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CHRISTMAS

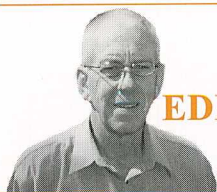
The Shepherd and his Flock

The Spirit of Bethlehem

Gold and Ivory
Tablecloth

The Sandpiper
Mission to Ukraine

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EDITORIAL

THE GIFT

Christmas is a time for giving and receiving. God loved us so much that he gave his only Son (John 3:16). But a gift is of no value to us unless we receive it. To all who receive Jesus he gives the right to become sons of God (John 1:12).

This is God's transforming Christmas gift—the gift, which if received, transforms the receiver into a son or daughter of God. Those who receive God's child, become children of God themselves. What a privilege that is! If God is our Father we have nothing to worry about. All heaven's resources are there for us and there is no problem that he can't handle.

How do we receive the Son? The very first Christmas gives us some lessons on receiving God's gift. The first to receive the gift of God's Son were the humble shepherds, one of the lowest classes of people in the land. They were full of uncomprehending wonder at the sight of the Babe on a bed of hay. They accepted him as the Messiah because of the angel's message (Luke 2:8-20).

The second to receive God's free gift were those who sincerely loved

God and were waiting for God to save his people. The first of these was Simeon. Within a short time of Jesus' birth, Joseph and Mary took him to the temple to dedicate him to the Lord. Simeon, who was waiting there, took the baby in his arms and said: 'Lord, ... now I can die in peace ... with my own eyes I have seen what you have done to save your people, and foreign nations will also see this ... (Luke 2:25-32 CEV).

The other believer was the eighty-four year old prophetess, Anna. When she saw the child, Jesus, she spoke about him to everyone who was looking for redemption (Luke 2:36-38).

Gentiles from the East also came to pay their respects to the baby who was born to be King (Matt. 2:1-2; 9-11). These wise men worshipped the boy, gave him costly gifts and then returned home.

The three classes of people who received Jesus were the lower-class Jews, the dedicated spiritual Jews and the Gentiles. We might well ask, 'What happened to the educated Jews?' The Bible says, 'He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him' (John 1:11). Why did the educated Jews, in the main, refuse to receive God's gift? They rejected their Messiah because they were worshipping an image of the Messiah that they had constructed with their own hands. Their Messiah would restore David's lost kingdom and would honour them as the spiritual leaders of Israel.

Jesus, on the other hand, refused

to buy into their vision for an earthly kingdom (John 6:15; 18:36) and condemned them for their hypocrisy and self-serving (Matt. 23:1-36). Because Jesus did not accept them and their theology, and because he did not conform to their expectations of the kind of person the Messiah would be, they rejected him. In rejecting him they rejected God's free gift of salvation.

If we are religious people there's a warning here for us. It could be that our religion is more important to us than Jesus. If that is the case we won't receive God's free gift until we are ready to give up the 'god' that we are worshipping in his place. That would be a terrible pity because eternal life is given only to those who receive the Son (John 3:36).

Ritchie Way

—Ritchie Way.



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Mission Statement

Christians united in offering to all, meaning and direction in their lives by a knowledge of God's reconciliation with humanity through his Son, Jesus Christ.

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THE SPIRIT OF BETHLEHEM

Dr Desmond Ford

In Dickens' inimitable style he climaxed his Christmas story of Scrooge by sketching the liberality of the converted miser. Giving for God has always been the inevitable result of receiving from God.

All Christian biography endorses Christian experience in this regard. Paul's exclamation: 'Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift' (2 Cor 9:15), epitomises the heart-cry of all who hear the Bethlehem story with understanding.

THE GOD WHO GIVES

While re-reading two great Christian biographical classics (*George Muller of Bristol* by A T Pierson, and *Hudson Taylor and the China Inland Mission* by Howard Taylor), this truth came home to me afresh. To receive Christ is to receive that One who so loved the world that he gave. Muller, after his conversion, resolved to show the world that the reality of the living God was demonstrated by his continual giving in response to private prayer. After more than sixty years of service, Muller could look back on over ten thousand orphans supported by him without lack, though never once did he make any public appeal for help. Similarly, Hudson Taylor at the end of his life, could review the providential provision and sustaining

of more than one thousand missionaries for hitherto neglected China, as the result of private intercessory prayer.

The Babe of Bethlehem was given in answer to millennia of prayers from the faithful. Every advance step in the ushering in of the Kingdom of God has been characterised by fervent prayer and the giving up of all, in response to the gospel. Reviewing the history of Christendom, A T Pierson affirmed that 'prayer has turned every great crisis.' We who await with eagerness the great Consummation need to sense afresh the power of the triad—God, prayer, giving—in order to effectually fulfil Carey's famous motto: 'Attempt great things for God; expect great things from God.' Thus Christmas is intended to bring us more than holidays, nostalgia and indigestion. It is a challenge to observe and pursue the divine way of doing things.

Our omnipotent Lord gave up heaven for a cattle shed, and he who from eternity had reclined upon the bosom of the Father, confessed, that on earth he had no certain place to lay his head. Even the foxes and birds were apparently richer than he. He had a right to remind us that where our treasure is there also is our heart. And there has never been a mature Christian who did not see the truth of this reminder and who has not recognised that he himself owns nothing, but is merely a steward of his Lord's goods. Thus Livingstone could write in his journal on one of his last lonely birthdays in central Africa: 'My Jesus, my King, my Life, my All—again I dedicate my whole self to Thee.'



HOW MUCH CAN I GIVE?

When John Wesley received thirty pounds a year he lived on twenty-eight and gave away the rest. Upon receiving twice as much he maintained his frugal living and gave away thirty-two pounds that year. The next year saw an income of ninety pounds and his gift distribution of all but the original twenty-eight needed to sustain life. When the collector of taxes called upon him near the end of his life the only valuable items he possessed were four silver spoons, having given away all else.

Upon reading the biography of Muller we find the same spirit. He gave away over eighty-one thousand pounds. All his investments had been in the work of God, not in lands or banks, stocks or bonds. He did not give a tithe, but rather all that remained after the supplying of vital needs. What a revolution in the Christian church would be accomplished if all cherished his ambition: 'My aim never was, how much I could obtain, but rather, how much I could give.'

In Hudson Taylor, the man God used for the salvation of millions, we find the same spirit. In his biography we read his comment on the significance not just of the first coming of Christ, but the second:

'I believe that the ignorance of the native Christians generally of the fact, that Christ is coming again and that the present state of things is to be utterly overthrown, is one reason for the selfishness and worldliness to be found in some branches of the church ...

Well do I remember the effect, when God was pleased to open my own heart to this great truth that the Lord Jesus was coming again, and that he might come at any time. I had not many books, but it sent me to see if I could give a good account of all I had, and also of the contents of my little wardrobe. The result was that some of the books disappeared before long, and some of the clothing too. It was an immense spiritual blessing to me.

When I go home from China and can make time to go through my house from attic to basement with my dear wife to review our things in the light of his speedy return, I always find it a profitable spiritual exercise to see what we can do without. It is important to remember that we are stewards who have to give an account of everything that we retain; and unless we can give a good reason for the retention, shall we not be ashamed when the Master comes? And since he may come any day, is it not well to be ready every day? I do not know of any truth that has been a greater blessing to me through life than this.' (Howard Taylor, *Hudson Taylor and the China Inland Mission*, p. 408).

As one reads great Christian biographies such as those here mentioned, one becomes aware that


Bethlehem, like Calvary, is a revelation of the constant attitude of God, just as what is seen when a log is sawn through represents what might be found at any point. God's love streams forth in continuous giving just as the sunshine ever proceeds from the sun. We who tire of admonitions to give liberally, can well resolve to stop giving—as soon as we stop receiving.

LIVING FOR OTHERS

Even inanimate things like oceans and green trees take only in order to give. Truly, nothing but the selfish heart of man tries to live to itself. Thus, in the midst of the records of men like Muller and Taylor, we find constant references to their receiving from God. Dr. Pierson tells us, for example: 'In fifty thousand cases, Mr. Muller calculated that he could trace distinct answers to definite prayers; and in multitudes of instances in which God's care was not definitely traced, it was day-by-day like an encompassing, but invisible, presence or atmosphere of life and strength' (pp. 73-74).

Hudson Taylor also constantly refers to the connection between receiving and giving. After recording one account of the preaching of the good news he says: 'Fifteen or sixteen offers for the mission-field were the result and a whole jewellery case was sent in next day. People had received so much that they felt they could give anything' (p. 374). On another preaching tour his subject was Philippians 3 and he summarised it in these words: 'What we give for Christ we gain and what we keep back is our real loss' (p. 417).

In our own day, another Christian who has written largely on the meaning of the incarnation, has echoed the same truth in these words: 'The principle runs through all life from top to bottom. Give up yourself, and you will find your real self. Lose your life and you will save it. Submit to death, death of your ambitions and favourite wishes every day and death of your whole body in the end; submit with every fibre of your being and you will find eternal life. Keep back nothing. Nothing that you have not given away will ever be raised from the dead. Look for yourself and you will find in the long run, only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin and decay. But look for Christ and you will find him, and with him, everything else thrown in' (C S Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p. 190).

How then shall we respond this year to the Christmas story? Not in a new way—but in that manner espoused by all who have rejoiced in the good news since that night when the angels brought 'good tidings of great joy.' We may not have gold, frankincense or myrrh, but we render what he esteems the best gift of all—our heart, and with it, head, hands and all. 



MISSION TO UKRAINE

Ritchie & Rosemary Way

Towards the end of May, 2009, Pastor Stepan Boyko, who has a church of about two hundred and fifty people in Ukraine, sent a message to Dr Ford, via Alexander Siminiouk, asking if he would come to run a series of meetings to teach his people the gospel. As Dr Ford was unable to go he suggested that Pr Boyko invite me instead. Pr Boyko asked that I come in October when the harvest would be over and the country people would be free to attend meetings in the daytime.

We appealed to our *Good News Unlimited* readers for funds for this mission, and we weren't disappointed. More than sufficient donations came in to meet the need. Thank you for your generosity and special thanks to friends who made it possible for Rosemary to accompany me. We had nail-biting problems getting visas to enter Ukraine, but they arrived from the Embassy in Canberra just twenty-four hours before our departure.

OUR TRANSLATOR

We were met at Lviv Airport by our interpreter, Volodymyr (Walter) Stefanyk, who took us to his new apartment in Ivano Frankivsk. Walter, a very intelligent man with an encyclopaedic knowledge of geography and history, had been baptised by Dr Ford in Canada in June, 2000, and was our enthusiastic sup-

ported us with comfortable accommodation and excellent meals while we were in Ivano Frankivsk.

THE UKRAINIAN NATION

Ukraine, the 'Breadbasket' of Europe, symbolised by its flag which has the lower half in yellow (depicting the grain fields), and the upper half in blue (depicting the sky), has been overrun many times by foreign powers, the more recent invasions being by the Soviet Union and Germany. The communists tried to turn Ukraine into a country of collective farms, but when the landowners resisted seizure of their land, agricultural equipment and cattle by the Soviet regime, Stalin sent many of them to Siberia and commandeered the total harvest. That winter (1932-33) seven million Ukrainians starved to death.

The Ukrainian people resisted their persecutors with a stoic sense of humour. One of their jokes was about a man away from home who booked in to a hotel. The only bed available was in a room shared by two other men. He wasn't able to sleep

however, because long into the night his companions criticised the Soviet regime and laughed uproariously at its many eccentricities. Finally, he got out of bed and went downstairs and ordered three coffees, asking that they be sent up in fifteen minutes.

Back in the room he climbed into bed while his room-mates continued their criticism of the occupying nation. After ten minutes he sat up and told them they should watch what they were saying because the room



Translator, Walter; his wife, Lyudmyl; children, Timothy and Christina with Ritchie and Rosemary

porter the whole time we were in Ukraine. From the time we got through Customs until the time we left Ukraine seventeen days later, he never left our side. In fact, he was the only person we were able to speak with directly the whole time we were there. It meant a great deal to us that Walter and his wife, Lyudmyla, not only willingly gave up their annual holidays to assist us with our mission, but also



could be bugged. When they laughed their heads off at this suggestion, he got out of bed, went over to a power socket in the wall and said into it, 'Please send up three coffees.' His companions were utterly gob-smacked when, a few minutes later, there was a knock on the door and the maid said, 'Here are the coffees you ordered.' They never said another word and he managed to get a good night's sleep.

Next morning when he woke up his companions' beds were empty and there were two KGB officers sitting on chairs inside the door. When he asked where his room-mates were, he was told that they were on their way to Siberia. 'Why didn't you send me too?' he enquired. 'After all, I was the one who warned them about your bugs.' 'Ah,' they said, 'The major really liked your joke.'

THE PRIVATE SECTOR

The private sector in Western Ukraine appears to be booming as new brick homes, most having two to three stories, are being erected on the edges of cities and in villages everywhere, all of them having the latest fittings and appliances. Many apartment buildings—financed by voluntary collectives of apartment owners—are being erected in the cities. New supermarkets and wholesale stores containing electronic equipment rarely seen in the West, are being



Gateway to Pr Boyko's Church

built. Most people have at least one cell phone, and there are lots of new cars and vans on the 'roads.'

The money for these projects and vehicles, etc. comes from about twenty percent of the workforce that is employed outside the country, from small business owners, from men who go to the cities for several months at a time to work in construction, or from bribes or kickbacks—which government workers get from their fellow citizens.

The average worker in the country would earn the equivalent of about \$250.00 US dollars per month. Life is especially difficult for retired and disabled people, most of whom get less than \$100.00 US per

month. They have no savings to rely on as their life savings disappeared with the collapse of the Soviet Union and its State-owned savings bank.

Ukraine, with one of the densest populations in Europe, has many thousands of villages, each within a short distance of others. The majority of people in these villages live on subsistence farms. The average farm would have a cow, a calf or heifer, sometimes a pig, sometimes a horse or two, ducks, geese, fowls, cats for rodent control, a dog or two; a plot of land for growing potatoes, pumpkins, cabbages, garlic, onions, zucchinis, tomatoes, beetroot, corn, oats, rye, sugar-beet, apples, walnuts, etc. most of which is grown without the use of modern machinery, fertilisers or sprays.

Less than one percent of the land in Ukraine (as in Germany) is fenced. Those with cows take them to pasture in the morning where they either tether or herd them until it's time to take them home in the evening.

THE PUBLIC SECTOR

The public sector, limited by low taxation returns and endemic corruption, presents a poor image. The roads are incredibly bad, and while there are magnificent monuments to individuals and the armed services around the country, sealed roads in residential areas and beautification programmes for city suburbs, are noticeable by their absence, making the environment quite depressing.

RELIGION

The people in Ukraine would be the most religious in all Europe, each village having one or two magnificent Orthodox or Greek Catholic churches, easily identified by their golden or silver domed roofs. The common greeting in one village where we stayed was, 'Glory to Jesus Christ,' to which the other person would respond, 'Glory to God forever.'

THE PEOPLE

The people of Ukraine that we met had to be some of the most generous people in the world. One young family moved out of their village home so we would have somewhere to stay while ministering to Pastor Boyko's congregation. Their home was a small log cottage that had been plastered with clay mixed with wheat husks. The walls, about thirty centimetres thick, had then been plastered, inside and out, with concrete. The window openings had glass both on the outside of the wall and the inside, providing double-glazing. Piped gas heated about two cubic metres of glazed bricks which kept the house warm for many hours after the flame had been extinguished. Each day the wife and mother would



come to cook food for us and stock the small refrigerator. This home, like all others in the village, has its own well and large, heavily laden apple trees.

When the pastor's wife, Anna, heard that we wanted to be taken to a market where we could purchase a tablecloth with the famous Ukrainian cross-stitch pattern, she presented us with one she had made thirty years ago when she was pregnant with one of her daughters. Her insistence that we accept this family heirloom touched our hearts. And when the people heard that it was Rosemary's birthday on the 14th they presented her with three boxes of chocolates, and Lyudmyla, Walter's wife, made her a beautiful cake designed in the shape of a rose.

FOOD

Borsht is a tasty soup made of beetroot and potato, which is eaten, either hot or cold, with sour cream. We were also served green borsht, which is made with sorrel. Apart from savoury rice rolls that were wrapped in cabbage leaves, these were the only greens we were served in Ukraine. Greens rarely, if ever, appear on Ukrainian tables. And while the Ukrainians grow acres of pumpkins, they are regarded mainly as animal food. The Ukrainian tomatoes are the sweetest I've ever tasted. One food they loved, but which Rosemary and I found difficult to eat because of its very high salt content, was their pickled tomatoes and zucchinis.

Another favourite meal is mashed potato topped with mushroom gravy. Thick fingers of bread are eaten at most meals, but without butter. Cheese, cottage cheese, eggs and veal sausage are also common on most tables. They also eat a very tasty cheese made from sheep's milk. A porridge made of buckwheat or cornmeal is also very popular. The main drink at meals is either black tea, or compote, which is a concoction of boiled apples and plums sweetened with sugar.

Before each meal everybody stands up to say grace, which can be very long.



THE LANGUAGE

The Ukraine language, which is quite distinct from the Russian language, has a Cyrillic alphabet of thirty-three

letters, most of which are taken from the Greek, though a few are from the Hebrew alphabet. The Latin-type letters have the following pronunciations B = V, H = N, P = R, C = S, Y = U, 3 = Z, X = kh, and W = Sh. After a while, as I became more adept at transliterating Ukrainian words, I was surprised to find words that were common to our own language, such as Stop, Mini Market, Motel, Cafe, Bank, Restaurant and Second Hand, etc.

PASTOR STEPAN BOYKO

Pastor Boyko is a big-boned man about six foot four inches in height. He is a born leader, with an infectious smile and a great sense of humour. He used to be a Seventh-day Adventist pastor but he, and the local church that supported him, were disfellowshipped when they raised questions with the church leadership about the Church's teaching on the Investigative Judgement and the role of Ellen G White in determining doctrinal truth. Because they lived behind the Iron Curtain at the time, they were completely unaware that the same controversy had come to the boil at Glacier View a decade earlier.

At a luncheon in his church an old lady asked me what we believed about the Investigative Judgement and Ellen White. When I told her she exclaimed, 'You mean, even in America people believe as we do?'



A section of the table at our church luncheon

Since his dismissal Pr Boyko has grown a large independent Sabbath-keeping church in the foothills of the Carpathian mountains; erected a three-storey church building with a large basement; purchased a brick building next door which they are converting into a social hall with accommodation; and purchased a Scania forty-eight seater bus to take the church choir to other parts of the country.

On the back wall of the church is a three-metre high depiction of the two tables of the Ten Commandments, with each letter of every word lovingly crafted from acacia wood. I would have liked to have seen these commandments superimposed by a large glass cross which scintillated with light focused on it, because it is in the minds and hearts of those who

accept Jesus' atoning death on the cross, that God writes his commands (Heb. 10:14-17).

Pastor Boyko told me about the wickedness that was invading their community and his desire to protect his people from its tentacles. Corruption bedevils all levels of government, and the week we were there a young Christian girl from his village was repeatedly raped by a gang of fifteen young men. When the severely traumatised girl recovered consciousness in the intensive care unit of a regional hospital she tried to commit suicide.

Pastor Boyko and his wife Anna have to be given credit for the fruit of their ministry—a vibrant, well managed church of non-judgmental and loving people, who serve their community and the Lord. We were impressed by the youthfulness of their congregation and the quality of the elders and deacons.

One day Pastor Boyko, who can't read or speak English, took a book out of his library and, holding it up lovingly, pointed to it and said to me, in English, 'Dr. Desmond Ford.' I saw that it was one of Dr Ford's books that someone must have sent him. I determined then that I would do what I could to see that at least one of Dr. Ford's books would be translated and printed in the Ukrainian language.

THE SABBATH

The Sabbath is one day of the week when believers can leave their mundane lives behind and celebrate a taste of heaven. Accordingly they dress in their best. Young women come tottering down the rocky lane to church in their high-heeled boots and men come in their dress shoes. On either side of the gate is a shallow trough where they pause to wash the mud off their footwear before entering the church. The women are dressed in their best, and the men wear tailor-made suits in the current fashion, with nicely-pressed white shirts and tasteful ties. As soon as boys start school they receive a suit, which they are very proud of. Most, but not all women cover their heads with a scarf.

The church has several choirs, for music is a gift the Lord gave best to the Ukrainians. The people sing like angels and their music brings tears to the eyes.

The very first Sabbath we were there was the

tenth anniversary of their church building, and it may not have been their intention, but the service lasted ten hours. However, not a moment of it was boring. The Sabbath School lesson on the theme of Job took two hours, and the level of biblical knowledge exhibited by the members was impressive. There were eight items from the various choirs. Being the first Sabbath of the month an offering was taken up for humanitarian work in the community, and that Sabbath was also children's Sabbath, when the children sang, or recited passages from the Bible.

After the service there was a sit-down luncheon for every person. The tables groaned with the weight of food, and as soon as one dish was emptied it was replaced by another.

Because the Ukrainians eat less at each regular meal than we do in the West, and because they don't have access to high calorie fast foods, we did not see a single obese person while we were there. Their diet, however, is very high in salt and sugar.

MY MESSAGES

I preached five times to Pastor Boyko's congregation. My messages focused on explaining the difference between faith and works: e.g. God saved his people from Egypt by the blood of the Passover Lamb. It was only after they were saved

that God gave them the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments, therefore, were the fruit of their salvation, not the root. I approached this subject from several different angles, and it was a great delight to me to see the lights come on in Pastor Boyko's face and the faces of his people. Pr. Boyko, on occasions unable to restrain himself, would leap to his feet and strongly affirm what I had said. The time came when the faces of the people lit up with joy when they discovered that their names were written in the Lamb's Book of Life, not because of what they were doing, but because of what Jesus had done for them; not because of their works, but because they had accepted God's free gift of eternal life.

Unbeknown to me a man in the congregation took exception to my messages and held his own sermon on the steps of the church, loudly denounc-



*Central Baptist Church
in Ivano Fankivsk*



ing my theology. That evening, on his way home from church he had an accident that totalled his car. Fortunately no-one was hurt. When he asked Pr. Boyko why God had let him down when he trusted him, Pr. Boyko replied, 'I think you can answer that question for yourself.'

FELLOWSHIP WITH BAPTISTS

Walter, our interpreter, arranged for Rosemary and me to be guests on the Baptist Television Programme, 'Peace to You.' The Baptist pastor, who interviewed us for forty minutes, invited us to speak to his congregation that evening. Rosemary and I spoke on 'God's Forgiveness and Ours; Being Reconciled with God and with Each Other.' And we didn't pull any punches when we discussed Matthew 6:14-15. During the message a young married woman came forward and fell to her knees, wanting to give her life back to the Lord after several years in the wilderness.

As we were driving away from the church an elder stopped our car, opened the door, and with a beaming face told us that he and another brother had just been reconciled after a long-standing disagreement. He was ecstatic. 'Thank you, thank you,' he repeated over and over.

That message resulted in us being invited to preach in three other Baptist churches, including the large stone Central Baptist Church in Ivano Frankivsk. Every church was packed. At the conclusion of one service I prayed in the benediction that everyone would get a good night's sleep. One woman came to me afterwards and said, 'There will be quite a few people who won't sleep at all tonight. They will be tossing and turning on their beds wondering how they will go about making things right with a brother or sister.'

SNOW STORM

On our way to our next appointment in Chernivtsi, we drove into a snow storm. It wasn't long before our wheels began to slip on the black ice, and a couple of times our new VW van came to a complete halt. Somehow we got going again each time. Many other vehicles, including

buses and trucks, were stranded at the side of the road. One van was on its side in a ditch. A huge truck, carrying a D12 bulldozer, had all its driving wheels spinning slowly but it wasn't moving a centimetre. Behind it the traffic was backed up, unable to pass. Another truck driver was clambering across the bonnet of his vehicle, shovelling thick snow from the windscreen.

Just beyond them our vehicle slid sideways toward a ditch. Walter and I got out to push the vehicle back up the camber to the middle of the road, but we couldn't get a grip on the icy road and fell flat on our faces in the snow several times. Each attempt to free the van brought it closer to the edge of the ditch and our escape seemed hopeless. I was afraid that one more try would have the vehicle on its side in the deep drain but, with God's blessing, our next attempt got us back on the road. We realised then that it would be foolhardy to continue on to Chernivtsi, so spent

the night in the cottage that had been our home the previous week.

The next morning, Rosemary's birthday, the landscape, glistening in the sunlight, was picture-postcard perfect. Twenty centimetres of snow covered everything. As the day warmed the ice on the roads melted, making it possible for



Snow at Pr Boyko's Village

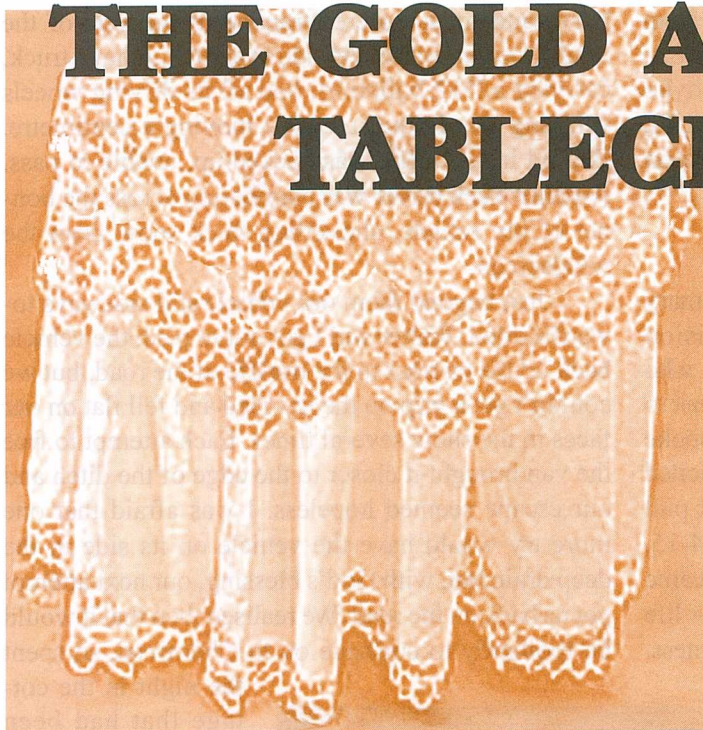
us to continue our onward journey. Near to Chernivtsi, we stayed with Ivan and Katarina, two wonderful musicians, who provided the music for our meetings in the city. This family do not have anywhere to fellowship so have taken out a forty-year lease on the former warehouse in their village that they hope to renovate—when they can afford it—so they will have a place to evangelise their large village.

Our meetings in Chernivtsi focused on showing the people that the judgement which determines our destiny will be over by the time Jesus comes back, because at his coming the faithful will be raised in the first resurrection already possessing immortality. This judgement began, not in recent times, but at the Cross, where the two criminals who were crucified with Jesus had their destinies determined by their acceptance or rejection of the Lord. Since that time, all who put their faith in Jesus are not condemned, but

(Continued on page 18)



THE GOLD AND IVORY TABLECLOTH



Howard C. Schade

some gold and ivory lace tablecloth. It was a magnificent item, nearly fifteen feet long. But it, too, dated from a long-vanished era. Who today, had any use for such a thing? There were a few half-hearted bids. The pastor was seized with what he thought was a great idea. He bid it in for \$6.50.

He carried the cloth back to the church and tacked it up on the wall behind the altar. It completely hid the hole, and the extraordinary beauty of its shimmering handiwork cast a fine, holiday glow over the chancel. It was a great triumph. Happily he went back to preparing his Christmas sermon.

Just before noon on the day of Christmas Eve, as the pastor was opening the church, he noticed a woman standing in the cold at the bus stop.

‘The bus won’t be here for forty minutes!’ he called, and he invited her into the church to get warm.

She told him she had come from the city that morning to be interviewed for a job as governess to the children of one of the wealthy families in town, but she had been turned down. A war refugee, her English was imperfect.

The woman sat down in a pew and chafed her hands and rested. After a while, she dropped her head and prayed. She looked up as the pastor began to adjust the great gold and ivory lace cloth across the hole. She rose suddenly and walked up the steps of the chancel. She looked at the tablecloth. The pastor smiled and started to tell her about the storm damage, but she didn’t seem to listen. She took up a fold of the cloth and rubbed it between her fingers.

‘It is mine!’ she said. ‘It is my banquet cloth!’ She lifted up a corner and showed the surprised pastor that there were initials monogrammed on it. ‘My husband had the cloth made especially for me in Brussels! There could not be another like it!’

For the next few minutes, the woman and the pastor talked excitedly



At Christmas time men and women everywhere gather in their churches to wonder anew at the greatest miracle the world has ever known. But the story I like best to recall was not a miracle—not exactly.

It happened to a pastor who was very young. His church was very old. Once long ago, it had flourished. Famous men had preached from its pulpit and prayed before its altar. Rich and poor alike had worshiped there and built it beautifully. Now the good days had passed from the section of town where it stood. But the pastor and his young wife believed in their run-down church. They felt that with hammer, paint and faith, they could get it in shape. Together they went to work.

But late in December, a severe storm whipped through the river valley and the worst blow fell on the little church—a huge chunk of rain-soaked plaster fell out of the inside wall just behind the altar. Sorrowfully, the pastor and his wife swept away the mess, but they couldn’t hide the ragged hole.

The pastor looked at it and had to remind himself quickly, ‘Thy will be done!’ But his wife wept, ‘Christmas is only two days away!’

That afternoon the dispirited couple attended an auction held for the benefit of a youth group. The auctioneer opened a box and shook out of its folds a hand-

together. She explained that she was Viennese and that she and her husband had opposed the Nazis and decided to leave the country. They were advised to go separately.

Her husband put her on a train for Switzerland. They planned that he would join her as soon as he could arrange to ship their household goods across the border.

She never saw him again. Later she heard that he had died in a concentration camp. 'I have always felt that it was my fault to leave without him,' she said. 'Perhaps these years of wandering have been my punishment!'

The pastor tried to comfort her, and he urged her to take the cloth with her. She refused. Then she went away.

As the church began to fill on Christmas Eve, it was clear that the cloth was going to be a great success. It had been skilfully designed to look its best by candlelight.

After the service, the pastor stood at the doorway; many people told him that the church looked

beautiful. One gentle-faced, middle-aged man, the local clock and watch repairman, looked rather puzzled.

'It is strange,' he said in his soft accent. 'Many years ago my wife, God rest her, and I owned such a cloth. In our home in Vienna, my wife put it on the table,' and he smiled, 'only when the bishop came to dinner!'

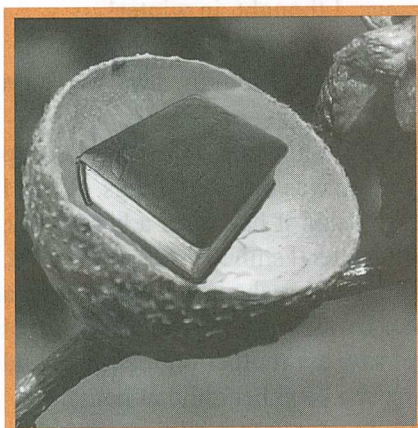
The pastor suddenly became very excited. He told the jeweller about the woman who had been in the church earlier in the day. The startled jeweller clutched the pastor's arm. 'Can it be? Does she live?'

Together the two got in touch with the family who had interviewed her. Then, in the pastor's car they started for the city. And as Christmas Day was born, this man and his wife, who had been separated through so many saddened Yuletides, were reunited.

To all who heard this story, the joyful purpose of the storm that had knocked a hole in the wall of the church was now quite clear. Of course, people said it was a miracle, but I think you will agree it was the season for it! □

—Published in *Reader's Digest*, December, 1954.

Good News Unlimited Seminars 2010



Theology in a Nutshell: The Book of Romans

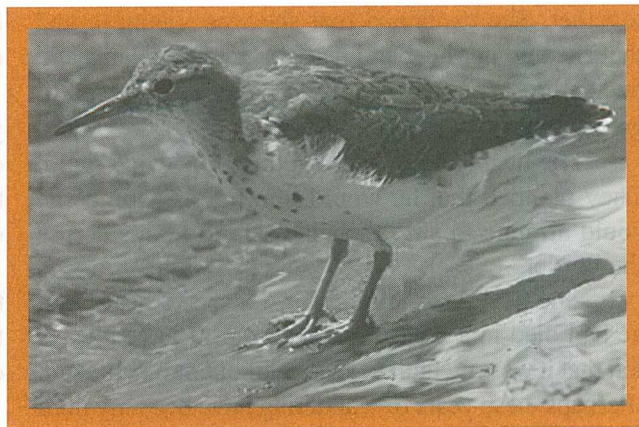
Desmond Ford Ron Allen
Ritchie Way Milton Hook

<u>Melbourne</u> March 6 th 2010 Carey Baptist Grammar Chapel, Barker's Road Kew, Victoria.	<u>Brisbane</u> April 17 th 2010 Springwood Tower Apartment Hotel 9 Murrajong Rd Springwood QLD	<u>Sydney</u> May 1 st 2010 Thornleigh Community Centre Cnr. Phyllis and Central Thornleigh NSW
9.00am Ron Allen	9.00am Ron Allen	9.00am Ron Allen
10.00am Milton Hook	10.00am Milton Hook	10.00am Ritchie Way
11.00am Desmond Ford	11.00am Desmond Ford	11.00am Desmond Ford
Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
1.30pm Desmond Ford answers Questions	1.30pm Desmond Ford answers Questions	1.30pm Desmond Ford answers Questions
Intermission	Intermission	Intermission
2.15pm Desmond Ford	2.15pm Desmond Ford	2.15pm Desmond Ford



The Sandpiper

Robert Peterson



She was six years old when I first met her on the beach near where I live. I drive to this beach, a distance of three or four miles, whenever the world begins to close in on me.

She was building a sand castle or something and looked up, her eyes as blue as the sea. ‘Hello,’ she said. I answered with a nod, not really in the mood to bother with a small child.

‘I’m building,’ she said.

‘I see that. What is it?’ I asked, not really caring.

‘Oh, I don’t know, I just like the feel of sand.’

‘That sounds good,’ I thought, and slipped off my shoes. A sandpiper glided by.

‘That’s a joy,’ the child said.

‘It’s a what?’

‘It’s a joy. My mama says sandpipers come to bring us joy.’

The bird went gliding down the beach. ‘Good-bye joy,’ I muttered to myself, ‘hello pain,’ and turned to walk on. I was depressed; my life seemed completely out of balance.

‘What’s your name?’ She wouldn’t give up.

‘Robert,’ I answered. ‘I’m Robert Peterson.’

‘Mine’s Wendy ... I’m six.’

‘Hi, Wendy.’

She giggled. ‘You’re funny,’ she said.

In spite of my gloom, I laughed too and walked on. Her musical giggle followed me.

‘Come again, Mr. P,’ she called. ‘We’ll have another happy day.’

The next few days consisted of a group of unruly Boy Scouts, PTA meetings, and an ailing mother.

The sun was shining one morning as I took my hands out of the dishwater. ‘I need a sandpiper,’ I said to myself, gathering up my coat. The ever-changing balm of the seashore awaited me.

The breeze was chilly but I strode along, trying

to recapture the serenity I needed.

‘Hello, Mr. P,’ she said. ‘Do you want to play?’

‘What did you have in mind?’ I asked, with a twinge of annoyance.

‘I don’t know. You say.’

‘How about charades?’ I asked sarcastically.

The tinkling laughter burst forth again. ‘I don’t know what that is.’

‘Then let’s just walk.’ Looking at her, I noticed the delicate fairness of her face. ‘Where do you live?’ I asked.

‘Over there.’ She pointed toward a row of summer cottages. Strange, I thought, in winter!

‘Where do you go to school?’

‘I don’t go to school. Mummy says we’re on vacation.’

She chattered little-girl-talk as we strolled up the beach, but my mind was on other things. When I left for home, Wendy said it had been a happy day. Feeling surprisingly better, I smiled at her and agreed.

Three weeks later, I rushed to my beach in a state of near panic. I was in no mood to even greet Wendy. I thought I saw her mother on the porch and felt like demanding she keep her child at home.

‘Look, if you don’t mind,’ I said crossly when Wendy caught up with me, ‘I’d rather be alone today.’ She seemed unusually pale and out of breath.

‘Why?’ she asked.

I turned to her and shouted, ‘Because my mother died!’ and thought, ‘Why was I saying this to a little child?’

‘Oh,’ she said quietly, ‘then this is a bad day.’

‘Yes,’ I said, ‘and yesterday and the day before and—oh, go away!’

‘Did it hurt?’ she inquired.

‘Did what hurt?’ I was exasperated with her; with myself.

‘When she died?’

‘Of course it hurt!’ I snapped, misunderstanding, wrapped up in myself. I strode off.



A month or so after that, when I next went to the beach, she wasn't there. Feeling guilty, ashamed and admitting to myself I missed her; I went up to the cottage after my walk and knocked at the door.

A drawn looking young woman with honey-coloured hair opened the door.

'Hello,' I said, 'I'm Robert Peterson. I missed your little girl today and wondered where she was.'

'Oh yes, Mr. Peterson, please come in. Wendy spoke of you so much. I'm afraid I allowed her to bother you. If she was a nuisance, please, accept my apologies.'

'Not at all—she's a delightful child.' I said, suddenly realising that I meant what I had just said.

'Wendy died last week, Mr. Peterson. She had leukaemia. Maybe she didn't tell you.'

Struck dumb, I groped for a chair. I had to catch my breath.

'She loved this beach, so when she asked to come, we couldn't say no. She seemed so much better here and had a lot of what she called, happy days. But the last few weeks, she declined rapidly ...' Her voice faltered, 'She left something for you, if only I can find it. Could you wait a moment while I look?'

I nodded stupidly, my mind racing for something to say to this lovely young woman. She handed me a smeared envelope with 'MR P' printed in bold childish letters. Inside was a drawing in bright crayon hues—a yellow beach, a blue sea and a brown bird. Underneath was carefully printed: *A sandpiper to bring you joy.*

Tears welled up in my eyes, and a heart that had almost forgotten to love opened wide. I took Wendy's mother in my arms.

'I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry,' I uttered over and over, and we wept together.

The precious little picture is framed now and hangs in my study. Six words—one for each year of her life—that speak to me of harmony, courage and undemanding love; a gift from a child with sea blue eyes and hair the colour of sand, who taught me the gift of love. □

—NOTE: This story happened more than twenty years ago and the incident changed Robert Peterson's life forever (Robert Peterson is a nom de plume for Mary Sherman Hilbert). It serves as a reminder to all of us that we need to take time to enjoy living and life and each other.

DID YOU KNOW?

JERICHO

Archaeologist, Kathleen Kenyon, claimed that there was no evidence to support the biblical story of the destruction of the city of Jericho by the Israelites (Joshua 6). While there was evidence that the ancient city had been destroyed, she stated that the date of its destruction was much too early for it to have been destroyed by Joshua.

Norman L. Geisler and Thomas Howe, however, say that 'recent re-examination of these earlier findings, and a closer look at current evidence, indicates that not only was there a city that fits the biblical chronology, but that its remains coincide with the biblical account of the destruction of this walled fortress.

In a paper published in *Biblical Archaeology Review* (March/April, 1990), Bryant G. Wood, visiting professor to the department of Near Eastern Studies at the University of Toronto, has presented evidence that the biblical report is accurate. His detailed investigation has yielded the following conclusions:

1. That the city which once existed on this site was strongly fortified,

corresponding to the biblical record in Joshua 2:5, 7, 15; 6:5, 20.

2. The ruins give evidence that the city was attacked after harvest-time in the spring, corresponding to Joshua 2:6, 3:15, 5:10.

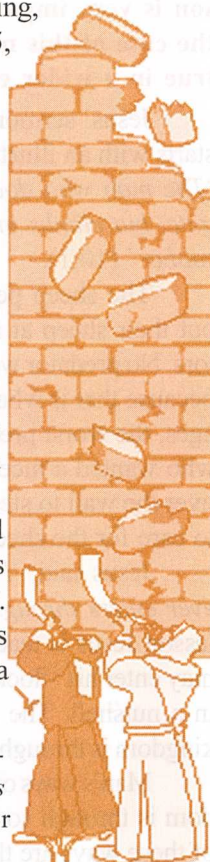
3. The inhabitants did not have the opportunity to flee with their foodstuffs from the invading army, as reported in Joshua 6:1.

4. The siege was short, not allowing the inhabitants to consume the food which was stored in the city, as Joshua 6:20 records.

5. The walls were levelled in such a way to provide access into the city for the invaders, as Joshua 6:20 records.

6. The city was not plundered by the invaders, according to God's instructions in Joshua 6:17-18. 7. The city was burned after the walls had been destroyed, just as Joshua 6:24 says.'

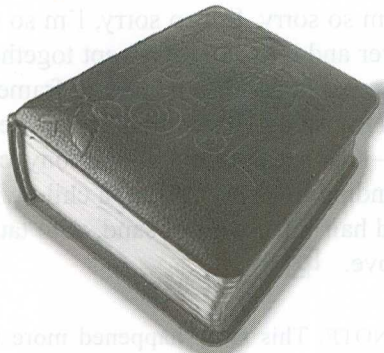
—(*The Big Book of Bible Difficulties: Clear and Concise Answers from Genesis to Revelation* [Baker Books, 1992], pp. 136-137).



THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Part 12

The Shepherd and his Flock



Ritchie Way

John 10:1-42 Jesus' lesson in John 10, about sheep and shepherds, was his commentary on the way the Jewish leaders had cast the healed blind man out of the synagogue (9:34). These false shepherds did not care for this sheep, but Jesus, the true Shepherd, took him in (9:35-38). This lesson is very important because what was true in the case of this man who was born blind, is also true in a wider context.

Jesus' sermon on 'The Shepherd and his Flock' starts with an illustration from Israel's pastoral scene: 'The man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in some other way, is a thief and a robber' (10:1).

The sheep pen was the place where shepherds put their sheep at night to protect them from predators. No predator would enter the pen through the gate, because that is where the watchman slept. As in other ages, the worst predators were humans. Such people, who wanted a nice fat lamb for a meal, would climb over the wall to steal and kill. Their intention was not to care for the sheep but to fleece them.

Jesus said, 'I am the gate for the sheep ... whoever enters through me will be saved' (10:7-9). The lesson Jesus is teaching, is that the only way a sheep may enter his 'flock' is through him. This is the gospel in a nutshell. The *only* acceptable way into Christ's kingdom is through Christ.

Man's ways of gaining entrance into Christ's kingdom is through some means other than Christ. Some of these ways are through human endeavour, faithful-

ness to the church, the Virgin Mary and the saints, saying the rosary, partaking of the mass, fasting, keeping the commandments, paying a faithful tithe, etc. Trusting in any type of human endeavour is an attempt to enter Christ's kingdom by a way other than through Christ—the gate.

Salvation is all of Christ and nothing of man. What do we mean when we say salvation is all of Christ and nothing of man? Does that mean that 'good works' are not involved in our salvation? Good works *are* involved in our salvation, but they have nothing to do with making us right with God, because all our good works are tainted with sin and therefore fall short of God's glory (Rom. 3:23 Eph. 2:8-9). The only righteousness that will get us into heaven is *God's* righteousness, not man's. And God's righteousness cannot be attained by what we do. It can only be received as a free gift, which becomes ours the moment we give all our sins to Jesus (2 Cor 5:21).

So at what point do good works come into our salvation? God redeemed his people from Egypt by the blood of the Passover Lamb, and after they were redeemed he gave them the Ten Commandments at Sinai. The Lord's preamble in Exodus 20:2—'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of bondage'—precedes his recitation of the Law in Exod. 20:3-17. While obedience *is not a part of our salvation*, it always *follows* salvation.

We are saved the moment we accept Christ. But when we accept Christ, his Spirit comes to live out his life within us. The *root* of our salvation is Jesus; the *fruit* of our salvation is good works produced in us by the Spirit of Christ. 'For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith ... not by works, so that no-one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works' (Eph. 2:8-10).

So good works are not the *means* of our salvation, but they are the *evidence* that we have been saved. For example, when the criminal on the cross accepted Jesus as his Lord and Saviour he upheld Jesus before others and condemned his old way of life (Luke 23:39-43). That testimony came from the heart of a man whose faith was in Jesus and Jesus alone.

THE WATCHMAN

There are five different kinds of people in the story of John 10: the Shepherd, the watchman, the stranger, the thief and the hired hand. The watchman is the under-shepherd—the pastor who cares for the Shepherd's flock. The work of the watchman is to protect the sheep and to 'open the gate' for the Shepherd (10:3). Any watchman who does not give the Shepherd access to his own sheep is a thief.



All true pastors are gate-openers for Jesus; they give him full and free access to his flock. The flock do not belong to the watchman, but to the Shepherd. It's the Shepherd's voice the sheep must follow, not the watchman's.

THE SHEEP KNOW JESUS' VOICE

'The sheep listen to [Jesus'] voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact they will run away from him because they do not recognise a stranger's voice' (10:3-5).

Sheepfolds often housed more than one flock overnight. At daybreak each shepherd would call his sheep and they would separate themselves from the others and follow him alone. Sheep in Israel had individual names, which, in this figure of speech, indicates that Jesus treats each of his 'sheep' as a person in their own right—they are much more to him than just a unit of his flock.

What distinguished Jesus' voice from the voice of other shepherds? Jesus' voice is a voice of self-sacrificing, unconditional love; the voice of forgiveness, peace, righteousness and hope. His voice is not a negative, condemning voice, or the demanding voice of compulsion, but the tender voice of encouragement. It is the voice of God.

THE GOOD SHEPHERD LAYS DOWN HIS LIFE FOR THE SHEEP

Jesus said, *'I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep' (10:11-13).*

The hired hand is a person whose main object is earning a wage, not in protecting the sheep; his heart is set on money rather than the flock. The good shepherd, however, will put his life on the line for his sheep; he would rather lose his life than have any of his sheep taken by a predator. And that's what our Good Shepherd did. He gave his life for the sake of his sheep.

Jesus added, *'The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No-one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord' (10:17-18).* Jesus makes it clear that his

sacrifice was not required of him; he did not have to die for his sheep. It was his own personal choice to die for them.

William Barclay wrote: 'Jesus's death was entirely voluntary. Jesus

stresses this again and again. In the garden he bade his would-be defender put up his sword. If he had wished, he could have called in the hosts of heaven to his defence (Matthew 26:53). He made it quite clear that Pilate was not condemning him, but that he was accepting death (John 19:10, 11). He was not the victim of circumstances.'

In the same way, we are not required to accept Jesus' death on our behalf; we do not have to become Jesus' sheep if we don't want to. The citizens of the kingdom of heaven are volunteers, not conscripts. The sheep that belong to Jesus' flock are those who choose to follow him of their own free will. It is for them that he died. 'While the blood of Jesus Christ is *sufficient* for the salvation of the world, it is *efficient* only for those who will believe' (Warren W. Wiersbe).


THERE ARE OTHER SHEEP

Jesus went on to say, *'I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd' (10:16).* God's sheep originally represented the Jewish nation (Isa. 40:11; Eze. 34:31). But because the leaders of the Jews had failed as true shepherds, Jesus was taking *his* sheep out of their 'sheep pen' and into his 'flock.' When the Pharisees threw the former blind man out of their synagogue Jesus received him into his own flock (9:34-35).

Jesus was also here pointing to the ingathering of the Gentiles—the people who were *'steeped in sin from birth,'* but had been healed of their spiritual blindness. John reports that *'Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one' (11:51-52).*

Each age has its 'scattered children of God' that need to be brought into Christ's flock. In our time they are the Atheists, Agnostics, Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, traditionalised Christians, etc. who are hungering and thirsting for something better than they currently have. These people are longing for a Shepherd who will give them green pastures to lie in and still waters to drink from. He will restore their souls, guide them in paths of righteousness, take them safely through the valley of the shadow of death, protect them from evil, and give them a safe home with a table overflowing with the best food and drink (Psa. 23). The only Shepherd who can do that, is Jesus.

The Jews were divided over Jesus' words. *'Many of them said, "He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?" But the others said, "These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"' (10:19-21).*

What's your opinion? 



GNU is a meeting of minds from a wide range of church affiliations and therefore, opinions expressed in our articles may differ from that of many of our readers.

Recognising that opinions can differ and we all have much to learn and unlearn, we encourage our readers to participate in this forum.

GOSPEL MUSIC

Hi Ritchie

The July issue of the Good News Unlimited magazine is great. God has given you the great gift of cutting to the chase; I love it. Thanks for dealing with the hard stuff. You have bought a new zing and forthrightness to the magazine.

A friend and I have co-written a new gospel album that also deals with some of the hard issues. It's not finally mastered but should be soon. The album has tracks like 'Bad Religion', 'Life's Crazy', and 'Who'll Be Laughin' Then?' We'll let you know when it is ready. In the meantime I'll send you a couple of tracks, though it may not be your sort of music.

God bless you Ritchie.

B. P.

Hi B

Thanks for your words of encouragement. Your gospel album sounds intriguing. You might be surprised at my taste in music. Some of our younger readers could be very interested in purchasing it. Let me know when it is ready.

Abundant blessings

Ritchie.

JESUS' DEATH

Dear Pastor Way

Regarding one of the letters to the editor in the last edition on 'What Kind of Death', I came across these statements concerning the sufferings and abandonment of Christ by the Father while he was on the cross, that reflected my feelings on Christ's experience at that time, which concurs with yours. They are found at <http://www.reformedonline.com/view/reformedonline/atonement.htm#f37>

Of all the sufferings that Christ endured on our behalf, the suffering of his soul receives special attention

by the Spirit-inspired writers. Jesus said, 'My soul is exceedingly sorrowful even to death' (Matt. 26:38). Our Lord's soul descended into the very depths of agony and misery. 'What our divine surety suffered in his soul must ever surpass all our powers of description or conception ... we have the best reason to suppose that every variety of inward agony which a sinless spirit can possibly feel, was experienced by him.' [Symington, On the Atonement and Intercession of Jesus Christ p. 149.].

Spurgeon writes: 'In order that the sacrifice of Christ might be complete, it pleased the Father to forsake his well-beloved Son. Sin was laid on Christ, so God must turn his face from the Sin-Bearer. To be deserted of his God was the climax of Christ's grief, the quintessence of his sorrow. See here the distinction between the martyrs and their Lord; in their dying agonies they have been divinely sustained; but Jesus, suffered as the Substitute for sinners, was forsaken of God.' [C. H. Spurgeon, The Gospel of Matthew (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1987), p. 406].

Christ, as a Priest, offered his own life as a substitutionary sacrifice. Symington says of Christ's sufferings on the cross: 'This was the period when emphatically the Son of God made atonement for sin; when the tide of suffering rose to its height; when the dregs of the bitter cup of anguish were wrung out; when the sentence of woe reached its climax. A period, into which whatever is painful in torture, ignominious in shame, distressing in privation, terrific in satanic assault, and overwhelming in experienced wrath, was, as it were, compressed—a period,

whether to the sufferer himself or to the guilty world whose cause he undertook, the most awfully momentous that had ever occurred since the commencement of time.' [Symington, On the Atonement and Intercession of Jesus Christ p. 15].

John Dick writes: 'He died by the sentence of his Father acting as a righteous judge, and subjecting him to punishment of sin. Great, therefore, as were his bodily torments, there were unseen sorrows which were far more severe; sorrows of the same kind with those which caused his agony in the garden, and the extremity of which drew from him that mournful complaint, 'My God, My God! Why hast thou forsaken me?' How great was his humiliation! The Lord of life and glory appeared like a common mortal and was distinguished only by the intensity of his sufferings, and the state of complete dereliction in which he expired. The multitude looked on with un pitying eyes: Heaven frowned in preternatural darkness and all consolation was withheld from him.' [John Dick, Lectures on Theology 2:98].

F. B.

Dear F

Thank you for contribution. I printed off all forty-three pages of Brian Schwertley's monograph, which you recommend, as it deserves a thorough reading. I expect eternity won't be long enough for us to plumb the depths of Christ's sacrifice.

God bless you and L.

Ritchie.

IS THE BIBLE COMPLETE?

Dear Editor

Do you think the Bible, as a collection of sixty-six books, is finished? Could it be possible that there are other books still to be added to the collection?

J. W.

Dear J

The Bible, starting with Genesis, is the story of God revealing himself to mankind. This revelation is progressive until we come to the Gospels, when God was ready to reveal himself



in person. In the Old Testament, God said he would one day come and dwell among his people and walk among them (Lev. 26:11-12) as he did in Eden (Gen. 3:8). And he did that in Jesus Christ, who was 'God with us' (Matt. 1:23).

Now there can be no greater revelation than God himself, in Jesus; he is the very apex, the summit of all truth and life. The Old Testament points forward to him, the Gospels reveal him, and the rest of the New Testament points back to him. We can proclaim him, but we can't add to him. I believe, therefore, that as we have received the fullness of God's self-revelation in Jesus, there is nothing more to add.

Ritchie.

REPETITION IN PRAYER

Dear Ritchie

In Matthew 6:7-8 (CEV) Jesus said, 'When you pray, don't talk on and on as people do who don't know God. They think God likes to hear long prayers. Don't be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask.' Yet in Luke 18:1 (CEV) 'Jesus told his disciples a story about how they should keep on praying and never give up.'

The counsel given in these two places seems contradictory. The first recommends short, non-repetitive prayers, while the second teaches the need to persist in prayer. I feel sure that these two teachings of Jesus on prayer can be reconciled, but how they may be reconciled eludes me.

Can you help?

P. W.

Dear P

Jesus is not against repetition in prayer; he is against mindless repetition. There is no efficacy in the same words being repeated endlessly; they bore not only the one praying, they also bore God. It's not the length of the prayer that counts with God, but its sincerity. If, however, you cry out to God for help and persist in prayer until you get an answer, God will come through for you. That's the teaching of Luke 11:5-13.

God bless you

Ritchie.



**BRING FROM
WHERE?**

Dear Ritchie

I want to make a comment about a reply that you made to R C in the June edition of the Good News Unlimited magazine.

In the second last paragraph you took the liberty to change the translation of 1 Thess. 4:14:

In the NAS it says '... even so God will bring with Him ...'

In the KJV it says '... will God bring with Him.'

In the Amplified it says '... God will also bring with Him ...'

In the NIV it says '... God will bring with Jesus ...'

The plain literal sense says that God is going to bring someone with the Lord Jesus from somewhere!

None of us have the authority to change God's Word to suit our teachings! What do you think?

R. C.

Dear R

You have a valid concern, because, as you say, 'None of us has the authority to change God's Word to suit our teachings!' Then again, if our interpretation of God's Word conflicts with other passages in the Scriptures, we have a duty to seek a reconciliation.

The problem passage, which you refer to, is 1 Thessalonians 4:14. It says there, 'We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him' (emphases mine). The latter part of this verse does not reveal the place from which God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. Paul goes on to say, however, that, that place is the grave where the sleeping saints await the resurrection (v. 16).

What does Paul, the author of 1 Thessalonians, say elsewhere on this subject?

In 1 Corinthians 15:23 he says those who belong to Christ 'will be made alive ... *when he comes.*' In Colossians 3:4 Paul reveals that 'when Christ ... appears, *then* you will also appear with him in glory' (emphases mine). In other words, the dead will neither be raised nor appear in glory until Christ comes.

Getting back to 1 Thessalonians 4:14, we find that this verse has two parts, each beginning with the words,

'we believe.' The two parts are joined by the word 'so', which can also be translated 'in the same way' (see Matt. 5:16; Luke 15:7). As this word 'so' refers to what precedes, Paul would have us understand that the second part of the verse is contingent upon the first—just as God brought Jesus to life from the grave, so (in the same way) he will bring, [as he did] with Jesus, those who have fallen asleep in him.

This interpretation is the only one that harmonises with the very next verse, which states that when Jesus comes, the living, together with the resurrected saints, will ascend to meet him. If the dead saints accompany Jesus on his journey back to earth, how is it possible that they will rise to meet him on his arrival? When you meet someone, the assumption is that you haven't seen them for quite awhile.

I await your response.

Abundant blessings

Ritchie.

CLEAN ROBES

Dear Editor

According to Revelation 22:14, the people who are given the right to the tree of life and who are permitted to enter the New Jerusalem, are those 'who wash their robes.'

Now if 'fine linen, bright and clean,' stands for 'the righteous acts of the saints' (19:8) then doesn't that point to the fact that eternal life is granted to us because of our good works?

G W.

Dear G

All who are given eternal life will have good works, but good works are the *fruit* and not the *root* of eternal life. John 15:1-8 reveals that there can be no fruit without the root. The only fruit that is acceptable to God is produced by those who are connected to the vine—Jesus.

Revelation 7:14-15 tells us what the root of our salvation is: 'They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, they are before the throne of God.' That word, 'therefore,' reveals the key as to why they are in God's presence.

God bless

Ritchie.

(Continued from page 9)

MISSION TO UKRAINE

cross over immediately from death to life. They enter Paradise (God's kingdom) the very day they accept Christ as their Lord and Saviour. This eternal life cannot be earned—it is a free gift; a gift that will be consummated when Jesus returns.

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

On our way back to New Zealand we stopped over in Vancouver to fellowship with the *Good News Unlimited* people there. Their immediate response was that we should get some of Dr Ford's books translated into the Ukrainian language. And their first choice was the book, *Jesus Only*. They are willing to help

with the costs of translation and printing, and asked that I co-ordinate the process. I have already been in touch with Walter, and he is enthusiastic about the project, believing that this is God's calling on his life.

We would like to use the donations that were surplus to our fares to provide the Ukrainian people with other gospel messages in their own language also. Only God knows the possibilities that await us.

P.S. We had been home less than a week when Walter emailed us to say that the Lord blessed the timing of our ministry because, shortly after our departure, an epidemic of viral pneumonia hit Western Ukraine killing many people. The government had shut down all kindergartens, schools and universities and was considering closing its international airport at Lviv. ☐

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phone: 0404 029822

KEEP WATCH

Bob Gass

'Keep watch ... you do not know what day your Lord will come' (Matt 24:42).

The ocean liner, *Californian*, was within 2,400 kilometres of Boston Harbour when a crew member observed flashes of light from a distant steamer. Repeated attempts to contact it failed. In fact, it appeared to be sailing away. By 1:40am. its lights vanished. It wasn't until later the captain learned what had actually happened. Neither he nor his second officer considered the flashing lights alarming, or that it was coincidental that they'd even seen them. Earlier, the *Californian* had parked because of oceanic ice, and the unscheduled stop gave her a ringside seat to an unimaginable event. The crew didn't realise the flares were distress signals, or they would have come to her aid—because they were roughly fifteen kilometres

away. The foundering ship also sent radio distress calls that were within answering range—except for one important detail. The *Californian's* radio operator, fresh from training school, was fast asleep! So on the morning of April 15, 1912, from his vantage point on the bridge, the liner's second officer unwittingly watched the Titanic sink!

Jesus said: 'People were eating, drinking, marrying, to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing until the flood came and took them ... That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. ... keep watch ... you do not know what day your Lord will come' (Matt 24:38-42).

And Paul adds: 'For the Grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and Godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ' (Titus 2:11-13). So, keep watch! ☐



Dr Desmond Ford

How to Win the Wager God's Odds

Pascal's Wager

Pascal's discoveries in science, his literary productions and his contributions in philosophy and theology, placed the world in his debt for all the years to come. Today, he is best known for his famous wager written about the end of the 17th Century, but reproduced innumerable times since then. Here it is:

Either God exists or he does not exist. But which view should be taken? Reason cannot answer this question. Imagine a coin is being spun, which will come down heads or tails; which will you wager? Since a choice must be made, let us see where your real interest lies. You have two things at stake—truth and happiness.

What is the gain and the loss if you call heads, that God exists? If you win, you win everything; if you lose, you lose nothing. A gambler, where there is an equal chance of gain or loss, would place a bet if the possible gain was twice the possible loss. But here the possible gain is infinite, and the possible loss, nothing. Every gambler takes a certain risk for uncertain gain. Here you are taking a certain risk with the prospect, either of infinite gain if you win, or no loss if you lose.

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Peachester meetings, 2nd and 4th Saturdays of the Month 2.30pm-4.00pm.

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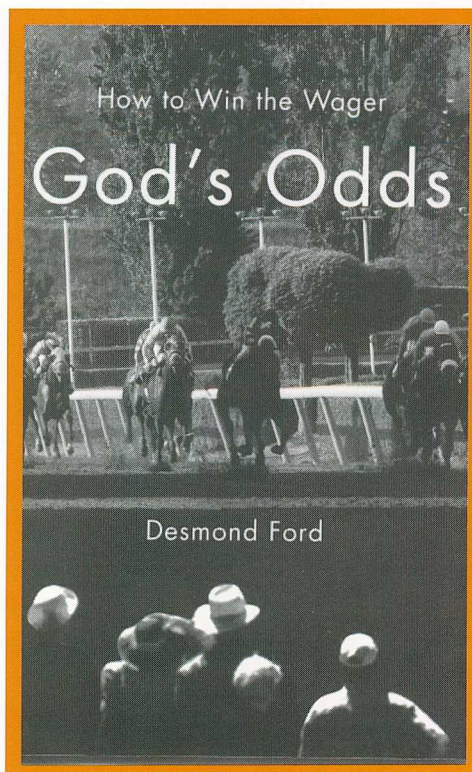
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Our daily choices are governed by our personal philosophy. For all action some hypothesis about the origin and nature of the universe and humanity must be adopted, whether consciously or unconsciously. We act according to prior decisions as to what has value and whether there is meaning to life.

Interested in a regular Fellowship meeting in the Maryborough, QLD Area?

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Carolyn at the GNU Office on:

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