

January 2007 Issue No. 1

# Good News Unlimited

**THE GREAT TRANSITION**

*Jesus and John  
The Baptist*

*Through Misery  
to Mercy*

*'As a Man  
Thinks  
So is He ...'*

*'It Is Finished'*

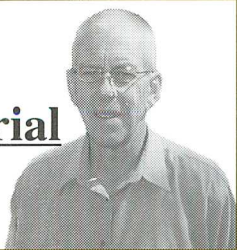


*The Hindsight Project*

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## Editorial



### Jesus and John

**P**eter, James and John were completely 'blown away' by what they had witnessed on the top of the mountain. So powerful was the glory that radiated from Jesus it hurt their eyes to look at him. And, up there, Moses and Elijah, in similar glory, came to talk with Jesus about his next mountaintop experience, the one that would radiate God's glory into the entire world—his death on a cross at Calvary (Luke 9:31).

While the three disciples from Jesus' inner circle did not understand the significance of what had happened up on the Mount of Transfiguration, it did confirm what they had been thinking—according to Malachi's prophecy, Jesus was truly the Lord who would come.

Peter, James and John had long suspected that Jesus was the promised Messiah, but when they once shared this view with the Jewish reli-

gious leaders they were told that Jesus couldn't possibly be the Lord, because the prophecy said that Elijah had to come first (Mal. 4:5). But now that Elijah had appeared on the mountain with Jesus, the three disciples wondered if this was the appearing that Malachi had referred to and they questioned Jesus about it as they descended. While Jesus did not deny it, he revealed that for the rest of the world the Elijah who would come was actually John the Baptist (Matt. 17:9-13; 11:11-14).

Now John the Baptist, who was of priestly descent through both his parents, was an extra-ordinary person, a powerful man who attracted a huge following, a man who put God's honour ahead of his own life. According to Jesus, John was 'more than a prophet,' he was the messenger who would be sent ahead of the coming Messiah to prepare the way for him (Matt. 11:9-10). In fact, Jesus said, 'Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist' (Matt. 11:11). With credentials like these, who would not want to be one of John's disciples?

Yet the time came for John—as it should for every Christian and religious institution—to pass on the torch and step aside, to say as John said, 'He must become greater; I must become less' (John 3:30). That, however, rarely happens. The Jewish religious

leaders, for example, saw Jesus, not as the fulfillment of all their hopes, ceremonies and prophecies, but as a threat to their vested interests. On the other hand, John the Baptist, who had a huge following, confessed, 'The bride belongs to the bridegroom' (John 3:29). And he pointed his followers to the Bridegroom and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God!' (John 1:36). On hearing this, two of John's disciples left him and followed Jesus. One of them, Andrew, introduced his brother, Simon Peter, to Jesus.

And, as Jesus outshone John the Baptist, so Simon Peter outshone Andrew. And so it goes. Every church and every Christian must become a stepping stone to something greater in the kingdom of God. If our greatness lies in ourselves alone, it shines like a meteor for a brief moment and then dies. But if it empowers another to rise above where we are, it leaves an enduring legacy.

John the Baptist's legacy was not in his self glory, or in the number of disciples he had at the end; his legacy lay in the fact that he had fulfilled his mission to prepare the way for Jesus and to point people to the One who came after him, but who surpassed him, because he was before him (John 1:15).

We can learn a lot from John.

—Ritchie Way

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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.

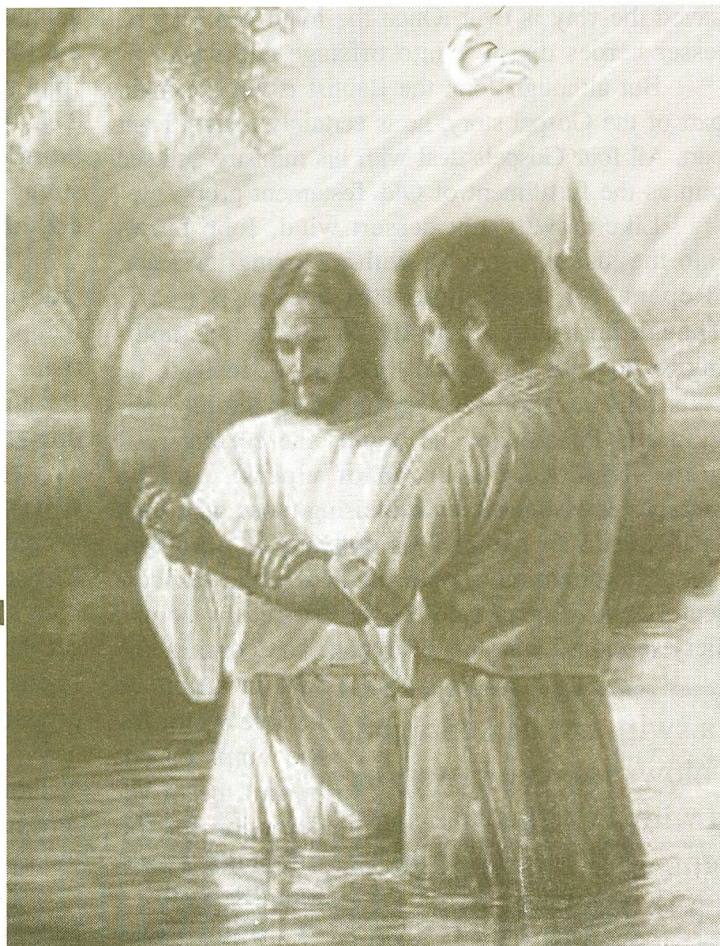




# JESUS AND JOHN THE BAPTIST

## Part One

Brad McIntyre



John the Baptist died alone, and perhaps, confused. Jesus did not intervene. The axe should have fallen on the root of each fruitless tree (Matt. 3:10; Luke 3:9). Instead, it fell on John's neck.

**I** sometimes feel sorry for John. Quite frankly, he got a raw deal for all his labours. Here he was, the forerunner of the Messiah, the charismatic leader of a new reform movement, the herald of a new age, yet he decreases in importance once Jesus comes on the scene. He never joins the Jesus movement, he is imprisoned and doubts whether or not Jesus is really the 'One who was to come,' and finally he is beheaded in the middle of the night in order to satisfy the whims of a drunken ruler.

Have you ever wondered what thoughts raced through John's mind before he lost his head? Did he expect a miracle would save his life at the last moment? Was he confident that everything would turn out all right in the end? Was John praying when the axe fell, or was he wondering? I doubt that he was singing.

John almost certainly had some doubts about

what was going on. Why shouldn't he be a bit confused over the turn of events? I know a few people who seriously criticise God because of what happened to John the Baptist. We expect a better fate for our spiritual heroes. Wouldn't John and Jesus have made a great evangelistic team? Why, they could have combined their ministries! Yet for some reason John disappears into oblivion.

The Gospels reveal John as a promoter of Jesus. This isn't surprising, for John was a 'pointer'—he pointed away from himself to the Messiah. Though John stood on the border of the new age, pointing toward it, he never entered into it himself.

He is a part of the Christian's story only because he bore witness to the Christian's Christ. John is a temporary actor in the divine drama, and once Jesus comes on the scene his role is over. For the Gospel writers, *John has no individual history apart from his witness to Christ*. Once his witness is finished, he is too—and what a terrible finish it was!

### JOHN—THE NEW PROPHET

There isn't room in the Gospel story for two heroes. Exit John. For when the reality arrives, there is little use for the shadow. When the Messiah finally comes, the work of those who have



paved the way is over. Once the main hero enters, lesser heroes dissolve into offstage darkness.

But although John the Baptist is not the main part of the Gospel story, he is certainly a significant part. All four Gospels deal with his ministry and see him as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.

Like a swift, hot desert wind, John blows into the history of Judea with a stirring message: 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near!' Though born into a priestly family, he has nothing to do with the formal priesthood. Instead, he calls into question the legitimacy of temple religion and Pharisaism; he brands the current religious leaders as 'a brood of vipers;' and he smashes Jewish pride by criticising those who trust in their perfect pedigree as children of Abraham.

The common people, including the tax collectors and Roman soldiers, are stirred by John's fiery sermons. John hits everyone. The coming age

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will be a time of terrible wrath for the unprepared, but a time of redemption for the repentant. Therefore, 'Repent!'

John dresses like Elijah

and lives an ascetic life in the wilderness. He is a loner who all his life has been preparing for this moment. Finally, when the Word of God comes, John goes. His immersion of the repentant in the Jordan will be superseded by the Coming One, who will immerse the repentant with the Spirit and with fire. Yet John's water baptism was significant. The Bible says John preached a 'baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins' (Mark 1:4). This baptism was not the *means* of forgiveness, as some have thought, but the *occasion* for forgiveness. It was the visible expression of a genuine repentance resulting in forgiveness through the grace of God. The ritual of water baptism gave expression to repentance, while repentance gave meaning to water baptism, making it more than just a barren act.

The baptism of John symbolised both obedience to God and unity with the purpose of God. If John was really God's new prophet, then submission to his baptism signified oneness with the Divine will. Luke tells us that the common people and even the tax collectors obeyed John and were baptised, but the religious elite rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been

baptised by John' (Luke 7:29-30). Jesus condemns the Pharisees for their refusal to acknowledge that John's baptism came from heaven (Matt. 21:23-27). In fact, the opposition of the religious authorities to John the Baptist, is a preview of the struggle Jesus would have later on with these same authorities.

The baptism of Jesus by John fulfilled all righteousness (Matt. 3:15). As our substitute, Christ demonstrated his solidarity with us through baptism. Though sinless, Jesus was buried beneath Jordan's waters and thereby gave supreme endorsement of John's ministry.

But the baptism given by John was limited. It was only a *preparatory* baptism, designed to prepare a person for the better baptism which Christ would bring. John's baptism did not initiate a person into the kingdom of God, it merely set the stage for one's entrance into the kingdom. It placed one at the border of the messianic age, prepared, ready and waiting. But it did not empower that person to cross over into the next era. Technically speaking, the baptism of John was for repentance only and did not include a baptism of the Spirit (see Acts 19:1-7).

Despite these limitations, John impacted the people of his age so powerfully that many thought he was the Christ. The Gospels, however, reveal that John was no egomaniac: 'He ... confessed freely, "I am not the Christ"' (John 1:20), and 'He must become greater; I must become less' (John 3:30).

### THE SECT OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

We admire John for such deference, but not all John's followers agreed with it. Some disciples of John resented Jesus stealing the show. There is evidence that a 'Baptist sect' existed long after John's death and that this sect came into conflict with certain Christian communities over the years. Some scholars have suggested that one motive behind the fourth Gospel, is to refute the inflated claims of these loyal followers of John the Baptist.

For example, John 1:6-8, while acknowledging that John's ministry came from God, sees John only as a witness, not a prophet. The baptism of John exists solely for the purpose of revealing Christ (1:31); Jesus existed before John and is greater than John (1:30); John the Baptist is not the Messiah (1:20; 3:28); unlike Jesus, John never worked miracles (10:41); and 4:2 seems to refute any claim that Jesus competed with John as a baptiser. We have already referred to the key verse (3:30) in which John himself says that he is to



decrease in importance while Jesus is to increase.

That certain disciples of John the Baptist continued the dream long after their leader's death, only accents the power of John's influence as a religious leader. What a powerful man of God he was! And lest we give the impression that the fourth Gospel downplays John the Baptist, we should point out the place of honour it gives to his ministry. John was sent by God (1:6) to reveal Jesus to Israel (1:31; 3:29), and, along with the Scriptures and miracles, he was one of the major witnesses to Jesus (5:31-40). John the Baptist was 'a lamp that burned and gave light' (5:35). So while the writer of the fourth Gospel recognises the superiority of Christ, he also recognises the greatness of John the Baptist.

### THE GREATEST OF THE PROPHETS

In Matthew 11:7-15, Jesus praises John the Baptist before the crowds. He says John was indeed a prophet and 'more than a prophet' (v. 9). Why? Because John was the specially chosen herald of the Messiah. Malachi wrote about him hundreds of years before, saying, 'Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who shall prepare your way before you' (Mal. 3:1).

To John was given the privilege of announcing the imminent coming of the Christ; of awakening people to the nearness of the kingdom of God and even of baptising the 'Lord's Anointed.' Therefore, Jesus could say, 'Among those born of women there has risen no one greater than John the Baptist' (v. 11).

Nothing in John himself made him the *greatest* of the prophets. Rather, it was the nature of his unique mission that conferred greatness upon him. John's greatness resided in his message, not in his own person. Yet despite his unique mission,

Jesus concluded his assessment of John's ministry by saying, 'He who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he' (v. 11). What did Jesus mean? Verses 12-14 give us a hint: 'From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and men of violence take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John; and if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who is to come' (RSV).

While these verses present many difficulties, one thing seems clear: John the Baptist marks a dispensational divide between the Law and the Prophets on the one hand, and the new age on the other. John symbolises a transition point at which the old age ends with him and the new age begins with Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom. These verses also imply that John belongs to the old age which has passed away, rather than to the new age in which the kingdom of God is exerting its power. He has been chosen to announce the soon-coming of the new age.

A similar verse in Luke implies the same thing: 'The law and the prophets were until John; since then the kingdom of God is preached and everyone enters it violently (16:16). Here John is portrayed as belonging to the time of the law and the prophets, while the new era is characterised by the preaching of the kingdom. The new situation which Christ brings about transcends all that has gone before, including the Law, the Prophets, and even John the Baptist. This is why the least important person in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John. He or she has already experienced the powers and privileges of the new age through faith in Christ, whereas John never crossed over the border into the new age. ♦

## THANK YOU FOR YOUR GIFTS



On behalf of the Board of GNU we wish to thank our readers for their financial support over the past twelve months. Many people send in their tithes and offerings to support our ministry and we are pleased to advise that the donations we received last year were the best since 1989.

Recently we moved ahead by faith to publish 16 magazines a year instead of six smaller magazines and six newsletters, and you responded accordingly by supplying the funds we needed. Thank you and God bless you. May you see the fulfillment of the promise, 'Give and it will be given to you with high compound interest' (our paraphrase).

We are also pleased to announce that our readership has increased quite markedly over the past year.

While our outreach to university students has not been as spectacular as we would have liked, we are still working on it. Nevertheless, over 200 new subscriptions are read every month in leading educational institutions around the world, and every so often we receive requests from teachers and students to be put on the mailing list.

From phone calls and letters we know that Good News Unlimited is the only spiritual succour that many people get. So please continue your support, both in prayer and through your monetary gifts.

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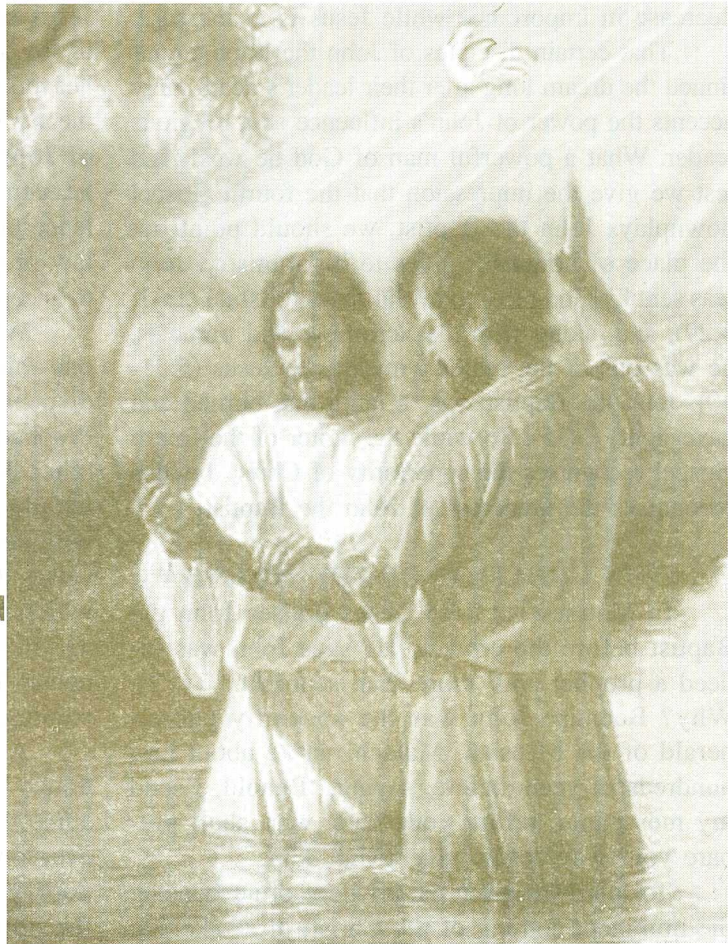
We at GNU pray for your happiness, health and safety in 2007.



# JESUS AND JOHN THE BAPTIST

## Part Two

Brad McIntyre



**I**n Part One we noticed that John the Baptist was a herald of Christ—a divinely chosen forerunner. We saw that he came upon the scene of biblical history as a new prophet, announcing the impending judgement and calling for repentance and redress. Now we will draw some lessons from John's life and death which will hopefully inspire our faith and edify us spiritually. I have organised our study under three headings: Rigor, Revival, and Resignation.

### RIGOR

When I think of John the Baptist, I think of spiritual rigor or discipline. He was called from birth to a specific task which would shape his entire upbringing and lifestyle. He lived for one purpose, to prepare the way of the Coming One. Of him it was said, 'He shall drink no wine nor strong drink' (Luke 1:15). Here we catch a hint of John's

ascetic lifestyle even before his birth. John is to be a Nazarite for his entire life, like Samson and Samuel. Rather than the superficial and debilitating excitement of intoxicants, John is to feed upon the supernatural nourishment of the Holy Spirit, for '... he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb' (Luke 1:15). Thus John became 'strong in spirit,' and his spiritual strength was developed '... in the wilderness till the day of his manifestation to Israel' (Luke 1:80).

The wilderness. Wild and isolated, separate and lonely, the wilderness can be a place where a person finds God. The wilderness is a rigorous environment in which survival is not guaranteed. It requires much physical stamina and psychological fortitude to exist in such a hostile and lonely area. Despite this, the wilderness can be the place for a tremendous spiritual breakthrough. For John, the wilderness of Judea was his seminary, the mountains and skies were his sanctuary, locusts and honey his diet. And it was in this very desert that 'the word of God' *happened* to John (Luke 3:2).

When the word of God comes to a person, it 'happens', that is, it is an event. The Old Testament prophets begin their messages with the



words, 'The word of the Lord that came to Hosea,' etc. The word translated 'came' actually comes from the verb 'to happen.' The word of God is a happening! And it happens to those preparing to hear it, as John was. Preparation for receiving the word of God implies spiritual rigor. Too often the word of God does not happen to us because we are not disciplined enough to prepare for receiving it. In other words, we don't take God's word seriously enough to earnestly desire it and discipline ourselves to be open to it.

Listen to these words from Rudolf Bultmann: 'God's word is not a general truth that can be stored in the treasure-house of human spiritual life. It remains his sovereign word, which we shall never master and which can only be believed as an ever-living miracle, spoken by God and constantly renewed. How should he who has heard it once not listen and hope, strive and pray, that he may hear it again?' (*Existence and Faith*, p. 169).

Has the word of God happened to you once? Did you think you could store that one event for future use? Are we not prone to forget that God's word can never be mastered or tucked away in some spiritual attic? We can never possess the word of God, but if we are fortunate, God's word will possess us! So, as Bultmann says, let us listen and hope, strive and pray, that we may hear the word of God afresh each day and that, in hearing, our spiritual deserts will be transformed into luscious gardens of spiritual vitality.

But this means spiritual discipline. It means a consistent seeking of the presence of God through meditation, prayer and study. It also means being open to the voice of God in other people whom we know, for many insights from God come through our social contacts. I am not describing a sort of 'works righteousness' here, as if to say we are saved by our devotional life. I am talking about the singleness of purpose which must accompany any worthwhile endeavour.

If our financial incomes depended upon the amount of time most of us spend seeking the Lord, I'm afraid most of us would be bankrupt! As in the business world, so in the spiritual realm: you reap what you sow; you get out of something only what you put into it. Earnestly seeking God in a disciplined way always pays off in the long run. As Jeremiah said long ago, 'You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart' (Jer. 29:13).

John the Baptist symbolises the disciplined spiritual life. His is the life of total devotion to the

will and purpose of God. His vocation was his divinely appointed task and the rigor of his preparation for that task is an example to us all.

But notice that John's spiritual discipline was not for the sake of 'navel gazing.' For when the word of God happened to John, he went into the world on his mission, 'preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins' (Luke 3:3). When the word of God came, John went! There is no future in a self-centred devotional life. The word of God does not happen for our sakes alone. *Solitude rightly used leads to service not selfishness.* If we are primarily concerned about saving our own necks or escaping from duty, we are misunderstanding the meaning of spiritual rigor. The word of God happens so that we might be equipped to go and serve, not run and hide.

## REVIVAL

John the Baptist came not to soothe but to stir up; he came not to applaud but to arouse. In this sense he was in full harmony with the Old Testament prophets, for the prophetic spirit is a spirit which stirs and arouses complacent religion. God used John to revive Israel and prepare his people for their Lord. Preparation means arousal in light of a coming event. It means a reorganisation of one's priorities and a restructuring of one's worldview. Preparation can mean a complete turnaround in how a person lives his or her life. And this was the goal of John's ministry—to revive God's people, to turn their lives upside down so they would be ready for the Coming One.

John chose to revive Israel through a stirring message of the soon-coming judgement. You might say John struck a note of terror into the people's hearts and shocked them into reformation. For John, the coming of the Messiah meant radical judgement—a judgement so severe that even the religious élite of Jerusalem were not immune. They too must repent and be baptised. Yet he held out the promise, that those who reformed would be adequately prepared for what was to come. This was *revival through reformation*.

At the heart of John's revival sermons was his warning against religious pride. It would do no good for the scribes and Pharisees to boast in their perfect pedigree (Abraham is our father). No. What mattered was one's present attitude toward the coming judgement of God. Regardless of a person's 'connections' with Abraham, each individual was to be judged on his or her response to God's 'new' revelation which was about to take



place in the Coming One. Being a Jew was not as important as being obedient.

How is it with us? When God revives us does he not often stir us up by confounding our settled opinions, attitudes or habits? When the prophetic spirit accosts us through either the written or spoken word, isn't our own self-understanding called into question? Suddenly, God's perspective breaks through the fog of our complacency, putting to shame the ungodly desires we cherish, the idols we love, the emptiness of our inner life, the pride which dominates us, the ambitions which enslave us and our insensitivity to the needs of our society.

Revival and reformation result from the Spirit's assault on personal ego, an assault which wounds, only to heal, and destroys, only to build up again. Such revival can occur only when the laser beam of God's penetrating judgement cuts to the heart of our distorted self-understanding, simultaneously revealing the inadequacy of our ways and the surpassing richness of God's ways.

Despite the enthusiastic responses to his ministry, John never forgot that he was merely a

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Despite the enthusiastic responses to his ministry, John never forgot that he was merely a pointer—pointing people away from himself to the Coming One. There was no confusion in John's mind between the messenger and the message.

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tween the messenger and the message. Even though John's disciples wanted to make John the message—the good news—John refused. He would not compete with the Coming One.

Not every messenger is able to play 'second fiddle' to the message. Human ambition is so subtle and powerful that very often messengers become the centre of attraction rather than the message. But we are not the good news! Jesus Christ is the good news! We are pointers, pointing others to Christ, not stealing the show. John never lost sight of the Coming One. That is why he could steer a steady course, despite the skewed ambitions of his fans. John knew the moment one's eyes move from Christ to self there is the danger that this individual will play Messiah.

This can happen also on a larger scale with religious institutions, which are interested prima-

rily in promoting and perpetuating themselves. Loyalty to the institution is equated with loyalty to Christ, when in fact, they really have very little in common.

Let us remember that every true revival is due to a renewed focus upon Christ alone. The prophetic spirit calls us away from inordinate loyalty to the messenger, toward ultimate loyalty to the Message itself—Christ. We must look beyond the messenger to the message of Christ and the Message that is Christ. Further, the prophetic spirit calls into question our settled self-understanding, our priorities, values, affections, ambitions and dreams. No area of life remains hidden in the closet. All is exposed to the searching judgement of God. Revival is obedient response to the stirring message of judgement and grace.

### RESIGNATION

The death of John the Baptist represents the continuing hostilities being waged between the forces of good and evil. John, the prophet of God, spoke the word of God in a powerful and persuasive way. And when this word encountered hard hearts, resistance and persecution resulted. John was beheaded by a man who was too weak to face the truth about himself, a man who could not bear to have his self-understanding blown to bits by the truth of God. When the message is too much for us to take, the messenger usually catches it in the neck. And don't we sometimes prefer a lie to the truth about ourselves? John symbolises those messengers who refuse to patronise our deceptions, even at the risk of death. Having done the job, having spoken the word, the messenger resigns himself, or herself, to whatever fate may come to pass.

Perhaps the best word to describe John's end is resignation. In the death of John the Baptist, we learn that not all heroes live happily ever after; not all good guys live to see their cause triumph; not all prayers for intervention are answered in the way we would like. The facts are, good people die senselessly and God chooses not to intervene. No angel's hand stops the axe falling, despite our most fervent prayers.

Resignation is the rest of soul which takes place when a person is at peace with God. Faith in God does not always protect us from senseless tragedies or cruel reversals. Even though I believe in God, my daughter may still be hit by a car, or my wife killed in an accident, or I might die of cancer. I am only fooling myself if I think that my



faith in God will shield me from every trauma in life. John the Baptist lost his head and he was a prophet! Where does that leave me?

Resignation is not a helpless giving up in the face of insurmountable odds. It is a daring affirmation of trust in a God who, despite the darkness of present circumstances, will bring order out of chaos and meaning out of madness. Mature faith is not based on miraculous interventions from above. It is based on the simple conviction that

regardless of external circumstances, *God is, and always will be*. Therefore, resignation is not weakness, but decision to commit the terrifying mysteries of life to a God who is above all, yet in all. Resignation, is to rest in the bosom of the Divine even though our trials lay us to rest in the bosom of the earth. It is based on the conviction that God will have the last word. Indeed, in Jesus Christ, God has already spoken his last word!

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## I SEE YOU, TOMMY

Thomas Robinson

**S**ome time back my wife, Wendy, damaged her cervical spine when she came off her skis. She came home from that accident in terrible pain and after awhile her left arm began to waste away.



Every night I would hold her in my arms and listen to her weep until she fell asleep exhausted. I remember one night as I held her in my arms I began to scream out to God, 'Where are you God? Can't you see us? Don't you care?' Instantly, in that dark room I was taken back to the time when I was four-years-old. At that time we lived in the little bush township of Hernes Oak, in the haunted Hills of Gippsland, Australia. My cousins and I had gone to the top of the town to follow the railway line into the bush. We knew that the Princes Highway ran parallel with the railway line, so that all we had to do was walk through the bush in the direction of the highway and we would not get lost.

As I walked along behind my cousins I found a dead bird. I tenderly picked it up and buried it beneath a gum tree. I then fenced the grave with sticks, which I pushed into the ground around it. This was just a passing moment in my life, something I had long forgotten.

Now, I stood behind myself as a four-year-old and I vividly remember seeing my head moving. Looking over my head I could see the grave of the bird. I then heard a voice say clearly, 'I see you, Tommy!' Then all was silent and I was aware again of my surroundings, holding Wendy in my arms.

The amazing thing about this was, not only had I forgotten that event from my childhood, but the only people who call me Tommy, are my close family, everyone else calls me Tom or Thomas. I then knew beyond a shadow of a doubt, that whatever was going to happen to Wendy, all would be well with our souls! God was watching over us. Just as he saw me take pity on that bird in the bush, so he saw me now!

I don't have all the answers to our problems. Like you who read this, I laugh, I cry, I get discouraged etc. but I know that God is with me, watching over me, just as he was at Hernes Oak.

♦





# THROUGH MISERY TO MERCY

Ron Allen

**It isn't easy to detect mercy in the midst of misery or to see grace amidst judgement. But if the gospel teaches us anything, it is that in Jesus Christ mercy and judgement have kissed each other. On the cross, Christ endured the judgement of God that we might taste God's mercy.**

**But how can this be? How can an act of judgement also be a deed of mercy?**

## JEREMIAH'S MISERY

The Old Testament prophet, Jeremiah, knew rejection first hand. Called to the prophetic office in a time of national crisis, Jeremiah's career spanned over fifty years (ca. 625-580 BC). He witnessed the invasion of Judah by the Babylonians and the destruction of the temple. While still a young man, Jeremiah was made a spokesperson for God. His task was to preach against many things that his fellow Jews held sacred. This brought him into conflict with the authorities of his own nation.

But God made a promise to Jeremiah: 'Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people of the land' (Jer. 1:18-19). As long as Jeremiah clung to God's presence, he would be impregnable—despite opposition. His misery would be turned into mercy.

The essential elements of Jeremiah's message are in his temple sermon, parts of which are in chapters 7 and 26. In his sermon, Jeremiah enraged the priests by referring to the temple as a den of robbers. He told them that the temple and the things associated with it were worthless. The priests were so incensed by Jeremiah's sermon that they said he should be executed.

From then on, Jeremiah's life was worthless to them. Since questioning the religious authorities, he was regarded as a pest and a scab. His friends disappeared. Any camaraderie he once had with his fellow priests was now gone. The people in his hometown felt so disgraced by his performance that they disowned him, actually hatching a plot to kill him. Jeremiah was even banned from visiting his parents' house for any encouragement—they too were disgusted with him and were part of the plot to kill him.

God told Jeremiah he shouldn't marry. 'You will be childless because I am going to destroy this people. They will be a childless people' (Jer. 16:2). So he lacked even the comfort of an understanding mate.

Among other things, the Lord told Jeremiah that he must not attend weddings because 'the sound of weddings and merry-making is soon to end in the land.' He was not to attend funerals. Why? Because he must not mourn over this people. They deserved what God was about to do to them. With no social life, forsaken by colleagues, friends and family, Jeremiah was destitute of any circle of companions.



More than this, the people misunderstood his message. They viewed Jeremiah as a traitor. To them, his stirring judgements were signs of disloyalty, not divine mercy. He spoke frankly about the people's sins and the sham of the sacred institutions. For this he received the label 'blasphemer.' Being of a sensitive nature, Jeremiah wanted only the best for his people, but he would not soft-peddle their sins.

Near the end of his long ministry, Jeremiah had little to show for his pains. From a human standpoint he was a complete failure. The religious leaders didn't accept his testimony, the civil leaders and the kings ignored his counsel, and even after the city had been burned to the ground and all his predictions came true, the remnant of the people still refused to listen to him.

### WHEN BELIEVERS WEEP

Jeremiah's experience caused untold personal sorrow. He is called 'the weeping prophet' because he felt the pain of his situation so keenly. Often his unpopularity reduced him to tears and he found himself in constant tension between his task and his own human weakness.

The book of Jeremiah contains sections called his 'confessions.' In passionate poetry Jeremiah bares his soul before God and complains bitterly about his persecution. For example, in chapter 20 he takes the Lord to task by exclaiming, 'You seduced me Lord. You seduced me.' Here the prophet is like a woman sexually violated by a heartless man and left abandoned and despised. God led Jeremiah into this tough mission only to abandon him when the going got rough—at least this is how Jeremiah felt during his lowest moments.

In the same chapter, we see this man of God wishing that he had never been called. He is tempted never to preach again. He goes on to curse the day of his birth and to wish himself dead. In chapter 9 there is another typical emotional outburst. He says, 'I wish I had a place to go away in the desert. A lodging place for travelers where I could get away from my people.' Is it possible to find any mercy in such abject misery?

Perhaps you are moved by Jeremiah's terrible situation. Perhaps you have been in similar circumstances. Have you ever taken a stand on an issue and lost some friends in the process? Have you ever felt compelled to make an unpopular assessment of something that people near to you hold in reverence? Have you ever disagreed, for conscience' sake, with your religious leaders?

Have you ever wished that you could travel to some hiding place in the wilderness, away from your people—the ones that make you feel terrible? Have you ever wept because of turmoil in your religious environment? Have you every wished that you had never heard some things, so that you wouldn't have to make a decision about them? Have you ever said, 'I wish I had never been born'?

Where does one, who identifies with the gospel, turn for solace when he or she loses all friends because of the gospel? I believe that there is an answer in Jeremiah's experience. The message he bore was at one and the same time, the cause and cure of his woes. Let's look at the substance of his message.

In Jeremiah 1:10 we learn that there

were two aspects to his preaching. First, he was to uproot, tear down, destroy and overthrow. Only then could he build and plant. As you read Jeremiah, there is plenty in it about tearing down and uprooting. Judgement is Jeremiah's main theme.

On the other hand, the careful reader will see that Jeremiah, true to his calling, has some important things to say about building and planting. Nevertheless, it must be emphasized that pulling down and destroying always precedes building and planting. The Lord obviously intends mercy for his people, but it is never mercy without judgement.

### JUDGEMENT BEFORE MERCY

The backdrop to Jeremiah's prophecy is Israel's appalling guilt. Prophet, priest, king and people are all bent on a course of rebellion. Over and over again, we hear Jeremiah's lonely voice being lifted in warning, 'The Lord is going to visit this place in judgement. Terrible things will happen to this land. There will be no cities left standing. Slain corpses will be everywhere.'

As Jerusalem's end approached, Jeremiah warned the people to submit to the Babylonian armies. Their only hope was to accept the Babylonian siege as an instrument of divine justice. God

(Continued on page 14)

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... we see this man of God wishing that he had never been called. He is tempted never to preach again. He goes on to curse the day of his birth and to wish himself dead.

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# Discussion Point

I we continue not sure  
hope faith agree discuss believe  
faith right

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.

**Dear Ritchie**

*I heard an evangelist say, in defence of a literal worldwide flood in Noah's day, that if the earth was levelled, sea water would cover it to a considerable depth. So there is apparently sufficient water for such a flood. But where did all the water come from in the first place? Can you tell me that?*

**B. D.**

**Dear B**

A world-wide flood could not be caused by rain, because most of the water that falls in rain comes from the sea (Eccl 1:7), which is why there is very little rain in central Australia or the Gobi desert. So if nearly all rain comes from the sea, even several years of unceasing heavy rain would not raise the oceans one centimetre. What might raise the oceans slightly would be all the sediment that got washed into them from the land. But that would not be enough to cause a world-wide flood. Even the melting of the polar icecaps would not be sufficient to inundate every island and continent.

It is generally accepted that Noah's Flood was a local event of mammoth proportions, such as what happened when the Sea of Marmara breached the south-western ramparts of the Black Sea basin. Some great flood like this left such an indelible impression upon the peoples of that area that it was recorded by several nations. Moses uses this story to show the parallels between what God did for Noah and what he did for Israel when it, too, came through the waters to a new land.

**Ritchie.**

**Dear Ritchie**

*I have read many praises of GNU by your readers and could add one more, the spontaneous belly laughs you give me! The behemoth (a hippopotamus) has a cedar-like tail? Good one Ritchie! If you are taking bets, then put*

*mine on the dinosaur to best fit this description. One can only hope all those reputable theologians are better at theology than they are at biology ...*

*The Bible does have a greater evil than sexual exploiters of children, fraudulent evangelists and blasphemous preachers—it is people who bring others to Christ and then sow seeds of doubt in his Holy Word knowing damned well (and that word is correctly used) the seeds will germinate and grow, and when these people abandon their faith, seven demons will return to where there was only one. Isn't that exactly what you are doing?*

*[I remain,] hopefully, a fundamentalist Christian*

**J. K.**

**Dear J**

The issue is not over what the Bible says about the behemoth and leviathan; it is over our personal interpretation of those words. I offered my interpretation, you have offered yours, but neither interpretation is God's Word. If I have sown any 'seeds of doubt' they are not in God's Word, but in personal interpretations that don't square with the revealed truth.

Perhaps an even better interpretation of the behemoth, than either yours or mine, is the one offered by R.D. in a following letter.

Grace and peace to you

**Ritchie.**

**Dear Ritchie**

*May I comment on your reply to M. R. K. in GNU, October 2006, p12. As you state, the general understanding is that the Behemoth is a hippopotamus and the Leviathan is a crocodile.*

*Notice, however, how the New English Bible translates Job 40:15-20: 'Consider the chief of beasts, the crocodile, who devours cattle as if they were grass ... his tail is rigid as a cedar ... he takes the cattle of the hills for his prey*

*and in his jaws he crunches all wild beasts.] Job's description fits the crocodile better than the hippopotamus.*

*I grew up with a row of cedar trees (of average size as I thought) growing on one side of our house for shade in summer, but later in Italy, near Florence, I saw a cedar of Lebanon, planted by Medici in the 1400s. Its limbs were rigid, and also of a massive size and length. So how do we apply v. 17 ('his tail is rigid as a cedar,' or 'he bends his tail like a cedar') according to this N.E.B. translation?*

*Also, what is the Leviathan of Job 41:19-22? It says 'Firebrands shoot from his mouth and sparks come streaming out; his nostrils pour forth smoke like a cauldron on fire blown to full heat. His breath sets burning coals ablaze and flames flash from his mouth ...' Is translation and meaning here as straight forward as some may claim?*

*With kind regards*

**R. D.**

**Dear R**

You have made a very good point. Even though the New American Standard Bible claims that the Behemoth is a hippopotamus, the description of its activity better fits a crocodile—as the New English Bible interprets it to be. If this is the case, then the Leviathan of Job 41:1 is not a different animal at all; it is just another name for the crocodile. (E.g. Crocodiles and Alligators would be described similarly, even though they have different names). If this is the case, then the whole passage from Job 40:15 to 41:34 is a poetic description of a crocodile.

Concerning the fire-breathing capabilities of this monster, we need to remember that the book of Job is poetic and not everything should be treated literally. Job, for instance, speaks of 'the skies, hard as a mirror of cast bronze' (37:18), the sea being locked behind



doors with bars (38:8-11), storehouses full of snow and hail (38:22), and the water jars of the heavens (38:37).

Grace and peace to you.

**Ritchie.**

**Hi Ritchie,**

*I have a question on something you wrote some time back, on how heaven may not be the perfect place we were led to believe it would be, when we were growing up. For instance, you mention that Adam and Eve were created with sweat glands, bladders and anuses. I have always thought that when sin entered the world certain things changed, and because there was now impurity in the world all of a sudden man needed a bladder and an anus. I believed that the fruit and water in Paradise Restored will be so pure that there will be no waste product left, because, to me, waste and impurity are part of sin.*

*Also, when Adam was kicked out of Paradise, we are told that from that time forward (not before) he would have to work by the sweat of his brow, which indicates sweat was a cursed thing.*

*Also, I myself can't believe that there will be destructive forces like tsunamis, because there won't be any sea on the new earth, nor tornadoes or earthquakes as they are all the result of an unwell earth which is chaotic and unstable. These natural forces destroy things and to me, are part of the dark side of nature caused by sin's curse.*

*God bless*

**N. J.**

**Hi N**

While these questions are interesting, they are not critical to our salvation, so it's of no great consequence whether or not we are right or wrong in our conclusions.

The main issue, as I see it, pivots on the word 'perfect.' The kind of perfection you propose would be unbearable to me. I would find it very difficult to live in such a cottonwool-protected world, where risks were impossible and everything was so perfect nothing needed doing. How could the New Earth be perfect if it was boring and we all suffered from ennui?

Besides, there is nothing wrong with tectonic earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanoes and hurricanes. They are only a serious problem when they kill people—and we are assured that won't happen in

the New Earth. I think that even in heaven, this kind of 'unstable' world would be a much more exiting and challenging place to live in than just lying around in clover most of the time.

The Earth is very much like your body, which is constantly renewing itself and regulating its temperature. The Earth renews itself by feeding old surface material into the core through subduction, also by new material coming forth in volcanoes etc. And hurricanes are the temperature regulators of the planet. Without them life on Earth would become intolerable for many plants and creatures.

You say there will be no sea in the world to come. To where, then, will the rivers flow? And where will subduction take place? What kind of Paradise would it be without whales, dolphins, sea otters, penguins and seals? What kind of New World would it be without coral reefs, sea horses, turtles, manta rays, and tropical fish? What kind of eternity would it be without clean seas lapping on pure sands overshadowed by pohutukawa or coconut trees? If there were no seas, what would regulate the planet's temperature or CO<sub>2</sub> levels. Some think John is using the word 'sea' in Revelation 21:1 as a symbol of a greater reality. We will have to wait and see.

Concerning the effects of the Fall, the Bible makes no mention of God creating sweat glands, bladders or large colons after Adam's sin, there wouldn't have been sufficient time for these changes to have occurred through evolution—were that possible. We can only assume, therefore, that Adam had these organs before the entrance of sin. Besides, I can't see what's so 'sinful' about urine and faeces, because when they are treated right they are a positive blessing. Just as when a sun burns out in a supernova, it creates elements which become the building blocks of new planets, so the human waste that you write, about can also become a building block of life.

Adam's Fall did not create the need for sweat glands; it created the need for continual work if man was to survive. 'The sweat of his brow,' is an appropriate expression for this constant busyness, but applies only in warmer climes.

Keep thinking; it's not sinful.

Blessings

**Ritchie.**

**Dear Ritchie**

*A person wrote to you and pointed out that it was not the general wicked who were killed by the brightness of Jesus' coming, but the man of sin. We were pleased to note your appreciation.*

*However, we now see that you have referred to the man of sin as Satan. We would point out that this is incorrect also. If you were to read 2 Thessalonians 2:9 it says, 'Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders.' This man of sin is not Satan but one who is 'after the working' of him.*

*Now we do not know your past history but we would guess that you were an Adventist as we were. You should try to get Adventism out of your system, which I admit is not easy. You seem to be still favouring Mrs White, also, we see her influence in your writing. You will be more informed if you go by the Bible only.*

*God bless.*

**W. D.**

**Dear W**

I agree with you that our theology should be informed by the Bible and the Bible only.

When Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians 2 he used several ambiguous phrases, such as 'the man of lawlessness,' 'the one who now holds it back,' 'the work of Satan,' and 'a powerful delusion. His reason for not being more specific was because this prophecy had a direct application to his time and he did not want to put Christians in danger of a backlash from the named parties.

It appears, however, that the Holy Spirit had another reason for Paul not being more specific, and that is this prophecy would have more than one fulfillment, for which reason some of its phrases were written in such a way that they would apply across the board.

Now let's look at the phrase you refer to, 'The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan ... (v. 9). The word used for coming (*parousia*) is the same word that is used for the coming of Jesus in verse 1. Who is this individual who will counterfeit the coming of

**(Continued on page 15)**





(Continued from page 11)

## THROUGH MISERY TO MERCY

wanted mercy for the people, but he was not going to provide it without a full settlement of those matters, which had brought about their problems in the first place.

The judgements of God forecast by Jeremiah were disguised mercies. Judah must be willing to face the music of judgement against sin. *Only by coming to terms with their sin and accepting God's punishment of it, could these people find mercy.*

This was Jeremiah's message. As such, it was the

everlasting gospel through and through. For the gospel addresses itself to the horrible fact of sin. Sin is a fact. It is the fact

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In Jeremiah 15:19, God reminds the prophet that he too is still a sinner in need of repentance. The messenger is not immune from the barbs of the message! The gospel says there is no difference between us—for all have sinned.

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which separates man from the blessedness of God's presence and favour. And the gospel provides mercy for the sinner without letting sin off the hook.

### THE CURSE OF SIN

Why is sin so objectionable to God? Because sin is deadly insubordination to Divine authority. Sin is rebellion and treason against God's government. Although God is our creator and sustainer, sin strikes at God like a vicious snake.

Like the immune system within our physical bodies, the universe has a built-in immune system designed to reject sin in every form. Things which do not glorify God and reflect his holiness, are rejected outright as dangerous aliens. When the gospel is preached, it treats sin as an intruder and aims to tear it down and uproot it. In this way, the gospel arouses the hostility of the sinner. This was the reason for Jeremiah's unpopularity. His message caused his sorrows. But he discovered that it cured them also. This was a discovery he did not reach easily.

In Jeremiah 15:19, God reminds the prophet that he too is still a sinner in need of repentance.

The messenger is not immune from the barbs of the message! The gospel says there is no difference between us—for all have sinned. It is all too easy for Christians to resent mistreatment and injustice and thus forget about their own need for repentance. Pride is so rooted in us, that every advance in grace could become a temptation and an occasion for sin. It is possible to study the gospel merely to nail people who don't accept it. But we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ. We must repent. We must come to the cross daily.

### CHRIST—OUR SUBSTITUTE

Now let us visit Calvary, where Jesus absorbed for us the Divine judgement on sin. Christ experienced God's hatred of sin. God's opposition to sin was fully felt by Christ. God's just response to rebellion was meted out to Christ. Christ was weighed in the balances of eternal justice and the verdict was 'Guilty!' The sentence—everlasting death.

Since Christ lived and died as our representative, he suffered all that we should have suffered. You might say, when Jesus died God hunted down all sinners and brought them to justice. Our sins have gone to judgement in Christ, and a full reckoning has been made for them. Therefore, we may claim mercy!

### JEREMIAH AND CHRIST

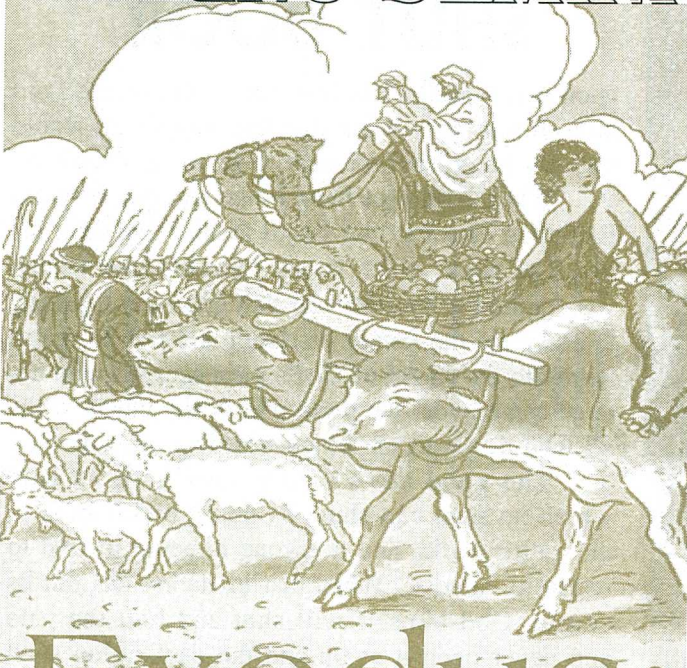
Like Christ, Jeremiah never married. Like Christ, he was set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel. He was to tear down and destroy, build and plant. Like Christ, he witnessed against the religious authorities. Like Christ, he appeared to be against the sacred institutions, such as the temple. Like Christ, he wept over his people and the temple. Like Christ, he forecast the temple's desolation. Like Christ, his life appeared as a failure.

Jeremiah's troubles resulted in fellowship with God. It can be the same for us. There is sweetness in trouble for the gospel's sake, because it puts us at close quarters with Christ and brings fellowship, which we could not have had otherwise.

But there's another benefit to trials. They can make the Christian savour the mercy of God all the more, because of the way our trials contrast with Christ's trials. For though we may suffer, we can never suffer as Jesus did. We may be rejected by men, but mercy of mercies; we are never rejected by God. There is mercy in the midst of our misery. ♦



# GNU SEMINARS 2007



## Exodus: Let My People Go!

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**Pastors Ron Allen**  
**and Ritchie Way**

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**9.30am - 4.00pm**

### Sydney

**Saturday, 5th May**  
**9.30am - 4.00pm**

### Melbourne

**Saturday, 19th May**  
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*Do You feel that life is too often a struggle? Then this seminar is especially for you.*

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Sound recording and storage technology is changing rapidly. In order to replace aging copying equipment and keep GNU up with product-user requirements, we need approximately \$2,500 to cover the cost of purchasing new equipment.

Would you please consider a donation specific to this need?  
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### (From page 13) Discussion Point

Jesus by coming and proclaiming himself to be God (v. 4)? He can't be Jesus, because this individual's coming is not in accordance with the activity of Jesus. He could, however, be Satan, because his coming will be 'in accordance with the activity of Satan.' This possibility is further supported by the fact that this deceiving individual is obliquely called '*the lie*' in contrast to Jesus who is called '*the truth*' (vv. 11-12).

Now while the only infallible interpreter of prophecy is history, I think you will agree, that, in the consummative fulfillment of this prophecy, there is a good case for Satan himself being 'the man of lawlessness.'

Peace and grace to you  
Ritchie. ♦

### Websites

**GNU Aust:** [www.goodnewsunlimited.org.au](http://www.goodnewsunlimited.org.au)  
**GNU USA:** [www.goodnewsunlimited.org](http://www.goodnewsunlimited.org)  
**Des Ford:** [www.desford.org.au](http://www.desford.org.au)





Ricardo Camino

**T**he sin of Adam and Eve radically changed their relationship with God. Instead of open communion, there was now a wall between them and God and the only gateway in the wall was filled with a flashing sword that would kill anyone who tried to enter. One thing and one thing alone could remove that sword, and that was the blood of the Lamb of God. The penalty pronounced

## THE OPEN AND SHUT DOOR

upon Adam had to fall, like that sword, on the Lord himself and only when that had happened, would the way be opened for man to return to Paradise.

When Jesus was hung in the gateway between Earth and Heaven, that sword flashed and took his life. The blood which issued from his fatal wound was applied to the lintel of that entryway, opening the way for the family of Adam and Eve to return boldly to the safety of God's presence. All who entered came under the protection of the blood, while all who despised the blood remained outside.

The good news of the open gate—a gate which no man can shut—is being proclaimed to the entire world, and everyone is being invited to return to Paradise. When that invitation has run its course, God himself will shut and bolt the gate and never open it again and the declaration shall be made, 'It is finished! Those who are in are in and those who are out are out!' And the fiery sword which destroys sin, will flash once more and all who are not protected by the blood will fall beneath its judgement strokes.

So, all ye who stand outside, do not hesitate to enter, for no man knows the day or the hour when the door will close forever. ♦

## 'IT IS FINISHED'

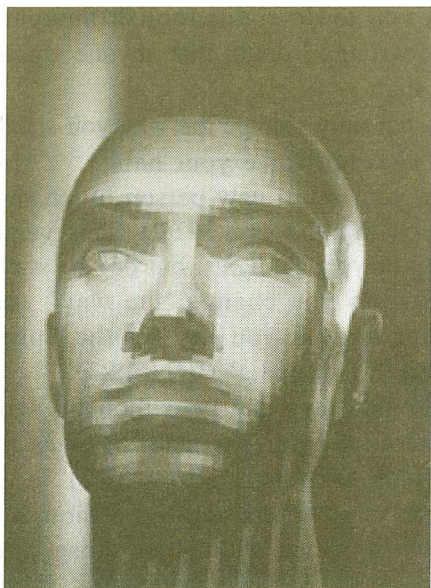
Boris Dobra

**W**ith his dying breath Jesus cried out from the cross, 'My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?' What mysterious pathos lies behind this heart-wrenching cry of desperation? The greatest mind would be hard-pressed to even partially comprehend the bottomless pit of emotional, spiritual and physical pain that Jesus endured as he hung between heaven and earth—not wanted by either. He, who had been one with the Father, uttered a cry that now revealed his total abandonment. As we watch in empathetic silence, we see the Lord of glory slipping from the realm of light into the realm of darkness; from the fullness of life into the absolute emptiness of a despairing and hopeless death. The sins of the entire world were upon him, suffocating and destroying him. The enormity of his total abandonment by his Father broke his heart and crushed out his life. With a final despairing shout he cried, 'It is finished!' and died. And it was.

Why did Jesus choose to give up everything for us? It was because the unconquerable love in his heart offered him no other alternative. It was contrary to the Lord's nature to allow his creatures to die without hope, so the only choice was for him to die in their place. Calvary was the unfolding of God's supreme love for you and me. The cross revealed the kind of God whom you and I worship—a God who was prepared to sacrifice himself for his disobedient children.

There is such a depth of mercy in Calvary, that eternity will not be long enough to plumb it, yet the basic message is so simple a child can understand it. The thief who was crucified beside Jesus grasped its essence; he understood that Jesus had thrown open the gates of Paradise for all who would enter. The thief had the assurance that his mustard seed of faith in Jesus would be enough to get him through those pearly gates. Because he trusted in Jesus, his striving for life was finished; the judgement against his sins was finished and the writing of his name in the Book of Life was finished. And we know it was finished because Jesus proclaimed it so. ♦





Santo Calarco

## AS A MAN *THINKS* SO IS HE

of the way I was currently thinking.

In his mercy the Lord led me to a Christian REBT therapist and pastor, who helped me to see that my battle was spiritual as well as physical. As I practised the Scripture-based principles he taught me, my life began to change quite rapidly. Subsequently, I became a qualified therapist myself.

Here are the steps that brought about transformation in my life:

*Guard your thoughts,  
they become your words.  
Guard your words,  
they become your actions.  
Guard your actions,  
they become your habits.  
Guard your habits,  
they become your character.  
Guard your character,  
it can determine your  
destiny.*

**F**or over thirty years my life was a mess. I blamed my childhood, after all, I was a victim of repeated sexual abuse from the hands of someone close to me. I expressed this pain in depression, anger, fear and anxiety. People began to pull away from me as I swung from depression to anger.

Later in my adult life I experienced a number of self-inflicted painful losses, which stopped me in my tracks. For the first time, I saw that maybe my life was heading the way it was, not only as a result of my victimised past, but more so because

### SPIRITUAL WARFARE DEFINED

The Bible says that Satan's chief weapon in warfare is destructive thoughts. Note the following passage by Paul, 'For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, *bringing every thought into captivity* to the obedience of Christ' (2 Cor. 10:3-5).

This passage tells us a number of things. First, it tells us that we are in a battle. Secondly, that  
(Continued page 18)

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### NEXT MONTH

The next issue of the *Good News Unlimited* magazine will be about Islam. How do Muslims live, what does the Qur'an teach, what do Muslims believe? How should the followers of Jesus relate to Muslims?

If you are not already getting your own copy of the GNU magazine send your name and address to Carolyn: [carolyn@goodnewsunlimited.org.au](mailto:carolyn@goodnewsunlimited.org.au) with a request to put your name on the mailing list, or write to Good News Unlimited, PO Box 6788, Sth. Tweed Heads, NSW 2486, AUSTRALIA.

### Good News Unlimited Saturday Bible School

at the GNU office, 2/54-60 Industry Dr.,  
South Tweed Heads NSW

Saturday Bible School will be held on the *first* and *third* Saturdays of the month at 9.30am. There will be occasional cancellations due to other GNU appointments. See the website on [www.goodnewsunlimited.org.au](http://www.goodnewsunlimited.org.au) or phone on 07 5524 5040. Bring a Bible. Morning tea will be provided.

Note the following dates for meetings:

No Meetings in January

February 3 & 17

March 3 & 17

April 7 & 21



battle is spiritual. Thirdly, this battle involves pulling down and casting down strongholds. What are 'strongholds'? Simply stated a stronghold is a fortified city—a castle or fortress. From very early times until comparatively recently, inhabitants of cities protected themselves by surrounding their cities (usually located on tops of hills or on high coastal cliffs) with high, strong walls. So Paul is telling us that Satan himself has his own strongholds—places where he and his demons sit safely waging war against us.

### **MIND-SETS AND WORLD-VIEWS**

Can we find out what and where these strongholds are? The key is found in the parallel nature of verses 4 and 5. In verse 4 Paul says that we use God's powerful spiritual weapons to demolish Satan's strongholds [plural]. He then uses the same Greek word for 'demolish' in verse 5 and begins to list what the strongholds are. 'Casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.'

*Strongholds are ways of thinking.* So when we are destroying and demolishing strongholds, we are destroying ways and systems of thinking. This makes the enemy, Satan; the battlefield, the mind; the weapons, thoughts; and warfare, 'taking thoughts captive.' So spiritual warfare is fundamentally, about the way Satan attempts to introduce his thoughts into our minds so that we think they are ours.

### **THOUGHTS AND FALLING DOMINOES**

So what's so important about the way we think? What real damage can thoughts cause? A major cause of our destructive emotions and behaviours is the way we think. We have already seen that Satan's chief weapon in warfare is destructive ways of thinking. However, the Bible also says that destructive, negative thinking, allows Satan to introduce his additional weapons. Scripture says that destructive thoughts create open doors for destructive words, actions, habits, characters and destinies.

Let's see the way the Bible unpacks this cognitive domino effect. The Bible teaches that our thoughts determine what we say: '... whatever is in your heart determines what you say' (Luke 6:45). That's pretty clear, isn't it?

Our thoughts also determine the way we act. Consider Ecclesiastes 10:2, for example, 'Sensible

thoughts lead you to do right; foolish thoughts lead you to do wrong.' I doubt that anyone would disagree with that.

Thoughts not only change the way you speak and act, they also influence your habits. '... let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think' (Rom. 12:2). This verse speaks not only of your thoughts, but of 'the way' you think. How do you change 'the way' you think? Paul encourages you to 'Let the Spirit change your way of thinking' (Eph. 4:23).

The Bible also says that your thoughts will eventually determine your character. 'For as he thinks in his heart, so is he ...' (Prov. 23:7).

And, finally, your characteristic thoughts will reveal your spiritual state, 'For those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit' (Rom. 8:5)

### **THE CAUSE OF NEGATIVE EMOTIONS**

Jesus deals specifically with the cause of negative emotions in his Sermon on the Mount. He counsels: 'Don't worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food, drink and clothes. Doesn't life consist of more than food and clothing?' (Matt. 6:25). Anxiety is caused by negative thinking, and negative thinking has its root in a lack of faith in our heavenly Father.

The New Living Translation puts it simply, 'Don't worry about food—what to eat and drink. Don't worry whether God will provide it for you. These things dominate the thoughts of most people, but your Father already knows your needs' (Luke 12:29-30).

Worry is a chief tool of Satan—for which reason the Bible encourages us to give our worries to God. 'Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about what happens to you. Be careful! Watch out for attacks from the Devil, your great enemy. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for some victim to devour' (2 Pet. 5:7-8).

Prior to my training as a therapist, I had never read verses 7 and 8 from the point of view of a cause-and-affect relationship. These verses are telling us that Satan uses worry as a chief form of attack—a way of devouring us.

### **DAVID AND JUDAS**

Satan's strategy is to introduce his thoughts into our minds so that we think they are ours. It happened to both King David and Judas. The



Bible says that Satan moved King David to take a census and number Israel (see 1 Chron. 21:1). The Scriptures clearly reveal that the victorious military conquests of David were an act of God, not of human military might. By triggering David to take a census, Satan was endeavouring to make King David rely more and more on human resources rather than the blessings of God. This is why the Bible says that this act displeased God and was forbidden (1 Chron. 21:7).

There is no question that Satan tempts us, but how does he place his thoughts into our minds? His master stroke is to place his thoughts into our minds in the first person, in order to deceive us into thinking that they are our own, for when he disguises his thoughts as our thoughts, we are more likely to accept them.

What about Judas? How did he become a pawn in the hand of Satan for the destruction of Jesus? Maybe Satan slipped the following thought into Judas' mind, 'If I deliver Jesus over to the Romans through the Jews, this may provoke him to show his military power and so deliver Israel? When Jesus realises that it was me who initiated this process, he will honour me with an important position

in his kingdom.' So Satan's strategy, is to simply place his thoughts into our mind in the first person, so that we believe they are our own.

### **IF SATAN CAN GET YOU TO BELIEVE HIS THOUGHTS HE CAN CONTROL YOUR LIFE**

When Satan can place his thoughts into our minds in the first person repetitively, he will lock us into an automatic way of thinking and reasoning. This then becomes a stronghold—a fortress. When he has us locked into automatic, habitual ways of thinking, his demons become further entrenched behind the fortress walls of our thinking and we are set on automatic self-destruct mode.

Destructive thoughts will produce destructive words, actions, habits, characters and destinies. So:

*Guard your thoughts, they become your words. Guard your words, they become your actions. Guard your actions, they become your habits. Guard your habits, they become your character. Guard your character, it can determine your destiny.*

Solomon said it succinctly: 'Be careful how you think; your life is shaped by your thoughts' (Prov. 4:23 TEV). ♦

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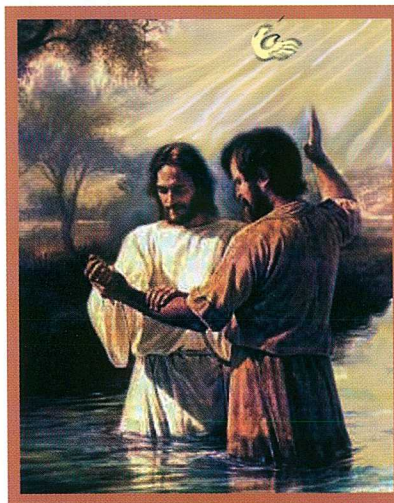


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