

January 2005

THE BIG PICTURE OF THE BIBLE

Perhaps you have read the Bible straight through from cover to cover. Or perhaps you have read different parts of the Bible at various times. But, have you seen the story that ties the 66 books into one- the big picture of the Bible?

God chose to give His revelation to man in the format of a "mystery" (1 Cor 2:7). This for-mat is common in books, TV shows, and movies. In the beginning of a mystery, the problem that needs to be resolved is presented. Then clues are given that point toward the solution- clues that are not clearly understood at the time they are given. Finally, at the end of the mystery, the solution is revealed. All of the clues then make perfect sense and the whole plot falls into place like a jigsaw puzzle.

The Creator had a plan before He made the world. God wanted men to be holy and blameless and to be children in His family (Eph 1:4-5). But, in order for this to happen, a solution had to be found to the problem presented in the early pages of the Bible- sin (See Genesis 3). How could those who sinned be "holy and blameless"? How could those who had sinned and had destroyed their relationship with a holy God become His children?

Right after the sin of Adam and Eve the first clue was given. The seed of woman would bruise Satan on the head and Satan would bruise him on the heel (Gen 3:15). Satan had won a battle against man in successfully enticing him to sin, but he would not win the war. A Savior born of woman would sustain a minor injury from Satan, but would deal him a crushing blow. But who would he be? Clues continued to be given to his identity.

This one who would bless all nations would be a descendent of Abraham (Gen 12:3), Isaac (Gen 26:4), and Jacob (or Israel, Gen 28:14) and therefore would come from the *nation* of Israel. This Savior would also be a King (Messiah) from the *tribe* of Judah (Gen 49:10). And, of those in the tribe of Judah, he would descend from the *family* of David (2 Sam 7:12,13). Many more clues were given such as where the Savior would be born (Micah 5:2), what kind of character he would have (Isa 42:1-4), and how that he would suffer and die, but live again (Isa 53:1-12).

God carried out his eternal purpose through Jesus (Eph 3:11) and revealed His my-stery through His ap-ostles and prophets (Eph 3:3-5) in the New Testament. A comparison of the N.T. with the predictions in the O.T. clearly shows us that He is the long, awaited Savior and King. He was of the right descent; he was born in the right place; he had the character Isaiah predicted he would, and he suffered, died, and arose. Through Jesus' sacrifice on Calvary's cross (Satan's injury to His heel), He crushed Satan's head and blessed all mankind with the opportunity to become holy and blameless and to be adopted into the family of God. As a son of God, man can strive toward the goal of God's mystery, that is, to have Christ in him (that is, Christ's character), which is his hope of glory in heaven (Col 1:27).

Now you know the big picture of the Bible. Keep it in mind as you read any part of the whole- it will help you to understand it. And, marvel as you see all of the pieces fit together!

ARE YOU HUNGRY?

Nearly every home has a Bible. Some are displayed on coffee tables. Others are placed in bookcases, put away in closet shelves, or packed in trunks in the attic. The Bible is owned and revered by more people than any other book in the world. Yet, most copies of it are doing little more than gathering dust.

Why is this so? There is no spiritual hunger for the Bible. Peter wrote, "Like newborn babes long for the pure milk of the Word so that you may grow in respect to salvation" (1 Pet 2:2). Anyone who has had a newborn baby or has been around one knows that they will not stop crying until they are fed. Unfortunately, it is rare in our society to see this kind of intense longing to learn the Word of God.

Many are starving spiritually with food right there in their homes. They just have no appetite for the Bible. They do not consider it any more important than any other book. In fact, it is treated as less important for many books go in and out of the home from the library, while the Bible remains unread.

January 2005

What about you? Do you have a Bible? Are you reading it? This bulletin is not at all a substitute for the Bible. It is designed to do the same thing a restaurant commercial does- to make you hungry. Are you hungry for the Word of God? The only way to satisfy that hunger is to open up its pages. Do it soon and do it often. Nourish you soul and watch it grow- Watch your relationship with God grow unto salvation.

CHRISTIAN DOORS

A few years ago, I went on a field trip with my son Jeremy to a house dating from the late 1800's. The tour guide called our attention to the design of the doors. She said that they were called "Christian" doors because the design on them was a cross with a rectangle on either side of the cross to represent an open Bible.

The design reflects an age where the cross of Jesus was important and Bibles were opened and read. In those days it was considered that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding" (Prov 9:10). Parents were diligent to instruct the children in the home so that it could be said that God's words were written on the doorposts of the house. (Dt 6:9)

Sadly, most people in our society pay little if any attention to the values reflected on the "Christian" doors. What about your house? Are those who go in and out of your doors knowledgeable in the Bible? Do they meditate on the cross of Jesus and are they being inspired by it to be His disciples? Does your house have "Christian" doors? If not, there's no time like the present to exalt the cross of Jesus and the Bible to their proper place in your home.

WHEN JESUS CAME TO WESTLAND

When Jesus came to Golgotha,
They nailed Him to a tree,
They drove great nails
Through His hands,
And made a Calvary.

They crowned Him with
a crown of thorns,
Red were His wounds, and deep;
For those were crude and cruel days
And human flesh was cheap.

When Jesus came to Westland,
They simply passed Him by;
They never hurt a hair of Him,
They only let him die.

For men had grown more tender
And they would not give Him pain;
They only just passed down the street
And left Him in the rain.

Still, Jesus cried, "Forgive them, Lord,
They know not what they do!"
And still it rained the winter rain
That drenched Him through and through.

The crowds went home and left the streets
Without a soul to see;
And Jesus crouched against a wall
And cried for Calvary.

Adapted from Studdart-Kennedy,
English poet
"When Jesus Came to Birmingham"

When Jesus walked the streets of Palestine, He created a great stir. Every one had an opinion about Him. Some said, "He is a good man", while others said, "No, on the contrary, He leads the people astray." (Jn 7:12). While many believed in Him, others wanted to seize Him and do Him harm. (Jn 7:40-43).

Emotions ran high concerning Jesus and were fickle. The Jewish rulers turned the people quickly against Him. The people hailed Jesus as King at the first of the week (Jn 12:13), but by the end of the week shouted, "Crucify Him!" (Jn 19:15).

As the poet Studdart-Kennedy puts it so well, it is hard to imagine Jesus producing the heated response in Westland that He did in Pale-stine 2000 years ago. Rather, if Jesus came to Westland and spoke, would He not find Himself ignored, mourning in the cold rain due to men's indifference-

"You must worship your Creator"
"Who cares?"

February 2005

"You must turn from sin"

"Who cares?"

"I am the Good Shepherd, follow My Word"

"Who cares?"

"I was crucified so God would forgive your sins"

"Who cares?"

Isn't this how men in Westland react to the Word of Jesus that they don't even bother to read? If He came to Westland, would it be any different?

March 2005

CAN'T YOU FEEL JESUS DRAWING YOU?

Jesus said, "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself." He said this to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die- crucifixion. (Jn 12:32-33) Have you meditated on the death of Jesus- can you think about the following and not feel the pull of Jesus, a pull that makes you want to be His disciple?

Jesus' humility

You can't think about Jesus' cross without reflecting on who was being crucified- God (deity), the Creator of the universe. (Jn 1:1-3) "Although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, he humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." (Phil 2:6-8) Doesn't the thought of One so high, powerful, and authoritative becoming so low, powerless, and obedient move you to want to follow Him?

Jesus' suffering

Have you thought about how much Jesus' suffered? He was scourged prior to being lifted up from the earth (Jn 19:1)- severely beaten with a whip that had fragments of bone and metal in it to rip His flesh. A crown of sharp thorns was driven into His head. (Jn 19:2) Soldiers attached His hands and feet to wooden beams with large nails before lifting Him up to feel the weight of His body tearing against the nails. He agonized this way for several hours, pulling Himself up

to gasp for a breath and then letting Himself back down, with excruciating pain in every movement. He became extremely thirsty due to dehydration. (Jn 19:28) In the torment of that dark hour He despaired, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Mt 27:46) Have you realized, as Paul did, that He endured all this suffering for you? (Gal 2:20) Aren't you drawn to Jesus by how He agonized for your sins? Doesn't His suffering make you want to become His disciple?

Jesus' love

Why would Jesus voluntarily suffer and lay down His life for you, for me and for all men? The songwriter J.G. Dailey answered well when he wrote, "Why did He drink the bitter cup, of sorrow, pain, and woe, Why on the cross be lifted up? Because He loved me so!" John put it simply, "We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us." (1 Jn 3:16) What affect should such love have on you? Paul said such love compelled him to be a Christian- "For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He dies 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) Can't you feel the pull of Jesus' love? Doesn't His death for you make you want to live for Him? - to love Him because He first loved you. (1 Jn 4:19)

The cross of Jesus is His powerful magnet. If you are not a Christian, please meditate more on how Jesus was lifted up and may His death almost 2000 years ago draw you to Him today.

JESUS' CROSS IS OUR ONLY DRAW

"Church" is marketed today just like any business. Churches use commercials to bring people in. Some say, "Come for the people, they are so friendly." Others say, "The music is great" or "The speaker is so dynamic." Casual clothes, contemporary worship, and convenient times are also a typical part of the advertising mix. The Palmer Road church of Christ totally rejects the idea of marketing the spiritual by an appeal to the worldly. In fact, we totally reject the idea of marketing ourselves. In the 21st century, we still hold to the 1st century approach of reaching people for Jesus, "We do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord." (2 Cor 4:5)

Again, Jesus said, "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself." (Jn 12:32; see the front page). Jesus' desire was that men be drawn to Him, not to His disciples.- to become followers of Him rather than

March 2005

followers of His followers. And, can you think of greater drawing power than the cross of Jesus? How can friendly people, pleasing music, charismatic speakers, comfortable clothes, an appealing worship style, or convenient times all combined "hold a candle" to the attraction of Jesus' cross?

Here's how Paul made disciples in the 1st century in Corinth: "And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God." (1 Cor 2:1-5)

There was no advertising campaign in Corinth to promote a church, but rather preaching to promote a Savior. Converts were made by the message and not the messenger. Men placed their faith in Jesus rather than Paul. "Many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized." (Acts 18:8). They became disciples of their Savior and the message of His cross was the power behind their spiritual lives. They were not just convinced by the wisdom of men to become "church members".

In the 21st century, the Palmer Road church of Christ has no advertising campaign to promote our church, but rather preaches to promote a Savior. Our aim in preaching, whether by speak-ing or writing, is not to impress you with us, but to impress you with Him. Our goal is to convince you by the gospel to place your faith in Jesus, not to convince you by our marketing to become a part of our church. We pray that, like the Corin-thians, you will believe the message of Jesus and Him crucified and be baptized for the remission of your sins- that from that time forward you will be a disciple of Jesus and that the message of His cross will be the power behind you spiritual life.

If we can assist you in being drawn to the Savior and His cross, please call, write, or email us- or visit us in person at one of our services.

April 2005

LET ME TELL YOU ABOUT MY PRIEST!

I want to tell you about my priest. What is a “priest”? A “priest” is a person who works on behalf of men to obtain God’s grace for them. A “priest” is a person through whom men draw near to God to worship. There are those who serve in the role of priest in both Catholic and Protestant churches, even though many of them do not wear “priest” as their title. The common word use to describe them is “clergy”. But, let me tell you why that, when I need forgiveness or when I want to worship, I do not call on any of these men or women, but I call on my priest, Jesus Christ.

God once set up a system where men drew near to God through other men who served as priests- the Israelites drew near to God through the sons of Aaron under the Law of Moses. The book of Hebrews explains the weaknesses of this system and how that the superior priesthood of Jesus Christ replaced it. Once you read and understand the following points from the book of Hebrews, you will never want to draw near to God through men and women of the “clergy” again!

My priest, Jesus, was appointed to be priest by an **oath of God** (7:20-21). God did not swear that the sons of Aaron would be priest, but they were appointed by **the Law of Moses** (7:28). Today’s clergy are not appointed either by God’s oath or by God’s law! **The Law of Christ** does not set up a priestly class of men like the Law of Moses. Yet by **human authority**, many “Christians” are appointed to a priestly role and then pass it on to others by ordination.

The character of my priest, Jesus, is **holy** (7:26). The character of the priests under the

Law of Moses was **sinful** and **weak** (7:27-28). The character of today’s clergy is likewise sinful and weak. Why would anyone seek to draw near to God through sinful men, when he/she could draw near through One with perfect purity?

Jesus, my priest, made **one sacrifice** to obtain God’s grace and mercy for man; accomplishing what the **continual rituals** of the priests under the Law of Moses could not (7:27; 10:11-12). Yet, Catholic and Protestant clergy perform continual rituals to seek the favor of God for the laity, favor already won by Jesus’ one perfect act. Christ’s churches need no altar – why do so many church buildings have them?

My priest, Jesus, works to make inter-cession for man at the right hand of the **throne of God in heaven** (8:1-2, 9:24). The priests of the Law of Moses served in **man made tabernacles** that were just a type of the true holy place of heaven. Even the most elaborate cathedral that the clergy serve in cannot compare with the work-place of Jesus and no human priest has His access to God!

Finally, my priest, Jesus, **lives forever** to serve me, to intercede for me and to present my worship to God. There were many priests under the Law of Moses. They **died** and had to be **replaced**. (7:23-25) The clergy that men have appointed to serve also die and men must choose their successors.

Won’t you reject the inferior, humanly authorized priestly class of men and women called clergy and draw near to God through Jesus Christ?

YOU CAN DRAW NEAR TO GOD THROUGH JESUS

If you were an Israelite under the Law of Moses, your access to God was very limited. If you were not a priest, then you could *never* seek God’s grace and mercy yourself. A priest had to seek God’s grace and mercy for you by presenting a sacrifice for you. And, in doing so, he would present your worship to God for you, as you were not allowed to enter the temple and present it yourself. If you were a priest, but not the high priest, you could enter into the holy place to serve God daily, but you could *never* go into the most holy place beyond the veil. And, even if you were the high priest, you could only go *once a year* into the most holy place, which symbolized heaven and the presence of God (Heb 9:7).

April 2005

But, when Jesus died, God tore the veil of the temple from top to bottom (Mt 27:51), signi-fying that *all* men could draw near to God *all* the time and *without the aid of a human priest*. In effect, all men were given the opportunity to become priests. All men were given the ability to access God- to seek mercy and to offer worship, through the great high priest, Jesus Christ. Listen, as the writer to the Hebrews encourages *all* Christians to draw near to God through Jesus:

“Let us *draw near* with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (4:16)

“Therefore He is able also to save forever those who *draw near* to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.” (7:25)

“Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great high priest over the house of God, let us *draw near* with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.” (10:19-22)

“Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.” (13:15)

Jesus’ death gives everyone access to God. But, as the priests of the Law of Moses first cleansed themselves and then approached God, we, too, must first cleanse ourselves. Believing and confessing that Jesus is Lord (Rom 10:9-10), repenting of our sins, and being baptized (Acts 2:38) we are cleansed from sin through Jesus’ blood. We are then ready to offer spiritual sacrifices of praise to the throne of God, not through the clergy, but through Jesus Christ. When we sin as Christians, we may draw near to God through Him and once again find mercy and grace to forgive us (Heb 4:14-16).

You can draw near to God through Jesus to obtain grace and mercy and to offer worship. Won’t you draw near?

May 2005

“WHAT ARE YOU ADVERTISING?”

Last month, when I was distributing this bulletin from house to house near the church building, I met a man who was curious as to what I was handing out. He inquired, “What are you advertising?” This was a logical question, as we all receive so many flyers on our door, soliciting us to buy various products such as pizza, replacements windows, telephone and TV service, and lawn care. Perhaps if you took this bulletin off of your door or out of your mailbox, you were disappointed that it wasn’t a pizza coupon. But, this bulletin is not about trying to get you to buy something and it is about something far more important than pizza.

If you listen to TV and radio preaching for very long, you might conclude that religion is all about the money. Hardly a program ends without a solicitation for money to keep the program on the air and offers of books and tapes/CDs that can be yours for a “donation”. But, did you realize that the gospel of Jesus Christ was first preached for free! John records that preachers “went out for the sake of the Name (Jesus-AJ), accepting nothing from the Gentiles.” (3 John 7) Paul told those he preached to at Corinth, “I do not seek what is yours, but you” (2 Cor 12:14), making it very clear to them that he was not after their money, but after their souls.

Unfortunately, not all Christians, even in N.T. times, were like the preachers John wrote about or like Paul. Many, in fact, were like the churches and preachers of today, marketing the Word of God for financial gain. Paul said that he and his fellow preaching companions were “not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God.” (2 Cor 2:17- NASV). Some versions use “corrupt” where the New American Standard Version uses “peddling”, but it is the NASV that really brings out the meaning here. It wasn’t the message that they were corrupting, it was their marketing of the message that was corrupt. Vine’s Expository Dictionary says that the Greek word (*kapeleuo*) Paul used “primarily signifies to be a retailer, to peddle, to hucksterize, hence to get base gain by dealing in anything, and so, more generally, to do anything for sordid personal advantage.”

This bulletin has been put on your door, mailed to you, or handed to you by a member of the Palmer Road church of Christ in all sincerity, with no interest in anything you might have. It is free of charge, as are our sermon tapes and other teaching materials. We hope that you will visit our worship services and Bible classes. You will find that these meetings also are free of charge. We do not solicit funds from visitors.

We do not put out *The Lower Lights* for our advantage, but yours. We want to impart to you the gospel, and if you would let us, ourselves for your spiritual profit (1 Thess 2:8). Our intention is the same as Paul’s, who told the Corinthians, “We do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord; and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus’ sake.” (2 Cor 4:5) Please read on to see why what we are presenting to you is far more valuable to you than a pizza coupon....

“ADVERTISING” JESUS

As we have said, we are not among the many who are selling Jesus to make a profit for themselves. However, there is a definition of “advertise” that describes very well the purpose of *The Lower Lights* and the purpose of our other evangelistic efforts. The American Heritage Dictionary gives as their second definition of “ad-vertise”, “to make known, call attention to.” In this way, we do “advertise” Jesus, calling your attention to you what was first made known so long ago:

When Jesus came to earth, an angel gave the first “advertisement”, “I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” (Lk 2:10-11)

John the Baptist “advertised” to his disciples, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” (Jn 1:29)

Peter, unmoved by being arrested for “advertising” Jesus, said of Him, “And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

May 2005

Paul "advertised" to his fellow Jews, "He whom God raised did not undergo decay. Therefore let it be made known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you." (Acts 13:37-38)

John the apostle, gave this eyewitness "advertisement" to all who never had the opportunity to walk the earth with Jesus, "What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life- and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us- what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ." (1 Jn 1:1-3)

The most serious problem that all men face is sin. Sin destroys our relationship with God, now and forever. Sin will cause us to face God's wrath at the Judgment day and be sentenced to eternal separation from Him in hell. But, there is good news of salvation- of a Savior, Jesus. Because of His sacrifice on the cross, our sins can be forgiven; we can have fellowship with God, both now and forever. We can enjoy the joy and peace that come from a clean conscience and the guidance of a Good Shepherd and the hope of heaven with God and Jesus beyond the grave.

Our "advertisement" is not to **sell** you something, but to **tell** you something- about what God is willing to *give* you, *if* you meet His *conditions* of forgiveness. Let us know if we can tell you more. Please visit us, write, call, or email.

June 2005

SEEING THE LORD OF GLORY

Jesus, though racked with the pain of crucifixion, begged His Father, "Forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." (Lk 23:34). Later, Paul echoed the words of Jesus, when he said that if the rulers of the world had understood who Jesus was, they would not have crucified "the Lord of glory". (1 Cor 2:8). Those who crucified Jesus saw much more evidence of the glory of the Christ than Isaiah, who spoke of Him, but their eyes were blinded so that their minds could not see who He was (Jn 12:39-41). Just what did they see, but harden their hearts to, that we should see about Jesus and His glory?

When we speak of seeing Jesus "glory" we speak of seeing His greatness, His magnificence, His majesty, of seeing those things that are so impressive that we conclude that He is important and worthy of honor and praise. When Jesus walked the earth, men saw His glory in:

His Signs: Jesus displayed Divine greatness in His miracles. Concerning the miracle of changing water into wine, John wrote, "This beginning of His signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him." (Jn 2:11) Other signs He performed included giving sight to the blind and the ability to walk to the lame, feeding 5,000 with five loaves of bread and two fish, and walking on water, demonstrating over and over His majesty and power, supplying abundant evidence and He is the Son of God and is worthy of man's worship.

His Character: The writer of Hebrews declared that Jesus is the "radiance (brightness-KJV) of His glory and the exact representation of His nature"

(Heb 1:3). Jesus said, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father." (Jn 14:9). Paul taught, "For God, who said, "light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." (2 Cor 4:6). Before Jesus walked in Palestine and since, the world has never seen such love, such kindness, such mercy and forgiveness, such purity and righteousness, such opposition of sin (among other things- the list is almost endless). Truly, men saw in Jesus "glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" (Jn 1:14)- the Divine character, worthy of man's honor and praise.

His Teaching: Jesus began His teaching in Galilee, fulfilling the prophet Isaiah, who said of the Christ, "the people who were sitting in dark-ness saw a Great Light, and those who were sitting in the land and shadow of death, upon them a Light dawned." (Mt 4:12-17). Jesus' teaching shows greater wisdom than Solomon (Mt 12:42) and even some officers who were sent to arrest Him, came back empty-handed, defending their actions by saying, "Never has a man spoken the way this man speaks." (Jn 7:45-46). Though He had no formal education, Jesus amazed the crowds with His wisdom (Jn 7:15; Mt 13:54). His teaching was impressive because He taught with authority and not like the scribes (Mt 7:28). Honest hearts were convinced that there was no other place to turn for the words eternal life than Jesus, the Holy One of God (Jn 6:68-69).

In Jesus' signs, His character, and His teaching, do you "see" the Lord of glory?

EYEWITNESS TESTIMONY TO THE LORD OF GLORY

Peter, James, and John were eyewitnesses to a spectacular display of the glory of Jesus. Jesus came from heaven in the appearance of a man (Phil 2:8). He didn't look any different than any other man. Men could walk by Him on the street and not realize that He was the Son of God. But one day, while He was praying on a high mountain with Peter, James, and John, His appearance became quite different, making it obvious from looking at Him that he was not just an ordinary man, but He was Divine. Jesus face shone like the sun. His clothing became whiter than any launderer can whiten clothes- they were white as light and gleaming.

Suddenly, Moses and Elijah appeared in glory and spoke with Jesus. While Peter was speaking about making a tabernacle for each of them, a cloud overshadowed them all and a voice out of the cloud said, "This is My Son, My chosen One; listen to Him!" Then Moses and Elijah disappeared and the three disciples saw only Jesus. (Mt 17:1-8; Mk 9:2-8; Lk 9:28-36).

June 2005

Many years later, when Peter knew that his death was near, he wrote of what he saw on that mountain to assure men of the historical, factual basis of their faith in Jesus as the Son of God. In some of his last recorded words, he testified, "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 of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, 'This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased'- and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain." (2 Pet 1:16-18)

Matthew and John, who were eyewitnesses of Jesus, wrote biographies of Jesus to show us His glory and convince us to believe in Him and become His disciples. Mark and Luke, who knew eyewitnesses of Jesus' glory, handed down two more biographies about Jesus. These four inspired accounts of Jesus' earthly life, commonly known as the "Gospels", enable us in the 21st century to "see" what men saw in the 1st century- they are the basis of our faith and service to Jesus- they are the reason why we honor Jesus as the Lord of glory

SEEING THE ROAD AHEAD!

Recently, I was traveling south on I-69 in Indiana when I encountered a traffic slowdown. In a few minutes I found out why we had slowed to a crawl. There was a horrible accident on the northbound side and everyone was slowing down to take a look. The accident involved two semis. One was turned on its side with all of the glass gone from the tractor. The nose of the other tractor was shoved in like an accordion. Immediately, I prayed for the welfare of the drivers and the comfort of their families. Their lives had been suddenly and unexpectedly changed. As the drivers left the terminal for the highway, they did not know what awaited them on the road ahead. The backup caused by the accident was five miles and was still growing. Motorists caught in it had a certain timetable in their mind to get to work or to get home from work, to get to a vacation destination or to return home. But, they, too, did not know what awaited them on the road ahead. Their timetable went out the window. They were making good time when suddenly and unexpectedly they were forced to stop and to wait, and wait, and wait.

Man cannot see the future. Solomon wrote, "Do not boast about tomorrow. For you do not know what a day may bring forth." (Prov 27:1) The wise and humble person will make plans accordingly. James admonished, "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow, we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.' Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little time and vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.'

But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil." (Js 4:13-16).

Yes, our future is subject to the will of the Lord who sees the road ahead that we cannot see. God proved to Israel that He knows the future. He told them of their coming destruction by a ruler from the north (Assyria) so that when it happened they would say, "He is right!" (Isa 10:5-6; 41:25-26). God foretold that, after He had carried Israel to captivity in Assyria and Babylon, He would bring them home by His shepherd Cyrus, a man who wasn't even born when the prediction was made (Isa 44:27-45:3).

Our realization that God sees the road ahead that we cannot see should inspire us to trust Him. If we trust Him, we will let the wisdom of His Word direct our lives- "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight." (Prov 3:5-6). We will not worry about the future, but will turn every care into a prayer, with the confidence that He who looks ahead will provide what we need (Mt 6:25-34; Phil 4:6-7). We will realize that, if we love Him, He will use even the tragedy and suffering that may lie ahead on the road to accomplish His purpose in us- to help us be conformed in our character to the image of His Son and to get us home to glory in heaven (Rom 8:28-30).

Where is your trust? In God who sees the road ahead or in yourself, you who cannot even anticipate an accident or a traffic jam?

WHAT GOD TELLS US IS ON THE ROAD AHEAD

When I passed by the exit following the end of the traffic jam (see pg 1) and saw cars and trucks streaming along at 70 m.p.h., I thought, "I sure wish I could warn them of the five mile back-up ahead so they could exit and try to find an alternate route." I can warn you about the things God tells us are on the road ahead. But there is no escaping them. There is no alternate route.

Death is on the road ahead of you. God says, "It is appointed for men to die once." (Heb 9:27) This is an appointment we must all keep (unless we are alive at the coming of Jesus- 1 Thess 4:15). Jesus told the story of a rich farmer who made big plans with no thought of this appointment. The farmer had more harvest than he knew what to do with. He planned to tear down his barns and build bigger ones and then sit back and enjoy life for many years to come. But, he didn't have many years left to live. In fact, God required his soul that night (Lk 12:16-20). Are you living like your life on earth will be forever or are you looking down the road?

July 2005

Judgment is on the road ahead of you. God adds to the sentence above, "It is appointed for men to die once and *after this comes judgment.*" (Heb 9:27) John described a vision he saw of this day, "And I saw the dead, the great and the small standing before the throne, and the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds." (Rev 20:12) God will pronounce sentence on you based on how you have lived and whether or not your name is in the book of life, His record of those who have a relationship with Him.

Heaven or hell is on the road ahead of you. At the Judgment, Jesus will hand out to you either the sentence of eternal life or eternal punishment (Mt 25:46). The eternal punishment is hell, the torment of the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels (Mt 25:41; Mk 9:43-48). Eternal life is never-ending fellowship with God and His Son in heaven, being honored as His children. God will wipe away all the tears of earth life and its sorrows will never be experienced again (Rom 8:19; Rev 21:1-4).

Death and judgment you cannot change, but your eternal destination you *will* choose. You will choose either to receive the wages of your sins (Rom 6:23) or you will choose to have Jesus pay for them with His blood so that your name can be added to the book of life. Believe in Jesus and confess Him as your Lord (Rom 10:9-10) and repent of your sins and be baptized (Acts 2:38). Continue in the book of life by walking in the light as God is in the light, confessing your sins so that the blood of Jesus will make you pure. (1 Jn 1:5-10) Remember, no one will arrive at heaven by accident and you must get there by the road less traveled (Mt 7:13-14).

Is heaven at the end of the road you are traveling?

August 2005

THE HEALTH AND WEALTH GOSPEL

Should a Christian get sick? "No!" Should a Christian be financially prosperous? "Yes!" So many say, as they preach from the Bible on T.V. and in pulpits across the country. They confidently affirm that Jesus will reward His disciples with both health and wealth. But did Jesus promise what these preachers promise? What does the Bible say?

The teaching that many advocate on health can be summed up by a quote from a tract, "Watch and Pray" put out by the Unity School of Christianity. The tract reads, "We watch that we do not claim sickness or negation by talking about 'my' cold, 'my' headache. We keep the watch of Truth and see ourselves as God sees us, whole and perfect in every part. The cells of our bodies respond to our strong healing consciousness, and good health is quickly restored to every part."

But, in the Bible, the apostle Paul says of his fellow-disciple, "Trophimus I left sick at Miletus" (2 Tim 4:19). Paul wrote about Epaphroditus, the faithful Christian and minister to his need, "He was sick unto the point of death." To Timothy, Paul advised, "Use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments." (1 Tim 5:23). And, the apostle spoke frankly about the Christian's suffering in this life and the hope of it ending when he receives a new body, "... but we ourselves, having the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body." (Rom 8:23).

The "Watch and Pray" tract says concerning financial prosperity, "There is a never ending prosperity that comes to us from God... We believe that God's will is abundance."

But, in the Bible, Paul, the devout and totally committed disciple of Jesus, wrote, "I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleep-less nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure." (2 Cor 11:27). Later, he penned these words to the church at Philippi while in prison preaching the gospel, "I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need" (Phil 4:12).

God's will for the Christian does not rule out and may very well include both financial adversity and ill health. God uses suffering to strengthen His children's faith and to develop their character. In fact, in the Bible, through His servant James, God instructed His people to rejoice when in trials, realizing the spiritual benefit God would bring from their suffering. God said, "con-sider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing." (Js 1:2-4).

Do not be deceived by the false teachers of the "health and wealth gospel! The advantage in obeying Jesus is spiritual, not physical and, o, what an advantage it is! Obey Jesus, be forgiven, live in joy and peace (even in trial), and go to heaven after this short and troubled life!

EVIDENCE FOR FAITH: THE DIMINISHING OF EGYPT

Americans will once again be able to see for themselves the treasures of ancient Egypt, as the King Tut exhibit makes another round. These treasures, as well as the magnificent pyramids, testify to Egypt's past greatness. But, now the glory of Egypt is but a memory, as the country that once was a great world power struggles among the "developing" nations.

When Egypt was at the height of its glory, the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel made these predictions:

- 1) There would more be a Prince of the land of Egypt (Eze 30:13).
- 2) Egypt would be diminished into a lowly kingdom (Eze 29:14-15)
- 3) The Nile River canals would dry up and Egypt would become desolate (Eze 29:9-10; 30:12; Isa 19:5-9)

August 2005

The amazing 3000-year dynasty of the Pharaohs ended in 343 B.C. Since then there have not been any native rulers, but the country has been ruled by foreigners, including those of Arab descent today.

Though others ruled them, Egypt remained rich for centuries. Augustus Caesar called it "the granary of the world" in the 1st century B.C. Even when the Arabians conquered it in A.D. 640, Egypt was the richest nation in the world.

But, when and why did Egypt so diminish? Herodotus called Egypt "the gift of the Nile". After the Arabians took control, they neglected to remove the silt from the canals and the Nile began to quit "giving". Now over 96% of Egypt is desert!

As predicted, the industries of agriculture and fishing have been destroyed and reeds no longer line the shores of the shrunken river. In 1991, the now lowly kingdom could by no means feed the world- they only grew half the wheat they needed to feed their own people!

Could Isaiah and Ezekiel, who lived when Egypt had power and riches and the Nile made the country fertile, have foreseen the destiny of Egypt with human eyes? Obviously not! They wrote as prophets of God and their work is part of the abundant evidence that should convince you to believe that the Bible could not be the work of men, but must be, as it claims, the Word of God!

September 2005

IF THERE IS A GOD WHY ARE THERE DISASTERS LIKE KATRINA?

Hurricane Katrina was a catastrophe beyond description. Apparently thousands were killed. The exact death toll may never be known. Over a million people have been displaced from their homes. Many of these no longer have a house or a job to return to. Property damage is in the billions. New Orleans is uninhabitable.

Katrina is a vivid reminder that this world is not a "perfect" place. Other disasters occur frequently around the world- tsunami, tornado, earthquake, fire, flood, drought, and pestilence. And men face more frequent and prevalent miseries- sickness, accidents, birth defects, and aging.

In the Scriptures those things that bring suffering to the world are referred to as "evil", especially in Ecclesiastes. Some refuse to believe in God, while others doubt because of the "evil" of suffering in this world. They wonder, "How could there be One who is "Almighty" if the world is full of 'defects'?" "And, if there is a God, how can it be said that He cares for man, when He has placed him in the middle of tragedy, sorrow, and death?" These questions may have crossed your mind as you have viewed and read about the devastation and the tears caused by Katrina. Let us look to the Scriptures for answers.

The book of Job provides us with the most extensive discussion of the problem of suffering. The writing begins with a "behind the scenes" look at what transpired in heaven before Job's suffering began. God asked Satan if He had considered His upright servant Job. Satan replied that Job served God because of the abundant possessions He had given him. So, God gave Satan permission to take away His possessions to see if, when he had nothing, he would curse God or continue to worship Him (1:6-12). When Job did not renounce God, Satan asked to afflict Job personally and this, too, God granted. Satan then smote Job with boils all over his body (2:1-7).

This background information to Job's troubles lets us know that "evil" is something God is in control of, but it actually stems from Satan. Satan seeks to turn men against God with the "evil", but God controls "if" and "to what extent" this can happen.

After Job and his friends debated the reasons for Job's suffering, God spoke to Job out of a whirlwind. He asked him where he was when He laid the earth's foundation and set the bounds of the sea. Had he ever brought the dawn of the day to the world? Had he caused it to rain, hail, lightning, or snow? Had he set in order the constellations? Had he created and cared for the animal kingdom? (chapters 38-41) God's answer to Job showed him that the tragedies he suffered were not due to God's lack of power to prevent them. And, the Creator's answer also showed him that he was just a small powerless creature who should not question how the Almighty worked in his life.

IF THERE IS A GOD ... WHY KATRINA

So, if there is an Almighty God who could stop catastrophes like Katrina, why doesn't He? Why does He allow man to suffer? Doesn't He care? The Scriptures point out that "evil" is present in the world because God *does* care. The world was made "good" and man, the crown of God's creation, was said to be "very good" (Gen 1:4, 10,12,18,21,25,31). The "evil", that is, all the things that cause man pain and tears, came into the world after Adam and Eve's sin. The consequences of their sin (Gen 3:16-19) reached beyond them- the consequences were more than a punishment to Adam and Eve for their disobedience. God wanted all succeeding generations to understand the serious consequences of sin.

When women have pain in childbirth, when men work with sweat in the midst of thorns to feed their families, when men die as the result of defect, sickness, aging, accident, natural disaster (e.g. Katrina), God is shouting, "Think about the consequences of sin!" Physical disease calls our attention the more serious spiritual disease. Physical death points to the more-to-be-feared spiritual death (separation from God, now and forever in hell). Temporal suffering makes us want to avoid sin and the *worse*, eternal suffering it brings (Jn 5:14).

As God sent Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden, He subjected the world to "evil" *in hope* (Rom 8:18-25). This shows that His subjection of the world to suffering was both temporary and purposeful. Even when God sent the sinful pair out of the Garden, He was looking forward to the glorious revealing of His sons in bodies that would no

September 2005

longer suffer misery. To see "evil" in its proper perspective, we must look at it from an eternal perspective. When compared to eternal glory, all pain and suffering becomes "light". (2 Cor 4:16-5:10).

God uses "evil" to discipline His sons so that they may experience eternal glory.. The same trials that Satan uses to try to destroy our relation-ship with God- God intends to work for our spiri-tual good- to draw us closer to Him. What we see as "disorder" in the world is part of His order. What we see as a lack of His care is part of His care (Rom 8:28-31; Heb 12:5-13; Js 1:2-4). Through "evil", Job learned patience (Js 5:11), David corrected his life (Ps 119:67,71,75), Solomon understood the meaning of life (Eccl 1:12-15 & 12:13-14), and Paul remained humble, despite receiving glorious revelations (2 Cor 12:7-10). To the servant of God, the "evil" of this world that brings tears is part of God's care and, in the spiritual growth that results, he can rejoice.

Finally, in suffering, God shows His care for His sons by hearing their prayers (Js 5:13). The Spirit and the Son add their interceding voices to these prayers (Rom 8:26-27, 34). God gave His Son to die on that painful and shame-filled Cross for his sons. Would He then abandon them while they suffer or even when they die? *Nothing* will separate them from His love! Over all "evil", even as catastrophic as Katrina, they are more than conquerors! (Rom 8:31-32, 35-39)

December 2005

CONTROVERSY OVER BAPTISM

No command of Scripture has generated more controversy and has caused more division among "Christians" than baptism. There are so many differences as to WHAT baptism is, WHO is to be baptized, and WHY one is to be baptized. How is the common man going to sort out all this confusion without going insane? The Scriptures contain the answers to these questions. If we look to them instead of tradition or denominational dogma, our confusion will be replaced with clear understanding. In this issue, let the Scriptures answer the question, "What is baptism?"

If you were to dye a white shirt so that it would be purple, would you sprinkle dye on it? Would you pour dye on it? Or would you dip the shirt into the dye? Well, unless you were interested in polka-dots, you would dip the entire shirt into the dye so that the whole shirt would turn to purple.

In the first century A.D., when the New Testament was written in the Greek language, the Greek word *baptizo* was used to describe the process of dyeing clothes (See Vine's Expository Dictionary of N.T. Words, p. 99). This is the same word that we read as "baptize" in our English Bibles. The Bible dictionaries agree that, when Jesus commanded men to be baptized, he was ordering men to be *dipped, immersed, or submerged*. Arndt and Gingrich (p. 131) add another clear illustration of how the word "baptize" was used in N.T. times. The word was used to describe someone who is overwhelmed by debt. As we would say, he is "in over his head".

The idea of "water" is not found in the word we call *baptism*. The submersion could be in dye or debt, or in anything the context de-scribes. So how do we know that the baptism Jesus commands is in water? By seeing men obey the command. After Philip brought the Ethiopian to faith by showing him how Jesus fulfilled Isaiah 53, the eunuch asked, "Behold here is *water*, what prevents me from being baptized?" Immediately following the Ethiopian's confession of his belief in Jesus, "they **both went down into** the *water*, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he *baptized* him. When they **came up out of** the *water* ... (Acts 8:38-39) It does not take a Greek scholar to see that Jesus commanded IMMERSION in WATER!

The first known case of sprinkling instead of immersion for *baptism* was not until A.D. 251 when Novation was sprinkled on his deathbed. Sprinkling was only done for the very sick until A.D. 1311 when the Catholic council at Ravenna okayed "baptism" for the healthy, as well as the sick. By the time the Bible was translated into English in the 1500's, the notion that the sprinkling and pouring of water constitutes "baptism" was widespread. So the translators did not trans-late the word *baptizo* as "immersion" as they should have. Instead, they coined a new English word by taking the Greek letters of *baptizo* and changing them to English letters (a process called transliteration). Then they gave the new English word **three** meanings- "sprinkling, pouring, or immersion". If the translators had been honest, everywhere you read "baptize" in your Bible you would read "dip, submerge, or immerse".

BURIED WITH JESUS

As surely as night follows day, burial follows death. We all have made our sad trips to the cemetery. There we lovingly placed the earthly remains of our dear ones, who are gone from our lives, but not from our hearts. We set up a memorial at the burial site and return from time to time to reflect and remember.

Jesus of Nazareth was CRUCIFIED some 2000 years ago. Following His cruel death, two of His once secret disciples stepped forward to re-ceive His body and prepare it for BURIAL. In a garden, near the crucifixion site, they lovingly laid it (Jn 19:38-42). Following the Sabbath rest, women who were friends and disciples of Jesus, who had shared closely in His ministry, came to see the tomb and to anoint His body with spices, in a show of their respect and love (Mt 28:1; Lk 23:55-24:1). But, the stone was rolled away from the tomb and the body was gone! Jesus was RISEN from the dead!!

The risen Savior commanded those who would become His disciples to be baptized. In baptism, a person is symbolically BURIED with Him,

December 2005

after first CRUCIFYING the old man of sin. As one is RAISED from the watery “grave” of baptism, to a new life of righteousness, he does so in “likeness of His resurrection” (Romans 6:3-6).

The fact that, in baptism, one is buried and raised with Jesus is proof that the baptism Jesus commanded is immersion in water, even without a Greek word study. Jesus commanded immersion because in this act men unite with His death, burial, and resurrection. When you bury someone, you don't sprinkle or pour dirt on them- you cover them with dirt! When sprinkling or pouring are substituted for immersion and called “baptism”, the action loses the symbolism and therefore the meaning that Jesus gave it.

Whenever you visit the cemetery or pass by, remind yourself what “burial” is. Think of Jesus' empty tomb in Palestine. Make the decision to crucify your old self. Then be buried and raised with Jesus by immersion in water and begin a new life with Him.

Baptism is:

- A. Immersion
- B. Sprinkling
- C. Pouring
- D. Any of the Above

If we wish to obey Jesus, then His choice, A., is the only right answer