

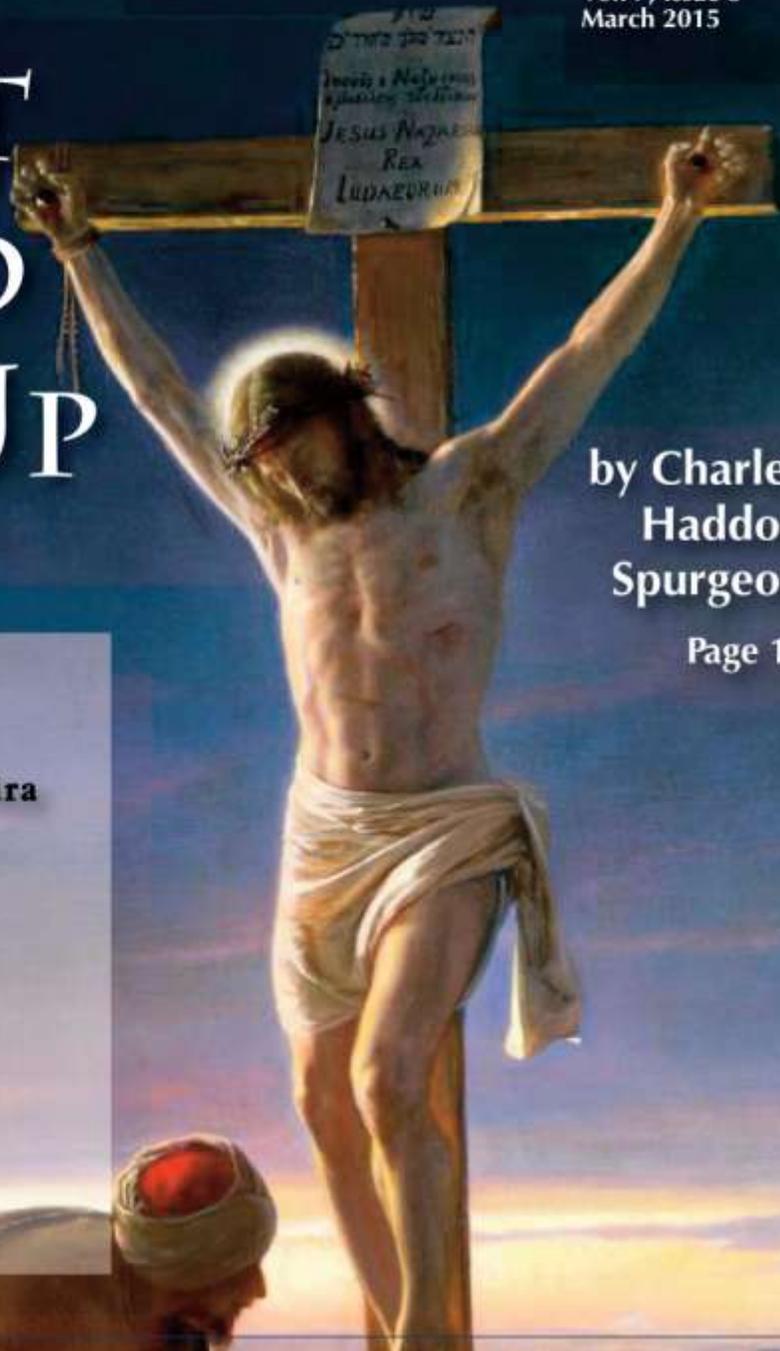
Disciple Magazine



Equipping believers for deeper life

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CHRIST LIFTED UP



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Christ Lifted Up

By Charles Haddon Spurgeon

Originally preached by Spurgeon as the first part of a sermon in 1857. Edited slightly for modern spellings.

“And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me” (John 12: 32).

It was an extraordinary occasion upon which the Savior uttered these words. It was the crisis of the world. We very often speak of the “present crisis of affairs,” and it is very common for persons of every period to believe their own age to be the crisis and turning point of the whole world’s history. They rightly imagine that very much of the future depends upon their present exertions, but they wrongly stretch the thought, and imagine that the period of their existence is the very hinge of the history of the world—that it is **the** crisis.

Now, however it may be correct, in a modified sense, that every period of time is in some sense a crisis, yet there never was a time which could be truly called a crisis, in comparison with the season when our Savior spoke. In the 31st verse, immediately preceding my text, we find in the English translation, “*Now is the judgment of this world*”; but we find in the Greek, “Now is the **crisis** of this world.” The world had come to a solemn crisis: now was the great turning point of all the world’s history. Should Christ die, or should He not? If He should refuse the bitter cup of agony, the world is doomed; if He should pass onward, do battle with the powers of death and hell, and come off a victor, then the world is blessed, and her future shall be glorious. Shall He succumb? Then is the world crushed and ruined beneath the tail of the old serpent. Shall He conquer? Shall He lead captivity captive, and receive gifts for men? Then this world shall yet see times when there shall be “*a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.*”

“Now is the crisis of this world!” “The crisis,” He says, “is two-fold. Dealing with Satan and men. I will tell you the result of it. ‘*Now shall the prince of this world be cast out.*’ Fear not that hell shall conquer. I shall cast him

out; and, on the other hand, doubt not but that I shall be victorious over the hearts of men. ‘*I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me.*’”

I. Christ’s Crucifixion Is Christ’s Glory

He uses the word “*lifted up*” to express the manner of His death. “*I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me. This, He said, signifying what death He should die.*” But notice the choice of the word to express His death. He does not say, I, if I be crucified, I, if I be hanged on the tree; no, but “*I, if I be lifted up*”: and in the Greek there is the meaning of exaltation. “I, if I be exalted—I, if I be lifted on high.” He took the outward and visible fashion of the cross, it being a lifting of Him up, to be the type and symbol of the glory with which the cross should invest even Him. “*I, if I be lifted up.*”

The cross of Christ is Christ’s glory. We will show you how. Man seeks to win his glory by the slaughter of others—Christ by the slaughter of Himself. Men seek to get crowns of gold—He sought a crown of thorns. Men think that glory lies in being exalted over others—Christ thought that His glory did lie in becoming “*a worm and no man*” (Ps. 22:6), a scoff and reproach among all that beheld Him. He stooped when He conquered, and He counted that the glory lay as much in the stooping as in the conquest.

1) Christ was glorified on the cross because love is always glorious. If I might prefer any glory, I should ask to be beloved by men. Surely, the greatest glory that a man can have among his fellows is not that of mere admiration, when they stare at him as he passes through the street, and throng the avenues to behold him as he rides in his triumph, the greatest fame, the greatest glory of a patriot is the love of his country—to feel that young men and maidens, old men and sires, are prepared to fall at his feet in love, to give up all they have to serve him who has served them. Now, Christ won more love by the cross than He did ever win elsewhere. O Lord Jesus, You would never have been so much loved, if You had sat in heaven for ever, as You are

now loved since You have stooped to death. Not cherubim and seraphim, and angels clad in light, ever could have loved with hearts so warm as Your redeemed above, or even Your redeemed below. You won love more abundantly by the nail than by your scepter.

Your open side brought You no emptiness of love, for Your people love You with all their hearts. Christ won glory by His cross. He was never so lifted up as when He was cast down; and the Christian will bear witness, that though he loves his Master anywhere, yet nothing moves his heart to rapture and vehemence of love, like the story of the crucifixion and the agonies of Calvary.

2) Christ won much glory by fortitude. The cross was a trial of Christ's fortitude and strength, and therein it was a garden in which His glory might be planted. The laurels of His crown were sown in a soil that was saturated with His own blood. Sometimes the ambitious soldier pants for battle, because in days of peace he cannot distinguish Himself. "*Here I sit,*" says he, "and rust my sword in my scabbard, and win no glory; let me rush to the cannon's mouth; though some call honor a painted bauble, it may be so, yet I am a soldier, and I want it;" and he pants for the encounter that he may win glory.

Now, in an infinitely higher sense than that poor glory which the soldier gets, Christ looked upon the cross as being His way to honor. "Oh!" said He, "now shall be the time of my endurance: I have suffered much, but I shall suffer more, and then shall the world see what a strong heart of love I have; how patient is the Lamb, how mighty to endure." Never would Christ have had such paeans of praise and such songs of honor as He now wins, if He had avoided the conflict, and the battle, and the agony. We might have blessed Him for what He is and for what He wished to do; we might have loved Him for the very longings of His heart; but we never could have praised Him for His strong endurance, for His intrepid spirit, for His unconquerable love, if we had not seen Him put to the severe test of crucifixion and the agonies of that awful day. Christ did win glory by His being crucified.

3) Christ looked upon His crucifixion as the completion of all His work. Therefore He looked upon it as exaltation. The completion of an enterprise is the harvest of its honor. And, my hearers, Christ longed for the cross, because He looked for it as the goal of all His exertions. It was to be the place upon which He could say, "*It is finished.*" He could never say "*It is finished*" on His throne: but on His cross He did cry it. He preferred the sufferings of Calvary to the honors of the multitude who crowded round about Him, for, preach as He might, and bless them as He might, and heal them as He might, still was His work undone. He was constrained, He had a baptism to be baptized with, and how was He constrained till it was accomplished. "But," He said, "now I pant for my cross, for it is the capstone of my labor. I long for my sufferings,

because they shall be the completion of my great work of grace."

4) Christ looked upon His crucifixion as the hour of triumph. His disciples thought that the cross would be a degradation. Christ looked through the outward and visible, and beheld the spiritual.

"The cross," said He, "the gibbet of my doom may seem to be cursed with ignominy, and the world shall stand round and hiss at the crucified, my name be forever dishonored as one who died upon the tree; and cavilers and scoffers may for ever throw this in the teeth of my friends that I died with the malefactor; but I look not at the cross as you do. I know its ignominy, but I despise the shame—I am prepared to endure it all. I look upon the cross as the gate of triumph, as the portal of victory. Oh, shall I tell you what I shall behold upon the cross? Just when mine eye is swimming with the last tear, and when my heart is palpitating with its last pang, just when my body is rent with its last thrill of anguish, then mine eye shall see the head of the dragon broken, it shall see hell's towers dismantled and its castle fallen. Mine eye shall see my seed eternally saved, I shall behold the ransomed coming from their prison-houses. In that last moment of my doom, when my mouth is just preparing for its last cry of '*It is finished*' I shall behold the year of my redeemed come, I shall shout my triumph in the delivery of all my beloved! Aye, and I shall see then, the world, mine own earth conquered, and usurpers all dethroned, and I shall behold in vision the glories of the latter days, when I shall sit upon the throne of my father David and judge the earth, attended with the pomp of angels and the shouts of my beloved!"

II. Christ Has another Lifting up

There is a lifting of Him upon the pole of the Gospel, in the preaching of the Word. Christ Jesus is to be lifted up every day, for that purpose He came into the world: "*That like as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness,*" even so He might by the preaching of the truth be lifted up, "*that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*" Christ is the minister's great theme, in opposition to a thousand other things which most men choose. I would prefer that the most prominent feature in my ministry should be the preaching of Christ Jesus.

Christ should be most prominent, not hell and damnation. God's ministers must preach God's terrors as well as God's mercies, we are to preach the thunder of God's law. If men will sin, we are to tell them that they must be punished for it. We should be unfaithful to the solemn charge which God has given us if we were wickedly to stifle all the threatenings of God's word. Did the loving Savior talk of the pit that burns, of the worm that never dies, and of the fire that can never be extinguished? It is

ours to speak as He spoke, and not to mince the matter. It is no mercy to men to hide their doom.

But, my brethren, terrors never ought to be the prominent feature of a minister's preaching. Many old divines thought they would do a great deal of good by preaching this. I do not believe it. Some souls are awakened and terrified by such preaching; they, however, are but few. Sometimes, right solemnly, the sacred mysteries of eternal wrath must be preached, but far oftener let us preach the wondrous love of God. There are more souls won by wooing than by threatening. It is not hell, but Christ, we desire to preach.

1) The theme of a minister should be Christ Jesus in opposition to mere doctrine. Some of my good brethren are always preaching doctrine. Well, they are right in so doing, but I would not care myself to have as the characteristic of my preaching, doctrine only. I would rather have it said, "He dwelt much upon the person of Christ, and seemed best pleased when he began to tell about the atonement and the sacrifice. He was not ashamed of the doctrines, he was not afraid of threatening, but he seemed as if he preached the threatening with tears in his eyes, and the doctrine solemnly as God's own Word, but when he preached of Jesus his tongue was loosed, and his heart was at liberty."

Brethren, there are some men who preach the doctrine only, who are an injury, I believe, to God's church rather than a benefit. I know of men who have set themselves up as umpires over all spirits. Wisdom will die with them. If they were once taken away the great standard of truth would be removed. We do not wonder that they hate the Pope, two of a trade never agree, for they are far more popish than he, they being themselves infallible. I am afraid that very much of the soundness of this age is but a mere sound, and is not real, does not enter into the core of the heart, nor affect the being. Brethren, we would rather preach Christ than election. We love the great doctrines of God's Word, but we had rather preach Christ than preach these.

2) The minister ought to preach Christ in opposition to mere morality. How many ministers in London could preach as well out of Shakespeare as the

Bible, for all they want is a moral maxim. The good man never thinks of mentioning regeneration. He sometimes talks of moral renovation. He does not think of talking about perseverance by grace. No; continuance in well-doing is his perpetual cry He does not think of preaching "believe and be saved." No, his continual exhortation is, "Good Christian people, say your prayers, and behave well, and by these means you shall enter the kingdom of heaven." The sum and substance of his Gospel is that we can do very well without Christ, that although certainly there is a little amiss in us, yet if we just mend our ways in some little degree, that old text, "except a man be born again," need not trouble us. Hear the testimony of holy Bishop Lavington, "We have long been attempting to reform the nation by moral preaching. With what effect? None. On the contrary, we have dexterously preached the people into downright infidelity. We must change our voice, we must preach Christ and Him crucified, nothing but the gospel is the power of God unto salvation."

3) The minister ought to preach Christ in opposition to some who think they ought to preach learning. God forbid we should ever preach against learning. The more of it a man can get, the better for him; and the better for his hearers if he has grace enough to use it well, but there are some who have so much of learning, that if in the course of their readings they find a very hard word, out comes the pencil-case: they jot it down, to be glorified in the next Sunday morning's sermon. Christ wants us not to preach learning, but to preach the good word of life in the simplest manner possible. Why, if I could only get lords and ladies to listen to me, by preaching to them so that they alone could understand me, there they might go, and I would not so much as snap my finger for them all. I would desire so to preach that the servant maid can understand, that the coachman can understand, that the poor and illiterate may hear readily and gladly receive the Word.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892), "the Prince of Preachers," was a renowned pastor and author who served as pastor of London's Metropolitan Tabernacle for 38 years. His works are still widely read today.

The Seven Churches of Revelation—Part 5

Thyatira: The Worldly Church

By Ray P. Burriss

If a person were to use just one word to state Thyatira's importance in the first century world, it would be "insignificant." Thyatira had no political importance (beyond being a part of the Roman Empire). Geographically it was on flat ground, so provided very little protection from

conquerors and it had no military value: All it had was a small garrison of Roman soldiers.

Even though it was insignificant in many ways, it was a very rich city. Thyatira was a manufacturing and a trade city. Many guilds were located there, controlling the various trades, which included tailors, metal craftsmen,

wool workers, bakers, tanners, slaves, merchants, linen makers, and dyers.

To Bible students, the most well known person from this city is Lydia, a dealer of purple cloth. Paul and his companions encountered her in her adopted home of Philippi: *“On the Sabbath day we went outside the city gate by the river, where we thought there was a place of prayer. We sat down and spoke to the women gathered there. A woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God, was listening. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was spoken by Paul”* (Acts 16:13-14).

We know little about Lydia, but from this passage we can infer that she was a dealer of the purple cloth, but not the dyer of cloth. At the time the Apostle Paul met her she was not a Christian, but she believed in God and she may have been a Greek who was interested in Jewish beliefs—she was meeting with other women in prayer on the Sabbath by a river because the city of Philippi had no synagogues. Lydia became the first person led to the Lord in Europe. She may have been very wealthy and perhaps a widow.

Purple cloth was very expensive and only royalty and the very wealthy could afford it. The process of obtaining the dye was laborious. There are three views on where the raw material for this dye came from: shellfish (murex sea snails), a certain type of shrimp found only in Thyatira (some say it took 10,000 shrimp to produce 1 gram of this dye), or from plant sources.

Like most of the Roman World (and the other cities in the province of Asia that John is told to address here), the city had pagan gods and the guild members were required to worship them. After a sacrifice, they had a feast and the meat of these sacrificed animals was served at the banquet, and these feasts were often followed by orgies. Each guild had its own pagan god, which put the new Christians in a very difficult position because to get a job required you to be a member of one of the guilds. Many of these new Christians started to compromise and take part in these feasts.

Because these new Christians started compromising, Christ made a direct intervention through this letter to the church. *“And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: ‘The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this: ‘I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first. But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality. Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her*

into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. And I will kill her children with pestilence, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds. But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them—I place no other burden on you. Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come. He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to Him I will give authority over the nations; and He shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have received authority from My Father; and I will give him the morning star.’” He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Rev. 2:18-29).

In this message, Christ was shown as *“The Son of God”* (not “a son of the gods,” showing His power and authority) and called attention to two distinguishing characteristics: His *“eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze”* (2:18). Thyatira was well known for having many pagan gods, but Christ made it a point to tell them that He was the only true God. He had eyes that penetrated everything, including each Christian’s thoughts and actions. He had feet of bronze, which to those in Thyatira was a symbol of strength. Christ was indicating He was stronger than any the gods worshipped in Thyatira.

Christ did commend the Christians there also: *“I know your works—your love, faithfulness, service, and endurance. Your last works are greater than the first”* (2:19). It is interesting to note that He commended the Christians for their love which is being shown through their works and, in spite of the persecution, the church was enduring and growing. Christ was also aware of the fact that they were increasing in what they are doing in providing good works.

Christ’s condemnation comes down not only Jezebel and those who believe her, but also the church in general because they allowed her to be a member of the church. There are two different views concerning who this Jezebel was. The first view is that she was an actual person, causing trouble in the church. The second view suggests that this could be a reference to a “spirit of Jezebel” (the wife of Ahab in the Old Testament who led Israel astray into idol worship) among the people. In either case, this name is tied to a false prophetess who was leading some of these new Christians away from the truth and was telling them it was all right to eat animals sacrificed on pagan altars (and, by default, endorsing the orgies). The Lord further states that He gave her time to repent, but she would not repent.

Christ’s correction addresses the consequences of this problem: She will become sick, and those who committed adultery with her will have tribulation and He will kill her children. It could be (bearing in mind that this

is just an opinion) that this is a reference to the judgment of sexually transmitted diseases (such as syphilis) which could be transmitted to those who committed immorality and also infect their children.

Christ's reward is proclaimed to those who have remained faithful. He said that He would give them authority over nations. It seems likely that this is still to take place in the future, when Christ returns. Did they remain faithful? The history of Thyatira offers minimal

evidence, but there were Christian churches there until the Turks forced out Greeks and other non-Muslims in 1922. Today, the city is called Akhisar, and is still known for trade, though today for tobacco, olives, olive oil, and automobile parts.

Ray P. Burriss is a marriage and family counselor and has served as a missionary in Puerto Rico.

The Best Things in Deuteronomy—Part 4 of 5

By Joe McKeever

XVI. The Lord Is Your Inheritance; Your Portion (10:9 and 18:1-2)

“The Levites will not be getting a portion or inheritance in Canaan; the Lord is his inheritance, just as the Lord your God promised him” (10:9).

In Numbers 18:20, the Lord told Aaron, *“You shall have no inheritance in their land [i.e., Canaan], nor shall you have any portion among them; I am your portion and your inheritance among the children of Israel.”* Members of the tribe of Levi (Numbers 18:2), Aaron's descendants were the priests for all future generations. All the other tribes of Israel received territorial allotments when Joshua led them to conquer Canaan. But not the Levites. The priests were to scatter throughout the countryside, live among the other tribes, and receive their living from the tithes and offerings (Sound familiar, preachers?). Israel's songwriters liked the concept of the Lord being our portion, and worked it into three psalms (Ps. 73:26; 119:57; 142:5).

Quick testimony here. In the year or two leading up to my retirement (June 2009), I was growing anxious. Would I get invited to preach anywhere and would we be able to live on our income? So many unanswered questions pestered me. One day, the Lord spoke to me: *“I am your portion.”* That's all, just those words. From that time to this—I'm in my sixth year of retirement—He has been my Portion and has provided magnificently. My preaching calendar is filled. I do admit to monitoring my retirement account with Guidestone, our denominational annuity program. But my faith is in the Heavenly Father and in no investment scheme of man. For now and eternity, the Lord is my portion. (See Philippians 1:21.)

XVII. The Very Worst Sin Imaginable (18:9-14)

Throughout the history of Israel, one sin stood out in the minds of everyone as the most wretched thing imaginable: sacrificing your child by fire to an idol. The few times it happened forever lingered in the minds of all who knew about it, and the prophets never let Israel forget it. King Manasseh did this during his reign. See 2

Chronicles 33:6. *“So Manasseh seduced Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to do more evil than the nations whom the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel”* (2 Chron. 33:9).

The fiery sacrifice of a child is generally referred to as *“the sin of Moloch,”* that being the pagan idol who required such (Jer. 32:35, etc.). But God forgave Manasseh for even this (according to 2 Chronicles 33:12ff), although it required a severe humbling for the Lord to get his attention.

The prophet Micah had this in mind when he gave us this unforgettable passage. *“With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the Most High God...? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression? The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”* (Micah 6:6-7). He answered his own question: *“He has shown you, O man, what is good, and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God”* (v.8). God would not be requiring brutal child sacrifice.

The story of Abraham “sacrificing” Isaac fits here (Genesis 22). Regardless what one makes of the story, clearly the object was to confirm to everyone involved—God as well as Abraham himself—that pagan idol-worshipers who sacrificed their children did not love them any more than Jehovah's people loved Him. While God would not be requiring such of His people, nevertheless the devotion He demanded was no less total and absolute. In a similar vein, the Lord said, *“Unless your righteousness exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will be no means enter the kingdom of Heaven”* (Matt. 5:20).

XVIII. Two Prophets, One of Whom Is Special (18:15-22)

“The Lord your god will raise up for you a Prophet like me. ... When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.” Moses does not know everything on the Lord's future

calendar, but he has learned that God will raise up a special Prophet at some distant time who is like him. Where did Moses get this idea? Easy. The Lord told him. *“The Lord said to me, ‘I will raise up for them a Prophet like you...’”* (v.18). *“Him, you shall hear”* (v.15). That would be Jesus.

Four traits of a true prophet are found in this text. A genuine prophet: **a)** Comes from God (he did not volunteer; see what Amos said about his call in Amos 7:15). **b)** Speaks the Lord’s message (not his own; see what Paul had to say in 2 Corinthians 4:5; and not someone else’s message; see Jeremiah 23:30). **c)** Declares all that the Lord commands him, not just the pleasant parts (see what Paul says would happen in the last days, in 2 Timothy 4:3). **d)** This is the biggie—what a true prophet says will come to pass (the standard is 100% fulfillment).

When I pointed out to a Mormon that his prophet Joseph Smith had predicted the moon to be inhabited with a race of giants dressed as Quakers, this man—who was a college professor with a Ph.D. and so not lacking in brain-power, just judgment—answered, “He clearly was not speaking as a prophet, but just giving his opinion.” So, let’s see how this works. If his prophecy is accurate, he is speaking as a prophet. Otherwise, not. Take this formula and no one would ever be accused as a false prophet!

Jeane Dixon (1904-1997) was an astrologer who made all kinds of prophecies and forecasts, a few of which came true. She is said to have predicted the assassination of JFK. She may or may not have done that, but the fact is she predicted a myriad of things that did not come to pass. Biographers said an adoring public and a gullible press turned her into a phenomenon. I imagine if we grade on the curve, she might have scored higher than you or I would have. But by the standard God gives—nothing less than perfection—she was an imposter and *“you shall not be afraid”* of her.

XIX. What Is It with Boundaries?

“You must not move your neighbor’s boundary marker” (19:14). Proverbs has a thing about boundaries. *“Don’t move an ancient property line that your fathers set up”* (Prov. 22:28 repeated in Proverbs 23:10). Property lines were big deals in agrarian societies where land was everything. Today we have surveyors and deeds that clearly delineate these things, although once in a while the law courts have to settle such matters. In the countryside, farmers can usually take you to corners of their property and show markers that have been driven deeply into the ground, making them more or less permanent and difficult to remove. As I recall, my friend Don Davidson, pastor the First Baptist Church in Alexandria, Virginia, says the ancient marker that sets out the southernmost corner of the District of Columbia can be found on their property. Not tampering with boundaries is about respecting the rights of others, honoring the property of a neighbor. How

many family feuds, we wonder, had their beginning by a controversy over a property line.

When the young man was mowing my lawn for the first time, he left a thin unmowed strip facing my neighbor’s house. He explained, “Your property line stops here.” I said, “Yes, but let’s be a good neighbor. Cut the whole strip.” Ever since, whether my neighbor is mowing his yard and we are doing mine, we cut the whole patch. Being neighborly is always a good idea.

Someone wrote to the Progressive Farmer. “My pond is almost totally enclosed by my property. However, about 50 feet of it fronts on my neighbor’s land. And he’s taken to fishing it, even though I stock it and I feed the fish. What can I do to put a stop to this?” The editor surmised that he had several choices, including erecting a fence in the water to keep his fish inside. I would have suggested that a few fish is a small investment in a good relationship with his neighbor. Some rights we do not enforce to keep the peace.

XX. Leaving the Gleanings for the Poor

“When you reap the harvest in your field, and you forget a sheaf in the field, do not go back to get it. It is to be left for the foreign resident, the fatherless, and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. When you knock down the fruit from your olive tree....” (24:19-22). Take care of the poor.

When I was a kid growing up on the small Alabama farm, Dad would send us over the cotton field a second time for the small amount that had ripened since the first picking. This was harder, slower, and less productive since the sharp empty burrs pricked your hands and the cotton was sparser. But our Dad was not so interested in growing cotton as he was in raising six children, so our protests fell on deaf ears.

In biblical times, that second picking was left for the poor of the land. Likewise, the last few rows planted on any field tend to produce poorly, and they too were left for the poor. This is the background of the story of Ruth—she *“gleans”* after the reapers, picking up what they drop. Boaz, who had taken a liking to this young widow, instructed his workers to *“let grain from the bundles fall purposely for her; leave it that she may glean, and do not rebuke her”* (Ruth 2:16).

This is clearly a level of poverty we know nothing of today. Travelers crossing a field were allowed to eat whatever they could strip with their hands. The disciples were doing this, in Matthew 12:1. Anyone reading the Proverbs quickly notices how Scripture shelters the poor. *“The one who shuts his ears to the cry of the poor will himself also cry out and not be answered”* (Pr. 21:13). Likewise, see Proverbs 14:31, 17:5, and 19:17. The Lord Jesus said, *“Give to everyone who asks from you”* (Luke 6:30).

Over the years, I've been distressed to find in every church I pastored a small contingent of members whose hearts were hardened toward helping the poor. They resented the government "handouts" and welfare programs, and insisted that churches were enabling scam artists by assisting the poor. Jesus said "*The poor you have with you always,*" they protest. Maybe so. But how we treat the poor says a great deal about whether the Lord Jesus has changed our hearts. "*When you give a party,*" He said, "*invite the*

poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind" (Luke 14:13). Do this and "*you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous*" (v.14). That should be enough for any child of God.

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Exegetically Speaking—by Spiros Zodhiates

It's Good to Remember What You Were

James 1:23

From Faith, Love & Hope: An Exposition of the Epistle of James, AMG Publishers, 1997.

"*For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was*" (James 1:24).

In verse 23 we had an illustration of the hearer of the Word as standing before a mirror, understanding his present condition in contrast to the day when he first believed in the purpose of God's creation. Let us examine the Greek word translated "*glass*" in the King James Version. "*For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass.*" The word used in Greek is *ésoptron*, which refers to a mirror, usually carried in the hand and made sometimes of silver but more frequently of a mixture of copper and tin. Socrates, that great father of philosophy, advised young men to carry a mirror. If they were good looking, they should remind themselves that an ugly life was out of keeping with good looks. If their appearance was not attractive, they were told to remember that handsome actions offset ugly looks.

This word "mirror" actually comes from the compound Greek verb *eisordō*, which means "to look into with the power of discernment." The hearer is pictured as a man who stands before the mirror looking just at his face. That is not enough. There should be a deeper look when you and I look into the mirror of the Word of God. It is not only the face that we should expose to the mirror, but also the heart; for after all the face is only a symptom of the attitude and condition of the heart. The doctor examines the symptoms carefully to find out where the cause of an illness lies. But he cannot just treat the symptoms; he must also treat the cause of the illness and have a very good look at that. Let us be like that Christian policeman who prayed at prayer meeting, "O Lord, put something in our faces as we walk about that people trouble may see and so be led to seek our help."

How does your face and mine look before the mirror? We should take time to have a good look at it. Is it smiling or is it long? Just imagine how terrible it would be if we could never see what we look like. When pioneer missionaries make contact with hitherto uncontacted people, one of the first things they give them is a mirror so that they can form an idea of what they look like. It must be terrible for everyone else to know what a man looks like except the man himself. Let us not fool ourselves; if we are hearers only, others know it, but it is good for us to know it and to see what we look like as a result of our disobedience to the commandments of God. Why do we have so many long-faced Christians today? Because we have so many disobedient Christians, so many hearers and so few doers. It is the doer's face that is a delight for others and for himself to look upon.

Verse 24 tells us that this hearer does not stay long before the mirror of the Word of God. It says: "*For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way.*" This is not a very accurate translation of the original Greek. The verb is in the aorist, which refers to an act in the past that is completed, an act which has no continuing effects upon the person who performed it. The verb, furthermore, is the same one that is used in the previous verse meaning "to understand." Thus we see that as soon as the hearer saw his face in the mirror he understood his condition, his state of heart and mind, but he did not linger for treatment. He went away and tried to forget what he looked like. Now is that intelligent? We look into a mirror to find out whether or not we are dirty. If we are, then the logical thing to do is to go get cleaned up. That is what God expects us to do, and He has assured us that His mercy and forgiveness are boundless.

The only way a person can really know himself is to see himself in the mirror of the Word of God. Is that not what our verse proclaims? It surely is, when we read it in

the original inspired Greek. With one look in the mirror he immediately understands what he is, that he is a sinner. This business of knowing oneself is not easy. It is the hardest thing in the world. If a man does not know he is a sinner, he will not seek a Savior. If he does not know he is sick, he will not go to a doctor. If he wants to know what he really is, he must start reading the Bible, the Word of God.

Christian, if you wish to know how you rate with God, read His Word. Expose yourself to God's X-ray machine and you will know what you are in your inner self and not merely on the outside. When you look at your face in the Word of God, you will know not only how you appear but what you are. That is what verse 24 says: "For he understood or discerned himself." A paint company used as its advertising slogan: "Save the surface and you save all." That is what many Christians try to do nowadays. They do everything under the sun to save face, to make their faces appear perfectly normal and Christ-like to others, but when they look into the mirror of the Word of God, they will find how short they fall of that high standard which God has set for them. Let us as Christians take time to find things out about ourselves, outside and inside.

"Look, Mommy, this potato is so big and nice, is it not?" Then the mother peeled it and cut it in half. How surprised was the little girl when she saw it all black and hollow in the middle. "Oh, Mommy," she said, "this potato is not a real Christian, is it?" You can be a big, fine-looking member in the Church of Jesus Christ, but beware lest you be black and hollow on the inside. The Word of God has the ability to penetrate below the surface. "*For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God*" (Rom. 3:23). The capacity for self-knowledge is one of our distinctive human endowments. Other creatures are not capable of knowing themselves. The study of our nature in the light of God's Word should become central in our lives. Let us not seek to find out only how we appear, and turn away from the knowledge of what we are.

But what does the man do after he acquires knowledge of what he is as a result of hearing the Word of God? "*For he understood, knew himself, and he went away from the mirror.*" That word translated "*and goeth his way*" actually means "and has left from it." It is in the perfect tense, which would indicate that the man has gone away from the mirror of the Word of God with the purpose of staying away.

Have you ever seen people who just do not like to be exposed to God's Word? When they hear the Gospel preached over the radio they reach out and turn it off. They will not tolerate any preaching. It is not because they hate the Word, not because they hate Christ—far from it. You

will never find them attacking religion. But they are afraid to be exposed to the Word because it will convict them of their sin. They are afraid lest it create in them uneasiness of conscience. The best way to silence their conscience, they figure, is to go away from the mirror which would show the filth of their life. But can one really get away from God?

So many people are like that young girl who, after sweeping the room, went to the window shade and hastily drew it down, saying, "It makes the room so dusty to have the sunshine coming in." She foolishly imagined that it was the sunshine which made the dust, whereas it only revealed it. We should rather get rid of the dust than the sunlight. That is what a wise man would do.

"*He came, he heard, he has gone away, and immediately he forgot who he was.*" What the Apostle really wants to tell us is that this man forgot what he found himself to be, after he looked in the mirror of the Word of God.

In our previous study we saw that the hearer who stands before the mirror of the Word of God remembers the face of his natural birth. He remembers the day when he was first born into the kingdom of God and how happy he was and how obedient he was to God. Now he avoids this mirror of the Word because it brings back these wonderful memories to him. Oh, yes, he yearns for them again, but unfortunately he is not willing to pay the price. Let us not forget our first love so easily. Let us not forget those blessings which were ours when we knew how to obey God's bidding.

A little barefoot, hungry, half-naked boy was crying pathetically. "I am cold, I am hungry!" he shouted at the top of his voice. A stranger approached him and asked, "Do you believe that God can take care of you?" "Yes," replied the starving little boy with assurance. "Why, then, does He not ask someone to bring you warm clothing and some food?" "I know, sir, that He asked someone to do it, but apparently this somebody whom He asked has forgotten it." The little boy was right. To hear the voice of God commanding us to do something and then to do all we can to forget that voice is the most deplorable calamity that could ever befall a Christian. Let us remember the joy that came to us the last time we did something for the Lord, and not turn away from His will as revealed to us in the mirror of His Word.

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Words to Stand You on Your Feet—by Joe McKeever

What People Are Dying to Hear about Easter

“God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power” (Acts 2:24).

It’s Easter, pastor. What are you preaching? Don’t preach about springtime, as much as we all love it. This is not the day for that. Don’t make the analogy about how Easter eggs speak to us about new birth and all that foolishness. Stay on track. You have the greatest message on the planet; don’t weaken it with trivialities.

Tell your people—and all those whom the Holy Spirit will send this Sunday, not yet “your people,” but potentially so—that death could not hold Jesus Christ, that He is risen from the dead, and what that means to them. Never forget that every sermon has two parts: “What?” and “So what?” So, what exactly does the Easter event mean? I’m glad you asked.

I. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ Means He Is Still Alive and Among Us Today

“Lo, I am with you all the way” (Matt.28:20). “I will never leave thee nor forsake thee” (Heb. 13:5). Pastor, let’s not encourage our people to think of Jesus’ resurrection as something that happened in the dusty realms of ancient civilization, as though Easter Sunday is a memorial day and we’re giving a history lesson. When we say “Jesus is risen!” we must emphasize that “He is here among us today!”

Question: Does your congregation believe Jesus Christ is in this place, among us today?

II. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ Means That Everything He Said Was True

Every promise He gave, every claim He made, is good, stamped with Heaven’s verification. Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father!

Question: When are we going to get straight about Jesus being the only Door to everything Heaven has to offer?

III. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ Means That Death Is Defeated

Death is dead, and we need never fear that faker again. Two huge scriptures on this: For this purpose Jesus partook of flesh and blood (like us), that *“through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to bondage all their lives”* (Heb. 2:14-15). He defeated the devil and delivered his captives!

Jesus is He *“who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel”* (2 Tim. 1:10). He literally “nullified” death, putting it out of business. So, when we die in Christ, we go straight to Him. To the redeemed, there is no death, in any way that truly matters.

Question: When are we going to stop fearing death and start believing Jesus?

IV. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ Means We May Live Boldly

Death has been defanged and “demonsterfied” (if that’s not a word, it should be!). No fear of death means no hesitation about living!

Question: What’s holding you back from the bold things Christ wants from you?

V. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ Means We Have a Gospel

The Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, ladies and gentlemen, is unlike any other message on the planet! And everyone needs to hear it. You and I are the messengers. We get to break the news to those still cowering in fear of death. We have the privilege of unlocking the chains holding them in darkness.

Question: Have we conned ourselves into thinking we can keep silent but live so wonderfully that the lost will see and believe? Someone needs to tell them about Jesus.

VI. For All Who Are in Christ, the News Is All Good

We are in Christ, from here on in—into eternity! Any trouble along the way is just so many speed bumps. Keep in mind, the message of Jesus is not called “good news” for nothing! My sins are gone, the charges against me have been nailed to the cross, the blood of Jesus has washed me from all sin, and there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. I am born again, adopted into the family of God, with my name written in the Book of Life. I am indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who also overshadows and undergirds me, goes before me and comes behind me. I am saved, forgiven, called, sent, accompanied, commanded, instructed, blessed, filled, and used by the living God for His purposes.

Question: Yes, we do preach on sin, but have we allowed our message to emphasize only the negative?

VII. I Must Not Be Upset if These Lessons Come Slowly to Me

Such truths are too wonderful for me. My carnal mind resists believing that death is defeated and that being absent from the body means being at home with our Lord, but my heart of hearts knows this is true. So, we daily give ourselves anew to Him, we surrender to His will for that day, and we dedicate ourselves to growing in Christ. One of these days, we'll get it right. Until then, do not weaken.

Question: Are we being too perfectionistic? Can we be more patient with ourselves and one another? "*O fools and slow of heart to believe...*" (Luke 24:25). Help us, Lord.

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Living out the Living Word—by Justin Lonas

“For the Lord Has Caused Her Grief”: Sin and Judgment

Lamentations: Introduction

To open up our study of Lamentations, we introduced the book's historical background, Jeremiah's authorship, and its unique poetic structure. We explored the reasons such a work is included in Scripture, seeking to understand lament as the facet of worship that incorporates mourning over sin and its consequences. As with most poetic sections of the Bible, Lamentations does not lend itself to the verse-by-verse expositional study that is so vital to understanding other passages. Rather, we will focus on the big picture painted by its descriptions, allusions, and metaphors.

The book opens with striking images: "*How lonely sits the city that was full of people! She has become like a widow who was once great among the nations! She who was a princess among the provinces has become a forced laborer*" (1:1). Jerusalem, Zion, the religious and political center of the Jewish nation sits empty; her armies defeated and her people captive to a hostile nation. All the promises of God wrapped up in the city and the land seem, in that moment unfulfilled and unfulfillable. Jeremiah depicts the holy city as a woman deprived of her position, provision, and love—what is she to do?

All those on whom she has relied are no help now: "*She has none to comfort her among all her lovers. All her friends have dealt treacherously with her*" (1:2). Perhaps Jeremiah here alludes to the false gods the people of Judah have bowed down to (adultery and promiscuity throughout the Old Testament often allude to the spiritual infidelity of the people). In the hour of crisis, none of these idols could help her in any way. The "*friends*" likewise (likely Egypt and other nations with whom Judah had pursued alliances) did not come to her aid when Babylon invaded.

Jeremiah enumerates the losses of the nation. They have "*gone into exile under affliction*" (1:3). What remained of true worship at the temple has been uprooted "*no one comes to the appointed feasts...her priests are groaning*" (1:4). Their independence has been taken from them: "*her adversaries have become her masters*" (1:5). The royal family has been dethroned, and their respect

among the nations has vanished: "*All her majesty has departed from the daughter of Zion*" (1:6). The temple treasury and all the articles used for worship of the Lord have been defiled and stolen: "*The adversary has stretched out his hand over all her precious things, for she has seen the nations enter her sanctuary, the ones whom You commanded that they should not enter into Your congregation*" (1:10). The people waste away from hunger: "*All her people groan seeking bread; they have given their precious things for food*" (1:11).

Beyond the pain of such tremendous loss, Jeremiah couches Jerusalem's fall in terms of shame and impurity. "*Jerusalem sinned greatly, therefore she has become an unclean thing. All who honored her despise her because they have seen her nakedness; even she herself groans and turns away*" (1:8). The people's rebellion against the God of their fathers had ultimately rendered them "*unclean*" before Him. Their pride blinded them to the fact that they had forgotten His covenant, and that the blessings He gave would turn to curses when they turned their backs on Him. His judgment came swiftly: "*She did not consider her future. Therefore she has fallen astonishingly*" (1:9).

Even in the midst of mourning, the awareness that Israel's fall is a result of their sins that threads through the whole book begins to show. "*For the Lord has caused her grief because of the multitude of their transgressions*" (1:5); "*Look and see if there is any pain like my pain which was severely dealt out to me, which the Lord inflicted on the day of His fierce anger*" (1:12); "*The yoke of my transgressions is bound; by His hand they are knit together*" (1:14). "*The Lord is righteous; for I have rebelled against His command*" (1:18).

In considering all these things, especially the chasm that has opened in their relationship to God, the people weep. "*My eyes run down with water; because far from me is a comforter, One who restores my soul*" (1:16). At the bottom, there is nowhere to look but up. Jeremiah depicts the people crying out again to God: "*See, O Lord, for I am in distress; My spirit is greatly troubled; my heart is*

overtaken within me, for I have been very rebellious.... All my enemies have heard of my calamity; they are glad that You have done it. Oh, that You would bring the day which You have proclaimed, that they may become like me. Let all their wickedness come before You; and deal with them as You have dealt with me for all my transgressions; for my groans are many and my heart is faint” (1:20-22).

Recognizing that the justice of God has come upon them for their sins at the hands of a pagan king and his armies, they pray for God’s ultimate justice to be brought to all people by the same standard with which He has judged them.

The prophet weeps, and all Judah with him, because we see in post-exile Jerusalem the end result of the life of rebellion against the Lord that the nation had chosen. They removed right worship and pursuit of holiness from their midst, and God in the end removed His hand of blessing. After Nebuchadnezzar, their physical reality matched the spiritual reality they had chosen.

The question remains: why did God bring this destruction to His people? Of course, the text itself links it directly to the “*multitude of their transgressions,*” but such judgment is rarely as simple as quid pro quo: “*If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared”* (Ps. 130:3-4). When does our sin go “thus far and no further?” I’d like to offer three (among many) possible answers.

1) In human terms, God’s people were brought to their knees for their own good. Sometimes, nothing short of “rock bottom” gets one’s attention and brings on confession and repentance. Conquest and exile is “rock bottom” for a nation, and through this experience, the people learned to fear God again. In God’s judgments, there is mercy. “*Thus you are to know in your heart that the Lord your God was disciplining you just as a man disciplines his son. Therefore, you shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him.*” (Deut. 8:5-6).

2) God’s plan for His people was for them to be a light to the nations: “*God be gracious to us and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us—Selah. That Your way may be known on the earth, Your salvation among all nations”* (Ps. 67:1-2). When they consistently refused to repent and live according to His Law, the nations mocked His name. Better that the people should be humbled and purified than that they should live in the land and prosper but defile His reputation.

3) In God’s Sovereign Plan, the loss of Jerusalem and the exile caused Israel to humble themselves and pray for God’s deliverance—for a Messiah to rescue them and restore the throne to David. Daniel’s prophecies (made from the seat of the foreign occupying power) foretell His coming in space and time, preparing the faithful among the Jews to watch and wait and to know Him and worship Him when He came (Simeon, for instance, in Luke 2). Without the exile and continued subjugation of Jerusalem by the Persians, Greeks, Seleucids, and Romans, the prophets would not have needed to emphasize Christ’s coming, and the people would not have longed for His appearance. For God to be faithful to keep His promises, He had to send a Redeemer.

Whatever God’s manifold reasons for bringing about this result in that time, Jeremiah wrote this under the Spirit’s direction—therefore we are to read and learn (cf. 1 Cor. 10:26). God gave Jeremiah these words to put in Jerusalem’s mouth. The history of her destruction is recorded by others (in and out of Scripture), but Jeremiah speaks for her heart. If nothing else, we see clearly that when God causes the consequences of our sin to fall on us, our response is to lament—recognizing the depth of our sin, meditating on God’s holiness and sovereignty, repenting, and returning to living for His glory and worshipping Him in spirit and in truth.

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Following God—by Erik Christensen

Being Subject to One Another: Husbands and Wives Ephesians 5:21-33

In Ephesians 5:21, Paul finalizes his whole series of statements connected with being filled with the Holy Spirit and walking in wisdom by commanding, “*and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.*”

In his classic work on this great epistle, Harold Hoehner states: “In this text, a result of believers filled by the Spirit is submission to one another in the body of believers. Unbelievers tend to take great pride in

individualism and independence, which leads to selfishness. However believers are to act differently.”

Paul, in stressing a walk that is worthy of the calling (4:1) and being filled with the Spirit (5:18), now gives an entire explanation of what it means within the Church body as well as the Christian family “*to be subject to one another.*” All of this is within the context of what it means to “*walk in wisdom*” from verse 15.

Paul deals with several very important relationships. First, Paul deals with the spousal relationship of husbands and wives. In verses 22-33 Paul gives specific commands regarding how husbands should act as well as wives. He also takes this relationship and uses it as a picture of Christ and the Church. Secondly Paul deals with the parent-child relationship and how children should be obedient to their parents. Lastly, in the culture when Paul wrote his letter, there was still slavery. Paul deals with the relationship between the master and slave. In our time, the principles Paul brings forth are very relevant to the relationship of a worker to a boss or vice versa.

The first issue here is the primary one—submitting to one another. It is amazing how this has been left out of much of the discussion regarding the husband and wife roles/relationships. In essence, the demand is that Christ is first, and as a result there is a willingness of believers to submit to one another. For the husband, it becomes clear that this is an all-out life sacrifice for his wife, just as Christ gave His life for the church. For wives, this is a willingness to submit to her husband's leading just as the Church does with the Lord who is our Head. In both cases, the emphasis is on love and sacrificial serving of one another. Simply put, a husband submits to his wife's need while a wife submits to her husband's lead.

Interesting to note is the amount of space Paul uses to speak to the husband's role. Many times, we focus on the command for woman to "submit" but Paul clearly spends quite a bit of time giving the "why" regarding a wife's submission to her husband. Verses 23-31 are all about what the husband is to do in serving his wife.

With that said, there are several things necessary for husbands that need to be addressed. Spirit-filled, Christ led husbands, are essential in leading their wives, families, and the Body of Christ.

Men need first of all to be surrendered in their hearts to God. In order to be godly leaders, husbands need to know the Lord in deep relationship as He is our Father. The Lord taught us to pray: "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name...'" (Matt. 6:9).

Elsewhere, Paul writes: "Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for

Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him" (1 Cor. 8:6). And to the Romans, he said, "For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, 'Abba! Father!'" (Rom. 8:14-15).

Husbands need to be not only surrendered but also Spirit-filled. In order to lead, husbands need to be led. In other words, men must be followers of Christ who are led by the Spirit of God.

The Spirit strengthens us, as Paul previously stated in 3:16, "that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man." He teaches us: "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words" (1 Cor. 2:12-13). He leads us: "But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law" (Gal. 5:18).

Lastly, men or husbands who are surrendered and Spirit-filled will serve their wives by submitting to meet their needs. The Spirit of God will produce within us His love, as Paul makes clear in Galatians 5:22-23: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law."

In Ephesians, it is clear that submitting to one another is not only a reflection of being filled with the Spirit but also walking in wisdom. Clearly, husbands are to love their wives in such a way as to serve them, reflecting the tremendous way in which the Lord loves His Church. This can only take place through surrendering to Christ and being Spirit-filled. Are we following the Lord in this? Is the Lord being seen in and through our lives along with the way in which we love our wives? May the Lord lead all of us to submit to one another as we follow Him.

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Points to Ponder—by David L. Olford

From "Went" to "Sent": The Jesus Mission—Part 1

Text: "And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. When He saw the crowds, He had compassion on

them..." (Matt. 9:35-36a). "These twelve Jesus sent out..." (Matt. 10:5a).

Thought: The mission of Jesus continues today. The Book of Acts records the start of the mission to the nations as it spread outward from Jerusalem to Rome, but in

this text the mission is restricted to Israel. We are seeing Jesus in action and on mission in Israel. But this text gives us a pattern to follow and principles to apply as we are on mission with Jesus today by the power of the Holy Spirit. To be fully involved in Jesus' Mission today:

I. We Must Grasp the Nature of Jesus' Ministry (verse 35)

Jesus' ministry was incarnational: "*And Jesus went throughout the cities and villages....*" This verse is a summary statement concerning Jesus' ministry. Jesus went to the people, He didn't wait for the people to come to Him; He went throughout the cities, the villages and the countryside. Jesus came into this world to reach and redeem people and here we see Him travelling throughout Galilee teaching, preaching and healing. Jesus became a human being in order to save human beings, and you see this mission in the way He reached out to people consistently.

Jesus' ministry was transformational: "*teaching... proclaiming...healing....*" Through His teaching and preaching, Jesus **declared** the kingdom of God. Through His miracles, healings and the casting out of demons, He **demonstrated** the kingdom of God. Jesus didn't come just to present ethical instructions or to do good deeds. Jesus came declaring that God the Father, in fulfillment of His promises was now intervening and was acting to redeem His people and establish a new covenant with them. This was and is the "good news." Of course, Jesus still had to go to the cross and be raised from the dead, be exalted on high, send the Holy Spirit, and plan to return to accomplish Kingdom purposes, but the kingdom of God was breaking into history in a new and profound way, because the King had come. God's rule and reign was being manifested.

With the coming "*at hand*" of the Kingdom there comes transformation. Jesus taught transforming truth, and Jesus did transforming miracles, because He was seeking to transform people's lives through repentance and belief in the Gospel, and through the power of the kingdom.

Our mission today needs to be incarnational and transformational. We need to reach people and we need to bring transformation through the truth and the power of the Gospel of King Jesus. We see this incarnational and transformational ministry continue in the Book of Acts. The nature of Jesus ministry was not only to teach and preach, but to change. He not only brought truth, He brought transforming truth, Kingdom truth. These truths would bring a new relationship with God, and a new hope for being a part of Kingdom consummation. He also demonstrated Kingdom power, which brought transformation as the level of human need. Jesus had to go to the cross to accomplish the redemptive kingdom mission, but He declared Kingdom truth and demonstrated Kingdom power and transformation on the way to the cross.

II. We Need to Share the depth of Jesus' Compassion (Verse 36a)

"*When He saw the crowds, He had compassion on them.*" We are used to thinking this about Jesus, but we need to reflect on His compassion. Jesus saw people. At times, we don't even see the people around us or their needs. We can even be fooled by the outward prosperity of people, and not see the reality of the eternal needs as well as practical needs that people still have. Human need is all around us, and sometimes we need "new eyes," the eyes of Jesus.

Jesus didn't see the crowd as taking up His time, draining His energy, getting in the way of His plans. The crowd was His plan. And He saw them as "harassed and helpless," scattered with no one to care for them. We need to travel into the heart of Jesus and feel His passion, His compassion for needy people, indeed His compassion for a needy world.

Jesus' mission today requires compassion if it is to be done Jesus' way, indeed God's way (see Exodus 3). The Apostle Paul speaks of sharing the afflictions of Christ (Col. 1:24) as being a part of his ministry. When sending Timothy to find out the spiritual condition of the Philippians he commends Timothy not only for being concerned about the things of Christ, but for his concern for the Philippians themselves (Phil. 2:20). That is why he could send Timothy, because Paul knew that Timothy "cared." Timothy had compassion for the people in Philippi.

The Great Commission requires all of us to be about "*making disciples of all nations.*" We need, though, to reach people with compassion in our hearts. Sometimes God leads us by giving us a special burden, a genuine compassion for a specific group of people. At the same time, there is no excuse for lacking compassion for all people, and especially those who come across our paths.

We need to visit the cross and stay there until we sense the compassion of Jesus for us. At the same time, this very text says it well. We need to walk with Jesus and see Jesus meeting people, responding to people's needs, and seeking to proclaim the good news of the kingdom. More than that, we need to pray specifically that we will have His eyes and His heart as we engage people every day.

Thrust: We have a wonderful Savior and Lord, who is also our example as we seek to continue His mission in this world. By the power of His Holy Spirit, we need to continue His ministry with His compassion today.

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

Jewels from Past Giants

The Comforts of God—Part 2 of 2

By Alexander Whyte

Originally preached as a sermon by Whyte and published in 1906 as part of the collection In Remembrance of Me. Edited slightly for modern spellings.

“Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God” (Isa. 40:1).

III. The Comfort of Repentance

But, let this be said in the same breath with all that—this caution and correction—that no man living in any known sin is ever comforted of God. The Holy Ghost never yet spoke one word of all His abounding consolations to any man so long as he lived in any actual sin, or in any neglect of known duty. You have that much-needed caution bound up into the very heart of God’s great name, when He proclaimed His great Name to Moses. *“The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and”*—and here comes this great correction and caution—*“will by no means clear the guilty”* (Ex. 34:6-7). That is to say, as long as you are living in any guilt, as long as your conscience accuses you, He will by no means clear or comfort you. *“He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy”* (Prov. 28:13), but he only.

You do not really care for God’s mercy or His comfort either, so long as you live in any sin. And it is well that you do not; for you can have neither. Your peace will be like a river when you put away your sin; but not one word of true peace, not one drop of true comfort, can you have till then. You will have to put out God’s eyes, and pervert His judgment, and turn His Throne upside down, before you can have His comfort with your sin. Choose which you will have: *“If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him”* (John 14:23). Are you that man? Are you intending to be that man? And when and in what are you to begin? Are you from this day to keep that word of His, which up to this day you know you have not kept?

Then, from this day Jesus and His Father will come to your good and honest, if broken and contrite heart, and will make their abode with you. And from this memorable day it will be said over you from heaven, what was said from heaven in Israel over all the men in Israel like you: *“To this man will I look, saith the Lord, even to him that is*

poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembleth at My word” (Isa. 66:2).

IV. The Comfort of Obedience

This is the rule, then, that comfort comes with obedience. But there are exceptions to every rule; and God’s rules with His people are full of exceptions. His people are so full of idiosyncrasy, non-conformity, and originality that no rule could possibly be laid down that would cover them all, or indeed, any two of them all. And hence it is that God has to make as many rules in His sanctification and comfort of His people as He has people to sanctify and comfort. Every new addition made to God’s people has a new rule made for itself. Heman (of Psalm 88) and Job are great favorites with the profunder of the Puritan case-preachers. Heman and Job were famous exceptions to the common rule that comfort comes with obedience. And you may possibly be a New Testament Job or Heman. You may, like them, have been chosen of God on a special platform on which God is going to display some deep and sovereign exception to His usual manner of dealing with His people.

That may be so; but you will be well advised not to assume that too much till you have proved it true by a lifetime of strict and spiritual obedience. And then, if, after a lifetime of strict and spiritual obedience, you are still left without your promised and expected comfort—why—then you are in good company, and must not complain. “God gives grace,” says Thomas Goodwin, “In cases where He does not give comfort; and then, He is the God of all grace in a far larger extent than of all comfort: yea, and often He gives most grace when He gives least comfort. He carries on some souls—as He carried on Christ at His death—i.e., to the highest acts of obedience, whilst yet He vouchsafes no comfort. Witness that doleful expression of Christ: *‘My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?’*—when yet He was in the highest act of obedience. Thus in thy temptation God will influence thee with grace, secretly assisting and strengthening thee, even when He affords thee no sensible comfort. Carry this home with thee,” adds the great preacher comfortably, “thou who hast for so many years been tossed with tempest and not comforted.”

V. Comfort for the Tormented Sinner

“Oh,” some of you will say in answer to all that—“you speak of exceptions, but I am an exception in nothing but in the corruption of my heart. How could God or man

comfort a heart like mine? No man sees my heart; else all men would flee from me. And it is because God sees my heart that He has so forsaken me. Do not speak about comfort to me! I want no comfort: I want—if God would give it and could give it—I want a clean heart. That, as God is my witness, would be comfort enough for me. I want the devil and hell taken out of my heart,” you protest. Your only moments of comfort are not when your corn and wine abound, but when the devil is asleep for a season. “O, wretched man that I am! I am of all men the most miserable!”

Yes! And No! You are; and you are not. I will tell you a far greater misery than yours, and a far greater wretchedness. It is a great deal worse misery to be miserable and not to know it. To be poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked, and to think, all the time, that you are rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing. At your worst, that is not your misery. If to know your misery is any alleviation of it, then surely that alleviation is yours. If to know nothing but misery is any preparation for God’s mercy—as it is—then according to your own showing and out of your own mouth, who among us all is prepared for God’s mercy this day like you?

There is only one Scripture you ever get any comfort out of. This is your text every morning, and you come back to it every night. “*The good that I would, I do not,*” you say, “*but the evil which I would not, that I do*” (Rom. 7:19). Very good. But, come on! Come on, and complete your own scripture—“*I find, then, a law that when I would do good, evil is present with me*” (Rom. 7:21). And come on still—“*For I delight in the law of God after the inward man.... O wretched man!*” (Rom. 7:22, 24a), you cry of your own accord, yes; but there is more—“*I thank God through Jesus Christ my Lord. There is therefore now no condemnation*” (Rom. 7:25-8:1), and ere ever you are aware, you will be swimming in a sea of comfort, a sea without a bottom or a shore. You are launched upon the eighth chapter of the Romans, and into the ocean of comfort, out of which that great chapter is but a cup.

VI. Comfort for the Prayerless

You would let go; you would yield yourself up on the spot to any of God’s comforts He or His servants are pleased to speak to you this day—if it were not that you are such an atheist and scandal in prayer. But your conscience is so in prison about prayer that you feel as if you must flee from the Lord’s table. Bad as your heart is, and bad as your life has been, yet there is nothing that makes you feel so despicable and so castaway as your shameful neglect of prayer. You like to read books about prayer. You like to hear sermons about prayer. You reverence and love the men of prayer. But all that only makes you a greater beast before God. You are in positive despair about prayer. And yet, you know on the testimony of thousands, and on the assurance

of God’s Word in endless places—that prayer is, of all things a mortal man can perform, by far the most blessed.

How can prophet, or apostle, or the Holy Ghost Himself, comfort you? You refuse to be comforted! The greatest and the best of comforts is in your own house, is every day, morning and night, and seven times a day, in your own heart; and you will not move a hand or foot to take it. There is no mystery about prayer: no mystery, but its nearness, and its easiness, and its sureness, and its fruitfulness, and its supreme, immediate, and everlasting blessedness. Only begin to pray. Prayer, of all things, only needs a beginning. Begin, and it will beat you to give over. Begin, and you will be a man of prayer yourself before you know where you are—a man of power with God, and not only a greatly comforted man yourself, but a fountainhead of comfort to many others.

What a father you would then begin to be and what a mother! What a sister and what a brother! What a friend and what a lover! What a minister and what a member! For you would have a well of comfort springing up in your own heart; and out of your heart comfort would flow like a river, far and near round about you. Till you, even you would be found exclaiming with Paul: “*God comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them that are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God*” (2 Cor. 1:4) “You will comfort My people,” says your God to His servants, “if you could prevail with them to pray.” We shall do our best, O God! Only pour out on us all, prophets and people, the promised spirit of prayer and supplication!

VII. The Comfort of Communion

But the Lord’s Supper is the crown and the seal of all our best comforts in this life. And you will never be nearer the “*God of all comfort*” till you sit down with Him in heaven, than you will be immediately, in a few moments. “*I sat,*” says the Bride, “*under His shadow with great delight, and His fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me into His banqueting-house, and His banner over me was love*” (Songs 2:3-4).

As John Newton wrote in song:

“Thou art coming to a King;
Large petitions with thee bring:
For His grace and power are such,
None can ever ask too much.”

Alexander Whyte (1837-1921), a Free Church of Scotland clergyman, was born at Kirriemuir, Forfarshire, and educated at the University of Aberdeen, New College, Edinburgh. Ordained a deacon, he became assistant pastor of Free St. John’s, Glasgow, from 1866-1870. He was minister of Free St. George’s, Edinburgh, from 1870 until 1909. After 1909, he served as professor of New Testament literature and principal of New College, Edinburgh.

Remembered as a powerful preacher overflowing with evangelistic zeal, he hosted D. L. Moody and Ira Sankey on

their first trip to Scotland in the 1870s.

Counselor's Corner—by James Rudy Gray

Easter Is Personal

I like Easter more than Christmas! Both are special and essential, and while the birth of Jesus is certainly significant, the resurrection of Christ from the dead is the foundation of our faith as Christians. 1 Corinthians 15:17 says, “*If Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.*” But the resurrection of Jesus changes everything for believers.

Currently, I am re-reading *The Valley of Vision*, a collection of prayers and meditations by the Puritans. Recently I read a chapter, “The Spirit’s Work,” where the author wrote, “Lead me to the cross and show me his wounds, the hateful nature of evil, the power of Satan; May I there see my sins as the nails that transfixed him, the cords that bound him, the thorns that tore him, the sword that pierced him.”

My mind began to think of two words “for me.” The suffering, mockery, and ridicule that Jesus suffered were for me. The loneliness like no one has ever experienced was for me. His pain and suffering from the spear thrust into His side, the pummeling He endured from the hands of His executioners, and the crown of thorns pressed onto His head were all for me. The scourging that nearly took His life was for me. When He breathed His last painful breath on the cross and died, it was for me. “*God made Him who knew no sin to become sin on my behalf that I might become the righteousness of God in Him*” (2 Cor. 5:21).

He died for me so I could live forever with Him and for Him. The resurrection proved that God the father had accepted forever the sacrifice of Jesus for sin. His birth, His life, and even His death on the cross awaited the

confirmation given by the resurrection. It proved that Jesus is who He says He is and that He accomplished what He came to do. For all of us who truly believe, the result is forgiveness, acceptance, and purpose.

Ronnie Hinson and Mike Payne wrote a song that reflects the personal nature of what Jesus did for those of us who believe, “When He was on the cross, I was on His mind.” The late E.V. Hill once commented on the power of the resurrection in a sermon. “That first Easter is so far away,” he said, “but I am here with the proof.” The reality of the resurrection is alive in those who are alive in the risen Savior. The resurrection can stand alone on its own merits, but the personal joy that comes from the new birth is indescribable.

The resurrection is personal, but it is not simply about you and me. It is about God’s glory. Our call is to glorify him in whatever we do. There is rejoicing in heaven when a sinner comes to Christ. He is the resurrection and the life and we are blessed through saving faith in Him.

I hope you will take time to meditate on what Christ did on the cross; why He did it; and for whom He did it. Think about it personally with gratitude and praise—it was for me.

Have a blessed Resurrection Day celebration.

James Rudy Gray is certified as a professional counselor by the National Board for Certified Counselors, and is a member of the American Association of Christian Counselors. He serves as the editor of *The Baptist Courier*, the official newspaper of the South Carolina Baptist Convention.

The Story behind the Song—by Lindsay Terry

“Author Unknown”

Song: “Come into His Presence”

“*Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto Him with psalms*” (Psalm 95:2).

The story behind this song, told to me by Lynn Baird in an interview in the early part of 2002, took place more than twenty years ago.

Lynn was born in 1952, in Phoenix, Arizona. He says of his conversion, “My earliest experience with the Lord was when I was about six years of age. I remember

becoming convicted of my need for Christ while at church. So I went forward at the close of a morning service and shared my thoughts with the pastor. Following the service he took me to his office, where he led me to a personal knowledge of Christ as my Savior. I was then baptized.”

In the early 1970s, while still a teenager and playing in a band, Unity, that he formed, Lynn also opened a coffeehouse, a place for young people to come, have refreshments, and hear Christian music along with a

message from the Bible. It grew to the extent that a couple of hundred attended each weekend.

The band members of Unity started a very successful Bible study with those who frequented the coffeehouse. Out of this group a church was planted called Foundation Fellowship. Lynn became one of the pastors and was in charge of the music ministry. He often wrote songs for their worship on Sunday mornings. This gave him tremendous encouragement plus an outlet for his songwriting.

The writing of Lynn's most famous song took place during the early days of his ministry. He related it thus: "In mid-1976, our family went to Oak Creek, in northern Arizona, a place where we had vacationed for years. We were staying in a mobile home in that resort area, surrounded by riverbeds and 'washes.' One day, while there, I decided to go for a hike. While walking through those wilderness places, the Lord dropped a melody and some lyrics into my mind. As soon as I was able to do so, I found something—I don't remember what—on which to write it all down. When I got to an instrument where I could play and sing the song, I became skeptical that it would even work, so I simply filed it away.

"Perhaps a year later, I pulled my song out of the files and played it for our praise band. Their response was positive, so we prepared to sing it during a Sunday morning service. It was so well received that we continued to sing it for five to six years—until it became old to us.

"In 1986, I was attending a leadership retreat in Scottsdale, Arizona. Before the start of the first morning session, a gentleman who was to be the worship leader for the retreat said to me and a few others standing near, 'Integrity has come out with a new praise and worship

tape.' We all looked to Integrity and eagerly awaited those tapes to get more worship materials. I thought you would like to hear the tape,' he continued. He played it for us, and the first song on the tape was 'Come into His Presence.' I excitedly said, '**That is my song!** I wonder how they got it!' All of us in that small group were just blown away. To add to my surprise, on the tape box, among the credits, the song was listed as 'author unknown. To this day it has never been determined how they got my song, but they have since recognized me as the author.'

"Come into His Presence" has extended the ministry of Lynn Baird a thousandfold. This, Lynn's only published song, is found in hymnals, in children's projects, on exercise tapes, on the *Songs 4 Worship* CD series, and in chorus books, just to name a few places. As I write this story, he continues to write songs for Abundant Life Community Church in Pasadena, California, where he is a pastor.

In Psalm 100, God lets us know that when we come into his presence he is pleased to have us praise him, sing to him, and be thankful to him—"Serve the Lord with gladness: come before his presence with singing. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name" (Ps. 100:2, 4).

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Lindsay Terry has been a song historian for more than 40 years, and has written widely on the background of great hymns and worship songs including the books *I Could Sing of Your Love Forever* (2008), from which this piece is excerpted, and *The Sacrifice of Praise* (2002).

Church Builders—by Bernard R. DeRemer

P.P. Bilhorn: Praising the Lord with Song

Peter Philip Bilhorn (1862-1936) was born at Mendota, Ill. His father's early death left the family impoverished. At age seven, Peter himself was barely saved from drowning. Already the Lord was at work in his young life.

When he was 15, the family moved to Chicago and opened a carriage business. At 19, he was saved in the Chicago Avenue Church (now Moody Church) under the preaching of George F. Pentecost and the singing of George C. Stebbins. Having discovered his own musical gift, he began to study music under George F. Root. Also he studied the Bible and started evangelistic preaching.

He attended Mt. Hermon School, East Northfield, Mass., founded by D.L. Moody. Thereafter he "devoted himself to preaching and singing the Gospel." His

evangelistic work took him into all the states of the Union, Great Britain, and other foreign countries. He served as the song leader for Billy Sunday's evangelistic meetings for a season ending in 1908.

Bilhorn invented a portable pump organ for use in his travels and street meetings. The miniature instrument known as the "Bilhorn Telescope Organ" weighed just 16 pounds. He began manufacturing them in 1887, and they were soon in demand all over the world, blessing many in out of the way places with music before the advent of reliable phonographs, radio, and television.

Bilhorn compiled several song books and wrote nearly 2,000 hymns and Gospel songs including "Peace, Peace, Sweet Peace," "I Will Sing the Wondrous Story," and "Drinking at the Living Fountain."

He passed away in 1936 in Los Angeles, California. “Well done, thou good and faithful servant...” (Matt. 25:21).

for *Pulpit Helps* Magazine. He continues to serve in this capacity as a volunteer contributor to *Disciple*. He lives in West Liberty, Ohio.

Bernard R. DeRemer chronicled the lives of dozens of heroes of the faith in more than a decade of writing

Reference: *Who Was Who in Church History*, by Elgin S. Moyer; excerpts used by permission of Moody Publishers.

Advancing the Ministries of the Gospel

Os Guinness Helps AMG Support National Workers

By AMG International Staff

“The time has come to trust God, move out, sharing and demonstrating the good news, following His call and living out our callings in every area of our lives, and then leave the outcome to Him.”

So says Christian author and social critic Os Guinness in his latest book, *Renaissance: The Power of the Gospel However Dark the Times*. Over his career, Guinness has returned to this theme over and over, challenging Christians to hold fast to the truth of God revealed in Scripture and to faithfully witness that in the modern world.

On March 26, Guinness will be the featured speaker at “Transforming Lives in the Face of Persecution” for AMG International (*Disciple*’s parent organization). This event at the Chattanooga Convention Center will raise ministry funds for AMG’s national workers—men and women who serve in Gospel missions within their native language and culture.

Guinness’ connection with global missions runs in the family. He was born in China in 1941, where both his parents and grandparents served as medical missionaries with the China Inland Mission. As a child, Os witnessed the climax of the Chinese Revolution under Mao Zedong before his family was among those expelled from the country in 1951.

Os’ heritage of Christian service goes back even further. His great grandfather, Henry Grattan Guinness, was a great Protestant preacher of the Ulster revival in Ireland during the 1850s and 60s and an influential mobilizer for world missions. His great aunt, Geraldine, was also a missionary in China and the daughter-in-law of Hudson Taylor.

Of course, if the family name sounds familiar, the patriarch of this extraordinary family was Os’ great-great-great-grandfather Arthur Guinness, the Dublin brewer, who was a faithful Christian and philanthropist. Arthur, who once heard John Wesley preach, took his message of the devoted Christian life to heart. He was instrumental in beginning Sunday school ministries in Ireland, served on hospital boards, and gave freely to those in need. Even his brewing business was touched by his desire to honor God and help others. In those days, alcohol consumption was

part of everyday life because contaminated water led to many disease outbreaks, but many drank to excess with terrible consequences. Guinness began brewing beer, which with its lower alcohol concentration genuinely helped people avoid excesses of drunkenness.

Os Guinness completed his undergraduate degree at the University of London and his D. Phil. in the social sciences from Oriel College, Oxford. He has been a guest scholar at the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Studies and a guest scholar and visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution. In the late 1980s, he served as executive director of the Williamsburg Charter Foundation, a bicentennial celebration of the First Amendment, where he was the lead drafter of the Williamsburg Charter (signed by former U. S. presidents, Supreme Court justices, and Christian and civic leaders). Os also was the primary drafter of the Global Charter of Conscience in defense of religious freedom, which was published in the E.U. Parliament in 2012.

Guinness founded the Trinity Forum for educating political and cultural leaders in 1991, serving as a senior fellow there until 2004. He has written or edited more than two dozen books on the Christian life, religious freedom, and cultural engagement including *The Call, Time for Truth, God in the Dark, A Free People’s Suicide, The Global Public Square*, and *Renaissance*. He has said that his lifelong passion has been to make sense of our extraordinary modern world and to stand between the worlds of scholarship and ordinary life, helping each to understand the other—particularly when advanced modern life touches on the profound issues of faith.

Before moving to the United States in 1984, Os served on staff at Francis Schaeffer’s L’Abri in Switzerland and worked as a freelance reporter with the BBC. He lives with his wife, Jenny, in McLean, Virginia, and they have a son, C. J., who is a businessman in New York.

“We are so excited to host Os Guinness, and we hope many from our area will join us March 26,” said Patrick Ragan, VP of Development for AMG International. “We see the Lord’s hand clearly in bringing us together with Os to help support our national workers who so

faithfully proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, even in the face of great opposition.”

Ragan said that AMG International’s connection with Guinness is not just a partnership for this particular event, but actually based on a relationship that goes back more than five decades. At a boarding school in England, one of Guinness’ classmates was a young Greek student, Evniki, who later married an aspiring young doctor from the biblical city of Thessaloniki, Demosthenes Katsarkas. In 1973, Dr. & Mrs. Katsarkas opened AMG’s St. Luke’s hospital in Thessaloniki, which is today among the best regarded medical facilities in Eastern Europe. Dr. Katsarkas presently serves on AMG’s board of directors.

If you are in the Chattanooga area and want to attend this event with Os Guinness, please visit www.amgbanquet.org or call (423) 894-6060.

To learn more about AMG’s national worker ministries around the world, discover how you can partner with us, or (if you are in the Chattanooga area) to register for this event with Os Guinness, please visit www.amginternational.org or call 1-800-251-7206.

Advancing the Ministries of the Gospel (AMG) International is a non-denominational, international missions agency based in Chattanooga, Tenn. AMG’s distinctive has always been its reliance on national workers to carry the Gospel in their own cultures. Today, they operate ministries in more than 30 countries around the world through partnership with national believers.

Marks of the Master—by the Old Scot

Searching out the Ordinances of Heaven

When we look up at the stars on a clear night, it is easy to believe that each of those bright points of light lies at an incredible distance from our planet—but only a constant of Nature gives us the assurance that this is really so.

Astronomers tell us that each of those stars is actually a huge emitter of radiant energy, like our Sun—though a great many of them are far bigger and brighter than it. So vast are the distances involved that astronomers had to invent a bigger “yard-stick” to measure them. This unit is the “light-year”—that is, the distance a particle of light travels in a year’s time. Since light travels at the hard-to-imagine speed of 186,000 miles each second, the equivalent number of miles in a light-year is extremely large!

Consider that our nearest neighboring star, Proxima Centauri, is more than four light-years distant, while billions of light-years are believed to separate us from stellar objects as far out in space as we can detect them. So far away are some star clusters and galaxies that for hundreds of years they were thought to be merely gaseous clouds in space, smudges in the heavens. Not until the modern combination of very large telescopes and time-exposure photography was brought to bear upon the problem did we realize that some of these “clouds” are made up of millions upon millions of individual stars.

But the question remained: were they actually so remote, or were they naturally faint stars, which only seemed by their dimness to be very far away? There was no way of being sure of the answer to this question until astronomers began to study a class of stars known as “Cepheid variables.” Variable stars wax and wane in

brightness. One astronomer discovered that the longer the cycle of variation in brightness, the more light the star actually emits. This discovery was tested repeatedly and found to be true for every Cepheid variable star found in our “local” galaxy, the Milky Way.

Then one day another astronomer studied a photograph of the great Andromeda star-cloud, the thought occurred to him that there might be Cepheid variable stars in that galaxy also, and perhaps in all the galaxies in the universe. If so, we could ascertain how distant those galaxies are from our own. Prolonged observation revealed that there are indeed Cepheid-type stars in the Andromeda galaxy, and they have since been discovered in a great number of other galaxies.

Without exception, once their periods (cycles) were charted and translated into intrinsic brightness, they were found to be as bright as local Cepheids with the same periods. But since they appear to us to be extremely faint, the difference must be accounted for by the vast distances their light must travel to reach us. Thus it was that astronomers began to speak of millions and even billions of light-years across the deep reaches of space.

This leads us to wonder how such order and uniformity can exist all across such a huge universe. Why does matter apparently behave everywhere in exactly the same ways it behaves here on Earth? How is it that these Cepheid-type stars have exactly the same characteristics wherever they are found? Why do meteorites, which visit our planet from outer space, contain only familiar metallic and stony compounds which also occur on Earth?

It appears that all the matter in the universe had a common origin and was made to obey the same laws—

which points to one Creator, just as the Bible states: “*In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth.... And God said, ‘Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven.... And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also’*” (Gen. 1:1; 1:16).

God challenged man with this question: “*Knowest thou the ordinances of heaven?*” (Job 38:33). Modern science is still groping for understanding of the laws that govern the heavens. They are searching out the works of God, though tragically, most choose to ignore the Ultimate Source of all things.

But how fortunate are we that God has left us a witness, both in His works and in His Word! His Word tells us that God not only created our Earth and the whole

universe, but that He also yearns over the children of men with a Father’s heart, earnestly desiring that we return to the closeness with Him which Adam and Eve once knew.

The Old Scot (Ted Kyle) served as managing editor for *Pulpit Helps* magazine (*Disciple’s* predecessor publication) from 1993-2008. He was always fascinated by the natural world, and readily saw God’s hand in every detail. Ted went to be with His Creator and Savior in April 2013.

Sources: *Immensity*, Clarence H. Benson, Van Kampen Press, Chicago, 1937. *The Story of Variable Stars*, Campbell and Jacchia, Blakiston Co., Philadelphia, 1941.

Book Review—March 2015

Experiencing the Trinity: The Grace of God for the People of God, Joe Thorn, 2015, Crossway, Wheaton, Ill., ISBN 9781433541681, 140 pages, \$10.99, softcover.

Kevin DeYoung wrote in *The Good News We Almost Forgot*: “The only thing more difficult than finding the truth is not losing it. What starts out as new and precious becomes plain and old. What begins a thrilling discovery becomes a rote exercise.” Joe Thorn, a pastor in the Chicago area ran with this idea in his 2011 book *Note to Self*, which featured 50 brief readings to encourage believers to preach the Gospel and teach the Word daily to our own hearts to avoid the stagnation and sin that so easily creeps in.

Building on the style and concept of *Note to Self*, Thorn has compiled 50 new devotional readings in *Experiencing the Trinity*. His goal here is to plant knowledge of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit deeply in readers’ souls so that our faith in Him is strengthened and our lives are shaped by His character.

These are short pieces, but they are not shallow. There is theological meat on the bones, challenging us to dig into to the Scriptures that Thorn cites and to resist the temptation to reduce God to our own narrow horizons and weak expectations. As you would expect from the title, the book is divided into three sections, one dedicated to each

person of the Godhead. In 15 segments, Thorn calls attention to the nature and attributes of the Father (He is holy, Creator, powerful, present, good, etc.). 20 readings are devoted to exploring the character and work of Christ (His humanity, deity, suffering, obedience, death, resurrection, mission, kingdom, etc.). A final 15 focus on the active, ongoing role the Holy Spirit plays in our lives, highlighting His regeneration, indwelling, comforting, convicting, teaching, and more.

In the introduction, Thorn lays out how personal this book is to him, as it was born out of his own desperation and battles with anxiety. He wrote it, he says, because remembering and meditating on these truths about who God is and what He has done and continues to do restored his spiritual health and zeal for ministry.

This is practical theology at its most practical, calling us to daily prayer and reflection based on the steadfastness of our God rather than the wavering of our own strength and emotions.

Justin Lonas

Target: All

Type: Devotional

Take: Recommended

News Update—March 2015

PCUSA Formally Approves Gay Marriage in Church Constitution

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has formally recognized homosexual marriage and will allow same-sex

weddings. The Church approved a new definition of marriage in the church, which includes “commitment between two people.” The definition was approved last year by the church General Assembly, but needed approval from

a majority of the 171 regional districts. The 86th vote was cast Tuesday night.

The new definition reads: “Marriage involves a unique commitment between two people, traditionally a man and a woman, to love and support each other for the rest of their lives.”

Fox News reports the change will officially take effect June 21. Under the new definition, clergy are not required to preside at a gay marriage; they can decide. According to reports, 41 regional districts voted against the redefinition.

“We hope that such ‘up/down’ voting does not mark the end, but the continuation of our desire to live in community,” the two top General Assembly officials said in a statement released this week. Still, Carmen Fowler LaBerge, president of the Presbyterian Lay Committee, is encouraging Presbyterians to stop donating to the national church until the original definition is restored.

Christian Headlines Daily

Meriam Ibrahim: I Don’t Support *I Am a Christian* Film

Filmmakers are working on a project to bring Meriam Ibrahim’s story to the big screen, but the Sudanese Christian says she has not approve of the film being made.

Ibrahim was raised a Christian from childhood and married a Christian man. However, the Sudanese government viewed the marriage as illegitimate since Ibrahim’s father was a Muslim. She was charged with apostasy and sentenced to 100 lashes and death by hanging, all the time refusing to renounce her Christian faith.

The persecuted Christian woman now says she did not give production company Christian Lives Matter consent to make the film *I Am a Christian*, telling the group that she has already accepted another company’s offer. Ibrahim’s husband Daniel Wani said that they felt Christian Lives Matter was “taking advantage of them.”

Ibrahim told *Christian Today* that she feels as if she is imprisoned in Sudan all over again. The filmmakers are “killing me and killing my dream,” she said.

Christian Headlines Daily

Religious Tensions Simmer across Pakistan following Church Bombings

Tensions simmered across Pakistan between the Muslim majority and Christians following deadly gun-and-bomb attacks on two churches and the subsequent killing of two Muslims on March 15.

At least 17 people, including two policemen, have succumbed to their injuries from the suicide attacks in Lahore’s Youhanabad area, which targeted Christ Church Youhanabad and St. John’s Catholic Church during Sunday

Mass. Christians on March 16 filled roads to protest against the attacks, and one Christian youth was killed and 15 others were wounded in Lahore as violent protests spread from Youhanabad to other parts of the country.

Tensions between Christians and Muslims were such that police had to use tear gas and water cannons to disperse protestors. By evening, the Punjab Home Department had to deploy three companies of paramilitary force, Pakistan Rangers, in the area after a violent standoff between local Muslim and Christian youths from Youhanabad and adjacent localities.

The two Muslims killed were accused of being accomplices of the terrorists and had been handed over to police soon after the bombings. While some local people told Morning Star News that they “had heard that the two suspects were armed with pistols and were firing their weapons at the locals,” others said that the men were suicide bombers who intended to target a third church in the area.

At least two young suicide attackers blew themselves up—one at each church building—just when services were ending. Both attacks were foiled by Christian security volunteers, who confronted the terrorists with bravery and laid down their lives to protect the 2,000 people worshipping at the two churches.

Morning Star News

Mother Ignores Doctors’ Advice to Abort Child, Baby Survives at 26 Weeks

A mother who refused to abort her baby despite doctors’ advice is celebrating her son’s first birthday this week. Michelle Moloney gave birth to “miracle” baby Michael at only 26 weeks. The child weighed only one pound 12 ounces and was born with lung damage.

Moloney’s water broke at 18 weeks; doctors told her that the baby would not survive and recommended inducing labor which would cause the child to die upon delivery. The alternative was to let nature take its course and she would likely miscarry within 10 days.

The Daily Mail reports Moloney said, “I felt my baby kick in the early hours. It was such a definite kick—the reassurance that every expectant mum longs for. Just a few hours later, my waters broke. I felt terrified. It was absolutely devastating. The baby was very scrunched up and very tiny. Doctors said they could either induce labour or let nature take its course in up to ten days. I could feel my baby move. There was no way I could go through with an induction.”

After refusing to induce labor, Moloney went home where she miraculously carried her son for several more weeks. At 24 weeks, she was admitted to the hospital where she stayed until Michael was born two weeks

later. Moloney said, “It was touch and go in the early days. He’s a miracle. I’m so thankful we have our little boy.”

Christian Headlines Daily

Boko Haram Pledges Loyalty to Brutal Islamic State

Boko Haram’s leader has pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in a new audio message, according to a group that monitors extremist activity.

In the recording, a man claiming to be Abubakar Shekau, leader of the Nigerian terrorist group that has killed thousands, vowed to follow Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the U.S.-based SITE Intel Group, announced on March 7.

“We announce our allegiance to the Caliph of the Muslims... and will hear and obey in times of difficulty and prosperity, in hardship and ease, and to endure being

discriminated against, and not to dispute about rule with those in power, except in case of evident infidelity regarding that which there is a proof from Allah,” Shekau said in a tweeted message that went along with the video, according to the Associated Press. Al-Baghdadi is the self-proclaimed head of the caliphate.

Flashpoint Intelligence, a global security firm, confirmed the recording to NBC News and said it was posted on Boko Haram social media accounts. *USA Today* was not able to independently verify the message. The pledge would make Boko Haram the largest extremist group to agree to fight under the Islamic State, *The New York Times* reported. Still, it’s uncertain what level of coordination the two terrorism groups would have, though there has been growing signs of a link between them.

Christian Headlines Daily

Sermon Helps—from www.sermonhall.com

Sermon Outlines

God’s Suffering Servant

Isaiah 53

Intro.: Jesus Christ drew us to His place, while He stepped into ours, taking upon Himself all the consequences of our sin. What can we say of God’s suffering Servant?

I. While Hell Focused on Him, He Focused on Us.

A. He Knew:

1. Sorrow.

2. Grief.

B. He was treated like a leper. People hid their faces from Him.

C. He was disparaged and disrespected.

D. He was beaten and afflicted.

E. But He:

1. Bore our griefs.

2. Carried our sorrows.

II. While Forfeiting His Own Well-Being, He Labored for Ours

A. For our transgressions—pierced!

B. For our iniquities—crushed!

C. For our healing—scourged!

1. The passion of Christ.

2. Bruised all over.

3. Cut and bleeding.

Conc.: While we were yet in our sins, Jesus Christ died for you and me. God’s Son gave Himself as a living propitiation to His Father, for our rebellion, that we might be cleansed and prepared for that Great Day of salvation and glory. What have you given of yourself that you might be so presented on that day?

J. A. Gillmartin

Why We Must Believe in the Resurrection of Christ

Mark 16

Intro.: The original “Resurrection Sunday” was a day of unbelief. Three times unbelief is mentioned in this account (vv. 11, 13, 14). “*Without faith it is impossible to please God*” (Heb. 11:6). We must believe in the resurrection of Christ because:

I. There Can Be No Justification without It

A. Jesus was raised for our justification (Rom. 5:1).

B. We are justified by faith (Rom. 5:1).

C. Faith in what? His resurrection!

II. There Can Be No Salvation without It

A. We will be saved if we believe in our heart that God raised Christ from the dead (Rom. 10:9-10).

B. “*He that believes...*” Mark 16:16. Believes in what? The resurrection! (v. 14).

III. There Can Be No Heaven without It

A. “*If we believe that Jesus died and rose again...*” (1 Thess. 4:13-17).

B. “*If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable*” (1 Cor. 15:19).

Conc.: Faith in the resurrection is the very keystone of Christianity. When removed, all must invariably crumble into ruin. It is the citadel of the Christian faith. It is the doctrine that turned the ancient world upside down—that distinguished Christianity from Judaism and the pagan religions of the Mediterranean world. But just as the presence of the reviling thief on the cross shows that a person can be right next to Jesus and yet be lost; just as the mocking Athenians show that you can hear the greatest

gospel preacher and still be lost, so does this message reveal that one can hear a message on the resurrection of Christ and still be lost—unless one believes and makes a confession of that new belief!

Victor Knowles

Sermon Illustrations

Eternal Life in Christ

On opening an Etruscan tomb, it was found to be occupied by the skeleton of a king. After thousands of years, he still wore, amid the gloom and ghastliness of the grave, a remainder of his former state of majesty. A rough fillet of gold had been placed around the skull—a mocking satire on his present condition, was a memorial of his previous greatness. Such a crown man wears in his hopes of immortality. Like indestructible gold, they have survived the fall and its spiritual death, though they are only vestiges of his departed glory. Of himself, and until quickened by Him who is the Resurrection and the Life, he cannot wear them as his crown; but when the Son of God raises the soul from its death; then He brings life and immortality to light, and life, kingly and eternal, becomes his blessed and abiding possession.

The Corruptible Made Incorruptible

A professor of biology made it his custom to stand before his students holding up a little seed between his thumb and forefinger. When he bowed before the seed, his students were mystified. This university professor had spent his whole life studying the beginning of life, and he acknowledged to his students that it was still a mystery to him. He said: “I know exactly what this seed consists of in the exact proportions of water, carbon, and other elements. I can mix these individual elements and make a seed that will look exactly like this one. If I plant the seed that I have compounded, it will rot. The various elements I have put together will be absorbed by the ground. However, if I sow the seed that God made, it will spring up into a plant, because it contains that mysterious element we call life.”

The physical resurrection of Christ is just as much a mystery. In fact, the life you now possess which causes your body to function and renew itself continually, and not collapse into a putrefying mass, is also a mystery. He, therefore, who in the beginning created our present

corruptible bodies, will also create a new body without having to collect the various elements of our old ones from the earth.

Bulletin Inserts

On The Resurrection

Easter says you can put truth in a grave, but it won't stay there.

Clarence W. Hall

Easter is the demonstration of God that life is essentially spiritual and timeless.

Charles M. Crowe

We live and die; Christ died and lived!

John R.W. Stott

Once more to new creation awake, and death gainsay, for death is swallowed up of life, and Christ is risen today!
George Newell Lovejoy

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

Augustine of Hippo

These five via www.quote garden.com

There is no detour to holiness. Jesus came to the resurrection through the cross, not around it.

Leighton Ford

Live as if Christ died yesterday, arose this morning, and is coming back tomorrow

Anonymous

No gift is more needed by a dying world than a living Savior.

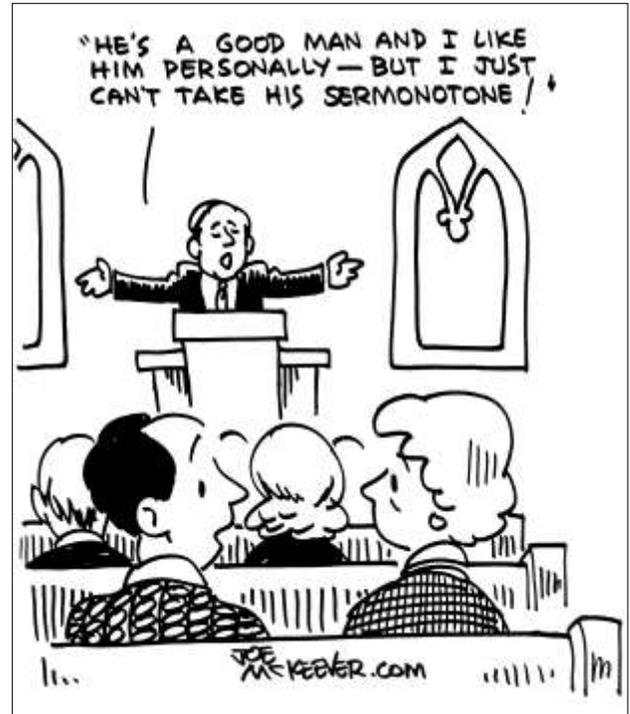
Croft M. Pentz

Three men died on Calvary: one for sin, one in sin, and one to sin. These three propositions cover the whole human race. Do not die in sin. Die to it by receiving as your Savior Him who died for it in your stead.

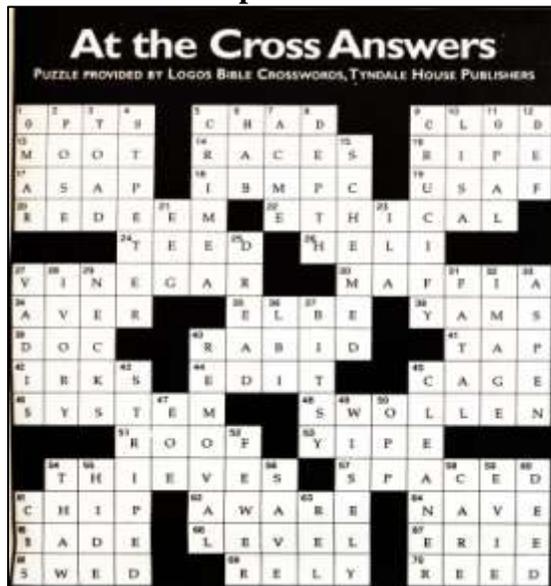
George Guille

Puzzles and ‘Toons

Church ‘Toons by Joe McKeever



Answers to last issue's puzzles:



Hidden Wisdom and Father Abraham

By Mark Oshman

Originally published in *Pulpit Helps*, June 1999

**Father Abraham's
Question Box**

By Mark Oshman

The Gospel of Matthew, Part 2
Fill in the missing word(s):

1. Who described himself as "a man under authority"? (Matt. 8)
2. What was Matthew doing when Jesus Christ called him to follow Him? (Matt. 9)
3. Who did Jesus Christ tell His apostle to fear? (Matt. 10)
4. What city did Jesus Christ declare would be "brought down to hell"? (Matt. 11)
5. What was the only sign Jesus Christ gave to His contemporaries? (Matt. 12)
6. In the parable of the wheat and the tares, what does "the field" represent? (Matt. 13)
7. Who asked Jesus to allow Him to walk on water? (Matt. 14)
8. Why did a woman of Canaan come to Jesus Christ? (Matt. 15)
9. Where did Peter confess that Jesus was "the Christ, the Son of the living God"? (Matt. 16)
10. What did Jesus Christ say Peter would find inside the mouth of a fish he would catch? (Matt. 17)

Solution on page 32

Hidden Wisdom: Bible Acrostic

by Mark A. Oshman

Solve the acrostic by using the clues to guess the words and by transferring the letter above each number to its appropriate place in the diagram. The result will be a Scripture verse of admonition, comfort, or instruction. Further, the initial letters of the answers will contain the name of the book from which the verse was taken. All quotations are from the King James Version. HAPPY SOLVING!

1H	2A	3K	4G	5I	6F	7D		8L	9F	10E		11H	12A	13G	14L	15E	
16B	17C		18L	19F		20H		21E	22J	23H	24K		25A	26F	27J	28L	29E
		30A	31G	32L	33C		34H		35J	36F	37G	38D		39A			
40L	41E	42G	43J	44B		45E	46F	47D	48I	49H		50K	51I	52L	53A		54E
	55J	56B	57D			58G	59J		60H	61I	62A	63E	64L	65J	66F	67C	
68A	69H	70K		71F	72L	73A	74E		75H	76G	77C	78S	79K		80G	81I	
82D		83B	84L	85E	86F	87B		88L	89A	90F	91E		92D	93A			

CLUES

- | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| A. <i>Gaultheria procumbens</i> | 30 | 39 | 89 | 68 | 25 | 73 | 12 | 62 | 93 | 2 | 53 |
| B. Without movement | 16 | 87 | 56 | 83 | 44 | | | | | | |
| C. Go to them, sluggards, and be wise! | 77 | 33 | 17 | 67 | | | | | | | |
| D. Paul was shepwrecked near here | 92 | 7 | 38 | 47 | 57 | 82 | | | | | |
| E. "_____ upon ever remembrance of you" (4wds.) | 54 | 10 | 41 | 45 | 15 | 63 | 21 | 29 | 85 | 91 | 74 |
| F. Largest city in West Virginia | 6 | 86 | 36 | 46 | 71 | 19 | 66 | 90 | 9 | 26 | |
| G. The kingdom of Judah, allegorically (Ezek. 23) | 13 | 76 | 4 | 37 | 58 | 80 | 42 | 31 | | | |
| H. N.T. opponents of Jesus Christ | 69 | 49 | 1 | 20 | 60 | 34 | 11 | 23 | 75 | | |
| I. He restored to life the son of a Shunemite woman | 81 | 78 | 5 | 48 | 51 | 61 | | | | | |
| J. Mr. Jinks and Krazy, among others | 35 | 65 | 43 | 22 | 59 | 27 | 55 | | | | |
| K. Gem | 3 | 70 | 50 | 24 | 79 | | | | | | |
| L. Mickey's sweetheart (2 wds) | 18 | 84 | 8 | 64 | 14 | 32 | 28 | 72 | 88 | 40 | 52 |