



9

For thirty pieces of silver

The Lord of all was sold for the price of a dead slave.



14

Grace: a license to sin?

Those who are most eager to spread the good news are often the best at burying it again.

OCHRISTIANdysssey

April/May 2009

Exploring Life and Faith



"We say goodbye..."

...but then what happens when we die?

5

Letters to the Editor

Thank you for your focus this past month on the creation account and evolution. I'd been listening to National Public Radio cover Darwin's 200th birthday celebration and really appreciate how current we are with the subject. You have great material in print as well as on the website!

SS, email

Thank you for your article "Creation and Evolution?" in the February/March 2009 edition of *Christian Odyssey*; it was thought provoking. I too believe that creation and evolution coexist to a degree, but I didn't realize that someone had put a name to it (Theistic Evolution).

After reading your article I wonder if you have allowed for the possibility that God created things in various stages of maturity. I think we all believe that Adam was created

as a man—not as a baby or a child. Couldn't God have orchestrated the creation of each piece of the universe to whatever stage of maturity he wanted? And wouldn't allowing for this possibility change how science views some of its "evidence"? I am ordering a couple of the books on your reading list, and am excited to read them.

MR, email

The Bible is a book of revelation into the supernatural realm of existence, thought and action, subject to the sovereignty of its author. Christianity is essentially a journey of discovery into the divine courtship of God and the children created in his image. Take out the supernatural and we're bound to the rational world views featured in the article.

GO, Australia

As we expected, we received many letters and emails about the material on creation and evolution in the last issue. Our position is as we explained at the end of the main article: we believe that when the Bible and scientific discovery appear to conflict, that one or the other has been misunderstood. Therefore, we do not deny the evidence from science that indicates a long history of life on this planet. We believe that only God can create life, and that the Creator has not revealed exactly how he has done it. —Editor

Letters for this section should be addressed to "Letters to the Editor." Send your letters to Worldwide Church of God, PO Box 5005, Glendora, CA 91740-0730, or by e-mail to john.halford@wcg.org.

The editor reserves the right to use letters so addressed in whole or in part, and to include your name and edit the letter for clarity and space. We welcome your comments.

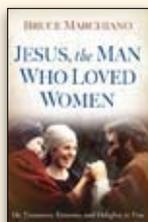
I've Been Reading...

Jesus, the Man Who Loved Women

by Bruce Marchiano

Reviewed by Ruth Miller

"This book," Marchiano explains, "is written for a singular purpose: that you might know Jesus a little better, and that you might draw closer to him as a woman and understand his specific heart for you" (page 152).



Though written especially for women, any reader will find the book fascinating as it challenges a host of popular misconceptions about what Jesus really came to do.

Marchiano draws heavily on his personal spiritual journey as he portrays Jesus as a loving, compassionate, tender and merciful Savior. In his experience he came to the conclusion that he knew a lot *about* Jesus, but simply did not know

Jesus himself as a man who epitomized love.

The book explores the lives and experiences of eleven women who encountered Jesus. Although their stories go back 2,000 years, Marchiano believes that women today can relate to the experiences, both good and bad, that these women shared. Jesus reached out to all of them with unconditional love, acceptance and admiration.

One of the most interesting aspects of the book is the compilation of scriptures chosen to present each encounter Jesus had with these particular women. He draws from both the Old and New Testaments, showing how Jesus fulfilled prophecies as he lived out his earthly ministry.

Marchiano believes that the one special quality of character that sets an individual apart is a desire to seek after God. The women pre-

sented in the book were all seekers of God. The book attempts to help women see Jesus as a *real* man, and to experience his amazing love. So often we tend to think of Jesus in "religious" terms, rather than seeing him as a human who experienced everything that we experience. It's somehow easier to understand the "fully God" part of Jesus than to grasp the "fully human" Jesus who lived and breathed and shed tears—just as we do. This book gives the reader an imaginative and thought-provoking look at Jesus the man.

One of the women whose story is graphically portrayed is Mary Magdalene, whose life has intrigued writers and researchers for centuries. Marchiano's fresh analysis of her struggles is certainly worth the read.

Marchiano wants the reader to understand that the pain and suffering we humans experience is not caused by God, but rather is caused by the broken world in which we live. God, in his redemptive love, works through the brokenness to bring healing and hope. In the epilogue, Marchiano quotes his retired pastor, Jack Hayford: "We live in a broken world full of broken people who cut each other with the jagged edges of their broken choices and ways."

Marchiano's goal is to give readers a heightened sense of the powerful emotions Jesus displayed and the overwhelming love he has for his creation, and in this he has brilliantly succeeded.

Bruce Marchiano, *Jesus, the Man Who Loved Women: He Treasures, Esteems, and Delights in You*. Howard Books, 2008. Paperback, \$14.99.

Circulation 19,000

Christian Odyssey (ISSN 1937-500X) is published five times per year by the **Worldwide Church of God**, PO Box 5005, Glendora, CA, 91740; PO Box 202, Burleigh Heads, Qld. 4220, Australia. ABN 53 096 517 190. Copyright © 2009 Worldwide Church of God. All rights reserved. *Christian Odyssey* is also available on the Internet at www.christianodyssey.org. For subscriber services in the U.S., phone 1-800-423-4444. In Australia, 7 5553 6000.

Executive Editor

Mike Feazell

Editor

John Halford

Managing Editor

Michael Morrison

Senior Editor

Paul Kroll

Circulation

Celestine Olive, Scott Wertz

Publisher

Worldwide Church of God

President: Joseph Tkach

Notice: *Christian Odyssey* cannot be responsible for the return of unsolicited articles and photographs. Subscriptions are sent automatically to contributing members of the Worldwide Church of God.

Postmaster: Please send address changes and Form 3579 to Worldwide Church of God, PO Box 5005, Glendora, CA, 91740-0730.

Unless noted otherwise, scriptures are quoted from the Holy Bible, New International Version. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers.

Contributions

Christian Odyssey gratefully accepts contributions to help meet publication costs. If you would like to help us bring the good news of the gospel of grace to others, send your contribution to Worldwide Church of God, PO Box 5005, Glendora, CA, 91740. In Australia, send it to Worldwide Church of God, PO Box 202, Burleigh Heads Qld 4220.

CHRISTIAN Odyssey

5 We say goodbye ...

... but then what happens when we die?

9 Sold for thirty pieces of silver

The Lord of all was sold for the price of a dead slave.

10 Between death and resurrection

We believe we will die and then be resurrected to eternal life. When does this happen?

12 The gentle giant

On screen he often plays a monster. But off stage, Richard Kiel is surprisingly different.

14 Grace: a license to sin?

Those who are most eager to spread the good news are often the best at burying it again.

16 From the cornfields to the city

How a small church reinvented itself.

18 Her beauty and her terror

The terror of crisis can reveal beauty in the human spirit.

Feature Articles

2 Letters to the Editor

2 I've Been Reading...

4 Editorial

8 In Other Words

15 Thinking Out Loud

20 Home Base

21 Speaking of Life

22 Bible Study

23 The Greeks Had a Word for it

24 Hmm...



Would you have chosen Barabbas?

By John Halford

Pontius Pilate knew he had no real reason to have Jesus killed. But the mob outside, urged on by their religious leaders, were baying for his blood. The Roman governor thought he saw a way out.

It was his custom at that time of year to release a prisoner as a goodwill gesture. He had planned to offer Barabbas, a robber and rabble-rouser. But now he could offer Jesus instead. Just a few days before, Jesus had been escorted into the city by an adoring crowd. Surely some of them were in that mob outside. Surely they would ask for him to be set free.

But they didn't. Urged on by Jesus' enemies, the mob called for Barabbas.

"What do I do with Jesus then?" asked the governor.

"Crucify him!" yelled the mob.

"But why? What has he done?" protested Pilate. But the mob was beyond reason.

"Crucify him! CRUCIFY HIM!"

So Jesus was led away to be flogged and crucified.

What would you have done if you had been in that crowd? Would you have joined in the clamor for Jesus to be killed?

"Certainly not!" you say?

Let's be honest, what would we have done if we were in that crowd on the night Jesus was arrested?

Don't be so sure.

The people who chose Barabbas over Jesus lived in an angry, confused, cruel and frustrated world. They had learned to survive in it, going with the flow without fully endorsing its worst aspects. Most of them would probably not have described themselves as "good people," but surely they were good enough.

Jesus was a likeable fellow. He was kind, fun to be around and generous. He exposed hypocritical public figures. He did fascinating miracles and gave great sermons. No wonder people liked to follow him around. You never knew what was going to happen next, but you knew it would be exciting.

Jesus said he represented a kingdom "not of this world," where love, forgiveness and peace are the way of life. He said the future belonged to the poor, the powerless and the disenfranchised. But the future is a

long way off, and right now, the poor were still poor and powerless and disenfranchised.

He spoke often of repentance and forgiveness—which was fine, but divine forgiveness didn't pay the tax man and didn't keep hypocritical public figures from taking your property and killing your children.

And Jesus had a disconcerting way of including "good-enough" people among the sinners. He seemed to expect them to make changes in how they lived, too. "Why do you call me Lord, and don't do what I tell you?" he'd ask.

Jesus threatened the status quo at every level. He still does, and we especially don't like that if we are comfortable. When we are confronted with the reality of Jesus, many of us good-enough people would prefer to do like Pilate, and wash our hands of him. We have nothing against him personally, but we don't like to be faced with the truth about our own greed, selfishness, double standards and hypocrisy. Save sinners by all means, but not in my back yard!

So Jesus was brutally put to death with the cries of ordinary people ringing in his ears. Three days later, he was resurrected. It was not just the triumph of one man over his own death. It is God's triumph over all sin and death—once and for all. Christians understand this, and we love, honor, praise and worship the one whose sacrifice has opened the way to our eternal life.

At least, we like to think we do. But let's be honest with ourselves. What would we have done if we had been in that crowd on the night Jesus was arrested?

We may not have liked Barabbas, but we understood him. He was of our world. We would not have wanted him as a next-door neighbour, but providing he posed no threat to us personally, we could let him live.

But that other fellow? He offered us promises we could not see, and he confronted us where it hurt most, invading our innermost being, challenging us to share, to serve, to be humble, to be honest, to put God first, to love others as much as we love ourselves and to forgive those who wrong us.

That is all very well in theory, and makes for wonderful prayers and praise songs. But in reality, that is not the way we do things down here. Better to play it safe with the devil you do know.

Are you sure you would not have chosen Barabbas? **eo**





“We say goodbye...” ...but then what happens when we die?

By John Halford

A much-loved relative had died “full of years,” as the King James Bible rather quaintly puts it. Family and friends gathered in the funeral home to say goodbye.

Open-casket funerals are the tradition in our area. So we sat sadly before the mortal remains of our loved one. A solemn recording of a well-known hymn provided an appropriate background for the snuffles and choked back tears of the mourners.

“That was her favorite hymn,” said someone. “She would have liked that.” And that is when the words of an old Beatles song suddenly popped into my head.

“You say goodbye, but I say hello.

Hello, hello.

I don’t know why you say goodbye, I say hello.”

I had to suppress a chuckle. Funerals are serious occasions, and certainly a time to keep one’s sense of humor in check. A Beatles song would not have gone down well. But, I asked myself, could those words actually reflect what was happening?

God did, of course, did know why we were saying goodbye. Death seems so final. The skillfully made

up mortal remains of our loved one was not actually her. She had gone. Death is a frontier, and it is one we rightly fear to even approach, let alone cross. It is, as Paul wrote, an enemy, and we hold it at bay as long as possible. But in the end it conquers us all.

But then what? Most people have some kind of belief that death is not the end. The people who joined together to say “goodbye” came from many religious persuasions, and it was obvious, talking with them

It is important to be specific and dogmatic where God is specific and dogmatic. But if he is not, we need to approach the subject with caution and humility.

afterwards, that they had different ideas about what happened to their departed loved one.

Some were convinced she was in heaven with Jesus. Others believed she was asleep, awaiting the

resurrection. Maybe some believed she was in Purgatory (but surely not for long, as she was a devout and sincere Christian.) And what is interesting is that all of us get our ideas about life after death from the Bible, or at least we think we do.

So who is right? What, precisely, has God told us happens to us when we die?

The answer is not what you might expect. You see, God has not told us *precisely* what happens immediately after we die. He has told us enough for us not to worry about it. He tells us that through Jesus, we have victory over death. He assures us that he is anxious for us to join him to experience life in a way that we cannot begin to imagine, and his promise is that it will last forever. But beyond that, the Bible is frustratingly

No longer bound by the limitations of time and space, Jesus could move back and forth from the dimensions we experience to those that are at the moment beyond our reach.

vague about the details. Especially the details of what happens immediately after we die.

Many ideas

“Wait a minute! Doesn’t the Bible say in...?” I can hear you protesting, as you reach for a familiar scripture to reinforce your own belief. Yes, it does. But in other places the Bible tells us something that seems to contradict that, or at least modify it. It is important to be specific and dogmatic where God is specific and dogmatic. But if he is not—and on this topic he is not—we need to approach the subject with caution and humility.

You may be surprised to know that the Bible has very little to say *specifically* about what happens immediately after we die. (Note I keep saying “immediately”—that’s important.) By emphasizing some texts over others you can build a case for any of several points of views. But the result can be a theological house of cards.

Some scriptures suggest that the dead are safely “asleep,” and will know nothing until the moment of resurrection when Jesus returns. But others imply that they are in some way conscious, and experience emotions. Paul had no fear of death. He had, at some

time in his eventful life, been given a “visitor’s pass” to heaven, and this had transformed his worldview. Life “here below” was difficult, and he was eager to begin the next step.

“As long as I’m alive in this body, there is good work for me to do,” he wrote to the Philippians. “If I had to choose right now, I hardly know which I’d choose. Hard choice! The desire to break camp here and be with Christ is powerful. Some days I can think of nothing better” (Philippians 1:22-23, *Message Bible*).

But what did he mean by “be with Christ”? He does not elaborate.

Another Bible writer with a day pass to heaven was John, the author of Revelation. He tells us how “I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, ‘How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?’ Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed” (Revelation 6:9-11).

Leaving aside the question of how literally he saw these things, the point is that he does not describe the dead as being asleep and unconscious. He would hardly invent an analogy that he knew to be heretical. Puzzling, isn’t it?

If anyone should have known, it was Jesus. Just before he died, he asked the Father to “receive my spirit.” And shortly before that, he made a promise to the repentant thief suffering crucifixion beside him. He was the first person in history to look on the dying Savior and ask for help. That man’s belief was that when they die, good people go to “paradise.” But he had not been a good man. He realized that Jesus had, so he begged him to remember him in whatever came next.

Jesus reassured him: “Today you will be with me in paradise.”

What did he mean by that? In the English language you can juggle with the punctuation, and manipulate it to support several ideas. But the original language in which Jesus spoke these words, and those into which they were translated, had no such distinctions. Enigmatic or not, it is best to take it at face value.

Dead and gone

The Bible does not really answer the question of what happens to us immediately after we die.

We can say with confidence that from our point of view, the dead are “departed.” One phase of life is, for better or worse, definitely over. The book of

Ecclesiastes reminds us to make the most of this life because, “in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom” (Ecclesiastes 9:10). The point the writer is making is that your physical death is a cutoff point. One phase of your existence is definitely over. Wherever, whatever happens next is different. You don’t just pick up where you left off.

So pagans get it totally wrong when they bury food, money, bows and arrows, pots and pans, etc., with their dead. But Christians also get it wrong if they reassure themselves that the righteous dead go to heaven, and the rest to hell. The Bible does not teach it precisely that way.

In fact, the Bible does not dwell on the details of what happens *in the short term* to the departed. It is as if God is saying, “Don’t worry about it. Leave it to me. I have things under control. Death is an enemy, but it is the last one you will ever face.” Rather, the emphasis of Scripture about what happens when we die is on something far more exciting—the resurrection of the body to what theologian N. T. Wright has called “the life after life after death,” in a new heavens and a new earth (see article on page 10).

Jesus first

When Jesus died on the cross, the Father “received his spirit,” along with, a little later, that of the repentant thief. “Whatever happens next” happened to them, and it still is happening for the thief. But after three days, Jesus was resurrected.

He was resurrected with a body. A real, recognizable body, with genuine body parts—not a wispy, ethereal manifestation that could look like a body when he needed to make himself visible. This spiritual body was a new life form—a permanent, everlasting version of what he had before—a *human being made eternal*. No longer bound by the limitations of time and space, Jesus could move back and forth from the dimensions we experience to those that are at the moment beyond our reach, although not necessarily beyond our imagination.

With the astounding evidence we are uncovering about the nature of reality, we are perhaps better equipped to contemplate this idea than ever before. We know there are dimensions we cannot experience, sights we can’t see, and “dark matter” that lies beyond the reach of our senses and the instruments we have developed to enhance them. Theoretical physicists play with notions that would, even a generation ago, have seemed like science fiction. The more we probe, the stranger and yet more wonderful it all seems. Physicist Freeman Dyson once observed, “The Universe is not only stranger than we imagine. It is

stranger than we can imagine.”

In an age where parallel universes, time travel and string theory are taken seriously, it no longer seems preposterous to suggest that this earth is not all there is, and that this earth is not yet all it will be. Or that there is a new creation within this one, waiting to be born. Just trying to put these ideas into words that make sense brings us, as theologian and scientist John Polkinghorne put it, to the “frontiers of language.” So we can’t blame people from other times for not having words to express such things, although Paul came close in his epistle to the Romans:

“The created world itself can hardly wait for what’s coming next. Everything in creation is being more or less held back. God reins it in until both creation and all the creatures are ready and can be released at the same moment into the glorious times ahead. Meanwhile, the joyful anticipation deepens.

“All around us we observe a pregnant creation. The difficult times of pain throughout the world are simply

We need to revamp our ideas of “eternal rest.” There is much more to eternal life than just living forever. It will be filled with activity, experiences, projects and much more.

birth pangs. But it’s not only around us; it’s within us. The Spirit of God is arousing us within. We’re also feeling the birth pangs. These sterile and barren bodies of ours are yearning for full deliverance” (Romans 8:19–23, *Message Bible*).

The Bible tells us, in no uncertain terms, that what happened to Jesus will also happen to us. “Now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2).

This is what the Bible focuses on when it tells us of life after death.

A new heaven and a new earth

There is much more to eternal life than just living forever. Eternity will not be spent in a sort of nebulous nether world, so utterly alien to everything we have experienced and everything we enjoy. Surely, no one really looks forward to an “eternal rest” of sitting on a cloud playing a harp, do they? About five minutes of that would be more than enough for most of us.

Fortunately, that is one of our ideas, not God's. He offers us a destiny with a new heavens *and* a new earth, with animals, trees, friends, love and fun. We need to re-vamp our ideas of "eternal rest." It will certainly be a rest from anxiety, feelings of guilt and the limitations of our frail bodies. But it will be filled with activity, experiences, projects—all you could possibly want in this life—and much, much, more.

"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him," wrote Paul to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 2:9). He added, "but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit" (v. 10).

At least, he gives us some tantalizing glimpses. That new world will not happen in its fullness until Jesus returns, and we don't know when that will be. But we can get foretastes of it when we experience the really wonderful things about being alive now.

Human love, hard-won accomplishment, deep friendships and acts of genuine unselfishness—those moments when we think, "I wish life was always like this" give us "flash forwards" to another kind of existence. It is the way we were meant to live, the way the world could be—and *will be* one day. They encourage us to join Jesus Christ in working for it with, as Paul said, "joyful anticipation."

So, could it be that the joyful anticipation continues in some way immediately after our physical death? Why not? Although we should not be dogmatic, there is enough in the Scriptures to show this is a strong possibility.

In the parking lot

Here is an analogy that might help. If you have ever visited one of the great theme parks on a holiday weekend, you'll know that the journey to get there is the worst part—crowded freeways, hot car, fraying tempers. But finally, you get to the parking lot.

The parking lot is still not the theme park, but you do feel you have arrived. There is upbeat music coming from speakers, and helpful attendants to guide you to a parking space and the transportation to the main gate. In the mid-distance you can see the tops of some of the rides, and hear the sounds of people enjoying themselves. It is a foretaste of what you too will soon be experiencing.

You have not yet arrived at the final destination, but you are no longer outside. The hardest part of the journey is over. Perhaps you are eager to get started, and your children are tugging at you, asking, like those souls under the altar John saw in Revelation, "Can we go in now?" And the answer is "All in God's good time."

In God's good time, the new heavens and the new earth will be revealed. There may be some surprises, but surely no disappointments for those who have eagerly awaited the fulfillment of our destiny.

This is what was going through my mind as the funeral service progressed. We were saying goodbye to a loved one. But could it be that somewhere—in a place beyond our reach and experience, God was saying "Hello. Welcome—not to your eternal rest—but to the rest of eternity?" ☪

In Other Words

Lozi Proverb

By Kalengule Kaoma

Cattle herding is part of their occupation. Livestock is one of the measures of their wealth. They use oxen to draw carts and plows. The Lozi people of Western Province in Zambia also use cattle in their language to express proverbial wisdom.

A wise Lozi lover might say to his beloved bride: "*Wele yange uende na ng'ombe ufuno ulingane.*" This can be translated, "My loved one, when we get married, bring your cattle so that our riches can add up and we prosper together."

When a bride and groom bring their cattle into one kraal, there is an immediate difference in their influence and social standing. Wealth doubles or triples. The couple together is wealthier than ei-



ther of them was before adding together their cattle.

In Matthew 18:20, Jesus said, "For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."

In Christian community, our spiritual resources are strengthened as we come together in support of one another. Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:16: "From [Jesus] the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work." In Christ, we are strong, and

together in Christ, we are even stronger than we can be alone.

That's why "*wele yange uende na ng'ombe ufuno ulingane*" is a good reminder of our admonition in Hebrews 10:25 to value assembling together as the children of God. We might not be many, but together in Christ, we are strong. ☪

SOLD

for Thirty Pieces of Silver

By Joyce Catherwood

Skimming the pages of a book about Jesus recently, my eye fell on a caption: "The Messiah sold for thirty pieces of silver."

I was struck by the enormity of the meaning of that caption and even the absurdity of it. The Messiah, the Savior, the One by whom all things were created, sold for 30 pieces of silver! I am always disarmed by the humility of our Lord who, time and time again, suffered indignities and insults at the hands of his own creatures. And in this instance, that it was perpetrated by one of his own disciples must have been a source of great sadness for him. The procession to the cross, ugly and violent as it was, had to be triggered by someone, and so it was Judas who set it off. It was to be expected, of course, but that didn't make it any easier for Jesus.

When Judas left the upper room to betray Jesus, he had already made arrangements with the chief priests, who wanted the charismatic teacher and his ministry destroyed. Jesus had been with his disciples in the home of Mary of Bethany six days before the last supper.

At great expense and with a heart brimming with devotion, Mary had poured perfume on Jesus' feet and reverently wiped them with her hair. The disciples, and in particular Judas, objected vehemently to her anointing, claiming it was a waste of money that could have been used for the poor. This was audacious criticism by Judas, who had already stolen funds from the money bag.

Jesus defended Mary and held her up as a shining and beautiful example. The fact that Jesus took Mary's side, telling the disciples to leave her alone,

must have ignited rage in Judas. He left Mary's home and went directly to the chief priests and elders inquiring what they would give him if he delivered Jesus over to them. Delighted, they counted out 30 silver coins, a sum equal to compensation for a dead slave. And thus the series of events that would be the most tragic in all of human history, and yet the most important and meaningful, began to unfold.

And though Judas' conduct was especially hurtful and destructive, the reaction of the rest of the disciples was also disheartening for Jesus. In the end, with the exception of John, Jesus was deserted by his disciples, who fled into hiding behind closed doors.

Their lack of support added even more misery to the crushing weight of the cross that he bore. Starting with Mary's anointing, only the women in his close circle of companions somehow understood that he needed the reassurance of his beloved friends.



Jesus was sold for 30 silver coins, a sum equal to compensation for a dead slave.

What would my reaction have been had I been there? I like to think it would have been the same as Mary's. On the other hand, to paraphrase a line from a praise song, would I have been ashamed, hearing my own mocking voice call out among the scoffers?

Even though it all started with 30 pieces of silver and betrayal, Jesus' lonely path to Golgotha ended gloriously by ushering in the salvation of all humanity. ◻

Between Death and Resurrection

By Michael Morrison

Everyone eventually dies. But the gospel says that everyone will be resurrected—brought back to life. When will this happen? The resurrection will occur when Christ returns (John 6:40; 1 Corinthians 15:21-23, 52; 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17). We will be given new and dramatically different bodies—imperishable, glorious, powerful, spiritual, and immortal (1 Corinthians 15:35-51).

But what happens between death and the resurrection? What is happening right now to believers who have died? And what will happen to *us* when we die, and are still awaiting the return of Christ and the renewal and transformation of our bodies?

Far better to be with the Lord

The apostle Paul deals with this question in two of his letters. When he wrote to the church at Philippi, he was in prison, thinking about the possibility of death. I'll paraphrase what he wrote:

The most important fact about our future is that our life will be *with the Lord*. He wants to share life with us—he created us for that very purpose.

“If it’s just for my own convenience, I’d rather die and get it over with. I’d like to escape the problems of this world and be with Christ. But I don’t want to just think about myself. I’ve got work to do, and it is better for *you* if I stick around a little longer.”¹

Paul thought that being with Christ was a lot better than living on earth. He doesn’t say it directly,

but he implies that he would be conscious. (There’s not much point in being *with* someone if you are totally unaware of it.) I don’t think he would say that a 2,000-year sleep was “better by far” than doing ministry on earth.

But there’s more to the afterlife than that, and since Christ has not yet returned and the resurrection has not yet happened, Paul is still not in his final state. He is in what theologians call “the intermediate state”—somewhere between death and resurrection.

Clothed with life

Paul tells us more about it in a letter to Corinth. He is again talking about the difficulties of life in this age. We are persecuted, he says, given over to death for Jesus’ sake (2 Corinthians 4:4-11).

He is motivated to continue “because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus” (verse 14). He knew that there would be life after death. “Outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day” (verse 16).

And then Paul describes what will happen to his body: “If the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands” (5:1). Ancient Greeks described the body as a tent, meaning a temporary dwelling. They thought that at death, the soul escaped the tent and existed without any need for a body.²

Paul uses this metaphor, too, but he says that our temporary dwelling will be replaced by a permanent one. The new body will be heavenly, not earthly, and eternal rather than wasting away.

He doesn’t tell us exactly what this home will be like, nor exactly when we get it. We might wish he had given those details, but that is not his purpose. He is simply saying that we’ve got something a lot better waiting for us. He gives a few more hints in subsequent verses:

“Meanwhile [in this life, in this body] we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked” (verses 2-3). As we struggle with the pains and

infirmities of our present mortal bodies, we would really like a better body.

Some people go to fitness centers in search of a better body; others try special diets. Some go to plastic surgeons. But no matter how good the fitness center and how diligently we diet, we are going to die. That's not such a bad deal, Paul says, because we'll get something a lot better.

At home with the Lord

"For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life" (verse 4).

Ancient Greeks expected to be a disembodied soul. Paul did not—that would be like being naked, he says. Our home and clothes might be a bit shabby right now, but the solution to the problem is not to go naked and homeless, but to get a better home and better clothes.

The body we have now is wasting away. It has aches and pains, wrinkles, memory lapses and tooth decay. It is temporary, mortal. So we want something better: to be clothed with *life*, to have life as a permanent possession, as a permanent home.

We were created for eternal life, heavenly life, not the aches and pains of mortal life. "Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come" (verse 5). God has plans for us, and he will make sure they work out.

"Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord.... We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord" (verses 6, 8).

Paul is contrasting life before and after death: We are now in the mortal body, but not with Christ.³ After death, we will be with Christ, but not in the old body.

That's what he prefers.

What difference does it make?

But there are a few pieces missing in this jigsaw puzzle, and so we need to make some guesses. Paul talks about a heavenly dwelling—apparently a body we will be given after we die. But in other passages, he says that our bodies will be resurrected when Christ returns. He does not tell us how these two ideas fit together.

Do we get a new body when we die, and a third one when Christ returns? Or are we disembodied for a while, despite Paul's desire to avoid it? Or is the concept of time irrelevant in the intermediate state? If our eternal home is in heaven, how will we remain with the Lord when he comes to earth?⁴

The Bible does not answer all these questions, for the simple reason that we do not need to know the answers. Those details have nothing to do with the way we live right now. Whether we are awake or asleep, with a body or not, does not change our need to trust in Christ, nor our duty to love one another.

Life between death and resurrection is simply a temporary state, and it is not our focus. Rather, we focus on what is eternal—life after the resurrection—what N.T. Wright calls "life after life after death." And the most important fact about our future is that our life will be *with the Lord*. He wants to share life with us—he created us for that very purpose.

And it is not just a never-ending life—it is a life filled with never-ending love and joy. Eternal life is not just a change in quantity, but also a change in *quality*. And when we see that, it can make a difference in the way we live right now, because Christ wants us to share in his life *even in this age*.

Notice Paul's next thought: "So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it" (verse 9). Since he is giving us a good future, we try to give him a good present. ☪

¹ This paraphrase is based on Philippians 1:21-24. It reads in the New International Version: "To me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know. I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body."

² N.T. Wright responds to this idea: "If the promised final future is simply that immortal souls leave behind their mortal

bodies, then death still rules—since that is a description not of the *defeat* of death but simply of death itself" (*Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, p. 15).

³ Spiritually, we are in Christ and he is in us; not even unbelievers are ever *completely* away from Christ. Although he is omnipresent, he is also more "present" in some places and some ways than in others. Paul's point is that we will be with him in a far greater way after we die than we are right now.

⁴ Wright gives an explanation: "Heaven and earth in biblical cosmology are not two different locations within the same continuum of space or matter. They are two different dimensions of God's good creation.... Heaven relates to earth tangentially so that the one who is in heaven [e.g., Christ] can be present simultaneously anywhere and everywhere on earth.... Though in one sense it will seem to us that he [Christ] is 'coming,' he will in fact be 'appearing' right where he presently is" (111, 135).

The Gentle Giant

Interviewed by Alan Doshna

Seven-foot-two-inches-tall Richard Kiel is probably best known as the actor who played the horrific “Jaws” character in the James Bond films. But appearances can be deceptive. Off stage, Richard is a gentle giant, a devout Christian and family man, who has used his stardom as an opportunity to do a greater work, including behind the camera. He was co-producer, co-writer and star of the Family Film Award-winning *The Giant of Thunder Mountain*, which explored the themes of looking beyond physical appearances to the intentions of the heart.



He has also written a landmark biography of the original Cassius Clay. When the name “Cassius Clay” is mentioned, most people think of the three-time world heavyweight champion, Cassius Clay, who changed his name to Muhammad Ali. The renowned boxer was named after his father, who in turn was named for Cassius Marcellus Clay, the 19th-century white abolitionist politician.

In an interview with Al Doshna, Kiel explained why he found the life of the great abolitionist so fascinating.

Al Doshna: How did you first learn about the abolitionist Cassius Clay?

Richard Kiel: My producer friend Arch Hall had started a documentary about Cassius Clay. His sister worked at Berea College, which Clay helped to start. Soon after, Hall died, and I started doing further research.

AD: What was it about Clay that inspired and appealed to you?

RK: Being an actor, I was impressed with the drama contained within Clay’s life. If a producer hired a half dozen writers and told them to come up with a heroic man, and you put all their stories together into one fictional story, it would not compare with the heroic events in the true-life story of Cassius Clay. It

was an actor’s dream role because it starts with him as a teenager and ends when he is in his early ’90s, still performing heroic deeds.

AD: You researched the book over a 25-year-period. It would seem that this subject in general is near and dear to your own heart, even apart from the specifics about Clay himself.

RK: My wife Diane is from Georgia and doesn’t have a racist bone in her body. While doing my research I discovered a lot of facts that aren’t well-known, which I found interesting. For example, only about 6 percent of the people in the South owned slaves and the other 94 percent were affected adversely by slavery, because they had to compete with this almost-free labor. White folks south of the Ohio River were “poor white trash” because of having to



compete with slavery. If you were a house painter, a cook or a gardener, you couldn’t make money competing with the slave labor that was being used to do the same thing. The same was true of almost every blue-collar job.

Of course, Cassius Clay freed his slaves decades before either the Emancipation Proclamation or the Thirteenth Amendment. He also donated ten prime acres and money to a Reverend John Fee so the pastor could build a home for himself and his family, as well as a church, and finally a small school, so that the slaves that Cassius had freed, young and old alike, could be educated. This small school blossomed with Clay’s help into the first interracial and non-gender

An Interview with Richard Kiel



There were some who were more passionate and willing to accomplish putting an end to slavery through any means including insurrection, killing and open disobedience to the law. Cassius Clay was not like that. He wanted to change the laws and to put an end to slavery through the law.

college in America—Berea College in Berea, Kentucky.

Cassius Clay once made the statement, which today could be wrongly turned against him, that “For better or worse the blacks are among us and they must be educated so they can be a part of our governing society.” That was not only a bold statement in

those times, but today his vision has become a reality, with our first black president being not only a part of our governing society, but its leader. One must consider Clay’s statement in the context of the time in which it was made to understand why he used the words that he did.

Facts like these are what drew me to the project, along with the fascinating story of the man Cassius Clay himself, who put his life on the line in an era that had little understanding of what he was trying to do.

There were some who were more passionate and willing to accomplish putting an end to slavery through any means including insurrection, killing and open disobedience to the law. Cassius Clay was not like that. He wanted to change the laws and to put an end to slavery through the law. He was beginning to accomplish that in Kentucky.

Of course, his personal story is equally fascinating, with all its elements for a great novel. His life spun

out like a soap opera with romance, courtroom drama, affairs, divorce and even murder!

AD: What do you believe was the driving force behind his quest?

RK: His personal and passionate feelings towards his slave friends George and Mary. He loved them and he saw in them the potential to be educated and to be part of our governing society. This is something that very few people of that era knew or understood.

AD: It is strange that a man as active in the events of his time as Clay was, especially involving slavery and the Civil War, is as relatively unknown as he is today. How do you account for that?

RK: For the same reasons that all of these facts I have described have been left out of the history books as they are written today. The story of Schindler in *Schindler’s List* was also an unknown story until Thomas Keneally took the time to write about it and get it published in 1982 and Steven Spielberg made it into a movie in 1993. At that rate it will be another 10 years before *Cassius Clay* will be made into a movie, and I will be almost 80 years old.

AD: Before we conclude, would you tell us a little about your Christian background?

RK: I grew up in a Christian family and attended church and Sunday school during my formative years. I was about 8 or 9 years old when I first made a declaration for Christ during a youth rally at our church. I was among many adults and teenagers passing out tracts at Los Angeles County General Hospital when I was about 10. I re-confirmed my decision for Christ at a youth camp at about age 16 and finally was baptized with full immersion when I was 27.

AD: Thanks for your time and all the best with your book. I hope to see the movie long before you turn 80. ☺



Alan Doshna is a freelance journalist living in California.

Grace: A license to sin?

By J. Michael Fezell

It is a constant wonder how we guardians of the true faith can become so adept at gumming up the greatest news in the universe. We hold in trust the Good News of all good news—God gives free grace to sinners for Christ’s sake—and then we break our necks to hide it behind a great wall of rules, regulations and laws.

“You must not take grace too far or you will turn it into license to sin!” we admonish one another, as though lack of license has ever stopped anybody from sinning.

Hasn’t anyone noticed? We are all sinners, for crying out loud, even all we religious, God-fearing, church-going Christians. Always have been, always

The church promises grace, then delivers condemnation. The church headlines the gospel, then preaches hellfire. The church disguises its moralistic hook with gospel bait, reels in the unwary catch and plops him or her into the hot greasy frying pan of salvation by works.

Consider how the gospel is plowed under by the relentless glacier of denominational “rightness,” doctrinal “exactness” and behavioral “standards.” Christian church against Christian church, warring over phraseology, terminology, dress codes, political stands, seating arrangements, music styles, architecture...the list seems endless.

We all seem to have at least a mild case of the “our-way-is-God’s-way-die-you-heretic” virus.

Certainly, right doctrine is important. But surely we need look no farther than the Nicene Creed or the Apostles Creed for those doctrinal “issues” that

The church disguises its moralistic hook with gospel bait, reels in the unwary catch and plops him or her into the hot greasy frying pan of salvation by works.



will be, in this life. It is only by God’s pure and unfettered grace, as demonstrated once for all through Jesus Christ, that we are made something else—righteous—and not by avoiding sin, but by trusting him.

It seems that our vigilant efforts to prevent anyone from “turning grace into license to sin” has resulted, ironically, in our managing to turn sin into a barrier to accepting grace.

really matter. Yet, many Christian churches still refuse Communion to fellow believers who don’t belong to the “right” denominational brand name or haven’t jumped through all the required theological hoops.

The underlying message of religious behaviorism, “Behave right (according to our particular standards), or go straight to hell,” buries the gospel under layer after layer of religious hair-splitting, nit-picking and

How to Fix People

By Barbara Dahlgren

We live in a quick-fix society. If we want a quick lunch, we eat fast food. If we want a quick home-cooked meal, we make Stouffer's lasagna or instant rice in our microwaves. If we want a quick marriage, we go to Vegas. If we want to change our TV channel quickly, we use the remote control. We have a quick fix for just about everything—except people.

Being a Christian is not really difficult if you don't have to deal with people. But then what do you do with those pesky scriptures that ask you to "love your neighbor" (Mark 12:31), "love your family" (Ephesians 5:25), "love one another" (John 13:34), and yea verily—even "love your enemies" (Matthew 5:43)? Still, I wish I had a remote-control gizmo I could just point at people who irritate me and "quick fix" them.

I would zap the woman ahead of me in the ten items or less lane who has 70 products in her cart. She always acts clueless, but I know she's doing it deliberately. I would zap the boss taking credit for my hard work and the self-appointed counselor giving me unwanted advice about my children when his are wreaking havoc.

I would zap the know-it-all wanting me to respect his opinion while he discards mine and the pessimist refusing to count his blessings. I would zap those thinking their likes and dislikes are the same as God's. I would zap the self-righteous, rude, thoughtless, humorless, nosey, and those who make me feel unvalued, unappreciated, or unwanted.

What fun I would have "quick-fixing" people!

However, Jesus didn't come to "quick-fix" people; he came to redeem them.

Fortunately for all us, God does not look at people through human eyes. In biblical times people saw Peter as impetuous or impulsive, James and John (sons of thunder) as angry and Thomas as lacking faith. God saw beyond outward appearances. It mattered not if people were tax collectors, women of ill repute, poor, rich, diseased or just plain annoying; God saw them all as his beloved children. And that's how he sees you and me—and everyone I would like to zap.

Actually, God loves all of us so much that he gave his only begotten Son Jesus Christ. Jesus loves us so much he gave his life (John 3:16-17). He gave it for all of us. Although I hate to admit it, this includes each and everyone who irritates me. God loves them and so should I. That doesn't mean I have to condone everything they do, but it's not my job to "fix" them. If they need to be "fixed," I guess I'll let God do it his way. ☪

measurement-taking.

That isn't the gospel. It's religion. It holds out salvation like some phantom carrot-and-stick reached only through a lifetime of unquantifiable good deeds. It is a soul-sapping lie against the truth of God.

Jesus did not bring some "new and better" brand of religion. He brought the gospel, which is good news for sinners, which we all are.

For the sake of Christ, God has thrown away all the report cards, homework records and detention notes in the world and given everybody a 4.0 GPA and a gold-plated invitation to eternal life.

Only some of us, it seems, "don't want no charity." We'd rather feel like we have been—or through discipline and devotion have become—the right and proper sort of person upon whom God could appropriately bestow eternal life.

We have been good Christians, and we don't want to be lumped in with a bunch of immoral losers who do nothing more than put their trust in the Christ we have worked so hard for so long to imitate and obey. (We thank you, O God, that we are not like the rest of people—greedy, dishonest, adulterous or, for that matter, like this embezzler.)

Suppose we take up a challenge: give up the charade. Drop the legalism and the fear tactics. Quit pretending to be worthy and righteous, admit we are hopeless sinners without anything to our credit, and put our trust in Jesus Christ, for whose sake God justifies the ungodly (Romans 4:5).

And drop the nonsense about how that would mean we could "just go out and sin all we want since we're already forgiven." Nobody who trusts God wants to sin. When you trust God to love you and forgive you, you want to be like Jesus; you don't want to sin. But when we do sin, in spite of the fact that we don't want to, we have an advocate with the Father, 1 John 2:1-2 tells us (and he tells us that so we won't sin, not so that we will, verse 1 says).

It's like Paul told Titus: "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good" (Titus 2:11-14).

It's *grace* that teaches us to say no to ungodliness. It's *grace* that makes us eager to do what is good. Knowing we're already forgiven and accepted does not lead us into the devil's workshop, but into deeper fellowship with our Lord and Savior.

The gospel really is that simple. It really is good news. ☪

From the cornfields to the city

How a small church reinvented itself

By Ken Williams

Two Friday evenings each month members of *Abundant Grace Church* gather in their building in the Charlotte Community of Rochester, New York, to live and share the gospel of Jesus with their community neighbors in a special way.

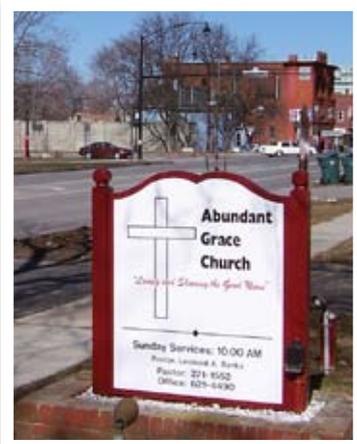
At 5:15 p.m., Mary Elwell, ministry leader of the church food cupboard, leads the team in prayer before turning them loose to fill sacks with canned food and

located on an industrial road. It was isolated from the community and almost invisible.

Leonard Banks believed in his denomination's motto: "living and sharing the gospel." He could see that the congregation was living the gospel, but they weren't sharing it. They wanted to, but their plans were bogged down in the discussion stage. So to get things moving, Leonard began to preach about evangelism.

He now realizes that was a mistake. He assumed the congregation was where he was on evangelism. It took two years of work with the church leaders, who then helped him work with the rest of the congregation, to prepare the church for living and sharing the

The little congregation was living the gospel, but they weren't sharing the gospel.



other staples. At the same time, Pastor Leonard Banks makes final preparation for the worship service that will precede the food distribution.

And some of the 80 to 85 community families served monthly are already lining up outside.

At 5:55 p.m. ushers open the doors and invite people to be seated for the 6:00 service. They aren't required to attend the service to receive food, but most recognize their spiritual need and come. Leonard can remember a time when people milled around noisily during the worship service. Now the Friday night gathering of 45 to 50 men, women and children sit quietly, listen, and worship. The church is seeing the result of years of hard work and prayer.

Moving from the suburbs to the city

Ten years ago, this congregation met on the outskirts of Henrietta, a southern suburb of Rochester. The meeting hall was surrounded by a cornfield and

gospel beyond their church walls.

The church came to see that they needed to be a community-based church. But which community? They realized that as a congregation, they had a heart and a gift for service. But there was already a church on nearly every corner in their community doing everything they could do. They decided that they were in the wrong community. They needed to move. But where?

They prayed for direction and formed a search committee. Eventually they found Charlotte Community, where there were few churches. Two resident church pastors told Leonard that the majority of the Charlotte residents were unchurched. Leonard inquired about renting space in a church that was up for sale and received a positive response. He took 16 church leaders with him to see the church property and the community. The consensus was that this was the right place to transplant their congregation. It

had taken two years of praying, studying demographics, and searching, but the congregation found their home in Charlotte Community in November 2001.

Finding their place

During the spring of 2002 the members knocked on doors of 1100 houses surrounding their new church home, inviting people to come to the Easter service. They also invited prayer requests and left door hangers containing church information and the Gospel of John. Only one person came two Sundays in a row, so the initial results were disappointing. But the members had shown that they were willing to meet their neighbors in their new community. Relationship building would take time, but it was a start.

As they prayed for ways to live and share the gospel, Leonard met with local civic leaders and asked what the community needs were. They told him that some people were in need of food subsidies, and there were a number of single mothers needing help. Leonard discussed this



with the congregation and the members decided to provide a food pantry, and trusted God to make it possible.

It so happened that some Charlotte Community residents were looking for a way to care for those in need but didn't have a venue to donate to. Abundant Grace Church provided that venue.

So they had the desire, and they had the right place. But the church had no experience in running a food pantry. It took another couple of years to understand the need, develop a strategy and inform the community. One of the church leaders, Mary Elwell, contacted others who were running a food cupboard in a neighboring community. Mary brought the information back to Abundant Grace, cast the vision, gathered a team and started preparing.

Leonard went to the town leaders, who connected the church with their networks of donors, and food donations began to pour in. The library provided a donation box on site. The Post Office also collected food. The

church purchased ad space in Charlotte Community News, the Veterans Post provided donations, the Charlotte Men's Club gave non-perishable items and cash donations, a local bakery began providing donations weekly, and a retail store also began donating items.

The food cupboard was launched in July 2003, with six community families receiving food. Today the Abundant Grace Church provides for 85 community families each month. The average weekly attendance on Sunday is 52. Fifteen of these members live in the community and had their initial contact with the church through the food cupboard ministry. Another 50 people attend on the food distribution Friday nights and are beginning to see this service as their church. Some 14 to 16 members manage the cupboard and seven of them are community residents.

What have they learned?

The folks at *Abundant Grace* have learned some valuable lessons as they successfully transplanted their congregation from the cornfields to the inner city. Leonard Banks believes it's too easy for a person with a vision to assume others see it too. He said patience and delegation are vital to the process. He assumed the church was in agreement with him just because he gave two sermons on evangelism. He needed to be patient and take time to understand the members' perspectives.

The congregation became willing to participate once they understood Leonard's vision. That took time. But as more people began to see it, Leonard delegated some of the work and leadership to them. The larger the team grew, the more others began to catch the vision.

What next?

The congregation would like to see their sanctuary filled to capacity for their Sunday service, so they are developing more leaders and workers in preparation for any growth that comes. But they are also thinking about yet another transplant, this time moving part of the congregation to the southern end of Rochester. Leonard explains: "It makes sense to know something about the community you want to serve. I live on the southern end of Rochester, where there aren't many churches. My community needs another good church." ☪

Thinking about a fresh start? Church Multiplication Ministries (CMM) exists to help pastors and their congregations start new churches. CMM can provide you with the training and resources that you need, and share the experiences of others in this exciting but challenging dimension of evangelism. If you are thinking of relocating your congregation or planting a new church, we would like to help you. Please contact Randy.Bloom@wgc.org.

Her Beauty and Her Terror

By Kerry Gubb

*"I love a sunburnt country...
I love her far horizons, I love her jewel-sea
Her beauty and her terror..."*¹

So wrote Australian poet Dorothea Mackellar (1885-1968) while living in England and missing her beloved country. "Her beauty and her terror" encapsulates something that resonates in the Australian psyche. Australia's beauty can be breathtaking, even stunning.

So can her terror.

In the beautiful Aussie bush, when over-abundant, rich fuel, dry heat, strong winds and any of a score of catalysts all merge into the perfect firestorm, "terror" is assuredly the word.

Absolutely the right word.

Along with cruel, vicious, merciless, unstoppable, inescapable, engulfing, overwhelming, capricious, unpredictable and

A nation reveals its true form in a crisis. The finery and fashion are stripped away. This is what the people are.

"A blast furnace so intense it melts window glass and sheets of roofing iron. A blast furnace so intense it shatters bricks. A blast furnace so intense a household fridge collapses in on itself like a crushed cardboard box..."

"We expect to find virtually nothing left. We find even less."²

Another writer, Greg Sheridan, observed, "A nation reveals itself in a crisis. The artifice is stripped away, the finery and the fashion disappear. Here is the nation in its true form. This is what the people are."³

Nobody invites crisis or disaster. And some people, communities, and nations cope far better than others.

Bushfires are an ever-present threat in Australia. So in the months to come, the nation will be unshocked, yet quietly grieving beyond the national



sinister.

The bushfires that swept through southeastern Australia in early February 2009 were the worst in our history.

For those who escaped with their lives, what they've been left with is described by Gary Hughes, a journalist for *The Australian*, who lost his own home:

"White ash a few centimetres deep spread surprisingly evenly over a concrete floor slab. That's what your life—everything you and your family owns, everything that makes you what you are, every memory and every treasured possession—becomes after you turn a blast furnace loose on it.

memorial service and day of mourning, focused on comforting the victims, and grateful to the heroes of the emergency services and the nation as a whole for its customary huge outpouring of moral and financial aid. Aussie "mateship" is at its best when we face crises together.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the state of Victoria, which suffered worst. Greg Sheridan wrote, "The Australians of the Victorian bushfires have revealed themselves to be magnificent, ordinary heroes. Practical, straightforward, remarkably tough, resilient under it all. In countless interviews on television and radio, it is stunning how often the survivors inject

some laughter, some note of dry irony.”⁴

One survivor’s interview profoundly touched my Christian sensibilities. A husband, holding his young son, stood with his wife before the fire-bunker she’d nagged him to build for them beside a huge water-tank. He’d finished it shortly before they’d fled into its shelter. They huddled together inside, while outside, their entire world incinerated out of existence in minutes. Now, a TV reporter asked them what it felt like, emerging to find their home—everything—gone.

He responded: “We’re alive! Material things—forget it! We’re alive! We can start again.”

Indeed they are; no doubt they will.

Such spirit is awesome, appealing to and awakening the best in us.

It also inspires personal reflection.

Question: In a culture so keenly focused on material possessions, where personal debt is dangerously high, where financial factors can drive and colour people’s entire world-view, what is it that enables anyone to say “Material things—forget it!”?

Answer: “We’re alive!”

Everything’s relative. When you’re rolling in luxury (so I’m told!) you can afford to focus on choosing between



Beluga and Osetra caviar at next week’s soiree. When a wall of fire is bearing down on you at 200 miles an hour, though, the caviar decision becomes a tad less significant. Crisis and disaster have a knack for rearranging our priorities.

Whatever else might (or not) help us become ever-more spiritually minded in an ever-more secular-minded world, the human spirit is capable of connecting with its destiny during, and immediately following, a crisis or disaster.

Crisis brings out at once the best and the worst. In this case, it brought out the best. Here was a man whose home and everything in it had been reduced to white ash a few inches deep—whose sole possessions now were the breeze-block bunker that had saved his family—and his core values. When the cup of life is shaken violently by severe crisis, your core values are what break free and float to the surface. There is something in that man’s nature or nurture that will now become the fountainhead of recovery for him and his little family.

Painful though it was, on one level this crisis created a magic moment. It enabled a man to say “Material things—forget it!”

Is he a Christian? I don’t know. It’s clear, though, that he understands what Jesus said, that “a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”⁵

It’s important to know what your core values are, because in a crisis, they *are* going to surface and play out—for better or worse.

Christians are blessed with a great deal of guidance about what our core values should be. When we are in crisis, what comes out should reflect the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. We gain valuable insights into the progress of our walk with God during such times. In easy times, we might coast along for years on the momentum of a self-image artificially fed by material well-being. But knowing how much we have actually grown up into him is unknowable—purely hypothetical—until “the artifice is stripped away,” the façades and masks drop off—and we are left with nothing but who and what we are.

As that family man, holding his young son and standing with his wife before the fire-bunker, starts to rebuild their life together, I wish him well—and sincere thanks. He’s reminded us all that when positive core values are in place, the terror of crisis can reveal beauty in the human spirit.

1 Peter 1:6-7: *In this [salvation] you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.* ☪

¹ Dorothea MacKellar, 1908, *My Country*. Online: www.dorotheamackellar.com.au/archive/mycountry.htm

12, 2009. Online: www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,25042641-601,00.html. Accessed Feb. 26.

Online: www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,25041835-24636,00.html.

⁴ Ibid.

² Gary Hughes, “No Phoenix of Hope Arising from the Ashes of the Victoria Bushfires.” *The Australian* newspaper, Feb.

³ Greg Sheridan, “Crisis Survived, We Must Quickly Apply the Lessons.” *The Australian* newspaper, Feb. 12, 2009.

⁵ Luke 12:15.

My Mother's Prayer

By Jeb Egbert

I had my first love affair when I was just 6 years old. It's true...but it's probably not what you're thinking.

When I was 6, I had a marvelous kite that was the love of my life. That kite meant everything to me. Frequently when my father arrived home from work, he would take the love of my life and me out to the front yard. Adorned with a huge ball of string and my kite, he would get it started. And as the kite soared into the Southern California sky, I watched with amazement as it bobbed and weaved in the breeze. How could life get any better? A small boy with his magical kite.

One day as I was flying the kite in our front yard, my mother knocked on the kitchen window to get my attention. As I glanced her way, she beckoned me inside. It was time for dinner. Disappointed that I would have to put my kite away for the evening, I began to reel the huge ball of string in.

But then something happened. The line went limp and the kite was no longer coming towards me. As a 6-year-old, I'm sure it took me a while to figure out what was happening, but the truth was, the love

The line went limp and the kite was no longer coming towards me.

of my life wasn't coming home! When I finally put all the pieces together, I did what most 6-year-old boys would do...burst into tears.

My mother saw all this playing out from the window and quickly summoned my father. I can still see Dad in my mind's eye rushing out of the house. "Son, I can't promise anything. But I'm going to go after that kite," he said. With window rolled down and his left arm swung over the driver's side door, I saw him poke his head out of the car to try to assess the direction the kite was heading. And he was off.

Twenty minutes later, he returned. He shared some of the saddest news I had heard in my young life. He was unable to retrieve the kite.

Simultaneously, and unbeknownst to me, my mom was experiencing a new love affair of her own. And because of this love affair she suggested some-

thing that we had never done ever before. "Jeb," she said. "Why don't we pray about it?" So before bed that evening, I knelt down next to my mother, hands folded in front of my bed. I don't really recall what she said, but I know she was praying that somehow, someday, the love her life...her God... would restore the kite to me.

The next morning I heard a knock on our front door. I was still in a foul mood, but I was the closest to the door, so I answered it. A neighbor I had never met was standing in front of me. "Son," he said. "I saw everything that happened last evening and I felt so badly for you that I decided that I would get you a replacement kite."

A couple of hours later, our next-door neighbor, whom I *did* know, knocked. He hadn't witnessed the tragedy that played out the prior evening but announced, "Jeb, I was cleaning out my garage and found a kite. I thought you might like it."

Finally, my dad came home from work with, you guessed it, another kite. Of course, this sudden wealth of kites left me feeling euphoric. But I also remember clearly, in my 6-year-old way, thinking that this new love affair of my mom's—the one she prayed to—was awesome.

That initial intervention has stuck with me for the better part of 50 years. It has had an indelible impact on my life. I thank my mother to this day that she didn't just pray for me in the confines of privacy, but openly invited me to eavesdrop.

Years later, my dad used to invite me to come along on his "prayer walks." It was often fascinating to hear not only what he talked to God about, but also *how* he talked with God. While there was reverence, it was conversational. While there was respect, it was shared as though with a close friend.

That's why I like to encourage parents and grandparents to intentionally spend time with their children and grandchildren in prayer. It's an opportunity for us to model for them our passion for our Lord and Savior. To let them listen in on our conversation with God.

It made a difference for me. It taught me at a tender young age that I could have a personal relationship with God and that he cared about me. I believe it can make a difference for your children or grandchildren, too! ☺



Speaking of Life...



with Joseph Tkach

When Jesus was on trial for his life, the soldiers twisted thorns into a makeshift crown and jammed it on his head (John 19:2). They hung a purple robe on him and ridiculed him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews," while they punched and kicked him.

Jesus was the king, and yet his rule was preceded by rejection, ridicule and suffering. His painful crown of thorns was one more demonstration of his right to rule a world filled with pain and suffering. At the same time, it was a symbol of hope for us, reminding us that we are joined to Jesus in the crucible of suffering.

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."

Jesus accepted the crown of thorns as part of his bitter cup of enduring what humans endure, as part of opening the door for us to escape with him from this world of tears. In this world, oppressors jam thorns on their victims. And in this world, Jesus suffered whatever they wanted to do with him to redeem us all from this world of ungodliness and thorns.

As a result, he says to every man, woman and child, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and

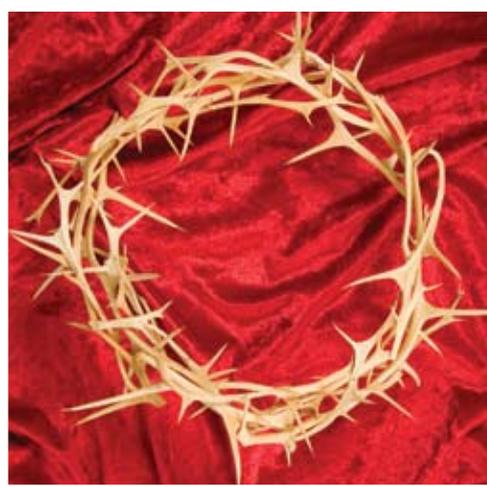
us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus."

We live in hope, knowing that this life is not all there is—that the day is coming when our faith will be sight, when all the promises will reach their ultimate fulfillment, when every tragedy of this life will be turned into the joy of the world to come. John wrote Revelation 21:3-5:

"And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will

be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.' He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!' Then he said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.'"

Jesus was the king, and yet his rule was preceded by rejection, ridicule and suffering. His painful crown of thorns was one more demonstration of his right to rule a world filled with pain and suffering.



The crown of thorns is not just part of a movie scene in which we are overwhelmed with the suffering that Jesus went through to be our Savior. Jesus said that if we want to follow him, we must take up our cross each day. He could just as easily have said that we must put on our crown of thorns. We are joined to Jesus in the crucible of suffering.

In Romans 8:17-18, the apostle Paul wrote: "Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glo-

learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

We all experience our crowns of thorns. We all have our crosses to bear. We all live in this fallen world and take part in its pain and sorrow. But the crown of thorns and the cross of death have met their match in Jesus. In him we have life, life that at present cannot be seen, but is nonetheless real.

Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:7: "And God raised us up with Christ and seated

Whatever crises we face in this life, we can take comfort and courage in two things. Our suffering is a participation in Jesus' suffering. And Jesus has for us a new life—beyond this one—in which there will be no more death, or mourning or crying or pain. ☪

This article is derived from Speaking of Life, a weekly video program presented by Joseph Tkach on the Worldwide Church of God website. You can watch it online, listen online, or download the video, audio, or text. For all these options, go to www.speakingoflife.org.

The Resurrection Body

A study of 1 Corinthians 15:35–58

By Michael Morrison

Ancient Greek philosophers believed that the world of spirit is perfect, whereas the world of matter is bad. The human soul is good, but it is trapped in the physical world. The body is like a tomb, and the soul needs to escape.

These beliefs affected the congregation in Corinth. Some church members thought that the body is bad, so they denied all bodily pleasures, even in marriage. Others went to the opposite extreme: since the body will eventually be discarded, it doesn't matter what a person does in the body.

The apostle Paul said there would be a resurrection of the body, but to Greeks steeped in ancient philosophy, this made no sense. Why would God mess up the afterlife by putting people back into their defective bodies?



Our mortal flesh is the seed of something far more spectacular than we can imagine. We look like Adam now, but in the resurrection, we will look like Christ.

Paul responds in 1 Corinthians 15. He begins by saying that Jesus was raised from the dead—with a body—and this is not only part of the gospel, it also shows that God will resurrect all who are in Christ.¹

Different kinds of bodies (verses 35-43)

Paul addresses the questions starting in verse 35: **But someone may ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?”** He responds, **How foolish!** It is foolish to reject the idea of a resurrection just because you have questions about how it works.

He uses an example from agriculture to illustrate: **What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else.** The seed ceases to exist, and something quite different comes up.

But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body. Each kind of seed produces a different kind of plant, and it is difficult to predict the size or shape of the plant

just from the shape of the seed.

Paul offers other living things as examples: **All flesh is not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another.** These creatures all have bodies, but they are not the same.

It's true in astronomy, too: **There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another.** The stars are glorious in one way; geological features in a different way.

The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor. So with all this variety, he seems to imply, why do you think that the spiritual world cannot have shape or body?

So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. Our bodies are defective, perishable, lacking honor, and weak. But the resurrection will not be an exact restoration—it will be a lot better.

A spiritual body (verses 44-49)

The old body will die, like a seed; a new body will live. **It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.** The old body has life similar to an animal; the new body will be energized by spirit.

If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. Biology and astronomy show that there are different kinds of bodies; there is variety in the spiritual realm, too. **So it is written: “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit.**

Genesis 2:7 says that Adam became a living soul. He had a mortal life. But the resurrected Jesus revealed a new kind of life: spiritual, and yet with a body.

The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. Adam came first; Jesus came later. **The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven.** Adam started as dust; Jesus started in the spiritual realm and became flesh.

As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. All humans followed the path of Adam. But Jesus brought something better.

So if we are in Christ, we will be resurrected in his mode, not in the Adamic mode. **And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.**

Our mortal flesh is the seed of something far more spectacular than we can imagine. We look like Adam now, but in the resurrection, we will look like Christ.

A dramatic change (verses 50-53)

The human body as we know it now is absolutely inadequate for the life we will have. **I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.**

In eternity, we will not need blood to circulate oxygen to our muscles. Flesh and blood is rooted in the biochemical world, where nothing lasts forever. Life based in chemical reactions cannot be eternal. The kind of flesh that decays cannot inherit the eternal realm.

There must be a radical change, and *change* is exactly what the gospel promises. **Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.**

At the return of Christ (verse 23), we will all be made alive. We will rise to meet him, and we will be with him forever (1 Thessalonians 4:14-17).

Paul uses one more metaphor: **For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.** We will not be a soul clothed with a perishable body—we will have a body that never decays. The resurrection body will never die, never grow weary, never wear out.

The great victory (verses 54-58)

When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the

saying that is written will come true: **“Death has been swallowed up in victory”** (Isaiah 25:8). In the resurrection, death will have been defeated.

Paul mocks his enemy with words similar to Hosea 13:14: **“Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?”** Where is your power now? All your work has been undone.

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law, and these three worked against us: the flesh led us into sin, and the law condemned us to die. But it has all been reversed in Jesus, who conquered sin in the flesh, and conquered death on behalf of us all.

Our enemies have been defeated, as Paul exclaims: **But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.** The resurrection of Jesus is not just good news for him—it is also wonderful news for us, because the reason that he went through his ordeal is to rescue us from our enemies. He gives the victory to *us!*

Paul concludes: **Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.** No good deed will be forgotten. There are eternal consequences for all our work—even actions as small as giving water to a thirsty person.

There is a resurrection, and there is an afterlife—and that gives tremendous meaning to this life as well. **co**

Taking it personally

- If I am “changed” as much as a seed changes into a tree, how will anyone recognize me? (v. 37)
- Would I describe my current body as dishonorable? (v. 43)
- What are the advantages of an imperishable body?
- Why does Paul say that the power of sin is the law? (v. 56)

For a study of the first part of 1 Corinthians 15, see the April-May 2006 *Christian Odyssey*, or see the article on our website at www.christianodyssey.org/corinth/1cor15a.htm.

The Greeks Had a Word for It

“Ψυχικός”

The Greek word *psychē* means “soul”; the word *psychikos* means “pertaining to the soul.” Since animals have souls, *psychikos* (even when referring to humans) may refer to an animal sort of life—the biochemistry and brain function of an animal. Paul uses the word to refer to the type of body we now have (1 Cor. 15:44-46), as opposed to a body animated by spirit.

In 1 Cor. 2:14, Paul says that the *psychikos* person cannot un-

derstand spiritual things. A horse may be spirited, but it does not understand spiritual realities. James 3:15 refers to *psychikos* wisdom; it is the sort of wisdom that an animal might have. Jude 19 uses the word to say that *psychikos* people follow their instincts; they do not have the Spirit.

Since the word is often used in opposition to spiritual, some scholars translate the word as “unspiritual.” **co**

Hmm...

GOD'S KINGDOM is not a place, but rather a relationship. It exists wherever people enthrone Jesus as lord of their lives.

J. I. Packer, *Growing in Christ*

The second main petition in the Lord's Prayer—"Thy Kingdom Come"—rules out any idea that the Kingdom of God is a purely heavenly (that is, "otherworldly") reality.... Think of the vision at the end of Revelation. It isn't about humans being snatched up from earth to heaven. The holy city, new Jerusalem, comes down from heaven to earth. God's space and ours are finally married, integrated at last.

N. T. Wright,
The Lord and His Prayer

God grant that the kingdom of Jesus Christ may grow in his Church on earth, God hasten the end of the kingdoms of this world, and establish his own kingdom in power and glory!

Dietrich Bonhoeffer,
The Cost of Discipleship

Unlike the teachings that we are accustomed to in our schools, lectures designed to do our thinking for us, Jesus' teachings sparkled with scintillating aphorisms. He wasn't so much handing out information as reshaping our imagination with metaphors so that we could take in the multi-dimensional truth that is Jesus.

Eugene Peterson, Tell It Slant

GOD NEVER wrought miracle to convince atheism, because his ordinary works convince it.

Francis Bacon

The church is evidence of God's patience.

Max Warren

"You must be little to belittle"

A friend from Chicago, Bill Leslie, used to say that the Bible asks three main questions about money: (1) How did you get it? (Legally and justly or exploitatively?); (2) What are you doing with it? (Indulging in luxuries or helping the needy?); and (3) What is it doing to you? Some of Jesus' most trenchant parables and sayings go straight to the heart of that last question.

Philip Yancey, writing in Christianity Today

The secret of a good sermon is to have a good beginning and a good ending, and to have the two as close together as possible.

George Burns

Be careful about reading health books. You may die of a misprint.

Mark Twain

Don't worry about avoiding temptation. As you grow older, it will avoid you.

Winston Churchill

Ambassador College of Christian Ministry Online Learning

Equipping men and women for more effective and informed service in the work of the gospel.



ACCM's flexible learning site provides practical, quality training in Christian ministry and a valuable source of informative and stimulating Christian studies through both credit and audit programs.

www.ambacol.org

Enjoy Reading Christian Odyssey?

Why not share with a friend? Give a free gift subscription today.



To request a subscription, see addresses and phone numbers on page 3. You can also subscribe at:

www.ChristianOdyssey.org

