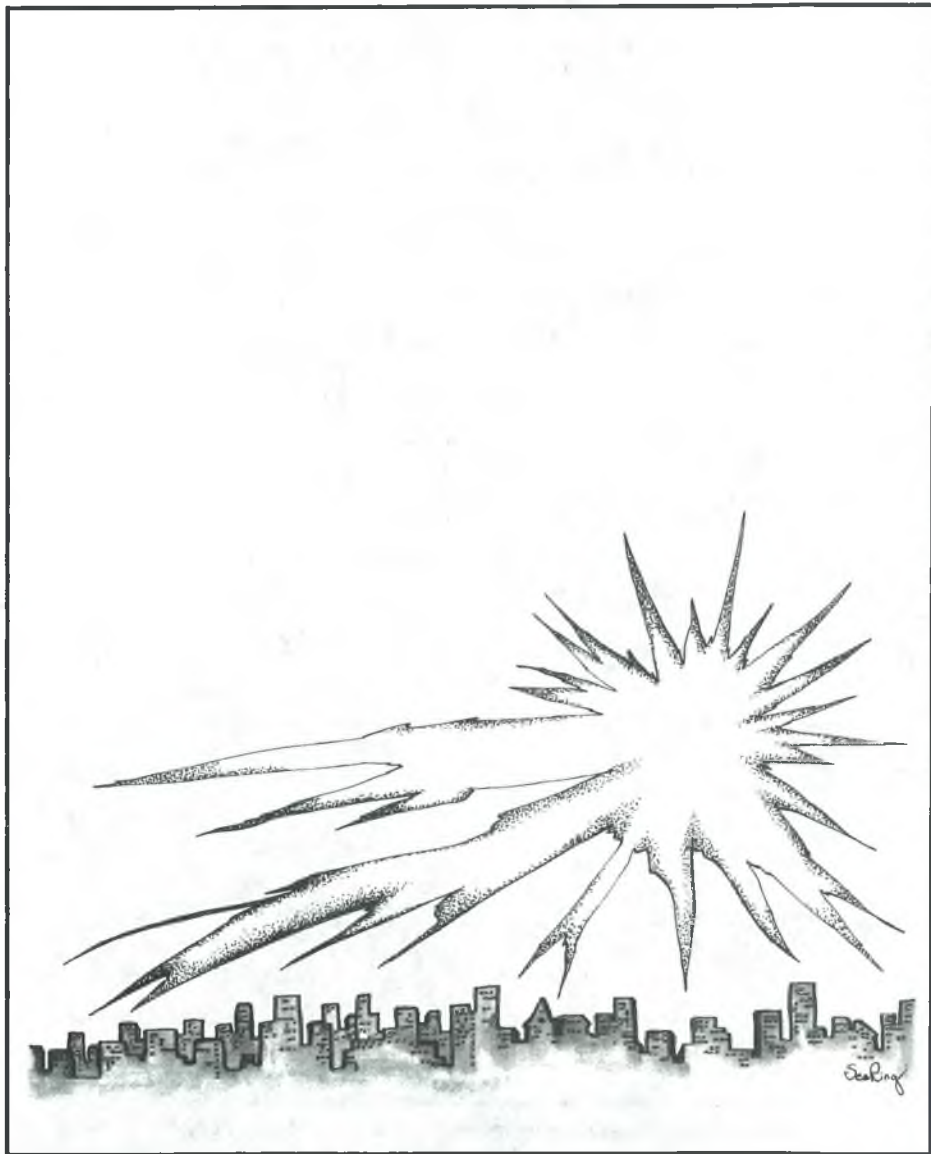
OPINION

Key text:
Acts 5:38, 39

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The Now and Future King

“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost” (Luke 19:10, NIV).



Was Jesus Really Unique?

by Steven G. Daily

What was unique about the message of Jesus Christ? This is the question with which college students have struggled in surveys taken throughout the nation. There are five names that appear on a simple questionnaire: Darwin, Freud, Marx, Einstein, and Jesus. Students are asked to identify the "unique contribution" that each of these individuals made to the development of human thought. Without exception, students on university campuses surveyed, both Christian and non-Christian, found it much more difficult to answer this question with regard to Jesus than the other four men.

I have used the questionnaire in my own Bible classes with similar results. Most students identify Darwin with evolution, Freud with psychoanalysis, Marx with socialism, and Einstein with the theory of relativity. But the unique contribution of Jesus seems to be much less clear.

The uniqueness of Christ's gospel is revealed in His proclamation that "the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:15). That kingdom is both a present and a future reality, and more important the kingdom is personified in Christ's own presence "within you" (Luke 17:21). In Jesus the fullness of God has been re-

vealed. Truth becomes objective, authority becomes absolute, God becomes human. Christ's message is the unique teaching in history. His claims the most radical, disturbing, and demanding. The one question that you and I cannot afford to ignore is: "What shall I do . . . with Jesus which is called Christ?" (Matt. 27:22).

Today this question is being increasingly pushed aside. Popular psychology proclaims a message of humanistic love and acceptance apart from Christ. Others become obsessed with social activism, ranging from abortion to nuclear war to apartheid, without any attempt to lift up Christ as the ultimate solution to human ills. "The earth is the Lord's" has been overshadowed by "We Are the World." The challenge in 1 John 4:2, 3 becomes more relevant every day. Whoever does not uplift Jesus and confess the incarnation of Christ runs the risk of being manipulated by the anti-christ.

There has never been a more exciting period in earth's history to be identified with the kingdom of God than the present. Those who know the Son have life.

This week we explore the most grand and practical implications of this unique and marvelous message.

INTRODUCTION

Scripture:
Luke 17:11—
19:10

Steven G. Daily is chaplain at Loma Linda University, La Sierra campus.

Dimensions of the Kingdom

by Mike Hannah

LOGOS **Theme:** Jesus shows that the kingdom of God has both present and future dimensions, and He further elaborates the response required of those who would be part of the kingdom.

1. The Ten Lepers (read Luke 17:11-19)

"Rise and go; your faith has made you well" (Luke 17:19, NIV).

As Jesus walks by a village in northern Israel, ten lepers stand at a distance and call out to him "Jesus, Master, have pity on us." As usual, Jesus responds to their call for help. There are two important points that we need to consider in this story.

a. They Were Healed Only As a Result of Their Obedience.

Instead of healing the lepers right then and there, Jesus told them to go and show themselves to the priests. It was only "as they went," that they were healed. Jesus choose to make their healing contingent on their exercise of faith. They started out with only a promise, but ended with the answer to their request. It often seems that God asks us to go out with faith in a promise, only to receive the answer or fulfillment of that promise along the way.

b. Only the One That Returned Received a Complete Healing.

After the ten were healed, nine of them went their separate ways, with only one returning to thank Jesus. Jesus says to this leper, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well." Why did Jesus say this? Was not the man already healed? It appears that it was only now that Jesus completed the healing of the whole person, both physically and spiritually. We are often guilty of coming to Jesus when we need something, and then when the need is met we go our own way, forgetting to thank Him. Those who do this forfeit the full blessing that God intends for His children.

2. I Want to See (read Luke 18:35-42)

"Jesus asked him, 'What do you want me to do for you?' 'Lord, I want to see,' he replied" (Luke 18:41, NIV).

When the blind man heard that Jesus was passing by, his hopes began to rise. Apparently this blind man had heard about Jesus, and all the miracles He had performed. If he could only get Jesus' attention, perhaps he also would be healed. As the procession of people came by, he shouted, "Son of Daivd, have mercy on me!" Those in the crowd rebuked him and told him to keep quiet. Those rebukes would have been enough to discourage many a person. The man had reached out looking for help and compassion and found nothing but harshness. He could have become dejected and given up hope. But determined in his request and ignoring his rebukers, he "shouted all the more." The result, Jesus heard his request for help and healed him. This man had a persistent faith, a faith that could meet opposition and overcome it. It is the same faith manifested by the persistent widow in Luke 18:1-8. Notice the blind man's response to God's grace in his life (a) **He followed Jesus**, (b) **He praised God**. The man did not just thank Jesus and leave. He followed Jesus and while he followed he praised God. Words without action are an

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empty response to God's grace in our lives. Not only did he praise God but, because of the miracle, all the people with Jesus praised God. This all happened because one man persevered in faith.

What is the result of Jesus' love in our lives? Are we both praising and following Jesus? Are we walking our talking?

3. The Man From the Tax Department (read Luke 19:1-9)

"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost" (Luke 19:10, NIV).

As a tax collector, Zacchaeus was a member of one of the most disliked groups in Jewish society. But in spite of Zacchaeus' notoriety, Jesus stops, and in front of a large crowd, He asks whether He can stay at Zacchaeus' house. For doing so He is sharply criticized by the Pharisees. Jesus, however, was more concerned about saving Zacchaeus than He was of His own reputation.

Zacchaeus, accustomed to being rejected by the religious leaders, is thrilled that Jesus is coming to stay at his house. Of all the people in town, Jesus is asking him—a "sinner extraordinaire"—whether He can be his guest.

Notice the urgency of this narrative. Jesus tells him to come down out of the tree *"immediately."* Zacchaeus replies, "Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor," and Jesus later replies, "*To-day* salvation has come to this house." What was it about Jesus that turned this man's life around so quickly? The answer is—the love of God. Jesus did not rebuke Zacchaeus for his sinful life. Instead Christ showed him a love and kindness that he knew was the exact opposite of what he deserved. Condemnation is not the most effective way to change a person. Change that results from criticism or a judgmental attitude takes place slowly and reluctantly. Change that comes in response to love takes place quickly and powerfully.

The Kingdom: Past, Present and Future

by Steven G. Daily

TESTIMONY

Key text:
Luke 17:20, 21

Our passages from Scripture this week suggest that the kingdom is a past, present, and future reality. Grace, commitment, and hope are the three necessary ingredients that bring the kingdom alive in our lives. Ellen White also understood the kingdom in such a three-dimensional context—it is the kingdom of grace, righteousness, and glory.

“Christ’s sacrifice in behalf of man was full and complete. The condition of the atonement had been fulfilled. The work for which He had come to this world had been accomplished. He had won the kingdom. He had wrested it from Satan, and had become heir of all things.”¹

“While His manners were gentle and unassuming, He impressed men with a sense of power that was hidden, yet could not be wholly concealed. Was this the One for whom Israel had so long waited?

“Jesus came in poverty and humiliation, that He might be our example as well as our Redeemer. If He had appeared with kingly pomp, how could He have taught humility? How could He have presented such cutting truths as in the Sermon on the Mount? Where would have been the hope of the lowly in life had Jesus come to dwell as a king among men? . . .

“The words which the priests and rabbis so much desired to hear, that Jesus would now restore the kingdom to Israel, had not been spoken. For such a king they had been waiting and watching; such a king they were ready to receive. But one who sought to establish in their hearts a kingdom of righteousness and peace, they would not accept.”²

“[The gospel preached by Paul] carried the minds of his hearers beyond the earthly service and the ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary, to the time when, having completed His mediatorial work, Christ would come again in power and great glory, and establish His kingdom on the earth.”³

REACT

1. If the kingdom of God has already begun through Christ, why does Ellen White warn against saying “I am saved”?
2. Is the presence of Jesus in your life something you think about on a day-to-day basis with any regularity? If not, why not?
3. If a Christian does not find contentment and fulfillment in this life is it likely that he or she will find such a meaningful existence in the kingdom of glory?
4. Do you picture Ellen White as a happy, joyful person or as an individual who was quite sober and serious? Why?

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 29.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 138.

3. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 228.

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What Is the Kingdom of God?

by Steven G. Daily

Charles Sheldon's classic novel, *In His Steps*, is the story of a middle-class church family confronted by a poor dying man, who interrupts their worship service and asks them each to consider a simple question, "What does it really mean to live as Jesus lived?"

The book, and the play, provides a gut-wrenching challenge to anyone who believes the kingdom of God can be experienced without the deepest personal commitment to Jesus Christ, or without an active involvement in the practice of social justice.

In the weeks that followed this dramatic presentation at La Sierra, I met with a group of students on campus who are seeking to live out the challenge of *In His Steps* in real life. We are asking the question, "What would Jesus have me do?" in each situation we face. Our discussions each week have been interesting, to say the least. For me it has been a humbling experience. To ask the question is difficult enough—to act on it appropriately is something else. The more we understand the broad demands of God's kingdom the more we feel the need to praise and uplift Christ.

Jesus equates His life, work, and ministry with the reality of the kingdom of God (Matt. 12:28). Those who have experienced His presence and committed themselves to His principles are better off than the prophets of old (Matt. 11:11). The Christian church has traditionally defined the kingdom of God through one of the following models:

1. The Kingdom of God Equals the Church. Christ gave His authority to Peter and the organized church (Matt. 16:18, 19). There is no salvation to be found outside of institutional religion.

2. The Kingdom of God Is Invisible and Present in the Hearts of All True Believers. Membership in the kingdom of God is a subjective "individual" relationship with Christ (Luke 17:21) that is not dependent on social structures or institutional religion.

3. The Kingdom of God Is Entirely a Present Reality. This view, which became popular in the nineteenth-century "social gospel" movement, argues that human beings can transform this world into the kingdom of God if we will only live up to the humanistic goodness and potential that we possess.

4. The Kingdom of God Is Entirely a Future Reality. We cannot save the world, therefore, Christians should not become social activists, but should focus their efforts on evangelism and personal salvation.

REACT

1. Which of these models can be most identified with twentieth-century Adventism?
2. Do you see dangers such as hierarchism, extreme individualism, humanism, and escapism in these models?
3. Assuming that all four models have some basis of truth, what do you think that Jesus would affirm in each of these models?
4. What does it mean to you personally to live out the kingdom of God in your life in the here and now?

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EVIDENCE

Key text:
Matt. 10:25

My Passport

by Les Pollard

HOW TO

Key text:
John 3:1-6

When one is traveling abroad a passport is indispensable. A few years ago, while traveling outside the United States and approaching the customs gate, I realized that I had misplaced this very important document. You talk about panic! I panicked (choked is the familiar athletic expression). I searched high and low. I tried to play it cool because I didn't want my wife to suspect that I had made a major blunder. Guess what? My "James Bond" composure paid off, for down among a number of my disheveled papers was my passport! Ahhh . . . sweet relief . . . !

Two thousand years ago Jesus informed a well-known religious figure that, despite his impressive religious, educational, and social credentials, he lacked Heaven's required passport. Christ said to him, "I tell you the truth, unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:5, NIV). Jesus makes it unmistakably clear that entrance into the kingdom demands that one be born again. Christ also explained how this experience is gained.

First, the Holy Spirit is the medium (John 3:8). His presence in the heart transforms the desires, tastes, attitudes, and outlooks. Through the Spirit the Christian becomes a "new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17).

Second, the cross is the message that produces conversion (John 3:14). The love of God as revealed at Calvary constrains the believer to embrace the Saviour in a personal way. Isaac Watts wrote:

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Don't leave worship today without your passport.

REACT

Keeping in mind the above analogy of the passport, consider the following questions.

1. Does our passport to heaven, like most passports, need to be renewed periodically?
2. Should we constantly be checking to make sure that we still have our passport and have not lost it along the way, or should we just acquire it and then not check on it until we arrive at the customs gate of heaven?
3. Are you afraid of arriving at heaven's gate and then fumbling around for your passport, only to find that you do not have the proper papers to get in?
4. Can we be sure of being accepted into God's kingdom? Why?

Les Pollard is associate chaplain at Loma Linda University, La Sierra campus. He is also associate pastor of the Kansas Avenue church.

Not Far From the Kingdom

by Les Pollard

Jesus' word to the scribe that day is an arresting one: "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God" (Mark 12:34). I feel this is relevant for modern disciples because I see in it a warning regarding the dangers of confusing intellectual assent with submissive faith. As food for reflection, note the comments made by Ellen White upon this encounter between Christ and the scribe: "The lesson [of loving submissive service to Christ and humanity] is no less needed in the world today than when it fell from the lips of Jesus. Selfishness and cold formality have well-nigh extinguished the fire of love, and dispelled the graces that should make fragrant the character. Many who profess His name have lost sight of the fact that Christians are to represent Christ. Unless there is practical self-sacrifice for the good of others, in the family circle, in the neighborhood, in the church, and wherever we may be, then whatever our profession, we are not Christians."*

Is it possible that the church has produced an entire generation of members who understand and agree with the facts of our message, but still lack that "vital connection" that the three angels' messages demand? What significance does Christ's invitation for Laodicea to repent hold in this generation?

In considering this subject it might be helpful to make a differentiation between cognitive and experiential belief. For example when the Philippian jailer asks Paul, "What must I do to be saved?" Paul's reply is, "Believe on the Lord Jesus" (Acts 16:30, 31). This does not mean simply having a cognitive belief that Jesus really exists, or even to believe that He is the Son of God, the Christ. Satan and demons recognize Him as the Son of God; they have a cognitive belief in Jesus (James 2:19; Luke 4:33, 34).

Paul is talking about an experiential belief. We must experience in our own lives that Jesus is Lord (the word *Lord* means "one to whom I belong"). Like the song, we must be able to say, "You ask me how I know He lives? He lives within my heart." Cognitive belief is to believe "about" someone or something. Experiential belief is to believe "in" someone or something. God calls us to a personal commitment in which we, the believers, invest ourselves in a relationship with Jesus Christ.

REACT

1. How does Christ's statement "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God" differ from King Agrippa's "almost persuaded" position in Acts 26:28?
2. Are you "almost persuaded" or "not far from the kingdom" in your spiritual experience?
3. Do you know Jesus Christ as your Saviour, or do you know about Him or of Him as the Saviour?
4. What do you think about the author's question "What significance does Christ's invitation for Laodicea to repent hold in this generation?"

OPINION

Key text:

Luke 18:18-30;

Mark 12:28-34

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* *The Desire of Ages*, p. 504.

The King in His City

"Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man" (Luke 21:36, NIV).



The Authority of Christ

by V. Bailey Gillespie, Ph.D.

**INTRO-
DUCTION**
Scripture:
Luke 19:11—
21:38

There are all kinds of authority. Teachers have it, preachers have it, parents have it, police have it, deans have it, friends have it, books have it, God has it. After saying that we need to ask, What makes something an authority? What made Jesus an authority?

Kahlil Gibran answers these questions poetically.

"They say that Jesus of Nazareth was humble and meek.

"They say that though He was a just man and righteous, He was a weakling, and was often confounded by the strong and the powerful; and that when He stood before men of authority He was but a lamb among lions.

"But I say that Jesus had authority over men, and that He knew His power and proclaimed it among the hills of Galilee, and in the cities of Judea and Phoenicia.

"What man yielding and soft would say, 'I am life, and I am the way to truth'?

"What man meek and lowly would say, 'I am in God, our Father; and our God, the Father, is in me'?"

"What man unmindful of His own strength would say, 'He who believes not in me believes not in this life nor in the life everlasting'?"

"What man uncertain of tomorrow would proclaim, 'Your world shall pass away and be naught but scattered ashes ere my words shall pass away'?"

"Was He doubtful of Himself when He said to those who

would confound Him with a harlot, 'He who is without sin, let him cast a stone' ? . . .

"Was it a coward who shook His hand in the face of the authorities and pronounced them 'liars, low, filthy, and degenerate'?"

"Shall a man bold enough to say these things to those who ruled Judea be deemed meek and humble?"

"Nay. The eagle builds not his nest in the weeping willow. And the lion seeks not his den among the ferns.

"I am sickened and the bowels within me stir and rise when I hear the fainthearted call Jesus humble and meek, that they may justify their own faintheartedness; and when the downtrodden, for comfort and companionship, speak of Jesus as a worm shining by their side."*

Boldness to risk, to challenge, to think, to create, to explore, to take a stand—this is what is authoritative. This quality in us makes others catch our vision and our respect. We long to be so strong as to risk. We suffer the dissonance within us when we fail to explore and to challenge the status quo in life. It is this quality in lives that gives them authority, that demands respect.

The authority that Christ commands is not derived simply because He is God. That respect cannot be understood, only feared. The authority of Christ is in the risking that He did for us, for God, and for the universe.

* Kahlil Gibran, *Jesus the Son of Man* (New York Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), pp. 59, 60.

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Triumphal Entry

by Carlos Garbutt

LOGOS **Theme:** In Jerusalem for the final stages of His ministry, Jesus establishes the basis of His authority, meets the attacks of the chief priests, and tells His disciples about the end and the signs of His coming.

1. Parable of the Ten Minas (read Luke 19:11-17)

"And he called ten of his slaves, and gave them ten minas, and said to them, 'Do business with this until I come back' "* (Luke 19:13, NASB).

It is not enough to be a member of a special crowd. All ten of the servants were part of a special group that received money from their master. Let's face it, the only criterion for separating the faithful servants from the foolish servant was the way in which they used the money their master had given them. The faithful servants were willing to invest their gifts in the marketplace of life, among the ordinary and secular in such a way that it yielded results. The foolish servant, on the other hand, restricted himself to brooding over his gift in the hallowed realms, in secret meditation. The saddest part of the story is the unfaithful steward's blindness amid the revelations he thought he had about his master. In verses 20-23 we see the proud words of the servant, 'I did what you wanted, I kept to myself, pure, untainted.' His next comment revealed both his laziness and his selfishness (see verse 21). The servant was wildly grasping for a way to excuse his lack of action; he reverted back to the excuses that the evil one first whispered to our Edenic forebears, "God, it's Your fault." "You shocked me with Your terrifying revelations, so I was unable to act." The servant then told unwittingly of how he didn't want to gain interest on the money because he would not get anything out of the deal. This story shows how inappropriate this assumption was in light of the rewards given to the other servants, perhaps in the very presence of the unfaithful servant. The story finally concludes with the seemingly irrational Biblical math. The one who had least, (because he had been unwilling to use his gift), was left with nothing because he was unwilling and unprepared to handle any responsibility. The one with the most returns was given even more, because he had shown that he took his master's commission seriously.

In light of the story of the ten minas, what does God require of us today? What should be the dividing line between isolation and witness? How willing are we to use God's gift to us in a humble, non-assuming manner to benefit the sick, as well as those who are sound?

2. The Triumphal Entry (read Luke 19:28-48)

"And as He was now approaching, near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the miracles which they had seen, saying, 'Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord; Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!'" (Luke 19:37, 38, NASB).

* A mina is equal to about 100 days' wages.

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The scene was apparently set for the greatest coronation the nation had ever witnessed. Here was Jesus the charismatic, puzzling, and ever fascinating leader who had roamed the dusty roads of Palestine. In the past He had not made any noise that could be interpreted as being political, but now that had changed. He was following the Jewish tradition of entering the city on a donkey to symbolize his kingship. No one was more joyous at this latest turn of events than His disciples. They imagined themselves the first officers of this glorious fledgling kingdom. Visions of national grandeur flashed before their minds and seduced the crowds into a frenzied expression of honor, love, and support for the new king.

But Jesus had a different purpose for this grand entrance into Jerusalem. He was not lusting after earthly power. His purpose was to call attention to Himself so that His saving sacrifice might be connected in the people's minds with His Lordship. He wanted to be visible; He wanted others to know about His mission. Yet in focusing the people's attention on Himself, He did not choose the grandest of all entrances, a divine, earth-shaking escort, surrounded by heavenly processional music, and celestial fireworks. Instead, Jesus was content to take the lot of a man and receive the recognition due a man.

The scene now changed, they stood in front of the temple in all its splendor, the white marble, and the magnificent structures gleaming in the sun. Instead of the customary expressions of national pride and hope for the future, the apparent heir to the throne of David broke down and wept. His sorrow did not stem from the sorrow He knew would be His lot, but rather the judgment that would befall His people for rejecting Him. "O Jerusalem," came the doleful cry "Why are you blind to your desperate situation? I could have saved you, but you refused!" He was not giving up on His people, yet they were forcing themselves away from the source of peace, care, and prosperity that had been promised them and was presently living among them.

The procession continued into the city of Jerusalem and halted in the Temple. There Christ found a scene that was sadly typical of the chosen people: the people of the promise, the ones with the divine revelations, preferred their profits to the honor of their God. In His house they had set up Wall Street, and were busily worshipping at the shrine of the god of capital gains. Jesus looked on this scene with pain and anger, and He acted on His Father's behalf. He drove out the crooked businessmen and reminded those present of their responsibility before God and other people. His authority was apparent. No longer was He a quiet unassuming lay preacher; He was a king in His city doing the bidding of His Father.

Are we, like the religious leaders of Jesus' day, attempting to hinder His entrance into our hearts by rejecting His authority in our lives?

3. Signs of the End of the Age (read Luke 21:5-38)

"And they questioned Him, saying, 'Teacher, when therefore will these things be? And what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?'" (Luke 21:7, NASB).

Jesus' predictive and sorrowful statement concerning the destruction of the Temple caught the interest of the disciples. They inquired about the timetable for these catastrophes and asked for telling signs of the proximity of these events. Jesus did not mince words regarding the difficulty of the times of both the end of Jerusalem and the lost world it represents. He was not attempting to give His followers set chronologies to follow. In fact, in this section Jesus gives few specifics. His answers represent general conditions, and promises for power as His disciples grew fearful of the future. Jesus told His followers that wars, disturbances, and confusion would precede His coming, and He urged them not to concentrate on the order of events (chap. 21:9, 31). He rather suggested that they should always be ready for His coming and the end of the world (verse 36).

The state of readiness to which Jesus called His disciples included not only watching and praying but also the call He had made earlier in the story of the ten minas, the call to invest one's talents in the marketplace of everyday life, in the here and now. Jesus left His followers with the assurance, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words [and promises] will not pass away" (verse 33, NASB).

"Never Before"

by Richard Rice, Ph.D.

"It was on the first day of the week that Christ made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Multitudes who had flocked to see Him at Bethany now accompanied Him, eager to witness His reception. Many people were on their way to the city to keep the Passover, and these joined the multitude attending Jesus. All nature seemed to rejoice. The trees were clothed with verdure, and their blossoms shed a delicate fragrance on the air. A new life and joy animated the people. The hope of the new kingdom was again springing up."¹

"Christ was following the Jewish custom for a royal entry. The animal on which He rode was that ridden by the kings of Israel, and prophecy had foretold that thus the Messiah should come to His kingdom. No sooner was He seated upon the colt than a loud shout of triumph rent the air. The multitude hailed Him as Messiah, their King. Jesus now accepted the homage which He had never before permitted, and the disciples received this as proof that their glad hopes were to be realized by seeing Him established on the throne. The multitude were convinced that the hour of their emancipation was at hand."²

"Never before had the world seen such a triumphal procession. It was not like that of the earth's famous conquerors. No train of mourning captives, as trophies of kingly valor, made a feature of that scene. But about the Saviour were the glorious trophies of His labors of love for sinful man. There were the captives whom He had rescued from Satan's power, praising God for their deliverance. The blind whom He had restored to sight were leading the way. The dumb whose tongues He had loosed shouted the loudest hosannas. The cripples whom He had healed bounded with joy, and were the most active in breaking the palm branches and waving them before the Saviour. Widows and orphans were exalting the name of Jesus for His works of mercy to them. The lepers whom He had cleansed spread their untainted garments in His path, and hailed Him as the King of glory. Those whom His voice had awakened from the sleep of death were in that throng."³

"Never before in His earthly life had Jesus permitted such a demonstration. He clearly foresaw the result. It would bring Him to the cross. But it was His purpose thus publicly to present Himself as the Redeemer. He desired to call attention to the sacrifice that was to crown His mission to a fallen world. . . . "The events connected with this triumphal ride would be the talk of every tongue, and would bring Jesus before every mind. After His crucifixion, many would recall these events in their connection with His trial and death. They would be led to search the prophecies, and would be convinced that Jesus was the Messiah; and in all lands converts to the faith would be multiplied."⁴

TESTIMONY

Key text:
Luke 19:29-44

1. *The Desire of Ages*,
p. 569.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 570.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 572.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 571.

Richard Rice is professor of theology at Loma Linda University.

The Mordecai Syndrome

by Edwin Zackrison

EVIDENCE

Key text:
Luke 20:1-8

What Mordecai was to Haman, Jesus Christ was to the system. Define "the system" any way you like, systems often make bad corporate decisions. Today we explain this phenomena in terms like "groupthink," and "moral man and immoral society." We perceive that groups of otherwise good men (and/or women) can yield to pressures, often political in nature, and decide corporately in a way they might not have as individuals.

Caiaphas' question, "Is it not better that one man die than the entire nation be destroyed?" was a variation of the theme played by Haman, "Is it not better that a whole nation die than that one man be insulted through lack of personal recognition?"

The wrong use of authority is often called into action by "the Mordecai syndrome." That ancient cousin of Queen Esther practiced passive aggression against Haman, an insecure leader who expected special recognition. This week's lesson illustrates the Mordecai syndrome—Christ at variance with the system. The leaders confronted Jesus in the court of the Gentiles and challenged, "By whose authority do you do these things (clearing out duly appointed traders from their officially appointed spots)?" If He answered "by My own" they would arrest Him, for no person was granted such authority apart from the system. If He answered "by God's authority" they would do likewise, for only the system made that decision.

Jesus' response turned the tables and threatened the system's authority: "Answer me first: was John speaking from human or divine authority?" If they replied "by God's authority" they would be forced to confess Jesus as Messiah, a potentiality the system had ruled out through corporate decision. But if they said "by human authority" the system would lose face and incite popular rebellion—two gravest fears of all politicians.

In the inability of the system to deal with Jesus' questions, Jesus appears to have won the round through confrontation. But no one beats the system through confrontation—if it is beaten it is through the Mordecai syndrome—and that at great personal cost by popular standards. Jesus maintained His integrity. He won the loyalty and respect of many thinking people, He won time for His mission (though only a few days), and He won by exposing men's best (but futile) attempts at creating consistent, corporate moral systems. But by the end of the week Jesus hung on the cross. The escape provided by Providence for Mordecai was not accorded Jesus.

A young man recently sat in my living room and poured out his tale of woe about how the system had "done him in." The rest of his life would be a constant unconquerable battle against the system. In our discussion some options emerged. Let the system continue to destroy your morale? Your courage? Your optimism? Your idealism? or let your apparent defeat send Providence to the rescue and rebuild—with or without the system. Allowing the system to occupy his thinking had embittered him. And in that rancor the system had won a most diabolical victory.

Edwin Zackrison is chairman of the department of religion at La Sierra Academy.

Praise for All Seasons

by Kathleen Dunn

Can you see these people as they walked with Jesus toward Jerusalem? I can see them. They look just like me when I'm very happy—smiling, light as a feather, hopeful, confident. In fact, there is so much happiness about them that Jesus makes it clear to those who have not caught the spirit of the moment that the stones will shout with joy if the people don't.

Now, let's face it, the times when we feel this happy are not numerous. But how about feeling just contented? Hopeful? Confident? Loving? If you aren't experiencing these positive emotions regularly, perhaps you need more praise in your life. Get more praise in my life? How is that going to help me get better grades, pay my school bills, appeal to the opposite sex? Well, success is partly a matter of attitude, a "can-do" attitude. Rejoicing does a lot for our attitude.

1. Praise acknowledges God's presence in our lives. When we give thanks we are recognizing a power higher than ourselves. We realize that we are not alone, struggling futilely against the problems of life. God is with us (Isa. 43:1, 2).

2. Praise generates trust. The realization that we are not alone encourages us to trust in the abundance of God's resources to help us deal with our circumstances. Paul, an experienced achiever, reminds us in Philippians 4:6 that worry is pointless, and in 2 Corinthians 9:11 and 2 Timothy 1:7 that God is able to provide for all our needs.

3. Praise brings peace. "You, Lord, give perfect peace to those who keep their purpose firm and put their trust in you" (Isa. 26:3, TEV). Our trust in the Lord brings us peace and the ability to move confidently ahead. Fear and discouragement do not hold us tightly and tie our feet to the ground when we praise God in all circumstances, releasing in our minds the power of trust, confidence, and peace.

REACT

List some of the ways we can focus our attention on praising God.

HOW TO

Key text:
Luke 19:37-40

Kathleen Dunn is the head of the reference-department library, California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, California.

The Freedom March

by Frank Knittel

OPINION

Key text:
Luke 19:38

We can see and hear it all now: the Pharisees muttering and scowling and sneering and writhing with anger and jealousy as they hear that crowd shout, "Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest" (Luke 19:38). And the common people—they throw garments and branches before their lowly yet exalted King, they sing and dance, they jostle for a closer look, they are ecstatic with the expectation that the miracle is now happening and that foreign tyranny will come to an end, now that their Messiah is marching to set them free.

A perplexing question—if the anticipations are hollow, if the hopes are at naught, why did Jesus allow all this? Indeed, why did He initiate that which for some would be a cruel disappointment?

The answer lies in caring. Jesus could not bear to leave His followers without a lift of love before the desolation awaiting them at His cross. It was a love that transcended the crowd's imperfect perception of the prophets, the law, and the gospel. It was a love that swept aside the throng's materialistic desires. It was a love that would hasten Jesus' own personal sacrifice and that would demonstrate forever the wide gulf existing between the Jewish system of belief and the pure simple light from heaven, which exemplified the Messiah. It was a love that ignored a form of religion defined by a system that uses it to control beliefs.

Jesus was aware that His march would solidify for a time some of the cherished beliefs about the nature of His kingdom. He nonetheless loved so much that He dared to allow variant beliefs and understandings rather than deny the people those spiritual and personal lifts His march gave them. He dared to show that God can be found even in a belief that may be murky but that through the Holy Spirit can be made plain. He dared to show that true religion is a human-God relationship defined uniquely for each person—a relationship not dependent upon a human system, though systems ought to help. Finally, Jesus dared to proclaim that God takes us where we are, even with immature or incomplete concepts, and He cares enough about us to lead us progressively through our own Gethsemanes, to our own marches, to our own crosses. That is what the march was all about so many centuries ago.

Do we dare take that triumphal march? Are we spiritually mature enough to sweep up in our march anyone who for various reasons is drawn to us, and do we dare include them in our march?

REACT

1. Are we secure enough with God so that we do as Jesus did—give people a lift where we find them, and as He did, make them feel accepted?

2. In His march Jesus took people just where they were; yet, as the Pharisees of old, we are not conditioned to do this. Can you give some reasons why?

Frank Knittel is chairman of the English department at Loma Linda University, La Sierra campus.

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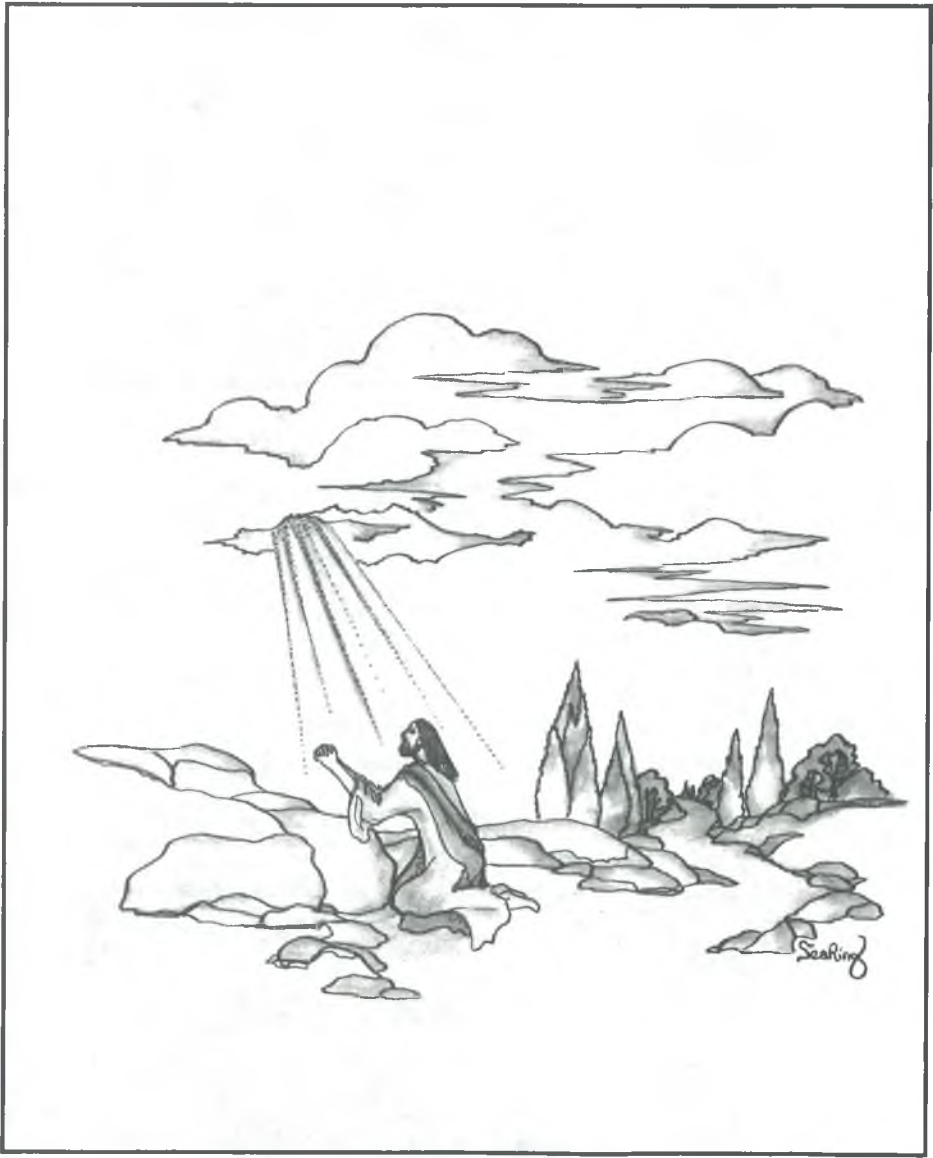
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A Crucified King

"And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me" (Luke 22:29, NIV).



Luther and the Crucified King

by Gilberto Abella

What is the significance of Christ's suffering and death? What impact does His sacrifice have in the personal experience of the Christian? These were some of the questions the young monk Martin Luther wrestled with in his search for an assurance of salvation. The answers he found transformed forever not only his life but the whole of Christendom.

Luther entered a monastery at the age of 22. During the next seven years he tried in vain to find peace with God. The strict religious life of the convent, the continuous study of theology, did not help him to feel accepted by God. Instead, he felt more and more doomed. At times, the burden of divine rejection seemed to crush him. He called this state of deep spiritual agony *Anfechtung*. There is no English translation for the term, but it represents the ultimate form of doubt, pain, turmoil, panic, and despair that can invade a human being.

At this point in his Christian experience, the future Reformer saw Christ, not as a loving Saviour, but as judge. He learned that God the Father had given all judgment to the Son. So, for Luther, Christ was the one who at the end would condemn him to eternal

damnation. All he felt in relation to the Redeemer was fear. John Staupitz, the superior of the monastery, tried to relieve Luther's fears by explaining the significance of Christ's suffering and death. But the young monk still failed to grasp the true meaning of the cross.

Then came the breakthrough. While studying the Psalms and the Gospels, Luther discovered that on the cross Christ experienced the agony of separation from the Father. What particularly impressed him was Christ's cry: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Psalm 22:1; Matt. 27:46, NIV). To Luther this meant Christ suffered *Anfechtung* while bearing the guilt of humanity. Christ felt all the condemnation, justice, and wrath of God while bearing the sins of the world, in His own body, on the tree. Luther saw Christ not only as judge but as Redeemer. Because Christ endured the full penalty of sin, God could reinstate sinners as righteous. Luther had found his Saviour. Salvation, which once appeared to him an impossible dream, became a simple matter of acceptance. His faith now rested on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

INTRODUCTION

Scripture:
Luke 22:1—
23:49

Gilberto Abella is special collections librarian at Loma Linda University, La Sierra campus.

Omnipotence in Impotence

by John W. Webster

LOGOS **Theme:** Jesus' mission on earth culminates at the cross in a wholesale inversion of values. Innocence is betrayed while murder is exonerated. Evil threatens total victory. But in these very acts God subverts evil from within. God is God precisely as the betrayed Son of man. Jesus is Lord only as the Crucified King who is in solidarity with the lowly. In the very master stroke of evil itself—God saves the world, and in so doing reveals the real omnipotence of God disguised in the impotence of man.

This week we are studying Luke 22:1—23:49. Read Luke's entire account of the passion story in its natural sequence. Here, in a mere 120 verses, Luke tells the story of the culmination of Jesus' ministry and brings together in climactic synthesis, three threads that he has been intricately weaving throughout his narrative.

1. Rejection and Betrayal of an Innocent Man

"Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss? . . . But this is your hour—when darkness reigns" (Luke 22:48, 53, NIV).

Luke wants to make two points. Jesus was rejected by all. But He was also totally innocent. Hardly could the sinister nature of what was happening be better captured than with the poignant conjoining of the words "betrayed with a kiss." Betrayal by a friend is probably the deepest form of rejection that we can experience, while the kiss is one of the most intimate of human expressions. To join the two is to signal injustice of an ultimate sort.

But Judas is not alone. Joining him are the disciples in their implicit infidelity (verses 24, 46; chap. 23:49), and Peter in his explicit denial (chap. 22:31-34, 54-62). Jesus is rejected by the soldiers (chap. 22:63-65; chap. 23:36, 37), the council (chap. 22:66-71), Herod (chap. 23:8-11), Pilate (chap. 23:1-4, 13-25), the people (chap. 23:35), and even one of His companions on the cross (chap. 23:39), and all the while "all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance" (verse 49, NIV). But this litany of rejection only climaxes the motif of rejection that is intricately woven into the whole fabric of the book of Luke.¹ In some sense the cross only unveils what has been true of His whole life. It reveals the cost of obedience (which is by implication also the cost of discipleship).

Luke also stresses that the One so rejected and betrayed, is the innocent One (chap. 23:4, 15, 22, 34, 41, 47). Perhaps nothing moves us more than the unjust suffering of innocent people. But Luke wants us to feel even more than righteous indignation. He wants us to sense the horror of the apparent victory of evil. Earlier, at the conclusion of the temptations in the wilderness Luke stated that "when the devil had ended every temptation [unsuccessfully], he departed from him until an opportune time [or *kairos*—the decisive moment]" (chap. 4:13, RSV). That decisive *kairos* came when "Satan entered Judas" and it looks as though evil will triumph. As Mat-

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thew and Mark put it: "Behold, the hour is at hand and the Son of man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners" (Matt. 26:45, NASB. See also Mark 14:41). What an incredible inversion!

What is the proper balance between selflessness and concern for rights and justice? If the desire for martyrdom on the one hand, and the mentality of the Crusades on the other, are the historical paradigms of what happens at either extreme, then what is the way of Christian prudence?

2. Omnipotence in Impotence

"They said, 'He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One.' . . . 'If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself!'" (Luke 23:35-38, NIV).

Salvation (*sodzo*—to save, to make well, to heal) is another major theme in the book of Luke.² Even in these dark hours Jesus promises healing and salvation to His disciples (see chap. 22:20, 29-31). At the crucifixion, even His enemies admit that He saved others, but what of Himself? The question is put best by the other thief on the cross, "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" But it was precisely the conjunction of the two that was impossible.

This gives us some clue as to the agony of Jesus' prayer on the Mount of Olives—"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done" (verse 42). Jesus came—according to the divine plan—to make atonement for the sins of the world. He clearly understood that (Luke 22:20; Matt. 20:28). Hence, this prayer does not reflect His fear of suffering, for there is no suggestion that Jesus was less stoic than any martyr.³ Neither, does the prayer reflect a moment of wavering faith or obedience. There is never a suggestion that anything but that the will of God be done. It is rather a question of the form God's will is to take in the death of His Son. Jesus Christ, the personification of "goodness," the One who came to save, is handed over to the power of evil and evil men. "It was not a matter of His suffering and dying in itself and as such, but of the dreadful thing that He saw coming upon Him in and with His suffering and dying. He saw clearly and correctly. It was the coming of the night . . . in which the good will of God will be indistinguishably one with the evil will of men and the world and Satan. It was a matter of the triumph of God being concealed under that of His adversary . . . not by chance, but according to the plan of God Himself, not superficially, but in serious earnest."⁴

The acts of Christ's enemies (Judas, the Sanhedrin, Pilate, etc.) are evil—but it is indicative of the omnipotence of God that these acts in all their evil, are the acts that bring about Christ's death and our salvation. He saved others, but He could not save Himself. This is the inversion of Luke's gospel.

One of the hardest questions to answer is how a good God could

allow the innocent to suffer. The usual answer is either to limit the power (and thereby the liability) of God, or to attempt to mitigate the injustice and evil of the suffering by trying to give it some moral purpose. Do you think there is anything in these passages that could help to suggest another answer—that it is precisely due to the omnipotence of God that we can survive injustice and suffering at all?

3. Solidarity With the Lowly

"And he was numbered with the transgressors" (Luke 22:37, NIV).

"When they came to the place called *The Skull*, there they crucified him, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left" (chap. 23:33, NIV).

Luke, far more than any of the other gospel writers, emphasizes that Jesus was a partisan of the poor and the outcasts. It is Luke who emphasizes the fact that Jesus was crucified with criminals (John does not even mention it, while Matthew and Mark do so only in passing). It is to a robber that Jesus says, "You will be with me in paradise" (verse 43). It is Luke alone who tells of Jesus' compassionate concern for the "Daughters of Jerusalem" who should not weep for Him but for themselves (verses 27-31). In fact, the role of women in Luke's gospel is surprising, given its Ancient Near Eastern cultural context. Furthermore, it is already in Mary's song that we hear the promise "He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away" (chap. 1:52, 53, RSV). In this solidarity, we are also reminded of His inaugural message, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (chap. 4:18, 19, RSV). Jesus teaches us by precept and example that to be His disciple is to be in solidarity with the victims of society.⁵

Do we fully appreciate the implications of Christ's concepts of what constitutes true service? Or have we advertently or inadvertently succumbed to the 'might is right' or 'Rambo' philosophy that is once again rearing its head in its crudest forms? Do we as a church seek to minister to those who are oppressed, and do we identify with those who are outcasts?

1. On this point see George E. Rice, *Christ in Collision* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1982), pp. 111-122.
2. See I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A commentary on the Greek text* (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1978), p. 35.
3. See Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Luke: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Third Gospel* (New York: Crossroad, 1984), p. 212.
4. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. IV/1 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956), p. 271.
5. The title of a recent book by Matthew L. Lamb, *Solidarity with Victims: Toward a Theology of Social Transformation* (New York: Crossroad, 1982).

In Remembrance of Me

by Gilberto Abella

TESTIMONY

Key text:
Luke 22:17-20

"In partaking with His disciples of the bread and wine, Christ pledged Himself to them as their Redeemer. He committed to them the new covenant, by which all who receive Him become children of God, and joint heirs with Christ. By this covenant every blessing that Heaven could bestow for this life and the life to come, was theirs. This covenant deed was to be ratified with the blood of Christ. And the administration of the sacrament was to keep before the disciples the infinite sacrifice made for each of them individually as a part of the great whole of fallen humanity. . . .

"The communion service points to Christ's second coming. It was designed to keep this hope vivid in the minds of the disciples. Whenever they met together to commemorate His death, they recounted how 'He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.' In their tribulation they found comfort in the hope of their Lord's return. Unspeakably precious to them was the thought, 'As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come.' (1 Cor. 11:26).

"These are the things we are never to forget. The love of Jesus, with its constraining power, is to be kept fresh in our memory. Christ has instituted this service that it may speak to our senses of the love of God that has been expressed in our behalf. There can be no union between our souls and God except through Christ. The union and love between brother and brother must be cemented and rendered eternal by the love of Jesus. And nothing less than the death of Christ could make His love efficacious for us. It is only because of His death that we can look with joy to His second coming. His sacrifice is the center of our hope. Upon this we must fix our faith."¹

"Christ was treated as we deserve, that we might be treated as He deserves. He was condemned for our sins, in which He had no share, that we might be justified by His righteousness, in which we had no share. He suffered the death which was ours, that we might receive the life which was His."²

1. *The Desire of Ages*,
pp. 656-660.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

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Of Traitors and Trust

by Mary Lynn Franks

EVIDENCE

Key text:
Luke 22:23

Judas Iscariot—scoundrel, thief, traitor. Simon Peter—impetuous, hot-tempered, admired. Both characters are vividly portrayed in the twenty-second chapter of Luke.

Judas is considered the most despicable of Bible personalities because he betrayed Jesus for a price. His life story is repeatedly told as a warning lesson against the dangers of materialism.

Ray Summers' commentary on Luke suggests that Judas's motivation for denying Christ may have involved more than merely an interest in monetary gain: "The uncertainty of the derivation of the name *Iscariot* has caused some interpreters to conclude that Judas was one of the Zealots—the political party plotting the revolution against Rome. The Roman word for the Zealots was 'sicarius.' The difficulty of the Jews in pronouncing the word could easily result in 'scarioth.' There is a hint of this in some ancient manuscripts of Luke which do have *Skarioth*. Judas could have been trying to force Jesus into the position of fighting, with the result that the revolution would start that week in Jerusalem."¹

Peter, on the other hand, is noted in Luke 22:31 as being devoted. No hint of his forthcoming denial of Christ is revealed in his attitude. Indeed, he declares, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death" (Luke 22:33, NIV).

The similarities between Judas' betrayal of Christ and Peter's denial of Him zeroes in on one particularly prominent characteristic of sin—self-centeredness.

Emil Brunner writes: "All human sin has an element of weakness; it is mingled with anxiety for one's life, a fear of losing something by obedience to God; thus it is a lack of confidence, a fear of venturing all on God alone; it is not simply rebellion, it is a kind of dizziness which attacks those who ought to step over the abyss leaning only on God. . . . Man's arrogance consists in believing that he can look after himself better than God can, that he knows what is good for him better than his Creator."²

Although both men had become fixated on one thing—themselves, the outcome of events was vastly different: Judas hanged himself in despair, while Peter, according to tradition, was crucified upside-down, a martyr for the Lord he had once denied. One man had learned to look only to himself for the fulfillment of his needs; the other had discovered something infinitely better.

"You must look away even from your own looking, and see nothing but Jesus, and the grace of God revealed in Him."³

1. Ray Summers, *Commentary on Luke* (Waco: Word Books, 1972), p. 268.

2. Emil Brunner, *Man in Revolt* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1939), pp. 131, 132.

3. Charles H. Spurgeon, *All of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), p. 43.

Mary Lynn Franks is a senior theology student at Loma Linda University.

A Memory or a Living Reality

by Gilberto Abella

Most Christians agree with the statement that the atoning death of Christ on the cross is the central doctrine of Christianity. Yet, among those who profess to believe in this premise, many find it difficult to relate the story of the cross to their lives and daily experiences. In the midst of the pressures and rush of our civilization, the question with which Martin Luther struggled arises anew: "What is the significance of the cross for me today?" While the final answer could be personal and subjective, there are some ways in which Christ's sacrifice is of relevance to the Christian's day-to-day living. Consider some practical aspects of the story of the Crucified King.

1. The experience of Calvary is a message of assurance and victory. The battle for the salvation of every human being has already been fought and won. There is no reason for uncertainty. Salvation is no longer an impossible struggle, but an acceptance by faith of what the Saviour gained for us at the cross. Seen from this perspective, the account of the Passion Week of Christ's ministry is not a mere page of history. It is a past event that has the power to become a present reality, that radically transforms our standing before God and our eternal destiny.

2. The sacrifice of Christ is a message of love from a caring God. Luke 22 and 23 is a more detailed description of the profound truth expressed in John 3:16. Both chapters reveal more than what God did once in history. They give us a glimpse of what He is and to what extent He cares for each of us.

3. The story of the cross explains to us the enormous price of sin. It is a reminder that salvation is not a matter of cheap grace. A heavy price had to be paid so that we can freely receive what the Crucified King has won for us. While the cross assures us that we no longer need to fear God's condemnation, it also alerts us to the grave consequences of the transgression of the law. When understood from this angle, the message of Calvary is more than a reminder of deliverance from the bondage of sin. It becomes a new beginning, an opportunity to move from death to life, from transgression to obedience, and from rebellion to sanctification.

HOW TO

Key text:

John 3:16

Lest We Forget

by Mary Lynn Franks

OPINION

Key text:
Luke 22:19

A card, letter, note, perhaps even a check or ticket stub—things that brokenhearted lovers keep tucked away in a hidden corner of a closet are similar in essence to what the Lord's Supper might represent.

"In the house of every one of us there is a drawer full of things which can only be called junk, and yet we will not throw them out, because when we touch and handle and look at them, they bring back this or that person, or this or that occasion. They are common things but they have a meaning far beyond themselves. That is a sacrament."¹

Just as the letter or card would be worthless without the person who accompanied the remembrance of it, so would be the communion bread and wine without the Christ who died to save. "The very origin of Christian experience is the conscious rejoicing in gratitude because Christ Jesus gave Himself for sinners. This is what He wanted His followers to keep in mind. It would be easy to forget."²

Personal interaction with the Christ of the sacraments is what makes the symbols of worth. In the Jewish tradition the people enacted the personal experience of their forefathers, who had been spared by the sprinkled blood of an innocent lamb and God's marvelous redemption from Egyptian slavery. It is only as we participate in the reality of the freedom offered in the gift of the cross that the symbols will have any value. "In every generation a man is bound to regard himself as though he personally had gone forth from Egypt, because it is said, and thou shalt tell thy son in that day, saying: It is because of that which the Lord did for me when I came forth out of Egypt."³

Some things are meant to be simple. The complexities involved in understanding the complete work of oneness with God achieved through the cross can never be fully absorbed by finite human minds.

God in Christ has given rich meaning to bread and wine. To a dying world of confusion was sent simplicity: a babe, a man, a king crucified. Bread. Wine. These are to remind us of the incomprehensible love of God. The mystery that is as simple as sitting down to eat, yet as complex as God dying for a rebellious planet. He has given us these things—lest we forget.

1. William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), p. 265.

2. Manfred G. Gutzke, *Plain Talk on Luke* (Grand Rapids: Zonderman Publishing House), p. 155.

3. *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 9, p. 709.

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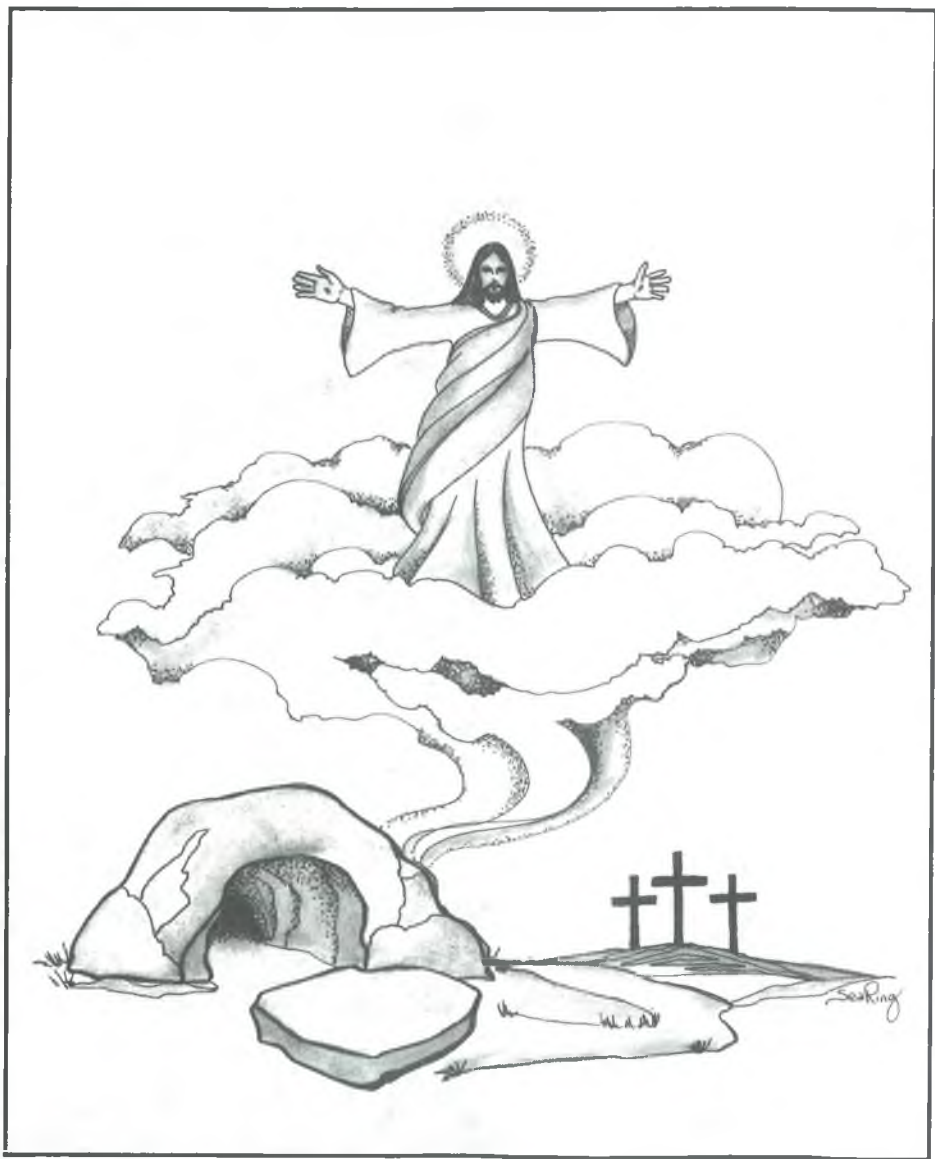


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The Victory of the Kingdom

"Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" (Luke 24:26, NIV).



Beyond Living and Suffering

by Alexander O. Lian

When the angels went to present themselves before the Lord, Satan appeared in the midst of them. God said: "What is it that you seek, Satan?" Answered the adversary: "I seek only to ask a question, most gracious Lord." "You may ask." "Tell me, I pray, from whence came suffering?"

Obviously, I don't intend to answer the fundamental questions of theodicy with this mini-dialogue, but I do hope to illustrate the point that suffering experienced by the Creator is no less real than that experienced by ourselves. This was made clear in last week's lesson. In contrast, this week's lesson seeks to point us beyond suffering to a life of assurance, hope, and stability.

In the concluding passages of Luke and the opening passages of Acts we discover these elements present in the lives of men and women who come into contact with the resurrected Christ. They are not immunized from the pitfalls of life, but receive from Christ,

through the Holy Spirit, the assurance and hope to continue living, and from each other the stability to do so.

They were a small group who were destined to change the world. They had suffered in the valley of the crucifixion and had climbed the mountain of ascension. Now, they were committed to the task of living and doing God's will. They did not, like Satan, seek to test God with unanswerable questions, but moved forward, full of faith.

Today, in a world governed by the cynic and agnostic, the victory of God's kingdom must be made manifest. Like the early Christians we must exhibit in our lives assurance, hope, and stability. This is achieved as we assemble together for edification and prayer. A simple prayer with a couple of friends can provide more power for living than a thousand sermons. The reign of suffering is not over. God and humanity still suffer, but do so now from the perspective of an empty tomb.

INTRODUCTION

Scripture:
**Luke 23:50—
 24:53;**
Acts 1:1-26

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Head in the Clouds

by Mike Hannah

LOGOS **Theme:** Jesus' resurrection from the dead and ascension into heaven confirm His identity as the reigning Messiah, and enable Him to empower His disciples with the Holy Spirit.

1. You Can't Keep a Good Man Down (read Luke 24:1-12)

"Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!" (Luke 24:5-6, NIV).

The resurrection is the climax of the gospel. It is because of the resurrection that Jesus is declared with power to be the Son of God. The "heart" of the gospel is the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (1 Cor. 15:3-4). Of these three the resurrection is of particular significance. Death is common. Burial is common. It is the resurrection that sets Christ apart. The resurrection is so central to the Christian faith that Paul can write, "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" (1 Cor. 15:17, NIV).

It took Christ's followers a while to catch on to who He was, and what He was here to do. When the women went to the tomb and found it empty, they were surprised. They still did not understand Christ's often repeated instruction about His death, burial, and resurrection. The two men in white, apparently angels, refocused their thinking by asking them the thought provoking question: "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" (Luke 24:5, NIV). Perhaps the question would jog their memory and cause them to reconsider their concepts of Jesus. A tomb was for dead people. Did they not know that Christ was going to rise again on the third day? We understand why they went there to look; that was the last place Christ's body was laid. As it turned out they were looking in the wrong place. Christ could not be contained in a hole in the rock.

Throughout history people have been trying to place Christ in a little compartment and put a lid on Him. We often have narrow ideas about Jesus Christ. We try to limit and contain Christ, and then when we go back to where we left Him, He is gone. There is nothing that can contain the resurrected Lord of Glory.

What are some ways that we try to limit Christ? Is our concept of Christ open to accept the unexpected?

2. The Last Commission (read Luke 24:36-53)

"But stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49, NIV).

In this post-resurrection scene Christ tells the disciples that they are going to be His witnesses, and preach forgiveness of sins to all nations. Although Christ charged them with this important mission, He emphasized that they were to go nowhere until they had received power from on high—the Holy Spirit. Spreading the Good News was important and urgent, but without the Holy Spirit it would be ineffective. They could have gone off half-baked and done some limited good, but the good is often the worst enemy of the best. Christ did not want to start a new sect; He planned on turning the

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world upside down. This could be accomplished only by men and women who were filled with the Holy Spirit.

If the Church is to be effective today it must be guided and empowered by the Spirit of God. If we desire to be dynamic Christians, dedicated to continuing Christ's mission, we must be filled with the Spirit.

When does God usually give a Christian the gift of the Spirit? How can you tell whether you have been filled with the Holy Spirit? How does the Holy Spirit guide and communicate with you?

3. Head in the Clouds? (read Acts 1:1-11)

"Why do you stand here looking into the sky?" (Acts 1:11, NIV).

The book of Acts is a continuation of the Gospel of Luke. In Acts 1:8 we find Christ giving His disciples a charge to be His witnesses "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (NIV). Christ tells them to start where they are—at Jerusalem. Then to move out towards Judea and Samaria, and after that, into all the world. Christ appears to be giving an evangelistic strategy. After Christ gave this commission the disciples watched as Jesus was taken into heaven. As they were "looking intently up into the sky" (verse 10, NIV) two men dressed in white suddenly appeared and asked, "Men of Galilee, . . . why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven" (verse 11, NIV). At the empty tomb there were also two men dressed in white asking a question to people who were looking for Christ. In both places they are redirecting people's attention. Instead of standing around looking at the sky, they should have been making preparations to carry out the commission. Looking for Christ's return is important. The Bible says we should eagerly expect His return. But the way to wait for Him is not by looking up at the sky. Christ tells us, the best way to be waiting for Him is to be serving Him. So that when the Master returns He will find His servants busy at work. We can be so preoccupied looking up into the sky, that we completely ignore a dying world that needs Jesus Christ. As Christians let us never be guilty of living with our heads in the clouds.

How can we find a balance between looking for Jesus Christ and looking around to help other people? What are some ways that we could have our "head in the clouds"?

Spiritual Influence

by John Haworth

TESTIMONY

Key text:
Acts 1:14

"When Christ gave His disciples the promise of the Spirit, He was nearing the close of His earthly ministry. He was standing in the shadow of the cross, with a full realization of the load of guilt that was to rest upon Him as the sin-bearer. Before offering Himself as the sacrificial victim, He instructed His disciples regarding a most essential and complete gift which He was to bestow upon His followers—the gift that would bring within their reach the boundless resources of His grace. 'I will pray the Father,' He said, 'and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.' (John 14:16, 17). The Saviour was pointing forward to the time when the Holy Spirit should come to do a mighty work as His representative."¹

"The Spirit is given as a regenerating agency, to make effectual the salvation wrought by the death of our Redeemer. The Spirit is constantly seeking to draw the attention of men to the great offering that was made on the cross of Calvary, to unfold to the world the love of God, and to open to the convicted soul the precious things of the Scriptures.

"Having brought conviction of sin, and presented before the mind the standard of righteousness, the Holy Spirit withdraws the affections from the things of this earth, and fills the soul with a desire for holiness. 'He will guide you into all truth' (John 16:13), the Saviour declared. If men are willing to be moulded, there will be brought about a sanctification of the whole being. The Spirit will take the things of God and stamp them on the soul. By His power the way of life will be made so plain that none need err therein."²

"But unless the members of God's church today have a living connection with the Source of all spiritual growth, they will not be ready for the time of reaping. . . .

"Those only who are constantly receiving fresh supplies of grace, will have power proportionate to their daily need and their ability to use that power. Instead of looking forward to some future time when, through a special endowment of spiritual power, they will receive a miraculous fitting up for soul-winning, they are yielding themselves daily to God, that He may make them vessels meet for His use. Daily they are improving the opportunities for service that lie within their reach. Daily they are witnessing for the Master wherever they may be, whether in some humble sphere of labor in the home, or in a public field of usefulness."³

1. *The Acts of the*

Apostles, p. 47.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 52, 53.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

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To Live and to Act

by Alexander O. Lian

It is fitting that more people attend church on Easter than any other day of the year (with the possible exception of Christmas). Easter is a time for celebration, a time when men and women, no matter what their condition, can look toward the heavens and praise God, the Creator and Sustainer of life.

In 1 Corinthians 15:54-57 Paul prosaically enunciates the fundamental reason for humanity's joy: Death, the great enemy, has been defeated. Jesus Christ has crushed the head of that most terrible serpent.

However, it is painfully apparent that the great masses that make the yearly pilgrimage to honor the Lord of Life, refuse to celebrate the defeat of death, and instead choose to live in its shadow, accepting the images that it casts on the walls of their consciousness as real and true.

Frustration, hopelessness, and cynicism are the specters that haunt modern people, including the Christian. What is wrong? Is it possible that the Easter faith is not celebrated as it should be, because in the midst of all our depression and suffering we do not see the God who made the great stand against death and its compatriots, but instead are confused by an endless cycle of forces that batter us so that we can barely think?

Jurgen Moltmann, the profound theologian of hope, writes that an Easter faith is one that "recognizes God's passion for the life of the person who is threatened by death and with death. And . . . participates in this process of love by getting up out of the apathy of misery and out of the cynicism of prosperity, and fighting against death's accomplices, here and now, in this life."*

If the resurrection of Jesus Christ is to have any consequence it must inspire us to live not in fear of, but in defiance to, the evil of this world. A celebrated Easter faith is one made alive by action, against individuals, structures, and systems that oppress people spiritually.

It is to achieve this end that the Easter celebration exists, a celebration conducted, not by individuals, but by groups of like-minded individuals who receive from the resurrection the inspiration to live and to act, and in so doing actualize within themselves the kingdom of God.

EVIDENCE

Key text:
Luke 24:5

* Jurgen Moltmann, *The Power of the Powerless* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983), pp. 12: 124.

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Making the Victory Meaningful

by Steve Beglau

HOW TO
Key text:
Luke 24:27

We have all heard the story of Jesus' resurrection and ascension. Most college students and graduates tend to intellectualize these stories as if they were just another class. We mentally know all the right answers to "the questions," and we aloofly feel that we understand most of the underlying messages. Unfortunately though, this story, like so many others, has no real personal meaning for many of us. It just isn't real to us as individuals. So the question is "How do we change ourselves to make stories like these alive and real for each of us?" Here are a few practical suggestions that will help us to experience the necessary changes.

1. Gain a good knowledge of the Scriptures through personal study. By personally studying the Bible and knowing it well, we develop our own personal insights into the victory of the kingdom. We allow Jesus to speak to us personally through His Word, instead of via the interpretations of others. This will result in a relationship with Jesus that is as individualistic as any friendship we've ever had with anyone.

2. Discuss your insights into the Scriptures with a small group of friends. Jesus did this with His disciples and friends, both before His death and, especially, afterward, as on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:27), and His meeting with the disciples (verses 44, 45). If Jesus needed a small support study group surely we could benefit from one also. I can tell from personal experience that with regular meetings of your group, closer bonds of friendship will develop than you may have thought possible. This will not only allow all of you to share your personal thoughts and insights with one another but will provide opportunity for discussions to take place free from the barriers that we normally maintain.

3. Spend time in prayer, individually and in groups. This will enhance our communion with Jesus and one another. In Acts 1:14 we read that the disciples gathered frequently to pray as a group. When they needed to make important decisions like finding a replacement for Judas they spent time in prayer (verses 23-26). Prayer in our lives will provide guidance for the many decisions we have to make.

Combining personal small-group study and prayer gives exciting results. The Bible stories you have heard over and over will take on new meaning. Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension are no longer just parts of a Bible story. They are events that allow you personally to confirm His identity as the reigning Messiah. In essence, you have begun the important process of developing your own individual understanding of Jesus' victory of the kingdom.

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Why Are You Looking?

by Alexander O. Lian

OPINION

Key text:
Acts 1:11

The disciples stood on the crest of the Mount of Olives. The time had arrived for the Messiah—Jesus—to return from whence He had come. As He slowly rose toward the heavens, the disciples, with sad hearts, watched their beloved Lord disappear into the clouds.

After Christ had ascended beyond their sight they still stared, heads tilted, hoping to catch the slightest glimpse of the Saviour. Then they heard strange voices. Turning, the disciples saw two men dressed in white: " 'Men of Galilee,' they said, 'why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven' " (Acts 1:11, NIV).

The words of the angels were meant to serve as a catalyst, igniting the disciples into action. They had a work to do, a commission to fulfill, but there they stood staring into the sky. Is not that a common malady? Don't we often pine for the comfort and security of our mountaintop religious experiences, without realizing they are only as good as the extent to which they inspire us to strive and work in our society?

The words of the men in white also serve as a reminder of the Christian's hope—the Second Coming. Without the knowledge that Jesus will return, the continual suffering and striving to do God's will seems futile. Hope is the great contradiction of experience, pointing to the future in a dynamic, aggressive way. Only by keeping this in mind can we act as the disciples did (Did you ever wonder how the book of Acts got its name?).

The martyred theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer; defined the world as, "the sphere of concrete responsibility given to us by and in Jesus Christ."¹ In contrast to many, Bonhoeffer did not see the duty of the Christian dictating withdrawal, but rather active, assertive involvement in human affairs. Bonhoeffer understood the need for constant communion with God to maintain a clear focus on his activities, but he never allowed himself too much time "looking into the sky." For as he once so pointedly stated: "The sin of respectable people reveals itself in flight from responsibility."²

1. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, translated by John W. Doberstein (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1954), p. 8.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

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Kingdom of the Spirit

"Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear" (Acts 2:33, NIV).



A Day in the Life

by David P. Anderson

I was up early this morning. I needed to get to the market place before the crowds began to arrive. Last year during my first visit to Jerusalem I spent the entire day at the market place. I was so frustrated by the end of the day I nearly gave up my new found faith in the Jewish religion. Suffice it to say, Jerusalem during the holidays is a busy place to be. As I rounded the corner by the Old Wall and entered the new part of the city a strange noise caught my ear. What was the noise? A windstorm? A tornado? At this hour of the morning? The loud rush of wind seemed to settle into the house just up the street.

By the time I got there a couple hundred people were already standing around wondering what was going on. It was then I spotted a friend and pushed my way over to him to see what he knew. What a relief to speak with someone who could not only understand my language but could also converse with the local people standing nearby.

About that time, a man the locals call Simon stood on the porch and began speaking to us. After five minutes I realized I was hearing in my own native tongue! How could this be? I knew Simon was a Galilean because, well, you know, they all look alike. But I'm sure it was a miracle because Simon spoke my language without ever having learned it.

Simon spoke for hours, but no one noticed. He spoke with

such clarity and conviction. I mean, it was as though his words and thoughts came straight from God. He explained that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah and invited each one of us to be baptized in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. Because of that invitation he and ten or eleven men baptized at least 3,000 of us.

Never before have I experienced such a day. Whereas, before, I had a good but restless life, now I have an exciting, satisfying life. A new vitality fills my body every morning. And the happiest part of my new life is sharing the love of Jesus with those around me.

All the "believers" throughout Jerusalem meet in small groups four or five times a week. We share our beliefs and experiences. There is a unity, a togetherness that I have never found anywhere else. It's hard to explain. I guess you could call it a spirit of love and genuine concern among the group, but I like to call it the Spirit of God.

I won't be staying in Jerusalem much longer. I need to get back to my work in Mesopotamia. Besides, I have to share this new love in Jesus Christ with my family. It's like what Peter was saying the other day, how each one of us has been promised the Holy Spirit—my wife, my children, even those in distant lands.

Yes, I need to get back. It's my turn to share what the Spirit of God has done in my life.

INTRO- DUCTION

Scripture:
Acts 2:1—4:12

David Anderson is assistant administrator at Hialeah Hospital, Florida.

Witness

by Richard Fredericks

LOGOS **Theme:** As Christ is *lifted up* the Holy Spirit comes down. The Spirit's primary purpose is to "testify" of God's mighty salvation provided for all people through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

1. Like a Mighty, Rushing Wind (read Acts 2:1-13)

Seven weeks have passed since Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. In an "upper room" His disciples, with 120 others (chap. 1:15), are unpacking the implications of this mighty miracle. Just seven weeks ago they were huddled in confusion and fear when the risen Christ first appeared to them and "opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures" (Luke 24:45, NIV). In the greatest Bible study in history Jesus walked the disciples through the Old Testament, revealing how it prefigured the defeat of sin and death through His suffering and resurrection. The true way to God was open (verses 46, 47).

Jesus told the disciples to be the witnesses of these things, but in the next breath He told them to *wait*—"until you have been clothed with power from on high" (verses 48, 49, NIV).

So they waited. For seven weeks they pondered Christ's death and resurrection. They prayed, repented, celebrated and came into unity. They focused on the *cross*—and then came *Pentecost!* The Holy Spirit "like the rush of a mighty wind" invaded the house and its occupants, empowering them to speak in languages unknown to them minutes before (Acts 2:1-11 RSV). The Spirit's purpose was clear: as they prepared to share Jesus Christ as God's all-sufficient source of salvation the Spirit came to make that testimony effective. He came, in all His power and with all His gifts, to point a lost race to its Redeemer.

2. We Are All Witnesses (read Acts 2:14-47)

Back to the action. A crowd gathers. Peter as usual grabs the main pulpit. He silences the mockers (verses 14-20) by declaring that the resurrection of Christ and the coming of the Spirit are the fulfillment of Joel's great eschatological prophecy and the beginning of "the last days" (verse 17).

With verse 21 Peter reaches his key text: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (NIV). That "Lord" spoken of by Joel, declares Peter, is *Jesus of Nazareth* whom "you nailed to a cross"—but whose death was the heart of God's "predetermined plan" (see verse 23, NASB). On Calvary God's mightiest victory was achieved through humanity's darkest act of rebellion. Wicked men crucify Christ—in order that Christ might bear the sins of wicked people. But God has the final word:

"This Jesus God raised up again. . . . Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:32-36, NASB).

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The crowd is convicted (verse 37, see also John 16:8-15). Peter tells them what to do: "Repent [turn to Christ], and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. . . . Be saved from this perverse generation'" (Acts 2:37-40, NASB). Through the first Spirit-empowered gospel sermon 3,000 people received Jesus as their Saviour. For this the Spirit had come.

The lives and life-styles of the new "Christians" changed radically. Jesus was Lord! They were not just "members in a church," they were His disciples (see Luke 14:33), and this affected the totality of their existence: their time, money, relationships, and goals. All things were now evaluated in the light of the determined desire to proclaim and honor Him supremely (Acts 2:42-47).

3. Why Look At Us? (read Acts 3:1—4:12)

It is the ninth hour—the same hour Jesus had cried triumphantly at Calvary, "It is finished!" as He died for the "iniquity of us all." Peter and John are pondering the crucifixion as they join the throng moving to the Temple to pray. There they see a beggar seeking what he thinks he needs most—money. Peter now has something better to offer: "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk'" (Acts 3:6, NIV). The beggar born "lame"—for forty years a cripple—stands up! Then, with unbelievable joy he begins to leap and shout. People come running! What a miracle! What a chance for Peter to bask in the admiration of the awe-struck crowd. But notice how the Spirit-filled disciples use this power.

Peter declares, "Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?" (Acts 3:12, NIV). Immediately Peter points them to Jesus, "the Holy and Righteous One. . . . You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong" (verses 14-16, NIV).

The key word to the entire book of Acts is *witness*. The early church was not trying to tell the world about their greatness, but about the greatness of Jesus. They saw themselves not so much as *workers* focused on the work they had to do for God, but as *witnesses* to the great work God had done for humanity through Christ's dying and rising (verses 18-26). This witness inspired them to courageous deeds.

4. The Status Quo and the Gospel (read Acts 4:1-12)

After orchestrating Christ's execution, Caiaphas thought he had solved the problem. The wily old high priest and his religious group (the Sadducees) controlled the purse strings of the Temple. With the Pharisees, they recognized in Jesus a threat to the status quo and the existing system that gave them their power. "It is better that this one man die," he had warned. But now, not two months later,

Caiaphas and company are confronted with Jesus' disciples in the Temple boldly proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead (Sadducees denied the possibility of the resurrection). The disciples are arrested on the spot (verses 1-3).

The next day, Peter and John, who had seen the brutal treatment of Jesus by the Sanhedrin, now stand before the Sanhedrin as Christ's followers. The whole gang is there, the blood of Jesus still fresh on their hands, determined to intimidate the pair into silence (verses 6, 7). But they no longer are dealing with Peter the cocky, self-confident coward. Emptied of self and filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter meets them gaze for gaze and puts *them* on trial, warning them that outside Christ "there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved" (verse 12, NASB).

In every instance in Acts 2, 3, and 4 the Spirit gave whatever was needed, whether gift, power, or courage, to those whose primary mission was to be witnesses for Jesus Christ. It is still true today. We will never receive the Spirit and His gifts unless—and until—our magnificent obsession is the gospel.

The Experience

by Howard C. Andersen

The blessings received at Pentecost were a result of much prayer and preparation. This was the moment that the Saviour had promised (John 14:16).

"During the patriarchal age, the influence of the Holy Spirit had often been revealed in a marked manner, but never in its fulness. Now, in obedience to the word of the Saviour, the disciples offered their supplications for this gift, and in heaven Christ added His intercession. He claimed the gift of the Spirit, that He might pour it upon His people."¹

"The Spirit came upon the waiting, praying disciples with a fulness that reached every heart. The Infinite One revealed Himself in power to His church. It was as if for ages this influence had been held in restraint, and now Heaven rejoiced in being able to pour out upon the church the riches of the Spirit's grace. And under the influence of the Spirit, words of penitence and confession mingled with songs of praise for sins forgiven. Words of thanksgiving and of prophecy were heard. All Heaven bent low to behold and to adore the wisdom of matchless, incomprehensible love. Lost in wonder, the apostles exclaimed, 'Herein is love.' They grasped the imparted gift. And what followed? The sword of the Spirit, newly edged with power and bathed in the lightnings of heaven, cut its way through unbelief. Thousands were converted in a day."²

It is important to realize that the apostles did not use the Holy Spirit, the Spirit used them.

"The Holy Spirit had done for them that which they could not have accomplished for themselves in a lifetime; they could now spread the truth of the gospel abroad, speaking with accuracy the language of those for whom they were laboring. This miraculous gift was the highest evidence they could present to the world that their commission bore the signet of Heaven."³

"They [the disciples] were transformed in character, and united in the bonds of Christian love. Although without wealth, though counted by the world as mere ignorant fishermen, they were made, by the Holy Spirit, witnesses for Christ. Without earthly honor or recognition, they were the heroes of faith. From their lips came words of divine eloquence and power that shook the world."⁴

The Holy Spirit has continued His work through the ages. To be filled with the Holy Spirit can be our experience.

"The outpouring of the Spirit in apostolic days was the 'former rain,' and glorious was the result. But the 'latter rain' will be more abundant. Joel 2:23.

"All who consecrate soul, body, and spirit to God will be constantly receiving a new endowment of physical and mental power. The inexhaustible supplies of heaven are at their command. Christ gives them the breath of His own spirit, the life of His own life. The Holy Spirit puts forth its highest energies to work in heart and mind. The grace of God enlarges and multiplies their faculties, and every perfection of the divine nature comes to their assistance in the

TESTIMONY

Key text:
John 14:16-21

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work of saving souls. Through co-operation with Christ they are complete in Him, and in their human weakness they are enabled to do the deeds of Omnipotence."⁵

"The Spirit awaits our demand and reception. Christ is again to be revealed in His fulness by the Holy Spirit's power."⁶

"... the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit, proceeding from the Saviour, pervades the soul, renews the motives and affections, and brings even the thoughts into obedience to the will of God, enabling the receiver to bear the precious fruit of holy deeds."⁷

REACT

Am I willing to pray for the Holy Spirit to dwell in my life that I may be used by Him for the glory of Jesus Christ?

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 37.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

3. *The Story of Redemption*, p. 243.

Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers, p. 67.

5. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 827.

Christ's Object Lessons, p. 121.

7. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 284.

The Force Behind the Acts

by Robert G. Wilson

In the book of Acts Luke had the very specific agenda of setting forth the evolving Christian church as a meritorious, righteous, and worthy development, within Judaic-Roman society. He wanted Roman authorities (symbolized by Theophilus) to perceive this new movement of Jesus' followers as a significant asset rather than a threat to good social structure. By religious history, narrative, and apology, Luke sought to have those in authority in the Roman Empire understand the virtue and value of Christian social contribution.

The passage at the beginning of the book under consideration in this lesson (Acts 2:1—4:12) depicts several very significant events within the first months of the church's life following the departure of Jesus. Luke records glimpses of the quality of their communal life—close, loving fellowship, practical care for one another, and their willingness to include others who chose to unite with them. He also illustrates the powerful deeds that attended their proclamation—the ability to communicate in languages they had not learned, the healing of individuals locked in the grips of crippling afflictions, as well as tremendous courage in the face of threats by those who wanted Christianity abolished.

Other writers for Lesson 12 have focused on specific lessons learned from some of the individual events—the proclamation of Christ as the fulfillment of the Old Testament predictions of the Messiah, the results of their bold preaching, the willingness to sacrifice individual possessions for the material needs of the group, and the healing that was done in the name of Jesus Christ. I would like to focus attention on Luke's implicit message beneath all these spectacular events. The driving force, the impelling motive, was the reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, which they had just witnessed. If God had the power to raise the dead, if the Rabbi they believed in and followed had received such divine affirmation by the infinite God, which these humble followers had undeniably witnessed, there was nothing they could believe God could not and would not do for them. The inspiration of that phenomenal experience catapulted their faith and courage into acts of power and boldness. They expected much!

Think of it! If the charismatic leader to whom you were close made the claims that Jesus did, you watched Him murdered by His enemies and buried, and then on some bright morning He stood before you and you talked with Him, touched Him, ate with Him, heard His words of commission to you, and then you watched Him rise toward His Father before your eyes—what impact would it have on you? In my work as a chaplain I look into the closed eyes of death regularly. Death is confirmed by an array of exotic, neurologic, cardiac, and respiratory technologies. If after such confirmation (to say nothing of burial) I had lunch in the cafeteria with that individual, he would unquestionably have my undivided attention. I think the amazing narrative of the early church can be understood only in

EVIDENCE

Key text:
1 Corinthians
15:12-17

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light of that dynamic personal experience. That explains the courage and the boldness, the faith and the action, the love and the service, exhibited in those early believers. Their eyewitness experience is the stimulating force behind their fearless acts of faith. Their personal experience with the resurrection of Jesus was the explanation of the bold deeds of the early church.

You and I are removed from the circumstances that impelled them into life-sacrificing exploits. How do these stories impact our lives? our educational pursuits? our jobs? our weekends? We in this moment of history can go up on the mountain and look back over the peaks of sacred history. The advantage of accumulated history is our perspective.

Prophecy and fulfillment, acts of courage and faith, eyewitness testimony, God's hand operative in extraordinary ways—all these provide a basis for us to stand on the shoulders of our predecessors and seek ways to make our faith significant to our context. Today is not the day of Moses, Elijah, Peter, John, or Paul, but it is our opportunity to be nurtured and inspired by God's action in and through them and be challenged to discover ways that our faith can be experienced, expressed, and lived out through the challenges of today. If the resurrection truly did occur as a historic event it has significant implications for the acts of faith and courage of modern apostles.

The First Days and Today

by Duane C. McBride, Ph.D.

This week's lesson focuses on the first days of the Christian church, the events that brought it into being, and its first messages and actions. As the millenniums have passed, many additional layers of messages and actions have been added. It is crucial for Christians to study the roots of existence. We need, at least to some extent, to cut through the layers of years and understand the meaning and practical implications of those first days.

HOW TO
Key text:
Acts 2:6-11,
44-46; 4:12

1. Universality and Unity

Perhaps the first message given to the church was the universality of the salvation offered by Jesus Christ and that the presentation of that good news was to be made in the language, culture, symbols, and cognitive structure of the whole human family. The picture given in Acts is not a mere transliteration or the imposition of Jewish culture on the world, but rather human dilemma and salvation were presented in immediately recognizable concepts. A key question for the church today is How do we present a Christ who transcended, and is yet a part of, all times, places, and cultures? How do we present such a Saviour without imposing a few cultures' limited understanding on all of humanity? In practical terms, this universality may involve:

- a. Recognizing the real imperfections and limitations of any particular cultural understanding of Jesus Christ.
- b. Accepting that differences in people may exist that do not reflect superior or inferior morals or standards.
- c. Recognizing that while God is an absolute, any individual human culture is not, and therefore, the way we present the gospel to one culture may be totally incomprehensible to another culture.

2. Exclusivity

The recognition of the basic human dilemma of wrongdoing, shortcoming, injustice, disease, poverty, greed, and exploitation is common to almost all philosophies, ideologies, and religions.

All of these perspectives put forward an action program designed to alleviate the human condition. The program may involve an infinite number of lifetimes to try to "get it right" or require the appropriate distribution of the means of production. The core message of the apostles is that no amount of lifetimes, no appropriate division of labor or resources will solve the human dilemma. The message is that only Jesus Christ has lived or could live the perfect life and only the direct intervention of God will reorder and make the earth new again. The perfect life—the object of all ideologies and religions—is available to everyone if we recognize that our lives and our world cannot be what we would have them to be, apart from Jesus Christ. This realization means that in our daily lives:

- a. We must work with and accept the limitations of human attempts to alleviate the dilemma of our existence. That is part of the dynamic tension of being in but not of the world. Our actions as the citizens of God's kingdom promote peace, justice, and healing as

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- an introduction to the world that will be; they are not in themselves an end process.
- b. We proclaim Jesus and His kingdom as the only ultimate solution and that the solution is universally available to everyone.

3. The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit

Adventists have tended to see this outpouring of the Holy Spirit and its dramatic impact as a foretaste of the last days of the church. In considering the context of those last days, it might be important to look at the context of the first days. Acts clearly focuses on the unity, universality, and commitment of the apostles, both as perhaps a cause and a consequence of the Spirit. Does the "latter rain" require a context of:

- a. Unity in a basic universal message?
- b. Focusing more on the mission and message and less on who is to be first in the kingdom?
- c. A radical commitment of resources and life that we are most hesitant to even discuss?
- d. A recognition of the absolute necessity of resting in Jesus Christ as the author and finisher of our salvation?

The Gate Beautiful

by Denise Read

OPINION

Key text:
Acts 3:1-10

"Alms, alms, alms for the poor." An outstretched hand, wrinkled, and leathery reaches upward to capture the attention of those passing by. "Alms, alms, alms for the lame and crippled." Many pass by without noticing. Then two men stop and look at the little man lying beside the gate Beautiful. "Sir?" the beggar asks with a question in his eyes, as the two take in the scene before them.

"Look on us," replies Peter. "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk" (Acts 3:6). Peter reaches out his strong, vital hand, takes the crippled, withered hand of the beggar, and raises the man to his feet.

These people knew this crippled beggar. Some of them may even have carried him to his usual place that morning before going into the Temple. It might help matters to realize that it was Peter and John who were doing the healing; after all, they were close disciples of Jesus, but then they throw you that inevitable curve ball and ask why you are amazed at the miracle that has just occurred.

We are amazed at the faith of a man who for forty years has been unable to walk, yet still believes that he can reach out his hand to Peter and John, who have the ability to heal in the name of Jesus Christ.

Not long ago a very good friend of mine was injured in an accident. Suddenly, this student leader, terrific athlete, and wonderful singer was completely paralyzed. Now, I was sure that I was about to witness a miracle, and I wasn't alone in my belief. All our friends and neighbors knew that they were going to see a youth revival and God was going to bring our church together with the healing of my friend. But the miracle we asked for never happened. What made God intervene with Peter and the beggar beside the gate Beautiful and not with my friend?

Maybe it's time to put this in better perspective. The story of the beggar took place during a time when God was forming a church. If it seems as though there were more miracles during this time than at any other you may well be right. Although no one ever became a follower of Christ because of miracles, yet miracles probably did more to strengthen the faith of those already following Him than anything else at the time.

Sometimes we may not understand why God does not intervene and heal those who we think should be healed. But maybe that's where the miracle of faith comes in today. Our church is an established church and needs to be sustained just as we need to be sustained. When we deal with illness or injury we are reminded of promise after promise in the Bible that tell us God would never burden us with more than we could handle, and that He will be there to help us through.

Peter and John received the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and were able to heal and perform miracles. Imagine what gifts are available to us if we only trust when we ask.

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The Kingdom Community

"Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness" (Acts 4:29, NIV).



The Community That Cares

by Mark J. Newmyer

It was late Friday evening and I was having a difficult time falling asleep as I tossed and turned, somehow sensing something was wrong. Just as I dozed off, the telephone rang. "Who in the world is calling at this hour?" I thought to myself. The familiar voice of my father on the phone caused my eyes to open wide. The words painfully tumbled from his trembling lips as he told me grandmother passed away just a few moments before.

I couldn't believe it. She was such an active woman and in such good health for a woman 87 years of age. It was only a few short months ago that I woke up in the morning to the sounds and smells of grandma's making breakfast in the kitchen. It just could not seem possible that grandma was dead. My stomach felt queasy as I began to realize the impact of my personal loss. She was the matriarch of the family and always had a kind word to share, a spirit of giving to those in need, and a lifetime commitment to Jesus.

It was a long drive from Miami to the funeral services that were held in Candler, North Carolina. Many relatives and friends came from near and far to pay their respects. As the family gathered, we caught up on family news and anything else just to keep our minds off the occasion that brought us together. As our conversation stumbled from

David's losing his first tooth to the weather in Long Beach, California, it somehow always managed to make its way around to the sensitivity and love that was shared with us by the community we were visiting.

The minute the church community heard of our tragic personal loss, they jelled together and moved right in with us, sharing our griefs, and attempting to meet our needs. Different families would take turns preparing meal after meal of roasts, sandwiches, casseroles, vegetables, salads, and desserts. It was all there. They brought the food to our home, fed our family (more than twenty of us), washed the dishes, and cleaned up afterward. Many wonderful people came by to extend their condolences, while another family picked up the laundry, took it home, and brought back clean, neatly stacked, bundles of clothes.

The love and kindness that this community shared with us made our loss easier to bear. They will probably never, ever fully realize how much their sharing and concern meant to our family. A community that is committed to Jesus is a community that pulls together in a crisis situation, shares what it has, considering all others as the family of Jesus, whether they are from near or far. Such a community can make a difference and change the world.

**INTRO-
DUCTION**
Scripture:
Acts 4:13—5:4

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Authenticity and Power

by Richard Fredericks

LOGOS Theme: A caring, committed, expanding community of believers develops in response to the gospel message.

1. Peter and John Before the Sanhedrin (read Acts 4:1-22)

The place is the Sanhedrin, the church headquarters and supreme court of the Jews rolled into one. The room is crowded with dignitaries who, sensing their power base threatened, had engineered the execution of Jesus of Nazareth a few weeks earlier. Now Peter and John stand before them on trial as disciples of the crucified One. Caiaphas and his cronies have been told by a servant girl how the one called Peter, the big fisherman, denied His Master in a frenzied burst of foul, frantic oaths when the finger was put on him the night of Jesus' trial. They figured this time he'd really crack. They figured wrong.

Caiaphas' gaze is icy cold, his voice intimidating: "By what power or what name did you do this [heal the cripple]?" (Acts 4:7, NIV). But in the next few moments the tables turn. It is Peter's voice and gaze that unnerve Caiaphas, and not the other way around. Peter has owned his sinfulness and disowned his self-sufficiency. Peter has experienced the forgiveness purchased on the cross and knows the reality of the resurrection. Peter is now the Holy Spirit's vessel, and this Peter is fearless (read verses 8-13). He puts the Sanhedrin on trial for murder and infidelity to God, and offers them (and us) one route of escape from the charges: to accept Jesus as Saviour, for "there is salvation in no one else" (verse 12, NASB).

The council is stunned. Silenced. Two things are clear: these men have been with Jesus, and they are courageous. The leaders buy time to think. Read verses 14-21 and follow their reasoning. They know the miracle is authentic, yet the paramount thing in their minds is the threat to their system. If they are going to maintain power they must continue to preserve their traditional theology, and that theology has no room for salvation through Jesus alone as its center. Threatened men become threatening. They command the disciples to silence; but it doesn't fly. For Peter and John, only what God commands matters; and proclaiming God's mercy in Christ is not an optional vocation—it is their ultimate reason for existence. Frustrated, the Sanhedrin releases them with "further threats" (verse 21, NIV).

2. The Believers' Prayer (read Acts 4:23-31)

A cycle begins here that repeats itself throughout the book of Acts. It goes like this: deep faith and assurance in Christ, outpouring of the Spirit's power, courageous witness, conversions and fellowship, and finally persecution (the dragon is threatened). This is followed by *greater* unity and outpouring of the Spirit's miraculous power, more effective witness, deeper fellowship, greater persecution . . . and so on. The Spirit's power supercedes Satan's anger as the church's witness becomes increasingly effective. Notice the

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prayer of the freed disciples and their community in verses 23-31. What a model for us. It doesn't begin with their present problem. It begins by rehearsing (a) God's sovereignty and creative power; (b) Christ as the great fulfillment of God's redemptive purposes; and only then (c) the present problem, but in the light of absolute confidence that *God will keep supplying whatever is necessary to keep strong their witness to the gospel of Christ*. And notice God's answer. To such a focused church He can entrust divine power: "After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly" (verse 31, NIV). Again, we catch the Spirit's purpose for coming—to empower the disciples' witness to Christ.

3. The Believers Share Their Possessions (read Acts 4:32-37)

The spokes of a wheel draw closer together as they draw nearer to the hub. Even so the early church, as they united around a deep and courageous discipleship to the Saviour, were united to one another (verses 32-36). They lived as simply as possible to free up resources for kingdom work. They ignored vain and selfish personal 'wants' to meet one another's legitimate 'needs.' Flashy trinkets for the body (or the home or parking lot, if you'll pardon my getting personal) were forgotten as the early Christians tangibly lived out Christ's self-sacrificing love for others. These people had discovered the reality of John 3:16. "God so loved," and then embraced the life-style of the "other" John 3:16, "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers" (1 John 3:16, NIV).

4. Ananias and Sapphira (read Acts 5:1-11)

The story of Ananias and Sapphira illustrates a tremendous problem God has faced throughout human history. (Read verses 5:1-11 and compare it with the stories of Achan, Joshua 7; Simon the Sorcerer, Acts 8; and the seven sons of Seva, Acts 19.) At key points, when God has a totally committed people, He gives them extraordinary power to carry forward their witness. But each time He bestows such power it immediately attracts those who covet only power, self-glorification, and selfish gain. They identify with the community's "success" as an avenue to feed their insatiable pride, and quickly their vanity and greed spreads like a cancer to poison the commitment of others. If the Spirit's power then remained present, it would be used to further the corrupt spirit of the world under a religious guise.

At this point God has two options: remove His power and weaken the church's proclamation of salvation to a dying and doomed world, or remove the cancer—perform radical surgery to save the body. Following Pentecost the Spirit's power was infused into the church and thousands were receiving salvation. The hypocritical greed of Ananias and Sapphira, who desired prominence but not repentance,

demanded radical and swift surgery. For us today, who long for the return of Pentecostal power, the lesson is a sobering one.

5. A Focused Community of Faith (read Acts 5:17-42)

In the final section of Acts 5 two things stand out with glaring clarity. First, note the jealous guarding of power by the official religious leaders. This caused their determined and intentional blindness to Christ's message and miraculous power within the apostolic community. Yet the more they sought to protect their positions, institutions, and defective theology by force, the more impotent their efforts become.

Equally clear is the opposite side of the same coin. Read verses 29-32. The Spirit came offering repentance and salvation through Christ's death and resurrection. As the church identified totally with that mission no Divine resource necessary for the task was denied them—whether it was angels (verses 19-23) or even allies within the Sanhedrin (verses 33-42).

Scripture indicates God's willingness still to do the same thing today for such a focused community of faith. But when preserving and promoting the system supercedes proclaiming the gospel, to that degree the medium has become the message and the church becomes impotent. Meanwhile God's enabling, innovative Spirit still seeks union with those following in the footsteps of the apostles, who "never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ" (verse 42, NIV).

Share Your Possessions

by Hilda J. Camargo

When Jesus walked on this earth many people did not understand His true mission. His disciples also spent time wondering which of them would be selected to sit at Jesus' side in heaven. "What could I do to gain this privilege?" was asked by each disciple. Jesus showed mercy and persevered in telling them this privilege was for those who are willing to give their God-given talents of time, money, and influence to those in need.

The popular philosophy in those days dictated that those who had more influence, wealth, and education were to rule the lower classes. The lower classes were only to obey and serve the thoughts and decisions of the higher classes. Religion was authoritarian. Not one person was allowed to think and act for himself or herself; instead, each person was to believe and practice what was directed by the superiors. However, Jesus was calling individuals to service and not to authority.¹

Just as today, when people were convicted of the gospel and their lives began to change, many were separated from their families and friends. There was a need to provide them with food and shelter. Those who could, sold their land and homes in order to provide for others. This act was an example of how their relationship with God and others was vital to their own Christian growth.²

We Christians who are growing strong in our travels today can offer this strength to those who are weaker. Christ does not want us to control anyone's mind, to judge one another, or to dictate to them what they should do. God has given each one of us the "freedom to think, and to follow his own convictions."³ Although we are free to be individualistic, there is also a responsibility we have to others. By sharing our gifts with a group of growing Christians, we make the group stronger and more capable of meeting the individual's needs.

We can work with the angels, who are sent from God as mercy messengers to cooperate with people in uplifting humanity. Because of basic necessities, we may not be free to sell our homes and land, but we can give of our time to those who need it, along with our talents, such as serving, teaching, encouraging, contributing generously, diligent leadership, and cheerfully showing mercy to others (see Rom. 12:8).

As we search for truth in heaven and earth, we will not find anything more powerfully satisfying than the offering of our services to those in need of sympathy and aid.⁴ We do this because we all have one thing in common, which is the Love of God in our hearts. We too can have the same mission in life as Jesus did as long as we are willing to share our gifts, no matter how small. If we do this in any way we can, we will become richer than those who are only idly seeking to sit at Christ's side.

TESTIMON

Key text:
Acts 4:32-36

1. See *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 549, 550.

2. See *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 70, 71.

3. *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 550, 551.

4. *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 1

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The Kingdom Community

by Kathy Figueroa

EVIDENCE

Key text:

Acts 5:38, 39

"If this plan or this undertaking is of men, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them" (Acts 5:38, 39, RSV). This was the advice given to the Sanhedrin by an insightful Pharisee named Gamaliel upon their decision of what to do with the apostles Peter and John, who continued to spread the gospel message to all who would listen.

Every day we stand before our jury just as Peter and John stood before the Sanhedrin. Even as they were ordered to refrain from all public speaking and teaching in the name of Jesus they replied, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge; for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19, 20, RSV).

There is a price to pay for standing firm for our beliefs. To what length would we go to live up to standards God has set and we have chosen? Would we risk our lives, even die for our convictions? Many before us have, and many after us will die for their declarations. Jesus died for us because He held fast to His convictions and gave up His life to confirm it. Martin Luther King stood against millions for his belief in human equality. He had a dream and risked his life for that dream. He died while in pursuit of his dream and did not get to witness how he helped change millions of lives.

For many of us, sticking to what we believe means giving up a fantastic job opportunity because it requires work on the Sabbath, or disclosing a wrong being done, with the result of job termination. Every day we are faced with right and wrong. God gave us the freedom of choice, and with His guidance we will make the right choice and be able to stand behind it.

Science cannot save us; money cannot save us. Only through Christ can we be saved. God raised Him to His right side as leader and Saviour. We must make Jesus the center in our lives. "The more our thoughts are upon Christ, the more we shall speak of Him to others, and represent Him to the world. We are called to come out and be separate from the world. . . ."

Our world today has many distractions and temptations. We must be bold as Peter and John in standing for right and proclaiming truth. We must boldly spread the gospel message to all with whom we come in contact. Our message will help or hinder, depending upon our attitude, dress, speech, and actions. Others will see our faith expressed in our words and works and will realize that faith connects us with Jesus. Faith cannot be just a vertical line, it must also be horizontal, reaching out to other people.

If we keep our eyes focused on Jesus we will overcome temptations from Satan and not be deterred from our focus. It is not going to be an unopposed life, but our integrity will bring us personal satisfaction now and also the ultimate reward—eternal life in the kingdom community.

Sharing

by Maritza Rivera Hirsch

As I work with toddlers and see their struggle with a concept they do not like, much less understand, I notice that they display feelings about sharing much like my own. What is the reasoning behind sharing what is mine, mine, mine? What do I gain? Like the toddler, I see that when I give, I am left with nothing. But, is that really true? Am I really left with nothing?

Giving is an attitude we learn when we are young, and is best taught by example. I read an article once that said that a child learns to give and share by seeing his parents put their extra change in the puppy piggy bank at the 7-11 store, explaining to their children that the money goes for the feeding and caring of puppies. Children learn by seeing their parent get a box of clothing together for the Community Services center, and by experiencing the concept of giving, by donating something of their own. These everyday experiences build a caring, giving attitude, which follows to adulthood.

A good example of this is a story I heard about Randy. Randy's parents are warm, wonderful Christian people who truly live their Christian experience. When Randy was 4 years old, he had a friend called Lynda. Actually it was his mother's friend, but she was very special to him. He had gone to see Santa Claus at a shopping mall. Santa gave him a button that read, "I went to see Santa." He loved this button and slept with it every night. One day his friend Lynda came to visit. He liked Lynda so much that he went to his room and looked at the button. After much deliberation he gave Lynda his button. Half of him ached and half of him was overjoyed that he could freely give Lynda his prized possession. God knows when we give from the heart. Lynda accepted the gift for the entire day. She told Randy that she'd see him at church that evening and would return the button to him at that time. Then she thanked him for his generous gift. Needless to say, Randy felt the full reward of giving.

The story told in Acts 4:32-36 is also one of learning through example. Those who followed the disciples watched carefully the example of their leaders. They sold all they had and gave it to the needy because they had the greatest example of sharing right before them. Christ gave His life in order to give them an opportunity they would never have otherwise. Forgiveness. Salvation.

There are ways we can learn to be giving individuals. For most of us it takes a conscious effort. Give these suggestions some thought:

1. Be sensitive to the needs of those around you.
2. Once a week share something that is yours. Whether it be your lunch, your smile, a special poem, a word of encouragement or praise.

It's still quite difficult to convince a toddler that sharing somehow makes you feel better. But the attitude it teaches is a valuable lesson. Only in struggling to attain this attitude can we begin to feel the immensity of Christ's gifts. Forgiveness and salvation, gifts He shares freely with us.

HOW TO
Key text:
Acts 4:32-36

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The Courage to Care

by Robert G. Wilson

OPINION

Key text:
James 1:2-4

This passage in Acts (4:13—5:42) impresses me with two very significant messages that I'll share with you. I see both principles illustrated in the lives of the early Christian believers as a result of Jesus' teaching and their eyewitness confirmation of the resurrection of Jesus.

First, the early Christians logically translated the Christian principle of love into concrete behavior. They accepted that love is its neighbor's keeper and that divine values placed upon them a responsibility for their neighbor's needs. The activity depicted in Acts 4:32-37 is a practical outflowing of this principle, which caused them to pool their collective material possessions and utilize their assets in behalf of the group. I don't think the application of this principle today necessitates our disposing of all our material possessions and turning the money over to the church treasurer, but I do think it has application to us in practical and significant terms. We ought to care for our own! If anybody in our church goes to bed hungry we as a church have failed, regardless of our profession. If anyone's home is cold in the chill of winter or if they lack adequate clothing or medical care or even education because they can't provide for it themselves we have collectively failed as a church. (There will always be some like Ananias and Sapphira who want to get credit for being identified with a group that functions by such principles while not personally embracing the principles). Our church has significant revenue, and it is spent on many things. However, new hymnals are not in order if one of us is in need of basics to live a productive life. If our considerable wealth is used for anything before the fundamental needs in our midst are cared for, I believe we need to appraise the priorities of our values. Christian charity demands that we provide for the needs of our own first. Some groups, like the Amish, take this principle very seriously.

A second issue I'm impressed with is the apostles' courage to speak very clearly and courageously against wrong. Look at how courageously they indicated the wrong of the Jewish leaders in killing Jesus (chap. 5:28-30). I'm well aware of the need to be tactful and nonoffensive. But aren't there some pretty significant times when things could be corrected in society, the church, or in other settings if enough people had the courage to call a spade a spade? Maybe "cowardice" often goes by the name of "tact." Someone said, "All evil needs to succeed is for good men to do nothing." That thought plagues me. When does right demand of me the courage to stand and "call sin by its right name,"¹ and when is it best to be silent? We should not be so naive as to think there is no price for courage. The apostles were beaten and threatened (verse 40).

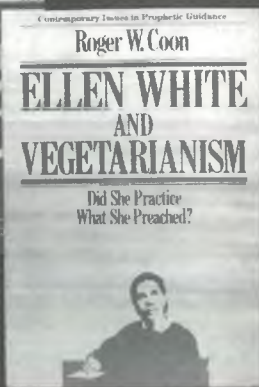
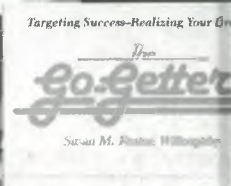
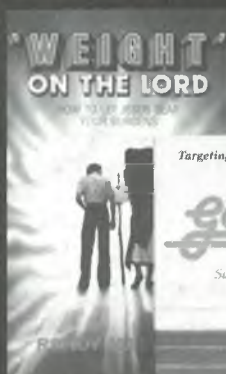
I have learned a lot from viewing the ABC news program "20/20." Their investigative reporting has had an impact. The Pentagon's \$750.00 hammer and excessive charges by military suppliers was investigated by Congress as a result of their reporting. They did a report on "whistleblowers" and found that these conscientious peo-

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ple paid a significant price—but were vindicated in the end when all the facts came to light. We should be under no illusion that to call right “right,” wrong “wrong,” injustice “injustice,” or abuse “abuse” will extract no cost from us. The example of the early apostles gives us good company to inspire us to “stand for the right though the heavens fall.”² I think it was Calvin Coolidge who said, “It is better to fail with a cause that will ultimately succeed, than to succeed with a cause that will ultimately fail.” May the Spirit of God give us the courage to stand up for the right and be counted when we should, and the wisdom to know when that is.

1. *Education*, p. 57.
2. *Ibid.*

RECOMMENDED READING



If you want to put meaning into your life or if you simply enjoy constructive topical investigation, one of the following books may be right for you. ■ Have you ever wished for a practical, nuts-and-bolts discussion of successful Christian living? If so, **WEIGHT ON THE LORD**, by Randy Maxwell, is for you! **WEIGHT ON THE LORD** is all about trust. Trusting in the Lord. Learn how you, too, can cast your burdens upon Jesus. US\$4.95/Cdn\$6.95. ■ If you want your life to really count and if you want to realize your dreams, **THE GO-GETTER**, by Susan Fenton Willoughby, is for you. Packed with practical advice for achieving success. US\$6.95/Cdn\$9.75. ■ **CHRISTIANITY MAKES SENSE**, by Kenneth Hopp, is a no-nonsense examination of Christianity by a former agnostic. As you read, you will discover that the arguments for Christianity and the evidences in its favor are stronger and more convincing than those against it. US\$5.95/Cdn\$8.35. ■ **ELLEN WHITE AND VEGETARIANISM—Did she practice what she preached?** by Roger Coon. This is a factual, frank discussion and examination of the allegations and evidence. Written by an authority on the life of Mrs. White who has access to relevant documents on her life. US\$1.25/Cdn\$1.75 ■ To get your copies see your ABC today or call toll free in the continental US 1-800-253-3000 (In Alaska and Hawaii 1-800-253-3002).

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Scripture: Acts 6:1—8:3

Theme: The church may expect guidance from the Spirit—both in dealing with internal situations and in meeting opposition from without—when it remains fearlessly devoted to its mission.

Lesson 2: DRAMA ON THE DAMASCUS ROAD

Scripture: Acts 8:4—9:31

Theme: Evil forces, blind prejudice, and fierce persecution cannot halt the forward progress of God's church. Under the Spirit's leading they actually promote the church's growth.

Lesson 3: THE GOSPEL TO THE GOYIM

Scripture: Acts 9:32—11:30

Theme: In breaching the wall of separation between Gentile and Jew with the message of Christ's salvation, God showed that in Jesus all human beings are one.

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