

January 2004

DO ALL ROADS LEAD TO HEAVEN?

A few days before Christmas in 1982, a man and his wife left their home in order to deliver some presents to relatives who lived 40 miles away. Nine days later, after they had traveled 4,000 miles and had driven through parts of several states, the man finally stopped at a location 150 miles from home and asked for directions. Throughout the trip the wife had begged her husband to stop and ask for directions, but true to the male stereotype, he stubbornly refused and tried to find his own way.

If you were to ask this couple, "Do all roads lead to the same place?" the answer would be, "NO!!" Yet, how many people throw logic to the wind by saying that all roads lead to heaven? Jesus said, "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it." (Mt 7:13-14)

There are TWO roads and TWO destinations. Only ONE road leads to heaven. And, contrary to popular belief, Jesus said that most people will not take this narrow route, but will take the broad path that leads to destruction in hell.

The reason that most people believe that all roads lead to heaven is that they recognize no standard of spiritual authority. Like Israel in the days before they had a king, every man is doing what is right in his own eyes. (Judges 17:6), expecting that God will be pleased. However, they forget what Israel forgot, that God is the King and that His Word is the law. He is pleased only when He is obeyed.

God has exalted Jesus to be King (Acts 2:33-36) and the N.T. is His law (1 Cor 9:21), His objective standard of spiritual authority. However, most people who say they are "Christians" and call Him "Lord" do not respect His rule and obey His law. As the man driving to deliver Christmas presents, they are trying to find their own way, stubbornly refusing to stop and ask Jesus for directions. To them, Jesus has become no more than a "puppet" king, who is forced to accept whatever worship and service they have chosen to offer and reward them for it with a home in heaven.

But, they will be deeply grieved when Jesus turns them away- when they find out that hell rather than heaven is their destination. Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord', will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'" (Mt 7:21-23)

Where are you going? Heaven or hell? It all depends on what road you are on. The road where you obey Jesus' law is the narrow way that leads to heaven. The road where you serve Jesus as you please is the broad way that leads to hell...

IF IT DOESN'T MATTER WHAT YOU BELIEVE...

The reason that many people believe that all roads lead to heaven is that they think that, when it comes to practicing Christianity, doctrine is unimportant- it does not matter what you believe, teach, and practice. But if it doesn't matter what you believe...

WHY DID PAUL WARN WITH TEARS FOR THREE YEARS?: "And from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things... Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. And now I commend you to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:30-32)

WHY DID PAUL CONDEMN PREACHING & FOLLOWING A PERVERTED GOSPEL?: "I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of God for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed." (Galatians 1:6-8)

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WHY DID PAUL SAY THAT YOU COULD BELIEVE A LIE AND BE DAMNED?: “For this reason God will send them a deluding influence so that they might believe what is false, in order that they may all be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness.” (2 Thessalonians 2:11-12)

WHY DID JOHN SAY THAT IF YOU DO NOT ABIDE IN CHRIST’ TEACHING, YOU DO NOT HAVE GOD?: “Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son.” (2 John 9)

How do you get to heaven? To reach your destination you must do as the lost driver in the front-page article, you must stop and ask for directions. The above passages not only point out that it does matter what you believe, they also point to what we must believe and follow if we are to make it to heaven- “the word of His grace (Acts 20), the “gospel” (Galatians 1), the “truth” (2 Thessalonians 2), and “the teaching of Christ” (2 John 9).

Don’t stubbornly choose your own path in service to Jesus or follow the way of any man, hoping for the best. You’ll find yourself lost and destined for hell. Consult, learn, and then follow Jesus’ roadmap to heaven.

If we can assist you in a study of Jesus’ roadmap, please write, call, or e-mail today. Studies are available by mail or in your home at your convenience.

February 2004

“BABEL”: LANGUAGE BARRIER CREATED, THEN TORN DOWN

Following the Flood, God’s instructions to man were to “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth” (Gen 9:1). As generations passed, men did multiply, but they had no intentions of filling the earth. Instead, in rebellion to God, they decided to build a great city and a great tower in the land of Shinar where everyone would live. This project was designed, not only to prevent them from scattering, but also to make for themselves a name- it was to be a monument to their own greatness. (Gen 11:2-4)

It was easy for men to work together because they spoke the same language (11:1) But, when God saw their defiance and their pride, He confused their speech, causing them to speak in different languages instead of one. The language barrier put an end to the work on the city and the tower (now called “Babel” or “confusion”) and men went their separate ways and filled the earth, as God intended. (11:6-9).

However, not long after man scattered from Babel, God began to work out a plan to bring all men together, not on the physical globe, but in a spiritual body. He promised Abraham that he would be the beginning of a great nation through whom He would bless all nations (Gen 12:3).

For nearly 2000 years, there was a national barrier among men, as Israel, the nation that sprung from Abraham, was God’s special nation out of all the nations of the earth (Ex 19:5-6). This barrier was temporary, lasting only until God’s purpose through Israel was accomplished. God used Israel to bring Jesus into the world to shed His blood for the forgiveness of all mankind (Acts 3:25-26). Through Jesus’ blood, all barriers are broken down- national, racial, social, sexual, and language, for all men can be united into ONE spiritual body of saved people, Jesus’ church (Gal 3:26-29; Eph 2:13-18; 4:4; 5:23)

The city and tower of Babel was designed to make a name for the men who built it and lived in it. In contrast, the church Jesus is building, a body of men made up of both Jews and Gentiles is a monument to the wisdom of God (Mt. 16:18; Rom 11:30-36). Those who are filled with human pride will not enter the saved body, for salvation does not come by human achievement. Jesus’ body is composed of rich and poor, scholar and drop out, celebrity and common man, who through obedient faith, have all been saved alike- by the grace of God. Therefore, to God be the glory. No man can boast. (1 Cor 1:18-31; Eph 2:8-9; Rom 16:25-27)

Only in the “Word of the Cross” (1 Cor 1:18) is it possible for all men to come together and with one voice glorify God (Rom 15:5,6). The “good news” or “gospel” is God’s universal language, which through its translation into hundreds of human languages, has saved (Rom 1:16) and spiritually united men of all nations and languages. As they all speak the common language of the gospel, they can work together to God’s glory (1 Cor 12:12-27).

THE SPIRITUAL “BABEL” OF DENOMINATIONALISM

If God’s intention from eternity was to purchase with the blood of His Son “men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation” (Rev 5:9) and unite them in One spiritual body where all could work together, is not the division of “Christianity” as we know it today contrary to His will? Certainly, it is! But, why does this division among “Christians” exist?

The answer is simple. Those who call themselves “Christians” today cannot work to-gether. They are in the same position as the men who had to stop building Babel because they did not speak the same language. A “Catholic” does not speak “Methodist” and a “Methodist” cannot speak “Catholic. And on it goes. Each denomination has its own language (doctrine) and its peculiar speech is the reason for its beginning and its continued existence. As men join with those of the same language (doctrine), they separate themselves from those of other languages (doctrines). The result is the “scattering” of “Christians”.

The first Christians were united because they “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine (Acts 2:42). They spoke “the same thing” (1 Cor. 1:10). They stayed in the doctrine of Christ” (2 Jn 9). They contended “earnestly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). They were “striving together for the faith of the gospel” (Phil 1:27).

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Numerous warnings were given concerning inventing or following "languages" other than the gospel (Acts 20:28-31, Gal 1:6-9; 1 Tim 4:1-3; 2 Tim 4:1-4, to name a few). Despite these pleas, new languages (doctrines) have continued to develop until now there are hundreds of denominations, each set apart from the others because of their peculiar language (doctrine). Many are not disturbed about this "spiritual Babel". They say, "You speak your language and I will speak mine. God will accept us both." But, the Scriptures clearly state that both "language" (doctrine) and unity matter to God!

Some see a problem with "spiritual Babel" and propose the solution of "non-denominational" congregations who accept men of all "languages" (doctrines). In these churches, denominational loyalty is abandoned, but the language barrier remains and men cannot truly work together since they do not speak the same language.

The only Scriptural solution to "spiritual Babel" is to break away totally from denominationalism, from its organizations and its languages (doctrines), and to unite with others who speak only the language of Jesus, His gospel, in a local church. This is our intention at the Palmer Road church of Christ. We pray that you will let us study the gospel with you that you may be able to learn the language of Jesus and be able to distinguish it from all the "Babel" of men.

WHY DID JESUS SUFFER?

Mel Gibson in his movie, "The Passion of the Christ" has drawn great attention to the suffering of Jesus. The movie very graphically depicts the extreme pain that Jesus endured in the last hours of his life. But, it is very doubtful that any man or group of men could ever fully portray the suffering of Jesus. John Milton, author of Paradise Lost, wrote a poem on Jesus' birth. He started to write a companion poem on the death of Jesus, but finally gave up, saying only, "This subject the author finding to be above the years he had when he wrote it, and nothing satisfied with what was begun, left it unfinished." Can any poem, song, book, or movie truly capture the N.T. story of Jesus' death on the cross?

Yet, while we grasp for words and pictures to portray the extent of Jesus' suffering, the reasons for it are clearly revealed in the N.T. And, these reasons are what make the horror of the pain that He went through so meaningful:

1) Jesus suffered to fulfill O.T. prophecy and to prove that He is the Christ. The O.T. prophets struggled in vain to understand the predictions about the coming "Christ" or "King" the Holy Spirit revealed to them. (1 Pet 1:10-11). Prophets, such as Isaiah, predicted that the Christ would suffer and then be glorified (see Isaiah 53). The meaning of these predictions was not clear until after Jesus died on the cross and arose from His suffering. Jesus then explained that what He went through was necessary to fulfill the O.T. Scriptures, to give men reason to believe that He indeed is the King that has the authority to rule men's lives (Lk 24:25-27; 44-46). This message became the central theme of preaching designed to convert men to Jesus (see Acts 2:22-36; 17:1-4).

2) Jesus suffered to learn obedience. It was the will of God to perfect Jesus through suffering (Heb 2:10). Just prior to His final pain-filled hours, Jesus, while sweating as it were great drops of blood (Lk 22:44), and crying loudly with tears (Heb 5:7) begged His Father to let the cup of agony He was about to drink pass from Him. Yet, He said, "My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done." (Mt 26:39,42). The grueling pain and the humiliating shame of the cross was the supreme test of Jesus' obedience to the Father. He willingly drank the cup of suffering, and, in doing so, learned to the fullest extent the meaning of "obedience".

3) Jesus suffered to become the author of man's salvation and to bring him to glory (Heb 2:10). He had to leave heaven and take on flesh and blood to suffer in man's place, the just for the unjust, to bring man to God (Heb 2:14; 1 Pet 3:17-18). Jesus had to bear man's sins in His body on the cross (1 Pet 2:21-24). Man could not regain God's favor through money (1 Pet 1:18) or through animal sacrifices (Heb 10:1-4). Sin was (and is) such an offense to God, that God Himself had to pay the price, through His Son. Only Jesus' blood could "propitiate" God, that is, meet His demand for justice (Rom 3:23-26) and cool His wrath (Rom 5:9), saving man from hell. Because Jesus suffered, man's sins can be forgiven, he can be reconciled to God now, and he can live with Jesus, beyond the grave, forever in heaven (Heb 10:5-18; 2 Cor 5:17-21; 1 Thess 5:9).

HOW HAVE YOU RESPONDED TO JESUS' SUFFERING?

In answering the question, "Why did Jesus suffer?" on the front page, I gave a few good reasons to consider, but still did not answer, "Why would He allow men to scourge His back into a bloody mess? "Why would He permit men to put a crown of thorns onto His head, slap Him, spit on Him, and joke about Him being a king?" Why would He let men drive nails through His hands and His feet into a wooden cross and then let them plant it into the ground and wait for Him to suffer the slow, excruciating death reserved for criminals?" In one word, the answer is, "Love". The apostle John put it this way; "We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us." (1 Jn 3:16).

The question of why Jesus suffered so much is also answered by John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." How can we even begin to comprehend the Father's love for man?! How could He give His Son, even for the sins of those who scourged Him, who spit upon Him, and who drove the nails into His hands? How could any father bear to see their son so abused? Truly, how much He wanted to keep man from perishing in hell! How much He desired that man instead would become His child and live forever in heaven with Him!

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Have you made the proper response to Jesus' suffering, to the love of the Father and the Son? John wrote, "We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us...

We love because He first loved us." (1 Jn 4:16, 19) Paul said, "For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf." (2 Cor 5:14-15)

In his song, "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross", Isaac Watts said so well what your response (and the response of all men) should be to Jesus' suffering:

*"Were the whole realm of nature mine, That were a present far too small; Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all."*

If you haven't already responded to the love of God and His Son, Jesus, won't you deny yourself, take up your cross daily and follow Him? (Lk 9:23) If you believe in Jesus, you can become His disciple by confessing Him as Lord (Rom 10:9-10) and repenting of your sins and being baptized (Acts 2:38). When you are immersed in water, you will bury your old man of sin and you will rise to walk in newness of life (Rom 6:3-4), a life dedicated to giving your *all* to Jesus, the One who died and rose again on your behalf.

If we can help *you* to make the proper re-sponse to Jesus' suffering, please *call, write, or email* us at our website!

April 2004

WON'T YOU RECEIVE THE WORD OF GOD LIKE THE BEREANS?

Preaching the gospel was a dangerous task in the days of the apostles. For fear of their lives Paul and Silas fled by night from Thessalonica to Berea (Acts 17:10). After that experience, how thankful they must have been to find men and women in Berea whose minds were prepared to hear the word of God.

The Bereans were said to be "more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness." (17:11). "Noble-minded" could be translated "fair minded", that is an "unprejudiced mind", a mind that was not already made up before Paul began to speak, but was willing to hear him out and examine the truthfulness of what he had to say. Do you study the Bible with your mind open to receive the truth of God or to prove what you already believe and to justify what you already practice? All who read the Bible or hear it preached must dismiss from their minds their own preconceived ideas in order to truly be receptive to the truth of God.

But, being "open minded" should not be confused with being "gullible". In Berea, Paul preached that Jesus was the Christ, furnishing proof from the Old Testament prophecies. Even though an apostle was doing the preaching, the Bereans had their Old Testaments open, "examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so." (17:11) They were not convinced that Paul was preaching the truth just because he had his Bible open and was claiming to be teaching what God said.

When you go to church, do you take your Bible along so that you can see for yourself whether or not the preacher or Bible class teacher is speaking the truth of God? If you bring your Bible, do you open it up and follow along with the speaker, looking up each reference as he cites it to make sure that the text really does say what he is teaching? When you listen preaching on the radio or TV, do you open your Bible to compare the message with the Word of God, "examining the Scriptures" to see whether these things are so? If the Bereans didn't take the apostle Paul's word for it, then why should you take *any* preacher at their word today?

Receiving the Word of God involves not only open minds and open Bibles, but open lives. Once men discover God's truth, to truly "receive" it, they must apply it to their lives. After examining Paul's teaching and finding it to be true, many of the Bereans believed. (17:12) We imply that they obeyed Jesus' conditions of salvation and became His disciples. As the first Jews who "gladly received the Word", they repented of their sins and were baptized (Acts 2:37-41). Then they began a steadfast and committed life of service to Jesus, continuing to learn more of His will and to apply it to their lives. (Acts 2:42).

Knowledge of the Bible is not enough. As James said, "But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, not having become a forgetful hearer, but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does." (Jas 1:25). Won't you receive the Word of God like the Bereans?

A CALL TO AN OPEN INVESTIGATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

There was a time in our nation's history, especially in the early to mid-1800's when people loved to hear the Bible preached. Though they belonged to different denominations, when a neighboring church had a preacher come to town to preach, they would all assemble to hear the message. There was an open investigation of the Scriptures. These pioneers were searching for God's truth and had a mind to receive it once they found it. They wanted to have a unity with brothers and sisters in Christ that was based on God's truth. As a result, many abandoned their denominations along with their denominational doctrines in order simply to become Christians, united in independent congregations whose only rule of faith was the New Testament.

But, today unfortunately, there is no such love for the Bible. Many churchgoers don't even bring their Bibles to church, much less open them to examine the truthfulness of what is being taught. Communities no longer assemble when a preacher comes to town to preach. Why not? Perhaps it is lack of interest. Perhaps it is denominational barriers. Probably both. The spirit of investigation, the quest for truth, is gone. Many have the skeptical and perhaps even sarcastic attitude of Pilate, "What is truth?" (Jn 18:38) Most people accept the common thought that it doesn't matter what you believe. If this be so, why sit down with others who differ with you and study the Bible to find out what God

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has spoken on the subject (s) of difference? There would be no point. It is so sad that the day of discussion has been replaced by the day of tolerance. No longer do "Christians" desire and put forth effort to unite upon the objective truth of the New Testament, but they are content "to live and let live", accepting those in all denominations as "brothers", yet remaining divided, contrary to Jesus' prayer that His disciples who be one as He and the Father are one (Jn 17:20-21).

We, the Palmer Road church of Christ, are calling men back to open investigation of the Scriptures. We are calling men back to the spirit of the pioneers of our country, only as that spirit is in keeping with the Bereans of the first century (see Acts 17:11-12; front page article). It is the goal of the Palmer Road church in the 21st century to practice the undenominational Christianity of the 1st century, a Christianity based on "the faith" (Jude 3). We call all men back to Jesus' New Testament as THE standard of authority that all may serve Him acceptably and receive the eternal salvation He promised the obedient (Heb 5:8-9).

May 2004

TIME FOR A NEW START

Snow and 80 degrees in the same week – Spring has come to Michigan, bringing with it its ever changing weather. It is a reminder that God is continuing to keep His promise to Noah, “While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and day and night shall not cease.” (Gen 8:22) After the dead of Winter, God is once again renewing His Creation. Trees, left bare for months, are now clothed with new green leaves. Many of them are in bloom, adding their brilliant colors to the bright colors of the flowers who have come to life around them. The geese honk and signal their return from the South and the return of a climate suitable for all of God’s creatures to live, to reproduce, and to raise their young.

Observing the renewal of Creation, we experience our own sense of renewal. We make a new start. Housewives do Spring-cleaning and find new arrangements for the furniture while their husbands busy themselves with home improvement projects. Professional farmers and backyard gardeners plant their seeds with expectation of greater yields than the last growing season. The worst of last year’s baseball teams (yes, even the Tigers) come out of Spring training with the same anticipation of winning as last year’s World Champs.

Perhaps this is a good time to consider the greatest renewal of all- spiritual renewal- a renewal that is always in season. If we were to paint a Nature scene to reflect the spiritual condition of most men, we would paint a Winter scene. We would paint plants smitten black by Jack Frost to represent what Sin has done to men’s souls. We would outline barren trees against the background of a low, gray sky to show men’s lack of righteousness. And, we would brush on plenty of snow and ice to symbolize the cold, hardened, unfeeling hearts of men that feel no guilt or shame because of their sin.

Unfortunately, most men are dead (spiritually) while they are alive (physically) (1 Tim 5:6). Even those now Christians were once “dead in trespasses” (Eph 2:1). But thanks be to God for His love, mercy, and grace. Because He gave His Son Jesus to die for man’s sins, man can be made alive (Eph 2:4-5). However, this new life is only for those who are willing to make a new spiritual start in life- for those who are willing to become “new creatures” (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15).

Simply put, to become spiritually alive, you have to become a different person than you used to be. You must lay aside the “old” man who practiced sin and put on the “new” man who practices righteousness, with the end goal of becoming like Jesus (Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:9-10). Your spiritual transformation begins when you renew your mind and it results in a total transformation of your life- a life where your very body is presented as a living, holy sacrifice to God (Rom 12:1-2). This transformation is as dramatic as the change from Winter to Spring and is even more amazing!

BEGINNING NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

Romans 6 explains how we enter into a relationship with Christ and begin life anew with Him. Paul wrote that man is “baptized into Christ” or into a relationship with Him (vs. 3). He further explains this in the following verses, teaching that baptism is done in the likeness of Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection (vs. 4-11). As Jesus was crucified and buried, one who has been baptized has crucified his old man of sin and buried him. As Jesus was raised from physical death, one who has been raised from the water of baptism has been raised from spiritual death- raised to walk in “newness of life”, to live a life of righteousness, a life that imitates Jesus. As March 20 marks the end of Winter and the beginning of Spring, so baptism marks the end of spiritual death and the beginning of spiritual life.

If we were to paint a scene of those who are “in Christ”, who are “new creatures”, who have been raised to life from their burial in the water of baptism, we would paint a Spring scene. We would paint them as a plants lush with deep green leaves to represent the life of their souls. We would picture them as trees filled with blossoms to show their fruitfulness in righteousness. And, we would brush on abundant pools of water all around them to show that their once cold hearts have melted.

If God were to paint a picture of *your* spiritual condition, would He paint a scene of Winter or Spring? Have you been baptized into Christ? Are you a new creature? Are you spiritually dead or alive? Perhaps you are in the middle of many Spring projects. You are cleaning your house, making repairs and improvements; you are rearranging your

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furniture and pictures; you are rolling your lawn, planting grass seed and fertilizing; you are planting your flower and vegetable gardens- but have you looked within and thought about making a new spiritual start?

Won't you lay aside your sweepers, mops, mowers, rakes, hoes, rototillers, hammers, saws, and paint brushes and give some time to your soul? Here are a few spiritual projects to consider:

- 1) Repair your soul by obtaining God's forgiveness.
- 2) Clean up your life; get rid of sin.
- 3) Rearrange your priorities, putting spiritual, eternal concerns before those of this physical, temporal life.
- 4) Improve your self by becoming more like Jesus.
- 5) Plant God's Word in your heart and look for the harvest of righteousness now and for heaven hereafter.

If we can help you in your spiritual renewal, please call, write, or e-mail.

June 2004

WHAT HONOR MUST BE DUE TO GOD?!!

I watched in amazement at the respect paid to President Reagan in his funeral proceedings. The hearse door was opened. A soldier very, very slowly and carefully removed the casket from the hearse until the rest of his team of military pallbearers could grasp it. Then he took his place with them. The band played, "Hail to the Chief", the song that had been played to announce the arrival of the President so many times while he was living. Then the band played "My Country 'Tis of Thee" as the pallbearers marched with precise and deliberate steps toward the presidential library.

The soldiers carried President Reagan into the library, marching across the room until they came near the place where his casket was to rest. They were given orders to stop, to left face toward the casket, and then to raise it into the air. Then orders were given to move one step at a time to their right until the casket was in position to be lowered onto the velvet-covered bier. Once the President's body was carefully laid, the soldiers bowed their heads and stood in silence for a few moments. Finally, another military color guard approached and positioned themselves as if to guard the casket and orders were given to those who carried the President's body to march away.

As I watched the proceedings for President Reagan, I wondered why more do not give God the honor that He is due for who He is, for what He has done for man in the past, and for what He is doing today? Listen to some excerpts from the Psalms, songs that were sung to honor God and to encourage others to do the same: "O come, let us sing for joy to the Lord, Let us shout joyfully to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving. Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms. For the Lord is a great God and a great King above all gods. In whose hand are the depths of the earth, The peaks of the mountains are His also. The sea is His, for it was He who made it, And His hands formed the dry land. Come let us worship and bow down, Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand. (Ps 95:1-7) ...

"The Lord reigns, let the peoples tremble; He is enthroned above the cherubim, let the earth shake! The Lord is great in Zion, And He is exalted above all the people. Let them praise Your great and awesome name; Holy is He." Ps 99:1-3) ...

"Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth. Serve the Lord with gladness; Come before Him with joyful singing. Know that the Lord Himself is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; We are His people and the sheep of His pasture. Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him, bless His name. For the Lord is good; His lovingkindness is everlasting and His faithfulness to all generations." (Ps 100)

God is our Maker, our King, our Shepherd, and our Savior. His character is one of lovingkindness and faithfulness. If honor is due to men, such as our presidents (and, so it is- see Romans 13:8), what honor must be due to God?!!

DO YOU HONOR GOD?

We have built museums, monuments and memorials to honor men such as the Orville and Wilbur Wright, Thomas Edison and Henry Ford whose inventions have blessed the world. But, do we honor the One who made Orville and Wilbur Wright, Thomas Edison, and Henry Ford? We have built museums, monuments, and memorials to honor those who sacrificed their lives in service to our country and others around the world. But, do we honor Jesus who left the glories of heaven to make the supreme sacrifice in service to mankind, saving all of us from our sins? We have built museums, monuments, and memorials to honor great Presidents such as George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, but do we honor God and His Son Jesus the Christ (King), the best Leaders we could ever have, if we would only follow their perfect Law?

Though there is every reason to honor God, so many in our society, like the Gentiles Paul spoke of in Romans 1, do not praise Him or give thanks (Rom 1:21). It seems that so few take time to assemble with others for worship, especially on a regular basis. How many make it a priority to honor God? How many even take the time at home to bow their heads and to thank God for the food He has blessed them with? What about *you*, do *you* honor God by giving Him praise and thanksgiving?

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Though there is every reason to honor God, so many in our society, like the Gentiles Paul spoke of in Romans 1, also are dishonoring God by living immoral lives. Homosexuality is being pushed as something that should be honored with a ceremony and called "marriage", but speaking of those who refused to honor God, Paul said, "For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women changed the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persona the due penalty of their error." (Rom 1:26-27)

Paul continued with a long list of attitudes and actions of men who refused to acknowledge God and honor Him, a list that sounds like today's newspaper- greed, envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice, gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evils, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, and unmerciful. The apostle wrote that those who so dishonor God are worthy of death (separation from God for eternity) (Rom 1:28-32). What about *you*, are *you* hon-oring God by living according to His moral law?

We invite *you* to assemble with us for worship and Bible study at the times listed below. Our desire is to our honor God, not only by our lips, but also by our lives. We pray that this is *your* desire, too. Won't *you* join with us to honor our great, holy, and awesome God?

July 2004

EVIDENCE THE BIBLE IS GOD'S WORD: PREDICTIONS ABOUT BABYLON

The Bible claims that all Scripture is inspired of God (2 Tim 3:16). No prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God (2 Pet 1:21). According to a poll published in *Life* magazine in December 1998, only 33% of Americans believe the Bible is the Word of God. Many who consider themselves "Christians", even many preachers, believe that the Bible came only from the mind and pen of men. It is amazing that men live by and preach from a book that would have to be considered a lie and a fraud if its claim to be the Word of God is not true. But, is there any evidence, any reason to believe, the Bible's claim to be the Word of God?

The God of the Bible has given man reason to belief in Him and in His prophets. He challenged the idols to bring forward their strong arguments for men to believe in them. He said to them, "Declare the things that are going to come afterward, that we may know that you are gods; Indeed do good or evil, that we may anxiously look about us and fear together." (Isa 41:23) Idols cannot speak, much less predict the future, but the God of the Bible declared things before they happened through His prophets so that when they happened men could say, "He is right" (Isa 41:26).

An example of predictions made by Bible prophets that were fulfilled and remain fulfilled are the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah concerning the great ancient city of Babylon. From the lists of kings mentioned at the beginning of their writings (Isa 1:1, Jer 1:3) we date Isaiah's predictions from about 700 B.C. and Jeremiah's some time before 586 B.C. Notice these very specific predictions made by Isaiah and Jeremiah about Babylon:

- 1) The Medes would destroy them (Isa 13:17-18; Jer 51:11,28)
- 2) The city would be conquered easily, while the Babylonians were drunk (Jer 51:30-32, 38-40, 57-58).

This was a remarkable prediction to make for, at the time it was made, Babylon was a city of tremendous fortifications. The city had 14 miles of walls surrounding it. The outer wall was 311 feet high (30 stories) and was 87 feet wide (11 car widths). In addition, there were 250 watchtowers that were 100 feet higher than the walls. But Jeremiah reported that God's attitude was, "You can build up to heaven, but I will destroy you!" (Jer 51:53)

- 3) The city would be completely destroyed: (Isa 13:19-22; Jer 50:3,12, 39; 51:61-64)
 - a) As when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.
 - b) Never to be inhabited.
 - c) Arab would not pitch his tent there.
 - d) Shepherds would not make their flocks lie down there.
 - e) It would be left as a place for wild beasts.

Read on to see that "God is right", Isaiah and Jeremiah did speak as prophets of God, and that you can have confidence that God, not men was behind the writing of the Bible...

FROM DARIUS THE MEDE TO... SADDAM HUSSEIN??

Darius the Mede destroyed Babylon on October 13, 539 B.C. The Medes diverted the Euphrates River that flowed through Babylon and, ignoring simply the high walls, entered the city in the abandoned riverbed. The city was taken easily, as the Babylonians were celebrating a feast and were drunk.

Alexander the Great thought to restore the great temple of Babylon, but found the project too costly. The Seleucids, who controlled the ruins of Babylon after him, also counted the cost and decided that reconstructing Babylon would be just as costly as building a new city. So they built Seleucia, 40 miles north of Babylon's ruins. Everyone living in the area of the ruins then left for the new city.

By the time of the reign of Augustus Caesar (27 B.C. - A.D. 14), the writer Strabo said, "The great city has become a desert." In A.D. 116, the emperor Trajan described the once glorious Babylon as "mounds and legends of mounds."

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In 1853, Austen Layard described the site, as "a naked and hideous waste. Owls stare from the scanty thickets and the foul jackal stalks through the furrows. Truly, the glory of kingdoms and the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency is as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah." Floyd Hamilton wrote in 1927, "Travelers report that the city is absolutely uninhabited, even by Bedouins.

There are various superstitions current among the Arabs that prevent them from pitching their tents there, while the character of the soil prevents the growth of vegetation suitable for the pasturage of flocks."

Saddam Hussein had a dream to rebuild Babylon (55 miles south of Baghdad). Under his direction, in 1982 workers began recon-structing the 600-room palace of Nebuchad-nezzar. They laid more than 60 million sand-colored bricks on top of the original bricks. The new bricks were inscribed, "In the era of Saddam Hussein, protector of Iraq, who rebuilt civilization and rebuilt Babylon."

The Gulf War interrupted Saddam's building. Operation Iraqi Freedom crushed his dream. God said that Babylon would be desolate forever. Saddam said he would rebuild it. Is it any wonder that he lost the war and was deposed from power? "God is right", Isaiah and Jeremiah were His prophets. Men could not have foreseen either the destruction of Babylon or its continued desolation for 2543 years and counting. You can believe that the Bible is what it claims, the Word of God!

Want to see more evidence? Please contact us for a correspondence course or an in home study of the abundant evidence available to convince us to believe in God, the Bible, as well as Jesus.

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LOOKING AT THE SCARS OF JESUS

Thomas couldn't believe that Jesus was alive. The other apostles said that they had seen the Lord. But, Thomas said, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." Soon he had the chance to see this evidence of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Jesus told him, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving." Upon examination of Jesus' scars, he said, "My Lord and my God!" (Jn 20:24-28)

Thomas and the rest of the apostles and hundreds of other witnesses (1 Cor 15:6) gave their testimony of Jesus' resurrection (Acts 4:33), their testimony was confirmed by miracle (Heb 2:4), and men and woman around the world who did not see Jesus' scars became believers. Their testimony continues to convince men to believe in the 21st century.

If we, through the eyes of faith, look at the scars of Jesus, here are a few of the many things we come to understand:

Humanity of Jesus: Jesus' scars show us that He did share with us in flesh and blood. He became like us so that He could be tempted, and, after resisting temptation, His hands and feet could be nailed to the cross for the forgiveness of our sins (Heb 2:14-18).

Humility of Jesus: It is hard to comprehend that One who existed in the form of God in heaven would lower Himself to the form of a bondservant and be obedient to death, even death on a cross.

But the scars of Jesus prove that indeed Jesus was *that* humble (Phil 2:5-8)!

Heart of God: What would cause the all-powerful Father to allow cruel man to crucify His only Son? There is no other explanation for the scars on Jesus' hands and feet and in his side other than "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16).

Horror of Sin: We may say, "So, I disobeyed God's commands, what's the big deal?" But, the scars of Jesus show us that sin is a big deal. The scars of Jesus show us the penalty that Jesus had to pay for our sins, so that God would be just to forgive us- "He Himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed" (1 Pet 2:24).

Hope of Heaven: When Thomas saw Jesus' scars, he saw wounds that were healed. Though He bled and died, He was alive and well. Because He rose again, conquered death, and then went to heaven, He gives the Christian every confidence they can do the same- God "caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away reserved in heaven for you." (1 Peter 1:3-4).

No wonder Jesus said that His crucifixion would draw all men to Him (Jn 12:32-33)! Have you been drawn? If not, meditate for a while on the meaning of Jesus' scars. How can you not be His disciple?

WHY DID YOU WATCH YOUR SON DIE?

You watch as the police arrest your son without making any charge against him. The police easily found him and arrested him out of the public eye because one of your son's best friends betrayed him and became a police informant. Though you see your son being arrested, you do nothing to stop it.

The police take your son straight to court, though it is the middle of the night. Many, even the judge, trump charges up against him and he is condemned as guilty. Your son is then whisked off to a higher court that has the power to hand out the death penalty. A cowardly judge tries to escape passing judgment on your son's case by transferring him to another court, but your son is sent back to him. You watch while many false statements are made concerning your son. Your son is made fun of, humiliated, and spit on. Your son is beaten within an inch of his life. By not long after breakfast time, the judge sentences your son to death for a crime he did not commit. There is no appeal and the sentence

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will be carried out immediately. Though you see all these unjust proceedings, you do nothing to intervene to save your son from death.

The capital punishment for your son is not to be the electric chair or lethal injection. Your son is in a society that gives no thought to being "humane" to criminals. You watch as soldiers hammer nails into your son's hands and feet, fastening them, arms outspread, onto a cross of wood. Your child's cross is then raised and planted in the ground. His slow death begins. Two actual criminals are crucified with your son, adding to his shame. A crowd gathers to watch your child die and several continue to verbally abuse your son.

Your son cries to you for help and asks you why you have forsaken him. You do nothing to help him. You watch him suffer in extreme pain. He becomes so dehydrated that he tells soldiers standing by the cross of his thirst. You see him take a small sip of relief. You continue to observe your son pulling himself up against the nails to gasp for breath until he becomes too weak to do so and he dies.

You are God. You created the universe. You destroyed the world with a flood. You turned Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes. Yet, you watched Your Son die and did nothing. *WHY?!!* "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom 5:8)

"Could we with ink the ocean fill, And were the skies of parchment made; Were every stalk on earth a quill, And every man a scribe by trade, To write the love of God above would drain the ocean dry, Nor could the scroll contain the whole, Tho' stretched from sky to sky"- F.M. Lehman

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SHOULD THERE BE "ETHNIC" CHURCHES?

The Detroit Metro area is truly a "melting pot" of the world's ethnic groups. "Ethnic" is de-fined as "sizable groups of people sharing a common and distinctive racial, national, religious, linguistic, or cultural heritage." Everywhere you go throughout our area you see men and women of various races and nationalities. Restaurants serving the food of cultures around the world seem to be on every corner. It is a wonderful thing to see the many diverse ethnic groups living and working together in peace in one community. But, can those who live and work together, worship together? Sadly, in many cases not. Many churches are unnecessarily made up of one ethnic group (that is, the reason they are meeting separately from others is not a language barrier). Is this the way that Jesus wants it to be?

When Jesus ran the money changers out of the temple, He said, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations?' But you have made it a robbers' den." (Mk 11:17) Jesus was quoting from Isaiah 56:7, one of many O.T. passages promising that worshipping God in the days of the Messiah would not be limited to the Jewish nation. All peoples would be able to participate together. In another passage Isaiah predicted that it would be too small of a job for God's Servant, the Messiah, to give help to Israel. God would also make Him a light to the nations so that His salvation might reach to the end of the earth. (Isa 49:6)

These prophecies were in keeping with a promise that God made to Abraham hundreds of years before when He told him, "In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." (Gen 12:3) God chose Abraham to begin a distinct race of people (the Jews). He set apart the nation of Israel for a time to use them to accomplish His purpose.

A teacher of mine gave me this illustration. When he was a child in rural KY in the 1920's, his teacher brought a special treat to the class each Friday, a basket of apples. One student was cho-sen to carry the basket of apples and to pass them out to the class. For a moment, the privileged boy or girl who was selected had all the apples, but only for the purpose of giving them to the class so that all could enjoy. God chose the nation of Israel to be His special people. For a "moment" they were privileged, as God used them to bring Jesus into the world to die so that all men might enjoy the remission of their sins.

Once Jesus came through the Jews, God no longer had a special physical nation, but a privileged spiritual nation, made up of both Jew and Gentile. Jesus was the peace between Jew and Gentile. He made both groups into one, breaking down the wall that divided them (Eph 2:11-18). Now there is neither Jew nor Greek. All are one in Christ Jesus- all are Abraham's spiritual off-spring, heirs according to promise (Gal. 3:27-29). This is the plan of God, the mystery once hidden, but now revealed in the gospel (Eph 3:1-6).

How is it that men of all nations who call themselves "Christians" cannot worship together in the same congregation, but are separated from one another because of ethnic differences? What must Jesus think!

THE GOSPEL IS FOR ALL

It wasn't easy for Christians of different ethnic backgrounds to worship together in the 1st century. In the first congregation at Jerusalem, some were Hellenistic Jews (having adopted the Greek culture), while others were living by the Jewish culture. Widows of Jewish culture were getting needed attention, while those of Greek culture were being neglected (Acts 6:1). The Jews had an especially difficult time accepting that the Gentiles could also be God's people. Only God's supernatural power could convince Peter to preach to the Gentiles and could convince his critics that "God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life" (Acts 10:1-11:18)

Even then, the problem of Jews and Gen-tiles accepting one another was far from over. Many Jews said that they would only accept the Gentiles if they become "Jews" (by circumcision and keeping the Law of Moses). But God made it clear that those who would only accept the Gen-tiles if they lived like Jews were wrong (Acts 15). Later though, even Peter stopped eating with the Gentiles once those he thought would disapprove arrived (Gal 2:11-14). It seems that many did not understand the full import of the gospel- that ethnic differences do not matter. They should have become all things to all men- adapted themselves to the ethnic practices of the Jew while with them and to the ethnic practices of the Gentile while among them- so by all means some souls could be saved (1 Cor 9:19-22).

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Christians of the 21st century need to understand what many 1st century Jewish Christians did not. Although men have ethnic differences, their deepest spiritual need is the same. The Gentile without the Law of Moses had the same problem that the Jew did who had the Law- SIN! All men have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God and will perish without a Savior (Rom 2:11-13, 23). But there is "good news" ("the gospel"), God's power to save both Jew and Greek (Rom 1:16). The grace of God has brought salvation to *all* men through the blood of Jesus (Tit 2:11-14). So *all* Christians should accept one another, "just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God." (Rom 15:7-12)

May Christians never judge one another on the basis of the color of skin, nationality, or culture that they may be truly one in their religion (Jn 17:20-21), each one putting on the new self and renewing himself in Jesus' image, "a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free man, but Christ is all and in all" (Col 3:9-11).

RIDING OUT A HURRICANE IN A MOBILE HOME

First came Charley, then Frances, followed by Ivan, and finally Jeanne. Four strong hurricanes battered Florida in rapid succession. With each passing storm, it seemed that more residents took the warnings seriously and either evacuated or went to shelters to put themselves out of harms way. But, as always, some chose to ride out the storm and stayed in their homes. Some even held "hurricane parties", apparently with a "Bring it on!" attitude.

One family of five was killed by hurricane Ivan. The storm leveled their mobile home. Their deaths seem so senseless. Modern technology had been tracking Ivan for many days, enabling warnings to be given far in advance to those in his path. His reputation for bringing death and destruction was well known. Why didn't this family leave town? Why didn't they go to a shelter? And, above all, one wonders why did they choose to ride out a hurricane in a mobile home, a dwelling a powerful wind can crush as easily as a man wads up a piece of paper? Quite a foolish choice and they paid for it with their lives.

The prophet Nahum compared God's wrath to a storm. He foretold God's destruction of Nineveh, the capital of the Assyria. He wrote, "A jealous and avenging God is the Lord; The Lord is avenging and wrathful, The Lord takes vengeance on His adversaries, and He reserves wrath for His enemies. The Lord is slow to anger and great in power, And the Lord will by no means leave the guilty unpunished. In whirlwind and storm is His way ... Who can stand before His indignation? Who can endure the burning of his anger? His wrath is poured out like fire and the rocks are broken up by Him. (Nah 1:2-3, 6)

It is for certain that the hurricane of God's judgment is coming. You and I, as all men are in its path (Eccl 12:13-14; Heb 9:27). The Bible tracks the storms of God. God destroyed Nineveh by His mighty wind as Nahum predicted. The high fortified walls of Babylon (Jer 51:53) and the rock fortress of Edom (Obadiah, vs 3-4) were like mobile homes, easily blown apart by God's whirlwind of judgment. These storm histories as well as many others, such as the devastation God brought by the Flood in the day of Noah, and later by fire and brimstone to Sodom and Gomorrah are given to us as an example so that we will fear and make preparations (2 Pet 2:5-9).

But despite these warnings, most men are making the foolish decision to "ride out" the approaching storm of God's judgment. Some laugh at the idea that the storm will hit since it has been so long since it was predicted. They party, saying, "Bring it on!" But, Jesus, the Eye of the hurricane, has not yet "made landfall" to give men time to repent (2 Pet 3:3-4,9). Others hear Jesus' words, but do nothing else. Jesus illustrated how foolish this is by His story of a man who built his house on the sand. His house was like a mobile home in a hurricane- so will a man be in the storm of God's judgment who has heard, but not obeyed Jesus' word. Only the man who builds his house on the rock, that is, who hears Jesus' word and obeys it, will survive the gusty winds and the floods of God's judgment. (Mt 7:24-28)

What about you? Facing God's judgment, are you trying to ride it out in a mobile home?

PREPARING FOR THE STORM

There is no question that the storm of God's wrath is coming. Two questions remain, "When?" and "Will I be prepared?" God's wrath is coming for one reason- sin. You have sinned. I have sinned (disrespected God's authority by breaking His law- 1 Jn 3:4). As the Scripture says, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Rom 3:23). Because we sinned, we alienated ourselves from God (Col 1:21) and became His enemy (Rom 5:10). We face the horrible punishment of hell, described this way by John, "He also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night" (Rev 14:10-11).

But, God Himself did something to save us from the storm of His wrath. "For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him."

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(Rom 5:6-9). Jesus took the punishment we were due so that by His blood God could be just and we could be forgiven. No longer did we have to fear the coming storm of His wrath.

Yet, you and I must act in order to receive this salvation from sin and prepare for God's judgment. Jesus died for all, but not all will be saved. The gift of salvation from sin and wrath is conditional. We must choose to let Jesus pay for our sins so that we do not have to pay for them ourselves. The Scriptures tell us that we do this by believing in our heart that God raised Jesus from the dead and confessing with our mouth that Jesus is Lord (Rom 10:9-10). We must also repent of our sins, that is, decide to turn away from all that is contrary to Jesus' will, to live for Him who died for us (Lk 13:1-5). We must then be baptized (immersed) in water for the remission of our sins (Acts 2:38; 8:36-38).

Once we have acted in faith to receive the benefits of Jesus' blood, "we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 5:1). We are "in Christ" (have a relationship with Him) and there is no condemnation (Rom 8:1). We have no need to fear, if we "continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, not moved away from the hope of the gospel" (Col 1:23; 1 Pet 1:3-4).

Have you met God's conditions to accept His salvation? Are you prepared for the storm of His judgment? Will you let Jesus pay for your sins or will you choose to face His wrath? If, in any way we can help you prepare for the storm, please write, call, or email. Remember friend, "it is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God." (Heb 10:31).

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REALITY CHECK

Television is filled with “reality” shows that are not reality. In reality, you and I will not be stranded on a desert island and be forced to survive. We will not pick a spouse from gorgeous candidates competing to marry us. We will not be hired or fired by “the Donald”. We will not eat worms or walk across the top of a moving semi-truck for a million dollars. We will not have our houses extremely made over in a week. Nor will anyone transform our bodies into “swans”. Perhaps these shows would be better labeled as “escape” from reality.

God has given us the book of Ecclesiastes for a reality check. His words about life apply to our lives just as much as they did to the lives of men 3000 years ago when the book was written:

Reality is that life is full of heartache. “Indeed, if a man should live many years, let him rejoice in them all, and let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many.” (11:8)

Reality is that many live in tears daily because of those who mistreat them. “Then I looked again at all the acts of oppression which were being done under the sun. And behold I saw the tears of the oppressed and that they had no one to comfort them ...” (4:1)

Reality is that life is not fair. “Furthermore, I have seen under the sun that in the place of justice there is wickedness and in the place of righteousness there is wickedness.” (3:16)

Reality is that we cannot find true satisfaction in money and what it will buy. “He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance with its income.” (5:10)

Reality is we will die and we are not guaranteed to live to old age. “Moreover, man does not know his time: like fish caught in a treacherous net and birds trapped in a snare, so the sons of men are snared at an evil time when it suddenly falls on them.” (9:12)

Reality is that, if we live to old age, our body will wear out and life’s joy will be replaced by pain. “Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near when you will say, ‘I have no pleasure in them.’” (12:1)

Reality is that “he who dies with the most toys” leaves them behind to others who may squander all he has worked for. “This also is a grievous evil- exactly as a man is born, thus will he die. So what is the advantage who toils for the wind?... Thus I hated all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun, for I must leave it to the man who will come after me. And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool?...” (5:16; 2:18-19)

Reality is that TV and movies may give us an “escape” from reality, but do not take away the problems of life, nor do they give us any lasting happiness. “I said to myself, ‘Come now, I will test you with pleasure. So enjoy yourself.’ And behold, it too was futility. I said of laughter, ‘It is madness,’ and of pleasure, ‘What does it accomplish?’” (2:1-2)

DEALING WITH REALITY

No matter how hard we try to escape reality, we just can’t. We dream that every day will be pleasant, but reality is that we have many dark days. We dream that people will always treat each other with kindness and fairness, but, in reality, many times we ourselves have felt the sting of mistreatment and injustice. We dream that we will be happy if we just have a little more of what money can buy, but, in reality, we’re like the child who thinks if they got the toy in the catalog, they’d have all they ever wanted- who then gets the toy- but soon after is eyeing the catalog for still another toy. We dream we will live to be old, ignoring the reality that it may not happen, illustrated right in front of our eyes by the early passing of family and friends. We dream that we can preserve our youth, but reality is wrinkle cream and hair dye may hide the aging of the body, but they cannot stop it. We dream that we will always be able to enjoy what we have worked so hard for, blind to the reality that it soon will belong to someone else when we leave this world with what we brought into it- nothing!

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We are fortunate that God had Solomon to “tell it like it is” about life and, in the end, to tell us what life must be all about, if we are to live it to its fullest, despite its dark realities. His closing words were, “The conclusion when all has been heard is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.” (12:13-14)

God’s wisdom tells us that the way to deal with reality is to live our lives in the fear of God. We will find true fulfillment in knowing we are living in accordance with the purpose we have been created. We will find joy in pleasing our Creator. We will find happiness in staying within His moral law instead of going our own way and experiencing the sorrows of sin. And we will have the satisfaction of doing something that lasts beyond the grave and brings eternal reward.

Realities found elsewhere in Scripture complete the story. The reality is that all of us have sinned and we can expect wrath, not reward, when every act is brought to judgment (Rom 3:23; Eph 2:1-3). But, another reality is that God so loved the world that He gave His Son, so that we may not perish, but have eternal life (Jn 3:16). God, in reality, will forgive us of our sins because of Jesus’ blood, if we believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and confess Him with our mouth (Rom 10:9-10) and repent of our sins and be baptized (Acts 2:38). After living for Jesus, fighting the good fight, finishing the course, and keeping the faith, the reality is that we will be rewarded with the crown of righteousness on the Day of Judgment (2 Tim 4:6-8).

Are you dealing with reality or just trying to escape it? If we can help you deal with the realities of life, death, sin, judgment, and salvation, please write, call, or e-mail us.

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SEEING THE INVISIBLE

Fanny Crosby wrote many inspiring hymns, hymns that take on even more meaning once one learns that Fanny was blind. In her hymn, "Safe in the Arms of Jesus", she penned, "Here let me wait with patience, wait till the *night* is o'er; Wait till I *see* the morning, break on the golden shore." And, in the chorus of her song "Saved by Grace" she wrote, "And I shall *see* Him face to face, and tell the story saved by grace." Though Fanny could not see with her eyes, with eyes of faith she saw God and she saw heaven. If you are reading this article, you are blessed to see what is visible in this life. But, do you, as Fanny, see the invisible? Moses, whose eyesight never dimmed though he lived 120 years (Dt 34:7), also had excellent spiritual vision, and as Fanny, saw the invisible.

Moses saw powerful Pharaoh. He knew Pharaoh wanted to kill him after he killed an Egyptian in defense of an Israelite. (Ex 2:11-16). But, he left Egypt, not fearing Pharaoh's wrath. How was he able to do this? He endured, trusting the One who is unseen to protect him. (Heb 11:27). By faith, do you see God? "Since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse." (Rom 1:20). All that you see with your physical eyes points to a Divine and Eternal Creator. Look at the magnificent beauty of a sunset. Do you see God? How can you not?!!

Moses saw the pleasure of sin and the treasures of Egypt. But rather than enjoy sin and have great riches, he chose to suffer with the people of God, enduring the reproach of Christ. Why? He was looking at the invisible- the reward (Heb 11:24-26). However pleasurable sin appeared to him, he knew its pleasure was "passing". If he chose to enjoy sin for a *moment*, he would miss heaven, his *eternal* reward (and end up in the *eternal* punishment of hell). He chose rather to live right and identify himself with his people- God's people- and to take the suffering that went with it, in order to gain the reward. Archaeologists have uncovered the fabulous riches of Egypt, such as those of King Tut. Similar treasures could have belonged to Moses, the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter. But his faith caused him to give up all that he could see in order to receive the treasures he could not see. Are you looking to the reward? Do you see heaven? Does the sight of heaven cause you to refuse sinful pleasures? Does looking to the reward give you the strength to suffer with others who do what is right? Do you see that sharing the reproach of Christ is more valuable than all the treasures of this world?

Jesus said, "The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness." (Mt 6:22-23) The Savior taught that the light in your life depends on the light in your eyes. If your physical eyes are bad, you live as Fanny Crosby did, in a world of darkness. If your spiritual eyes are bad, you live in spiritual darkness. Is God as real to you as your next-door neighbor? Is heaven as real as Detroit? Do you see the invisible or are you blind?