



Foundation of Faith

IT IS FINISHED!
Christ is Risen!

Christ, Our Substitute
Do Not Be Afraid, Only Believe!
Martha, the Homemaker
Diamonds Grow in the Dark

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CHRIST IS RISEN!

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Editorial

Dear Readers,

“It is finished!”—What powerful words these are, resounding from the mouth of the Creator of the universe! God’s plan to redeem a fallen, lost humanity was fulfilled in the sacrificial death of the Lamb of God on Calvary. But was that the end?

If Jesus had died and remained in the tomb, all would have been hopeless! A dead Savior would have been of no use to us, and the powers of darkness would have triumphed. But Jesus did not remain in the tomb; He rose victorious! On Easter morning, the enemies retreated in dismay and were confronted with the fact that they had been defeated once and for all. Since then, Satan can only try to pretend that he can exercise power. However, the roaring lion is chained—he can only go as far as the victor, Christ, allows him to go.

Jesus is risen! What does that mean for us? It means life from God. It means that we need not fear death. It means that with Jesus we are on the winning side. It means that we have a Savior and High Priest to whom we can flee in every situation and who is always there for His children. It means that He has gone to prepare a place for us and that He will come again to take His own to be with Him. And it means that we can have a personal relationship of love with Him and walk with Him through this life every day and every hour. And, ultimately, in His victory, we too can be victorious!

So let us thank and serve Him with joy. May the articles in this issue be a help and a blessing to us in doing so.

R. Taron

Behold, He Is Dying—Dying for You!

What is this uproar, this shouting of the mob? Who is the noble figure in the midst of the enraged crowd? It is the Prophet from Galilee, the Messiah, the King of the Jews, condemned by Pilate to a shameful death upon the cross.

What strange events! Only a few hours earlier we saw Him in the silvery moonlight in the Garden of Gethsemane, lying on His face in earnest prayer to God. There, in the anguish of His heart, in the torment of His soul, in the terrible struggle with the powers of darkness, He made the great and fateful decision by choosing the way of the cross. He was willing to make the greatest sacrifice in order to save suffering humanity from the heavy burden of its sin and guilt and from the cruel hands of its enemy.

The struggle rages there with fiercest intensity. Great is the anguish of the divine Sufferer. See the sweat rolling from His brow like drops of blood. See how He lies upon His face, groaning and sighing under the weight of the sins of the whole world! Yes, your sins and mine rest heavily upon Him, yet He prevails. He submits to the will of His Heavenly Father, and in deepest surrender the words come from His lips: “[N]ot My will, but Yours, be done.” There was no other way to free humanity. Having won the victory within, He rises to meet His enemies.

Then we see Him in the judgment hall, surrounded by the hard-hearted Roman soldiers. What a sight! He is whipped until blood drips from the many wounds on His battered body. Crowned with thorns, He is mocked and spat upon. Oh, what suffering He had to endure. But behold the patience, the majestic love with which He endures it all. Even Pilate is so moved by this sight that he exclaims: “Behold the Man!” Yes, behold the Man!

Behold Him in His suffering. Look at His pale, pain-stricken face. See how the fear and torment of His soul are reflected in His noble countenance. Yes, He is man, but more than man—He is the Son of God. He is your Savior, your Redeemer. All of this He did for you, out of love, to rescue you from your sins. It was He, the righteous One, who suffered for the unrighteous.

“What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?” we hear Pilate say. The people’s answer is:

“Away with *Him*, away with *Him*! Crucify Him!” The verdict is passed; Jesus is led away. Having been spat upon by the brutal soldiers, He is led out. In the midst of great turmoil and biting mockery and hatred from the Pharisees and chief priests, He is pushed through the streets of Jerusalem. Outside the gates of the city, we see Him in the midst of the raging, angry crowd. Like a criminal, He is led away to Golgotha, staggering with exhaustion under the weight of the cross. Just look at this scene! Who can say what thoughts stormed through His mind, what feelings shook His heart, what suffering, what sorrow, what love, what compassion overwhelmed His soul! He came to His own, but His own did not receive Him, instead they rejected Him. He had come to do good, to heal the sick, to feed the hungry, to comfort the sorrowful, to raise the dead, yes, to save His people from their sins.

The path of suffering has reached its end. Upon arriving at Golgotha, Jesus is cruelly nailed to the cross. With rough hands, the cross is mercilessly erected. One’s heart shudders at the sight. Here, hanging with outstretched arms between heaven and earth, one sees the Lamb of God bearing the sins of the world. Such a sight!

Oh Golgotha, who can fathom your secrets? Who can comprehend this unfolding scene of sorrow?—Has man fallen so low that he needed such a sacrifice? Is sin so despicable? Is the rebellion of the human heart so great that it would raise its hand against the Son of God—against its own Creator—that the Creator Himself must die at the hands of His own creatures? Is that possible? Yes, the cross on Golgotha reveals the sinfulness, depravity, and darkness of the human heart.

Behold Jesus dying—wrestling with death. A cry escapes from His tormented heart. He cries out, “It is finished!” He bows His head and dies. Jesus, your Savior, your King, the Son of God, dies! Unseen observers from another world seem to be present, as if their faces were veiled. There is profound silence. The magnificent work is done! The curtain is torn—the way to the loving heart of God is now laid open. That which no law, no good works or tears, neither self-improvement or mental anguish, nor even the blood of thousands of sacrificial animals could accomplish, Christ, the Sav-

ior, has accomplished through His suffering, through His blood that was shed for us. Praise God forever! Here on Golgotha, He opened a fountain into which thousands and millions of guilty and sin-stained souls have already been immersed and have become whiter than snow. This fountain still flows today from the cross of Calvary!

O soul, hasten with your guilty conscience to Golgotha. Sit at the foot of the cross and behold your Lord and Savior dying for you. Behold God's great love, and let your heart be moved. As for those who scoff, step aside; here is a sight that should banish the darkest unbelief, the vilest pride, the most haughty arrogance. Here is a deed that should silence the mouth of every worldly wise man. Here is a love that can soften the hardest heart and humble the proudest spirit.

All creation was affected by the death of its Creator. The sun hid its face, the rocks were split apart, the earth shook, all nature was shrouded in mourning! And you, dear reader? Are you not stirred, are you not touched? Can this sight, this act of love, fail to move you? If you despise such a sacrifice, the only valid sacrifice, what will become of you? Holy Scripture says, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31).

Oh, take another look at Golgotha. Flee the wrath to come! Flee into the open arms of your Savior! He desires to receive you; He wants to cover you with the wings of His love. He wants to save you and press you to His great, loving heart. With His blood He wants to wash you from your sins. Oh, come to the cross. Do not delay any longer—come now!

D. Meyer

The Most Wonderful Message of All Time

A well-dressed gentleman stood in front of the display window of an art shop, gazing at a painting of the Crucifixion. As he stood there, a small, poorly dressed boy came along and stopped beside him.

The man pointed to the picture and asked the boy, "Do you know who that is hanging on the cross?"

"Oh yes," came the quick reply, "that is the Savior!"

As he spoke, the boy's eyes revealed his surprise and his pity at the fine gentleman's ignorance. Then—after a pause—he added, with an obvious desire to enlighten the stranger, "Those beside him are the Roman soldiers." With a heavy sigh he explained, "The woman who is crying there is His mother." After another moment of silence, he added, "They killed Him."

The two stood silently together in front of the painting until finally the gentleman gently stroked the boy's hair and walked away. Soon he disappeared into the crowd. When he was already half a block farther on, he heard behind him the shrill voice of the little boy, pushing his way through the crowd:

"Hello, sir! Hello!"

The man turned around and waited for the boy. Completely out of breath when he reached him, the boy gasped out his important message:

"I just wanted to tell you—He has risen again!"

What a message! Whether the little boy knew it or not, never again in his life would he deliver a message of greater importance. No new rocket, no satellite, no moon landing, no interplanetary journey could ever produce a more important headline than the one his childlike lips had just spoken: "Hello, sir! He has risen again!"

Christ, Our Substitute

Righteous yet merciful

Some time ago, a judge in America was called upon to try a prisoner who had been his companion in his early youth. It was a crime for which the penalty was a fine, more or less heavy. The judge did not diminish the fine; the case was clearly a bad one, and he fined the prisoner to the full. Some who knew his former relation to the offender thought him somewhat unkind thus to carry out the law, while others admired his impartiality. All were surprised when the judge quitted the bench and himself paid every farthing of the penalty. He had both shown his respect for the law and his goodwill to the man who had broken it; he exacted the penalty, but he paid it himself. So

God hath done in the Person of his dear Son. He has not remitted the punishment, but he has himself endured it. His own Son, who is none other than God himself—for there is an essential union between them—has paid the debt which was incurred by human sin.

The righteous for the unrighteous

We have heard of [a] case, that of two brothers, one of whom had been a great criminal, and was about to die, when his brother, coming into the court, decorated with medals, and having many wounds upon him, rose up to plead with the judge, that he would have mercy on the criminal for his sake. Then he began to strip himself, and show his scars, how here and there on his big

broad chest he had received sabre cuts in defence of his country. "By these wounds," he said, and he lifted up one arm, the other having been cut away, "by these my wounds, and the sufferings I have endured for my country, I beseech thee, have mercy on him." For his brother's sake, the criminal was allowed to escape the punishment that was hanging over his head. It was even so with Christ. "The sinner," He said, "deserves to die; then I will die in his stead. He deserves not to enter heaven, for he has not kept the law; but I have kept the law for him, he shall have my righteousness, and I will take his sin; and so the Just shall die for the unjust, to bring him to God."

Charles Spurgeon

"For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us,
that we might become the
righteousness of God in Him."

2 Corinthians 5:21

He Lives!

Yes, He lives, indeed He has risen from the dead! Oh, that these words would echo throughout the world! Jesus, the ever-present Savior, can be found everywhere—except in the tomb. He has broken the chains of death. He lives, and we who have been redeemed from our sins through Him will live with Him as well. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the foundation of our faith and the confirmation that God has accepted the great sacrifice of atonement offered on the cross at Golgotha. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:14: “If Christ is not risen, then our preaching *is* empty and your faith *is* also empty.”

The resurrection of Christ clearly shows us two truths: Christ died for the sins of the world and rose again as the Conqueror over sin and death. Likewise, we must die to sin, forsake it, and rise to new life. This is precisely why Christ died and rose again.

In Romans 4:25 we read: “[Christ] was delivered up because of our offenses and was raised because of our justification.” The natural man is dead in sins and trespasses, but in Jesus Christ there is life. Whoever comes to Him in remorseful repentance and believes

in Him receives life—everlasting life. Jesus Himself says: “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live” (John 11:25).

To be able to live with Him in glory for all eternity, we must already have the assurance here that is founded in the Son of God Himself. Who would want to refuse the life that is freely given to us? Who would rather choose death and continue in sin, when it was our sin that brought the Son of God to the cross? Dear soul, be of good courage! The Prince of Life is calling you. He wants to free you from the burden and bondage of sin. He wants to make you His own, that you may not suffer eternal death and damnation. Heed once more the words of Jesus: “Whoever believes in me will not die.” May you understand their full meaning! Do not hesitate but turn to the One who loves you and is waiting for you to save you from your sins. You will then be victorious over sin here on earth and will one day live with Him forever in heavenly glory.

There is also special comfort for the redeemed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In it lies the anchor of their hope, and it is the foundation

of their faith. Through His glorious resurrection, Jesus, the Risen One, has taken away the power of the one who had authority over death, namely the devil. In Revelation 20, we read that when the trumpet of the Lord sounds, the sea and the realm of the dead will give up their dead. Everyone will be resurrected, great and small. For those who have been cleansed of their sins in the blood of Jesus and have served the Lord faithfully, the words will be fulfilled: “Death, where *is* your sting? Hell, where *is* your victory?” (1 Corinthians 15:55). They will be with the Lord forever.

Jesus lives! His resurrection brings hope to the hearts of those who mourn a loved one. The resurrection of Christ is the guarantee that we will see our loved ones again, those who have fallen asleep in the Lord and gone before us. Then all suffering on this earth will be over for all those who have truly been saved from their sins and have served the Lord faithfully. God’s Word says in Revelation 14:13: “‘Blessed *are* the dead who die in the Lord’ . . . ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them.’” ■

The Greatest Triumph: Christ is Risen

Paul prays: “that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.” Philippians 3: 10

The event of Jesus’ resurrection most certainly formed an essential part of the preaching of the apostle John, the disciple whom Jesus loved. I can vividly imagine him, as an old father, sitting in a circle of young people and answering their questions. Someone may have asked, “What was it like that morning when Christ rose from the dead?” According to the Bible, John may have replied: “Although I am now old, my hair is white and my hands tremble, I can still vividly remember. I was there and cannot forget those times, including the dark night in Gethsemane, our hasty flight, and then the shame of my cowardice. I remember standing at the cross and seeing His agony. Powerless and speechless, I supported His mother. We had hoped for so much, expected so much, and now everything seemed to have shattered.”

“I cannot describe to you in words our pain, our fear, our doubts and questions. It was simply a terrible time. The tomb, the heavy stone, the seal, the soldiers standing guard—all of this showed us that it was finally over. But God had other plans. An earthquake shook the earth, and the angel of God rolled away the heavy stone. When we came to the tomb, it was empty. Death had no claim on the exalted Christ. At the time, we understood so little. We saw it, and yet we could not comprehend it. It was only through the revelation of the Holy Spirit that we came to understand the triumph of the Resurrection. Divine power triumphed, defeating death, hell, and sin, and laying the foundation for a new age. Today I know that the morning of the Resurrection was the beginning of a life of divine power for all who believe in Him.”

Triumph over death and sin

Since the Fall, all have been under the dominion of death. Sin brought death into the world—and with it human mortality. It revealed humanity’s separation from God, the source of eternal life. Christ confronted death—not as a defeated victim, but as a victorious Lord. In his Pentecost sermon, Peter said, “God raised

[Christ] up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it” (Acts 2:24). Death had no claim on the sinless Son of God. That morning, it became clear that death is not the master, but a defeated enemy.

Hebrews 2:14–15 shows us that through His death and resurrection, Christ took all power and authority of death from Satan. For God’s children, who are redeemed through Christ, death has lost its terror. This victory has tremendous implications for all the redeemed: freedom from judgment and eternal damnation, and salvation from the power of death. This truth brings us deep hope and unshakeable assurance.

The Resurrection: God Confirms the Work of Redemption

John was standing near the cross when he heard Jesus cry out, “It is finished!” But it was only through the Resurrection that it became publicly visible that the work of redemption had been completely accomplished. Paul also points this out in his letter to the Romans, where he declares that Christ “was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification” (Romans 4:25). Also, Paul shows the Corinthians how important the Resurrection is for our redemption. For “if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!” (1 Corinthians 15:17). The Resurrection clearly reveals the triumph of the Son of God in the work of redemption.

For God’s children, this fact means that their guilt is forgiven, their conscience is cleansed, and they have free access to God at all times. No condemnation can separate us from God (Romans 8:33–34). Through the power of His resurrection, we can have deep peace in our hearts and with God, regardless of circumstances. Christ did not remain in the grave. He is now seated at the right hand of God, and all is subject to Him. He is the exalted Lord, the King of kings.

Christ reigns today. His word is true: “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Mat-



thew 28:18). His kingdom is not a political entity; above all, it is a dominion over the unseen spiritual realm. With His resurrection, he laid the foundation for the church, the kingdom of God. No power, no distress or persecution, no affliction or calamity can snatch it from God's hand. In the risen Lord lies the source of all our confidence, our courage, and our steadfastness in faith.

The effect on us and our everyday lives

The power of the Resurrection not only has historical significance, it also affects our personal lives. Paul wrote: "we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4). The effect of conversion on the individual is so radical that Paul speaks of a new creation: "Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). The old self has passed away, and a new life has begun. A life of holiness is possible because the reign of sin has been broken.

Paul's prayer for the Ephesians was that the eyes of their understanding would be enlightened, that they may know the working of God's mighty power and the hope of His calling (Ephesians 1:15–19). That is also relevant for us today. The overwhelming power of God, revealed in the resurrection, is at work in our lives as well—and this is meant to strengthen our courage rooted in faith (Ephesians 1:15–19).

This becomes especially evident when human strength reaches its limit.

1. In weakness and affliction

Paul underscores God's divine promise: "My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). It is God's will that we recognize that we ourselves are helpless, because when we look to Him in suffering, sickness, discouragement, and inner struggles, the power of the Resurrection becomes mighty in us.

2. In temptation and fear

"If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you" (Romans 8:11). This power has freed us from the dominion of sin and gives us victory in temptation, and freedom from fear and condemnation. Through His resurrection, we can live victoriously in Christ every day.

3. Preservation and hope

The power of the Resurrection keeps us in the grace of God, for He "is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present *you* faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy" (Jude 24). God has given us eternal hope in Christ, which goes beyond the grave to the final consummation in Christ.

Christ is risen! He lives and the triumphant power of His resurrection is still at work in us today. This power is sufficient to carry us to our eternal home, to preserve us and bring us to the final consummation.

*Hermann Vogt
Gifhorn, Germany*



Because He Lives!

Christ is alive in the world, but that is not enough. He must arise in our hearts!

The Christian religion has never been gloomy, joyless, or boring. Jesus repeatedly spoke of the Christian experience as the way of life—a joyful, exuberant life lived to the fullest. In Christ, we experience deep inner satisfaction even under the burden of sorrow, difficulties, or persecution.

Jesus spoke of resurrection and immortality. Yet, His words can also be applied to our time. Because Christ lives, we, you and I, walk through life as Christians, as “new creations” (2 Corinthians 5:17). Since we believe in the Son of God, we have found the secret of abundant life. Now we live in abundance because

we have “loved His appearing” (2 Timothy 4:8). We live from abundance because we are His disciples—keeping His commandments and willing to take up His cross. When we try to avoid the cross, our religion loses its radiant power. In our generation, Christianity has lost its luster because our tendency is to choose the easier path, the path of least effort, the path of least resistance.

The men who brought honor and glory to Christianity were cut from a different cloth. We are told how David Livingstone, after years of service and suffering in the jungles of Africa, once said goodbye to some

friends on the coast who were returning to his homeland. He could have gone with them, and they urged him to do so. But he preferred to continue his work on the dark continent. He stood on the pier for a long time, watching the ship slowly disappear on the horizon. His friends on the ship asked each other, “Why does he insist on burying himself in that godforsaken place?”

There is only one answer to this question: Jesus Christ lived powerfully and brightly in the heart of David Livingstone. This undaunted missionary never lost his joy, enthusiasm, and devotion in obedience to his divine mission.

Why do people turn away from Christ, even though many see Him as the only hope for our

hopeless world? Who or what can bridge the gap and avert hostility between nations except Christ and His spirit of love and forgiveness? Christ holds the solution to all of humanity’s ills in His hands, if only we would accept His way. If we did not so persistently push Him aside and so deliberately overlook Him, He could be “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6) for all nations.

We must be filled with His spirit and shape all aspects of human life according to His mindset if we want to achieve joy and abundant life. Christ is alive in the world, but that is not enough. He must be alive in us. He must experience a resurrection in our hearts. When He can fill us completely with His Spirit, we will be able to successfully use the power of our Christian conscience against the evil in the world.

Paul once asked, “Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Romans 7:24). The answer was: “Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:25). Those who are dead in sins and transgressions can only be brought to spiritual life through Christ. How many repentant people with a guilty conscience need and seek such a resurrection today? Sinners seek forgiveness and a new life. The despondent seek open doors. Those who failed seek a new beginning. People with wounded souls seek a measure of peace that has so far been denied them. Drifting, disappointed, and lost souls reach out for firm ground that will support them and on which they can build a new life.

When Christ’s life becomes our life, we have found a companion who walks with us every hour of the day. In Him we have a guide who has already walked the path before us. His life in us strengthens us enough to bear the burdens of life and gives us abundant power to emerge victorious from all temptations, as well as much courage to cope with our worries and fears. With Him, hope is reborn in our hearts, and faith finds a firm hold on the promises that guarantee us abundance for life, for death, and for eternity.

Christ certainly lives today! He lives on Earth in the hearts and lives of His people. He lives in the church and its work. He lives in the highest and most valuable ideals of this world. He also lives in heaven and still

This undaunted missionary never lost his joy, enthusiasm, and devotion in obedience to his divine mission.

promises today: “And where I am, there My servant will be also” (John 12:26). The people in whom He lives become like Him.

Through the years, a beloved story has circulated in Christian circles: an actor reciting Psalm 23 followed by a pastor. While the actor’s performance impresses the eyes and ears, it is the minister who touches hearts—a beautiful reminder of what it truly means to know the Shepherd.

At a gathering of young people, there was “present an aged minister and a distinguished actor. The actor was asked to give a recitation to the company, and at the minister’s request he repeated the twenty-third psalm. Such was the beauty of his voice and the charm of his manner that a subdued murmur of praise went round at the close. The actor then invited the old minister to repeat the same psalm. When the minister had ended there were tears in all eyes, for he had spoken with a deep tenderness and spiritual understanding. None felt the difference more keenly than the actor. Turning to the minister, he said: ‘I know the psalm, but you know the Shepherd.’”*

Do you know this loving Shepherd, the one who left the ninety-nine behind and went in search of the one lost sheep? Have you experienced the resurrection of life and hope through Him? ■

**The Homiletic Review, September, 1929.*

Do Not Be Afraid; Only Believe

“Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but when the desire comes, it is a tree of life.” (Proverbs 13: 12)

A wonderfully glorious and beautiful day has dawned upon Jerusalem. In the surrounding barley fields, the ripe ears of grain sway back and forth. Two middle-aged men push their way through one of the gates, their heads bowed toward the ground. Oh, how empty and desolate everything seems to them!

“Where is my hope? Was it all for nothing? Did I believe in vain? Brother, help me—I feel like I’m sinking. There’s nothing solid beneath my feet anymore, no ground to stand on. If you still have any comfort to give, please give it to me. What happened to the hope we carried for so long? We believed He would redeem Israel, restore His people to their former glory. We expected a king—His kingdom filled with the power and blessing of God. Are we now supposed to give up our faith? It feels like I’m standing on a small pile of sand, and with every moment more of it slips away beneath me. Around me an abyss seems to be opening, ready to swallow everything we hoped for.”

“You want me to comfort you? If you could see my heart right now, you would find the very same pain you just described. It’s broken. I saw Him when they pressed the crown of thorns onto His head and draped that purple robe over His shoulders. I watched as they bound Him and beat Him. They covered His face, spat on Him, mocked Him. When they brought Him out before the people, He was covered in blood. He looked so terribly human—there was no visible glory, nothing that looked like divine majesty. I cannot understand it; it is a mystery beyond me. I kept waiting, though. My heart was breaking, but I still hoped . . . maybe something would happen. Maybe it would change. And then I heard Pilate say, ‘take Him and crucify Him.’ In that moment, all my hope collapsed.” Tears ran down His face.

“I don’t know,” the other replies, “but I ran into Mary, and her face was full of joy. She said He has risen—she said He’s alive. And they’re saying that Simon and John went to the tomb themselves and came back reporting that it was empty.”

The two now walk silently side by side. Each is lost in his own pain. Sad, depressed, and almost hopeless, they make their way down the street. This is how the conversation between the two men might have gone.

A stranger approaches them. When He catches up with them, they continue on their way together, sad and dejected. “What kind of conversation *is* this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad?” asks the stranger (Luke 24: 17).

“Are You the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have You not known the things which happened there in these days?” the travelers ask in unison. “What things?” asks the stranger.

With a voice trembling with sorrow and pain, Cleopas explains, “The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and crucified Him. But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened. Yes, and certain women of our company, who arrived at the tomb early, astonished us. When they did not find His body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive. And certain of those *who were* with us went to the tomb and found *it* just as the women had said; but Him they did not see” (Luke 24: 19–24).

“O foolish ones, and slow of heart, to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!” replies the stranger. “Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things



and to enter into His glory?” And He begins to explain to them the Scriptures of Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms. Gradually, their hearts are enlightened. A glimmer of hope shines again. Their eyes are fixed on His mouth, from which so much grace, light, and understanding flows to them. It seems that they arrived at the destination of their journey, Emmaus, much too quickly.

Soon they arrive at the gate of their home. The sun is beginning to set, and they are horrified to realize that their companion wants to continue on His way. So they beg Him, “Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent.” And He stays. They sit down to eat supper together. Their eyes are fixed on Him. Then He takes the bread, gives thanks, breaks it, and gives it to them. And then! A holy miracle! Is it really Him—their beloved Lord and Master? Yes, it is Him, it is no stranger! Blessed joy fills their hearts.

But what is this? Where is He? They are alone! Tears of joy run down their cheeks. All hopelessness has vanished. And at that very hour, they set out to return to Jerusalem and bring the joyful news to the other disciples. “Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road and while He opened the Scriptures to us?” they say. When they arrive in Jerusalem, they tell the disciples what they

had experienced on the road and how they had recognized the Lord when He broke bread.

Dear Reader, perhaps you too have had to bury some earthly hopes. You hoped for so much, only to see one pillar after another crumble. “Happy is *he* who *has* the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope *is* in the LORD his God” (Psalm 146:5). This hope never fails. It can never be a disappointment. Everything else is only an illusion, but this divine hope is reality.

Perhaps you often feel like these two disciples. You hoped that your relatives and friends would follow you on the path to salvation. But now many years may have passed, and your hope is beginning to fade. Or you are sick and in need of help, facing struggles, persecution, contempt, or disgrace? And you ask, “How long, Lord?” Wait for the Lord! Though He permits sorrow, His mercy is renewed. Even though tears flow, He will draw near to you. You will realize that He has not forsaken you, even if you could not recognize Him in those trials.

Take courage, dear child of God. If He did not spare His only Son for our sake, but gave Him up for us all, will He not now, when we are reconciled to Him through Jesus, give us everything? In Him, all of God’s promises are yes and amen!

J. B.

The Easter Lamb



Today is the last day of school before the Easter holidays. Laura and her classmates are excited because they will soon have several days off.

During recess, Laura's friend Emilia opens her lunchbox and takes out something special—a little cake shaped like a lamb.

"Wow!" Laura says. "Why is your cake shaped like a lamb?"

Emilia shrugs and smiles. "My mom bakes this cake every year. She says it's part of Easter."

At lunchtime, Laura tells her mother about it. "Mom," she asks, "why does Easter have anything to do with a lamb?"

Mom smiles. "Do you remember the Bible story about when God helped the Israelites leave Egypt?"

Laura thinks for a moment. "Yes . . . Pharaoh would not let them go, and God sent plagues to Egypt."

"That's right," Mom says. "During the last plague, the Israelites had to take a lamb and put some of its blood on their doorposts. When God saw the blood, their families were protected."

Laura nods slowly.

"That was the first Passover," Mom explains. "After that, the Israelites celebrated it every year and

remembered how God had saved them."

Then Mom continues, "In the Bible, Jesus is also called a lamb. He loved us so much that He was willing to give His life for us."

Jesus had done nothing wrong, but He allowed Himself to be arrested. He died on the cross—not for His own sins, but for the sins of all people. This happened around the time of Passover. That's why the Bible calls Jesus our Passover Lamb.

Mom looks at Laura and says gently, "Every year at Easter, we remember what Jesus did for us."

Laura thinks about Emilia's cake again. Now she understands why it was shaped like a lamb. For many people, the lamb is a symbol of Easter. It reminds them of how God saved the Israelites—and how Jesus gave His life for us.

During the Easter holidays, Laura decides she wants to read more in the Bible about this. And maybe one day she and Mom will bake an Easter lamb cake together.

But most of all, Laura feels thankful to Jesus—because He died for her too and that she can be His child.

Irene Wuchrer

Jesus Christ—The Eternal Prince of Peace

Long ago, there was the great empire of the Chaldeans with their beautiful capital city of Babylon. High walls protected the beautiful buildings and wonderful gardens. The powerful King Nebuchadnezzar ruled over many nations. One night, the king began to wonder: “Will my kingdom last forever? What will happen after I am gone?”

God answered him through a dream (you can read it in Daniel 2). In the dream, the king saw a huge statue. It looked bright and impressive, but also a little frightening. The statue was made from different materials.

Suddenly something amazing happened. A stone came from heaven and hit the statue on its feet. No one had thrown the stone. When it struck the statue, the whole statue was completely shattered. But the stone grew bigger and bigger until it filled the whole earth.

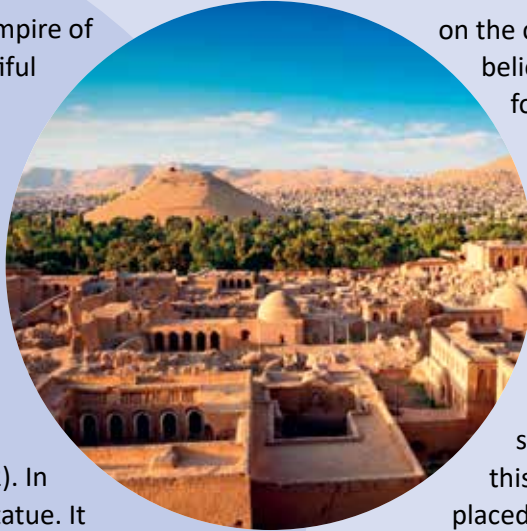
King Nebuchadnezzar did not understand the dream. So God helped the prophet Daniel explain it.

Daniel said that the statue stood for four great world empires that would rule one after another. These kingdoms would become powerful through war and violence, but each one would eventually fall, and another would take its place.

But the stone meant something very special. It stood for God’s kingdom. This kingdom comes from God Himself. It is not built with armies or weapons, and no one can destroy it. God’s kingdom is stronger and greater than all the kingdoms of people.

God kept his promise. About 600 years later, during the Roman Empire—the fourth kingdom from Nebuchadnezzar’s dream—Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem.

Jesus is the King of God’s kingdom. But He did not come with armies or violence. Instead, He brought peace and love. Jesus loves us so much that He died



on the cross for our sins. Anyone who believes in Him and asks God for forgiveness can become a child of God and belong to His kingdom (John 1: 12).

Sadly, many people did not believe in Jesus—just like many people today. When the Roman governor Pontius Pilate asked Jesus, “Are You a king then?” Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world.” Pilate even had a sign placed above the cross on which Jesus

was crucified that said, “Jesus of Nazareth,

King of the Jews.”

Jesus did not build a kingdom you can find on a map. After He died, He rose from the dead and lives forever. He said that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him (Matthew 28: 18).

Today Jesus rules as the Prince of Peace—in heaven, in the hearts of those who follow Him, and among His people.

And His kingdom will last forever.

Helene Rotfuss

“Christ, our Passover
Lamb, has been
sacrificed for us.”
1 Corinthians 5:7 (NLT)



It is FINISHED!

Recently, I was driving with a friend in West Texas, and we drove by a building that had been started, but never finished. As I have traveled throughout the world, I have often seen buildings that were started, but never finished. I have seen cars in pieces where the owner was planning to rebuild the car, but never finished. How many projects are started that are never finished?

On the other hand, we have some examples of projects that were not only started, but also finished. The Eiffel Tower in Paris is an amazing structure and built long ago! The project was started in 1887 and finished in 1889. It is hard to imagine how this structure was built without our modern technology and machinery, yet it was. Many have climbed Mount Everest, after spending years training for this epic event. Many made it to the top. Think of Ernest Shackleton, who traveled to the Antarctic with his ship, HMS Endurance. The ship became trapped in the ice and eventually sank. Shackleton did his utmost to rescue his twenty-seven men. He spent many months in the rescue, until finally it was “finished.”

The greatest story of “finishing” in our human history is the story of God sending His son Jesus Christ into this world, to live, to die, and to rise from the dead. On the cross, near His death, Jesus called out: “‘It is finished.’ With that, He bowed His head and gave up His spirit” (John 19: 30b, NIV). What exactly did Jesus “finish” as He died on the cross? What does this mean for us? Does it make any difference in our lives today, in our modern world?

I would suggest that these words of Jesus are as relevant today as they were 2,000 years

ago. Jesus finished God's plan to save all people. We, as a human race, were disobedient to God when we lived in the Garden of Eden. We were removed from the Garden and were like desert wanderers. Then Jesus came and showed us the way back to the heart of the Father. He died for us so that we could receive forgiveness from the Father. On the third day after His death, He rose from the dead. In His resurrection, the complete plan of God was finished. As Paul wrote to the Romans: "If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10: 9, NIV).

When Jesus spoke those powerful words, He spoke of God's plan for us. This plan included Jesus coming into this world as a human being, setting a perfect example for His followers, dying on the cross, being raised from the dead, and returning to heaven. God's plan also includes you and me. God loves every one of us, and through His love, He reaches out and calls us to be disciples of Jesus Christ. God calls us to follow His Son, and to be people who honor Him.

What stands at the center of all that He finished? I am convinced that it is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Paul wrote to the Corinthian church: "And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith" (1 Corinthians 15: 14, NIV). Without the Resurrection, the entire foundation of our faith collapses. Yet the Resurrection was not something believed without evidence. There were many eyewitness accounts of Jesus being alive after His crucifixion. Paul states: "After that, He appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep" (1 Corinthians 15: 6, NIV). It is an undeniable historic fact, agreed upon by many scholars today, that Jesus lived, died, and rose from the dead. Those of us who are His followers have also

experienced the living Jesus at work in our own lives.

The apostles preached about the Resurrection. At Pentecost Peter proclaimed: "But God raised Him from the dead, freeing Him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on Him" (Acts 2: 24, NIV). Soon after this first sermon, Peter once again proclaims to a crowd, "God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it" (Acts 2: 32, NIV). Later in Antioch Paul preached, "But God raised Him from the dead, and for many days He was seen by those who had traveled with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem" (Acts 13: 30–31, NIV). There is no doubt that the resurrection of Jesus Christ was foundational in the teachings of the Apostles.

Paul's desire was to know Christ better and to better understand "the power of His resurrection." He wrote to the Philippian church: "I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection . . ." (Philippians 3: 10, NIV). What power was necessary for God to raise His son from the dead? Paul wanted to know this power, because it was that power that was available to him as he faced life's battles. He ended his life on earth with this assurance: "The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory for ever and ever. Amen" (2 Timothy 4: 18, NIV). Paul understood the great power of God and was convinced it was enough to overcome every battle and bring him safely home.

"It is finished," are powerful words for us as well. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is vital to our faith and understanding of God's plan. We also want to know the "power of His resurrection." This power is available to us. We can proclaim with Paul that God's power is there to rescue us from every evil attack and bring us safely to His heavenly kingdom.

*Sieg Schuler
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Martha, the Homemaker

Hospitality in daily life—inspired by the little family in Bethany

Bethany was not a large or important place. And yet this small village on the slope of the Mount of Olives plays a remarkably significant role in the Gospels. Only about three kilometers (2 mi) from Jerusalem (John 11:18), Bethany was close enough to reach the city on foot, yet far enough away to escape the noise, bustle, and stress of the capital. Bethany was a place of retreat. A place of rest, connection, and reflection. It was here that Martha, Mary, and Lazarus lived.

Even the name Bethany carries a double meaning. On the one hand, it comes from “Beth” (house) and “An’ya” (misery, poverty), thus referring to a place for the sick, the needy, and the outcast. The fact that Simon the leper lived there (Matthew 26:6) fits well with this description. On the other hand, Bethany may also derive from “Beth” and “Ani” (dates, figs)—a reference to fruitfulness, provision, and life. Together, these meanings create a powerful image: Bethany is a place where human need and divine care connect. And this is precisely what is reflected in the home of the three siblings.

An open door for Jesus

Martha, Mary, and Lazarus appear in the Gospels in three key events spanning a period of about one to one and a half years. Initially, Martha welcomes Jesus into her home (Luke 10:38–42). Later, Lazarus dies and is raised by Jesus (John 11). Finally, a few days before Christ’s suffering, He is again a guest in Bethany, where Mary anoints His feet with expensive perfume (John 12:1–9).

All these events have one thing in common: the home of these siblings is open to Jesus. It is a place of hospitality and fellowship, but also of sorrow, questions, and faith. Jesus does not come only as a teacher or miracle worker, but as a friend. And Martha plays a central role in this.

Martha—not just “the industrious one”

The name Martha comes from Aramaic and means “mistress” or “lady.” It describes a woman of responsibility, dignity, and energy. Martha is not a minor character, nor merely “kitchen help.” She is the lady of

the house—a worthy, respected person, full of energy and good works. She organizes, is decisive, and takes responsibility. Her name suits her and corresponds to the image of the homemaker in Proverbs 31. In verse 26 we read: “She opens her mouth with wisdom, and on her tongue is the law of kindness.”

In Luke 10 it simply says: “Martha welcomed Him.” This brief statement says much. Hospitality is nothing unusual for her; it is natural. She opens her home, prepares for guests, and takes charge. She was likely practical by nature, perhaps even the eldest of the siblings—we cannot know for certain, but her manner suggests she was accustomed to responsibility.

Anyone familiar with family life knows that many guests in the house mean much work. And this is the origin of the well-known tension between Martha and Mary. While Mary sits at Jesus’ feet and listens, Martha is “distracted with much serving” (Luke 10:40). Her service becomes overwhelming. Perhaps perfectionism played a role, perhaps the desire to live up to everyone’s expectations. In any case, she lacks the inner freedom to unwind and listen to Jesus.

What is remarkable here is how Martha deals with her frustration. She goes to Jesus. She brings her emotions directly to the Lord. That is no small matter; it reveals spiritual maturity. And Jesus’ answer is both loving and correcting: “Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed” (Luke 10:41–42).

Jesus does not question the duty of service. He does not condemn Martha. But He shows her that even good things—such as hospitality—can result in loss of balance if they are not motivated through a relationship with Him. Extremes lead to tension, even in family life.

Enduring faith—even in crisis

In John 11 we see another side of Martha. When Lazarus becomes sick and dies, the sisters seek help from Jesus. And then we read: “Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus” (John 11:5). This order is striking. It underscores Martha’s special position, but also the deep, personal relationship between Jesus and this family.



When Jesus finally comes, Martha goes to meet Him—determined, energetic, not giving up. While Mary initially remains in the house, Martha seeks to connect. She openly shares what’s on her heart: her disappointment, her hope, her faith. And this faith is remarkably deep. Martha confesses Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, and believes in the Resurrection that overcomes death (verses 21–27).

At the same time, Martha is honest. When Jesus commands that the stone be removed from the tomb, she points out the odor (verse 39). Her doubts, her questions, and the things she does not understand can all be laid before Him. Martha shows that faith does not mean understanding everything, but bringing it all to Jesus.

A Life of Service

At Jesus’ final visit to Bethany (John 12:1–9), shortly before the Passover, we encounter a matured Martha. Again, we read: “Martha served” (John 12:2), but this time without mention of overload, complaint, or comparison. The siblings seem in harmony. Together they prepared the meal. Lazarus sits at the table with Jesus, and Mary anoints Jesus’ feet with her most precious possession. Each contributes his or her gift.

Here we see what wholesome hospitality can look like: a blend of service, fellowship, and devotion. No one seeks the limelight, no one shirks responsibility. All enjoy the presence of Jesus—even amid duty. And Martha continues to serve. But her service is integrated in fellowship with Jesus and inner peace.

Lessons for families

Martha is a great example—especially for families. She shows that hospitality is a biblical virtue. It is an expression of love, caring, and responsibility. Scripture explicitly directs children of God to be hospitable (1 Peter 4:9; Hebrews 13:2). Church leaders are especially called to be an example in this (1 Timothy 3:2).

At the same time, it is important to distinguish hospitality from special ministries or spiritual gifts. Hospitality is not a special gift for a few, but an attitude to which every Christian is called. It follows the example of Jesus Himself, who said He came to serve (Matthew 20:25–28).

Spiritual gifts, on the other hand, are distributed differently. Paul names a wide variety: teaching, ministering, exhortation, prophesying, healing, and more (Romans 12:7–8; 1 Corinthians 12:8–10). Not everyone serves in the same manner—and that is good. Families and churches thrive on this diversity.

Martha reminds us that to remain in His love, a relationship with Jesus is essential in our daily lives, within our family, and in our relationships. Conflicts can be resolved in a healthy way when we approach them “through Jesus.” The essence of hospitality is not a perfect meal or a spotless house, but an open heart.

Bethany shows us that when we open our homes, we open a space for God to work. And Martha shows that even the dining room table can be a sacred space.

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THE SECRET OF THE SINGING HEART

C. W. Naylor

The desire to be happy is one of the most universal of human desires. Few people put anything else ahead of their own happiness. In many a life this is the most powerful motive. Happiness, like everything else in this world of law and order, is the result of the operation of certain laws. It is a product, the result of certain processes.

One thing should be clearly noted. The road to happiness is not a direct one. To arrive at happiness, we must first go somewhere else. On this path, we must pass through the gate of duty, and walking on the way of right, pass through the village of love, descend into the valley of humility, go over the stony way of loyalty and sincerity, and ascend to the heights of innocence. Here, without looking for it, we will find happiness.

Worthy motives

It is a mistake to think that true happiness can come from mere gratification of desire. Gratification has its part, but often pursuit of a worthy motive is a greater factor. Unworthy motives, selfish desires and sensual gratifications, instead of producing happiness, produce disappointment and disillusion. It is a law of our natures that the higher the desire to be gratified or the higher the motive that we have, the higher and truer the happiness that results. No truer thing was ever said than that they that sow to the “flesh will of the flesh reap corruption.” It is the inevitable consequence.

Gratification of the desires of the flesh may bring physical joy. The drunkard and the immoral person may join in singing their drinking songs, their sensual love songs, and the like, but these are not songs of true happiness. A sensual joy poisons itself and dies in the midst of its song. Pure song brings higher forms of joy and higher and purer inspiration. It springs from pure and innocent love, from the home where love reigns, from the heart that is full of kindness, caring, consideration for others and love of goodness.

The highest happiness comes from the use of our highest faculties. The exercise of these faculties blossoms forth in the truest and purest joy. Joy of mind and of heart, rather than enjoyment of the flesh, inspires the heart with rejoicing. The song that has no minor strain is the song of innocence, at peace with

God and with its fellow men. Selfish desire and selfish living build an impossible barrier between us and true happiness. The poet spoke truly when he said,

“Tell me not then of the pleasures that sting,
Coiled under roses of pride,
None but the holy and innocent sing,
Out of a bosom where pleasures abide.”

D. S. Warner

In harmony with God

Innocence need not be a thing that we associate only with childhood. It may be mature. It may be a characteristic of middle age and of gray hair. Innocence is the result of right relations with God and with man. Right relations can exist only when a right attitude is maintained. A right attitude can be maintained only when it is supported by right desires and right purposes.

Happiness is the fruit of harmony. Harmony comes when our lives are in line with the laws of our being. The law of God revealed in the Bible is the law of harmony. Those who are holy are truly happy because their lives are truly in harmony. Both their inner life and their outward life are in harmony. Their relationship with God and with others is marked by harmony. The elements of strife and conflict are absent.

Happiness is not the result of where we live or of our surroundings or of what we possess. It is the result of what we are. No matter how favorable our situation may be, or how much we own or have going for us, if we do not have within our own hearts the things that produce happiness, we will never truly be happy.

We have already noted that true happiness is associated with innocence. There is nothing from which greater happiness springs than an inner consciousness of being innocent before God. It is striking that many Christian teachers have claimed that it is impossible for a Christian to live in innocence before God. The sad result of this teaching has been that it robs the Christian life of much of its joy and leads many people to see it as an unsatisfying life—almost like a battle that cannot be won.

It has been taught that Christians must sin continually day by day. Believing this doctrine, it is no



wonder that many Christians are unhappy and live far beneath their privileges. Their outlook is one of defeat, of constant shortcoming, of repeatedly enduring a sense of condemnation. Now, such teaching is assuredly not in harmony with the teachings of the Scriptures, particularly of the New Testament. The Christian life there is pictured to be a joyful life. The command is “Rejoice always.” How can one rejoice evermore when he is conscious of being guilty before God? Jesus said, “Blessed *are* the pure in heart.” If there be no such persons, Christ’s words are mockery.

A new creation in Christ

What is the New Testament picture of a Christian? It is of a man or woman forgiven of their iniquities, cleansed from their guilt, walking in righteousness before God. Or, as Paul puts it, “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1). Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you” (John 14:27). The joyful fellowship Paul had with Christ, which is evident through all his epistles, is completely inconsistent with the kind of life that is often described as the Christian life. “But,” one may say, “How about the seventh chapter of Romans?” I do not think Paul was very happy when his life corresponded to the seventh chapter of Romans. Paul passed out of the seventh chapter into the eighth chapter that day on the road to Damascus when Jesus appeared to him.

From that day there was a new song in Paul’s heart and in his mouth. He lived a new life, the life pictured in the eighth chapter. The seventh chapter is not the picture of a Christian life. It is the picture of a man, without grace, trying to live up to the law of God and finding himself continually failing. It is a continuation of his argument extending from the third to the sixth chapters, of the failure of works and of the saving power of grace. Real Christians do not live in the seventh chapter of Romans. It is not the reflection of a Christian experience.



Christians live in fellowship with God. God is their Father. They are not rebellious children, but obedient children. Sin is a thing of the motive and of the will. Mistakes, blunders, weaknesses, failures and unintentional shortcomings are not sins. To treat them as sins is to make a vital error. The Bible does not treat them as sins. Sin is willful disobedience. It is rebellion against God, and nothing, save things of this kind may properly be called sins, or be treated as sins. These other things often called “sins” do not produce the effects of sin. The real Christian experience is a walk with God. There is mutual understanding between the soul and God. There is a sincere desire to please God and a genuine effort to do so.

Along with living in harmony with God and with our fellow human beings, selfless devotion to the highest things for their own sake is the surest path to happiness. It is the tree whose fruit is happiness. It bears twelve kinds of fruits (Revelation 22:2) and always has both the fragrant blossoms and the luscious fruits. The Scripture that says, “the wages of sin *is* death” (Romans 6:23), is not a threat. It is a simple statement of an unavoidable reality—true both now and in the life to come. Evil always brings its own reward, and we begin to reap its consequences the moment we are guilty of it. It never goes bankrupt; its returns only grow greater as the years go by. On the other hand, the dividends of righteousness are never withheld. They are always paid in golden coin.

Disobeying our best and highest impulses, aspirations, and desires will inevitably lead to disappointed hopes, an accusing conscience, regret, and a sense of failure. It is a poison injected into the cup of happiness. If we want the song of happiness in our hearts, we must learn that the Secret of the Singing Heart is to be innocent, to be true to the best within us, and to live on a higher plane—above the mire of sin, selfishness, and sensual gratification.

WHEN GOD SPEAKS THROUGH HIS SERVANTS

Preaching is more than words from a pulpit; it is God speaking to listening hearts. Where God sends, where preachers serve faithfully and congregations listen in faith, life springs from His Word (see Romans 10: 14–17).

Despite their central, even crucial, role in worship services, sermons are increasingly being called into question for being too long, too abstract, or simply out of date. Nonetheless, many preachers feel they have a responsibility to deliver “good” sermons that speak to people, touch their hearts, and change their lives.

By contrast, Paul addresses this matter at a much more fundamental level. In Romans 10: 14, he underscores the sermons’ necessity rather than its form, asking, “How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?” This highlights the key function of preaching as a tool through which God reveals His plan of salvation. It is not a human addition to biblical truth, but rather a way for God to reach people.

This perspective reveals both how valuable sermons are and who bears the responsibility for them. Since God makes use of preaching as a way for people to meet Him through His word, sermons are more than just a time slot in the evening’s program; we will be held accountable for how we use this time (Hebrews 4: 2).

God could have communicated His will in many other ways, for instance, by sending angels, visible signs, or direct revelations. However, He chose a different way: God sends people to proclaim His Word. Paul clearly shows that preachers do not go and preach of their own accord, but because God has sent them.

“How shall they preach unless they are sent?” Sermons begin

with God, not the preacher. God creates the message, calls His messenger, and determines the time, location, and content. Preaching is therefore primarily an act of obedience to God’s calling, not an achievement for us to perform (Romans 10: 15).

Where God’s Word is faithfully proclaimed, congregations experience far more than a formally structured, ordinary worship service. The whole atmosphere is changed through the presence of God as all the listeners—and the preacher too—suddenly find themselves in the holy presence of God the Eternal. Such a sermon has great authority. This is not the result of the preacher’s eloquence, but rather of the preacher’s willingness to step back from the limelight, giving the powerful Word of God unrestricted space. Such preachers do not take the pulpit of their own initiative or on behalf of others; they are there because God chose them as His messengers (1 Thessalonians 2: 13).

Preaching in this sense is not solely about addressing issues in religion or presenting smart thoughts, ethical concerns, or moral appeals. Preaching is about sharing a message—passing on what God wants to say. In the word of the prophets, “Thus says the LORD.” By extension, a deeply touching and morally correct speech on biblical topics is not necessarily a sermon in keeping with God’s calling and will.

Preaching reveals God’s will. It is not about reading densely filled pages or about standing up and speaking. The point is rather to share God’s message, heart to heart, with the people who need to hear it. When this aspect is lost, a sermon becomes a mere speech, exhortation, or conversation. However interesting or emotional it is, it no longer contains what Paul calls the “word of Christ”—the word through which faith is born (Luke 2: 10–11; 2 Timothy 4: 2; John 6: 63; Colossians 3: 16).



THE PASTOR AND HIS MINISTRY (PART 4)

Who is responsible for sermons?

Some preachers may worry, “Is it my fault if the sermon has no apparent effect?” It is true that preachers have responsibilities—of obedience, of fidelity, and of service. However, the first and last responsibility for the content, delivery, and impact of the sermons lies with God. This is reflected in our text as well.

In his letters, especially the pastoral epistles, Paul never discusses optimizing technique, rhetoric, or logical argumentation. Instead, he exhibits the certainty that “faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.” That is how God works: preachers are the tools, and God remains the One who uses them (Romans 10:17; Acts 16:14).

This is cause for reflection. It is not our job to “make” the sermon; instead, as faithful servants, our task is to wait for the Lord to speak. Similarly, we cannot “make” the audience have faith or become more spiritual. It is not our own skill or craft that grants a sermon its power (not even AI can do that). God gives us seeds to spread, and He gives them growth. Maintaining this attitude protects us from focusing on people and thereby losing sight of Him (1 Corinthians 3:6–7; 2 Corinthians 4:5–7).

However, just because we do not have the primary responsibility does not mean we can get lazy. In fact, because God ultimately has the responsibility, preachers must take all the more serious care to preach only God’s Word. Faithfulness is not a trivial matter: “It is required in stewards that one be found faithful” (1 Corinthians 4:1–2; 2 Timothy 2:15).

What spiritual principle are sermons built on?

Preachers are to be a messenger between God and people. A smartphone in our hand, if it is offline—without any connection—is, at best, just a decorative object,

because it can only receive messages while connected to the network. Similarly, preachers are only truly preachers when connected to God and receiving the Word from Him (John 15:4–5; Jeremiah 15:19).

The underlying biblical principle is that, when God speaks through people, the impact depends on the unhindered presence of the Holy Spirit rather than on the messenger’s skills. That is why a preacher can say all the right things and even remain in harmony with the biblical truth, but nonetheless fail to resonate with listeners’ souls. At its core, the Word of God is more than true information; it is spirit and life (John 6:63, 1 Thessalonians 2:13).

For preachers, this means that preparation is not about gathering and structuring thoughts but, above all, about being still in the presence of God. The question is therefore not “What will I say?” but “What will God say to each of the listeners, personally, in the next sermon?” For congregations, this means praying not for a “good sermon,” but for the preachers, in the holy presence of His heavenly majesty, to receive the preparation they need to maintain a strong connection between the sender and His messenger (Acts 6:4; Ephesians 6:18–20).

What about the person behind the pulpit?

Preachers are still people. They have weaknesses, limitations, imperfections, and temptations; their public service and spiritual work come with expectations, comparisons, and criticism; a lack of visible success may weigh heavily on them. As a result, many preachers struggle, not only with being good messengers and faithful workers but also with the pain in their own soul.

The Bible does not ignore these tensions. As Paul put it, “we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that ▶



the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us” (2 Corinthians 4:7). To translate this metaphor, God’s servants must be fragile vessels with vulnerable souls and immense weakness so that there is no confusion about the actual impact coming from God.

God is not reliant on smooth, smart, diplomatic, and pastoral preachers who have a lot of education, gifts, and abilities. After all, it is not knowledge, insight, and zeal that God looks for first, but rather, an authentic heart that is filled with deep love for the Savior and hidden under the cloak of true humility. Such workers can be used by God in His vineyard (1 Corinthians 13).

What is the community’s responsibility?

Romans 10 speaks not only about the preachers but also about the listeners. Even in the time of Ezekiel, God pointed out that Israel was very willing to listen—but not to apply what they heard. In such cases, the problem is not the sermon but its reception (Ezekiel 33:30–32; Romans 10:16–17).

In order for God to open the windows of Heaven and, from His sanctuary, dispatch messages that

will tremendously impact their recipients, the church must earnestly ask God to do so. It may be that congregations, unhappy with the meager food on offer, are yearning for revival behind the pulpit. This is a change that must begin in our hearts. If we fill them with what is needed—repentance, humility, hunger, a yearning for the Word of God, and the willingness to obey—God will freely share His wealth of blessings with us. He truly wants to serve us rich and plentiful feasts of the Spirit; He wants us to grow and to honor Him thereby; and He wants us to thank Him when we have been allowed to enter His presence and when His Word has touched our hearts and lives.

As individuals, let us humbly complete the tasks God assigns us when He calls us into the glorious service of His vineyard. As a church, let us never forget the promise Jesus made as He prepared His disciples for life without Him: “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you” (John 15:7).

*Hermann Vogt
Gifhorn, Germany*

ANNOUNCEMENTS

April 3 to 6, 2026

Easter Conference in Hamm (Germany)

May 15 to 17, 2026

Conference in Winnipeg, MB

May 23 to 25, 2026

Pentecost Conference in Herford (Germany)

May 23 to 24, 2026

Pentecost Conference in Aylmer, ON

August 17 to 28, 2026

Bible Course in Edmonton, AB

Victory in Defeat

“Remember that Jesus Christ . . . was raised from the dead.” (2 Timothy 2: 8)

The mystery of Easter is the foundation of our faith. We are Christians because we believe in Christ, who died and rose again for us. So let us joyfully celebrate Easter! Even on Good Friday, the cross is touched by the hope of Easter, and in the radiant light of Easter, we can still see the shadows of Good Friday. Thus, the mystery of Easter “shines” all the more powerfully for us.

Apparent defeat

What happened on Good Friday? The Lord’s suffering and death were accomplished out of obedient love for the Father and in sacrificial love for us—for the glory of God and for our salvation. On that day, Jesus was delivered into the hands of the powers of darkness. Never did Satan’s dominion seem so powerful and so dark as in that hour at Golgotha. Satan’s rebellion against God had reached its climax. God’s cause seemed hopelessly lost. Enemy powers seemed to have overcome the One who sustains the universe with His Word. Apparently, God’s kingdom had collapsed. God Himself seemed to have been dethroned. And what about us? Without a Savior, our fate is only death and bondage, as hopeless slaves of Satan.

In reality, victory

Thank God, this was not the end of His work. It finds its crowning glory in the resurrection of our Lord. God does not allow his Holy One (Jesus) to see decay, but raises Him from the dead (Acts 2: 25–27, 31). Yes, if death could have held our Savior, then God would truly have been defeated and dethroned. But Christ broke the bonds of death and thus escaped the power of Satan. Physically subjected to this power, His soul was, and is, infinitely superior to it. He broke the chains of death and thus revealed that there is a power stronger than Satan, sin, and death. These dark powers

only have as much power in the world, and for as long, as God allows. God did not take away all their power in one swoop, as He could have done. But the powers of darkness are already judged. The battle is decided. They and all the followers of Satan are fighting a losing battle.

See, there is a great “nevertheless” in the mystery of our salvation. Outwardly at the mercy of Satan’s power, Christ nevertheless destroyed the works of the devil as was His purpose. That is the victory in defeat, the success of failure, the triumph in defeat. God is in control, and Jesus is Lord!

We have the privilege of being truly free.

Consequences for believers

And what about us? We have the privilege of being truly free. Yet Satan will keep coming against

us again and again. And this world of sin, destined for destruction, will continually try to draw us into its grip. That is where we must fight—and it is a lifelong struggle. Yet the peace of God already surrounds us. We, who have accepted salvation through faith, have become children of God. A divine seed of life is alive in us. We live and have victory in the grace of Christ. Christ in us! The Apostle John affirms that “He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (1 John 4: 4). Yes, Christ is mightier than Satan.

It is our mission to push back Satan’s influence in the world. We are to be examples who visibly live out God’s principles of righteousness and love and spread the kingdom of God until the Lord returns. And we have this certainty: the victory belongs to God—Satan has already been fundamentally defeated.

Easter joy

This is the gift of the risen Lord to us: freedom, liberty, and eternal life for our souls. Our Easter joy overcomes all fear and hopelessness. Freedom and life—that is God’s gift to everyone who believes. ■

Diamonds Grow in the Dark

For years, a little book entitled “Diamonds Grow in the Dark” has enriched my Christian book collection. This image, taken from nature, succinctly summarizes how God can transform a painful life journey into visible blessings. Hardly anyone would voluntarily choose a path of hardship and darkness for themselves, and yet the end result, “diamonds,” sounds very tempting.

Why is that? What is so special about a diamond? Isn't it just one of many forms of the element carbon that occur in nature? Yes—but unlike soft graphite, it is the hardest and most durable natural substance and is therefore often used to work on other materials. It is also nearly inert, meaning it is almost entirely unaffected by other substances.

And when professionally cut, it is transformed into the most valuable gemstone, whose brilliance is based on countless reflections of light. The uniqueness of this mineral lies in its internal crystal structure and can be explained by its formation deep in the Earth's mantle under extreme pressure and high temperatures. It takes powerful eruptions, such as volcanic eruptions, to bring this hidden treasure to the Earth's surface. How can we apply this image from nature to our Christian life?

Surely each of us wishes for a character strong enough that it doesn't immediately crumble under challenges and pressures. Should we not stand firm especially in the storms of life and continue to grow—for the glory of God and the blessing of those around us? No one is born with a fully polished personality.

Rather, it is a lifelong task to mature into a person who reflects into their surroundings the rays of God's love, kindness, and mercy that they themselves have experienced. For this, we need salvation, but then God's work on the “rough diamond” continues. And how much and how often must God shape and polish us to make us useful for service in His kingdom!

She was plagued by the question of why God had allowed this hardship in her life and what she herself had done wrong.

In her book “Diamonds Grow in the Dark”, author Elfriede Deis describes precisely this path of inner preparation in her own life.

The diagnosis of multiple sclerosis at the age of just under 20 plunged her into deep spiritual distress. After severe inner struggles, she was finally able to surrender completely to God's will. In many ways, the Lord led her through profound darkness into the light. Not only did she experience complete salvation of her soul, but under God's wise guidance, she was able to explore the most important questions of life. Elfriede not only found the scriptural answers to these questions, but also began to align her inner attitude and actions with them. In this way, she herself became more spiritually mature and resilient.

Of course, she was also plagued by the question of why God had allowed this hardship in her life and what she herself had done wrong. Yet this accusing attitude only made her illness worse. Soon, the accusations gave way to the realization that God had allowed suffering into her life with wise foresight and that He wanted her complete trust. So she held on to the scripture, “In quietness and confidence shall be your strength” (Isaiah 30:15).

In fact, God's actions always have a meaning and purpose, even if we don't understand them at the moment. A hopeful, forward-looking "for what purpose?" usually helps us more than a gnawing, backward-looking "why?" Since Elfriede had a chronic illness, she needed a lot of patience, but also a good measure of humility, because at times she had to give up her independence completely and let others help her. As we know, this does not lead to the best feelings or moods. Yet she did not want to burden those around her with this. In the example of Jesus, she also found a biblical solution to this problem. "Take my yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart" (Matthew 11:29).

Unfortunately, the enemy of our souls does not sleep when we are going through difficult times, and

so another burning question arose in Elfriede. Did her illness come from God or from the devil?

The answer to this question is very important, especially for the chronically ill. Once again, she found guidance in God's Word, which says: "Blessed be the Lord! Day after day he bears our burdens; God is our salvation" (Psalm 68:19 CSB). The evangelist Moder-son once stated: "What we do not take from God's hand, the devil will seize."

Knowing that behind every hardship and challenge is a plan from God assures us of His support and help, allowing us to praise Him even in dark days.

*Brigitte Ress
Herford, Germany
To be continued*

Experiences with God

To the glory of God, I would like to share a testimony. When we moved to Mexico and began attending the worship services of the Church of God, I thought, "Now everything will be fine. Now my life will become easier." But I had not considered that the enemy of our souls does not rest.

It did not take long before the devil placed a large rock in my path. In my thoughts I heard him say, "Give up—you will never get over it; this rock is too big!" Then dark and heavy days came. During that time my sister took her own life. Not long after that, my brother did as well. I could not understand it. "Why, Lord? Why did this have to happen?" These questions gnawed at me, and finally I suffered a complete inner

breakdown. I no longer knew how to go on.

One morning, when I was utterly at my end, I went to my husband and said, "I can't go on anymore!" He simply replied, "Then we will pray." And we prayed. During that prayer I experienced how the enemy retreated. I felt it clearly: the devil did not want to let me go—but my God was stronger! He does not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear (1 Corinthians 10:13).

I have promised the Lord to write a testimony—to strengthen the faith of others and for His glory. Please pray for me, that I may remain faithful and steadfast.

*Elisa Wieler
Seminole, TX*

Through Death to Life

Do you know the One who silently suffered
And carried His cross to die on the hill?
Do you know why He so willingly offered
His life out of love, God's plan to fulfill?

Do you see His face and head pierced by sharp thorns,
and yet so gracious, so gentle and kind?
Do you see His body with wounds all deformed,
yet, even in death, with honor defined?

Did you hear the words from the cross which He said:
"Father, forgive them?" He died in our place.
He prayed for His enemies, who wished Him dead,
And offered His foes such mercy and grace.

Salvation has come through His death on the cross.
He cried: "It is finished," and breathed there His last.
But it did not end there, for all was not lost,
Death was defeated, and darkness had passed.

Believe it, my soul, and rejoice evermore:
Jesus, your Savior and King is alive!
Nothing can keep you from the One you adore,
For sin is defeated, so that you, too, can thrive.

Rejoice, o my soul, Christ is risen indeed.
If you trust Him, you will not be put to shame!
To judge the world He will soon come with speed,
But blessed are those, all who trust in His name.

H. Miescher