

NT

A pattern for life
in God's House

Survivor!

What Jesus said
about ... money and
possessions

Bible metaphors:

Lights in the world

Minor prophets:

Jonah

Issue 1 2015

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From the Editors' desk

The Founder

As another year opens we are glad to welcome readers to a varied selection of articles, reports and testimonies in the pages of NT magazine.

On only one occasion during the ministry of the Lord do we read of Him writing.¹ What He wrote on the ground soon disappeared as people walked over it. His words, however, live on – forever!²

Who Jesus is, the founder of our faith,³ is where we begin in a new series on 'The Story of Christianity' and issue one takes us from the times of the Lord and His Apostles to the Great Schism. In future issues we will cover the 2000 plus years of the story to the present day. The story, of course, is a living one, because He is a living Saviour.

Christianity is not just a story; it is how disciples of the founder live. To be called a Christian is honourable⁴ and brings responsibility. One of our practical series this year features some of the good works a Christian should engage in.

'What Jesus said about ...' will deal with some of the topics He addressed and, in this issue, we visit the subject of 'money'.

The first in the series 'Bible Metaphors' on shining lights reminds us of the one who is the Light of the World,⁵ one of the great I Am titles of the Son of God. Further metaphors will be 'Branches in the Vine', 'Working parts of Christ's Body' and 'Living stones in God's house'.

We also look at 'Lessons from the Minor Prophets' beginning with Jonah who had to learn about the compassion of God. In subsequent issues we will also learn from Hosea, Haggai and Zechariah.

*"Learn from me,"*⁶ said the founder.

May I run the race before me,
Strong and brave to face the foe,
Looking only unto Jesus
As I onward go.⁷

Robert

References: (1) John 8:6,8 (2) Mat. 24:35 (3) Heb. 12:2 (4) Jas. 2:7 (5) John 8:12 (6) Mat. 11:29 (7) K.B. Wilkinson

All Bible quotation from ESV

Darkness and light

Alex Jarvis, Romford, England

A striking new monument to Martin Luther King in Washington DC carries various quotations from a number of his speeches carved into a long, polished, black granite wall. One that caught my eye came from a speech he made a few months before his assassination in 1968: “Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that.”

The Bible opens to a scene of darkness and desolation and closes with a vision of dazzling light!

In the second verse of Genesis we read: *The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep.* Then, suddenly and dramatically, we read in the next verse: *And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.* Complete transformation at one word from the Creator: darkness driven out by light!

In the last chapters of Revelation we read John’s wonderful vision of God’s eternal city: *And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb ... and there will be no night there.*¹

In between these bookends we read about the never ending struggle between darkness and light; between hatred and love. This struggle reached its climax when the Lord Jesus came to bring light and love into the world, claiming: *“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”*²

Shortly before making this statement, Jesus had been visited by Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin Council. He was puzzled by the negative comments the religious leaders were making about Jesus which seemed at total variance with his numerous acts of kindness and miraculous healing which were the talk of Jerusalem. Troubled, Nicodemus decided to visit Jesus and find out for himself. Perhaps scared of how his fellow-rulers might react, he went at night – under cover of darkness.

Their fascinating conversation is recorded in the third chapter of John’s Gospel. It is well worth reading, because it was to this leading Pharisee, rather than to one of His own close followers, that Jesus revealed not only the manner of His death (by crucifixion), but also its true purpose: *“... that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.”*³ The chapter then summarises the struggle between darkness and light: *“And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, ... whoever does what is true comes to the light...”*⁴

I wonder what Nicodemus made of this conversation? Perhaps the light started to dawn as he walked home through the dark streets of Jerusalem! Certainly, some months later when the Sanhedrin Council were again condemning Jesus and His teaching out of hand,



Nicodemus screwed up sufficient courage to stick up for Jesus by challenging his peers: *“Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?”*⁵ Although he got short shrift for his intervention, it seems that Nicodemus was beginning to see the light!

The battle between light and darkness took its most dramatic turn when Jesus was taken by the Jews and crucified – just as He had predicted to Nicodemus. Luke records the scene for us: *It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun’s light failed.*⁶

How amazing! The sun’s light was totally blotted out, not just for a few minutes as in an eclipse, but for three whole hours! During those three long hours of impenetrable darkness, God’s only Son – the Light of the World – proved His love for us by dying a truly agonising death so that whoever believed on Him could come permanently out of darkness into His most glorious light.

Here, indeed, was hatred driven out by love!

The Bible doesn’t tell us whether Nicodemus witnessed these events. I like to think he did, as – together with Joseph, another ‘secret disciple’ – Nicodemus finally nailed his colours to the mast and sought permission from Pilate, the Roman Governor, to take Jesus’ body down from the cross to bury Him. That took some courage!

This simple act of love left no one in any doubt that Nicodemus had joined all those other disciples who, down the centuries since Jesus’ death, have – like Martin Luther King – fulfilled in their lives the truth of His words that: *“... whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.”*⁷

References: (1) Rev. 21:23,25 (2) John 8:12 (3) John 3:15 (4) John 3:19,21 (5) John 7:51 (6) Luke 23:44-45 (7) John 12:46

Bible quotations from ESV

Bible metaphors

Shine as lights in the world

David Woods, Manchester, England

Most people don't like the dark. Environments familiar to us become places of uncertainty and fear when we're unable to sense them with our vision. We know there's (usually) nothing to be afraid of, but there's still a nervous feeling that descends on us when we're in the dark. Robbed of the ability to see the environment clearly, we feel at risk.

My son was overwhelmed by fear when the tour guides switched off the lights during a visit to an underground cavern. It was darkness like we'd never experienced before, and my son is in no hurry to visit a cavern again!

Also, when people are not fully aware of what's happening around them, have not been 'let in' on a secret, or are struggling to comprehend something, we describe them as being 'in the dark'. So, we equate a lack of understanding and appreciation with being in darkness; and I'm sure you've heard someone who eventually grasps something they didn't previously understand, say, "I've seen the light!"

When we read what God tells us about darkness, we can see He means the same thing: that darkness describes a lack of understanding and appreciation, and also depicts a place of uncertainty and fear. As we'll see, God describes humanity as being in darkness, far removed from the source of all knowledge (God Himself) because of its sin and rebellion. Satan perpetuates this self-imposed ignorance and blindness, but the good news is that God breaks into this darkness to bring light and life to sinners, who will, in their transformed lives, shine as luminaries to attract others to the knowledge of Christ.

John, when opening his account of Jesus' life,¹ states that everything was created by the Word – a description of

God the Son in His work as the agent of creation. Not only that, but *in him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.*² So, when life was given to humanity it is described as being light – it brought understanding. This sets the life God gives to humanity apart from the life He gives to other creatures, and confirms the distinctive quality of human existence. Despite what secular scientists tell us, and what our schools teach, the life we have as humans is different from the life of other living creatures: we have knowledge. *God created mankind in his own image,*³ having uniquely *breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.*⁴ This life brought light – the understanding of who God was.

Then Satan, the one with whom sin originated, came and suggested that humanity could know and understand more by doing what God said shouldn't be done. Humanity succumbed to the temptation to know as much as the all-knowing God, and in the process discovered that our understanding of God was ruined. Sin resulted in an eternal 'disconnect' – a separation from God who is the source of all knowledge and life. We ended up in fearful darkness.

Our spiritual blindness and darkness prevents us from appreciating the greatness and glory of God. It's a frightening state to be in, because the wrath of God remains over those who are guilty of rejecting Him.⁵

Thankfully John wrote, *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*⁶ This is his summarising preface to the account of the life of Jesus Christ. John's theme and focus throughout his gospel is people coming to understand Jesus – light overcoming darkness. Jesus said: *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."*⁷ Notice the similar language to John 1:4 – *the light of life*. Jesus came to restore that which was taken away by sin and to give us, through salvation, the appreciation and understanding of God that enables us to live as God originally intended us to.



This work of God is confirmed in 2 Corinthians 4:4-6. Paul writes, *the god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*⁸ Man's rebellion, preyed on by Satan, means that there's a darkness that needs to be overcome; and it's God's work to overcome it! *For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness', made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.*⁹ It's in the person and work of Jesus Christ that God brings sinners from darkness into the light of the understanding of His grace and love and mercy and life – into an appreciation of His glory!

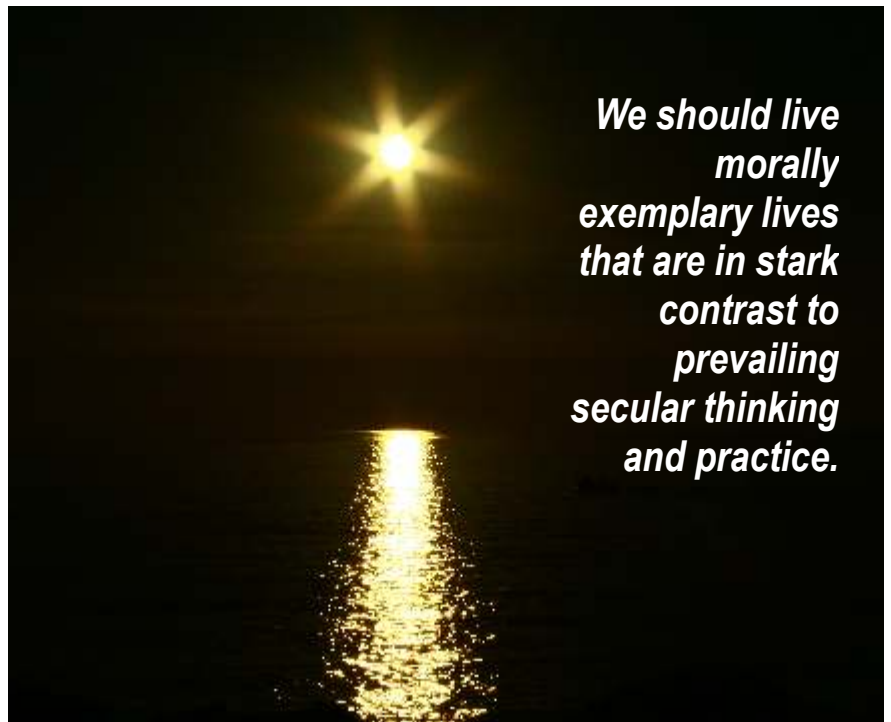
Light overcoming darkness is God's work, but Jesus was the one to tell us that we, as disciples, should shine brightly in this dark world, to testify to others of the light that has come into our experience. Jesus said, *"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."*¹⁰

The metaphor is easy to understand! Individually the disciples were to be like lamps sitting on a stand giving light in a room. There was no point in lighting a lamp to hide it! So, Jesus encourages us to shine.

We are given the responsibility to demonstrate our understanding and appreciation of the glory of God by the way we live.

The apostle Paul was given a special commission to be a preacher to the Gentiles. He recounted what Jesus said to him during his conversion experience on the road to Damascus: *"... 'I am sending you to [the Gentiles] to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'..."*¹¹ We are sent ones too – sent to proclaim Christ in the things we say, supported by the things we do. Paul preached the word of God, knowing that it was the means by which people would come to see the light of the gospel. It's no different for us today. Let's not be content to think that living 'a good Christian life' is a sufficient testimony about Jesus. It's a vital aspect, for sure, but Paul writes, *faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.*¹² If we're to help open eyes and turn people from darkness, we need to share the word of God with them.

Individually we are to be shining lamps, but the Lord said something else that we shouldn't overlook: that the disciples were like *a town built on a hill*. Back in those



We should live morally exemplary lives that are in stark contrast to prevailing secular thinking and practice.

days a town was usually a place of safety and security, and a place of learning. This would suggest that Jesus was saying that disciples serving God together, in obedience to His Word, would powerfully proclaim God's glory too.

Paul writes about how disciples in churches of God should serve together, so that they would be a shining testimony to the world around them: *Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life.*¹³

There was a problem with infighting in the church of God in Philippi, so Paul was addressing that directly because it was affecting the believers' ability to shine for God. We need to learn from this too. But there's also a general point being made: that, being recipients of light through our life in Christ, we should live morally exemplary lives that are in stark contrast to prevailing secular thinking and practice. Children of God are to be blameless and pure and without fault, demonstrating the amazing change in attitude and practice that results from God's salvation and the indwelling of His Holy Spirit.

Let's be encouraged that God works to bring people from darkness to light, but let's realise our responsibility individually, and collectively, to be the means by which people are pointed to His light.

References:

- (1) John 1:1-3 (2) John 1:4 (3) Gen. 1:27 (4) Gen. 2:7 (5) John 3:36 (6) John 1:5 (7) John 8:12 (8) 2 Cor. 4:4 (9) 2 Cor. 4:6 (10) Mat. 5:14-16 (11) Acts 26:17-18 (12) Rom. 10:17 (13) Phil. 2:14-16 ESV

Bible quotations from NIV 2011 unless stated otherwise

Lessons from the minor prophets

Jonah

God's compassion and Jonah's lack of it

Jonny Archibald, Glasgow, Scotland

Jonah was a prophet, but he was also rebellious. He was told by God to go and preach to an infamous Gentile city far from Israel ... and he refused! The sensational account of 'Jonah and the whale' is familiar to many from Sunday School days and whilst a basic summary of its events has a natural fascination for children, there is a far greater message of God's compassion upon all nations who repent.

Jonah was living in a time of difficulty for Israel; of split kingdoms and the threat of neighbouring enemies, but Jonah was involved in blessing for the people when Jeroboam ... *restored the territory of Israel ... according to the word of the LORD God of Israel, which he had spoken through his servant Jonah ... For the LORD saw that the affliction of Israel was very bitter; and whether bond or free, there was no helper for Israel.*¹

Whilst the record in 2 Kings shows the local blessing of the word of the Lord through Jonah, the Book of Jonah begins with the very clear instruction for a mission far from home: *the word of the LORD came to Jonah ... saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me."*²

Nineveh was perhaps not attractive to Jonah for a number of reasons. It had been founded by Nimrod who, in

addition to being a 'mighty hunter', was also a prolific builder of cities.³ Nimrod had come from the line of Ham, son of Noah, who had received a curse, rather than a blessing from Noah. The Philistines had also come from that line, another enemy of God's people, as had the Canaanites generally. Israel, by contrast, came from the line of Shem, the son for whom Noah sought blessing. In addition to Nineveh's ancient and perhaps despised origin, there was also the very practical matter of its being several hundred miles north-east across arid and hostile country from Jonah's place of birth in Galilee.⁴ At the outset of Jonah's assignment the Lord said to Jonah that the city was guilty of wickedness, which would only reinforce the negative aspects of the duty in Jonah's mind.

Nineveh was a great⁵ city in its size and fame, (perhaps taking three days to walk round⁶) and possibly inhabited



by families who had a combined 120,000 children, and space for ‘much livestock’.⁷ A reading of the short book of Nahum (and Zephaniah 2:13-15) provides a great deal more detail on the condition and attitude of the inhabitants of Nineveh a few generations after Jonah’s witness in the city. These give a very graphic account of the extent of Nineveh’s poor spiritual condition in the sight of the Lord. The site of ancient Nineveh is near the Tigris River and close to modern day Mosul in Iraq. It is instructive to us that even though the Lord knew that, within a few generations of Jonah’s preaching, the city would have to be judged severely and destroyed, He still had compassion on the generation living in Jonah’s day. This aspect of God’s character is highlighted for us in the New Testament when Peter says, *In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.*⁸

Jonah was well aware of the compassionate heart of the Lord; when Jonah heard that he was to go and preach to this Gentile city he knew that if they repented then the Lord would relent from doing harm. Jonah claimed that it was for this very reason that he decided that he would try to avoid going to Nineveh by travelling in the very opposite direction, first on land and then by sea. Jonah was so opposed to the idea of the Ninevites escaping from judgment that when they repented at his preaching it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry.⁹ Jonah felt so strongly about the Lord being merciful that he felt that it would be better if the Lord should take his life, *for it is better for me to die than to live!*¹⁰ Despite Jonah’s tantrum, the Lord gave him the opportunity to change his mind by patiently asking him the question; *Is it right for you to be angry?*¹¹ Jonah then went out of Nineveh, with the apparent hope that its people may yet commit further wrongdoing and come into judgment. Jonah made a shelter close to the city, so that if the Lord would still judge them, then he would have a prime position to view the destruction. The Lord provided a plant to give further shade for Jonah from the oppressive sunlight, but when the plant died Jonah had greater pity for the fleeting life of the plant than the potentially severe judgement of the people of Nineveh, with its very substantial infant population and dependent livestock.

Jonah is a special book in showing us the compassion of the Lord on Gentiles in the Old Testament. Similarly, in Jeremiah 12 we read of a fascinating conversation between Jeremiah and the Lord. Jeremiah asks why wicked Gentile nations prosper and the Lord answers: *Thus says the LORD: “Against all My evil neighbours who touch the inheritance which I have caused my people Israel to inherit – behold, I will pluck them out of their land and pluck out the house of Judah from among them. Then it shall be, after I have plucked them out, that I will return and have compassion on them and bring them back, everyone to his heritage and everyone to his land. And it shall be, if they will learn carefully the ways of my people, to swear by My name, ‘As the LORD lives,’ as they taught my people to swear by Baal, then they shall be established in the midst of My people.”*¹²

The warmth of the compassion of God is also seen touchingly in Lamentations:

For the Lord will not cast off for ever.

Though He causes grief, yet He will show compassion according to the multitude of His mercies.

*For He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.*¹³

We could reasonably expect the approach of God in the Old Testament to be matched in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is ... *the fullness of the Godhead bodily.*¹⁴ Matthew’s Gospel says of Jesus: *But when he saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.”*¹⁵ This illustrates for us the compassion of the Lord, but also the need that there is for labourers to go out in His harvest and show the compassion of a shepherd. Jonah had been sent on just such a mission – to preach a message to a Gentile city burdened by sin. He was learning the need for compassion, just as the disciples were learning that need in their journeys with Jesus. The education of the disciples about compassion continued prior to, and during, the ‘feeding of the five thousand’ and the ‘feeding of the four thousand’, when Jesus said to them: *“I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. And I do not want to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way.”*¹⁶ Jesus’ compassion was seen both in His dealings with the multitudes and also individuals, as shown in Mark 1: *Now a leper came to Him, imploring Him, kneeling down to Him and saying to Him, “If you are willing, you can make me clean.” Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, “I am willing; be cleansed.”*¹⁷

From the writing of Peter we can see that the Lord had brought him to understand the importance of compassion. Peter’s surprisingly sympathetic tones show the development in his own life: *Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing.*¹⁸

In Old Testament and New, God is a God of compassion, and He teaches us how to practise it in our own lives, just as Jonah and the disciples learnt in their day.

References:

- (1) 2 Kin. 14:25-26 (2) Jon. 1:1-2 (3) Gen. 10:8-12
- (4) 2 Kin. 14:25 (5) Jon. 1:2 (6) Jon. 3:3 (7) Jon. 4:11
- (8) Acts 10:34b-35 (9) Jon. 4:1 (10) Jon. 4:3 (11) Jon. 4:4 (12) Jer. 12:14-16 (13) Lam. 3:31-33 (14) Col. 2:9
- (15) Mat. 9:36-38 (16) Mat. 15:32 (17) Mark 1:40-41
- (18) 1 Pet. 3:8-9

Bible quotations from NKJV

The poor always with us

Robert Fisher, Bathgate, Scotland

In the town where I live there is a fund, paid out annually from a bequest, for ‘the poor’. To qualify, you have to be male, over 70 years of age, and in ‘straitened circumstances’. Not a lot of help for many of the townspeople!

*For the poor will never cease to be in the land; therefore I command you, saying, ‘You shall freely open your hand to your brother, to your needy and poor in your land.’*¹

Jesus said: “*For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you wish you can do good to them; but you do not always have Me.*”²

The Lord made provision in the Law for His people, and through His people, for the poor in the land. This was to be freely and generously given.³ With the command came a promise of divine blessing. In the early days of Christianity need arose in Jerusalem, and through the exercise of saints in Macedonia and Achaia,⁴ and probably also Corinth and Rome, Paul, Titus and others took a bountiful gift⁵ to alleviate the distress being experienced. To remember the poor was part of the decree from the Jerusalem Conference of Acts 15.⁶

Names from history (in the UK) with a Christian ethos like Müller, Barnardo and Quarrier are well known for their care for the poor, particularly orphan children, Barnardo’s slogan being ‘no destitute child turned away’. Mission reports in this magazine have, on occasion, focused on the work of the Fellowship Relief Committee (FRC) where practical help is given in the developing world in meeting needs in health, business and education, to mention only a few. FRC occasionally produces newsletters which are distributed throughout the Churches of God. Other reports have had a more local flavour, but again some of these have been on the theme of ‘remembering the poor’.

During the Depression years in the 1920s, a church of God collected for the ‘needy saints’ in a nearby town which was of great benefit, and regular reports were given until conditions improved. Over fifty years later the recipient church was able to make a sizeable contribution to help the others in their work. The Lord indeed blessed the giving all those years before.

Paul wrote of his own personal exercise in giving to the poor⁶ and many have done likewise, and still do – in such a way that the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing.⁷ The greeter, who welcomed visitors to the Gospel meetings in a certain town, always kept a folded banknote in his pocket in case anyone came who was in need. It was done in secret,⁸ where he could give *freely to the poor* with the associated blessing that *his horn will be exalted in honor.*⁹

Giving is a grace, seen so wonderfully in what the Lord Jesus did: *He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.*¹⁰ He said, “*It is more blessed to give than to receive.*”¹¹ As recipients of His grace, in appreciation, we can have open hands, whenever we wish, to show the grace of giving. This is an important aspect of practical Christianity.

References:

(1) Deut. 15:11 (2) Mark 14:7 (3) Deut. 15:8 (4) Rom. 15:26 (5) 2 Cor. 9:5 (6) Gal. 2:10 (7) Mat. 6:3 (8) Mat. 6:4 (9) Ps. 112:9 (10) 2 Cor. 8:9 (11) Acts 20:35

Bible quotations from NASB



E-church?

Geoff Hydon, Mount Forest, Canada

The internet is a great tool. Christians can use it to do scripture study more quickly and easily. Internet based social media have replaced traditional human contacts in many contexts. Are we now approaching the time when all church activities can be conducted online?



Print media enabled more people to read the Bible for themselves. Churches became far more effective in spreading the message of the gospel far and wide. People could research the meaning of scripture, through concordances, dictionaries, commentaries and books on a host of scripture topics. It was only a matter of time before the same would be true of radio communication, with all its added-value of attractive use of the human voice and musical instruments. Spoken words have more appeal. Television was likewise bound to be used by religious broadcasters and movie-makers who could afford it. The combination of sight and sound would be even more compelling than the messages in books or radio transmissions. Churches reached a wider audience, and televised financial appeals made it a big business. One result was that some people felt they no longer needed to go to the church service; they could instead watch it, sing along at home, listen to a powerful sermon, and feel satisfied; their perceived needs were met! They could also switch churches without moving from their seat! So more entertainment was introduced into church services, to bring in audiences, and churches became more 'menu-driven', catering to what would attract different people.

Now we have the internet. It combines all the benefits of previous media capabilities and adds immediate interactivity and much better research functions. There are obvious dangers in using the web and social media badly, but the basic tools are really useful. However, can they provide a substitute for meeting together as a church?

Some readers may immediately think of Scriptures such as Hebrews 10:25, with its instruction to not neglect meeting together. However, we must ask if this requires physically being in the same place, or if the need is sometimes satisfied by 'meeting' via video conference? We know what happens when a church of God meets for prayer; its prayers are heard in heaven in the presence of God. Would this unseen ultimate spiritual reality be disturbed if the people voicing the prayers and the 'amens' on earth were in different places, seeing and hearing each other via a video link? An intellectual discussion along these lines could be pursued. However, we perhaps need to think more deeply about God's

objectives for us in such matters, starting with the clearest example.

The Churches of God have always taught that the context for the Remembrance (or 'the Lord's Supper') is in a formally arranged meeting of a church of God.¹ There are no Bible examples of individual Christians keeping the Remembrance by themselves. It requires a joint physical participation in actual bread, broken by one brother as the Lord did, and shared with the rest of the church (and so also with the wine). This method was established by the Lord even though He knew it would soon have to be carried out when persecution made meeting very difficult. Not only does it require meeting, it requires the whole group doing so to be suitably prepared and to be unselfishly submissive to the needs of others.

1 Corinthians 11 leaves no room for doubt on these points, which reflect divine objectives for the maintenance of a church's spiritual condition. If there were unresolved problems between attendees, these would need to be addressed first.² The enthralling picture of spiritual worship in heaven's holy place that we observe in Hebrews 10 and 12 is implemented through churches of God meeting physically on earth. And when we meet, Romans 16:16 and 1 Peter 5:14 are among many Scriptures that appeal to us to show warm affection for fellow saints. *Love for one another* must be an identifying characteristic.³ We must ask, if our contact with each other was purely through screen use, would we be effective in meeting all these scriptural objectives? Surely the answer is "No!" Moreover, we should not limit these divine objectives for a properly functioning church of God purely to its meeting for the Remembrance; they apply in many respects to every meeting, and in terms of general principle the more meetings of saints the better!⁴ We can and should supplement physical meetings with wise use of the internet, but an e-church cannot substitute for the scriptural expectations of the real thing.

References: (1) 1 Cor. 11:18-20 (2) Mat. 5:23,24; 18:15-18 (3) John 13:35; 15:12 (4) see Acts 2:46-47; 1 Cor. 14:23

The story of Christianity

From the Apostles to the Great Schism

Peter Hickling, Cromer, England

The original

It all began with one man – the man, Jesus Christ. For three years His little band of disciples had followed Him around Israel, and had seen the marvellous things that He had done and heard what He said. Then, disaster: He was betrayed by one of His own, taken at night by the religious authorities, and given to the Roman power, who put Him to a barbaric death. But after this, triumph, when He was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead.¹ Christ's exalted position enabled Him to say, "*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*"²

That commission was underpinned by precise instructions: for forty days the resurrected Lord spoke to the apostles about the kingdom of God.³ So when the first church of God, in Jerusalem, met together the believers who had been baptised and added to it devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.⁴ The apostles' teaching was in fact the Lord's teaching, delivered to the apostles to promulgate, at first orally, then in written form. Paul, who although an apostle and a witness of Christ's resurrection,⁵ had not been with Him during His earthly ministry, was entrusted with the task of codifying the Lord's teaching and putting it into practice in the churches which sprang up as the gospel spread westwards. In every place the template remained the same: the disciples came together to study the teaching (a Bible reading later), they remembered their Lord by breaking bread and the church prayed together.

The governance of the churches, too, was organised. In each church there were men responsible for its government and teaching, variously called overseers (bishops; Gk: *episkopoi*) or elders (Gk: *presbuteroi*).⁶ In addition, deacons (from Greek *diakonos*, a servant) served the church.⁷ As new churches were established new elders were needed; for instance, Paul delegated his authority to Timothy in Crete, telling him to appoint elders in every town.⁸ Churches had to be largely autonomous in their local practical arrangements, but apostolic letters were passed round the churches,⁹ itinerant preachers were received (and sometimes refused) and if a doctrinal matter which affected the whole community arose, elders met together at a central point to discuss it. This pattern, then, was not merely one that emerged spontaneously; it was the Lord's plan, given by Him to the apostles.

Persecution

In the post-apostolic period, after about AD 100, Christianity spread westwards, initially impelled by persecution.¹⁰ Initially, its evangelists had spoken only to Jews, and it was regarded by the authorities as a Jewish sect, but revelation showed the apostles that they should include Gentile believers too. Christians were persecuted for their beliefs both by the Jews, who regarded them as an heretical sect, and sporadically and in different places by pagans. Initially there was no centrally directed persecution of Christians, but locally prominent men brought accusations against them, on the grounds that they disrespected the local gods, who were tied up with civic pride. Robin Lane Fox writes, 'In the early Church, martyrdoms were exceptionally public events, because Christians coincided with a particular phase in the history of public entertainment; they were pitched into the cities' arenas for unarmed combat with gladiators, bulls, leopards or the dreaded bears. ... These displays were chosen and financed by the great men of the cities "out of love for their home town". By the second century BC the phrase "love of honour" could refer directly to a show of lurid violence. People liked it, and donors courted popularity through this potent psychological form.'¹¹ Why did some people want to put them to death? On the one hand there were ignorant calumnies, such as saying that they had cannibalistic rites such as eating flesh and drinking blood, a misrepresentation of the Remembrance, and on the other hand there was their stubborn intransigence in refusing to burn incense or participate in sacrifice to the local god(s). This latter was interpreted as a possible source of disaffection with the Roman power.

The first centrally directed persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire began with Nero in AD 64, when the Great Fire of Rome destroyed parts of the city, and it was expedient for Nero to divert the blame onto the Christians. Empire-wide persecutions took place under Maximinus Thrax and Decius. State persecution reached its height under Diocletian. All Christians in the Empire were commanded to sacrifice to the gods or face immediate execution. Over 20,000 Christians are thought to have died during Diocletian's reign. In the civil realm Diocletian restored stable rule, and created a college of four, the 'Tetrarchy'; governors were given their deputies, called 'vicars', and provinces were grouped into bigger regions, or 'dioceses'.

Estimates of the number of Christians killed for religious reasons in the first three centuries vary greatly, from a high of almost 100,000 to a low of 10,000. Because to give oneself to die, often by torture or as the object of sadistic sport, was seen as the highest act of self-sacrifice

there were some who volunteered to be martyred, leading one cynical proconsul to tell such a group that if they wanted to die there was plenty of rope available or cliffs they could jump off.

The Post-Apostolic churches

The terms ‘bishop’ and ‘elder’ were synonymous in Scripture, as we have seen, and they were used thus by Clement in the 1st century, but they began to separate to form an ecclesiastical hierarchy; this was a matter of expediency rather than of principle. As the movement grew, Christians in the bigger cities became divided between different places of worship. By giving authority to one leader, the churches could more easily maintain uniformity. Thus there grew up a system in which a bishop had jurisdiction over an area, and each church had elders, splitting the application of the original terms. The *episkopos* became the bishop, and the *presbuteros* the elder. The latter came to be regarded as similar to the priest of the Old Testament, and these distinctions were elaborated over the years, to an extent that cannot be discussed here. Christians still regarded themselves as one Church, but there were differences between the different areas, and the bishops that led them.

The conversion of Constantine

After the abdication of Diocletian, his successors struggled for the control of the Roman Empire. Constantine, representing the Western Empire, confronted Maxentius on 28th October 312 at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge. On the previous day, according to the Christian chronicler Eusebius, Constantine had a vision, where he looked up to the sun and saw a cross of light above it, with the words in Greek ‘In this sign you shall conquer.’ He then had a dream in which Christ explained to him that he should use the sign against his enemies.



Constantine had his troops put the sign on the shields of his troops, and won the battle, attributing his victory to divine assistance. Although some coins show the sun after this date, in the following year, 313, Constantine issued the Edict of Milan, which made Christianity an officially recognised and tolerated religion in the Roman Empire. After his victory, Constantine supported the Church financially and returned property confiscated during Diocletian’s persecution. He also played an active part in the leadership of the Church.

Christianity as the Roman state religion

This was a complete reversal of the attitude of Emperors before Constantine. In 380, by the Edict of Thessalonica, Theodosius I adopted trinitarian Christianity as the state religion of the Empire. The Church also adopted the same organisational areas as Diocletian had arranged a generation previously; its provinces, called ‘dioceses’ were each administered by a bishop, from his ‘seat’, or ‘see’. The mixture between secular and theological matters bedevilled relationships within the churches, and meant that a theological dispute could become a matter of state. We cannot here discuss all the controversies from the fifth century onwards, many of which centred on Christological doctrines.

Divisions between East and West

The transfer of the Imperial capital from Rome to Constantinople brought mistrust to the relations of the two great sees (areas of a bishop’s jurisdiction), and communication between the Greek east and the Latin west by the 7th century had become dangerous and had practically ceased. A division arose principally about the primacy of the bishop of Rome and the filioque clause. By the 5th century Christendom was divided into a pentarchy of five sees with Rome afforded the primacy. The four eastern sees, Constantinople, Jerusalem, Antioch and Alexandria, saw this as first among equals, whereas Rome interpreted her primacy in terms of sovereignty. The other problem was the *filioque* (‘and the Son’) clause, adding in the Nicene creed those words, to say that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father and the Son. The division which resulted from these is normally called the Great Schism, and dated to 1054, although it was really the culmination of a long period of estrangement between Latin and Greek churches, which led to the establishment of Western Catholicism and Greek Orthodoxy.

References: (1) Rom. 1:4 (2) Mat. 28:18-20 ESV (3) Acts 1:3 (4) Acts 2:42 (5) Acts 22:8 (6) Acts 20:17 (7) Phil. 1:1 (8) Titus 1:5 (9) Col. 4:16 (10) Acts 8:1 (11) Lane Fox, *Robin Pagans and Christian in the Mediterranean world from the second century AD to the conversion of Constantine*, Penguin

For detail about the period see Lane Fox, Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* and Wikipedia *History of Christendom*.

Note: The term ‘the Church’ is used in this article in its popular sense, to describe the mass of professed adherents to the Christian faith; the scriptural use is more precise.

Can there be a God in a world of suffering?

Why it's an issue

Brian Johnston, Leigh, England

*How long, O LORD, will I call for help,
And You will not hear?
I cry out to You, "Violence!" Yet You
do not save. (Hab. 1:2)*

Those words could have been written yesterday by someone on the wrong side of pain and suffering, but they were actually written 2,500 years ago by a Bible prophet.

It's been said that no other single issue keeps more people from God – or troubles them so much in their relationship with God – than the issue of suffering. We confirmed that to be the case recently when we were taking the Christian message onto the streets of Leigh, in Lancashire, north-west England. Almost 1 in 5 of the people surveyed volunteered that, if they cared to hear any topic addressed in church, it would be this one. That's in part at least why it's our topic for this series. It presents us with both emotional and intellectual challenges, as we'll see.

At 9:02, in the morning of April 19, 1995, Gulf War veteran Timothy McVeigh detonated 4,800 lbs of fertilizer and fuel oil. The resulting blast destroyed the Federal Government Building in Oklahoma, killing 168 people. That bombing was then the largest act of domestic terrorism in the U.S., shattering its pre-911 innocence. Rescue services, as well as bystanders, rushed to pull victims out of the twisted wreckage. As they sifted through the rubble, the small, half-buried body of a critically injured infant was found, and so 1-year-old (Miss) Baylee Almon was thrust into the arms of firefighter, Captain Chris Fields, an image captured by the world's media. Baylee didn't make it, her one name out of the 168 remains with me, since she was the same age as my own son.

But it's not only suffering caused by human atrocities that we need to account for. James Jones, the former bishop of Liverpool, in his book, *Why Do People Suffer?*, tells the story of a school that collapsed when the city it was in was hit by an earthquake. At the school, all the teachers and most of the children were killed. One little boy was badly maimed, and rushed to hospital – barely alive. For hours, a team of medics fought to save his life, while his mother waited anxiously outside the operating theatre. After seven hours of painstaking surgery the little boy finally died.



Instead of leaving it to the nurse to tell the mother, the surgeon himself went out. As he broke the dreadful news, the mother became hysterical in her grief and attacked the surgeon, pummeling his chest with her fists. But instead of pushing her away, the surgeon held her tightly to himself until the woman's sobbing subsided and she rested, cradled in his arms.

And then in the heavy silence the surgeon also began to weep. Tears streamed down his face and grief racked his body, for he'd come to the hospital the moment he had heard that his one and only son had been killed in that same school.

Assuming the story to be true, as I do, you may still say to me that what seems to be hinted at there, is not an adequate perspective. The surgeon was certainly loving and skilful, but not being superhuman, he was unable to save the child. So, how does that speak to the global issue of pain? For an all-loving God – as per the Christian claim – who is also allegedly all-powerful, could surely have prevented that or intervened in some way. So how do you answer the question: 'Why doesn't God put an end to such misery?'

That was the question Olivia put to me on the streets of Leigh recently. And later she took up the challenge and brought her sister Gemma to sit down with a group of us to discuss what the Bible has to say on this profound and poignant issue of pain – which, in some way, touches every single one of us. The Bible does have things to say on it. In fact, it's a recurring theme on its pages – and one we shall be exploring in subsequent issues during this year, God willing, as we hope to treat the intellectual, philosophical, theological and emotional aspects of this troublesome question.

Survivor!

Interview with Audrey Hunter, Toronto, Canada

Some readers will know you as a ‘cancer survivor’. We want you to share your story, but could you first provide some insights for readers unfamiliar with your background?

My younger years were difficult, in a rather dysfunctional and hostile family setting. There was simply no peace. I had no real idea what true Christianity was, since the so-called examples of it had been negative; I thought of it only in terms of ‘religion’ not relationships. The big change in my life came after a friendship developed with a work colleague; he asked me to attend a church meeting with him, since Christianity was very important to him. Others might not have understood our friendship, since I was clearly not a believer. But the Lord knew best. That is how I met my husband, Graeme, and he has been a wonderful blessing to me in every way! I came to know Jesus as my Saviour in May, 1980 and then He gave me His word: *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid”* (John 14:27 NIV). I was baptized that October and was added to the Church of God in Edinburgh. That put my life on the firm footing that I would much later need to become a ‘cancer survivor’. I must say straightaway, that my victory is not simply defined in medical terms. In fact, I know there is always a risk I may suffer again. The victory the Lord gives is in seeing Him and His purpose despite suffering, not just in being relieved from it. Physically, cancer is a rotten, awful thing to undergo. Victory lies in finding God’s peace through it.

With the benefit of hindsight, can you suggest some ways you can now see the Lord was preparing you for your journey?

Apart from the provision of a very supportive husband and family, I can also see the Lord’s hand in several events that helped me. Before the cancer was discovered in 2012, I had for six years been involved in regular, serious Bible study with other women. The Lord was putting into my heart what He would later draw on to help me. I also attended a ‘Sisters’ Weekend’ at which some published material about the different ‘rooms’ of our lives was being considered. In the related study, we concluded we needed to completely change the way the published material tackled the subject. We saw we didn’t need a sun room to relax in, we needed a Son room in which to enjoy communion with the Lord; that is where our strength comes from. I was continuing to learn about the source of peace, but beginning to realize it was in a context of victory in trial; it is not an easy option. Little did I know I would soon be challenged so directly to apply what I had learned.

The cancer was discovered just at the time I was committed to leading the catering team at a Christian summer camp for children – Mount Forest Camp. I kept my diagnosis a secret, so the Camp program would not be disrupted, and looked for the Lord to meet all my needs and bring victory. I can’t emphasize enough that He told me it will be OK; not that I was to miraculously avoid suffering but His ‘OK’ promised all would be well as I went through it all. He was preparing me for what lay ahead, in perfect love and wisdom. He gave me the lessons I had needed to learn and He gave me the amazing people who would support me, and He gave me the great grace to recognize He was doing these things.

What did you find were the things that best sustained you at your lowest points?

Physically, cancer is dreadful. In my case, the initial hope that one surgery would be enough proved incorrect and further surgery, chemotherapy and radiation would prove necessary. Anyone who has experienced these things knows how difficult they are to bear. It would be a struggle to just go on without the Lord’s strengthening. Hair loss also added to the emotional trauma and, as a woman, proved so challenging. What would I have done if the Lord had not provided my wonderful husband and family? Each stepped up and willingly did everything that had to be done; so supportive! 1 Peter 4:19 gave me determination to keep going. Isaiah 45:2-3 became like a beacon to me (please read them now!); the Lord had summoned me by name to take this journey. He granted me treasures beyond my understanding as my relationship with Him deepened further through these experiences. Nearing the end of my treatments I was given Songs 2:10-13 by a dear friend; the time for singing had come! I will never be the same again, and I would not exchange the journey I have travelled as I would otherwise have not met the Lord as I did.



Audrey with her family at her daughter’s wedding in 2014

Did you find any well-meaning reactions of others unhelpful in any way?

Everyone was very supportive and I would not want to be critical, but there are a couple of things worth mentioning for the benefit of others. Loving friends would do anything to help me, but when they sought to relieve me of responsibilities without prior discussion with me it hurt; it was important to me to ‘continue to do good’ to the maximum extent I could. Also, some caring individuals probed a little too deeply into the medical aspects of my suffering; the initiative in providing such details should lie with the patient.

How has the passage through your dealing with cancer changed your outlook?

The Lord has taught me how to be more compassionate and aware that we are surrounded by people with real needs. Cancer hospitals can be spiritually sterile places filled with fear. Conversations about faith are God-given opportunities. And friends gave me gospel literature to leave alongside the ‘empty’ magazines in waiting rooms. Would I have been conscious of these needs if I had not had cancer? The Lord has spoken to my spirit and changed me forever. He has revealed Himself to me not only as Saviour and Lord, but as my Friend, my Sustainer, my great Comforter. Philippians 4:6-7 are now imbedded in my mind. I have learned to treasure my time with the Lord.

Survivor!

What Jesus said about ...

Money and possessions

Ira Williamson, Trinidad, USA

“How much money is there in the world?” – “All of it!”

This witty and insightful answer to an otherwise very complicated question reminds me of the temporary nature of the thing we call ‘money’. Simply speaking, money is an intrinsically valueless and abstract invention which gives us a way of assigning value to items. There is a saying: ‘Money makes the world go round’, but the truth is most of the world goes around for money.

How sad this world must look from God’s perspective – He values things so differently! Here we exchange time for money which governments simply print on paper. The desire for wealth is the focus of so much effort, time, life and love – yet God simply says: *‘The silver is Mine and the gold is Mine.’*¹ He owns all the ‘treasures’ of this world – yet one thing He values is our time! His command to us is to give Him priority in our lives – not just first place, but every place.

Amazingly, it was into this twisted and perverse world of upside down values that He sent the immeasurably valuable gift of His Son. The Son laid aside His glory, was born to the wife of a carpenter and raised in Nazareth. He was rich (consider the truth and depth of this statement) yet He became poor for us.² His family offered turtledoves – not a lamb when Mary presented Him at the Temple.³ Jesus Christ was born!⁴ He understands what it is to be poor, hungry and surrounded by those of apparent greater wealth.

Jesus Christ, knowing mankind’s greed and natural desire for the temporal, gave clear teaching on money and laid down principles on which the New Testament writers built.⁵ Jesus speaks about money or wealth in various ways, and we will consider three.

The first is **spiritual poverty**. Perhaps Jesus’ first mention of this subject was in the synagogue in Nazareth, when reading from Isaiah’s prophecy: “... *He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor.*”⁶ This group of poor people is the same as those He speaks about in the ‘Beatitudes’: “*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*”⁷ The word for ‘poor’ in both these places is not ‘peasant’, or a ‘person with little wealth.’ This word describes **a person who has no wealth at all**. A person with no possessions and with no resources or power to acquire any – this is a truly poor person. This description of our state of abject spiritual poverty before God is what Jesus came to change! From poverty to wealth, death to life, cursed to blessed – and it was obtained by His becoming poor, by His death, by His becoming the curse for us. Praise God that the riches that have flowed from His becoming poor cannot fade away! This is not an earthly investment, but rather a heavenly transaction – “*It is finished!*”⁸ – guaranteed by the blood of Christ⁹ and held firmly in the hand of God.¹⁰

The second way in which we will consider Jesus’ words concerning money is in relation to **wealth in this world**. In Luke 21, Jesus watched as people filed past the temple treasury. Perhaps Matthew 6:2 describes what Jesus saw as some of Jerusalem’s wealthy worshippers brought their offerings to God. It was into the vast wealth of the temple treasury that a widow dropped two mites – unannounced and unnoticed, except by God. What greater recognition than to be heralded by the voice that called light from the darkness! How often we desire the acclaim of man, the sound of trumpets – instead of God’s approval: *‘Well done, good and faithful servant.’*¹¹ Jesus described that widow’s gift as being more valuable than all the others.

It's amazing to think that this dear woman, having decided to give these coins to God, actually added them to all the gold in the treasury. She might so easily have thought, "Why add my pittance to this abundance?" Her eye was not on the gifts; her focus was God. She wasn't adding her money to the pile, she was offering it to God. In truth, no amount of money is impressive to God. Jesus knew the hearts of the people bringing in their offerings – He still does. *"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth ... But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven ... for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*¹² The widow's heart treasured God.

Is it wrong to be rich? Certainly not! *The blessing of the LORD brings wealth.*¹³ But Jesus' warning is not to treasure the wealth, but rather the one who gave it. Remember the rich young ruler? He ran to Jesus with joy, yet walked away sorrowful. Why? Because he treasured his riches above the Master.¹⁴ Like the widow, our eyes ought to be on the giver, not the gifts. Our heavenly Father knows our needs and He will meet them according to His will.¹⁵ The false teaching of the 'Prosperity Gospel' would desire us to impose man's values on God. But God has commanded us to value as He does – for some, perhaps many, this will mean being poor in the eyes of the world, yet rich toward God.¹⁶

The final perspective is Jesus' words concerning **heavenly wealth**. Jesus says: *"Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done."*¹⁷ Paul exhorts us concerning our priorities and conduct in 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 when he reminds us that our actions now will one day pass through fire. The useless, selfish and sinful hours of wood, hay and straw will be burned up leaving the gold, silver and precious stones. Perhaps most poignantly is the Lord's exhortation to saints in a church of God: *'I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white*

*garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.*¹⁸

Can you relate to the lukewarm church? Perhaps Jesus is at the door of your heart knocking – longing for you to open the door, to hear His voice, and to buy refined gold from Him. Not with money, but with time: time spent with Him. Exchange the priorities and values of this world for those of His world! Enjoy the economy of the unshakable kingdom!¹⁹ The wonderful truth of the treasures of heaven is that while we cannot yet fully know the things God is preparing for us, we can begin to enjoy them now!

In conclusion, this world's wealth is of no value without first being rich toward God. We must first acknowledge our poverty. Second, we must seek first the kingdom of God and He will look after our physical needs. Look after the blessings God gives to us – being good stewards of these things. Spend less than we earn and be ready to give to those in need.²⁰ Debt is one of this world's greatest traps. Finally, invest in the economy of the kingdom of heaven! Spend time with Jesus. Learn from Him,²¹ buy from Him.²²

"How much money is there in the world?" All of it, and that is where it will stay! When we face Jesus Christ one day, we will truly understand what James meant when he said, *the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position.*²³

References: (1) Hag. 2:8 (2) 2 Cor. 8:9 (3) Lev. 12:6-8; Luke 2:22-24 (4) John 1:14, Rom. 8:3; Phil. 2:6-8; Heb. 4:15 (5) Luke 3:10-14 (6) Luke 4:18 (7) Mat. 5:3 (8) John 19:30 (9) 1 Pet. 1:19 (10) John 10:29 (11) Mat. 25:21 NKJV (12) Mat. 6:19-21 (13) Prov. 10:22 NIV (14) Mat. 19:16-22 (15) Mat. 6:32 (16) Luke 12:21, 1 Cor. 1:26-31 (17) Rev. 22:12 (18) Rev. 3:15-20 (19) Heb. 12:28 (20) Mat. 25:35-36, Luke 3:10-11 (21) Mat. 11:29 (22) Is. 55:1-2; Rev. 3:18 (23) Jas. 1:9

Bible quotations from NASB



Mission

Camps

Kevin Beal, Brantford, Canada

The Lord Jesus taught the Apostles to make disciples of all the nations. They were to teach them to observe all the things that He had commanded (Mat. 28:19-20). Camps throughout the Churches of God are a great opportunity to do this.

No two camps in the Fellowship of churches are exactly alike. They are each unique in their own way due to location, culture, leadership, teachers, staff and students. This year the Lord directed me to attend camps in four different countries. Each one had something special to offer. Evidence of the Holy Spirit being at work was the main attraction at each of them for me.

Camp Baldy in Colorado is perhaps one of the most rustic camps we have. Sleeping in a tent under the stars, on top of a mountain is about as far away from worldly things that youth can get these days. It provides a great opportunity to spend time in the Bible away from the busyness of life. Youth there enjoy studying the Word and are happy to sit around the campfire singing old hymns and other favourite songs. Two weeks of camp take place on Mount Baldy each year: one for children and the other for teens. This year the teens received teaching through group discussion and ministry. The lessons were based around Luke 4:18,19. We thought about Trusting God, Knowing God, Listening to God and Walking with God.

Gospel Defenders Youth Camp in Jamaica was held for the first time this year. None of us knew what to expect. We had first-time campers and staff. They were a mix of personalities from different backgrounds. A bunch of Canadians added to the mix. Everyone pulled together to make this camp a success. God worked in the lives of those who attended. This was very much revealed on the last night around the

campfire when written testimonies were read out. The youth were great singers and taught us many new songs which are now favourites. Lessons were in a group format consisting of different stations. The camp theme was 'The Real Jesus' and it was well received.

This year, Malawi camp was held at a school that was walking distance from Lake Malawi. The lake was enjoyed by us twice during the week. It was the first time most had ever seen a body of water. A local elder had the opportunity to be like Jesus and preach out of a small wooden boat while we sat on the shore listening. This camp is for added Church of God youth only. The majority of each day was filled with lessons and praise. The theme this year was 'Treasure Hunt'. Many topics from House of God teaching were covered. I taught most of the lessons which then had to be translated. We broke into groups twice a day and had a question and answer period. The choirs from each assembly were enjoyed. The praises that go up from disciples here are sweet melodies to the Lord!

The Philippines had two weeks of camp this year. Philippines' camps are also aimed at added members. For the first time an Adult camp was held here. The theme was Living in God's House. Half the week was for the men and the other half for women. It was a great opportunity for the adults to dig deeper into House of God truths they live by faithfully. The theme for Youth camp this year was Living Worthily for God (Col. 1:10). The youth were taught by six brothers in a ministry teaching style. Group times are also a part of studying the Word at these camps. Translation is necessary here when English-speaking brothers are doing the teaching. Saints here come to camp for fellowship and

learning; sports and other activities are very minimal.

It's always a pleasure to see saints here putting God's Word first and taking great joy in it. Camps have had a great effect on many lives. In my experience, what works best at one camp doesn't necessarily work at another camp. Patience for the Lord's guidance and timing is key to a successful camp. Preparation is required beforehand, but we need to be prepared to allow the Spirit to work and make changes when the timing is right. As servants, if we keep our eyes upon the Master disciples will be made and His commands will be observed.

