

50 Short Talks and Invitations

By D. L. Stephens

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Printed in the United States of America.

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Advice on delivering the invitation.

There are people who would rather face the firing squad than say anything in public. Men who could face a charging rhino and not flinch, become quivering jelly when the deacon says, "Will you lead the opening prayer?" They answer, "Uh, sure," but down deep they review their list of reasons why they should be allowed to leave the services. When they stand to speak the mouth dries, the hands shake, and the voice increases about four octaves. And those feelings are minor beside the abject terror that seizes the man the deacon asks to make a talk. If that is you, don't worry. Making a short talk in church is seldom fatal. Many people have done it without a scratch. You can rest at ease knowing that this booklet shows you how to avoid the pitfalls of the short talk. It prepares you, so that when the fearful day comes that the preacher leans over and says, "How about offering the invitation tonight?" You will confidently answer, "Sure. Why not?"

The Invitation.

An invitation is the same as Moses gave to Hobab the Midianite as recorded in the Bible. The Book of Numbers tells us that as the children of Israel journeyed from Sinai to Edom Moses came to Hobab the son of Reuel, and said,

"We are setting out to the place of which the Lord said, 'I will give it to you; come with us and we will do you good, for the Lord has promised good concerning Israel.'" Numbers 10:29.

In these words, Moses included many of the important elements of an invitation. It is a friendly gesture. It is a call to join company, to be present, or to participate. In the invitation there is something freely given, and with it comes the blessing of the Lord.

Christ gave the most important invitation of all when He said,

Matthew 11:28 "Come unto Me all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take

My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My load is light."

The focus of this book is the invitation of Christ. Christ invites every person to become His disciple. Christ, primarily, offers the invitation to man, asking man to join company with Him, to find purpose, instruction and meaningful work. In practice, the disciples of Christ repeat His invitation to people outside His church. Frequently, the minister, or evangelist offers the invitation to wayward disciples to repent, and to return to the Lord's service.

The appropriate time.

It is good practice to offer an invitation after classes or sermons when the whole congregation is gathered. Someone in the audience might be waiting for an invitation to become a part of the group. More than that, someone might deeply desire to become a disciple of Christ, but might be too shy to respond without a friendly word.

As a matter of practice teachers, preachers and others offer the invitation publicly. Sometimes teachers, evangelists, or friends offer the invitation privately. The private invitation is not discussed in this book. We are concerned here with the invitation that someone offers at the conclusion of a sermon, lecture, or class.

In Acts the second chapter, the Bible tells how Peter delivered the first gospel sermon, telling the men of Israel how they had crucified the Lord, how God had raised him from the dead, exalted Him to glory, and then poured out His Spirit. The message of the sermon convicted the Israelites of their sin. They asked what they could do? Then came the invitation.

That is the pattern. A message is followed by an invitation to join company with the disciples in serving Christ.

In the same chapter of Acts the apostles followed up their invitation with action. The invitation requires that you have an action plan. If a person responds to the gospel invitation and wants to be baptized, you should have a plan to carry out their

request. Usually, the church has a baptistery, or a designated pool for baptism, but it is wise to know who will perform the baptism. Also, be aware of who will interview the person who responds to your invitation. Have proper questions in mind to ask, such as, "Do you wish to become a Christian?" Or "Is there something you wish to confess?" Or "Do you wish to ask for the prayers of the church?" Most of the time the regular minister is present, and he will assume the responsibility of the interview. He can perform any baptisms that may follow. This may not appear to be relevant to the invitation, but it is. For the novice speaker it is reassuring to know that he has covered the possibilities. This frees up his mind to concentrate on the invitation.

Delivering an invitation.

In November 1863, at the dedication of the Gettysburg national cemetery, Edward Everett delivered an oration that took the better part of two hours. It ran to 13,000 words, all of which he had memorized. Reporters wrote in awe of his gestures, saying, that if anyone ever saw these gestures they would never forget them. The speech was, however.

How many people remember what Edward Everett said at Gettysburg? Not many. Abraham Lincoln spoke for two minutes. How many people **do not** remember his Gettysburg Address?

Experience has taught me that when the time comes to offer the invitation the audience is tired. They have listened either to a sermon, or a class lecture, and they want time to digest what they have heard. At this point the audience has little, if any, attention span left. This leads to an important rule to follow when giving the invitation: **keep it short.**

"Short" means that you **speak only about five minutes.** Less if possible. The average person, in normal speech, will speak about 120 words a minute. A fast talker will speak 180 words. As a rule of thumb, you can estimate a five minute speech at 600 words. That's not much. You could write out the whole thing on three pages of 8 1/2 x 11 notebook paper—even if you write big. (I am not suggesting you do this.) I know a student who, when he had to make his three minute speech to a freshman class, wrote the whole thing on a three by five card. It was a

confidence builder to have the whole speech there in front of him, but his voice still squeaked.

"Short" means that you **aim to make a single point**. Resist the urge to piggyback another idea. That extra thought will confuse your listener. You might want to discuss atonement, baptism and how they relate to the Law of Moses, but don't. **Keep it simple.**

The talk should **have a consistent theme**. A theme is the root idea. For example, in the parable of The Talents the central theme is "active preparation for the coming of the Lord." The story is a powerful lesson that we must use and develop what the Lord gave us. Notice that the Lord did not confuse the issue by including a few thoughts about grace.

Use illustrations and anecdotes. Matthew tells us that Jesus was reclining at a meal, and there were with Him tax gatherers and sinners. The Pharisees said to the disciples, "Why does your Teacher eat with the tax gatherers and sinners?" Jesus said to them, "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are ill." (Matthew 9:10-12).

Did He make his point?

The Lord used examples from life. He taught doctrine by telling stories--parables. A parable is a type of anecdote. It is a short, allegorical tale. The parable is usually simple and homely. It typically illustrates, or reinforces, a single spiritual truth. Use them.

Reinforce the theme of your invitation with a **relevant** anecdote. Emphasis is on relevant. A human interest story that has no connection to the theme of the invitation might cause someone to shed a tear, but it will not help the hearer remember the point you attempted to make. Just remember this: people will hear and remember the personal story long after they have forgotten your bullet items. I've had people come to me weeks later and tell me they still remember the anecdote.

Never forget **the speaker's main purpose**. Your purpose is to **tell about Christ**. In doing this you convey insight into Bible precepts. You help the hearer to understand, accept and respond. Therefore, always lay a foundation with Scriptural truth. Use factual illustrations that clarify the lesson. Follow the example of

Christ by using parables, and examples to make it easier to remember. You are not an entertainer. Entertainment is not the reason for your talk. Nevertheless, you should use the time-tested methods of capturing and holding attention so that your audience will listen.

Avoid reading your invitation. Unless you have an exceptional talent, leave the dramatic readings to actors. Speeches that the speaker reads are flat. Your talk will grab audience attention if you speak from your heart, and if you use words that sound like you just thought of them. Does it disappoint you to learn that dazzling intellect does not necessarily make a good speech? I hope not. The tried and true rule is: get the doctrine right, but aim for the heart.

Here are a few more tips to remember. **Practice your talk** before you come to church. Practice smoothes rough edges. It forces you to select words. It prevents mumbling, or stumbling over the choice of an appropriate word. **Avoid chewing gum** when you deliver your talk. It distracts the audience. **Remove coins** from your pockets. A speaker is tempted to put his hands in his pockets. The coins will make noise. If you wear jewelry (a watch, bracelet, ring, etc.) don't play with it. It betrays your nervousness.

Types of talks.

Major speech types may be described by their purpose. These are the informative, the entertaining, and the persuasive. The invitation is primarily persuasive. An invitation should be informative. It had better be entertaining, or no one will listen to it. But what kind of invitation should you offer? Do you reprove, rebuke, exhort...? Should you use expository (a talk that clarifies something, such as a doctrine), biographical (a story about the life of a Biblical character), or exegetical (an interpretation, or explanation of a passage of Scripture)?

Any of these will work.

Just remember that the primary interest of man is other people. If you will reflect a moment on the content of Scripture you will remember that the Bible contains numerous stories about people. Indeed, the theme of the Bible is the coming of a person, namely the Christ. The most vivid passages are about the

trials, and dramatic choices made by the people in the Bible. We remember Joseph because he said "no" to Potiphar's wife. From the same story we learn that adultery is wrong. Abraham is the prototype of faith. Why? Because he offered Isaac upon the altar. Because when God told him to leave his native country, he did. Do the Scriptures simply list Abraham as a man of faith? No. The Scriptures tell how he acted in faith.

The Scriptures are a treasure house of examples of how people reacted when under danger, temptation, or stress. People of today are no different in their feelings from the people described in the Bible. Use those examples. Pick the character and incident that illustrates the point you intend to make. For example, if the theme of your invitation is repentance then use the story of David and the prophet Nathan. The Bible tells us that David had taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite and committed adultery with her; then he had Uriah killed to cover his sin. Nathan confronted David. And how did he do it? With a story. He told David the story of the two men, one was rich and the other poor. The rich man had many flocks and herds. The poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb. You know the story. The point is: Nathan's story brought David to repentance—the story **and the way Nathan presented it to him.**

Does the invitation reprove the sinner? Yes, but **for his good.** Is it a rebuke? Yes, **of his sin.** Does it exhort? It had better. Your exhortation is better understood, your rebuke better received, and your reproof more appreciated if it is done as tactfully as Nathan presented his to King David.

Principles for Intelligent Speaking.

Just like the Creation, **a speech has a design.** Like a story, a speech should have a beginning, a middle, and an end. Do it well and your audience will not be anticipating the third part. The speaker follows the design rigorously, or deviates from it depending on the circumstances existing when he delivers the speech. If you are inexperienced it is best to work out the design and follow it. Leave the ad-libbing to a time when experience can guide it.

Think about what you plan to say. If you need ideas, read some of the things Jesus said. Visit with Paul or Peter. Your

thoughts probably will not come in perfect logical order. Write them down anyway. After you have collected your thoughts, group them by subject, and sort them into order. Discard anything that duplicates another part of the talk. (Repetition is an effective tool for teaching—if used properly. Otherwise, it's boring.)

Use notes. Prepare an outline of your invitation. Don't be afraid to write out your thoughts. It's good insurance. Don't be like the preacher who thought it was below his professional dignity to speak from notes. He always wrote out his sermon, then memorized it. When he presented his sermon he always spoke from memory. A day came when he mounted to the pulpit, then stood there staring at the audience. They waited. He racked his memory as his face grew red. To his deep regret, nothing of his sermon came back to him. So, he dismounted the pulpit and left. There was no sermon that day. That's an extreme example. You can prevent that kind of embarrassment to yourself by simply preparing an outline, and jotting down the key words in your major points. These will refresh your memory at the right time, and you'll look like an evangelist with twenty years of experience.

Use familiar words. Avoid jargon (your professional speech). Computereese sounds impressive, but says nothing to a lawyer, a salesman, or a housewife. If you must use Greek, define it.

Write out the Scripture, and the point to be made. People differ on this. You may be more comfortable with the Bible opened to the passage, and a list of bullet items that contain what you intend to say. Nevertheless, if you take the time to select the words you intend to say before you stand in front of the audience, you have conquered a major obstacle. You will not have to struggle for words, and perhaps use one that is inappropriate. Preparation is a confidence builder.

When you deliver your invitation **speak directly and positively**. As your grammar teacher would say, "Use the active voice!" Speaking passively will put your audience to sleep. Examples of the active voice are,

David slew Goliath.

Jesus bore his cross to Calvary.

Examples of the passive voice (which you will not use) are,
Goliath was slain by David.

The cross was borne by Jesus to Calvary.

Make clear and forthright statements. Avoid vagueness. Say what you mean. For example, do not say something like:

"The individual usually, if not always, does not come on time to the services."

Say rather,

"He usually comes late."

Your Audience.

When you present your invitation the audience will contain people of all ages, both sexes, many education levels, and various professional backgrounds, but all of them will fall into one of two spiritual categories. They are either Christians, or they are not. The invitation should take these differences into account. Offer the invitation first to those who are not Christians. Remind them of the necessity of faith, repentance, confession, and baptism. For the second group extend an opportunity for repentance, and forgiveness. Do not forget to mention that forgiveness is based upon the grace of God in Christ.

1- Sin, the deadly venom of death.

Sin is the cause of death.

Paul said,

1 Corinthians 15: 56 "The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law."

Deadly venom, the deadly mamba snake of South Saharan Africa.

The mamba is a snake of South Saharan Africa that sometimes grows to 14 feet in length. It comes in two colors: green and black--each snake is deadly poisonous. The black mamba is extremely aggressive, and will attack man. When it strikes it rears up on its coils and bites the upper torso. Some say it is the most feared of snakes. One man, bitten by a mamba, died of fright before the venom could do its work. On another occasion a mamba turned on a group of farm workers when a truck ran over its tail. It killed fourteen men before it was stopped.

It is the mamba's venom that further makes it strange; for the poison **paralyzes and deadens** the victim's nerves before it kills. Oddly, death by a mamba is painless.

- Moral: Sin is like that.

The word Paul used in the Corinthian passage is the Greek: κεντρον: (*kentron*), meaning "sting." In this passage the word means: destructive power, **deadly venom**.

- We have a Serpent with which to contend.
- In Genesis, Satan is described as a serpent.
- Satan's venom is deadlier than the mamba.

The victory over death.

1 Corinthians 15:54 But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory. 55 "O death, where is your victory? O

death, where is your sting?" 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; 57 but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.

- The victory over sin and death is in Christ.

2 - Though Your Sins Be as Scarlet...

Leprosy and Sin.

Luke says concerning Jesus that,

Luke 5:12 ...it came about that while He was in one of the cities, behold, there was a man full of leprosy; and when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and implored Him, saying, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean."

- This leper did not doubt Jesus' ability to heal him.
- He believed the only thing that would prevent his release from leprosy was Jesus' willingness.

Leprosy at this time was an incurable disease. Even today it is difficult to cure. It is perhaps the most loathsome. It causes and ugliness that is difficult to approach.

Many believe that God chose leprosy as the symbol of sin and its consequences. The Law of Moses certainly carries out this idea. Sin. Uncleaness. These two ideas lie together. Under the Law of Moses lepers are separated from the uninfected.

The Hebrews prohibited lepers from mingling with the healthy. Luke tells us that this man was "full of leprosy." He was a leper past all hope of recovery.

In this condition he would be a repulsive sight. The whole appearance of his face would have changed until he looked as a lion. Nodules grow on the skin. They ulcerate. Discharges flow. The eyebrows fall out. The eyes stare. The voice becomes hoarse. The victim wheezes. Ultimately the disease spreads inward. It ends in consumption, dropsy, suffocation, and death. This man was not far from that end.

"Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean."

To many Jews of that far off day uncleaness was at least as horrible as the disease. It meant to be an outcast from Israel, to be classed with swine, and dogs.

So, besides asking to be healed, the leper asked that the Lord would remove his shame.

- Remember this: to the Jew a man's physical condition told of his spiritual condition. And this man asked to be made clean—he did not ask for good health.

What is incurable to man is not incurable to God.

Mark 9:14 When they came back to the disciples, they saw a large crowd around them, and some scribes arguing with them. 15 Immediately, when the entire crowd saw Him, they were amazed and began running up to greet Him. 16 And He asked them, “What are you discussing with them?” 17 and one of the crowd answered Him, “Teacher, I brought You my son, possessed with a spirit which makes him mute; 18 and whenever it seizes him, it slams him to the ground and he foams at the mouth, and grinds his teeth and stiffens out. I told Your disciples to cast it out, and they could not do it.” 19 And He *answered them and *said, “O unbelieving generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him to Me!” 20 They brought the boy to Him. When he saw Him, immediately the spirit threw him into a convulsion, and falling to the ground, he began rolling around and foaming at the mouth. 21 And He asked his father, “How long has this been happening to him?” And he said, “From childhood. 22 “It has often thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But **if You can do anything**, take pity on us and help us!” 23 And Jesus said to him, “**‘If You can?’ All things are possible to him who believes.**” 24 Immediately the boy’s father cried out and said, “**I do believe; help my unbelief.**” 25 When Jesus saw that a crowd was rapidly gathering, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, “You deaf and mute spirit, I command you, come out of him and do not enter him again.” 26

After crying out and throwing him into terrible convulsions, it came out; and the boy became so much like a corpse that most of them said, “He is dead!” 27 But Jesus took him by the hand and raised him; and he got up.

Jesus reaches out to the most pitiable, and repulsive.

Jesus healed the demoniac who had been possessed from childhood. Even the disciples of Jesus could not heal him. But Jesus cast the demon out, and healed him.

The leper was beyond help so far as man was concerned, but he believed.

Luke says of the leper that Jesus,
... stretched out His hand and touched him.

He touched him!

And Jesus said, "I am willing; be cleansed."

And immediately the leprosy left him. Luke 5:13

- No matter how loathsome the disease—or the sin. The Lord can touch you.
- He is willing to cleanse—to forgive.

Matthew 19:23 And Jesus said to His disciples, “Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. 24 “Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” 25 When the disciples heard this, they were very astonished and said, “Then who can be saved?” 26 And looking at them Jesus said to them, “With people this is impossible, but **with God all things are possible.**”

- No one is beyond the reach of God’s forgiveness and salvation, except the one who puts himself there.

3 - Courage and Faith.

Daniel and the Image of Gold.

Daniel was a man who worshipped the God of Heaven. He knew God was spirit, and well knew the commandment: "You shall have no other gods before Me."

The Bible says in Daniel chapter 3,

Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, the height of which was sixty cubits and its width six cubits (that's about ninety feet by nine feet); he set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. Daniel 3:1.

When the image was in place,

Daniel 3:2 "Then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent word to assemble the satraps, the prefects and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates and all the rulers of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

Then the herald announced the king's command.

Daniel 3:5 At the sound of the music you are to fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king has set up. And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a furnace of blazing fire."

- Here indeed was a test for the believer in God.

Daniel and his two friends would not bow down. Accusers came before the king and told him that the Hebrews had ignored his command. In a rage the king gave orders that they be brought before him.

When they brought the Hebrews Nebuchadnezzar asked, "Is this true that you do not serve my gods, or worship the golden image I have set up?" And "If you don't who will deliver you out of my hands?"

- What person would be bold enough to answer forthrightly in such a circumstance?

- Who could "speak truth with all boldness"?

Daniel knew that they were objects of the king's wrath, and that their lives lay in the hands of the most powerful man on earth. Even his whims became law.

Yet Daniel and his friends answered,

Daniel 3:16-18 "We do not need to give you an answer concerning this. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire, and He will deliver us out of your hand O king. But even if he does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods, or worship the golden image you have set up."

God delivers His servants.

What an answer! Here indeed is boldness, and truth. As Barnes said, "When we consider the circumstances of those who made this reply; when we remember their comparative youth, and the few opportunities which they had for instruction in the nature of religion, and that they were captives in a distant land, and that they stood before the absolute monarch of the Earth, that they had no powerful friends to support them, and with certain death threatening them, we may well admire the grace of that God who could so amply furnish them for such a trial, and love that religion which enabled them to take a stand so noble and so bold."

- God delivered Daniel and his friends out of the fiery furnace.
- The Son of God was with them as they passed through the fire.

4 - Forgiveness.

We do not always receive good for good.

Many years ago in Holland the authorities persecuted the Anabaptists because they taught the separation of church and state. Some of these were the predecessor of the Mennonites. As the story is told an Anabaptist by the name of Dirk Willemzoon was charged with fellowship with the sect, and was sentenced to death.

But Dirk escaped the authorities when they came to arrest him. Nevertheless, one of the officers pursued him out of town and into the countryside. It was winter. The ground was frozen, and covered with snow. As he fled he came to a frozen lake, and started across. As he passed over the surface the ice began to tremble and crack, but he reached the opposite shore safely.

The officer who pursued him was not so fortunate. As he chased Willemzoon out upon the frozen lake, the ice gave way, and he sank into the icy water.

In the woods on the other side, Dirk could hear the officer crying for help. There was none to hear him except Willemzoon. What could he do? He could ignore the cries and escape to safety. Or he could return and be arrested.

Willemzoon would not abandon the clear teaching of the Christ neither would he abandon the officer to the icy waters of the lake. He returned, and at great risk to his own safety, he extended his hand to the officer. This generous act saved the officer from certain death. Later, the officer desired to save Willemzoon from the executioner, but the Burgomaster of Asperen would not hear the appeal. The burgomaster arrested Willemzoon, and on the 16th of May following they burned him to death.

- Willemzoon did the right thing.
- He suffered evil for doing the right thing.

The world urges conflict and retaliation.

The world teaches us to retaliate when we receive evil. Worldly philosophy is as the bumper sticker says, "Don't get

mad, get even.” But getting even is not the philosophy of Christ. The practice of an “eye for an eye and tooth for tooth” has been replaced by something much better. Let us remember what the Scriptures say,

1 Corinthians 4:12 Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed we entreat.

God Forgives those who trespass.

Knowing that we have been forgiven a great burden of sin, we forgive others. As the Lord said on the cross, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." Luke 23:34.

The Lord said His followers should forgive others. In the gospel of Mark we read,

Mark 11:25 "And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your transgressions."

- **Forgiveness begets forgiveness.**

The Apostle Paul said to the Romans,

Romans 12:14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. 16 Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion. 17 Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. 18 If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. 19 Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. 20 Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

- The Lord is abundant in mercy and forgiveness.
- Seek His forgiveness
- Forgive others.

5 - Redemption

Bought back with a sack of rice.

First Lieutenant Jeff De Blanc of St. Martinville, LA told a story about aerial combat in which he was involved while a member of Marine fighter squadron VMF-112. Flying near Guadalcanal in early 1943 he and others of his squadron engaged a group of Japanese Zeros. A Zero shot Lieutenant De Blanc down. He bailed out of his aircraft and landed in the ocean near a small island named Kolombangara. After swimming for about six hours he reached the island and slipped into the jungle.

The Japanese occupied the island, so he took to the trees to avoid detection. The freedom of the trees allowed him to make headway against the heavy vegetation on the ground. After surviving for a few days on coconuts, he awoke one morning to find himself surrounded by natives. The natives took him captive, and brought him by dugout canoe to their village. That night he said the jungle drums sounded their ominous beats, raising the hair on the nape of his neck.

Sometime later a group of seven other natives arrived. They came to where he was held captive and threw down a sack of rice. After this his captors released De Blanc into the newcomers' custody, and later he returned to his unit.

They left the village without speaking a word, but the Lieutenant knew that he had been bought for a sack of rice. De Blanc said that very few people know exactly how much they are worth. He knows, one sack of rice.¹

You have been bought with a price.

Peter said, speaking of Christ,

1 Peter 1:16 And if you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each man's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your

¹ Joe Foss and Matthew Brennan, *Top Guns*, Pocket Star Books, New York, 1991.

stay upon the earth; knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.

The Blood of Christ will redeem you from your sins.

- Christ is spoken of as having bought his followers, making them His property.
- The purchased price was his blood.

Paul said to the Corinthians after he had admonished them to flee from sin, "For you have been bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body." 1 Corinthians 6:20.

6 - The Bread of Life.

Bread--the staff of life.

Through thousands of years bread has been the mainstay in the diets of many people. In the New Testament “bread” is the Greek word, *artos*, a small loaf, or cake, composed of flour and water, kneaded together, and baked into a round or oblong shape about as thick as the thumb. Sometimes the bread was leavened, sometimes not. These loaves were not cut for eating, but were broken.

The Jews consecrated bread to the Lord every Sabbath, and called it the shewbread, that is, the loaves of presentation.

The Lord Jesus, when he broke bread with the disciples on the Passover before his crucifixion, **used unleavened bread.**

The cure for hunger.

There is a report that during World War II, the Nazis forced many twelve and thirteen year old boys into the Junior Gestapo. They treated the boys harshly, and gave them inhumane jobs to perform. By the time the war ended, most of the boys had lost their families, and the Nazis turned them out to wander without food or shelter.

When the allies came, they placed many of the youngsters in tent cities where they might be sheltered. Doctors and psychologists attempted to restore their mental and physical health. They found that many of the boys would awaken in the middle of the night, screaming in fear.

One doctor had an idea. After the evening meal, he put the boys to bed, and gave each a piece of bread to hold in his hand. They were told to save it until the morning.

The boys then slept soundly. After so many years of hunger, they finally had the assurance of food for the next day.

The Bread of Life.

In John 6:32 Jesus therefore said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven. For the bread of

God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world.

They said therefore to Him, "Lord, evermore give us this bread." Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst."

So many people today have the Bread of Life literally in hand, yet sleep in fear. Worse, they hunger for the nourishment that only Christ can give.

7 - A place to dwell.

Temporary Dwelling.

A few years ago a woman in New York City made the news because she ran afoul the city authorities for living on a steam grating. The city was trying to evict her from her place on the sidewalk. A homeless person, she had moved all her worldly goods to the city streets, and warmed herself from the winter cold by hovering over the steam rising from the grating. A dwelling place without walls or roof might not appeal to many, but it was a coveted place to live—among the homeless. Ironically, according to her she still needed over \$10, 000 per year to live in New York City.

- Earthly dwellings are sometimes barely adequate.
- Earthly dwellings are short lived.

The Apostle Peter told his readers in his second letter about the Christian virtues, and then he said,

2 Peter 1:12 For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth. 13 Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding you, 14 knowing that shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me.

When Peter wrote “tent” he was not referring to his house in Capernaum. He was talking about his human form—his body. In the King James it is called a "tent." Peter was looking forward to inhabiting his mansion. The mansion is the body that he will have as a permanent dwelling in heaven.

Obtaining a Permanent Dwelling.

The writer of Hebrews tells us that Abraham had no permanent dwelling on earth, and had to dwell in tents—not necessarily the human body, but those made of animal skins and fabrics. These dwellings were temporary and Abraham had in

mind a better place. He knew that the better dwelling would be obtained by faith.

Hebrews 11:8 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; 10 for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

- Abraham endured life in a tent because he wanted something better.
- Abraham waited for a dwelling place that would endure.

In John 14 Jesus says,

John 14:1 "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. 2 "In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. 3 "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.

So, to obtain one of those "mansions" the Lord promised we must believe in God, and believe in Christ. Nothing else will do.

There is the story of the wealthy woman who, when she reached heaven, was conducted to a very plain house. She had expected better, so she objected.

"Well," she was told, "that is the dwelling place prepared for you."

"Whose is that fine mansion across the way?" she asked.

"It belongs to your gardener," her guide replied.

"How is it that he has a house so much better than mine?"

"The houses here are prepared from the materials that are sent up. We do not choose them; you do that by your faithfulness while on earth."

- What we do in this life does have some influence upon our future dwelling place.
- Do you want a fine mansion? Then believe in Christ and lay up treasure in Heaven.

And as He said,

"Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moss nor rust doth corrupt, nor do thieves break in and steal."

8 - The one wish

Solomon's opportunity.

In one of the television commercials where the pink rabbit sells batteries that have “long life” there is an episode in which an adventurer has found a bottle with a genie inside. The genie tells him he will grant him three wishes. The man asks for riches, for the love of women, and lastly he asks for “long life.” These are the secret wishes of nearly every man. But in the commercial the genie gives him money, women and then changes him into a pink rabbit with a long-life battery and with a drum to beat on as he “keeps on going.”

- The moral is: be careful what you ask for because your wish just might be granted.

Solomon is probably the only man God ever asked that famous question, “Ask what you wish me to give you?” And when God asks such a question we know that he can fulfill it. It is no human fantasy.

Solomon sleeps and dreams.

The Bible tells us in 1 Kings 3:5 that Solomon had come from worship. On that day the tabernacle stood on the top of the hill at Gibeon. A procession of nobles, soldiers, and priests marched out to praise Jehovah. They had come to this observance with an offering of a thousand burnt offerings. To these they added their songs of praise, and offered up the united prayers of Israel. This great ceremony prepared young king Solomon for his dream.

As he slept he dreamed, and as it happened in those days, God came to him in his dream. “Ask what I shall give thee...?” the Lord said. 1 Kings 3:5.

What will it be? Long life? Riches? Vengeance on enemies? Solomon answered,

1 Kings 3:9 “So give Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?”

- an understanding heart.
- to discern between good and evil.

What is God's gift to you?

Would you ask for riches, the love of women and long life?

Would you ask for "life, peace and security?"

Would you ask to be wise?

Paul also said to the Ephesians,

Ephesians 1:15 Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, 16 do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, 18 the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power ...

When God opens the eyes of our understanding then we know the hope of a calling in Christ, the riches of the reward that awaits a faithful Christian life, and the greatness of the power of God to influence our lives for good.

James said,

James 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

- Every good and perfect gift is in Christ.
- You need Christ.
- Serve Him.

9 - The Mindset.

The advice of the Apostle Paul

Several years ago the Chevron Oil Company did a study of Service Station Robbers. The oil company's intent was to discover what caused the robber to steal from the gas station. They discovered that the thief had a mindset. Before entering the gas station to rob it, he had already decided that the money in the cash register was his. He believed that taking the money was not really robbery of the oil company. He was only taking what belonged to him.

- **Moral:** frequently, sinners justify their sin to themselves before they commit it.

Paul told the Colossians, "Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth." Col. 3:2.

With the mindset Paul recommended, a man would be intent on the promises of Christ, of all the comfort and satisfaction that would come to the servant of God for a life of dedication to the cause of good.

A mind set on earthly things.

A young man named Sean made big plans to take his girlfriend to the prom. The girl's father was kind enough to buy tickets for his daughter and Neal, and had bought a tuxedo for Neal as well.

But that was not enough for Neal. He wanted to take his date to the St. Thomas Aquinas High School prom in a limousine. So intent did he become on having the limousine that he got a Beretta, a handgun.

On a Sunday before the prom, Neal robbed the Galleria store on Sunrise Boulevard, in Ft. Lauderdale. The next day he robbed the Best Wishes store of Delray. Brandishing the handgun he demanded money. He left, taking cash and jewelry.

Police tracked him down by using his fingerprints. The Best Wishes store owner identified him. Instead of going to the prom in a limousine, he rode a police cruiser to the county jail where

he was charged with felony armed robbery, aggravated assault, and possession of a firearm.

- A mind set on earthly things leads to ruin.

Renew your mind.

Romans 8:6 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace; because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the Law of God, for it is not even able to do so; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Again,

Romans 12:1 I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Set your mind on Christ.

Do you want to turn your life to a better purpose. Set your mind on Christ. Pursue His interest, His teaching. Have faith in Him. Obey his will. Become His disciple by repenting of sin, receiving His baptism, confessing Him as your Lord.

10 - They trusted in the Lord

The story of Abijah, King of Judah, and Jeroboam, King of Israel. II Chr. 13:1-20.

2 Chr. 13:1 In the eighteenth year of King Jeroboam, Abijah became king over Judah. 2 He reigned three years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Michaiah the daughter of Uriel of Gibeah. And there was war between Abijah and Jeroboam. 3 Abijah set the battle in order with an army of valiant warriors, four hundred thousand choice men. Jeroboam also drew up in battle formation against him with eight hundred thousand choice men, mighty men of valor. 4 Then Abijah stood on Mount Zemaraim, which is in the mountains of Ephraim, and said, "Hear me, Jeroboam and all Israel: 5 "Should you not know that the LORD God of Israel gave the dominion over Israel to David forever, to him and his sons, by a covenant of salt? 6 "Yet Jeroboam the son of Nebat, the servant of Solomon the son of David, rose up and rebelled against his lord. 7 "Then worthless rogues gathered to him, and strengthened themselves against Rehoboam the son of Solomon, when Rehoboam was young and inexperienced and could not withstand them. 8 "And now you think to withstand the kingdom of the LORD, which is in the hand of the sons of David; and you are a great multitude, and with you are the gold calves which Jeroboam made for you as gods. 9 "Have you not cast out the priests of the LORD, the sons of Aaron, and the Levites, and made for yourselves priests, like the peoples of other lands, so that whoever comes to consecrate himself with a young bull and seven rams may be a priest of things that are not gods? 10 "But as for us, the LORD is our God, and we have not forsaken Him; and the priests who

minister to the LORD are the sons of Aaron, and the Levites attend to their duties. 11 "And they burn to the LORD every morning and every evening burnt sacrifices and sweet incense; they also set the showbread in order on the pure gold table, and the lampstand of gold with its lamps to burn every evening; for we keep the command of the LORD our God, but you have forsaken Him. 12 "Now look, God Himself is with us as our head, and His priests with sounding trumpets to sound the alarm against you. O children of Israel, do not fight against the LORD God of your fathers, for you shall not prosper!" 13 But Jeroboam caused an ambush to go around behind them; so they were in front of Judah, and the ambush was behind them. 14 And when Judah looked around, to their surprise the battle line was at both front and rear; and they cried out to the LORD, and the priests sounded the trumpets. 15 Then the men of Judah gave a shout; and as the men of Judah shouted, it happened that God struck Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah. 16 And the children of Israel fled before Judah, and God delivered them into their hand. 17 Then Abijah and his people struck them with a great slaughter; so five hundred thousand choice men of Israel fell slain. 18 Thus the children of Israel were subdued at that time; and the children of Judah prevailed, because they relied on the LORD God of their fathers. 19 And Abijah pursued Jeroboam and took cities from him: Bethel with its villages, Jeshanah with its villages, and Ephraim with its villages. 20 So Jeroboam did not recover strength again in the days of Abijah; and the LORD struck him, and he died.

- Those who oppose the Lord will perish.
- Those who rely on the Lord will win the victory.

"More than conquerors in Christ" Romans 8:31-39

Romans 8:31 What then shall we say to these things?

If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? 33 Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." 37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. 38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, 39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

- Though the enemy have us compassed about, the Lord will grant us the victory.

11- Be Alert.

Be on the alert.

Matt 24:42

"Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming."

Be properly dressed.

When former President Eisenhower was vacationing in Denver a number of years ago, aides called his attention to an open letter in a local newspaper, which told how a six-year old, Paul Haley, lay dying of incurable cancer, and had expressed a wish to see the President of the United States. Spontaneously, in one of those gracious gestures remembered long after a man's most carefully prepared speeches are forgotten, the President decided to grant the boy's wish.

So, one Sunday morning in August, a big limousine pulled up outside the Haley home, and out stepped the President. He walked up to the door and knocked.

On that Sunday morning a knock at the door awakened Paul Haley's father. He dressed hurriedly, in jeans and a flannel shirt. So, unkempt, and with a day's growth of beard he went to the door. When he opened the door he was shocked to see Dwight Eisenhower standing there. His little boy, Paul, stood behind him.

You can imagine their amazement at finding President Eisenhower standing on their doorstep.

"Paul," said the President, "I understand you wanted to see me. Glad to see you." Then he shook hands with the six-year old, and took him out to see the presidential limousine. They shook hands again, and the President left.

Donald Haley always wishes he had got up earlier that morning, and that he had shaved and put on his best clothes.²

- Such will be the coming of the Lord.

² Billy Graham, *World Aflame*.

- It will be a surprise to many.
- Many will not be properly dressed.

Revelation 3:18 "I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire, that you may become rich, and white garments, that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed, and eye salve to anoint your eyes that you may see."

Put on Christ.

- Moral: Do you want to be properly dressed? Then put on Christ.

Galatians 3:26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

12 - The Unexpectedness of the End of the World.

The End of the world will come unexpectedly to some.

Matt. 24:38 "For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, they were marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark..."

- The majority of the people of the world live according to their appetites and take no thought of the spiritual.
- The end will come on a day they think not.

The suddenness of the storm of 1938.

In September 1938 the people of New England were naive about the power and danger of the Atlantic hurricane, and few paid attention to them. There was not much news reported about hurricanes anyway. They were thought to be a problem for Florida, and the Caribbean. But that year a hurricane of great ferocity took an unusual path, turning north, sparing Florida, and passing east of Cape Hatteras. The U.S. Weather Bureau tracked the storm, and was convinced it would turn out to sea.

The sky lowered, the wind increased, and the sea rose upon people who were caught without preparation. Some people were caught playing at the beach, fishermen were at work, one family was having a wedding. They had rented a hall at a hotel in Providence, and a bridal suite at another hotel next door. Virtually without warning the storm struck Long Island, N.Y., and Rhode Island on a September day in which the people did not expect it.

There was one incident in which a young girl who lived on a strip of sand jutting out into the bay, saw the neighboring house through her bedroom window. Three women came out on the porch of the house and were standing still, staring at the sea as it approached. The sea rose, lifted the house then washed over

it. When the water receded the house, and the women, were gone. The house belonged to the Nestors.

This same young girl survived the storm by riding a portion of the third floor of her house across the bay, driven by the force of the storm. Winds of the storm blew her from Rhode Island to Connecticut.³

Don't let the cares of this life distract you from your duty to the Lord.

- His return will be sudden.
- His return will be unexpected.

The Lord said,

Luke 22:34 "Be on guard, that your hearts may not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap; for it will come upon all those who dwell on the face of all the earth. But keep on the alert at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man. Luke 22:34-36.

³ The American Experience, WEDU, Ch 3, Florida West Coast Public Broadcasting.

13 - Temptation.

Temptation.

The Bible says that,

Matthew 4:1 ...Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry. Matthew 4:1-2.

- Moral: As it was with the Lord so it is with His disciples, temptation usually comes upon us when we are weakest.

On Big Pine Key in the Florida Keys live the Key deer. These are tiny, docile creatures about knee high on a man. It is said that a Key deer can be lured to its death by the offer of a Twinkie.

- Moral: Often the greatest price is exacted for the least of value.

Temptation is a test of the heart.

In 2 Chronicles chapter 32 the Scripture tells us that God allowed king Hezekiah to be tested that He might know all that was in his heart.

- Moral: Testing comes upon a person to prove their faith.

James wrote,

James 1:13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt any one. 14 But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.

From 2 Chronicles Chapter 32 we learn that Hezekiah had accomplished tremendous things. He had acquired immense wealth, and honor; he built cities, acquired flocks and herds. In all he did he prospered; except, that he had a proud heart, and "he gave no return for the benefit he received." So he became mortally ill that he might humble the mighty pride of his heart before God.

- Hezekiah became proud and returned no thanks to the Lord.
- Pride goes before a fall.
- Illness frequently reminds us of our frailty before God.

Paul said,

1 Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you but such as it is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able; but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it.

- God knows of our temptations.
- Nevertheless, we are expected to overcome.

Harlan Johnson of Crosby, North Dakota, is a farmer. He was expecting a \$31 payment from the federal government for a farm program. When the check arrived it was for more than \$4 million dollars. It was an error.

Can you imagine the thoughts that might have entered his mind? Here was enough money to live in luxury almost anywhere in the world. But was he overcome by the temptation? No.

"I had a good laugh over it...and then took the check back," Johnson said.

The check had been issued by the U.S. Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service, which did not notice the error until the day after the check was mailed.

Overcoming temptation.

The writer of Hebrews said,

Hebrews 4:15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.

- Overcome through Christ.

John wrote,

1 John 2:1 My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; 2 and He himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.

- Jesus pleads for the sinner.
- Jesus is the one who appeases our sin.⁴

Note for speaker:

Propitiate: hilaskomai (ἱλάσκομαι) , ...in the N.T. It is never used of any act whereby man brings God into a favorable attitude or gracious disposition. It is God who is propitiated by the vindication of His holy and righteous character, whereby, through the provision He has made in the vicarious and expiatory sacrifice of Christ, He has so dealt with sin that He can show mercy to the believing sinner in the removal of his guilt and the remission of his sins.⁵

⁴ Vine, W., & Bruce, F. (1981). Vol. 2: *Vine's Expository dictionary of Old and New Testament words* (223). Old Tappan NJ: Revell.

⁵ Ibid. Vine, W., & Bruce, F. "propitiate."

14 - Love not the world.

Do Not Love the World.

Mark tells of an incident when Jesus came into Judaea teaching. A man ran up to him, knelt before him, and asked, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

Jesus reminds him of the Law of Moses and some of the Ten Commandments. The man answered that "I have kept all of these things from my youth up."

Then Mark says,

Mark 10:21 And looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him, and said to him, "One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess, and give it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." 22 But at these words his face fell, and he went away grieved, for he was one who owned much property. Mark 10:17-22.

In 1 John chapter 2 the Scripture says,

1 John 2:15 Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

We must let go of the world to serve God.

In India there are men who capture monkeys. The story goes that they have a system that works every time. They make a box, enclosed on all sides, top and bottom, except on one side, they cut a hole. Not a large hole. It is just big enough for the monkey to put his hand through it. Then they take the box out into the jungle where the monkeys live. Once in the jungle, they place a banana inside the box.

After a while the monkey discovers the box, and the banana inside. He puts his hand through the hole, and takes hold of the banana. But when he tries to remove the banana, he discovers that the hole is too small for his hand, and the banana. The mind of the monkey is such that he cannot let go of the banana.

Upon this scene of simian dilemma, the hunter comes and takes the monkey away.

Some sins are like that. It is something we want, something desirable. We know the Devil has us, but still we can't let go. But we are not monkeys.

- Moral: Let go of the banana.

Some men are in the same condition as the monkey when it comes to their appetites. But before they can serve God, they must let go of whatever it is that is hindering their service to the Lord. Worse, if they refuse to let go, then the Hunter of Men will come and take them away. In the end they will suffer eternally because they could not—or would not—let go.

Choose Christ and not the world.

The Lord said,

Matthew 16: 25 "For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it. For what will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" Matthew 16:25-26.

- The soul is too valuable to give up for any price.
- Let go of whatever prevents you from serving Christ.

15 - The Gospel is not secret.

Open to Public View.

Paul in his defense before Agrippa and Festus in Acts Chapter 26 spoke about the resurrection from the dead.

"Paul, you are out of your mind! Your great learning is driving you mad," Festus said in a loud voice. vs 24.

"I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth." vs 25.

"For the king knows about these matters, and I speak to him also with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this has not been done in a corner." vs 26.

Festus thought Paul was crazy. The Apostle's claims were incredible to him.

In every age there are men who make outrageous claims. Our age is no different. In the outrageous claims department there is the story about cold fusion.

Two professors at the University of Utah, Ponds and Fleishman, claimed to have found the secret to cheap and virtually unlimited energy. Hydrogen fusion, which is the process at work in the hydrogen bomb, has been known to occur at great temperatures and pressures. Ponds and Fleishman published a report that claimed they had found a way to accomplish fusion at room temperatures, and with a simple apparatus. The only problem was, the experiment could not be duplicated, and there were no witnesses other than the men who reported the results.

- Moral: This thing **was done in a corner.**
- **There were no independent witnesses.**

But there were witnesses to the resurrection.

Peter said in his second letter,

2 Peter 1:16 "For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and

coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses to his majesty.

The appeal of truth, and of facts.

The Apostles of Christ **were not**,

learned men,
overly intelligent,
men of worldly credentials,
religious fanatics,
But they were eyewitnesses.

These Apostles were competent witnesses of where Jesus went, of what He said, and what He did.

J. W. McGarvey wrote that, “Competency is determined by considering the **opportunities** of the witness **to obtain knowledge** of that to which he testifies, and his **mental capacity to observe** and remember the facts.”⁶ Note that the Apostles had companied with Jesus from the time that Jesus received the baptism of John the Baptist, and they understood that their office was that of witnesses.⁷ The Apostles were mentally and physically competent. Physical competency required mainly good eyes, and good ears. As has been said,

Good eyes and ears were better qualifications for the original Apostles than all the learning of the Archbishop of York, or of the potentialities of a Rhodes Scholar. Their most important role was to identify the person of Jesus, whenever and wherever they saw him. Jesus expected them to tell what he did, to repeat what he said, and to proclaim the facts without comment.

Truly, the matters concerning the trial and crucifixion of Christ had not been done in a corner. More importantly, His resurrection was a public event that occurred in the city where he was surrounded by his avowed enemies. Many witnesses confirmed His appearances following his resurrection. The proofs were so convincing that many even of his former

⁶ J. W. McGarvey, *Evidences of Christianity*, Part III, p. 117,18.

⁷ Acts 1:21,22.

enemies—including those from among the Jewish priests—were converted and became His followers.⁸

Paul was well aware of these facts, and so was Agrippa. Today we have the written testimony of those early witnesses to the resurrection of Christ. This testimony is comprised of the gospels, the Acts and the letters of the Apostles to the churches.

Paul wrote to the church of the Ephesians,

Eph. 3:3 that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. 4 And by referring to this, **when you read** you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ...

- People understand what Paul wrote by reading his letters.
- The same is true of the gospels.

To the church at Corinth Paul wrote,

1 Cor. 1:21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased **through** the foolishness of **the message preached** to **save those who believe**. 22 For indeed Jews ask for signs, and Greeks search for wisdom; 23 but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness, 24 but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

- The gospel is public knowledge.
- You can understand it by reading it.

⁸ Acts 6:7. See also John 12:42, "...many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him..." These rulers knew the truth but had not the courage to act on it.

16 - Missing or Misplaced Concern

Misplaced concern.

A young girl named Samantha, of Manchester, Maine, met with Soviet premier Michael Gorbachev, and talked with him about the arms race that could lead to the nuclear destruction of both the Soviet Union and the United States. She was eleven years old at the time. After the meeting with the premier she became a spokesperson for the anti-nuclear movement, and launched a modeling/acting career as a result of the publicity.

She was killed in the crash of a commuter airplane in August 1985 while traveling with her father. She was thirteen years old when she died.

- She should have been more concerned about the risks of travel than of nuclear war.
- Fix your attention on the proper goal.
- Be concerned about spiritual things.

Peter said,

1 Peter 1:13 Therefore, gird your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

The unconcerned.

Centralia Pennsylvania is a town sitting above an inferno. Coal mine fires burn in tunnels below the town. Since 1962 most of the town's 20 inhabitants have fled. Today, there is imminent danger that the ground will collapse, and the remaining 84 inhabitants will be cast into the fires. Are they going? No. Residents who remain say they will stay till they die.

- Do not ignore the dangers.
- Christ lifts the veil
- Be concerned about knowing Him.

Paul said,

2 Cor. 4:3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake.

Have concern for the soul.

The Lord said,

Matt. 16:26 "For what will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? "For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and will then recompense every man according to his deeds." Matthew 16:26-27.

- Our most valuable possession is our soul.
- Be concerned for your soul.
- The Lord is coming back to see how you have done.

17 - Unreasonable Expectations

The condition of those who do not believe.

John wrote in his gospel concerning Jesus that,

John 3:18 “He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

Years ago a Milwaukee newspaper, *The Milwaukee Journal*, conducted a poll of 607 heads of households by telephone, in which the persons were asked where they expect to go when they die. Eighty-Three percent of the persons interviewed expected to go to Heaven; only 5 percent expected to go to Hell. Five percent said they didn't know. Seven percent declined to answer.

- This was a remarkable example of self-deception.
- Whether a person is saved or not depends not on how we feel, but on whether we believe in Christ.

To believe in the Son of God is to put one's confidence in his work, and to trust Him. Merely to believe that Jesus once lived in the history of the world and that He died on the cross is not the belief that John wrote about. Belief is a condition in which the person has complete trust and reliance on Jesus. It is like the faith of Abraham who when God called him he left his home and lived as an alien in a foreign land in a tent with his sons. When he was tested he was willing to offer his son, Isaac, as a sacrifice because he believed that God is able even to raise him from the dead.

Abraham believed.

- John wrote that condemnation rests on the person who does not believe in Jesus.

Contrary to what many people believe the default position of a person is not salvation, but condemnation. John said, "... he

who does not believe has been judged already." The word here that is translated "judged" means "condemned"⁹.

- Those who do not believe in him are condemned already.
- The unbelievers are condemned because they have not believed in the Son of God.

Therefore, salvation and judgment are present realities because of the coming of the Christ. It is much the same as the example Jesus gave to Nicodemus—explained in the same context of John Chapter Three. Jesus gave Nicodemus the old testament example of the lifting up of the serpent in the wilderness.

The people of Israel had sinned and the Bible says that,

Numbers 21:6 The LORD sent fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. 7 So the people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned, because we have spoken against the LORD and you; intercede with the LORD, that He may remove the serpents from us." And Moses interceded for the people. 8 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery *serpent*, and set it on a standard; and it shall come about, that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, he will live." 9 And Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on the standard; and it came about, that if a serpent bit any man, when he looked to the bronze serpent, he lived.

Even so, as the dying Israelites turned their eyes on the brazen serpent and received life, men today under the condemnation of sin will receive eternal life and healing through the uplifted savior—if they turn to Him.¹⁰

Our opinions and expectations can be quite mistaken. It is quite necessary that a person trust in what Jesus said.

⁹ 56.30 κρίνω^f; κρίσις^e, εως *ℓ* κρίμα^d, τος *n*: to judge a person to be guilty and liable to punishment—to judge as guilty, to condemn, condemnation.⁹

¹⁰ *New Bible Commentary*, p. 872.

As it is written,

John 12:47–48 (NASB95)

12:47 “If anyone hears My sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. 48 “He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day.

18 Jochanan ben Sakkai

The death of the rabbi

Jochanan ben Saccai was a learned Rabbi, and scribe. He lived in Jerusalem in the decades before the destruction of the city by the Romans. In the years before 70 A. D. he taught the Law to his disciples, using as his authority the traditions of the Rabbis. He served for two years as the president of the Great Sanhedrin. His service as president came in the year immediately before the destruction of the Temple, and the year after. Therefore, he presided over his nation during her death throes.¹¹

The Talmud tells of an incident that happened as he lay dying. His disciples came to visit him. When they came in to his chambers and saw him on his death bed, he burst into tears. His tears astonished them. Why they asked, did he whom they called the “light of Israel,” the right pillar of the Temple, and its mighty hammer—why did he betray such signs of fear?

He replied, "If I were now to be brought before an earthly king, who lives today and dies tomorrow, whose wrath and whose bonds are not everlasting, and whose sentence of death, even, is not that of eternal death, who can be assuaged by arguments, or perhaps bought off by money—I should tremble and weep. How much more reason have I for it when about to be led before the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He, Who lives and abides forever, Whose chains are chains ever more, and whose sentence of death kills forever, Whom I cannot assuage with words, nor bribe with money! And not only so, but there are before me two ways, one to paradise, and the other to hell, and I know not which of the two ways I shall have to go—whether to paradise or to hell. How, then, shall I not shed tears?"¹²

At the end of his life Jochanan ben Saccai doubted his eternal resting place. He did not know the right way. Years sitting as a judge of Israel, years of keeping the traditions, years of keeping the Law availed him nothing.

¹¹ Jeremias, J., *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*. pp. 116, 125, 237.

¹² Edersheim, A., *Sketches of Jewish Social Life*. pp. 161,2.

- Jochanan ben Sakkai trusted in his keeping of the Law of Moses—or we should say, the Halacha.
- In the end it availed him nothing.

The meaning of his name.

- The name Jehochanan or Jochanan is in English, “the Lord is gracious.”
- Jochanan ben Sakkai had the answer to his question nearer to him than he could imagine.
- The answer was in his name.

So it is in life that the “Lord is nearer” than we could ever conceive; in fact, as the Apostle Paul said, “...in Him we live and move and have our being.”

Sakkai had looked for his salvation in his observance of the Law of Moses and did not find it. Paul found it in faith. He said of himself and of other believers in Christ,

Philippians 3:3 for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh, 4 although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: 5 circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. 7 But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, 9 and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the

basis of faith, 10 that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; 11 in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

- Christians are to put no confidence in the flesh.
- Paul was eminently qualified to put confidence in the flesh—but he refused to do it.
- The righteousness that Paul sought came to him on the basis of faith.
- Faith leads to a true knowledge of Christ and a joyous resurrection from the dead.

19 Holding on to Principle. Persevering.

The need for Endurance under persecution and stress.

The Hebrew writer said,

Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.

Hebrews 10:37 For yet a very little while, He who is coming will come, and will not delay. 38 But My righteous one shall live by faith; And if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him.

Sir Thomas More was an English lawyer. He served for three years as chancellor of England. He was a man loyal to the Roman Catholic Church, and to the Pope. His tenacity in clinging to moral law won him the enmity of King Henry VIII.

Henry VIII asked More to attend the coronation of the new queen Anne Boleyn. Henry VIII had divorced Katharine of Aragon in defiance of the law against adultery, and had caused a schism between the English church and the Papacy. Henry VIII would have made himself head of the church.

Thomas More objected. He refused to approve the actions of the king. For this he was beheaded in 1535 on Tower Hill.

More held to principle in the face of tyranny and persecution.

Holding fast the confession.

Again the Hebrew writer,

Hebrews 10:39 But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.

and,

Hebrews 10:23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful...

- The Apostles held fast their confession of Christ firm to the end. All of them were martyred except John who was exiled to the island of Patmos.
- Hebrews Chapter 11 lists others who held their confessions without wavering.
- We should follow their example.

20 An Unashamed Workman

Jesus Answers the Sadducees

Matthew 22:23 On that day some Sadducees (who say there is no resurrection) came to Jesus and questioned Him, 24 asking, "Teacher, Moses said, 'If a man dies having no children, his brother as next of kin shall marry his wife, and raise up children for his brother.' 25 "Now there were seven brothers with us; and the first married and died, and having no children left his wife to his brother; 26 so also the second, and the third, down to the seventh. 27 "Last of all, the woman died. 28 "In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had married her." 29 But Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God. 30 "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. 31 "But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God: 32 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living." 33 When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at His teaching.

Misreading of the scriptures

SOME people have strange ideas about what is taught in the Bible. There was the man who said, "Sure, I live it up a little, but we're not here forever, you know. Even the Good Book says, 'Eat, drink, and be merry!'" Someone asked him if he ever read the entire passage he had quoted. He said no. So they turned to the story of the rich man in Luke 12, and pointed out to him God's response: "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee" (Luke 12:20).

The man was speechless.

There is another story of a lady who insisted that there was one perfect person born into the world besides Jesus. When asked who it was, she said that in Psalm 37:37 we read about "Mark the perfect man." Because of carelessness, she had failed to note the context and had drawn the wrong conclusion. Actually, the verse is an exhortation to observe anyone who is righteous in God's sight, and it has no reference to a specific individual.

A haphazard reading of the Bible, snatching a text here and there out of its setting, is dangerous. The Scriptures must be studied, "comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (1 Cor. 2:13). We must interpret passages in their context, noting who is speaking, who is being addressed, the time in history, and the point being made by the writer. Reading the Bible casually can be harmful rather than helpful. You have to study the Word carefully if you want to get it straight!

2 Timothy 2:11 It is a trustworthy statement: For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him; 12 If we endure, we will also reign with Him; If we deny Him, He also will deny us; 13 If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself. 14 Remind them of these things, and solemnly charge them in the presence of God not to wrangle about words, which is useless and leads to the ruin of the hearers. 15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth. 16 But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness, 17 and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, 18 men who have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and they upset the faith of some.

- Be diligent to present yourself approved.
- Handle accurately the word of truth.

21 The Representative Man.

One Representative for the Nation.

The Philistines were the enemies of Israel when David was a boy. The day came when the Philistines gathered their army and camped opposite Israel. Among the Philistines there was a giant, a champion, a hero of the people, whose name was Goliath. He approached the army of the Israelites and said,

1 Samuel 17:8 ... "Choose a man for yourselves and let him come down to me. 9 If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will become your servants; but if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall become our servants, and serve us."

Goliath represented the interests and fortunes of the Philistines. He was their representative man. Boasting of his ability to deliver for Philistia, Goliath wagered the servitude of his fellows. Everything depended upon the outcome of the conflict.

But among the Israelites there was no warrior, no champion, to face Goliath. The Israelites were afraid. Their pride and national honor sank to a new low. They looked around and found no one to represent them.

But the boy, David, trusted God and said,

1 Samuel 17:37 ... "The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." So King Saul told him, "Go, and may the Lord be with you."

The Lord did indeed go with David, but more than that Israel went with him.

Israel's interest, fortune and honor went with David.

- He was Israel's "representative man."

David killed Goliath and redeemed the honor of his countrymen. For this accomplishment King Saul honored David. Moreover, God honored David for his faithfulness. Even today

we regard David as a representative prophet and king. He is in many ways a representative man.

Jesus the True Representative Man.

Isaiah says of Jesus,

4 Surely our griefs He Himself bore,
And our sorrows He carried;
Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten of God, and afflicted.

5 But He was pierced through for our transgressions,
He was crushed for our iniquities;
The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him,
And by His scourging we are healed.

6 All of us like sheep have gone astray,
Each of us has turned to his own way;
But 'the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all
to fall on Him. Isaiah 53:4-6.

Jesus is our representative in the matter of suffering and death for sin. In short, He died for us. His stripes are our stripes; His death, our death.

- As in His death, so is it in His resurrection.

22 Substitution

The test of Abraham: Love of God vs love of son. Genesis 22:1-19

The Bible says in Genesis,

Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him "Abraham!"

And he said, "Here I am."

- Abraham loved the Lord God. He was devout, and pious.
- Abraham was ready at hand.

God said,

"Take now your son, **your only son, whom you love**, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah; and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you."

- Abraham is caught on a merciless dilemma.
- Disobey and bring down God's wrath.
- Obey and his only son dies.

Abraham saddled his donkey and took his son Isaac into the wilderness.

Substitutionary sacrifice.

Then they came to the place of which God had told him; and Abraham built the altar there, and arranged the wood, and bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar on top of the wood.

And Abraham stretched out his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am."

And he said, "Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.

Abraham then saw the ram caught in a thicket by his horns.

Abraham offered the ram for a burnt offering in the place of his son.

- The ram died for Isaac.

- The Lamb of God died for us

23 Atonement

The Garments of the High Priest.

Cuspius Fadus, the procurator of Judaea following Pontius Pilate, sent for the high priests and principal citizens of Jerusalem, and told them to bring to the Romans the long garments, and sacred vestments of the high priest. These vestments were to be kept in the Tower of Antonia, the fortress of the Romans that stood on the Northwest corner of the Temple enclosure.

This order greatly dismayed the Jews, for they believed the vestments of the high priest were holy. The vestments, they believed, possessed atoning power, and each of the eight parts atoned for specific sins. The Jews believed that the character of the high priestly office was transmitted to him by the investiture with the eight parts of the high-priestly garment. The vestments were for Jewry the very symbol of their religion.

At different times, the Romans, Herod the Great, and Archelaus seized these garments because they could find no more effective safeguard against Jewish rebellion than to keep the high-priestly robes in the Tower of Antonia, handing them over to the high priest only on feast days. The Emperor Claudius ordered their release on 28 June A.D. 45.

- The garments of the High Priest did not atone for sins.
- But the Jews believed they did.
- Blood sacrifice atoned for sin.

Atonement Requires Blood

The Bible says in Leviticus 17:11

For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement;

- The Jewish priests should have known this.

And in Hebrews 9:13-14,

9:13 For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled, sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse you conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

- The blood of Christ is superior to the blood of bulls and goats.

24 The Bread of Life

The Giving of the Morsel.

The Oriental meal consisted many times of a bowl of stew, with a sauce or gravy over meat. The practice was to tear off a piece of bread, drag it through the sauce then eat it.

There is no incident of the Oriental meal that is more celebrated than the giving of the morsel, or sop, to a table-neighbor as a **mark of favor**. If the mouthful is large the sauce or gravy is apt to run down the beard. A common way of doing it is to take two pieces of bread, and with these serving as a spoon to pick up meat and gravy then put it into the mouth of the one who is **favored**.

The Opportunity Given to Judas.

In John Chapter 13, after Jesus tells the disciples that one of them would betray Him, they ask him who it is.

Jesus therefore answered, "That is the one for whom I shall dip the morsel, and give it to him." So when He had dipped the morsel, He took and gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. vs.26.

Christ was now standing at the door of the heart of His apostle. He was favoring him. He was holding out the opportunity to repent. Even at this point it was not too late for the wayward disciple. He was not rejected.

The scripture says that... after the morsel, Satan then entered into him. Jesus therefore said to him, "What you do, do quickly." Vs. 27.

Judas was favored, and had opportunity to repent, but he rejected Jesus, and opened his heart to Satan. Satan entered into him.

The Opportunity Given to All.

John wrote,

6:35 Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. 36 But I said to

you, that you have seen Me, and yet do not believe. 37 All that the Father gives to Me shall come to Me; and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out." John 6:35-37.

- Jesus offers to all fellowship with Him.

25 The Great Physician

Those who are spiritually ill need the Great Physician.

Matthew says concerning Jesus,

Matthew 9:10 And it happened that as he was reclining at table in the house, behold many tax-gatherers and sinners came and joined Jesus and His disciples at the table. And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to His disciples, "Why does your Teacher eat with the tax-gatherers and sinners?" But when He heard this, He said, "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are ill."

- Spiritual illness cannot be cured by human medicine.

In 1835 a man visited a doctor in Florence, Italy. He was filled with anxiety and exhausted from lack of sleep. He couldn't eat, and he avoided his friends. The doctor examined him and found that he was in prime physical condition. Concluding that his patient needed to have a break from his routine and to enjoy some recreation, the physician told him about a circus in town and its star performer, a clown named Grimaldi. Night after night his performance had the people rolling in the aisles. "You must go and see him," the doctor said. "Grimaldi is the world's funniest clown. He make you laugh and cure your sadness.

"No," the man replied, and there was despair in his voice.

"He can't help me."

"Why?" the doctor demanded.

"I am Grimaldi," the man said.

The Lord Heals.

Matthew wrote in the Thirteenth Chapter of his gospel,

Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.

And in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled,
which says,

You will keep on hearing, but will not understand;
And you will keep on seeing, but will not perceive;
For the heart of this people has become dull,
And with their ears they scarcely hear,
And they have closed their eyes
Lest they should see with their eyes,
And hear with their ears,
And understand with their heart and turn again,
And I should heal them.

But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears,
because they hear.

See Matthew 13:13–16.

- Jesus will heal the willing.

26 Treasure Unrecognized.

Introduction.

The Jews held a veritable treasure of knowledge through the prophecies of Daniel. Through Daniel God told them when their Messiah was to come. But when He came they did not recognize Him, and so, they rejected Him.

Treasure--Nearness.

The treasure hunter, Mel Fisher, spent many months searching the waters of the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico, looking for treasures which sank with Spanish sailing ships centuries ago. His long months of work led him to find the Spanish galleon, The *Atocha*, off the Florida southwest coast. In that wreck they found 4 million dollars worth of gold, silver and artifacts. A generous man, Fisher, shared the treasure with his crew of divers, and with the State of Florida. He said on the day the diver found the wreck of the *Atocha*, that he returned to the surface bearing an ingot of silver in his hand and shouting enthusiastically. With the silver the diver also brought up an interesting modern article--a fishhook. Actually, fishhooks were numerous on the pile of stone like silver ingots. Over the years, fishermen had come there to catch fish, had hooked the silver, and unknowingly broke their lines and left. So near to a treasure were they without knowing.

The Kingdom of God is like that...

- Some men are near the greatest treasure of all, but are so intent on something else, they go away never knowing how close they came.

The Value of Christ.

Peter wrote,

For this is contained in Scripture:

"Behold I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious
cornerstone,

and he who believes in Him shall not be
disappointed."

This precious value, then, is for you who believe, but
for those who disbelieve,

The stone which the builders rejected,

This became the very cornerstone...

I Peter 2:6-7

- Christ is that precious cornerstone, the precious value.

27 Deliberate Change of Direction- -Repentance

"...the agony of defeat."

For years, the opening of the "ABC The Wide World of Sports" television program illustrated "The thrill of victory, and the agony of defeat." In one scene there is a painful ending to an attempted ski jump. The skier appeared in good form as he headed down the jump, but then, for no apparent reason, he tumbled head over heels off the side of the jump, bouncing off the supporting structure.

What viewers did not know was that he chose to fall rather than finish the jump. Why? As he explained later, the jump surface had become too fast, and midway down the ramp, he realized if he completed the jump, he would land on the level ground, beyond the safe sloping landing area. That landing would be fatal.

As it happened, the skier suffered no more than a headache from the tumble.

To change one's course in life can be a dramatic and painful undertaking, but change is better than a fatal landing at the end.

"Unless you repent..."

Jesus said,

"Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the Tower in Siloam fell and killed them, were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? I tell you, no, but, unless you repent you will all likewise perish." Luke 13:4-5.

It is better to change the course of your life now, rather than continue on a path that leads to destruction, even if the change is painful.

Peter said to the multitude,

Acts 2:38 "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your

children, and for all who are far off, as many as
the Lord our God shall call to Himself."

Word Pictures says of Peter's use of the word "repent,"

"Change your mind and your life. Turn right about
and do it now. You *crucified* this Jesus. Now *crown* him
in your hearts as Lord and Christ."¹³

¹³ Robertson, A. (1933). *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Ac
2:38). Nashville, TN: Broadman Press. (μετανοησατε
[*metanoēsate*])

28 Love and Sacrifice

A little boy's sacrifice.

In his book *Written in Blood*, Robert Coleman tells the story of a little boy whose sister needed a blood transfusion. The doctor explained that she had the same disease that he had recovered from two years earlier. Her only chance for recovery was a transfusion from someone who had already conquered the disease. Since the two children had the same rare blood type, the boy was the ideal donor.

"Would you give your blood to Mary?" the doctor asked.

Johnny hesitated. His eyes widened. His lower lip began to tremble.

"Well?"

"Yes, sir. For my sister."

So the two children were wheeled into the hospital room-- Mary, pale and thin; Johnny, robust and healthy. Neither spoke, but when their eyes met, Johnny smiled.

As the nurse inserted the needle into this arm, Johnny's smile faded. He watched the blood flow through the tube. This continued for a time. When it was almost over, Johnny asked in a shaky voice, "Doctor, when do I die?"

Only then did the Doctor realize why Johnny had hesitated, why his lip had trembled. He had thought giving his blood to his sister meant giving up his life. In that brief moment, he had made a great decision.

Fortunately, Johnny did not have to die. And he was greatly relieved to learn that from the Doctor.

God's Sacrifice.

After God created Man He placed him in the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and to keep it. Adam had the gift of life. He had the gift of the earth. He had one command which if he disobeyed he would die. Surely, God knew when he placed man in the garden, and gave him the command that man might disobey. And if he disobeyed there was only one way to save him. God took a risk with man.

Isaiah said, The Lord took our iniquity upon Himself. Isaiah 53:4-6.

He shed His blood for you. He died for you.

29 Small Offense, Big Results

The Mysterious Shipwreck.

Years ago an ocean liner sank off the coast of Ireland. The disaster bewildered the maritime people--masters and sailors alike. Because the ship's captain was an excellent seaman, no one could figure out what caused the accident. To answer the riddle they sent divers down to the sunken ship to gather what evidence they could. By this investigation they hoped to find the solution to the riddle.

One of the items divers brought up was the ship's compass. As they opened the compass box, they found the point of a knife blade inside. Apparently, while cleaning the compass, a sailor had broken off the tip of his knife. The tiny piece of knife blade had become lodged inside the compass. It was only a tiny piece of metal, but it was large enough to cause the compass to give a bad reading. As a result, the ship took the wrong course, and became a victim of the rocky coast.

It is easy for our moral compass to be thrown off.

The Psalmist said,
How blessed are those whose way is blameless,
Who walk in the way of the Lord.
How blessed are those who observe His testimonies,
Who seek Him with all their heart.
They also do no unrighteousness;
They walk in His ways.
Thou hast ordained Thy precepts,
That we should keep them diligently.
Oh that my ways may be established
To keep Thy statutes!
Then I shall not be ashamed
When I look upon all thy commandments. Psalms
119:1-6

The Hebrew writer said,

Hebrews 12:1 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

He is our moral compass. There is no impurity or contamination in Him.

30 Savior and Judge

Saved only to be condemned.

In the old West there was a frontier town in which a horse bolted and ran away with a wagon carrying a little boy. Seeing the child in danger, a young man went after the runaway wagon-- at great risk to himself. He managed to overtake the runaway, and stop the wagon before the child could be hurt.

The child grew up to become an outlaw. He committed serious crimes. One day he stood before a judge to be sentenced. The prisoner recognized the judge as the man, who, years before, had saved his life by stopping the runaway wagon. Recalling that experience to the judge he pleaded for mercy.

But the judge refused. He said, "Young man, then I was your savior. Today I am your judge. I must sentence you to be hanged."

Savior and Judge.

The Lord came the first time to save us.

Paul said,

"It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners..." I Timothy 1:15.

The second time he comes as our Judge.

Paul also said,

For we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. 2 Corinthians 5:10

He comes not to bear sin...

The Hebrew writer said concerning Christ,

Hebrews 9:26 ... now once at the consummation He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once, and after this comes judgment; so Christ also, having been

offered once to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time, not to bear sin, to those who eagerly await Him, for salvation."

- Take advantage of the opportunity now.

31 Opposition to Christ

The Jews opposed Jesus and crucified Him.

After Jesus had been falsely convicted before the Great Sanhedrin the Jews then brought Him before Pilate. Luke wrote that,

Luke 23:1 The whole body of them arose and brought Him before Pilate. 2 And they began to accuse Him saying, "We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, and saying that He Himself is Christ, a King."

Sometimes people oppose the thing that can save them..

In Culver City, California, December 5, 1988. Gary Busey, the actor who played Buddy Holly in the *Buddy Holly Story*, suffered severe head injuries when he lost control of his motorcycle, fell and struck a curb. Busey, 44, did not wear a safety helmet. Doctors planned neurosurgery to repair the damage.

Ironically, Gary Busey had actively opposed a law which would have required him to wear a safety helmet.

- Moral: Sometimes a man opposes the very law that can save him.

In Acts the eighth chapter Elymas the magician opposed Barnabas and Paul. Elymas sought to turn the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, away from the faith. Elymas was the enemy of what could have saved him. For his opposition to the light of the gospel, Elymas lost his sight.

- Moral: Opposition to the truth leads to spiritual blindness.

Cooperation leads to truth and freedom.

Paul wrote to Timothy,

2 Timothy 2:24 And the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, 25 with gentleness

correcting those who are in opposition; if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, 26 and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.

- Repentance leads to knowledge of the truth.
- Those in opposition are in the snare of the devil.

32 Doing what seems right.

Satan disguises himself.

Paul said to the Corinthians,

2 Corinthians 11:14 ...even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. 15 Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their deeds.

- Moral: beware of what appears to be good.

What seems right can be deadly.

In Brazil, South America, a firm that owned a machine used in medicine for x-rays and imaging left the device unattended in a warehouse where after several years it was sold to a salvage company. After the passage of time, they transferred the machine to people who wanted scrap metal, and who were not experts in radiation. Afterward, the machine fell into the hands of people who knew nothing of the deadly radiation which it harbored.

These poor, and uneducated people opened the machine and took out the beautiful, glowing material--handled it, kept it beside them, and traveled with it. One even wore it, thinking it was a kind of jewelry. Many people died of the exposure to lethal radiation. Many more were permanently injured.

The wise man wrote that...

There is a way which seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death. Proverbs 14:12

Paul said to the Thessalonians,

2 Thessalonians 2:8 And then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; 9 that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, 10 and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. 11 And for this

reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they might believe what is false, 12 in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness.

- Moral: Just because it seems right doesn't make it so.

33 Choose the Lord

Ambivalence. Inability to choose.

Charlie Ward, the Heisman Trophy winning quarterback for the Florida State Seminoles, was not drafted by the NFL in 1994. The reason given was that he would not commit to football. Ward had said that he might pursue a career in baseball, or basketball.

The professions, and those who hire professionals, require a commitment. Divided attention leads to poor performance.

- As it is in sports, and so it is in religion.

You cannot serve two masters.

Jesus said,

Matthew 6:24 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and Mammon."

In I Kings the eighteenth chapter the Bible tells us that king Ahab sent a message among all the sons of Israel, and brought the prophets together at mount Carmel. This was a test for the people of Israel, for they had followed Ahab and Jezebel in the worship of the Baals. Yet, they appeared to hesitate whether to leave Jehovah altogether.

The Scripture says,

1 Kings 18:20 And Elijah came near to all the people and said, "How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him." But the people did not answer him a word.

Make your choice for the Lord.

Be as Joshua, who said,

Joshua 24:14 "Now, therefore, fear the Lord and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. 15 And if it is

disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord,
choose for yourselves today whom you will serve:
whether the gods which your fathers served which
were beyond the River, or the Gods of the
Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for
me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

- The choice is yours.

34 Confession

The Roman Caesar and the confession.

In A.D. 66, Tiridates the Parthian, wanted to be King of Armenia. Yet, Tiridates could not be king without the approval of Caesar, and Nero was Caesar. So Tiridates left his country and traveled to Rome with his whole family, surrounded by a retinue of princes and 30 Parthian nobles.

By this time the Romans had proclaimed Nero to be a god. When Nero built his palace he included a colossus 120 feet high, bearing the likeness of his head haloed with solar rays that identified him as Phoebus Apollo.

When Tiridates came to Italy, he did homage to Nero at Naples as "The Lord" and in Rome he knelt and worshipped Nero as Mithras, a god. He wanted that kingdom.

The confession of Christ.

Paul said to the Romans,

Romans 10:9...if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; 10 for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

Jesus' statement shows that the opposite of confession is denial. In Matthew we read,

Matt. 10:32 "Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. 33 "But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven. Matthew 10:32.

Christ refused the Devil.

In the temptation of Christ, Satan took Jesus to a very high mountain. The Scripture says that he showed Jesus,

Matthew 4:8 "...all the kingdoms of the world, and their glory; 9 and he said to Him, "All these

things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me."

10 Then Jesus said to him, "Begone Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.'"

- Tiridates did for a kingdom what Jesus refused to do.
- Confess Christ.

35 He saw the altar in Damascus...

Ahaz subordinated Jehovah to the god of Assyria.

2 Kings the 16th chapter tells about the reign of Ahaz, king of Judah.

He was a bad king.

The Bible says,

2 Kings 16:3 ... he walked in the way of the kings of Israel; indeed he made his son pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD had cast out from before the children of Israel. 4 And he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places, on the hills, and under every green tree.

The kings of Syria, and Israel made war with Ahaz, but could not overcome him.

But they captured the city of Elath, and the Edomites moved in there.

So Ahaz appealed to the king of Assyria to help him.

7 So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria, saying, "I am your servant and your son. Come up and save me from the hand of the king of Syria and from the hand of the king of Israel, who rise up against me."

8 And Ahaz took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the LORD, and in the treasuries of the king's house, and sent it as a present to the king of Assyria.

9 So the king of Assyria heeded him; for the king of Assyria went up against Damascus and took it, carried its people captive to Kir, and killed Rezin.

10 Now King Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria, and saw an altar that was at Damascus; and King Ahaz sent to

Urijah the priest the design of the altar and its pattern, according to all its workmanship.

- Ahaz appealed to the king of Assyria rather than Jehovah.
- Ahaz subordinated Jehovah to Ashur of the Assyrians. He, in effect made an alliance between Jehovah and the god of the Assyrians. Since Judah was a vassal state to Assyria, the alliance subordinated Jehovah.
- He “saw an altar that was at Damascus.” This was an Assyrian altar. He returned with its pattern. What did he see? Something different? Something desirable? Something required?

Jehovah does not share His altar.

The prophet Hosea cried against Israel and Judah at this time. He said,

Hosea 5:1 "Hear this, O priests! Take heed, O house of Israel! Give ear, O house of the king! For yours is the judgment, Because you have been a snare to Mizpah And a net spread on Tabor. 2 The revolters are deeply involved in slaughter, Though I rebuke them all. 3 I know Ephraim, And Israel is not hidden from Me; For now, O Ephraim, you commit harlotry; Israel is defiled. 4 "They do not direct their deeds Toward turning to their God, For the spirit of harlotry is in their midst, And they do not know the LORD. 5 The pride of Israel testifies to his face; Therefore Israel and Ephraim stumble in their iniquity; Judah also stumbles with them. 6 "With their flocks and herds They shall go to seek the LORD, But they will not find Him; He has withdrawn Himself from them. 7 They have dealt treacherously with the LORD, For they have begotten pagan

children. Now a New Moon shall devour them and their heritage. 8 "Blow the ram's horn in Gibeah, The trumpet in Ramah! Cry aloud at Beth Aven, 'Look behind you, O Benjamin!' 9 Ephraim shall be desolate in the day of rebuke; Among the tribes of Israel I make known what is sure. 10 "The princes of Judah are like those who remove a landmark; I will pour out my wrath on them like water. 11 Ephraim is oppressed and broken in judgment, Because he willingly walked by human precept. 12 Therefore I will be to Ephraim like a moth, And to the house of Judah like rottenness. 13 "When Ephraim saw his sickness, And Judah saw his wound, Then Ephraim went to Assyria And sent to King Jareb; Yet he cannot cure you, Nor heal you of your wound. 14 For I will be like a lion to Ephraim, And like a young lion to the house of Judah. I, even I, will tear them and go away; I will take them away, and no one shall rescue. 15 I will return again to My place Till they acknowledge their offense. Then they will seek My face; In their affliction they will earnestly seek Me."

Return to the Lord and do not share his altar with false gods.

Hosea 6:1 Come, and let us return to the LORD; For He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up. 2 After two days He will revive us; On the third day He will raise us up, That we may live in His sight. 3 Let us know, Let us pursue the knowledge of the LORD. His going forth is established as the morning; He will come to us like the rain, Like the latter and former rain to the earth.

Christians have an altar.

Hebrews 13:10 We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat.

- Let us not share the altar of the Lord with unbelievers.
- Let us not subordinate the altar of the Lord to other gods, other doctrines, other religions.
- Let us not be as Ahaz, and Judah.

36 Suffering, its benefits.

Paul wrote to the Romans,

Romans 8:16 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow-heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him.

Suffering may be a blessing.

John Comer, author of the book, *Combat Crew*, tells a story of a friend named Johnny Graves, who was also an aerial gunner in the 2nd World War, and a crewman of a B17. Grave's aircraft was badly damaged in a bombing run over Germany, and although still airborne it had no chance to make it back across the North Sea to England.

After calling Air-Sea Rescue they ditched their ship. He said they hit hard and the plane bounced before settling in the water. Quickly, Graves and another crewman launched the rubber rafts. They entered one, taking three other crewmen with them. The weather was freezing.

As soon as they got into the raft they discovered that it was leaking--from a defect, or battle damage. Since it was almost dark they realized they had little hope for rescue before morning. Graves took out a hand pump and began to re-inflate the raft. It was difficult work. He would alternate pumping with one of the waist gunners to share the work of pumping.

The other raft drifted away from them in the night, and they do not know what happened to it. The wind blew, and he says the got wet from the ocean spray, and the temperature plummeted. It was numbing cold.

But the two of them stayed with the hand pump, continuing all night to keep the raft inflated. When dawn came, he discovered that the other three men in the raft were dead of cold and exposure. The exercise of pumping that hand pump to keep the raft inflated was enough to keep him and the waist-gunner alive through that awful night. Later that morning they were discovered by a patrol boat, and the ordeal was finally over.

- Sometimes what appears to be increased suffering, is a blessing in disguise.

Glory follows suffering.

Paul goes on to say to the Romans,

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. Romans 8:18.

- Suffer with Him. It's worth it.

37 Sleeping with the Dead

The land of shadow and of death

When Jesus began His ministry the scripture says that,

... He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali.

14 *This was* to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet:

15 “THE LAND OF ZEBULUN AND THE LAND OF
NAPHTALI,
BY THE WAY OF THE SEA, BEYOND THE JORDAN,
GALILEE OF THE GENTILES—

16 “THE PEOPLE WHO WERE SITTING IN DARKNESS
SAW A GREAT LIGHT,
AND THOSE WHO WERE SITTING IN THE LAND AND
SHADOW OF DEATH,
UPON THEM A LIGHT DAWNED.” Matthew 4:13-
16.

- The people who lived in Capernaum probably thought they saw the light every day.
- They would have said, "We are alive. We are not dead."
- But Isaiah said they lived in darkness and the shadow of death.
- It is no different today for people who live without the revelation of God.

The testimony of John the Baptist

Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, uttered this prophecy when John was born,

Luke 1:76 “And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;

For you will go on BEFORE THE LORD TO
PREPARE HIS WAYS;

77 To give to His people the knowledge of salvation

By the forgiveness of their sins,

78 Because of the tender mercy of our God,
With which the Sunrise from on high will visit us,

79 TO SHINE UPON THOSE WHO SIT IN
DARKNESS AND THE SHADOW OF DEATH,

To guide our feet into the way of peace.”

- John the Baptist came to herald the Messiah, who would be the Light to shine upon those who "sit in darkness and the shadow of death."

The Apostle Paul wrote about the life of the Christian, Ephesians 4:17 So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, 18 being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart;

- The people of the world live in darkness and the shadow of death largely because of ignorance and hardness of heart.
- They walk in futility of mind and are excluded from the life of God.
- In other words they are dead.

Don't let worldly darkness overcome you.

Harold Buell was a naval dive bomber pilot in the 2nd World War. He told of an incident which occurred when he was aboard the USS Yorktown in the Coral Sea.

The Japanese attacked the Yorktown. Their aircraft struck the ship with a bomb that penetrated four decks before it exploded. The attack killed or wounded many of the ship's crew. So great were the numbers that the ship's hospital quickly filled with wounded and then the injured had to be placed in the officer's wardroom. Mess tables became operating tables. Seriously wounded waited in wire baskets in the passageways

and in officer's quarters for their turn with the doctors. Many of them died waiting. Buell calls it a scene from Dante's *Inferno*.

Buell had been flying missions against the Japanese and was exhausted. He dozed in a ready-room chair but says he longed to lie in his bunk. But that area was where the wounded were being treated by the medics. Despite all that he said he decided to try to make it to his quarters before he collapsed.

So he took a flashlight and made his way back to his room. He needed the light because the ship was without power in many sections, and the passageways were dark. As he neared his quarters he saw that the passageways were crowded with dead and wounded. Even his room was occupied. But the upper bunk was still empty. Carefully stepping around the baskets of men he climbed into the berth, took off his shoes, loosened his belt, lay back and fell immediately into a deep sleep.

Rough hands aroused him some time later. They grabbed him and lifted him off the bunk. It was still dark, and he had no idea what was happening. He yelled in a loud voice, "What is going on?"

A startled voice said, "My God, Doc, this one ain't dead!"

Captain Buckmaster had ordered that all the dead be buried that night off the fantail. Corpsmen had removed the other dead from Buell's room and were preparing to remove him.¹⁴

Harold Buell had been asleep with the dead.

Do Not Postpone your Service to Christ.

Matthew tells us,

Matthew 8:21 Another of the disciples said to Him,
"Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father."
22 But Jesus said to him, "Follow Me; and allow
the dead to bury their own dead."

¹⁴ Harold L. Buell, *Dauntless Helldivers*, p89-91.

- The call of Christ is urgent and takes precedence over devotion to parents, and all else.
- Don't be found sleeping with the dead, either literally or spiritually.
- Come to Christ and receive life.

38 God's Providential Care

Joseph and God's care.

In Genesis the 50th chapter the Bible tells us of the conversation Joseph had with his brothers after he had revealed himself to them. They had sold him into bondage, and Joseph had suffered in Egypt, but God had watched over him. Now his brothers are sorrowful because of their ill treatment of him, but Joseph said,

Genesis 50:20 And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.

- "God meant it for good."
- Sometimes the things that happen to us look dire and foreboding, and even harmful,
- except that God ensures that it works good.
- We may not see the result until it's over.

Unknown friends

During the Second World War an American B-17 bomber (*The Tondelayo*) on a mission over the German city of Kassel flew into a barrage of flack from Nazi anti-aircraft guns. Gunfire struck the bomber's gas tanks. The crew waited, expecting to see the wing burst into flames, and then explode. But there was no fire, and no explosion.

The bomber limped back to its base. The next morning the pilot, Bohn Fawkes, went down to the line to ask the crew-chief for the shell as a souvenir of unbelievable luck. The crew chief told Bohn that it was not just one shell, but eleven had been found in the gas tanks. There were eleven unexploded cannon shells where only one would be enough to destroy the bomber.

The pilot was shaken.

The crew chief told him the shells had been sent to the armorers to be defused. So the pilot went to the armorers to get the cannon shells as souvenirs. The armorers told him that

Intelligence had picked up the shells. When the armorers had opened the shells they had found no explosives inside. Curious, Intelligence officers wanted to know why. But the armorers said the shells were not all empty, one shell had contained a piece of paper, carefully rolled up, and placed into that part of the cannon shell that normally contained the explosives. There were words on the paper, written in Czech. After a difficult search to find a Czech translator, they finally learned that the message said,

"This is all we can do for you now." ¹⁵

- Any one of the shells--if it had exploded--could have brought the bomber down.
- Czech workers in a German munitions factory had not put the explosives into the shells, but instead put in a note. It was all they could do for the Americans.
- But it was enough.

What God has done for us.

Those of us who have suffered in our Christian life wonder at times why these things have happened to us. It could be like God told Paul once, "...My grace is sufficient for you."

That's another way of saying, "This is all I can do for you now."

- How many things has God done for us? How much will we see he has helped us when the final "Intelligence" report is filed?

As Paul wrote,

Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard,

And which have not entered the heart of man,

All that God has prepared for those who love Him. 1

Cor. 2:9.

- How much has God done? The answer is everything.

¹⁵ <https://www.truthorfiction.com/fall-of-fortresses-bendiner/>

Paul said to the Romans,

Romans 8:28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

- He gave His Son.

Romans 8:29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; 30 and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. 31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?

and in verse 37,

Romans 8:37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.

- God has done enough for everyone.
- We should respond accordingly.

39 Be Ready for the Lord's Return

Heaven, the hope of the average citizen is not realistic.

The magazine *U.S. Catholic* conducted a survey of more than 10 people about the afterlife. Twenty eight percent of the people responded. The results were printed in the May 1983 issue of the magazine. The findings of the survey were:

Ninety-seven percent of the respondents expressed a belief in heaven, and 83 percent expected to go there. Respondents were reluctant to put anybody in hell. Twenty-two percents condemned Adolf Hitler to hell; 15 percent condemned Josef Stalin; 12 percent Idi Amin; only 10 percent condemned Judas the one who betrayed Jesus. Five percent said Hugh Hefner, founder of Playboy Magazine was headed to hell.

While 86 percent said they believed in hell, only 40 percent said they avoided evil because of the consequences after death. Six percent did not believe in hell.

Among the items people thought would be "heaven" are: an unlimited credit card, and all the chocolate they could eat.

In an article about the survey, James Breig quoted an Ohio woman who wrote: "I do not think too much about heaven and hell; I'm too busy getting it together here. However, I would like to think that if I got run over by a truck while mailing this questionnaire, I would be ready to meet my maker."

The Admonition of Jesus about preparation, and readiness.

In the 12th chapter of the gospel of Luke Jesus tells the disciples,

Luke 12:35 "Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning;

[The garment had to be lifted and girded for rapid movement of the feet. And a wedding usually

took place at night; therefore, the person needed a lamp.]

- 36 "and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately.
- 37 "Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them.
- 38 "And if he should come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants.
- 39 "But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into.
- 40 "Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."
- 41 Then Peter said to Him, "Lord, do You speak this parable only to us, or to all people?"
- 42 And the Lord said, "Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season?"
- 43 "Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes.
- 44 "Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has.
- 45 "But if that servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk,
- 46 "the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers.

47 "And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.

48 "But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.

- Be faithful and wise.

40 Help In Time of Need

A Narrow Escape.

A crewman of a British Wellington bomber told a story of an experience during a night bombing mission over Germany. "We were in a Wellington Bomber," he said. "The rear entry hatch cover becomes part of the walkway through the waist. I was operating the wireless when we flew through some flak and took a bit of a hit mid-ship. It banged the craft around, and the pilot called me to take my torch and see if the control cables were OK back there. I picked up my torch, but the thing wouldn't light up. I stepped back into the waist, flicking the switch, and dropped out into bloody space. The flak had knocked off the hatch cover! I grabbed the rim of the hatch with one hand and hung on—no parachute.

He was hanging out in space. Only one hand kept him from falling.

"I couldn't get a good grip with my other hand, and I knew I couldn't hang on for very long. The wind blast was terrific. My mike was still snapped on because we have a long cord, but I couldn't talk, just gurgled and made choking sounds. The pilot heard those funny noises and rushed someone back to see what was wrong. He followed my mike cord back to the hatch, and grabbed me just before I slipped off. It took two blokes to pull me back into the aircraft."

When the British airman finished telling his story, great beads of sweat stood out on his forehead, even though the temperature in the room was fifty degrees.

- Some people might be in this condition—spiritually.

Help from the Lord in time of need.

The Writer of Hebrews said,

Hebrews 4:14 Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot

sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

- Jesus sympathizes with you.
- Jesus will help in time of need.

41 Who is He?

Billie Burke – Pride in the presence of Authority.

- Actors, politicians, or talk show guests should not be considered experts on morals.

Billie Burke was an actress of note a number of years ago. She enjoyed success as a performer, although not considered a legend of the silver screen. As it happens in so many cases, her success on the screen affected her judgment about her knowledge in other matters.

She was on a ship once, going to Europe, and was in the dining room, when she noticed that the man sitting at the next table had a terrible cold. After watching him sneeze, cough and blow his nose for a few minutes she said to him, "I'm Billie Burke of Hollywood. You know, my grandmother taught me a wonderful remedy for the cold. You go to your room and take a steaming hot bath. Then you wrap yourself up in a wool blanket, and drink a tall glass of bourbon, and go to bed. I know it will work. You can depend on it. I'm Billie Burke of Hollywood."

"Thank you," the man said. "I'm William Mayo, of the Mayo Clinic."

- Billie Burke's skill as an actress did not qualify her to give medical advice.
- Sometimes success can lead a person to think they are more than they really are.
- A little education can do the same thing.
- She did not know the man who had the cold.

Jesus before Pilate—power before Power.

John 18:33 Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" 34 Jesus answered him, "Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?" 35 Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief

priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?" 36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here." 37 Pilate therefore said to Him, "Are You a king then?" Jesus answered, "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."

- Pilate was the Roman governor of Judaea.
- Pilate stood before his Creator, and questioned Him as if He were a criminal.
- Pilate had no idea of the rank and power of the One who stood trial before him.
- Pilate judged from outward appearances. "Look at the man!"
- After this exchange Pilate had Jesus scourged.

John 19:6 Therefore, when the chief priests and officers saw Him, they cried out, saying, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" Pilate said to them, "You take Him and crucify Him, for I find no fault in Him." 7 The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God." 8 Therefore, when Pilate heard that saying, he was the more afraid, 9 and went again into the Praetorium, and said to Jesus, "Where are You from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. 10 Then Pilate said to Him, "Are You not speaking to me? Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You?" 11 Jesus answered, "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin."

- Pilate had the power to crucify Jesus.

- Jesus had the power to destroy everything else if He chose.

Jesus and the woman at the well—Naiveté before Wisdom.

John 4:6 Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied from His journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour. 7 A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink." 8 For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. 9 Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. 10 Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."

- Had the woman of Samaria known who this man was she could have asked the right question.
- Jesus was the One who could fulfill her deepest need.
- But she did not know.
- If she only knew...

Jesus and the Blind Man—humility in the presence of Ability.

John 9:6 When He had said these things, He spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva; and He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay. 7 And He said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which is translated, Sent). So he went and washed, and came back seeing. 8 Therefore the neighbors and those who previously had seen that he was blind said, "Is not this he who sat and begged?" 9 Some said, "This is he." Others said,

"He is like him." He said, "I am he." 10
Therefore they said to him, "How were your eyes
opened?" 11 He answered and said, "A Man
called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and
said to me, 'Go to the pool of Siloam and wash.'
So I went and washed, and I received sight." 12
Then they said to him, "Where is He?" He said, "I
do not know."

John 9:24 So they again called the man who was
blind, and said to him, "Give God the glory! We
know that this Man is a sinner." 25 He answered
and said, "Whether He is a sinner or not I do not
know. One thing I know: that though I was blind,
now I see." 26 Then they said to him again,
"What did He do to you? How did He open your
eyes?" 27 He answered them, "I told you already,
and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it
again? Do you also want to become His
disciples?" 28 Then they reviled him and said,
"You are His disciple, but we are Moses'
disciples. 29 "We know that God spoke to
Moses; as for this fellow, we do not know where
He is from." 30 The man answered and said to
them, "Why, this is a marvelous thing, that you do
not know where He is from; yet He has opened
my eyes!

- The blind man confounded the Pharisees with simple evidence.
- It was evidence that spoke convincingly to the honest, to the powerless, to the lowly and to the simple.
- Yet to the Pharisee it spoke not at all.
- The Pharisees put the blind man out of the synagogue.

John 9:35 Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and
when He had found him, He said to him, "Do you
believe in the Son of God?" 36 He answered and
said, "Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in

Him?" 37 And Jesus said to him, "You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you."

38 Then he said, "Lord, I believe!" And he worshiped Him.

- Here is the Truth recognized, and accepted in its purity and simplicity.
- The blind man knew that Jesus was Lord because He could be no other.
- The blind man received sight in a way that power and position had denied to Pilate; and hypocrisy had denied to the Pharisees.

42 Free Will

A Wife for Isaac. Gen. 24.

One of the oldest questions in religion is, "Does man have a free will?" If he does not have a free will then everything is determined, including whether he is saved or lost. The Bible provides an illuminating story in Abraham's search for the wife of Isaac. In the book of Genesis the Bible says,

Genesis 24:1 Now Abraham was old, well advanced in age; and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things. 2 So Abraham said to the oldest servant of his house, who ruled over all that he had, "Please, put your hand under my thigh, 3 "and I will make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell; 4 "but you shall go to my country and to my family, and take a wife for my son Isaac." 5 And the servant said to him, "Perhaps the woman will not be willing to follow me to this land. Must I take your son back to the land from which you came?"

- The servant is convinced of a possibility; the woman might not be willing.
- In other words, she has some say in this matter.

The Servant's Doubt.

After Abraham's servant had journeyed back to the land from which Abraham had come, he prayed to God to reveal the woman to him. Even though the servant prayed a detailed prayer to God, and received answer for it, yet the woman could still refuse. The Scripture says,

Genesis 24:39 "And I said to my master, 'Perhaps the woman will not follow me.' 40 "But he said to me, 'The LORD, before whom I walk, will send His angel with you and prosper your way; and

you shall take a wife for my son from my family and from my father's house. 41 'You will be clear from this oath when you arrive among my family; for if they will not give her to you, then you will be released from my oath.'

- The servant knew the woman retained the choice to follow or not.
- Even though Abraham knew the Lord would be with his servant, he knew they had the ability to refuse.

43 Please God, Not Man

The man, the boy and the donkey.

There is a story about an old man who was traveling with a boy and a donkey. As they passed through a village, the man led the donkey and the boy walked behind. The people of the town saw them and said the old man was a fool for walking, and not riding the donkey. So to please them he mounted the donkey, and rode.

When they came to the next village, the people there said the man was cruel because he let the child walk while he rode. So to please them he got off and set the boy on the donkey's back. And so they continued their journey.

In the third village the people accused the child of being lazy, and the man of being indulgent, and that both of them should ride. So the man mounted the donkey with the boy, and they continued their journey.

In the fourth village the people became indignant when they saw the man and boy riding the donkey and they accused them of cruelty to an animal.

The last time they saw the man he was carrying the donkey down the road.

- You cannot please all men.

Please God, not men.

Paul wrote to the Thessalonians,

1 Thess. 2:1 For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain. 2 But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict. 3 For our exhortation did not come from error or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit. 4 But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts. 5 For neither at any time did we use flattering

words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness; God is witness. 6 Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ.

The Apostle's coming to Thessalonica was not in vain.

- He spoke boldly in the face of conflict.
- He spoke not to please men, but God.
- He did not seek the glory from men.

Paul said to the Galatians,

Galatians 1:10 For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.

James, in his letter, wrote,

4:1 Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. 4 Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. 5 Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"? 6 But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble." 7 Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble

yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

44 A better city

“I’ve been to Rome.”

The story is told of a man who lived many hundreds of years ago. He was extremely proud of the city in which he lived. Every day he looked upon it with pride. One day a close friend came to visit him. So he took his friend on a tour of the town to show him its gardens, art and its buildings. He couldn’t wait to show him the newest building. It was the largest, and he thought the most impressive.

His friend looked at it, but made no comment.

This greatly disappointed the man, because he expected him to be impressed. As they returned to his house he asked his friend, “Didn’t you think it was beautiful?”.

“No. Not really,” his friend answered.

“Why not?”

“I’ve been to Rome,” he answered.

- The man thought Rome was the greatest of cities.
- After he had seen Rome nothing compared to it.

Looking for a better city.

Hebrews 11:13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. 14 For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. 15 And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

- Those who have gone before have seen a better city.

The city of God.

Hebrews 12:22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, 23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, 24 to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.

- The perfections of the heavenly city are yours in Christ.

45 The master builder.

A giant blunder in ship construction.

Several years ago the London, England Daily Telegraph reported a story about a shipbuilding company. Managers at Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering, Ltd, at Barrow, England suffered embarrassment when workers welded a large section of the vessel into position upside down. The British Navy ordered an inquiry to determine how it could have happened. The ship was a nuclear powered hunter submarine. "I don't think anyone can remember quite such a blunder," an employee of the company said. Correcting the mistake will cost \$1.86 million dollars, according to a trade union leader quoted by the British domestic news agency Press Association.¹⁶

- This blunder is analogous to the mistakes some churches have made in their attempts to build spiritual houses.
- Usually the cause is a disregard for the biblical instructions.

Man's spiritual construction.

Jeremiah 10:23 O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps.

The grace to build.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians,

1 Cor. 3:10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. 11 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if anyone

¹⁶ Ft. Lauderdale, FL, News/Sun-Sentinel, April 9, 1988. (From a report in the London Daily Telegraph.)

builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. 14 If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

- Take care how you build, and on what foundation you raise the spiritual structure.
- The foundation is Christ.
- Our work is to be tested by fire.

46 Medicine—one kills, another cures.

Man's medicines.

It was reported by the Ft. Lauderdale *News/Sun-Sentinel*,¹⁷ that in Camden, New Jersey a man died after he was injected with the wrong drug while undergoing kidney dialysis. No punitive action was planned, and no charges were filed, either against the medical practitioner, or the hospital. Angelo Carillo, 68, died on Wednesday, April 6, 1988 at Our Lady Of Lourdes Medical Center. Two other patients who were injected with the wrong drug went into cardiac arrest. It was believed that the error occurred because the drug was mislabeled.

- Beware of the medicines of man.
- A lot of them are mislabeled.
- The religions and philosophies of man are touted to do good, but they do the opposite.

God's word imparts life.

The Psalmist wrote,

Psalm 119:47 And I will delight myself in Your commandments, Which I love. 48 My hands also I will lift up to Your commandments, Which I love, And I will meditate on Your statutes. 49 Remember the word to Your servant, Upon which You have caused me to hope. 50 This is my comfort in my affliction, For Your word has given me life.

- The word of God is not mislabeled.
- The word of God imparts life.

¹⁷ Ft. Lauderdale, FL, *News/Sun-Sentinel*, April 9, 1988.

Place your confidence in the right one.

A doctor who had ten patients in the hospital prescribed medicine for them and left. The next day he returned and asked the orderly, "How did the patients do last night?"

"Nine died," said the orderly.

"Nine died? But didn't I prescribe for ten?"

"Yes. But one refused the medicine."

- Perhaps the prescription ought to be changed.
- A time comes to refuse the medicine of man.

Jesus thought of Himself as a Physician.

Matthew says in his gospel,

Matthew 9:10 Now it happened, as Jesus sat at the table in the house, that behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples. 11 And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to His disciples, "Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" 12 When Jesus heard that, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. 13 "But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

- The prescription of Christ leads to life.

John 5:24 "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.

- He who HEARS and BELIEVES lives.

Do you want eternal life?

1 John 1:1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life; 2 the life

was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us; 3 that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. 4 And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.

47 Teach them to observe all...

A tiny mistake.

A few years ago the Soviet Union launched a space probe to Mars with the plan to land the vehicle on the surface of the planet, and carry out scientific studies. Space flights, especially long ones, usually require occasional mid-course corrections in the path of the spacecraft. These corrections are necessary because of inaccuracies in navigational instruments, and errors that creep into the movement of the craft through space. In September 1988 the Russians found it necessary to send a mid-course correction to the craft. A soviet space scientist sent a message which included a series of commands to the craft to alter its course. In sending the message he made one tiny mistake. He left out the equivalent of one alphabetic letter. The result was to instruct the space probe to destroy itself.

- Tiny mistakes can have grave results.

Do not omit God's words.

Jeremiah 26:1 In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word came from the LORD, saying, 2 "Thus says the LORD: 'Stand in the court of the Lord's house, and speak to all the cities of Judah, which come to worship in the Lord's house, all the words that I command you to speak to them. Do not diminish a word. 3 'Perhaps everyone will listen and turn from his evil way, that I may relent concerning the calamity which I purpose to bring on them because of the evil of their doings.' Jer. 26:1-3. NKJV.

- "...Do not omit a word." Vs. 2, NASB.
- Whether we are studying for ourselves, or teaching another, do not diminish a word.
- Will you self-destruct spiritually because something important has been omitted?

- Don't cause someone to self-destruct because of your omission.
- You are not God's editor.

Jesus said teach them to “observe all things...”

Matthew 28:18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

- God requires that we observe all things that He has commanded.

48 Persevere Steadfastly in the Christian Course.

Persevere as if in an Olympic run. 12:1-3

Hebrews 12:1 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us...

The writer of Hebrews urges the Hebrew Christians to persevere in their course as disciples of the Lord. He represents them as contestants in a race course. The imagery is drawn from the footraces that were celebrated throughout the Roman Empire during the time of the Apostles. They are to run with endurance.

In the 1984 Summer Olympics which were held at Los Angeles, CA, the men's marathon race was held last. Many started; in fact, there was a throng of starters. Some of the runners had entered without real qualifications. The numbers dwindled quickly. As the grueling race continued, a small number of serious contenders drew in front. This group included the serious contenders for the crown at the end. The ones favored to win the race lost—the Japanese runner, the Australian and two Africans.

Millions of people watched the race on TV—a host of witnesses. They saw runners in scant clothing, carrying as little weight as possible so that they might run as far and as fast as possible. The contestants ran all the way—27 miles—to the finish line where the medals awaited the victors. Along the route of the race there were flag wavers, some gave water, others cheered.

A Portuguese won, a man 47 years old. After he broke the ribbon at the end of the course he kept running. Such was his training and inclination. He was determined to continue running.

- Many start the race; only a few finish.
- The winner runs with determination.

- Make all due preparation for the race of life. Do this by laying aside every weight that might in any way serve to impede progress.
- Run the race with patience, as in the presence of a cloud of witnesses.

The chief example of endurance is Christ Himself (12:1-3).

The Hebrew writer goes on to say,

Heb. 12:2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. NKJV

The motive to endure the race is the reward that awaits the victors. A crown of life awaits the one who is victorious in the race of life. It is a reward infinitely greater than the gold medal of the Olympics.

49 Prayer

Several years ago a city crane operator working at the Golden Gate Park near San Francisco dumped a rock in the park. It was an abandoned parking barrier that was shaped like a phallic-symbol. When local Hindus discovered the rock they began to pray there, pouring out libations of milk and leaving flowers at the base of the stone. Quickly they turned it into a religious shrine. People were drawn to it from as far away as India. It created a constitutional issue for city officials who thought it was not appropriate to have a religious shrine in a public park. So, they had it removed.¹⁸

- The story illustrates how far some people will go to visualize a deity.
- But God is not a rock.

The Lord said through the prophet Isaiah,

Isaiah 46:5 “To whom would you liken Me
And make Me equal and compare Me,
That we would be alike?

6 “Those who lavish gold from the purse
And weigh silver on the scale
Hire a goldsmith, and he makes it into a god;
They bow down, indeed they worship it.

7 “They lift it upon the shoulder and carry it;
They set it in its place and it stands there.
It does not move from its place.

Though one may cry to it, it cannot answer;
It cannot deliver him from his distress. (NASB95)

- Rocks do not answer prayer.

¹⁸ Tampa Tribune, Oct 25, 1993, and Associated Press, January 24, 1994.

- The Lord God does.

People who worship the real God worship Him in spirit and in truth. God is not a rock. He is not made of wood, or gold or silver.

Jesus told the woman at the well in Samaria,

John 4:23 “But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. 24 “God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

- God is spirit.

Jesus instructed His disciples to pray in this way,

Matthew 6:5 “When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. 6 “But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. 7 “And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. 8 “So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.

9 “Pray, then, in this way:

‘Our Father who is in heaven,

Hallowed be Your name.

10 ‘Your kingdom come.

Your will be done,

On earth as it is in heaven.

11 ‘Give us this day our daily bread.

12 ‘And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

13 'And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.]'

- Address God as "Our Father."
- Our Father is in heaven.
- Pray for His government to prevail.
- Pray for necessities.
- Pray for forgiveness of sins
- Forgive others.
- Avoid evil and pray for deliverance from it.

50 Ambivalence

Ambivalence, or divided allegiance.

At the outbreak of the Civil war, a Tennessee cotton farmer could not decide whether he should support the North, or the South. He had friends on both sides, so he decided his best course would be to remain neutral. To show his solidarity with both sides he wore a gray jacket, and blue trousers. He hoped by this that he would be seen as friendly both to the Union and the Confederacy.

The day came when the two opposing armies approached one another and the cotton farmer's land lay between them. As it happened the farmer was caught between the Yankees on one side, and the Johnnie Rebs on the other. The fighting had forced him to lie down, but after a while he stood up, and shouted that he was neutral in this fight. He expected that they allow him to leave the field before the battle closed in on him.

But the Yankee sharpshooters saw the gray jacket, and riddled it with bullets. The Rebs saw the blue pants, and filled them with lead.

- You cannot serve two masters.

Matthew 6:24 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

The friend of Caesar or the friend of Jesus.

On the day Jesus stood trial before Pontius Pilate, the governor appeared to be searching for a way to release Jesus. He saw no fault in Jesus. He would have released Him, but for one thing. The Gospel of John says,

John 19:10 Then Pilate said to Him, "Are You not speaking to me? Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You?"
11 Jesus answered, "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered Me to

you has the greater sin." 12 From then on Pilate sought to release Him, but the Jews cried out, saying, "If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar's friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar."

The Jewish authorities were no friends of Jesus, they wanted to crucify Him. But Pilate might have released him except for one thing. He wanted to be the friend of Caesar. The words of the Jewish accusers hit the mark. They knew Pilate belonged to an exclusive club which was called "The Friends of Caesar." To prove his membership in this exalted club he wore a ring. On that ring were inscribed the words, "Friend of Caesar."

Implied in the challenge of the Jewish accusers Pilate could see this: If he were to set Jesus free, they would send a delegation to Tiberius Caesar, accusing him of condoning treason in someone who would set himself up as a counter-king to Rome. Under Roman Law that was a crime. Also the Jews would accuse Pilate of failure to uphold their religious law. Caesar had sent a threatening letter to Pilate only five months ago at the instigation of the Jews. If he upheld them then in the case of the golden shields, he'll uphold this time in a far more serious matter. Pilate would have to leave the exclusive club of the Friends of Caesar. They would pull from his finger the golden membership ring, and he would make his exit in the way prescribed for disgraced members—exile, or compulsory suicide.

The choice was his. Friend of Jesus, or friend of Caesar.

It is the eternal choice:

"... no friend of Caesar ..."

"... no friend of the company ... (you must work on the Lord's Day)"

"... no friend of ours ...(if you don't drink with us, play with us, etc.)"

"... we buy from our friends ... so..."

Who is your lord? Christ or Caesar? Christ or friends? Christ or family? Christ or position? Christ or reputation?

What will it be?

For those who have made the confession, and think we are secure, consider what Paul said. In his's letter to the Romans he said in the 14th chapter,

Romans 14:10 But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of God. 11 For it is written,

“AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD, EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME,
AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE
(CONFESS) TO GOD.”

In the Romans passage Paul quotes from Isaiah the 45th chapter. And Isaiah said,

Isaiah 45:22 “Turn to Me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth; For I am God, and there is no other.
23 I have sworn by Myself, The word has gone forth from My mouth in righteousness, And will not turn back, That to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear *allegiance*. NASB.

And in the New King James Version,

Isaiah 45:23 I have sworn by Myself; The word has gone out of My mouth in righteousness, And shall not return, That to Me every knee shall bow,
Every tongue shall **take an oath**. NKJV

The confession we make is not a simple statement of a fact: Jesus Christ is the Son of God. The confession is a statement of loyalty, and allegiance. You are confessing with your mouth, “...Jesus as Lord.” As **your** Lord. And that to the exclusion of all others. The Romans understood that because the confession of Christ stood opposite the confession of Caesar as Lord. The confessor's life hung in the balance depending on whom he chose.

You cannot be friends with the world and friends with God.

The Apostle James wrote,

James 4:1 Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. 4 Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. 5 Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"? 6 But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble." 7 Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

- The desire to satisfy worldly pleasure leads to many of life's problems.
- We do not receive from God because we ask according to our worldly, selfish desires.
- Christians are married to God, not the world.
- Turn from the world and seek God, and He will reward you.
- Be the friend of Christ, and He will be your friend.