



The Gospel of Jesus



Inside

2022: Living the Gospel



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I Am Ready!

If someone asked you to explain the gospel in just one word, what would that word be? I say it must be *Jesus*! The gospel of the kingdom is all about Him. As Paul writes, the “gospel of God” is “concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 1:1-3, 9). A few verses later, in probably the Bible’s most crucial passage about the gospel, Paul explains what the gospel of Christ is all about (vv. 16, 17).

That passage about the power and righteousness of God being revealed in the good news of Jesus and His salvation has occupied my thoughts these past weeks. You’ll find it discussed in three or more articles in this issue. But then I noticed three little words in the verse before (v. 15), and I’ve not been able to stop thinking about them. Paul writes, “I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also.”

“I am ready!” Paul says. But am I? *Are you?* This got me thinking about my readiness, and a precious memory came to mind. I was tucking my son Isaac into bed one night, and in the dimly lit room he pulled my face by my beard close to his. He asked, in all seriousness, “Daddy, are you going to die someday?”

Stunned that my three-year-old boy held such thoughts, I collected myself and answered, “Yes, someday, but we don’t have to be afraid, because Jesus died so we might live with Him forever. We just need to trust Him.” Isaac replied sweetly, “OK!” Completely satisfied, he fell asleep.

It really is as simple as that. Hebrews 2 says: “As the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He [Jesus] . . . likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (vv. 14, 15).

What excellent news! What hope! We must “always be ready” to share it (1 Peter 3:15). And I think we *are*, if we know Jesus. So let’s declare, without fear, the One who has defeated death and changed us and everything. Say it with me: *Jesus*!

— Jason Overman





The Gospels and Time

Jesus — the same yesterday,
today, and forever.

by R. Herbert

The four Gospels are amazingly complex portraits of the Son of God. Each account verbally “paints” its subject from many different angles, capturing different aspects of the gospel just as a cut and polished precious stone catches and reflects light differently from its many facets.

One of those aspects of the good news is the way Jesus is shown to relate to us in time. We often do not think about it, but time was part of the announcement of the gospel. Mark tells us that Jesus proclaimed, “The time has come. . . . The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!” (1:15). Luke also shows this: “The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached” (16:16). Luke even portrays Jesus

criticizing the people of Jerusalem precisely “because you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you” (19:44).

In fact, the gospel of Jesus Christ cannot be separated from time. Each of the four Gospels gives a different perspective on this.

Gospel from the past

This dimension of time is particularly easy to see in Matthew’s account, which is deeply rooted in the past. Matthew continually looks back to what was written in the Hebrew Scriptures, to the prophecies and promises of the Messiah who would come. In fact, there are some 70 references in the Gospel of Matthew that are cited from the Old Testament.

This is an astonishing number of citations for the size of the book, and a number that far

outstrips the quotations from the Old Testament found in all the other Gospels. Matthew could even be called the Gospel of Fulfillment, as he continually tells us that actions or events in the life of Jesus occurred that it “might be fulfilled” or “was fulfilled” (1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 27:9, 35, NKJV). And as Jesus said in His own words, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (5:17).

Even apart from the many examples of fulfilled prophecies of the past, Matthew frequently uses the expression “It is written.” Again, this directs his readers back to the past and to the evidence of Jesus’ identity as the promised Christ. It also shows them how rooted the teaching of Jesus was in the bedrock of Jewish culture and biblical law (cf. 4:4, 7, 10).

Interestingly, Matthew often does not arrange his material chronologically. He simply organizes it by topic. In this fact we see again the importance in his Gospel not of how things happened in the present but of how the events that occurred fulfilled the words of the past.

Matthew points us to the past to better see the gospel of the One promised there.

Gospel in the now

Mark’s Gospel is firmly set in the present in that it does not continually appeal to past prophecies as Matthew’s account does, but looks more directly at Jesus’ deeds in the here and now. In fact, “here and now” perfectly summarizes the stress

on time in Mark. This Gospel not only stays within the time of the actions recorded but also continually underscores the immediacy of Jesus’ actions “now.”

For example, Mark tells us (emphases added) that at the onset of Jesus’ ministry “*At once* the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness” (1:12); “*At once* they left their nets and followed him” (v. 18); “*Without delay* he called them” (v. 20); “news about him spread *quickly* over the whole region of Galilee” (v. 28). The pattern continues throughout Mark’s Gospel. The Greek word *eutheos*, translated “immediately,” “straight away,” “at once,” etc., occurs no fewer than 42 times in Mark. This and other terms of time give an immediacy to important events and

Gospel of the future

Luke’s perspective often involves a focus on the future. For example, in his Gospel we find the continued use of the word *will*, as in “the Son of man will . . .” (cf. 9:26; 12:8, 10; 22:22, 69). We see how pronounced this pattern is when we realize that compared to Mark, which has 89 occurrences of *will*, Luke’s account uses this same word 243 times. In Matthew, the great majority of the instances of *will* occur in his citations of past prophecies that state, “Such and such will happen.” In Luke the emphasis is almost entirely on words spoken in the present, referring to future actions or events.

For example, Luke is unlike Mark’s account. Mark does not

“Matthew points us to the past to better see the gospel of the One promised there.”

even everyday actions in Jesus’ life. Mark constantly uses the historical present tense to show the dedication and non-stop work of Jesus.

Mark’s present-focused story of Jesus challenges us to live out our part in God’s calling by doing what we have been given to do — now.

clearly separate Jesus’ return from the events of that age and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70 (“But in those days, following that distress,” Mark 13:24). However, Luke more clearly projects Jesus’ return into the distant future by writing “Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (21:24).

Luke continues his future perspective of the gospel of Jesus in Acts. He begins this book with Jesus' words, culminating in "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (1:8). These future-looking promises are reinforced by the angelic message about Christ at His ascension: "Heaven must

21). John bridges this division by the use of seven time markers regarding Christ's "hour." Three times in the first half of this Gospel we find some variant of the expression "My hour has not yet come" (2:4; 7:30; 8:20). Then, four times in the second half of the Gospel, we find variants of "The hour has come" (12:23; 12:27; 13:1; 17:1). But Jesus' "hour" is always seen against the backdrop of eternity.

John paints a portrait of Jesus as the Eternal One who came in love and truth, to call us to eternity.

Was, is, and is to come

The pattern of past-present-future-eternity found in the four canonical descriptions of Jesus' life and ministry is so clear that we might wonder if the arrangement of the Gospels as we have them is more than coincidental. Could their order be part of the inspiration of how the gospel accounts have come down to us? We have no way of knowing, of course.

Whatever the case, the four Gospels do show that time is part of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Although God transcends time, He is nevertheless the one "who is, and who was, and who is to come" (Revelation 1:8). Perhaps that is why God has given us the gospel of Christ not at a single point of time but throughout time.

What is certain is that God places events in time the way a master jeweler places precious stones in their settings. They would not be so perfectly placed in any other manner. Different aspects of the gospel of Jesus Christ are placed in time in exactly that way. **BA**

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“John paints a portrait of Jesus as the Eternal One who came in love and truth, to call us to eternity.”

receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything" (3:21).

Luke continually points us to the future aspects of the gospel of Jesus.

Gospel of eternity

Just as John's Gospel is different from the other three in many ways, so its perspective and focus on time are unique. First, John stresses the importance of time in Jesus' ministry more than any other Gospel writer. His account may be divided into two halves: the ministry of Jesus (chapters 1-12) and the final few days of Jesus' life (chapters 13-

While the first three Gospels often focus on past, present, and future, respectively, John's account utilizes a wider view. Just as his audience was a universal one, John's perspective is an eternal one. Starting with "In the beginning" (1:1) and ending in an eternal future (21:22-25), the narrative is all-encompassing in its view of time. Throughout his Gospel John repeatedly points us to aspects of eternity. For example, the repeated emphasis on the kingdom of God in the first three Gospels is missing in John. Instead, John places continual emphasis on eternal life (3:15, 16, 36, et al).

Fragrance

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by Lydia E. Harris

"Is there someone who can wrap these flowers?" I asked the store clerk as I paid for my bouquet of bright pink carnations nestled in baby's breath.

"I'll call someone to floral," he said.

As I waited, I lifted the flowers to my nose and smelled their spicy-sweet fragrance. Soon a young man, who told me he was about to graduate from high school, arrived at the floral counter and pulled out pink tissue paper and cellophane.

"May I ask the occasion for the flowers?" he inquired as he wrapped my bouquet.

"It's for my granddaughter." I smiled. "She did a great job at her piano recital today."

"Nice," he said. "I used to play the drums at Cedar Park."

"Cedar Park Church?" I asked.

"Yeah," he said, "but I don't go there anymore."

"Where do you go now?" I asked, looking at his name badge.

"Nowhere," he replied, wrapping the bouquet.

"Oh, I'm sorry to hear that, Jared." I paused, then added, "Jesus is coming back soon, and it's important to be ready." I smiled. "I'm listening for the trumpet sound."

"I'm an agnostic, so I don't believe like that." Jared pulled out a white ribbon to tie around the bouquet.

"Just keep reading the Bible," I said. "Do you have one?"

"No, but I can borrow my mom's if I need one."

As we talked more, I learned his mother was a Christian, but he didn't know much about his father. When I mentioned I would rather err

believing in God than not believing, he replied, "Well, if I'm wrong, I'll find out and pay for it." He glanced toward the checkout clerk and said, "Looks like I'm needed."

"Thanks for wrapping my bouquet," I said, wrapping up the conversation. "You did a great job." I looked at the white ribbon tied around the bouquet and wished I could tie up our conversation with a happy ending for Jared.

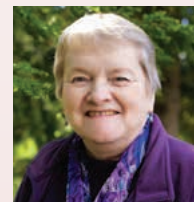
As I walked to the car, I remembered verses in Jude: "Be merciful to those who doubt; save others by snatching them from the fire" (vv. 22, 23). I joined my waiting husband in the car and prayed aloud, "Lord, draw Jared's heart to Jesus. May he seek and find You."

I continue to pray that God will use my conversation to stir Jared's thinking and draw him to Jesus so he will know that God exists. I pray he wants a relationship with Him now and for eternity.

Although I had stopped by the store briefly to buy fragrant flowers, God brought an unexpected witnessing opportunity — an opportunity to spread the aroma of life.

But thanks be to God, who always leads us . . . and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved . . . an aroma that brings life (2 Corinthians 2:14-16). **BA**

Lydia E. Harris writes from Lake Forest Park, WA. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.





The God who remains with
us in our suffering.
by Raúl Cruz

Life is full of good and bad experiences. The good ones don't affect us as much as the bad ones do. Oftentimes, bad experiences leave us wounded, caused by such things as the loss of a loved one, physical abuse, sickness, and injustice. Many times these wounds don't heal; they remain open for a long time.

Sometimes we feel like Jenny in the movie *Forrest Gump*. She is Forrest's friend, and her father has been sexually abusing her. After he is arrested, Jenny goes on to live with another person, but her struggles with what her father has done to her have only

begun. In fact, she spends the rest of her life trying to recover from the damage done to her.

Years later, Jenny returns to the small town where she grew up to visit Forrest. Both of them, now thirty years old, walk near the house where she had lived. Upon seeing the house, Jenny is immediately flooded with painful memories of the abuse, memories that had been around for a long time. She begins to cry in pain and anger and throws her shoes at the house. Then she throws rocks. When she runs out of rocks, she collapses to the ground, crying.

Reflecting on what just happened, Forrest says, "Sometimes, I guess there just aren't enough rocks."

Suffering Savior

The Bible tells about the suffering that Jesus Christ experienced

on earth, but He didn't lash out in pain and anger as Jenny did. Matthew 20:17-19 describes His last stop in Jerusalem and some of the events that would take place there in the near future. Jerusalem was the center of Judaism at that time and the symbol for the people dominated by the Roman Empire. It was Jesus' final destination where He would be betrayed, condemned to death, and crucified. The disciples would abandon Him there, and Peter would deny Him.

Jesus was crucified, just as He predicted. But His death was not the end. God had prepared something that would transcend human history: the resurrection of Christ's crucified body. Despite this miracle of new life, Jesus bore the scars of His wounds. In fact, they ended up becoming the signs that identify Him (John 20:20-29). His scars are permanent.

This truth is significant for us. The Resurrection does not strip Jesus of His outward human condition. It provides continuity between the past and the present. Jesus continues to join each one of us in our suffering.

Jesus had the option to descend from the cross, but He didn't. He preferred to be with us. Though He returned to heaven, He bears our wounds caused by sickness and injustice. In that way, He consoles us and heals what has damaged us.

Inner damage

In another scene in *Forrest Gump*, Jenny, five years old, is running from her drunken father, and she asks God to make her a bird so she can fly far from there. We can be like that, too, with hurt and anger damaging our hearts. Sometimes an angry voice inside of us yells, *God, this isn't fair! It is not OK. What did I do to deserve this?*

Some wounds are emotional, psychological, and physical, and often nothing can heal them; only God can. Sometimes we live with resentment toward God because we wish we would have been born in a different place or to a different family, with better opportunities in education or jobs.

Most of us bear wounds we experienced throughout life, and we have scars from a body that managed to heal. These can be seen in two ways: We can relive the pain, the fear, or the anger that they caused us, and fall into bitterness, or we can look past them and be thankful that we were rescued from any imminent threat.

While He was on the cross, Je-

sus faced abandonment from the Father. "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:45, 46), Jesus cried out — not only for Himself but for us as well. Through that cry, Jesus expressed to God our pain, suffering due to injustice, solitude, discrimination, sickness, and fear of death.

Survivors

Viktor Frankl, a Jewish psychiatrist, was captured by the Nazis and taken to Auschwitz. In his book *Man's Search for Meaning*, he tells how his parents and his wife died in different concentration camps. He experienced hunger, cold, and physical and psychological abuse. The concentra-

mourning, but God is present in our lives.

God knows that every one of us is experiencing the journey to pass through our own Jerusalem. Perhaps you are dealing with solitude, lack of work, sickness, or divorce. Perhaps out of helplessness you cry out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

All of us can feel like that. On one occasion, a brother from the church who had suffered with his family the effects of the virus, said, "We are survivors of COVID-19." We are all survivors of all the wounds caused by different circumstances in life.

What Forrest Gump said is true: Sometimes there just aren't enough rocks. But we don't

“Jesus had the option to descend from the cross, but He didn't. He preferred to be with us.”

tion camps were surrounded by electric fencing, and on several occasions, Frankl had the urge to commit suicide. But at some point he realized his purpose in the world, and he survived in the end, thanks to God being with him.

No matter how great our suffering, we don't have to face it alone. The grace and love of God have been with us all along. As proof of this, here we are, perhaps sick, without work, and

need them. We are victorious survivors because of God's grace through the crucified and resurrected Christ. **BA**

Raúl Cruz writes from Danbury, CT. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.





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by **Sonia Fay Buckland**

I had been called in to give an emergency talk to a first grade class at a school where I once interned as guidance counselor. As I entered the room, loud, desperate sobs filled the air. The homeroom teacher explained that a close relative of a student in the class was shot and killed the previous evening. The student's mourning caused many of the other students to burst into tears as they remembered their own relatives who had been killed.

My heart was filled with heaviness to see the hopelessness in the otherwise starry-eyed little ones. What could I possibly share with them to ease the pain that had marred their hearts at such a young age? Many of the students lived in the neighboring inner-city communities, which were filled with frequent spates of violence. I was tasked with one of the most difficult subjects that all mortals must grapple with eventually: the reality of death.

As a Christian counselor, I searched my heart. Then, like a light bulb turning on, I had a strong conviction of how to approach such a sensitive subject. I shared about the hope of the resurrection.

As I began explaining to the children about the reality of seeing their loved ones again one day, I saw a marvelous transformation in their demeanor right before my eyes. Tears stopped flowing on their faces. As I continued reassuring them from the Bible, a few students even began to smile. The homeroom teacher looked on in wonder, as other attempts at comforting the students had failed before I was called.

As simple as this encounter was, it was a strong reminder of the real power that the message of Jesus' resurrection has to give hope to the world. Oftentimes, people who grow up in the church may take for granted the relevance of this life-changing message beyond the church walls, but its ability to provide real comfort and tangible hope can never be overstated.

In my own time of grief when I lost both my grandmother and mother, my best friends, the truth of Jesus' resurrection has sustained me to prevent deep depression. The best thing about the Resurrection is the historical truth it rests upon. Even the enemies of Jesus could not produce His body from the tomb to counteract the disciples' testimonies. This reality distinguishes our faith from all others. Meditating on the Resurrection in my own life and in my counseling practice is a testimony that its power continues to this very day, working in our lives!

In the days we live in, finding truly good news and lasting hope can be difficult. To anyone grieving or in a rut, remember what Jesus went through. Jesus understands your suffering. He went all the way to death, but it did not stop there. The empty tomb, my class' testimonies, and my own life's experiences testify to the living hope of the resurrection in our lives as believers. This power brings peace now and salvation for the life to come. Will you tap into the power of Jesus' resurrection today? **BA**

Sonia Fay Buckland writes from the West Indies.



Questions & Answers



How do you understand John 1:1? “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

Linked as it is with John’s prologue (1:1-18) and the full fourth Gospel, this verse reveals timeless truths and endless insights beyond what we can fully grasp, but that doesn’t keep us from grasping.

Who or what is Jesus? John’s Gospel begins by introducing the Word, an eternal entity who not only *relates with* God but also *identifies as* God. John 1:1 leaves us longing for more. Thankfully, the next seventeen verses tell us much of what our minds yearn to know about the Word, and the balance of the book fleshes out much more of the heavenly scene.

John 1:14 fills in the biggest blank by affirming that the Word of verse 1 “was made flesh, and dwelt among us” (KJV). This is an unmistakable reference to that Incarnation event by which the preexistent spiritual Son of the eternal, invisible Spirit Father-God in heaven took human form like us so that we could be restored to the image of Him who first created us.

Said another way, the transcendent Word of John 1:1 became the divine-human Son. The fourth Gospel sets Him forth as the Bread and Water of Life, the Light of the world, the Good Shepherd and only Door to the one true sheepfold, the Way and Truth, the Resurrection and Life, and the Lamb of God that takes away the world’s sin.

The nature and essence of the Word who became flesh and lived among us in the person of Jesus can scarcely be distinguished from the nature and essence of His Father in heaven. The Word who became flesh

and dwelt among us was one true, beloved, begotten Son of the one true God. He shared the omnipotence of the almighty Creator, the omniscience of the all-wise Father, and the omnipresence of the all-loving Spirit of God.

When was the Word both God and with God? Before He became flesh and lived among us in Jesus Christ? “In the beginning” (Genesis 1:1; John 1:1) pushes us back into the farthest limits of time past, to eternity’s unfathomable border. If Jesus was begotten — not created — of His Father, as we affirm, then we can scarcely conceive of a time when the eternal Father did not know, did not cherish, had not begotten His one and only Son. Speaking of creation, we think of an act or acts that are accomplished in time and space. Thinking of Jesus’ begetting by His Father’s own divine self and God-person, we need not think in the same terms. The Bible’s “In the beginning” is mostly equivalent to “Before time began.”

Where was the Word with God? The Bible’s one God reveals Himself as both Father and Son, via the Holy Spirit. Our Father in heaven is God. His Son Jesus Christ shared the Father’s eternal glory before taking human form to serve and die on earth, and now reigns with His Father above — Lord over all. They share the same one “God essence” and the same one divine nature, united in the Holy Spirit of love.

Expressing these profound Bible truths so that they are understood and accessible to all is not within human reach, but it is no sin to try — even when we fail. Of all scriptures that bear on this amazing theme, John 1:1ff is the most familiar. Other texts that support the same view of Christ’s personhood and deity are Philipians 2:5-11; Colossians 1:12-20; and Hebrews 1:1-14.

— Elder Calvin Burrell

A Faith Like Rhoda's



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Developing a childlike trust in God, despite the circumstances.

by Marcia Sanders

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1, NASB).

Faith can be such a challenging concept: assurance of things *hoped for*, the conviction of things *not seen*. It is so hard to trust in things we cannot see. In fact, it may seem foolish to do this — even when we're trying so hard to trust. Often, we fear being thought foolish, so we're afraid to express a trust in something that can't be seen or explained.

Imagine for a moment that you are part of the early church. Do you struggle trusting in things you can't see or explain? You have experienced times of great joy as you've personally witnessed or heard about many amazing miracles: the lame walking, the blind seeing.

But there have also been excruciatingly difficult times. And now you have learned the horrifying news of a fellow believer jailed for his faith.

How can you hold on? If you are the servant girl, Rhoda, you will stand out for your faith in this situation.

A king arrests

Herod has executed James, John's brother, for spreading the good news of Jesus. The Jews praised Herod for that vicious act. With one "victory" under his belt, Herod now has Peter arrest-

ed and imprisoned — Peter, the bold, brash, outspoken follower of the Way. Not wanting to take any chances with an escape, four squads of four soldiers each are guarding Peter until Passover is done, when he can be brought out before the people (Acts 12:1-4).

Concerned about Herod's intentions, those of you in the church gather secretly to pray for Peter's release. *We can't lose another leader*, you think, so you keep praying. Meanwhile, Peter is sleeping between two soldiers. He is bound with two chains, and guards stand in front of the door watching over the prison. Herod is leaving nothing to chance. An escape will not be permitted (vv. 5, 6).

A disciple freed

Peter, though, seems unconcerned, trusting in the Lord's

deliverance as he rests peacefully. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appears in a great light and strikes Peter on the side, waking him. “Quick, get up!” the angel orders, and the chains immediately fall off. “Put on your clothes and sandals. . . . Wrap your cloak around you and follow me” (vv. 7, 8).

Thinking it all a dream, Peter complies. However, as they pass first one and then a second guard and the great iron gate leading into the city swings open on its own, Peter realizes that the Lord has truly rescued him from not only Herod but also the Jews. Once outside the gate, he heads immediately to the home where he is confident many are gathered, praying for his release (vv. 9-12).

Try to place yourself in Peter’s shoes. Still in shock from this miraculous escape, you’re eager to tell your friends, to let them know their prayers have been answered. You’re knocking on the door, excited to tell them of God’s miraculous rescue in spite of all the odds against it. You rehearse in your mind the various miracles that occurred during your escape so that you don’t leave out any details.

A servant runs

However, rather than the gate being thrown open in welcome, nothing happens. The young servant girl who answers the knock is so overjoyed at hearing Peter’s voice that she forgets to open the gate. Instead she races into where the others are gathered and announces Peter’s arrival (vv. 13, 14).

Can Peter hear the confusion

inside? Rhoda’s joyous news that Peter is alive and at the gate. The disbelief of those praying so passionately for his release: “How can Peter be at the gate? He’s in jail!” “You must be out of your mind!” Possibly a few “silly girl” comments as well. Peter smiles to himself at these conflicting expressions of faith. He continues to knock at the gate, and Rhoda continues to insist that Peter truly is free.

This situation is much like what happened in Mark 9. The father of a demon-possessed boy tells Jesus, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” (v. 24).



Praying for Peter’s freedom but not accepting his miraculous release. Assurance of things hoped for, evidence of things not seen. Perhaps the believers have developed their own ideas of how God will answer their prayer.

A simple faith

Only Rhoda, it seems, doesn’t hesitate, doesn’t doubt. As soon as she hears Peter’s voice, she knows who he is. She knows he is on the other side of that door,

that their prayers have been answered, that she must share the good news with the others — the older, more experienced Christians, those with greater faith. Or so she thinks.

Faith is so counterintuitive to our human experience. We want to see and touch in order to believe, but our Father asks for our unwavering trust — even when we can’t see how He is working. Or we pray for God’s will but decide what that will should look like. We want to tell God how to handle our situation, but then we sometimes miss His answer when it doesn’t align with our expected outcome. Perhaps this complete, trusting faith of Rhoda’s is a further example of what Christ meant when he said that we must become as little children (Matthew 18:3). One who didn’t fear being wrong, didn’t doubt that prayers had been answered, but simply recognized Peter’s voice and gave thanks for the answer to prayer.

Lord, help us to be like Rhoda, fully trusting that You are at work in our lives, resting securely in the knowledge that we don’t need to figure things out, because You already have. Your ways are not our ways, but Your ways are most definitely the best. **BA**

Marcia Sanders

writes from Fort Smith, AR, where she attends the Church of God (Seventh Day) with her husband, Randy. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*, unless otherwise noted.





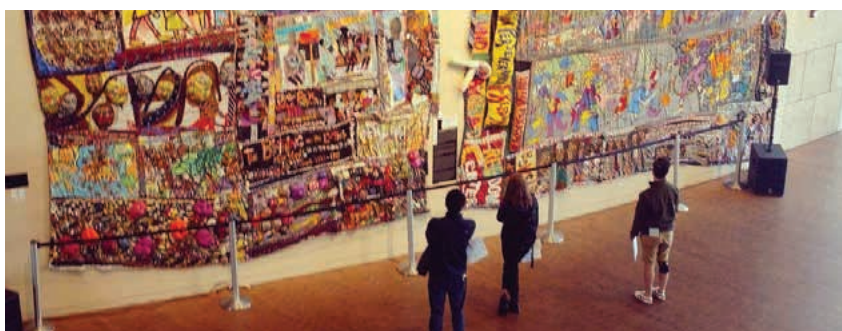
Save the Dates!

We've marked our July 2023 calendar in bold letters: **GC Convention**. Are you making plans as well?

July 10-15, 2023, will be a week filled with worship, fellowship, instruction, and relationships. And don't forget to come early on Monday, July 10, to join friends and family at the Ark Encounter and the evening reception.

It will be an incredible experience you won't want to miss after being apart so long. We are eager to welcome you to Covington, Kentucky. Hope to see you there!

— Convention Planning Committee





Gratitude

© Petr Tkachenko | Dreamstime.com

by **Leo Cardez**

Prison life has beat the hellion out of me. It has helped me to learn not to be hardheaded when God is trying to teach me something. For these lessons, I thank God.

Life is a painful struggle, but only the dead need not struggle. For these struggles, I thank God.

Trials and tribulations have made me stronger, and that pain has mysteriously turned into beauty. For these trials, tribulations, and pain, I thank God.

I can use my strengths to help others who are going through what I have endured, for what good is being strong unless it can be used to help the weak? For these opportunities, I thank God.

Honest friendship, deep conversation, and a good laugh even in the midst of chaos. For these blessings, I thank God.

The opportunity to focus my energy into making needed changes in my thinking — that even behind these bars, I can make a positive shift in my outlook. For these changes, I thank God.

Food, water, and shelter: For these basic necessities, which so many lack, I thank God.

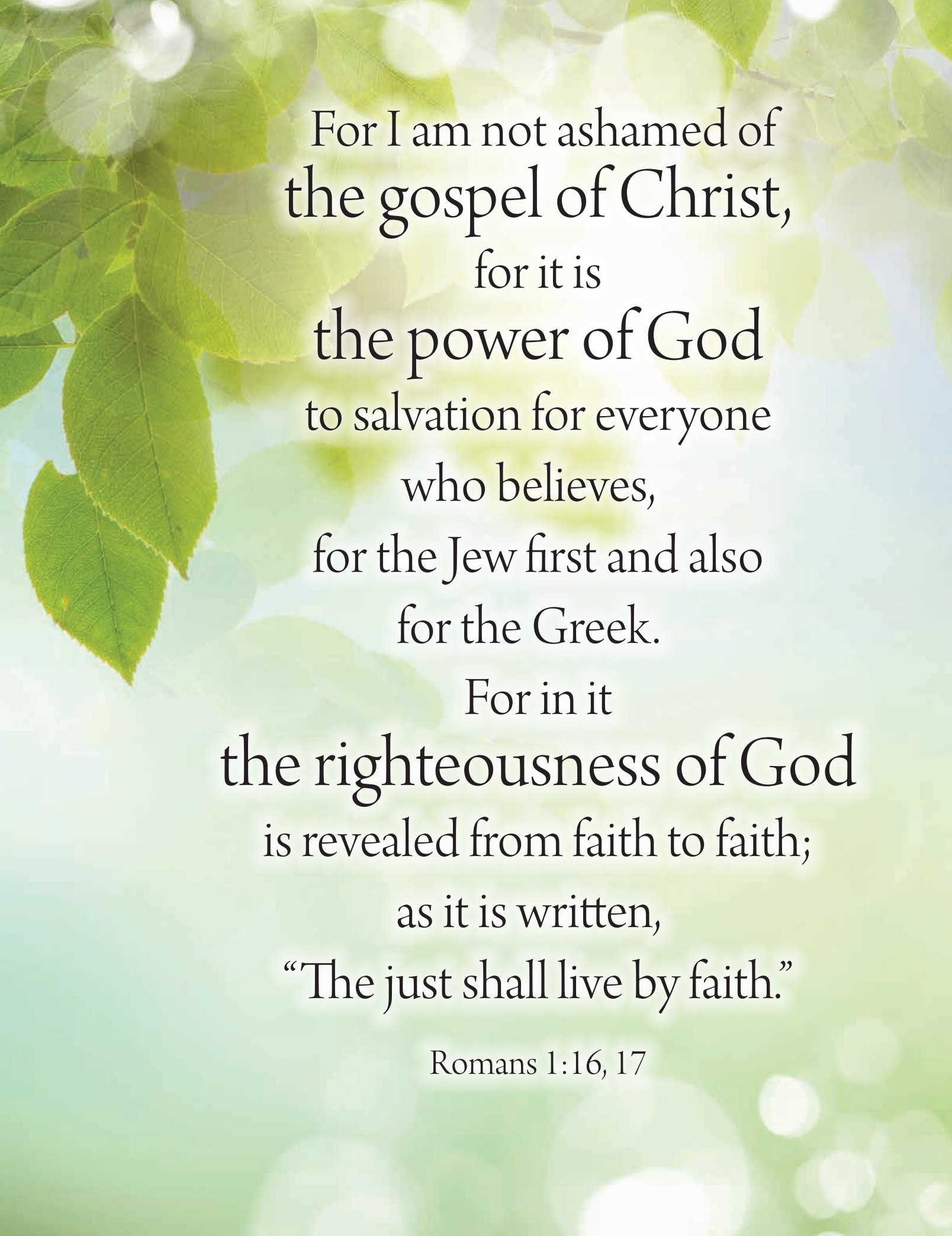
For getting into shape and living a healthier lifestyle removed from my addictions, I thank God.

For all those who go out of their way to make things harder than they need to be; for all the inmates who whine and complain about anything and everything; for all the friends and family who turned their backs on me in my darkest hour and chose hate instead of love, anger instead of compassion, animosity instead of understanding, and rancor instead of forgiveness; for all the frustrations that come with a life lived inside a concrete jungle on the fringes of society — all of which drove me to do what I didn't before: give my life to Jesus Christ. For all these people, I thank God.

For this soul-saving intervention that has opened my eyes and heart to the importance of real family, loyal friends, unflinching love, and to the God who made it all.

For all of this, I will forever thank God. **BA**

Leo Cardez (a pen name) is an inmate at a facility in Dixon, IL.



For I am not ashamed of
the gospel of Christ,
for it is
the power of God
to salvation for everyone
who believes,
for the Jew first and also
for the Greek.

For in it
the righteousness of God
is revealed from faith to faith;
as it is written,
“The just shall live by faith.”

Romans 1:16, 17

Anatomy of the Gospel

Romans 1:16, 17 not only states the theme of Romans but also stands as the center and summary of the New Testament and the whole Bible. Let's review this monumental confession line by line.

For I . . . The gospel is a divine act that changes everything. It confronts and demands a personal decision (Romans 10:6-13).

am not ashamed . . . The gospel is no misguided claim that results in shame, but the radical and triumphant truth of God confessed with full confidence (Mark 8:34; Psalm 71:1, 2, 14-18, 24).

of the gospel . . . The gospel refers to good news, glad tidings of God's reign, sent and shared by ambassadors of the King (Isaiah 52:7; Romans 10:14, 15).

of Christ . . . The gospel is not a proposition but a Person. The "gospel of God" is the "gospel of His Son," King Jesus! It is all about Him and what He has done (Romans 1:1-4, 9).

for it is the power of God . . . The gospel event is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which shows God's saving and transforming power and might (1 Corinthians 1:18, 24; 15:1-4).

to salvation . . . The gospel offers the benefits of what Jesus has accomplished in reconciling us to God, forgiving our sins, and delivering us from wrath and death (Romans 5; 1 Corinthians 15).

for everyone who believes . . . The gospel of salvation is a gift of God received not by our works but by the obedience of faith, trusting Jesus as Savior and Lord (Romans 1:5; Ephesians 2:8).

for the Jew first and also for the Greek . . . The gospel does not abandon Israel's story; it fulfills it and welcomes all into the covenant family. Everyone needs God's grace (Romans 3:9; 10:12; Galatians 3:26-29).

For in it the righteousness of God is revealed . . . The gospel is an apocalyptic event. In Christ, God's covenant faithfulness, justice, and power for salvation are unveiled before all (Romans 3:3-7, 21, 22; Psalm 98:1, 2; 143:1, 2, 11; Isaiah 51:5-8).

from faith to faith . . . The gospel revelation of God's saving righteousness progresses from His faithfulness to our response of faith for righteousness. This two-sided faith — divine and human — is fully seen in Jesus (Romans 3:3, 22; Genesis 15:6).

as it is written, "The just shall live by faith." This gospel offers life by simple faith. This good news isn't new but the fulfillment of God's promises in Scripture (Romans 1:2; 16:26; Habakkuk 2:4).



The Gospel

by Whaid Rose

"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15).

A right understanding of the gospel makes all the difference in how we live out our salvation experience. So what is the nature and core content of the gospel? The goal of this article is to show that the gospel story is about the crucified and resurrected Christ and the power of salvation through Him.

We will look at two passages of Scripture. The first is Romans 1. Here Paul, after establishing the source and far-reaching implications of the gospel in the opening verses, goes on to unwrap its core contents in verses 16, 17:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

Power and righteousness

In these verses, Paul insists that the gospel demonstrates two essential characteristics: God's power and God's righteousness.

Contained within the gospel itself is a power that can transform sinful humans into new creatures in Christ. This power is not of our own nor of the preacher nor of an evangelistic program, but a power that Paul attributes to the One who first spoke the gospel in Genesis 3:15. To the serpent, God declared, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel."

Known as the *proto-euangelion* (or "first gospel"), this verse is widely recognized as the Bible's earliest announcement of God's eternal good news, made to our first parents in Eden soon after their "fall" into sin. It signaled the beginning of the drama of redemption. Central to its promised outcome is Jesus, the seed of the woman who would one day crush the serpent's head.

This is precisely what Jesus did through His atoning sacrifice on the cross, thus satisfying the just demands of the law on one hand

and supplying the second gospel element on the other: the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith.

These fundamental truths led to the sixteenth century Protestant Reformation, which permanently changed the tenor and landscape of Christianity. It grew out of Martin Luther's dilemma over the question of justification: How can a sinful human being come to stand justified before a holy and righteous God?

Recognizing the inadequacy of his own self-effort, Luther longed for inner peace with God. He came to realize while meditating on Romans 1:16, et al., that his only means of acceptance and right standing before God was through Christ. Paul affirms this in 5:1, 2:

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand.

Central truth

There's more that Paul wants us to understand about the nature of the gospel, which he articulates at length in

of Jesus Christ

1 Corinthians 15. Consider these opening verses:

For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures (vv. 3, 4).

Here Paul summarizes the gospel he had preached to the Corinthian brethren, the gospel in which they now stand (vv. 1, 2). He emphasizes that this gospel cannot be separated from the historical report of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. The phrase “first of all” in verse 3 can be rendered “of first importance,” underscoring that death, burial, and resurrection are no side issues in their faith. To strengthen his case, Paul lists the many eyewitnesses of the risen Christ (vv. 5-8), including many still then alive, like the apostle himself!

Further, Paul uses a highly compelling line of thought in verses 13-18 to show the dire implications of a gospel void of the resurrection, concluding with this grim reality: “For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen,

your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!”

In essence, there is no real gospel without the Resurrection. As wise Bible students have observed, the Resurrection is “God’s amen!” to Christ’s atoning work on the cross. It points to the source of the gospel’s power (the same power that raised Jesus from the dead) and roots the gospel story in historical fact.

This separates the claims of Christianity from religious myths and fables. This seems to be John’s objective in the opening verses of his first epistle. “I’m writing to you about what we have heard, seen, and touched,” John explains, in essence (1 John 1:1-3). His use of the pronoun we here includes his fellow disciples to whom the resurrected Christ appeared on multiple occasions. John wants his readers to know that he was there in the room, and after Thomas touched Jesus’ hands and side, John may have touched them too.

Right understanding

The gospel story is therefore about the crucified and resurrected Christ, the good news about what He did to rescue us from

sin and death. Incidentally, Paul’s defense of the Resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15 is directed, not to skeptics of Christianity but to the Corinthian believers themselves. Because the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing (1:18), Christians face the ever-present temptation to water it down to make it more palatable. But a right understanding of the gospel is critical, not only to our initial salvation experience but also to our faith journey.

The gospel isn’t just for the unsaved; it’s for believers too. We don’t come to Christ and then move on into deeper theological waters; we move deeper into the gospel. The gospel not only saves us but leads us all the way home. This is amazing grace! **BA**

Whaid Rose is dean of the Artios Center for Vibrant Leadership, and he pastors the Newton, NC congregation.





We Would See Jesus!

A gospel for the
whole world.
by Dorothy Nimchuk

The recent resurrection of Lazarus had caused quite a stir in Jerusalem among the throngs gathered for Passover. A number of Greeks, probably Jewish proselytes, had also come to Jerusalem to worship and heard of the miracle. They approached Philip: “Sir, we would see Jesus” (John 12:21, KJV).

Jesus’ followers didn’t know it then, but the desire of these Greeks could have been the Holy Spirit drawing them to the Savior. Such was planned and prophesied long ago. But it

wasn’t until after His death and resurrection that the gospel truly extended into all the world.

Pressing matters

The request of the Greeks may have originated from simple curiosity: Why did the Jews exhibit such animosity against Jesus? Philip, along with Andrew, relayed their request to Jesus, but, seemingly, it remained unanswered. Instead, preoccupied with the nearness of His “hour,” Jesus shared with His disciples that His time had come to be glorified:

“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. . . . Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save

Me from this hour’? But for this purpose I came to this hour” (vv. 23, 24, 27, 28).

Jesus had every right to be troubled. The Pharisees were redoubling their efforts to get rid of Him — and Lazarus, lest the Romans take away their place and nation. In response to their fears, Caiaphas responded that it was better for one man to die, rather than the entire nation. This means that Jesus’ death was not only for the Jews but for everyone (11:49-52).

Trial and crucifixion

Things progressed quickly and dramatically after the news of Jesus’ arrest spread. The Pharisees’ efforts to convict Jesus sprang from fear and jealousy. Pilate let the Jews decide whom he should release at Passover: Jesus or

Barabbas. The Pharisees called for Barabbas, a man guilty of murder and sedition, to be free. "But what do I do with Jesus?" Pilate asked (Matthew 27:15-22).

"Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" The cry arose from the chief priests and officers. Reluctant to do so, Pilate was warned by the people that releasing Jesus meant he was no friend of Caesar's. The people parroted the call for crucifixion and shouted, "We have no king but Caesar!" they shouted (John 19:12, 15).

The Lamb of God died on Passover's Preparation Day. Three days later, He rose even as He said. However, paid by the Pharisees, guards of the tomb reported that Jesus' disciples had stolen His body.

The Greeks who first approached Philip may have felt a strange sense of loss as they made their way home. We can imagine what went through their minds: *Who is this Jesus, and why is His life and message wasted in the wake of His death? He had preached a kingdom, but now all is lost.*

Universal gospel

A few short weeks later, these same Greeks would gather in Jerusalem for Pentecost. Mingling with Jews from all over the world, they heard excitement — nay, amazement — as each person heard and understood in their own language the resurrection of Jesus, preached by Peter and other disciples. Grief turned to conviction and conversion, and Jews were baptized by the thousands. *Could this salvation be for us as well?* the Greeks might have thought. Perhaps they returned home discouraged

as the Jews insisted they needed to be circumcised, the one rite they had failed to comply with.

In the months that followed, the Greeks discovered that salvation is for all humanity, not just for the Jews. They may have heard Paul's message that it was the faith unto righteousness, like that of the "father of many nations" that saved and that, under the terms of the new covenant, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision availed anything. Again, they might have puzzled, *What exactly is needed to remove the guilt and punishment for man's sin, to wash away the stain?*

Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary defines sin and its remedy well:

“What exactly is needed to remove the guilt and punishment for man's sin, to wash away the stain?”

In the Bible sin is viewed in several ways: as an offense against God, which requires a pardon; as defilement, which requires cleansing; as slavery, which cries out for emancipation; as a debt, which must be canceled; as defeat, which must be reversed by victory; and as estrangement, which must be set right by reconciliation. However sin is viewed, it is through the work

of Christ that the remedy is provided. He has procured the pardon, the cleansing, the emancipation, the cancellation, the victory, and the reconciliation.

Isaiah revealed the scope of this good news when he wrote that Jesus would be "a light to the Gentiles, that you should be My salvation to the ends of the earth" (49:6)

It may have been curiosity that first led the Greeks to seek Jesus. Though they received no direct response from Him at the time, they ended up witnessing the mighty power of God at work and understood clearly salvation was extended to them.

Everyone needs to see Jesus, regardless of race, nationality, or background. It's up to us to share Him with them! **BA**

Dorothy Nimchuk and her husband, Nick (retired pastor), are isolated CoG7 members in Medicine Hat, Alberta.





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Failure to Strength

How can we prepare before we're tempted to wander?

by Dr. David R. Downey

One of the most memorable failures in the Bible is recorded in Mark 14:27-31 and 66-72.

Just after the Last Supper, Jesus told the disciples that they would all be scattered and desert Him. The apostle Peter assured Him that if everyone else were to deny Him, he would not, and was prepared to die. I can see Peter gesture to the others while putting his arm around the Master in a protective gesture. "You and me against the world, Lord. You can count on me!"

The latter verses above give

us the rest of the story, including Peter's horrifying denial in the courtyard of the high priest: "I do not know the man!" Although Peter failed spectacularly, his restoration is a case study in the right way back. It is not so important to wonder whether we will fail the Lord or others, because we certainly will. It would be better to determine if we have spiritual resources in the bank when we do.

Judas also failed spectacularly. I have found it helpful to contrast the failures of Judas and Peter in these dramatic days before the Crucifixion and Resurrection. Judas went on to total destruction, while Peter found grace. What was the difference?

Comparing and contrasting

Judas is cynical; Peter is on adventure. The Bible portrays

Judas Iscariot in a negative light and otherwise says little about him, possibly because he never ventured an opinion, asked a question out of curiosity, or participated with others in a positive way. He occupied the shadows of the narrative. When he did speak, he was critical and selfish.

In contrast, the reason we know so much about Peter is that he took risks. We see Peter close to Jesus, asking questions, offering suggestions, sometimes tripping on his good intentions. He was engaged and adventurous.

Judas is arrogant; Peter is hungry for guidance. Cynicism concerning the Savior is bad, but arrogance is worse. The one time we remember Judas taking part in the discussion is when he chose to rebuke the Master.

In John 12:1-8, Jesus blesses the woman who bathes His feet with the expensive perfume, and Judas questions the wisdom of such an act, ostensibly because he cared for the poor. But the Bible indicates that Judas was just a thief!

Peter, on the other hand, was brash, overconfident, impetuous, and unaware of his own weakness, but not arrogant. On the frequent occasions when Jesus corrected Peter, he listened silently, never resisting, and in my mind's eye, ticked off on his fingers ways he could make corrections in the future.

Judas stumbles downstairs; Peter crawls upstairs. In his book *David: After God's Own Heart*, author H. Edwin Young points out perhaps the most important difference between these two disciples. Peter, like King David many years before him, looked for the Lord's strength to climb out of the basement once he found himself there. Judas, like King Saul, continued to stumble down into the darkness. Peter's example shows the Lord is compassionate toward people who fail, and then reach out for help.

Of course, it would be better not to stumble at all! We can limit our wandering by proper preparation. An abiding relationship with God is both the prevention and the cure.

Spiritual preparation

From the first moment we see him, Peter was on mission with Christ. For all of his failures, Peter happily identified with Him. Nevertheless, whenever he failed, even after the Lord had

left the earth (Galatians 2:11-14), he apparently was thinking first for Peter, and only then for Jesus and His will. In other words, Peter was not in full fellowship with the Savior.

For our spiritual condition to remain fresh, God gave us spiritual disciplines. A discipline, or a habit, is something we do regularly. Let's highlight two familiar disciplines that will keep us from being blindsided by temptation as Peter was.

Prayer

The opposite of the discipline of prayer is spiritual insensitivity, for prayer is simply an open line of communication with heaven. When we are thus open to the Holy Spirit's influence, we will not stumble into sin as Peter did, but rather will be forewarned. We can start each day with a time of prayer, a quiet time. We should give as much time as we reasonably can to this, and it should be serious and disciplined. This will order our mind, open us to the Lord's influence, and set our path for the rest of the day.

We should follow this set

prayer time without intermission (Luke 18:1-8; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; Ephesians 6:18), a practical and constant state of attentiveness to the urgings of God. This prayer does not require mumbling all day or any particular posture, like folded hands or kneeling. Additionally, some of the day will not be in conscious prayer, as other things will take our attention. However, we can order our minds so that we are multitasking, attending to the needs of the day while always being in touch with heaven.

Bible study

Prayer keeps us centered, but Bible study gives us stability. In fact, without careful attention to the Word of God, our prayer lacks power. Prayer needs balance. I find the richness of the Word of God reaches the deepest recesses of my personality and restores order. I heard somewhere that the ancient rabbis said, "An hour in study of the Torah is to the Holy One, as an hour in prayer." During my quiet time in the morning, I make sure not to miss my Bible reading. I can pray all day wherever I am,

“When we are open to the Holy Spirit's influence, we will not stumble into sin as Peter did.”

Special Tribute

Gina Tolbert

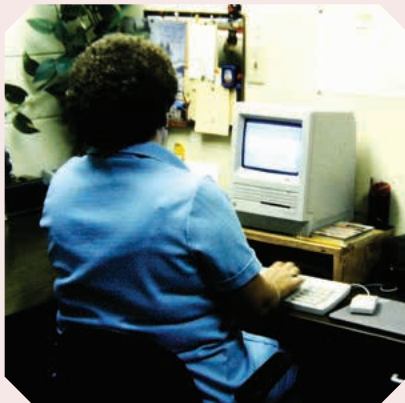
1939 - 2021

Gina Tolbert (82) of Denver, Colorado, passed away on December 31, 2021. She was born March 22, 1939, in Springfield, Missouri.

Beginning as mailroom clerk and proofreader, Gina moved on to serve the Bible Advocate Press for several decades and in several capacities, including editor of the children's magazine, *Footprints*, and editor of *The Harvest Field Messenger*. Gina retired after working for almost ten years as accountant for Fairmount Cemetery.

Gina will be remembered in the Denver church for her ministry with her husband, George, in leading the children's department. She will especially be remembered for her puppetry ministry to children and her programming of children's church.

Gina is survived by her husband of 66 years, George; her daughter, Sheri Hanks; and four grandchildren. She was predeceased by her daughter, Kimberly.



Please visit churchright.org for other memorials.

but I cannot always open the Bible.

We should also respond to what we read. We should make every effort to do what the Word says and make changes when we seem unwilling to respond to its commands.

Other disciplines like worship, service, and fasting all have a place in maintaining a strong relationship with God and should not be neglected. Our hope in being spiritually on task is to tap into the power He has to keep us.

Best defense

Peter was a good man. We all wish we were as ready as he always seemed to be. However, just like us, Peter tended to overestimate his readiness in spiritual matters.

We can learn that our best defense is to realize that without the strong arm of the Lord, we are vulnerable and insufficient. Furthermore, when we fail, we can come back, being sure of the compassion of the Lord. Tears and heartbreak over our sin, as Peter showed, are indications that we are truly His. We can then dust ourselves off, take His hand again, and remember to stay close. **BA**

Dr. David Downey writes from Burleson, TX.



Like a Tree

"They will be like a tree planted by the water . . . its leaves are always green" (Jeremiah 17:8, NIV).

Like a tree by a stream, let me be,
my roots deep in moist soil,
so when drought comes,
heavens don't give rain,
I stand green and flourishing.

May I be a sturdy oak,
my roots deep in God,
so when winds blow,
storms unleash,
I stand erect in any gale,
firm upon the Rock.

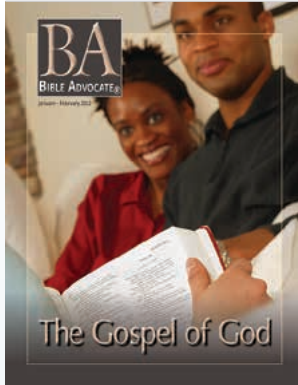
May my faith go deep into His Word,
until I stand strong, rooted,
steadfast in His promises,
able to weather any storm —
like a tree by a stream.

Jewell Johnson





Readers Write



Psalm of the Cross

Rarely does an article impact so deeply that the revelation of it captures the heart and dominates our thinking. R. Herbert's "Psalm of the Cross" [January-February, p.14] does just that, and so much more.

Herbert's focus and insight on the death cry of Jesus on the cross (as recorded in Mathew 27:46) is profound, revolutionary, and magnificent in its clarity and scope.

Jesus in His battered and beaten state cries aloud, "My God, My God, why have You forgotten me?" We know the verse well, and we've accepted the nearly universal interpretation that God, who cannot look upon sin, turned away from His Son at the very time "His Son" needed Him most.

Yet even though we hear Bible scholars telling us this over and over, there remains something within our understanding that whispers to our hearts that somehow there must be more, that His solemn and historically riveting words really meant something quite different.

Herbert's writing is an illuminating soul stirrer that explores a subject we've all pondered but had no answer for, other than accepting the interpretation of conventional thinking. Herbert takes [us] on a journey into ancient Hebrew thinking, and with scripture references, paints a two-page masterpiece.

I have been a regular reader of the *Bible Advocate* for years; I have loved the articles and have been inspired along the way. But — this writing is different and deserves a special place within our heart's understanding.

Herbert reminds us that the Malachi 3:6 "I am The Lord and do not change" God of the Old Testament is the same God who was with His Son on the day of His "it is finished" salvation work. This article has captured my heart and inspired me all the more, to search out and dig deeper!

The additional takeaway may well be, what other scriptural unveilings will be coming our way as the time of God's return draws nearer?

Thank you, R. Herbert, for writing and sharing this unique and wonderful article.

I loved it!

C. F.
Walla Walla, WA



Don't have time to read the Bible Advocate? No problem! The new AudioBA is just the thing for busy people or for readers who want to experience the magazine in a different way. You can listen on the website or download the files to your favorite electronic device.

Give a listen to the January-February and March-April issues, and let us know what you think!

GC Ministries News

ARTIOS • MISSIONS • PUBLICATIONS



Looking for resources for your daily Christian walk or for your local church's mission? Check out the Artios Center for Vibrant Leadership!

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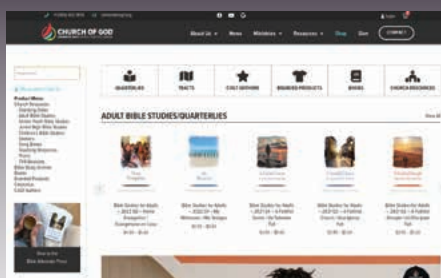
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NAMC Meeting

The North America Ministerial Council meeting is scheduled for October 10-15, 2022, at the Embassy Suites Cincinnati RiverCenter in Covington, Kentucky (across the river from Cincinnati, Ohio).

Two topics that will be discussed:

- the roles of women
- study of the old and new covenants.

Please join us in prayer, and support your pastor to attend. If you have comments or questions, please contact us at namc-office@cog7.org.





How the church can fulfill
the Great Commission.

by Ramon Ruiz

There are five main areas in the Great Commission that Christ gave the church: evangelism, teaching, worship, fellowship, and service. However, it is important to highlight that, today, evangelism is not only the first but also the most urgent area of the whole mission that we must fulfill.

The reason for this statement is simple: All the other tasks of the church depend on evangelization. What would a shepherd be without sheep? What good would a teacher be if there were no students? Who would be served and with whom would one fellowship if there were no

members? Yet evangelism is the least developed area of the church.

In the history of our denomination, the Church of God (Seventh Day), we have placed a great emphasis on the knowledge of biblical truth, and by the grace of God, we have achieved a great theological development. But not in evangelism. Statistics show that our growth in numbers has been scant, and in some cases, null. It is time to reinforce the evangelistic work that each and every member should participate in, considering, among other things, the following points.

1. The church is called to evangelize at all times, in all places, and in all circumstances.

Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word (Acts 8:4).

The church of the first century grew significantly due to the work of preaching (4:4). But following Christ implies eventually facing difficulties. Still, the early believers took every opportunity to announce the good news of salvation to the world, even when persecuted. Never in the history of Christianity has the church grown as much as in the first century, when the believers lived in the midst of persecution.

According to an article on CBN News (January 2022), during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, more than 4,000 churches closed in the United States. Thirty percent of believers have not returned to church, and 20,000 pastors left the ministry. This data demonstrates the danger we find ourselves in. Not only are we not winning new souls for Christ, but in some cases, we are losing them.

As a church, we must recog-

nize that God has called us to go out and testify what He has done through His Son Jesus Christ and what He has done in us. There is no time to waste. Evangelization is not a job done one day a week nor in a specific place, nor when the circumstances are optimal to do it.

Unfortunately, many Christians believe that going to worship on Saturday means satisfying our obligation with God, but that is not the case. In reality, the great work of the believer begins precisely when the pastor says, “Amen” at the end of the service. Evangelism is done at work, in the neighborhood, at school, and anywhere we go. As someone once said, each Sabbath the church is gathered to worship. The rest of the week we are scattered to serve.

2. The church must understand that evangelism is not only a gift of the Holy Spirit but also a commandment we must fulfill.

The Bible says this about the gift of evangelism:

But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. . . . And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers (Ephesians 4:7, 8, 11).

Also, the Lord commands, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matthew 28:19). Historically,



the task of evangelizing has been assigned to a few members of the church — that is, those who have the gift. The rest of us have been merely observers and sometimes even angry critics, claiming that there is little or no growth of the church.

It is time to change our way of thinking. Evangelization is not the responsibility of some, but the privilege of all.

As a church, we have been zealous to keep the commandments of God. Unfortunately, we have not obeyed the mandate to evangelize. It is a forgotten commandment, or ignored by the vast majority of us. And the only way to reverse this reality is for each convert to also become an evangelist.

3. The church must first talk to God and then talk about God.

Jesus said to His disciples: “What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops” (Matthew 10:27). *First comes the preparation of the messenger and then the preparation of the message.*

No one can speak to people about God if they have not previously been in prayer with Him. The fruit of evangelization is produced when the evangelist, filled with the Holy Spirit, gives the message of salvation to listeners. It is God who, through His Spirit, converts people. Human wisdom, good homiletics, or great theological knowledge do not convert the sinner. It is solely the work of the Holy Spirit. The evan-



gelist is the means by which God has determined to complete this work, but the one who converts hearts is God himself. Paul in his own words affirms this: "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase" (1 Corinthians 3:6, 7).

Additionally, the evangelist fights against a spiritual power called sin, and only the power of God can defeat it. Paul says, "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Ephesians 6:12).

For this reason, Jesus insisted that His disciples not leave Jerusalem until they had received the anointing of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-8) or the presence of God in their lives. For everything previously mentioned, believers must invest time in prayer to God in order to be invested with His Spirit and become evangelists who bear much fruit in Christ, especially to win souls for Christ.

4. Everything that we are as a church has a purpose: to testify.

The apostle Peter says what we are as a church and what we should do with what we are: "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; *that* ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Peter 2:9). In this text I emphasized the word *that* because the two great statements Peter deals with in this passage — what we are and what we must do — are grammatically united by this function word. In this case, *that* is used to introduce a clause that provides more information.

In short, we are a church to the degree we testify. A church that does not announce the gospel is not a church.

Before Peter's writing, Jesus promised believers that He would be with us until the end of the world (Matthew 28:20). But this promise is also given in the scope of the mission. This means that Christ is with us to the same extent that we are fulfilling the mission. If we don't, we can't assure His presence.

Joining the mission

Speaking of work in regard to the work of God and speaking of workers, Jesus said to His disciples: "Then saith he unto his disciples, the harvest truly is plentiful, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest" (Matthew 9:37, 38).

This passage is quite profound. Jesus toured the cities and villages, teaching in the synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and ailment of the crowds. While observing the people, He felt compassion for them because they were scattered like sheep without a shepherd.

Reading the passage carefully, one can imagine Jesus overwhelmed by so much need. Despite being the Son of God, His spirit was moved seeing the crowds disoriented and aimless. Christ was so afflicted that He asked His disciples to pray that God would send the necessary help. Seeing the size of the mission, Jesus exclaimed, "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that he will send forth labourers into his harvest" (Matthew 9:38).

Here is another great teaching: There is no mission without missionaries. Let all of us do our part.



Online Extra

What do you do when someone threatens to commit suicide? How do you handle the heartbreak when they carry through with it? Our May-June Online Extra features a story by a woman who endured the

crushing aftermath of a suicide and worked toward new faith in God.

Read her account at baonline.org. And please share the story with someone who needs encouragement in this area.

Ramon Ruiz is president of the International Ministerial Congress and pastors the Melbourne church in Dallas, TX, with his wife, Rebeca. Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version.





Tell 'Em, Tell 'Em, and Tell 'Em!

Would you believe I had a high school speech teacher named Mr. Mushrush? One of his suggestions was that speakers use the “Tell ‘em, Tell ‘em, and Tell ‘em” approach to organizing their speeches. Introduction: Tell ‘em what you’re going to tell ‘em. Body: Tell ‘em what you told them you were going to tell ‘em. Conclusion: Tell ‘em what you told ‘em.

The apostle Paul never took Mr. Mushrush’s class, but in his epistle to the Roman believers, Paul follows that pattern. His brief introduction is “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, just as it is written: The righteous will live by faith” (Romans 1:16, 17). Three key words — *salvation*, *righteousness*, and *faith* — introduce three key concepts within the body of Paul’s message.

The word *salvation* indicates that there is something from which we need to be saved. And, as promised, Paul tells us: “God’s wrath is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness of people who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth” (v. 18). We need to be saved from the wrath of God against our own godlessness and unrighteousness. Lest we think that we are not godless and unrighteous, Paul devotes most of chapters 1-3 to telling us “There is no one righteous, not even one” (3:10). We stand before God condemned and “without excuse” (1:20). We need salvation.

The word *righteous* means “morally right.” We face the wrath of God because He himself is the very measure of being morally right, and we are

not even close. God’s righteousness is perfect and definitive. Anything less is unrighteous, the very quality for which we stand condemned. Elsewhere in Romans, Paul tells us the horrible truth that “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (3:23) and that “the wages of sin is death” (6:23). This is the reason we face the wrath of God. This is the reason we need salvation.

After that bad news, just as promised, Paul gives us the good news represented by the word *faith* and its synonym *belief*. Though we are born into this world fallen as sinful beings, and though we quickly prove our godlessness and unrighteousness by our attitudes and behaviors, the salvation we need is available by God’s grace. If we truly believe and place our faith in Jesus Christ, we can be considered perfectly righteous by our heavenly Judge (John 3:16).

Paul concludes the body of his gospel presentation by telling us what he’s told us: “I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38, 39, NASB).

People desperately need to hear the gospel. Let’s tell ‘em, tell ‘em, and tell ‘em.

— Loren Stacy

Scripture quotations are from the *Christian Standard Bible*, unless otherwise noted.



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