

Wisdom & Power

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We hope each issue gives you something to think about, laugh over, pray on, and pass around.

Readers are urged to submit articles for publication. We can’t guarantee that they will be used, however.

We gladly receive mail from you. Tell us what you think of the magazine.

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On the cover: This is a picture of Sangre de Cristo Mountains in Colorado. By Bob Morrison.

First Words

Redeemed!!

“*Redeemed, how I love to proclaim it!*” That’s a line from one of our old hymns. No doubt you have sang those words. It is a song of joy and celebration. It can lift us up. You may have wondered what it was you were redeemed from? I did. Redemption is a word that we don’t use much anymore. Redeem means: to buy or win back, to free from what distresses or harms, or convert into something of value. Those are terms that help me understand the idea.

Peter tells us our redemption was from the aimless, worthless, empty lifestyle we learned from our fathers (1 Peter 1:18-19). I think anyone who had a hand in forging our character is included. These can be thought of as distressing or harmful to our spiritual development. We may have “inherited” a way of life from our parents that keeps us from being something of value, however that may be perceived.

This contains a great message of hope. We aren’t trapped in a lifestyle we don’t want or one that keeps us from being useful to God. We aren’t sentenced to a life of “recovering” from any form of bondage. We are not prisoners to things that have happened to us at the hands of others. We are not bound by “family values” and prejudices that were impressed on us as we grew up. We have been set free. The blood of Jesus, the lamb without spot or blemish, has done it. Therein lies the hope. There is a possibility of being set free.

As a matter of fact, we are told that part of what Jesus was anointed to do (Isa. 61:1-3), was to proclaim liberty to the captives and to open the prisons for those in bondage, we may not be able to see physical doors opened, but there is no reason to remain in bondage, we have been redeemed, “...how I love to proclaim it...”

Are you caught by something in the past? Are there memories that continue to haunt your life, and hold you back from really living? You can trust the word of God. In Jesus you are set free. It no longer needs to control you. You no longer have to believe the lies associated with it. The self condemnation and accusations are

false, and you aren’t bound by them. Trust what God has promised in Christ, because you are free.

Are you a lot like mom or dad? Have you noticed habits or thinking that your folks had, that you know is wrong, but can’t seem to find a good replacement? Hallelujah, You are set free!

Jesus is Lord of the future, present, and past. With that said, then, the past doesn’t control you. It is a task master with no hope or life. God has given His son as a ransom and a redeemer to set you free from what harms or distresses you.

Trust Him. Let him minister his blood to make your redemption real. Let the past with its chains and oppression fall away and be replaced with the Lordship of Jesus, which will give you hope, joy and excitement now, and life in the age to come.

In this issue we have a couple of responses to an article from the last issue concerning hearing from God. It is important to give consideration to this issue.

I want to welcome a new writer for *W&P*, Kara Taylor. She has written about spiritual gifts.

Patrick Navas has contributed his thoughts on what the gospel involves. This will be a multi-part series.

Jeff Fletcher has written about dead men. You have to read his article to find out what he thinks of them.

I am glad that this issue has come into your hands and you are thinking about reading it. May our great God, Yahweh, bless you as you read.

There is a lot to find out beyond this page, so...

Read on.

Chuck Jones

Dead Man Talking

Pastor Jeff Fletcher

I like a good mystery every now and then, a good story to get involved with for a few hours and read or watch and shut everything else out. I like to see how early into the story I'm able to figure it out. Usually, I do a pretty good job. But a few years ago I went to see a movie called *Sixth Sense*. I knew nothing about the movie when I went to see it, but someone told me it was worth seeing.

It was a story about a very successful child psychologist who is shot at the beginning by one of his former patients because, as he said, "you failed me!"

After he is shot we fast forward several months and see the psychologist attempting to connect with a new patient, a young boy who is having trouble adjusting to his parent's recent divorce and is mercilessly teased by the kids at school. We discover that the little boy has a secret. He finally trusts the therapist enough to disclose the secret – "I see dead people." If that weren't enough, he adds "They don't know they're dead".

Now, the irony we discover at the end of the movie is that the child psychologist who is trying to help him is, in fact, himself dead, but he doesn't know it yet. In the process of helping the young boy deal with his "gift" of talking to dead people, the boy helps him accept his own death and move on.

It was a good mystery and it had me fooled. Of course, the movie was not true. We know from a careful study of the Bible that dead

people don't really "speak". The Bible clearly teaches that when a person dies they go to their grave, where they are in a state of unconsciousness. The Bible frequently uses the term "sleep" to describe the current state of the dead.

Psalm 90:5 says "*You sweep men away in the sleep of death*"

Ecclesiastes 9:5 says: "*For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing...*"

Death is a state of unconscious, unawareness. But there is a hope for life beyond death at the resurrection.

Daniel 12:2 states that "*multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake*".

"I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes. I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!" (Job 19 25,27).

Consistently throughout the Bible, death is compared to sleep. The dead remain in the grave unconscious, but at the resurrection they will awaken and have their bodies restored. Their newly restored bodies will be incorruptible. 1 Corinthians 15:52-53 says it clearly: "*In a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable,*

and the mortal with immortality."

It is only then, at the Last Trumpet, at the end of this age, when Christ himself returns, that the dead will be raised and we will be made immortal. We will be like Jesus is now, unable to die again.

So, if we believe the Bible, we know that there are no ghosts wandering around speaking to us. I know that my father, who died 7 years ago, is not up in heaven watching me. He's not haunting whoever is living in my parent's old house in Louisiana or anywhere else. He is sleeping in his grave. When Jesus comes back, hopefully soon, he will be raised up and made immortal. He will be made new again. It won't be a body that was eaten up with cancer and made weak and frail. It will be a healthy, strong, immortal body.

The dead don't speak, because they are dead, and yet, in a way, the dead do still speak. The Bible uses this metaphorical language to describe the dead.

When Cain killed Abel, God said to Cain "*Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground*" (Genesis 4:10). Now, no one imagines that Abel's blood was literally "crying out" to God from the ground. God is using figurative language here. Abel was dead, but his blood was crying out for justice.

Several years ago a Nun from New Orleans, Sister Helen Prejean, befriended two young men who were on Louisiana's Death Row awaiting execution for horrific murders that they committed. Her

book is titled *Dead Man Walking*, which is what the prison guards call out when a condemned prisoner is being escorted to the electric chair or gas chamber to receive their lethal injection. They aren't literally "dead men who are walking" but metaphorically speaking, they are dead because they are condemned by the state and are going to be executed, so they are as good as dead.

Hebrews 11 could easily be labeled "Dead Men Talking". It contains a summary of many of the great men and women of faith in the Bible who, although they are long dead, through faith are still speaking to us through God's word.

"Dr. Anthony Campolo once did a study in which 50 people over the age of 95 were asked, "If you could live your life over again, what would you do differently?" An array of responses came from these eldest of senior citizens. However, three answers constantly surfaced far more than others. If I had it to do over again, I would reflect more. If I had it to do over again, I would risk more. If I had it to do over again, I would do more things that would live on after I am dead." (Source: Chuck Norris-<http://www.creators.com/opinion/chuck-norris/on-charlton-heston-kirk-douglas-and-aging-well.html>)

Now, how does that happen? How do we create things that live on after we die? Art museums are filled with paintings and sculptures made by those who have long since died; Rembrandt, Monet, Da Vinci. The music of Mozart, Beethoven, and Bach is still enjoyed long after their deaths. The poems of Homer, the plays of Shakespeare, the stories of Steinbeck, the movies of Hitchcock and De Mille, live on long after their creators have died. In a way, although these people are

dead, they still speak to us.

Technology makes it possible for the dead to still speak. Film and audio tapes can preserve the sound of their voices. Cogcast is doing a wonderful job of taking old songs and sermons and preserving and broadcasting them. E. Richard Smith is asleep in the Bethel cemetery and yet recently he has had his sermons broadcast around the world via the internet. He was preaching once again.

Recently I heard a sermon that my father preached in Virginia in 1953. He would be amazed to know that seven years after he fell asleep in death he was preaching the Abrahamic Faith to people in Australia. We can do more things that live on after we die.

*Abel's simple
sacrifice, which
happened nearly 6000
years ago still speaks*

That's pretty significant, isn't it? When you think about it, most people, after they die, are only remembered by about 3 generations.

The faith that my grandfather taught to my father, and my father taught to me, and I teach to my children and when they have children they will pass on to their children, and then to their children's children. As long as his faith lives on, he will live on.

The whole message of Hebrews 11 is that the dead still speak to us, by faith.

Hebrews 11:4 says of Abel "by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead." Abel is in the ground. He is asleep, awaiting the resurrection when Christ comes. Yet, by faith, he is still speaking to us. Just as his blood cried out from the ground to

God, his faith still speaks to us today.

Abel never built a cathedral, never painted a painting, never wrote a book; in fact, as far as we know, he never even married or had children. He was a simple man who raised sheep. Yet he had a heart that loved God and he was moved by his faith and love of God to freely take the best of his flock, to sacrifice it and present the best of it, the fat portions, to God (you can read about it in Genesis 4). Abel loved God and wanted to worship God by giving the best of what he had to Him, and God was very pleased with this sacrifice.

Abel's simple sacrifice, which happened nearly 6000 years ago still speaks to us. Jesus referred to Abel in his teaching, and the writer of Hebrews uses it here as an example of faith.

You never know what impact a simple act of faith will have. A young boy brings his lunch of bread and fish and listens to Jesus preach. People are hungry, there are thousands there listening to Jesus. What is a few fish and some bread to so many people? And yet, in faith, he offers his little fish sandwich and Jesus takes it and feeds 5000 men plus women and children. Two thousand years later, this little boy is long in the grave, and yet his faith in Jesus still speaks to us here.

The writer of Hebrews goes down this list of those who have died, yet their faith still speaks.

Enoch is dead, but he still speaks by faith. He was the 7th generation from Moses. According to Jude, he was a prophet. Genesis says that he walked with God. He was willing to prophecy against sin in his day. It cost him his life, but he still speaks by faith today.

Noah is dead, but he still speaks

by faith. Both Jesus and Peter referred to Noah in their teaching and preaching.

Abraham is dead, but he still speaks by faith. Imagine, a one hundred year old man who lived as a nomad, wandering through the land of Canaan, who went most of his life thinking that he and his wife Sarah would never have children. Yet, 4000 years later, half a world away, there are people who call themselves the Church of God of the Abrahamic Faith. Jesus said that "Abraham rejoiced to see my day". Abraham died before Jesus was born, yet, through the eyes of faith he looked forward, and saw it "at a distance" (Hebrews 11:13).

Abraham was prepared to sacrifice his son Isaac because he believed in the resurrection. Abraham is dead, but he still speaks by faith.

Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses' parents, Moses himself, Rahab the prostitute, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel... they all are dead, but they all still speak through faith.

They all died, and, when the book of Hebrews was written they still had not received what was promised. They were, and are still, asleep in the ground, waiting for the sound of the trumpet, the voice of the archangel at the coming of Jesus. Hebrews 11:39 says that "only together with us will they be made perfect." That will be at the resurrection, when Jesus comes to wake us from our sleeping, to give us our immortal bodies, when we will reign with Christ on the earth along with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Noah, Moses, Rahab, David, Abel, Enoch, Elijah, and Elisha. The list can go on and on. Our loved ones who lived in faith, who died trusting Jesus Christ their Lord and who passed on their faith to us in lives of

faith, who they still speak to us through faith, though they are now asleep in the grave. We are their legacy they left behind.

And now it is up to you and me. If the Lord's return is delayed, what legacy will you and I leave behind?

Remember those who lived to be ninety-five years old who said, "We would have done more things that will live on after we die."? When you live a life of faithfulness to God, in faith, you continue to speak long after you have died.

When you teach, when you encourage others in the faith, when you give your free will offerings out of a heart filled with gratitude toward God, when you serve, when you share your faith with others, when you love the least of these in Jesus' name, you are living a life of faith and leaving a legacy. Your life will speak long after you have gone to sleep in the grave.

What are you doing with your life? Do you want your life to matter long after you have stopped breathing? All that you do in faith to God, in response to what He has done for you in giving Jesus as your savior, is an investment that will last for all eternity in the coming kingdom of God.

Will you commit today to creating a life that will speak forever? If Christ's coming is delayed, one day you will die and join those who sleep in the ground. Don't you want your life to count for something that will last forever?

Houses crumble. Fortunes are lost. Possessions get burned in fires, are destroyed by floods, get rusty, get sold for taxes, or are given away to Goodwill, sold at auctions or fill up landfills. But a life invested in the things of God will pay dividends that last forever. Who knows, one day you too could be a "dead man or a dead woman talking". ☹

Why Go To Church?

Submitted by Dennis Baldwin

A Church goer wrote a letter to the editor of a newspaper and complained that it made no sense to go to church every Sunday. "I've gone for thirty years now," he wrote, "and in that time I have heard something like three thousand sermons. For the life of me, I can't remember a single one of them. So, I think I'm wasting my time and the pastors are wasting theirs by giving sermons at all."

This started a real controversy in the 'Letters to the Editor' column, much to the delight of the editor. It went on for weeks until someone wrote this clincher:

"I've been married for thirty years now. In that time my wife has cooked some 32,000 meals. For the life of me, I cannot recall the entire menu for a single one of those meals. But I do know this; they all nourished me and gave me the strength I needed to do my work. If my wife had not given me these meals, I would be physically dead today. Likewise, if I had not gone to church for nourishment, I would be spiritually dead today!"

When you are down to nothing God is up to something! Faith sees the invisible, believes the incredible and receives the impossible! Thank God for our physical and our spiritual nourishment! Tell your preacher, "Thank you". ☹

What is the “Gospel”?

Understanding the ‘good news’ in the 21st Century

by Patrick Navas

This is a multi-part series looking at what the gospel means for us today.

The term “gospel” literally means “good news.” In the Christian Scriptures, or New Testament, it is described more fully as “the good news of the kingdom of God” (Luke 4:43), “the good news about the Christ” (2 Cor. 2:12), “the good news of peace” (Acts 10:36), and “the good news of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24). The gospel, accepted as “the word of truth,” is a hopeful, joy-inspiring message for “every nation, tribe, tongue, and people” -- revealed by the Creator through prophecy, recorded in sacred Scripture for all generations. It is the joyous news about God’s gift of salvation through faith in Jesus, the long-awaited “Christ” or “Messiah,” and of the Creator’s purpose to “restore all things” by means of the promised kingdom ruled by him. -- Eph. 1:13; 2:8; Col. 1:5; Rev. 14:6; Acts 3:21

It is impossible, though, to truly appreciate the importance of the good news, and its life-giving significance to mankind, without first coming to direct terms with the underlying human and world condition.

The natural world around us, in all the richness of its diversity, is truly marvelous. Even in our

modern age, many thoughtful persons agree that it all appears to have been purposefully designed by a supremely powerful and exceedingly wise Creator. Life itself, under the right conditions, can be so beautiful, so pleasurable, so meaningful—almost perfect. There is, in fact, so much beauty, goodness, and *potential* for goodness in the world—from the sweet harmonies of music, to the enjoyment of wholesome food, to the joyful satisfaction of family life, to the wonder and magnificence of nature (*the entire scope of life’s inherent goodness*)—it seems almost incredible to think that it all could have come about without purpose or apart from some kind of designing intelligence. It is true, of course, that mainstream science cannot conclusively “prove” or “disprove” the existence of God. But one thing science cannot legitimately claim is that *faith* in God’s existence is irrational or without logical basis. Although unable to be proven in a strict, “scientific” sense, it is, nevertheless, entirely reasonable to believe in the existence of a Supreme Being who created the world with a purpose, even in the light of modern science. —Rom. 1:20; Psalm 19:1; 104:1-30; Prov. 3:19

But life in this world, as

experience reveals, is marred so often by sickness, poverty, hatred, injustice, and senseless episodes of human cruelty. History itself is a testimony to countless wars, untold bloodshed, the violent rise and fall of civilizations, and disturbingly repetitive, terrifying measures of human suffering and adversity. In the midst of so much trouble we often find ourselves struggling to simply survive. Yet, if we can find moments of pleasure and meaning in this life, we still mourn for the evil and suffering in the world around us. And, when forced to reflect on it, we despair the inevitable prospect of sickness and death – the eventuality of the generations before us, a reality we all must eventually experience.

In this light it is understandable that humans have often wondered: Is there a God – an invisible, caring, father – like figure in heaven? Is there a *meaning* and *purpose* to our existence in this world? Is it possible that there is some kind of life beyond death? What is the true origin, and what is the ultimate destiny of, humankind? These are the questions only human beings – with our extraordinary intellectual capacities – can, and have, asked, setting us far apart from even the most sophisticated of animals. Yet in the end, as an ancient Scripture soberly reminds us, *all*, human and

animal alike “go to the same place; both were made from the dust, and to the dust they both return.” – Ecc. 3:20

Genesis, the first of the five books of Moses, is another ancient text yielding credible and unparalleled insights into the history and origin of the human race. It tells of the Creator’s wondrous works, and of His original, loving purpose for the human family – setting the stage for reliable comprehension of our universal, human predicament; created, as we were, in “the image of God,” with the innate longing for immortality, yet tragically enslaved to the futility of decay and death.

– Gen. 1:26; Ecc. 3:11; Rom. 8:21

It was “in the beginning,” according to Scripture, when Jehovah, God, “created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). On the sixth day of the creation event God proceeded to create man “in his own image,” forming him out of the elements of the earth, as he “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life” – the day man became “a living soul” (Gen. 1:27; 2:7). The account goes on to describe how the first man, Adam, was created to live in an ideal environment, the Garden of Eden, where all his physical needs would be satisfied. After Jehovah created the first woman, Eve, from the man’s body, He commanded the couple to be fruitful, to multiply, and to fill the earth and subdue it (Gen. 1:28). In their garden home the first humans were permitted to enjoy every blessing created for their joy and benefit. As the Scripture states, God saw that every one of them was “good” (Gen. 1:21, 25). Yet, according to the scriptural record, “the tree of life was in the midst of the garden,” and also, “the tree of the knowledge of good and bad.”

– Gen. 2:9

Consequently, the first humans were given one prohibition from Jehovah, their life-giver: “From every tree of the garden you may eat of freely. But as for the tree of the knowledge of good and bad you must not eat from it,” God warned, “for in the day you eat of it *you shall surely die.*” – Gen. 2:16

In spite of the Giver of life’s clearly-stated warning, however, the first humans, under satanic influence, partook of the forbidden fruit of the tree. The account explains that “when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate.” – Gen. 3:1-13

*“The first humans
were permitted to
enjoy every blessing
created for their joy
and benefit”*

They were once naked, without shame. After the trespass, their eyes were opened, and they were conscious of their nakedness and shame, induced by their disobedience, they became afraid. So God cursed the first human couple in their failure to obey His command: “*By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.*”

Tragically, the man was expelled from the garden paradise, so that from that point onward he could not “reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and

eat, and thus live for ever.” – Gen. 3:1-24

In the words “you are dust, and to dust you shall return,” God’s sentence of death was formally pronounced upon humanity. Through the first human act of disobedience, a rejection of faith in their Creator’s wisdom, and a failed attempt at self-determination and independence from their life-giver. The ancestors of the human race forfeited their right to the life graciously given them by God. Hence, the introduction of sin and sin’s corresponding consequence, death, came to the first man, and, consequently, to the first man’s offspring – all future generations of the human family. As Scripture says: “*sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all had sinned.*” It was, according to another biblical text, a case of “one trespass” leading “to condemnation for all men.” – Rom. 5:12-19

Although the pronouncement in the garden was dismal, and the results disastrous, God did not leave His creation without a ray of hope, as He went on to foretell the coming of a “seed” that would come through the woman. The one who would eventually “bruise” the head of the serpent that deceived her, leading to humanity’s ruin. – Gen. 3:15

The rest of the books forming the modern “Bible” were written over the course of many centuries. Although diverse in scope, in authorship, and in literary form, they are remarkably unified in spirit and in the way they reveal the progressive fulfillment of God’s original pledge to the human race. This pledge is inextricably linked to His associated promise to the man He called “Abraham,” and to the

people of Israel, Abraham's descendants.

Abraham, as Genesis tells us, was a man who proved faithful to God under test. Thus, as an extension of His original declaration in Genesis, God made the solemn promise to Abraham that "all nations of the earth" would "be blessed" by means of his seed, or offspring. The Hebrew Scriptures (often called the 'Old Testament') combine to form a record of God's interactions with Abraham's descendants, those who would eventually constitute the twelve tribes of the nation of Israel. – Gen. 22:1-17

The Scriptures go on to trace the history of the Israelites, Abraham's descendants, from their dramatic deliverance from slavery and following exodus out of Egypt, to Jehovah's giving of the national law (along with its sacrificial system) through Moses, to Israel's rise as a great kingdom centered in Jerusalem, to its unfaithfulness and eventual downfall and dispersion among the nations, emphasis is placed on God's abiding promise to Israel's King David (Abraham's descendent): how He would ultimately, being true to His oath, "put one of [David's] descendants on his throne" and "establish the throne of his kingdom forever." —Acts 2:30; 1 Sam. 7:12-13

After many centuries had passed, the foretold seed of Abraham and offspring of David -- the true King and Savior of Israel—would arrive to fulfill the prophecy. As Scripture states, it was "in the fullness of time" that "God sent forth his Son, born of a woman." – Gal. 4:4 ☺
(This will be continued)

What About Enoch?

by Jeff Fletcher

Enoch is dead, but he still speaks by faith. He was the 7th generation from Moses. According to Jude he was a prophet. Genesis says that he walked with God.

Some people read Hebrews 11:5 and what it says about Enoch and they get confused because it appears to say that Enoch was taken away by God without dying. Indeed some of the modern translations make it sound that way. In this case the old King James does a better job of staying faithful to the original Greek text than to the New American Standard and New International versions. Hebrews 11:5 says: "*By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.*"

Herbert Armstrong has written an excellent article on what happened to Enoch. Let me summarize by saying that it's a mistake to conclude that Enoch went to heaven without dying. For two reasons: 1. To believe that would be to contradict Jesus who said: "'No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man" (John 3:13). And 2. Hebrews 11:13 speaking about Abel, Enoch, Noah and Abraham says "**All** these people were still living by faith when they **died.**" Enoch was among those listed who were living by faith when they died. All means "all", the

entire group! Enoch is one of the "all". Therefore, Enoch died. So, whatever Enoch's "translation" or "taking away" means, it can't mean that he didn't die.

As Hebrews 9:27 says "It is appointed unto man once to die." Armstrong concludes from his study that Enoch died an untimely death. He was 365 when he died. That seems old by today's standards, but remember, he was living before the Flood when people lived to be 900 years old. In fact, everyone listed in Genesis 5 lived to be at least 700 except for Enoch.

Armstrong believes that the evidence indicates that Enoch was martyred as a prophet at a much younger age than normal, and that God did not allow those who killed him to desecrate his body, so that "God himself" took Enoch's body and buried it at a place known only to him. In much the same way that he did for Moses when he died, and possibly Elijah. In addition, the death that God spared Enoch from is not the first death, the one that all of us face, but the second death. The writer of Hebrews was saying that, because of His faith, Enoch was martyred, but God buried him Himself and Enoch will be spared the second death, the one which follows the final judgment. ☺

Return To The Lord

by Chuck Jones

What comes to mind when you think of the idea of “returning to the Lord”? For some the answer is “Why?” Basically, life can become comfortable without Jehovah. Let me explain before you give up reading further.

Life can become comfortable for people even if they are experiencing pain. It’s the idea of just growing old or “that’s life”. It may not be comfortable with pain, physical or emotional, but that situation can come to be viewed as normal, or the best there is.

When emotionally hard situations become routine, people often try to devise ways to cope. There is the brooding mentality that says, “give me a break, I’m in discomfort here”. There’s also the avoiding method. It’s been called denial and it is ignoring that a problem exists.

Some have tried lying about the situation, saying something like: “Oh it doesn’t really matter”, or “I’ve gotten over it”, when in fact they still hold on to the hurt. It is in a slow boil.

Then there is also the bullying tactic. This shows up with a loud aggressive voice that is accompanied by intimidation. Rather than dealing with a problem, this type of person will just try to squash the issue, thereby avoiding it and living with it.

When we are faced with emotional discomfort, it is possible for us to refuse God’s help and

comfort. Notice what David said in Psalm 77:2; “In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord. My hand was stretched out in the night, and did not get tired. My soul refused to be comforted.” Here David is quite candid when he says “I sought Yahweh”, but “My soul refused to be comforted.” What God gave wasn’t enough for David. Have you ever felt that way?

Here are some of my personal reasons why we may refuse God’s comfort. I think the foremost is that what God says will bring comfort goes against the flesh. One of the major enemies of sanctification is how we “feel” about it. Our flesh cries out, “I won’t (or can’t) do that, I refuse your comfort.”

A second element of refusal of the comfort we can receive from Yahweh is our pride. Our pride can be heard as saying something like, “I’m too important to submit to this way of comfort. It could ruin my reputation. I’d look foolish and I can’t afford that”. It often seems that when people are in a position of responsibility in the congregation for a long period of time, humility before Yahweh and His people is difficult. So pride, rather than God’s comfort, becomes the foundation for living.

Another point that may include the first two is that what Yahweh says will give us comfort will go against our intellect. Some may think that it is better **not** to forgive or be reconciled. This is one of the

major issues in the Church today. There are many people who follow this path, and can’t find comfort. They conclude (by their own intellect) that it is better to keep someone under their thumb or hold something over them in a conflict for control. This thinking won’t bring Yahweh’s comfort.

Let me suggest that if we are obeying our flesh, pride, or intellect we are not obeying Yahweh. This is exactly where we find Israel, in our study. This is what they were guilty of. Here is how Hosea reports it.

Hosea acknowledges that it is Yahweh who has “torn” us. Yahweh has been against their unfaithfulness. Even though He is the reason for the discomfort, He is also the one who will do the healing. Through He has “stricken,” He will also bandage the wound. There is comfort in knowing that the one who is bringing the discomfort is also the one who brings the comfort.

Paul, the Apostle, wrote : “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; who comforts us in all our affliction, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, through the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

Aside from God it is possible to find temporary comfort in our own devices, whatever childish method that may be. However, real deep,

lasting comfort comes only from Yahweh. If He has brought the trouble, because of our sins, He too, can bring comfort.

This is what Hosea say on this issue: “Come, and let us return to Yahweh; for he has torn, and he will heal us; he has struck, and he will bind us up. After two days will he revive us: on the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live before him ”(Hosea 6:1-2). You may see a messianic theme in these verses, but the fact is that Yahweh will work on our behalf. Knowing this, then, the response should be as Hosea 6:3 states: “Let us know, let us follow on to know Yahweh: his going forth is sure as the morning; and he will come to us as the rain, as the latter rain that waters the earth.”

Here is the question: What does it take for Yahweh to revive us? I will assert here that it is more than attendance at a worship service on a weekly basis. It is even more than our names on a membership role. It's more than listening or singing worship songs. I'm only writing this because of what Yahweh says; “For I desire goodness, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings” (Hosea 6:6). This is why it takes more than ritual (going through the motions, tokens, doing the bare minimums), or giving lip service (singing worship songs on Sunday).

“Well then,” you may ask, “what does it take?” There is a simple answer, return to Yahweh. Turn (repent) from your evil ways, those ways of doing life that are estranged from God. These include, but are not limited to, avoidance of the issues, brooding over offence, lying about what in your heart, or bullying another with anger.

All of these (and other conditions) when ignored, can create a false sense of well being.

That false sense of well being was portrayed in the Pharisees, of whom Jesus said; “When the Pharisees saw it, they said to his disciples, ‘Why does your teacher eat with the tax collectors and sinners?’ When Jesus heard it, he said to them, ‘Those who are healthy have no need for a physician, but those who are sick do’” (Matthew 19:11-12).

Those who think that there is nothing wrong in their lives as far as living in the truth is concerned, are open to a very harsh rebuke. Jesus went on to say; “But you go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,’ for I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Matthew 9:13). Returning to God necessitates that we realize that we have wondered off.

Aside from God it is possible to find temporary comfort in our own devices

Returning to Yahweh is a life long pursuit. It doesn't end. There are course corrections that are necessary. It is like driving down an interstate highway. The driver doesn't hold the steering wheel in a fixed position as the vehicle goes down the road. No, there are small course corrections that are made along the journey. The same is with believers. Repentance is a continual course correction process.

It comes down to our thoughts of revenge, our lusts, covetousness, or our desire to be “prosperous” that can distract us from the way Yahweh has called us to. The realization that we are off track demands repentance on our part. That's when we know we should return to Yahweh. 🙏

Questions & Answers

by Dr. John Roller

Q: What did Jesus mean when he said (in Luke 23:46) – while on the cross, just before he died – “Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit”? Luke 23:46 goes on to say, “Then he breathed his last.”

A: Jesus was actually quoting Psalm 31:5a, which was commonly used as a Jewish child's bedtime prayer (similar to the prayer, “Now I lay me down to sleep; I pray the Lord my soul to keep”). The point of the prayer was that one's “spirit” (literally, one's breath) is, figuratively, “in one's own hands” during the day – while awake, we keep remembering to breathe – but needs to be “committed into someone else's hands” at night, when one is asleep (and, therefore, unable to remember to breathe). So this child's prayer is, “Dear God, please help me to keep breathing while I am asleep. I can start breathing on my own again when I wake up tomorrow morning.” It's basically a way of saying, “Goodnight, Lord! See you tomorrow!” Jesus saw His impending death as being analogous to falling asleep at night. He expected to be unconscious until God raised Him from the dead (Romans 10:9b). He was asking His Heavenly Father to see to it that He would come back to life again after His extra-long night's rest. 🙏

If you have a question, send it to johnroller@faithbiblechristian.com Or to the magazine.

Salvation

What did it really mean to Jesus and his disciples?

By Mario A Olcese

This article is based on the interesting dialogue between Christ and the rich young man.

Christian theology teaches that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. But what does the Bible really mean by the word salvation? From what would we have to be saved, and for what? It is necessary to answer these questions with the Bible and not accordingly the ideas of tradition.

The Savior of Men

The Bible tells us that there is one who saves men, and that one is the Creator, God the Father. He says: "... Then all mankind will know that I, Yahweh, am your Savior, your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob" (Isaiah 49:26). "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (John 3:16,17). So we see that the Father is the Savior of all men through His unique Son, the Lord Messiah Jesus.

Salvation from Condemnation

In John 3:17, Jesus says that He came to the world to save sinners from condemnation or from doom.

But what did the world do to merit the condemnation? Two verses later, Jesus answers: "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil." (v.19). It is clear that Christ came to save men who were in spiritual darkness and who were doing bad things. In this account, Jesus came to save the sinners who were, in fact, already convicted by God.

Paul will say later: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). Yes, the gift of God is everlasting life by means of Christ and his sacrifice on the cross. Sin's payment is death, and as all have sinned (Romans 3:9), then we all are doomed for death. But Jesus took our sins and paid for them by dying on the cross of Calvary. His death gave us life, and it canceled the outstanding debt that we owed God. The only thing that we are supposed to do on our part is to accept that payment that Christ made for us, and serve Him for life, as a symbol of gratitude. We were slaves to sin, but Jesus set us free through his sacrifice. Now you, and all men, have an opportunity to approach God and live as new men and in sanctity. Now God has welcomed us, as the father did with his repentant lost son in the famous parable of the Prodigal Son.

There Still Remains a Future Salvation

Even though Jesus saved us from our crimes and sins passed, nevertheless, it still remains that our salvation must be culminated. In fact, we have not yet received all our salvation. Surprising, but real! Let's see what Paul says: "So Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring SALVATION to those who are waiting for him" (Hebrews 9:28).

Let's take note that Christ's first coming had to do with sin. This means that Christ's first coming was in order to treat the subject of the sins of the world, and to cancel them with his death on the cross. Now, His second coming is no longer for dying for the sins of the world, but to complete His salvation for those whom He has forgiven for their faith and good works. This means that Christ will complete the process of salvation for those who have accepted Him as their Savior, in all times and places, and who have lived as they should during his absence. Also Peter says with regard to this matter: "who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:5).

What Does Future Salvation Mean?

So far we have seen that there are: a past salvation (Luke 23:35), a present salvation (1 Peter 4:18), and even another future salvation (Hebrews 9:28, 1 Peter 1:5). Also we have seen that the past salvation has to do with our past sins and God's pardon. Nevertheless, there are few people who know what the future salvation is all about.

Some suppose that we are already saved, and that another salvation is not necessary. These people suppose that the ones who are meant to be in grace will go to heaven once physical death happens to them. According to these believers, Jesus did not talk about any future salvation, ignoring Hebrews 9:28 and 1 Peter 1:5, and of course Matthew 24:13, texts that affirm that there will be a future salvation when the end comes.

The Bible is clear concerning the future salvation is all about. Nevertheless, only few have noticed that the future salvation is hidden in Jesus dialogue with the rich young man in Matthew 19:16-25. Yes, in this short dialogue the significance of the true future salvation is hidden. Only those who examine the Bible with prayer and with the aid of the Holy Spirit can discover it

You must open your heart and mind to reflect, unbiased, upon the main verses of the mentioned dialogue. We are going to write them just as they appear in the Bible:

"And someone came to Him and said, "Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?" And He said to him, "Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is only One who is good; but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments." Then he said

to Him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "you shall not commit murder; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; honor your father and mother; and you shall love your neighbor as yourself." The young man said to Him, "All these things I have kept; what am I still lacking?" Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." But when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieving; for he was one who owned much property. And Jesus said to His disciples, "Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven." Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." When the disciples heard this, they were very astonished and said, "Then who can be saved?"

Here there are three key phrases that clearly define what future salvation is all about. Those phrases are: eternal life (Verse 16), kingdom of God (Verse 24), and be saved (Verse 25). These three sentences have not been noticed by the majority of Bible students, thus they fail to understand what future salvation was for Jesus and His disciples.

The rich young man wanted to inherit everlasting life, but he was not willing to give everything to the poor in order to follow Christ. Jesus, it seems, needed to say that a rich man will hardly enter the kingdom of God. The disciples then ask Jesus: "Then who can be saved?" Now, what is salvation according to this dialogue? The answer is as clear as pure water. You will have to open your heart and mind to understand what our

Lord is teaching to all of us. The formula is this: The only thing you have to do is to accommodate or arrange the three Key sentences: Eternal Life, Kingdom of God, and be Saved. What is the result? Salvation is then eternal life in the kingdom of God or to enter the kingdom of God with eternal life. This simple explanation is not known to millions of Christians. Most Christians believes that salvation is to be with God in heaven (the third heaven). But this is not what Jesus says. Here Jesus speaks of a kingdom and of a future salvation that will come with the second coming of Christ. Then Rev. 12:10 will be fulfilled.

This verse says: "Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ". Take note here that salvation is correlated with the kingdom of God and the authority of Christ. Salvation and the Kingdom walk always side by side. Of course none of the dead saints have inherited the kingdom, but they will be raised from their graves to be included in it in the parousia of Jesus.

If a Bible student compares Hebrews 9:28 and Matthew 25:31,34, he will discover that the salvation of the faithful will happen immediately with the second coming of Christ. This means that these people will inherit the kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world. This is Jesus' true and pristine gospel that needs to be preached all over the world (Matt. 24:14)!

Christ and His Kingdom are the more important themes of the Bible, since they are mentioned so often from the beginning to the end of it. Jesus began his ministry preaching the kingdom of God (Mark

1:1,14,15). Also his disciples preached it (Luke 8:1-2; Luke 9:1-2; Acts 8:12; Acts 28:23,30,31). It was also the last thing that Jesus taught to his disciples, just before going up to the Father (Acts 1:3).

The apostle Paul preached it as part of his ministry to the Gentiles (Acts 28:23,30,31). He also said that in order to be included in it, one must first suffer tribulations in this life (Acts 14:22). He affirmed that it is impossible to inherit the Kingdom with our mortal bodies (1 Corinthians 15:50). He clarified that the dead and the living would receive transformed bodies at the second coming of Christ in glory (1 Corinthians 15:42, 52).

Will You Pass Up This Great Salvation?

Paul says: "how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him" (Hebrews 2:3). Now I ask you: Will you pass up this great salvation of God, that is also intended for you? Do not postpone your decision to earn that present and future salvation, because tomorrow may be too late. For that reason Paul tells the Corinthians: "...now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2b). ☺

Mario is a Member of the Church of God Abrahamic Faith, and helped Bill Wachtel & Anthony Buzzard start a meeting place in Lima in 1988 You Can See Some Pictures of the meeting place at www.yeshuahamashij.org.

Developing your Gift”

by Kara Taylor

How is God speaking to you today? I’m sure we have heard this phrase many times. Communication with God is available, and consistent if we let it become that. We are always in communication with Him, and He reveals himself in subtle or very obvious ways.

Romans 12:6 tells us that “we have different gifts, according to the grace given us.” As we explore our spiritual gifts, we can become closer to God. As a musician creates music or an artist develops a portrait, they learn something about their ability. A gift always involves a receiver and a giver. Someone cannot open a gift that was not specifically chosen for them.

When a child opens a gift from his father, he can trust that his father was thinking of him when he chose it. The father knew what he wanted to give and wrapped it up. The joy came when he was able to watch his son open the gift. This demonstrates the trust of a relationship. The child is then free to explore his gift and discover everything about it.

A developmental theory of multiple intelligences says that individuals learn best in areas that come naturally to them. This means that people who are musical may learn through music and those who are technical may learn through experience. One type of learning is not better than another type of learning, just as “there are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all

men” (1 Cor. 12:4-6). We may all find our unique gift, which will strengthen our relationship with God. Our spiritual gift will give us opportunities to do good works, it will also help us learn about ourselves and connect with God.

Developing your spiritual gift will distract you from the world by not “conforming to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2). What do you learn about yourself when you are using your gift? Ask yourself why God chose this for you, and how you can continually use it to draw closer to Him.

The child explored his gift from his father, which was a shiny red bicycle. He was free to learn to ride it. He tried to pedal as fast as he could and fell down numerous times. His father explained that he didn’t have to be the best at it, and didn’t have to learn on his own. The child asked his father to hold the back of the bicycle as he learned to ride it. He trusted that he would not fall down. The child loved to ride bicycles, but more importantly he realized that his father guided him the whole way.

How is God speaking to you through your gifts and abilities? It is good to use our gift to serve others, but easy to miss how it can serve God? How can we put our trust in God when we develop our gift? “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding;” (Proverbs 3:5).

May we trust that our gifts are intentional, and a way to commune with God and serve others. ☺

Hearing from God, and a Caution.

By Anthony Buzzard

No one, I am sure, who is a believer in the One God of the universe, the God of Israel and of Jesus, doubts that God can speak to us personally in different ways. He can produce strong impressions in our minds, He can speak through other people to us, and so on. But He speaks to us most extensively in Scripture.

Here is a caution. In the past year, I have had correspondence, among thousands of emails, with two individuals who knew, as they said, that God had spoken to them personally. The one had heard a definite voice, a kind of whisper, which told her that after all, despite what she had earlier believed and been taught, that Jesus, the Son of God preexisted as the Son and had been created just before Genesis. Another told me that God had told her through personal Bible study that there will be no millennium. When Jesus comes back, she assured me, everyone will be immortal and we will not rule over the nations, as she had previously believed. She seemed pleased with this new

understanding.

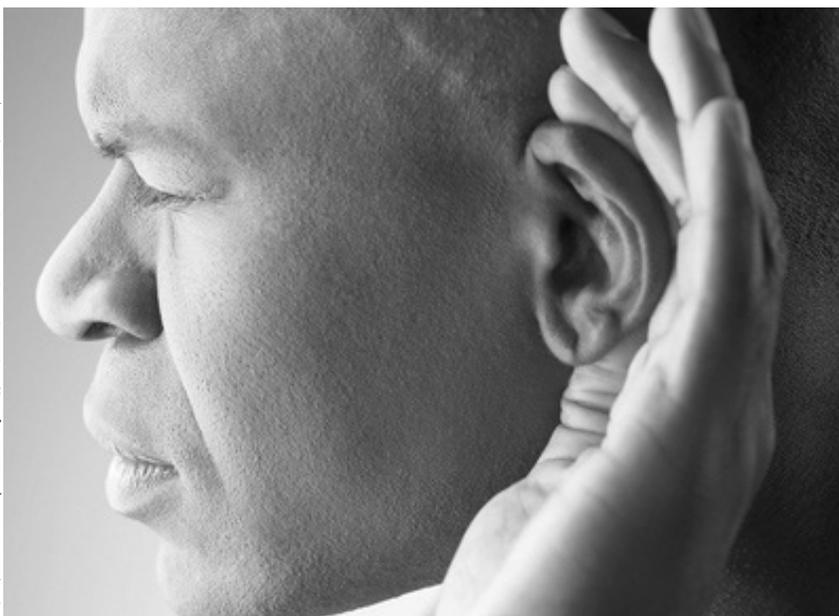
Note that these persons were quite sure that God had told them these things. Never mind their previous convictions, never mind the beliefs of the body of believers with whom they had long been associated. Now something new was true. It was true, because God had personally informed them.

It is very hard to persuade people out of these newly found convictions. They seem so personal and so certain. After all, God had spoken to them. The problem is that in both cases, Scripture was rather obviously contradicted. This means that the "voice" or conviction which had come to them did not have its source in the spirit of Truth and the mind of Christ (I Cor. 2:16)

which Christians are to have.

The same very individual conviction can arise in the case of the claims to "speak in tongues."

A very strange phenomenon has arisen in some circles, that there is a so-called "prayer language" which every Christian can and should possess. Those who have it place a very great deal of value in it and wish it for everyone else too. People become convinced that there is an available prayer-language in tongues for all believers, and they seek it, but sometimes they do not find it. They may seek it year after year. They may go forward in a service to have others pray that they may receive it. But they don't ever obtain it, and then they feel condemned and forsaken. I have met via email some who have this frustrating experience. I know of others who in earlier years spoke in tongues regularly, especially in private prayer, but when they learned some of the great truths of the Bible – about the One God and who Jesus is, and about the Gospel of the Kingdom – their "prayer language" became much less important and they gave it up altogether, believing that it was a "learned behavior" and was not in



fact the biblical gift of languages.

In I Cor. 12, Paul gives us a series of rhetorical questions. He asked this: "Are all apostles, are all prophets, do all have the gift of healings, do all speak in tongues, do all interpret?" His answer in every case was "Of course not." Paul had most carefully outlined how God was at work in that church. He showed that the spirit which all true Christians have (without the spirit they do not qualify as believers at all) manifests itself in various ways. Some in Paul's day were apostles with the gift of special signs and wonders (II Cor. 12:12). They had actually seen Jesus personally.

But Paul is insistent that not everyone had access to all these gifts. They were given on a principle of distribution. "To one is given.... to another is given...." Not all have the power to speak in tongues. When later Paul says "I want you all to speak in tongues," he is not contradicting himself but means, in typical Jewish idiom, the "all" defined by chapter 12-- all those who have that gift, and that is not everyone. Paul also wanted all to be single, as was he, but he was not commanding celibacy for the whole church!

It is incredible then based on this passage in I Cor. 12:28-30, to maintain that all can and should have the gift or ability to "speak in tongues." It would directly contradict Paul who said "Do all speak in tongues? Of course not." To those who did have that gift he exhorted them to use it in public, translated, either by a person with the companion gift of translation, or by self-interpretation. An interpretation by one other than the speaker seems to have been the preferred way. Paul's point was that there is no such thing as a permanently uninterpreted tongue.

It is not to remain in the prayer closet, it is to be shared in the public meeting. "Let the one who has the gift of tongues, pray that he may interpret" (I Cor 13:14)

In the book of Acts, certain groups and individuals were able to speak foreign languages unlearned. At Pentecost the apostles, and probably others, not only had tongues of fire coming from them, they were able to utter foreign languages and be understood by visitors who spoke those languages as their mother tongue. It is important to know that this miracle was not to substitute for an interpreter. The languages were not needed for communication. The crowd could all communicate in Greek and probably Aramaic, and when Peter went on to preach his famous sermon, there is no evidence it was being delivered in a language that Peter did not know. The miracle was to identify where God was now at work – through His Apostolic church, just as God had identified how He was at work in his Son, "This is my beloved Son, listen to him" with the spirit like a dove coming down on him.

The first litmus test for authenticity is Scripture. Peter was first authorized by Jesus on the basis, not of a physical miracle or an audible miracle of languages, but on the basis of his understanding of who Jesus was. Jesus was so impressed with Peter's identification of the Messiah, Son of God (Matt. 16), that he exclaimed that God had revealed this by miracle to Peter. It was a revelation through the spirit of God working in Peter. A changed mind, one which grasps truth, is the best indicator of spirit. That is why Paul categorically says that "because people did not receive the love of the truth," (II Thess. 2:10) they would finally be given over to

a spirit of delusion. That is a warning for us all. It is by Truth, and Truth revealed by spirit-inspired Scripture, which is the safest place to hear from God. And we can do it corporately as the body of Christ. We need the "multitude of counsel" available from a body of informed believers.

Paul said that "we are all baptized by one spirit into one body" (I Cor. 12:13). This is a much abused text. For Paul, the spirit is received when people accept the Gospel of the Kingdom (Acts 8:12), the word of the Truth (see especially Eph. 1:13, where the same sequence is laid out). In Acts 19, Paul asked some believers in John the Baptist. "Did you receive the spirit when you believed?" He did not say, "Did you receive the spirit since you believed?" (the KJV is wrongly translated here). The spirit is received upon conversion in the NT (a very slight delay was necessary so that the Apostles could personally confirm the true belief of the folk in Acts 8, a brand new group of people getting the Gospel). The normal procedure in the New Testament is that the spirit comes with the Gospel (Gal 3:1-2; I Cor 12:13). After that, we are to "go on allowing ourselves to be filled with spirit" (Eph. 5:18). We must seek renewal day by day.

I think that all will agree that these issues need to be submitted to the bar of Scripture and not to "personal" revelation, which may not come from the right source. Voices from God are certainly possible, but their theological effect must be examined. In the case of the command to "go into the world and preach the Gospel," God has spoken to us all through Jesus. That should be enough to convince us to "get on with the job." 🙏

This is part of a response to a letter I received from a reader of *Wisdom & Power*. He was writing because of one of the articles Gary Turner had written.

The letter begins:

“In reference to your article: “God Told Me...” So you would have us listen to the audible ‘voice’ in our head, that of the son of perdition and false prophet? Do you not understand why there is a difference between that ‘voice’ in your head, and the voice of His Word? The difference is because God knew beforehand of the ‘lie’ of Satan, that of other men (‘men of lawlessness’) who will enter our head, pretending to be God.”

Here is my reply:

Hello,

You make a fascinating accusation: “That the audible voice in our head is that of the son of perdition and false prophet.”

I do agree with you that there are all sorts of voices clamoring for our attention and loyalty. Yet you have missed a couple of important points. I’d just like to raise these for your consideration.

One of the important points, I think, that you omitted is meditation. How is this effectual exercise to be done if we don’t listen to ourselves think about what we’ve read in Scripture? Psalm one tells us of the blessing that goes to the person who meditates day and night on the law of God. I do not consider Biblical meditation to be the same as Hindu meditation. Rather than trying to empty our mind, as Hindu’s teach, we are to fill it with God’s law, ways, and word. Then we are to consider how that effects our lives. How it will change our behavior. That takes listening to ourselves.

How would you judge, or

More on Hearing From God

by Chuck Jones

determine, whether or not you were walking in the counsel of the sinners, standing in the way of sinners, or sitting in the seat of the scornful if you didn’t give it any thought? We must take the time to consider our ways as it says in Proverbs 14:8 “The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his ways.”

A second point is we are told in Philippians 4:8 about what sort of things we are to think about and thereby which things to avoid. Now the Scripture, God’s breathed word, gives us the direction but what is it that reminds us when we detour from these directions? This is important. There is an inner voice that gives warning, or convicts us, how far afield we have gone. If there is no inner voice, how far afield could we go?

That ‘voice’ I would assert is our conscience, a co-perception with God. This gives us the same perception that God has. This can be rendered useless if we fail to give heed to it. Let me pose a situation to you. You are asked a question that you could (possibly for argument’s sake) answer with a lie. That temptation presents itself, but you being a just man decide to tell the truth. This vignette seems plausible doesn’t it? Aren’t we faced constantly with moral choices? To follow Yahweh or our own inclinations? How do you decide what to do if you don’t consider the options? Well, of course, we’ve read from the Bible not to lie, but tell the truth. That

word was in our memory and we ‘heard’ it in our deliberations. So naturally those who want to be faithful will follow what they know to be right. Here is where our conscience comes into the battle.

Our minds need to be transformed or renewed. They have been redeemed. We have the mind of Christ which is a valuable resource.

A third area you should consider is how God’s spirit bears witness with our spirit that we know we are His children (Romans 8:16). This happens within our minds. This is how we realize that we belong to Him.

The voices that clamor for attention need to be distinguished from one another. If we fail at this effort of discernment, how can we know the voice of Satan or the voice of Christ? This comes by reading the Bible and putting God’s word in our hearts so that it can be recalled when necessary.

There is a danger in dwelling on fantasy and conspiracy theories. Those can take us from the truth of Yahweh. We must, beyond any doubt, learn how to discern the spirits (voices in our heads) to know whether they are of God. It’s been said, “all truth is God’s truth”. I have to agree. Yet there is another side. “All lies come from the father of lies”. The question is, how do you tell the difference? The answer is in reading and internalizing Scripture. Meditate on it day and night. 🍀

Carl's Garden

Submitted by Phyllis Wachtel

Carl was a quiet man. He didn't talk much. He would always greet you with a big smile and a firm handshake. Even after living in our neighborhood for over 50 years, no one could really say they knew him very well.

Before his retirement, Carl took the bus to work each morning. The lone sight of him walking down the street often worried us. He had a slight limp from a bullet wound received in WWII. Watching him, we worried that although he had survived WWII, he may not make it through our changing uptown neighborhood with its ever-increasing random violence, gangs, and drug activity.

When he saw the flyer at our local church asking for volunteers for caring for the gardens behind the minister's residence, he responded in his characteristically unassuming manner. Without fanfare, he just signed up.

He was well into his 87th year when the very thing we had always feared finally happened. He was just finishing his watering for the day when three gang members approached him. Ignoring their attempt to intimidate him, he simply asked, "Would you like a drink from the hose?"

The tallest and toughest-looking of the three said, "Yeah, sure," with a malevolent little smile. As Carl offered the hose to him, the other two grabbed Carl's arm, throwing him down. As the hose snaked crazily over the ground, dousing everything in its way, Carl's

assailants stole his retirement watch and his wallet, and then fled.

Carl tried to get himself up, but he had been thrown down on his bad leg. He lay there trying to gather himself as the minister came running to help him. Although the minister had witnessed the attack from his window, he couldn't get there fast enough to stop it. "Carl, are you okay? Are you hurt?" the minister kept asking as he helped Carl to his feet.

Carl just passed a hand over his brow and sighed, shaking his head. "Just some punk kids. I hope they'll wise up someday." His wet clothes clung to his slight frame as he bent to pick up the hose. He adjusted the nozzle again and started to water.

Confused and a little concerned, the minister asked, "Carl, what are you doing?"

"I've got to finish my watering. It's been very dry lately," came the calm reply.

Satisfying himself that Carl really was alright, the minister could only marvel. Carl was a man from a different time and place.

A few weeks later the three returned. Just as before their threat was unchallenged. Carl again offered them a drink from his hose.

This time they didn't rob him. They wrenched the hose from his hand and drenched him head to foot in the icy water. When they had finished their humiliation of him, they sauntered off down the street, throwing catcalls and curses, falling over one another laughing at the hilarity of what they had just done.

Carl just watched them. Then he turned toward the warmth giving sun, picked up his hose, and went on with his watering.

The summer was quickly fading into fall. Carl was doing some tilling when he was startled by the sudden approach of someone behind him. He stumbled and fell into some evergreen branches. As he struggled to regain his footing, he turned to see the tall leader of his summer tormentors reaching down for him. He braced himself for the expected attack.

"Don't worry old man, I'm not gonna hurt you this time." The young man spoke softly, still offering the tattooed and scarred hand to Carl. As he helped Carl get up, the man pulled a crumpled bag from his pocket and handed it to Carl.

"What's this?" Carl asked.

"It's your stuff," the man explained. "It's your stuff back. Even the money in your wallet."

"I don't understand," Carl said. "Why would you help me now?"

The man shifted his feet, seeming embarrassed and ill at ease. "I learned something from you," he said. "I ran with that gang and hurt people like you. We picked you because you were old and we knew we could do it. But every time we came and did something to you, instead of yelling and fighting back, you tried to give us a drink. You didn't hate us for hating you. You kept showing love against our hate." He stopped for a moment. "I couldn't sleep after we stole your

stuff, so here it is back.” He paused for another awkward moment, not knowing what more there was to say. “That bag’s my way of saying thanks for straightening me out, I guess.” And with that, he walked off down the street.

Carl looked down at the sack in his hands and gingerly opened it. He took out his retirement watch and put it back on his wrist. Opening his wallet, he checked for his wedding photo. He gazed for a moment at the young bride that still smiled back at him from all those years ago.

Carl died one cold day after Christmas that winter. Many people attended his funeral in spite of the weather. In particular the minister noticed a tall young man who he didn’t know sitting quietly in a distant corner of the church.

The minister spoke of Carl’s garden as a lesson in life. In a voice

made thick with unshed tears, he said, “Do your best and make your garden as beautiful as you can. We will never forget Carl and his garden.”

The following spring another flyer went up. It read: “Person needed to care for Carl’s garden.” The flyer went unnoticed by the busy parishioners until one day when a knock was heard at the minister’s office door. Opening the door, the minister saw a pair of scarred and tattooed hands holding the flyer. “I believe this is my job, if you’ll have me,” the young man said.

The minister recognized him as the same young man who had returned the stolen watch and wallet to Carl. He knew that Carl’s kindness had turned this man’s life around. As the minister handed him the keys to the garden shed, he said, “Yes, go take care of Carl’s garden

and honor him.” The man went to work and, over the next several years, he tended the flowers and vegetables just as Carl had done. In that time, he went to college, got married, and became a prominent member of the community. But he never forgot his promise to Carl’s memory and kept the garden as beautiful as he thought Carl would have kept it.

One day he approached the new minister and told him that he couldn’t care for the garden any longer. He explained with a shy and happy smile, “My wife just had a baby boy last night, and she’s bringing him home on Saturday.”

“Well, congratulations!” said the minister, as he was handed the garden shed keys. “That’s wonderful! What’s the baby’s name?”

“Carl,” he replied. 🍀

Burning Huts:

Submitted by Donna Marshall

The only survivor of a shipwreck was washed up on a small, uninhabited island. He prayed feverishly for God to rescue him. Every day he scanned the horizon for help, but none seemed forthcoming. Exhausted, he eventually managed to build a little hut out of driftwood to protect him from the elements, and to store his few possessions.

One day, after scavenging for food, he arrived home to find his little hut in flames, with smoke rolling up to the sky. He felt the worst had happened, and everything was lost. He was stunned with disbelief, grief, and anger. He cried out, “God! How could you do this to me?” Early the next day, he was awakened by the sound of a ship approaching the island! It had come to rescue him!

“How did you know I was here?” asked the weary man of his rescuers.

“We saw your smoke signal,” they replied.

The moral of this story: It is easy to get discouraged when things are going bad, but we should not lose heart, because God is at work in our lives, even in the midst of our pain and suffering. Remember that the next time your little hut seems to be burning to the ground. It just may be a smoke signal that summons the grace of God.

You may want to consider repeating this because you never know who feels as if their hut is on fire today.