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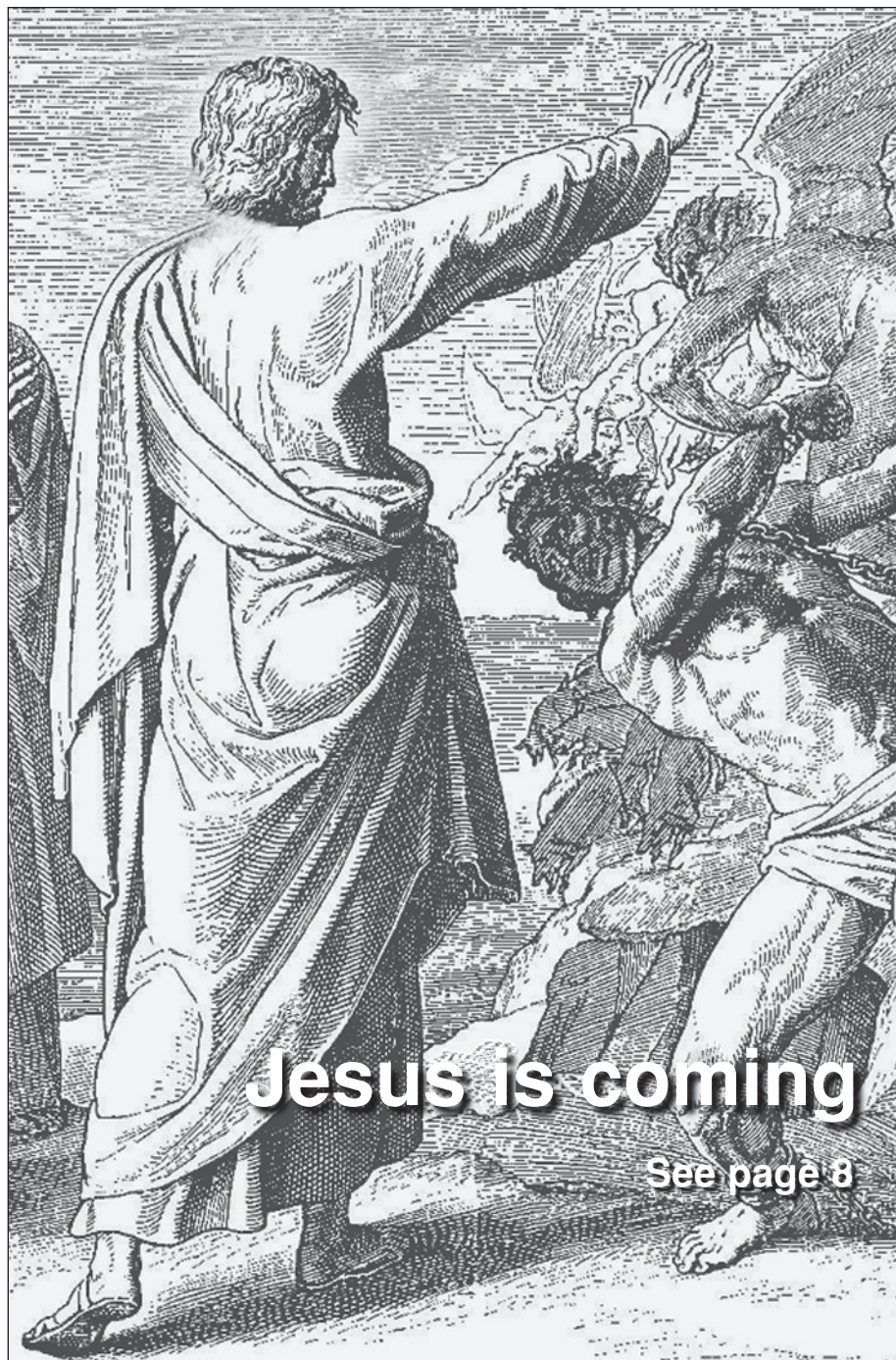
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Attention riveted

I read the April *Christian Odyssey*, and my attention was riveted on the "Radical Consequences of Justification" article and the Bible study on "Real Wealth Lasts Forever."

I practice the faith that God chooses some for a special relationship because they have accepted his love. Also, I agree Jesus paid his huge price not just for a small benefit. God made the prior objective decision to save humanity, however, eternal life must be accepted and not thrown away.

Anything else is to imply God has a Revelation 13:16 attitude, that is, causing people to accept something they don't need.

Richard Walker
Chicago, Illinois



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The Word Made Flesh

By Joseph Tkach

John does not start “the story of Jesus” in the usual way. He says nothing about the way Jesus was born. Rather, he takes us back in time to “the beginning.”

In the beginning, he says, was “the Word.” Modern readers may not know at first what this “Word” is, but it becomes clear in verse 14: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.” The Word became a human being, a Jewish man named Jesus.

When John talks about “the Word,” he is talking about a Person who existed in the beginning with God, and he was God (v. 1). He was not a created being; rather, it is through him that all created things were made (v. 3).

The question that I’d like to comment on now is, Why does John tell us this? Why do we need to know that Jesus was originally a Person who was not only with God, but he was also God?

A great idea

By using the word *Word*, John was using a term that had rich meaning to Greek and Jewish philosophers. They also believed that God had created everything through his word, or his wisdom. Since God was a rational being, he always had a word with him. The “word” was his power to think—his rationality, his creativity.

John takes this idea and gives it a radical twist: The Word be-



came flesh. Something in the realm of the perfect and the eternal became part of the imperfect and decaying world. That was a preposterous idea, people might have said. That did not fit their idea of what God was.

John may have agreed with them: This was quite unexpected. God did not act the way we thought he would. Indeed, as we read John’s Gospel we will find that Jesus frequently did the unexpected.

He was not acting the way that people expected a man of God to act—and that is part of the reason that he came, and part of the reason that John tells the story. We had wrong ideas about God, and Jesus came to set us straight.

Jesus did not just bring a message about God—he himself was the message. He showed us in the flesh what God is like.

Shortly before Jesus was killed, Philip asked him, “Lord, show us the Father” (14:8). And Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you for such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (v. 9).

If you want to know what God is like, then study Jesus. Jesus shows us the love that God has for us; he freely gave his life to save others. When the Word humbled himself to become a

flesh-and-blood human, it was a change—something God had never done before—but it was not a change in God’s nature. Rather, it was a demonstration of his unchanging nature—his unchanging faithfulness to us. It showed us the love that God has for us all the time.

The Greek philosophers imagined that God was so perfect that he would have nothing to do with messed-up human beings.

Many Jews felt the same way—they emphasized God’s holiness so much that they thought the people of God should have nothing

to do with people who weren’t careful about keeping the laws of holiness. They were right in saying that God was holy, but they had forgotten that his holiness includes love and mercy and his power includes tenderness.

Life and truth

As a disciple, John did not start off knowing that his teacher was eternally pre-existent. This awareness came to him slowly, and may be reflected in the words of the disciples. Peter said, “You are the Holy One of God” (6:69); Martha said, “You are the Christ, the Son of God” (11:27); and after the resurrection, Thomas said, “My Lord and my God!” (20:28).

John develops this theme throughout the Gospel, but he wants us as readers to know even from the beginning who Jesus is, so that we can watch the story unfold with a little more understanding. Jesus is “God the One and Only, who is **See Word made flesh, page 4**

Jesus shows us the love that God has for us; he freely gave his life to save others.

The Word became flesh. Something in the realm of the perfect and the eternal became part of the imperfect and decaying world.

Word made flesh

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at the Father's side"—and he "has made the Father known" (1:18).

This flesh-and-blood God had life, "and that life was the light of men" (v. 4). He was bringing eternal life, and his "light" reveals to us the way to eternal life. We can read the story knowing that this person is actually God in the flesh, showing us what God is like.

John the Baptist told people about Jesus, but most people could not accept what he said: "Look—the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (v. 29). But "the darkness" could not understand the light of the world. "The world did not recognize him ... did not receive him" (vs. 10-11). But for those who did believe, John says, they became children of God, born not in the ordinary

way, "but born of God" (v. 13).

"We have seen his glory," John says, and it does not consist of blazing fire and thundering voice. Rather, the glory of God that we see in Jesus is "grace and truth." In his words and in his works, Jesus shows us that truth is gracious. Some people want "truth" to be a weapon that beats other people down, but Jesus shows us that it lifts people up.

"The law was given through Moses," but the law could not give us eternal life. Here's what we really needed: "Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (v. 17). Yes, God gave the law, but the law could not reveal the true nature of God. God cannot be defined by a list of rules. He is revealed as a person who walked this earth as one of us, showed mercy to sin-

ners, and died for others.

God did not have to do this, but the fact that he did shows how much he cares about us: "the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin" (Exodus 34:6-7). This had been revealed to Moses, but it seems that the Israelites had forgotten it, so Jesus came to reveal it in the flesh.

Even today, after nearly 2,000 years of Christian teaching, many people—even many Christians—think that God is a stern Judge, but Jesus stepped in and thwarted God's plan to punish us. The truth is that the love and mercy we see in Jesus is exactly how God has always been. That's something worth thinking about. 🦋

God gave the law, but the law could not reveal the true nature of God.

Is Jesus Enough?

Michael V. Houghton Sr.

With recent events in the Middle East, the attention of many Americans has been drawn to the members of our armed forces, the men and women who have volunteered to fight to defend our nation and its interests.

We have heard stories of great heroism and of tremendous sacrifice. While seemingly 99.9 percent of our troops are upbeat and confident, the media still manage to find those few who are disgruntled and will freely express their dissatisfaction with their current situation. Of course this is their right, a right that they are fighting to defend, but I found one complaint intriguing from a Christian perspective.

One young man was quoted as saying he joined the Army only for

the benefits. He never believed that he would actually have to go to war. He took the oath to protect and serve his country, but his motivation was the GI bill as a way to pay for his college education.

A soldier surprised to find himself at war seems bizarre, and yet there he was in the desert of Iraq with a rifle in his hands, dumbfounded by his position.

He had to have suspected that he might be called upon to do what he had been trained to do, yet his motivation was strictly personal. He must have factored in this possibility, I thought, but then again he seemed

genuinely shocked to be at war.

For him the honor of serving his country was not enough. He had signed on for the benefits: money for his college education.

As I watched this young man, I wondered how many of us have signed onto Christianity for the benefits alone and gave no thought to the fact that we were dedicating ourselves to serving Jesus, the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Being a Christian does have some great perks. When we sign up, we instantly become part of a comparatively safe and supportive community. See Jesus Enough?, page 7 🌊

Being a Christian does have some great perks. When we sign up, we instantly become part of a comparatively safe and supportive community.

What Paul wished members knew about ministers

By Neil Earle

Second Corinthians is a highly personal piece of writing in which the apostle Paul strips himself bare.

Throughout this letter, Paul is on the defensive. As theologian Ralph Martin explains, Paul is here dealing with severe criticisms of himself and his ministry: “The first part of the letter reflects what must have been one of the most distressing experiences of Paul’s life. He had personally been opposed and insulted by an individual or a group in the church at Corinth, which taunted him with insincerity and duplicity ... he was accused of vacillation (1:17), pride and boasting (3:1), lack of success in preaching (4:3), physical weakness (10:10), ‘rudeness’ of speech, deficiency in rhetorical skill (11:6), being an ungifted person (4:7-10), dishonesty (12:16-19), posing as a ‘fool’ (5:13), and lack of apostolic standing (11:5).

“Above all he is held to be a deceiver (4:8) and a charlatan (10:1), a blatant denial of the power of the Christian message (13:2-9)” (Word Commentary: *Second Corinthians*, pages lxi-lxii).

Wow! That’s some ministerial evaluation!

The God of comfort

Yet perhaps because Paul is passing through the crucible with those pesky Corinthians, this letter also contains some of the richest spiritual teaching Paul ever penned. It is in this letter that we read of the God of all comfort, believers as the fragrance of Christ, the spirit of liberty, a new creation, faith—not sight, ambassadors for Christ, the ministry of reconciliation, God’s



indescribable gift, power perfected through weakness.

A powerful two-beat rhythm persists throughout as Paul contrasts vital principles—death/life, distress/consolation, present affliction/future glory, weakness/strength, sow abundantly/ reap abundantly.

In short, 2 Corinthians is what we could call today, an emotional roller-coaster. Why this emotion-etched epistle? Scholar James Dunn put it succinctly: “[Paul] experiences Christ as the Crucified as well as the Exalted; indeed it is only when he experiences Christ as crucified that it is possible for him to experience Christ as exalted, that it is possible to experience the risen life of Christ.”

In this epistle, Paul gives the New Testament’s best expose of life as a minister, a candid and personal revelation that Paul wanted members to know about.

The perils of Paul

Paul knew this: Millions want Christ’s crown, but few want his cross. It grieved Paul that his beloved Corinthians (he planted the church there, after all) couldn’t see that some were out for advantage, building themselves up at the expense of Paul’s concern for his flock (2 Corinthians 11:18-19). It is a familiar pattern. Would-be pastors crave power over people to make up for their own shortcomings. The self-anointed (who often

get their way, incidentally) want prestige, forgetting the call to duty, to faithfulness unto death. Paul was richly experienced with those who enter ministry to manipulate men and women or as mere hirelings (11:20-21).

But Paul had been through this before. The slings and arrows of criticism, blame placing, negative projection, misunderstanding and willful misinterpretation that are often the minister’s lot soon drive the ministerial wannabes away, sometimes, however, only after much damage has been done to the flock.

Formal, full-time service in ministry, Paul knew, is no place to build wounded self-esteem or release frustrated power urges. That’s why his words inspire today’s pastors. His catalogue of battle scars in 11:23-29 have their modern parallels.

G. Lloyd Rediger writes: “Abuse of pastors by congregations and the breakdown of pastors due to inadequate support are now tragic realities.

This worst-case scenario, one that is increasing in epidemic proportions, is not a misinterpretation by a few discontented clergy. Rather, it is a phenomenon that is veri-

fied by both research and experience. . . .

“Pastors have become more vulnerable, parishioners more confused and less courageous, denominational offices more political, and our whole society more numb

It is only when Paul experiences Christ as crucified that it is possible for him to experience Christ as exalted, that it is possible to experience the risen life of Christ.

to abuse and conflict. Together these factors create opportunity for abuse of spiritual leaders and even encourage its development.”

Time was in America, especially small-town America, that if a person needed a loan from a bank, the financial officers would often check with a pastor or a teacher to “verify a person’s good character.” No more.

As Rediger points out, today the expectations for pastors are far higher. “Megapastoring” is the measure of all things: “This is the expectation on the part of both the congregation and the pastor that the pastor must be a charismatic personality who can be up front at all church activities, make them successful, and continually draw new members.

“The goal, of course, is for the congregation to become a megachurch, with hundreds of enthusiastic members, dozens of thriving programs and an expanding budget that allows for regular additions to building facilities....

“The congregation and pastor who do not function like a megachurch are suspected of being in decline. The pastor, of course, is blamed and punished” (*Clergy Killers*, pages 1-23).

These realities help explain why so many pastors find great comfort in 2 Corinthians. From the opening chapter we sense it will be a barnburner. “We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed in our hearts we felt the sentence of death” (1:8-9).

It is full of candid disclosures: “We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord” (5:7). The last verses contain a heartfelt plea: “Now we pray to God that you will not do anything wrong” (13:7).

Yet the dominant note throughout is one of triumphantly holding fast to a ministerial calling in the face of great pressure and misunderstandings. Paul has confidence that the spiritually mature in Christ have already accepted the correction he doled out in 1 Corinthians and that the church there is, on the whole, on the rebound.

Paul loves these troublesome members as only a pastor could! He values their good opinion. Yet he knows that in this letter he must not be afraid to lay some things on the line. “We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us” (2 Corinthians 6:12).

He is not hesitant about being autobiographical in defending his call to ministry.

Paul knew that Christ gives ministers authority without expecting them to turn into authoritarians (10:8-11). Yet the pastoral office was given to keep order in the church.

“It must be emphasized that Paul is not moved by self-concern,” writes Philip E. Hughes. “He willingly endures for Christ’s sake any number of affronts and indignities to his own person. But when the genuineness of his apostleship is called into question that is

something he dare not endure in silence, for it is no less a challenge to the authority of Christ himself (The New International Commentary on the New Testament: *Second Corinthians*, page 477).

Hence Paul’s references to being flogged more severely, imprisoned more frequently and exposed to death more often (11:24). Such personal declarations work both ways. Even today it is hard for ministers and pastors who feel like singing the blues not to feel a little embarrassed in reading about the perils of Paul. They help give perspective to the peculiar ministerial trials of life in the goldfish bowl.

Fools for Christ?

So, what keeps ministers going? What kept Paul going? Really, it is something other-worldly, beautiful and even slightly mystical, this sense of calling that ministers have for ministry. Ask them about it sometime.

One pastor I know was told by a particularly difficult and recalcitrant parishioner: “You know, you really seem like a fool to me, hopelessly trying to persuade me to do something you know I will never do.” Yes, what ministers attempt to do often seems, by worldly measurements, foolish. But if it is in a good cause for godly ends then they find comfort in being what Paul called a “fool for Christ” (1 Corinthians 4:10).

What character trait is needed for pastors to keep coming back week after week to people who quite often are not listening to what they have to say? Or to never cease reaching out to those who tune them out and then have the pastor for lunch after the sermon is over?

Can one make sense of this indescribable, relentless sense of mission that keeps pastors riveted to their post? Like the prophet Jeremiah, their emotions do often fail them (Jeremiah 15:18). Pas-

Paul loves these troublesome members as only a pastor could! He values their good opinion. Yet he knows that in this letter he must not be afraid to lay some things on the line. “We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us.”

tors do get discouraged, do feel abused and sometimes do lash out in unfortunate anger or resentment against their persecutors and critics.

But most stay the course. Their emotions may fail them, but the faith of Christ never fails them. Notice the wisdom in this note I saw on a pastor's door: "The pulpit calls those anointed to it as the sea calls its sailors; and like the sea, it batters and bruises, and does not rest. . . . To preach, to really preach, is to die naked a little at a time and know each time you do it that you must do it again."

So, why do pastors stay in there? What keeps them going?

Two things are necessary to keep faithful ministers going, growing and abounding from year to year, and parishioners need to know this. These two essentials are a strong sense of initial calling and an unusual love and regard for members in their care. Without these it is easy to go under in the often turbulent ebb and flow of pastoral ministry. Let the ambitious beware.

Paul's sense of calling never left him. That blinding glimpse of Christ on the Damascus road is still a classic text on ministry. Most calls are not so dramatic. They are maybe more of a growing sense of conviction over time when the pastor and those in community with him slowly sense that God has indeed selected this individual for a special work (Acts 13:1-3).

But the call—however manifested—becomes a life raft that bothered and bewildered ministers cling to in years to come. That's when Christ's reminder speaks

most forcefully and hopefully: "You did not choose me but I chose you" (John 15:16).

Two essentials are a strong sense of initial calling and an unusual love and regard for members in their care. Without these it is easy to go under in the often turbulent ebb and flow of pastoral ministry.

Supernatural love

The unusual love ministers have for members—even for those who hurt them—is sensed throughout 2 Corinthians.


Even though Paul needs to reprimand this church, he still wants things to work out between him and them. "We have opened wide our hearts to you ... open wide your hearts also" (6:11-13).

He interjects: "I speak as to my children." And in a magnificent short declaration he plunges to the heart of the member-minister relationship: "For we do not preach ourselves,

but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Corinthians 4:5).

That just about says it all. Paul

is not in it for himself. He wants members to know that the most basic common ground between them is a mutual relationship with the risen Lord. Every true minister of Christ understands that even in corrective matters he must proceed in meekness, for he is often "instructing those that oppose themselves." The true pastor does this with a deep Christ-like sense that most people—even those who may hate him temporarily—are their own worst enemies (2 Timothy 2:25, King James Version).

Such attitudes reach the very heights of Christian love and empathy as well as Christian service. But Paul well knew that such depth and maturity of character and outlook are vital parts of any ministry that lasts. The calling is sacrificial, abiding. God takes the minister's life and then gives it to the people after placing within his servants a godly concern for the members (8:16). That's how ministers endure. This is why Paul could say: "Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift" (9:11). 

Jesus Enough?

Continued from page 4

community. We have some place to go and know that we belong. We can sing some good songs and enjoy most of the sermons, have coffee and cookies afterward and every once in a while have a potluck supper, which quite literally adds gravy to the deal.

And, of course, free eternal life insurance goes with membership. It is a great thing to know that at the end of our lives, Jesus will be standing there with open arms waiting to embrace us for all eternity. Membership has its privileges: food, friends, family and a

future. How great is that?

All of these things are great beyond our ability to express, but I started to wonder how many of us would have signed up if all that was promised to us was to share in the life of Jesus? Jesus told us that if we followed him, chances are we would be hated because of him (Matthew 10:22; 24:9; Mark 13:13; Luke 21:17; John 15:18).

He did not promise earthly success or great riches. When a young man volunteered to follow him, he replied, "Why, I don't even have a place to lay my head" (paraphrase of Matthew 8:20). Granted, he did say that his disciples would never hunger or thirst once they had tasted of the living water and the

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Lesson 27

Jesus is coming

Mark 5:1-18

They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an evil spirit came from the tombs to meet him. This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him any more, not even with a chain. For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.

When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. He shouted at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Swear to God that you won't torture me!" For Jesus had said to him, "Come out of this man, you evil spirit!"

Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?"

"My name is Legion," he replied, "for we are many."

And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area.

A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. The demons begged Jesus, "Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them." He gave them permission, and the evil spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.

Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man—and told about the pigs as well. Then the people

began to plead with Jesus to leave their region.

As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him.

By Mike Feazell



Some people feel sorry for the pigs in this story—a poor, innocent herd of snorting and grunting swine minding their own piggy business on the hillside, and Jesus lets a bunch of evil spirits enter them and run them off a cliff to their deaths in the sea.

I don't feel sorry for the pigs. I didn't feel sorry for the halibut I ate for dinner last night either. That halibut sacrificed its life so that I could have some protein. I don't know how many beasts, birds, fish, trees and plants have likewise died so that I, by eating them, wearing them or otherwise using them, might live. The herd of pigs that night on the shore of the Sea of Galilee died instead of the child of God whom Jesus traveled across the dark and stormy water to save (see Mark 4:35-41).

No match for Jesus

The man's demons, so powerful he describes them in terms of a Roman legion of 6,000 warriors, made the man torture himself (Mark 5:5). They caused him to be ostracized and chained (verses 3-4). They caused him unrelenting anguish and misery; but

they could not destroy him.

Evil spirits these were, hateful and cruel, bent on destruction of whatever they possessed. The instant they entered the pigs, these demons destroyed them. But



When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an evil spirit came from the tombs to meet him. This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him any more, not even with a chain.

they could not destroy the one man they possessed.

Under the old covenant, the one Hebrews 10 says was fulfilled in Christ, pigs were ritually unclean, and as such were not even to be touched, much less eaten, by children of the covenant. Jesus, in effect, “sacrificed” a whole herd of swine for the sake of this one tormented man living among the tombs. To Jesus, the deliverance and restoration of one human being is worth whatever sacrifice it takes, even Jesus’ own torture and death on a wood cross at Golgotha.


How long had this man lived in the graveyard under the unforgiving power of this legion of demons? We aren’t told. But we do know this: Jesus was coming. In Mark’s story, the only reason Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee that evening—bringing the disciples through a storm they feared would kill them all, but which Jesus calmed with a word—was to deliver that poor man from his bondage.

Jesus is coming

What are your demons? What has you in self-destructive bondage? Know this: whatever your devils may be, they do not have the power to finally destroy you. Jesus is coming, he’s coming for you, to set you free. Not even death can stop him—his or yours; he conquered death itself. He can free you from anything.

The song says, “Put your hand in the hand of the man who calmed the waters...” Maybe that’s what the Gerasene demoniac wanted to do when he ran to Jesus after seeing him from afar (Mark 5:6). But all he could do was fall on his knees and let the demons do the talking (verse 7). It didn’t matter. Jesus came to save him, regardless of the odds, regardless of the depth of the pit the man was in, regardless of the man’s inability, because of the demons, to ask Jesus to save him.

Jesus freed him and banned his demons forever by way of the pigs drowned in the sea, symbols of the uncleanness and the end of the demons, as well as of the personal sacrifice of Jesus, who took the uncleanness of the world upon himself and cleaned it—that you and I might live free in him.

It has been said that most people have a hard time relating to the story of the Gerasene demoniac, but that drug addicts relate to it easily. That makes sense. I think that anyone who takes sin seriously, like Jesus does, relates easily to this story. Like the demoniac, howling away in the dark from the tombs, even when our sinfulness darkens our hearts, somewhere deep inside we know our need, and we know Jesus is the one who has come to set us free. 

Jesus Enough?

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bread of life (John 4; 6:35), but on psychologist Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of human needs, these basic needs are on the lowest rung of the scale.

Jesus used simple analogies to describe the life of a disciple, such as put your hand to the plow and take up your cross. Discipleship requires sacrifice, and often it requires suffering.

Some of us who are pastors find ourselves in positions where our livelihood is threatened by decreasing attendance or decreases in giving. We might be asked to continue our work at half salary or possibly no salary at all.

Suddenly we find ourselves in the middle of a desert with a rifle in our hands, confused, much like the young man discussed

above, and we are forced to ask and answer this question: Is Jesus enough?

If the bottom falls out of our financial situation—is Jesus enough? Is it enough to know and serve the Lord?

Peter had to confront this question—is Jesus enough to risk everything for, with little hope of anything in return?

Paul had to confront this question—is Jesus enough to give up my success as a religious leader and my potential to one day sit with the Sanhedrin?

Each of us who seek to serve the Lord must confront this question as well—is it enough that my work pleases the Lord?

Only one of the 12 was asked by Jesus to step out of the boat. Peter alone was asked to do this, and

what a privilege it was for him. As he began to sink, I don’t believe he was thinking, “Hey, how great is this—I get to drown for the Lord.” But from the perspective of time, we can see what a privilege and even an honor our Lord gave to Peter that day.

Some of us find ourselves standing on the edge of the boat, being beckoned by our Lord to step out into the unknown and follow our Lord, and we ask ourselves, Is Jesus enough?

Can we trust him to do for us what he did for Peter? Can we believe him when he says to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added unto you? (Matthew 6:33).

See *Jesus Enough?*, page 16 

Peter had to confront this question—is Jesus enough to risk everything for, with little hope of anything in return?

Exclusive interview with

Robert Farrar Capon, author of *Genesis: the Movie*

Pastor Tim Brassell interviews Robert F. Capon, Christian author and scholar.

Part Six of a six-part interview

Chance by Design and the Ecology of Redemption

Tim Brassell: You've said that God rules by chance. Could you elaborate?

Robert Capon: To return to *Genesis: the Movie*, the world as it's presented in the mind of God in chapter one of Genesis is good. Evil doesn't show up until chapter three. Obviously, however, evil is built into the world from the beginning. When God makes the creatures of the sea, how do they live? They eat each other. When he makes the creatures of the land—same thing.

He makes the world as an ecology—it works by life and death. Death is the engine that drives life—creatures kill and eat one another to stay alive. Even plants die so that animals can live. And it has always been that way—it's the nature of creation.

Creation is an ecology of life and death, and it works! The brilliance of the ecology is that it is created purposely to operate on

sheer chance, that is, creatures eat the next edible thing that they see. Foxes eat chickens and so on. All that is done within the ecology God set in place.

One of the great insights we've had in the last century is to recognize that we are wrecking the ecology of the world by trying to control it. You might say God runs the world like an honest casino operator—he doesn't rig the wheels. He doesn't stack the deck. He doesn't interfere in the ecology of the world as he has let it unfold. Why? Because he knows the odds.

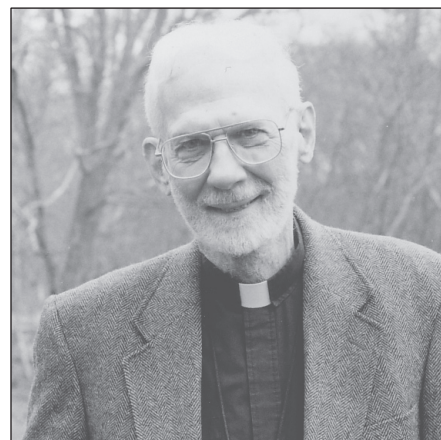
That's how insurance companies work. They don't influence people's lives to keep them alive or kill them or anything else. The insurance system works because companies know the odds. In God's case, he built in the odds from the beginning.

God made a random creation by design, and he is omniscient—he knows how his creation ecology all plays together and works itself out.

So, what I say about Genesis is that chance is not the enemy of design—chance is the design. And God, in Christ, runs the world by coming into the world and being roughed up by it—by entering the rough world—by accepting the negative odds for himself.

He took on himself the part of the creation that went bad, the evil part, and redeemed it by letting it play itself out on him and then being raised from the dead.

TB: Since 9/11, many have ques-



Robert F. Capon

tioned God's goodness in the face of so much evil in the world. Would you share a few of your insights on that topic?

RC: The theological term is theodicy. Theodicy is trying to defend or justify the ways of God to man. Forget it. It's a useless pastime.

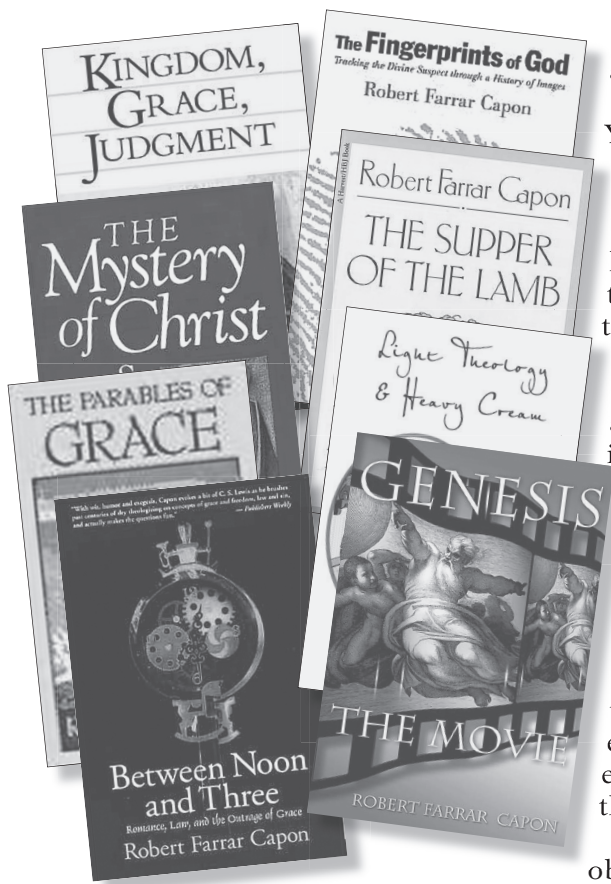
The ways of God are clear enough and they are: You can do anything that you can manage to do. It could be good. It could be bad. It could be indifferent. It could be anything. God doesn't force people to behave. God doesn't stop sinners from sinning—he doesn't stop murderers from murdering. Of course, he does make exceptions, but those are exceptions, not the rule.

The wonderful thing about the ecology of good and evil, of life and death, is that death is given free reign as much as life.

But from the beginning God knows the end, and the end is redemption. Redemption is the



Tim Brassell



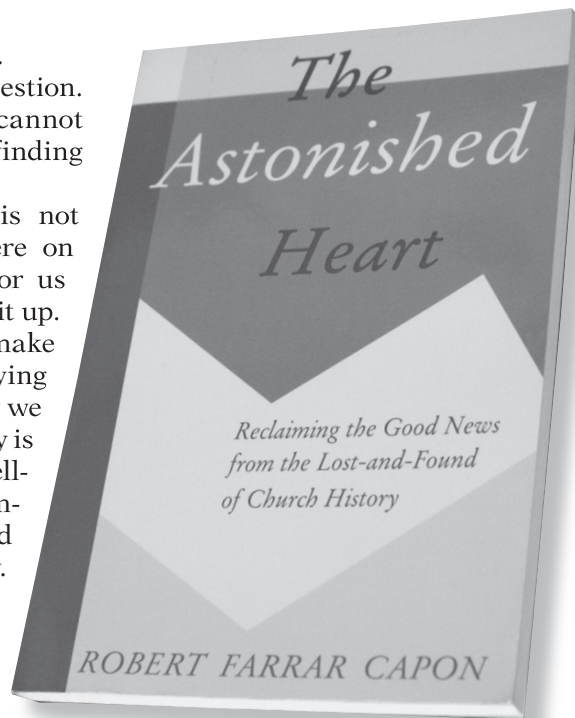
whole story from beginning to end. God took the evil on himself and redeems it—Jesus’ resurrection is the core of the whole thing—the real meaning of the whole creation. Death is swallowed up in the victory of life. It’s

all about redemption.

TB: One other question. You said that you cannot discover history by finding facts?

RC: Yes. History is not lying around out there on the ground waiting for us to discover it and pick it up. History is what we make of the facts that are lying around out there, how we interpret them. History is story told by storytellers. You can’t rummage around and find the real history. That’s the mistake of biblical literalism, and it’s also the mistake of scientific literalism, which is liberal literalism of the left—it’s the same mistake.

They think it’s something objective or fixed lying out there somewhere. It isn’t, it’s only in here—in the mind. You can have one version of history, and I can have another. And we can argue about it. That’s how we function. It’s the ecology of mixed minds, mixed motives, mixed ideas. And we work it



out and we slug it out and then we have a drink. (Laughter) 🦋

Robert Capon Books

Autographed copies of Robert Farrar Capon’s books are available from the author by clicking on the Amazon.com “used and new” button and going to seller “quietchina” for your purchase.

Son-block

By James R. Henderson

Do you get frustrated with other people?

The other day in a supermarket I lost my cool. I was looking at some fruit, and was only there a second when a woman walked in front of me and blocked my view. I responded: “Who do you think you are? I was here first.” The woman laughed nervously, blushed, and then tears came to her eyes.

I made a mistake. Every time we meet someone is an opportunity for them to meet Jesus, the Jesus who lives within us. Instead of

meeting Jesus, the woman in the supermarket met an impatient man concerned about his own desires.

Jesus did not shine in that encounter—my blocking factor was too high. Just like we use a sunscreen to block out the sun’s rays, sometimes our self gets in the way and blocks the Son of God, the Sun of Righteousness (Malachi 4:2), from shining through us—we become Son-blocks!

Instead of acknowledging the woman’s needs, I was thinking of my own. Maybe, like mine, they were selfish. Or perhaps she was in a rush, or she was thinking of

other things and was unaware that she had interrupted me. Whatever her personal situation in life was, I did not meet her there.

In Luke 9:10-11 Jesus was trying to have a private meeting with his disciples when the multitudes interrupted him. Jesus did not send them away, but “received them.”

Throughout his ministry Jesus met people at their point of need.

Jesus lives in us Christians, and can help us shift our viewpoint from a selfish to an outgoing focus—will we let him do that? Shall I—will you—block out the self and let Jesus shine through? 🦋

Bless children with Jesus' love

By Ted Johnston

In this series we are examining five principles for effective ministry to children.

In the first article in May, I summarized all five using the acronym B.R.I.N.G. to remind us that our purpose is to bring children to Jesus. Each principle adds to our effectiveness in living out this responsibility.

We turn now to examining each principle individually—starting with principle number one: Bless children with Jesus' love.

In the Gospel accounts, Jesus acknowledged the great value of children. In a culture that tended to ignore and otherwise devalue children, Jesus made it clear that he viewed children as people with great value in God's sight. Jesus reached out to children, welcoming them into his presence and blessing them (Matthew 19:14-15). On several occasions Jesus went out of his way to heal children (Luke 8:49-56). He was willing to be "bothered" in order to minister to children.

Five love languages

How can we reach out with Jesus' love to bless the children in our homes, neighborhoods, churches and communities? A key is to understand that love is like a language—it must be spoken (expressed) and understood (received). Learning how a child perceives and receives love is essential for those who seek to bless children with Jesus' love.

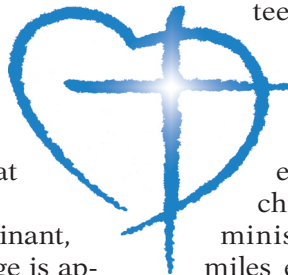
Not every child speaks the same love language. In *The Five Love Languages of Children*, Gary Chap-



man and Ross Campbell identify five love languages for children: appropriate physical touch, words of affirmation, gifts, acts of service and quality time. The book explains how an adult (such as a parent)

may liberally extend love to a child using one love language, only to find that the child does not feel loved because he or she does not "speak" that particular language.

Perhaps a child's dominant, or preferred love language is appropriate physical touch, but the parents, though liberal in gift giving, are physically distant with the child, and as a result he or she feels unloved. We have to be careful to discern how a child receives love



Jesus acknowledged the great value of children. In a culture that tended to ignore and otherwise devalue children, Jesus made it clear that he viewed children as people with great value in God's sight.

and then reach out using that love language.

One of the ways the authors give to discern a child's dominant love language is to observe how the child expresses love to others.

When working with a group of

children, we will need to speak love in multiple love languages. In that regard, I'm grateful for the work of Heart of the Cross Church in Lexington, Ohio. Though small, this vibrant Worldwide Church of God congregation emphasizes reaching out to children and teens with Christ's love.

They share that love with the young using multiple love languages.

For example, they give extended, quality time to children through their van ministry—driving multiple miles every Sunday to pick up children, bring them to church and then return them home. The commute affords time to build bonds of Christian love as the adults give quality attention to the children and share words of affirmation that say "we care about you—you are accepted and loved by us."

Sometimes on the drive home, they buy the children a snack (the love language of gift giving), and at times they arrange service projects to help improve a child's home environment (the love language of acts of service).

They also extend careful and appropriate physical affection (the language of physical touch), such as a pat on the back or shoulder or an appropriate, non-sexual hug. In various ways, using multiple love languages, each child can receive the blessing of Christ's love extended from a safe, caring and supportive adult.

Such Christian love has to be given unconditionally. If the only time children receive attention and affirmation is when they have

See Bless Children, page 13

The Story of Christianity— Justo Gonzalez

By Terry Akers

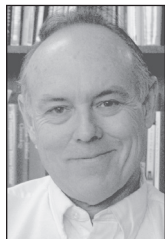
Over the past two decades, Justo Gonzalez's two-volume *The Story of Christianity* has been a standard introduction to Christian history in seminaries and universities throughout the world.

Volume I covers the lives of key figures and theological developments from the apostolic church to the dawn of the Reformation. The story continues in Volume II from the Reformation to our present day.

Gonzalez is also the author of the three-volume *History of Christian Thought* and numerous other major works. He was the youngest person to be awarded a Ph.D. in historical theology at Yale and has served as professor of church history at Emory University and United Seminary in Cuba. He is currently on the faculty at Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta.

The back cover notes: "*The Story of Christianity* ... brings alive the people, dramatic events and ideas that shaped the church's life and thought. Justo Gonzalez shows how various social, political and economic movements affected Christianity's internal growth, tracing out core theological issues and developments as reflected in the lives and struggles of leading thinkers within the various traditions of the church....

"Historian Justo Gonzalez brings to life the people, dramatic events and shaping ideas of Protestantism, Catholicism and [Eastern] Orthodoxy, keynoting crucial theological developments. In par-



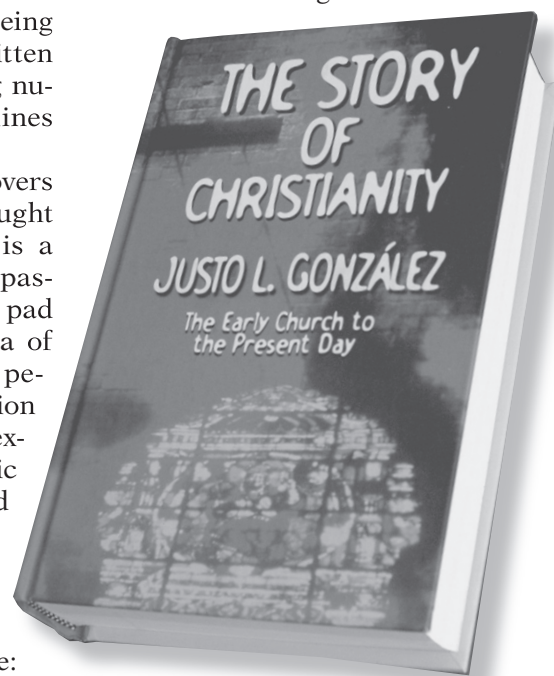
ticular, the author notes recurring themes of unrest, rebellion and reformation."

Justo Gonzalez's book is one of the best surveys of church history available. It is scholarly without being academic, clearly written and easy to follow, containing numerous maps, charts, timelines and illustrations.

Gonzalez, a Protestant, covers the spectrum of Christian thought and history in his book. It is a good resource for lay people, pastors or students and a launch pad for deeper study in one's area of interest, such as the Patristic period, Middle Ages, Reformation or modern era. The author explains how the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches and the various Protestant denominations originated and evolved.

Christianity Today has an informative article on its web site: www.christianitytoday.com/history/newsletter/2003/mar28.html, titled, "Top Ten Reasons to Read Christian History." It shows how deeply Christian history is integrated into society, politics and culture and how essential it is to understand-

ing our modern world. The article also points out how an appreciation of Christian history helps root out prejudice and makes us less critical of others and more aware of our own shortcomings



and limited perspectives.

Christian Book Distributors offers this classic Christian resource in a new single volume hardcover for \$12.99 on their web site: www.christianbook.com. 🦋

Bless children

Continued from page 12

done something to please us, they quickly learn that our love is conditional, based solely on their performance. In *The Gift of the Blessing*, Gary Smalley and John Trent point out that affirmations should

be given to a child based on who the child is (a valuable and worthwhile person whom Jesus loves) rather than on what they have or have not done. It is particularly important not to fail to offer this gift of blessing when a child's performance is disappointing. In this way we model God's unconditional grace and love that is in Christ. 🦋

The Purpose of Healings

a study of Matthew 9

By Michael Morrison



Matthew 9, like most other chapters in Matthew, tells of several events in the life of Christ. But these are not random reports—Matthew sometimes puts stories next to each other because they shed light on each other. They give physical examples of spiritual truths. In chapter 9, Matthew tells several stories that are also found in Mark and Luke—but Matthew’s version is much shorter, more to the point.

Authority to forgive

When Jesus returned to Capernaum, **“some men brought to him a paralyzed man, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the man, ‘Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven’ ”** (v. 2, TNIV throughout). In faith, they brought this man to Jesus to be healed, and instead of healing him, Jesus simply said that his sins were forgiven. The man’s most serious problem was not his paralysis—it was his sins—and Jesus took care of that first.

But some of the teachers of the law were thinking, **“This fellow is blaspheming!”** (v. 3). Only God can forgive sin, they thought, so Jesus is claiming too much for himself.

Jesus knew what they were thinking, scolded them for their evil thoughts, and challenged them: **“Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’? But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. So he said to the paralyzed man, ‘Get up, take your mat and go home.’ Then the man got up and went home”** (vv. 5-7).

It is easy to talk about divine forgiveness, but it is hard to prove that it has really happened. So Jesus performed a miracle of healing in order to show that he had authority to forgive sins. His mission on earth was not to heal everyone’s physical diseases, and he didn’t even heal everyone in Judea. Rather, his mission was to announce forgiveness—and that he was the source of forgiveness. This miracle was designed not to announce physical healings, but to announce something more important: spiritual healing.

“When the crowd saw this ... they praised God” (v. 8)—but not everyone was happy.

Eating with sinners

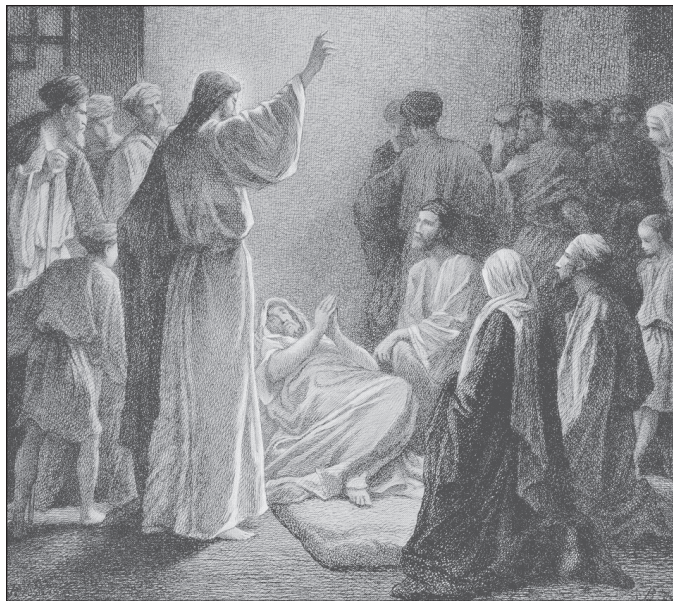
After this incident, Jesus **“saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector’s booth. ‘Follow me,’ he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him”** (v. 9). The fact that Matthew had a “booth” suggests that he collected taxes from people transporting goods through the area—perhaps even from fishermen taking their catch into town to sell.

He was a customs agent, a toll-road cashier, and a Roman-appointed highway robber. But he left his lucrative job to follow Jesus, and the first thing he did was invite Jesus to a banquet with his friends.

“While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew’s house, many tax collectors and ‘sinners’ came and ate with him and his disciples” (v. 10). It would be like a pastor going to a party at a Mafia mansion.

The Pharisees noticed the kind of company that

Jesus kept, but they did not challenge him directly. Instead, they asked his disciples, **“Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and ‘sinners’?”**



When Jesus returned to Capernaum, “some men brought to him a paralyzed man, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the man, ‘Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven’” (Matthew 9: 2).

(v. 11). The disciples may have been a little puzzled themselves, and eventually Jesus gave the answer: **“It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice’ [Hosea 6:6]. For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners”** (v. 12). He had authority to forgive.

Just as a doctor associates with the sick, Jesus associated with sinners because those are the sort of people he came to help. (Everyone is a sinner, of course, but that isn’t the point that Jesus is making here.) He called people to be holy, but he didn’t require them to be perfect before he called them.

Just as we need mercy more than judgment, God wants us to extend mercy more than judgment. If we do everything that God tells us to do (i.e., sacrifice) but fail to have mercy for others, we have failed.

The new and the old

The Pharisees were not the only ones who were puzzled by the ministry of Jesus. The disciples of John the Baptist asked this question: **“How is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?”** (v. 14). They fasted because they were sorry that the nation had strayed so far from God.

Jesus replied: **“How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast”** (v. 15). There is no need to mourn while I am here, he said—but he hinted that he would eventually be “taken”—removed by force—and then his disciples would mourn and fast.

Jesus then gave a puzzling proverb: **“No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved”** (vv. 16-17).

Jesus did not come to “patch” the Pharisee approach to pleasing God. He was not trying to add mercy to the sacrifices that the Pharisees taught, nor was he trying to pour new ideas into an old framework. Rather, he was starting all over, bringing something new. We call it the new covenant.

Raising the dead, healing the unclean

Matthew then connects another story to this one by telling us: **“While he was saying this, a synagogue leader came and knelt before him and said, ‘My daughter has just died. But come and put your hand on her, and she will live’ ”** (v. 18). Here is an unusual religious leader—one who had faith in Jesus. Jesus went and raised the girl from the dead (v. 25), but while he was on the way, someone else came to him for healing:

“Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak. She said to herself, ‘If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed.’ Jesus turned and saw her. ‘Take heart, daughter,’ he said, ‘your faith has healed you.’ And the woman was healed from that moment” (vv. 20-22).

The woman was unclean because of the bleeding. The Law of Moses said that people should not touch her. Jesus had a new approach. Instead of avoiding her, he healed her when she touched him. Matthew highlights the reason: faith.

Faith is what prompted men to bring a paralyzed friend. Faith is what motivated Matthew to leave his job. Faith brought a religious leader to seek life for a dead daughter, a woman to seek healing for continual bleeding, and blind

men to seek for sight (v. 29). All sorts of ailments, but one source of healing: Jesus.

The spiritual significance is clear: Jesus forgives sin, gives new life and new direction in life. He makes us clean and helps us see. This new wine is not poured into the old framework of Moses—it creates its own framework. The ministry of Jesus is built around the mission of mercy. 🦋

Faith is what prompted men to bring a paralyzed friend. Faith is what motivated Matthew to leave his job. Faith brought a religious leader to seek life for a dead daughter, a woman to seek healing for continual bleeding, and blind men to seek for sight.

Questions for discussion


- If I were paralyzed, would I rather hear a word of forgiveness, or a command to rise? (vv. 2, 6)
- Under what circumstances would a pastor go to a party with the Mafia? (v. 10)
- Are there ways in which I try to use the gospel to patch an old garment? (v. 16)
- Is there anything unclean in my life, any longstanding sin, for which I need to go to Jesus for healing? (v. 20)
- Does the example of Jesus encourage me to change the way that I look at other people?

Jesus Enough?

Continued from page 9

We cannot make things happen on our own. Even with the Lord's help Peter could take only a step or two before he began to sink.

I have come to see that success or failure is not the issue here—rather, it is answering the question of Jesus' ultimate value in my life.

Is Jesus enough? Absolutely! Even if there were no eternal life in the presence of the Lord; if there were no assurance of salvation; knowing Jesus and the privilege of being asked to follow him, right now, wherever he leads, is more than enough. So here we stand with water up to our knees saying with Peter: "Lord, Save me!" (Matthew 14:30). 

Lectionary Readings for June 2005

June 5

Genesis 12:1-9
Psalm 50:7-15
Matthew 9:9-26
Romans 4:13-25

June 12

Genesis 18:1-15
Psalm 100
Matthew 9:35-10:8
Romans 5:1-8

June 19

Genesis 21:8-21
Psalm 69:7-18
Matthew 10:24-39
Romans 6:1-11

June 26

Genesis 22:1-14
Psalm 89:1-18
Matthew 10:40-42
Romans 6:12-23

July 3

Genesis 24:34-67
Psalm 145:8-14
Matthew 11:16-30
Romans 7:15-25

Church History Corner

The Birth of the Church


After his resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples and instructed them for 40 days, after which he ascended to heaven. While with them, he said: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:4-5). That first baptism of the Spirit would be the birthday of the church.

Jesus' words were fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. The disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4), and the apostle Peter preached his first sermon, urging the crowds to repent, to believe in Jesus Christ as their Messiah and to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (verse 38). That very day of Pentecost some 3,000 people were baptized and became the people of God (verse 41). The church had been born.

The day called Pentecost is named after the Greek word *pentekostos*, which means 50th. It is the Mosaic festival observed by Jews, Shavuoth, sometimes called in the Old Testament the Feast of Weeks (Exodus 34:22; Leviticus 23:15; Numbers 28:26; Deuteronomy 16:9-12). Other names for the day are the Feast of the Harvest and Day of First Fruits (Exodus 23:16; Numbers 28:26). Pentecost was to be observed in ancient Israel on the 50th day after the priest waved a selected sheaf of the first grain that had been harvested in the spring (Leviticus 23:15-21). That meant that seven weeks elapsed between the day of the wave sheaf offering and the beginning of Pentecost, thus the name of the festival—the Feast of Weeks.

This festival had come to signify for Jews the commemoration of the giving of the Law of Moses (the Torah) at Mount Sinai 50 days after the Exodus Passover (Exodus 20–24).

Perhaps the Holy Spirit first came specifically on the Jewish day of Shavuoth, or Pentecost, to signal that God had now moved to write the Law not on tables of stone, but in the hearts of his people through the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3). The indwelling Spirit, the Comforter or Advocate Jesus had sent, was replacing the external "schoolmaster" Law of Moses that had supervised ancient Israel's worship under the old covenant (Galatians 3:23-25).

"And I, if I am lifted up," Jesus said, "I will draw all men to myself" (John 12:32). God had moved once and for all through his Son to rescue humanity from sin and death. The coming of the Spirit into human hearts and minds on that Day of Pentecost in the early 30s was God's sign that in Christ he was creating a new people—a new Israel—an Israel of the Spirit (Galatians 6:16) that included Jews and Gentiles alike. 

Pentecost or Whitsunday

Many Christians celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit in worship activities on Pentecost, or as it is sometimes called, Whitsunday. This name is said to arise from the traditional ancient practice of newly baptized individuals wearing white robes during this time. In the Christian liturgical year, Pentecost is the seventh Sunday after Easter and closes the Easter season. This year the Christian Pentecost or Whitsunday falls on May 15 and next year it is on June 4.