

digital edition
**GOSPEL
LIGHT**

vol.
14
dec
2009

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF
CEBU GOSPEL CHURCH

宿務
基督
教會
會刊

**務
光**

上網版

主編：教會文字組
發行：宿務基督教會

*Published bi-annually by the
CGC Literature Committee*

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Kid'z Theology

BY LOWELL D. STRIKER



Five-year old Christopher Walsh excitedly reported to his parents what he had learned in Sunday School.

He told the story of Adam and Eve and how Eve was created from one of Adam's ribs. A few days later he told his mother, "My side hurts. I think

"I'm having a wife."
"Did Moses ever get better in the end?" asked little Sarah when she got home from Sunday School.
"Why," asked her mother, "whatever makes you think he was ill?"
"Well, he must have been," was

the reply. "Didn't the Lord have him take two tablets?"



The Sufficiency of God's Grace

BY REV. WEE UN HOCK



*"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."
Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses,
so that Christ's power may rest on me. (2 Corinthians 12:9)*

In a pastoral conference, the pastors were discussing on "What makes Christianity different from all the other religions?" Some suggested that God became man but another pastor objected by saying that other religions also teach similar doctrines. "What about the resurrection?" a young pastor asked. No, it was argued by most pastors for they say other people also believe that the dead will rise again. The discussion grew heated. Then, C. S. Lewis, a Christian teacher and strong defender of Christianity came in late, sat down, and asked, 'What's the discussion all about? It seems very interesting.' When he learned that it was about the uniqueness of Christianity, he immediately commented, "Oh, that's easy. It's grace.

What is *grace*? Grace is at the foundation of Christianity. By grace, the meaningless becomes meaningful. The lost are found. By grace, God's children stand in confidence. It is also defined as "*undeserving favor*". We don't deserve good things from God; rather, it is His act of kindness. God can allow us to die in sin and forever be separated from Him for we are sinner but instead, His justice and love through His One and Only Son Jesus Christ saved us from eternal death.

Another question you may ask, "What significance does it have with my present life right now?" "Why is God's grace sufficient to us?"

I. GRACE HELPS US FACE ALL KINDS OF LIFE'S

DIFFICULTIES

The grace of God is more than enough to help us face and overcome life's struggles. As long as we come in humility before the Lord and recognize our own weaknesses by not relying on own strength, only then will we see God's sufficient grace working in our lives.

In John 15:5, Jesus said, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing." In John, Jesus reminded us not to depend on ourselves or on the things of this world, but simply to rely on the Lord. The people of this world tend to rely on themselves and on the things of this world; but we, as God's children, must rely on Him.

People by nature are weak and pitiful. We become weak when we are faced with life's difficulties. By nature when faced with problems in life, people either run away or ignore or even hide from them. Just like when we were still small kids, we just covered ourselves with blanket or even hid under the bed whenever we were afraid of something else.

The difficulties we find hard to face is bearing hardship and suffering. Whenever hardship and suffering come into our lives, the first reaction is to ask, "Why is it happening to me? What can I do? Where is God?" These are some of the questions that run into our minds. We tend to forget that God said in Romans 8:28, "All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose." It says

all things, not only happy moments but hardship and suffering as well. These things happen in our lives for our own good. And 1Corinthians 10:13 states, "No temptation or trials has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."

By nature, we do not have the power to resist sin and temptation. Paul said in Romans 7:19-20, "For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me." Relying on doing good things with our own strength and will is impossible to achieve for the sinful nature within us prevents it from happening. If you know of your inabilities and weaknesses, do not let this stop you. While it is true that apart from Christ we can do nothing, it is also true that *we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us* (please refer to Phil. 4:13). The grace of God is already with us the moment we open our hearts and accept the Lord Jesus Christ into our hearts. And only through God's grace are we called His children. It's true that we are sinners and will never please Him, but He set us free from our sins because of God's grace. The grace of God will help us and is already there working in our lives. The grace of God will assist us in life's difficulties. In short, God's grace is sufficient in times of problems and

troubles.

No matter how difficult the trials we are facing now, the grace of God is more than enough to let us go through. We simply need to admit our weakness and inadequacy, then we will see His hand working in our lives. For God does not save or help those who believe that they can do so themselves. He helps the helpless and the needy. He gives help to those who are at the end of their own strength. That is why Paul boldly said, "...for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong." (2Corinthians 12:10)

II. GOD'S GRACE HELPS US SEE THE POWER OF GOD IN OUR LIVES

"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." The next phrase says, "For my power is perfected in weakness." God's power is put on display through our own weakness.

How can the power of God be revealed in our lives? The glory of God will not be able to shine in our lives if we trust in our own ability. It is revealed when we cling on the Lord and rely on Him especially in times of our weaknesses and inadequacy.

A great example is when Moses was sent by God to go and bring the Israelites out of Egypt. When God called Moses to lead His people out of Egypt, Moses said to God, "*Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?*" God said, "Certainly, I will be with you, and this shall be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain" (Exodus 3:11-12).

Moses was hesitant to do the work of the Lord because he knew his weakness and limitations all too well. But when God calls, He also enables His people. It does not depend on man's capabilities, but on God's abilities.

Another example is when Jeremiah was called to be a prophet when he was a young man. The Lord called Jeremiah when he was but a youth to be God's spokesman to the people of Israel but Jeremiah responded, "Alas, Lord GOD! Behold, I do not know how to speak,

because I am a youth.' But the LORD said to me, 'Do not say, "I am a youth," because everywhere I send you, you shall go, and all that I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you,' declares the LORD. Then the LORD stretched out His hand and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me, 'Behold, I have put My Words in your mouth'" (Jer.1:6-9).

The power is at its greatest when weakness is at its weakest. Only then can we see God and experience his awesomeness. God is calling us to admit to our weakness and rely on God's strength so that we might glorify Him by allowing Him to show Himself strong on our behalf. "...so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen" (1 Pet. 4:11)

III. GOD'S GRACE HELPS US VALUE GOD GREATLY IN OUR LIVES

The grace of God not only helps us overcome and face all kinds of life's difficulties. It does not only help us see God's greatness working in our lives, the grace of God also brings us closer to God. The grace of God will lead us to know Him and understand Him more.

If Christ is the one in control of our lives, then the *grace of God* is in us and will surely work mightily. The grace of God will also surely lead us to maturity. 2Corinthians 5:17 states, "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" This new you will have a desire to live for the Lord and the sinful desire in you will become lesser and lesser.

A good example is Paul's life. The Lord gave him a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to hinder him, to keep him humble. We don't know exactly what this "thorn" was. It could have been some kind of illness or disease. He appeared to have problems with his eyes since he said on one occasion that he wrote with large letters, and on another occasion he said that the Galatians would have plucked out their eyes to help him. Paul sought the Lord three times that it might depart from him, but the Lord did not remove it. Paul had also undergone hardships in life

like being shipwrecked three times, stoned by the people three times, underwent tremendous slashing five times, laughed at and falsely accused, went without food and sleep, and put in and out of prison. All these motivated him to seek God more earnestly, to depend upon Him more fully, and to trust Him more completely.

In conclusion, here is a touching story on how God's grace can work in one's life: A gangster named Nicky Cruz was the leader of the toughest gang in New York City. His Satanist parents abused him brutally so he grew up a hardened man, void of love and full of hate. "I wanted to do to others what my mother did to me," Nicky said. "I used to feel good when I hurt some people." But privately, he didn't feel good. "Privately or when alone, loneliness was like a seductive woman crawling inside my chest and eating me up. I was there twisting and fighting; I felt so lost!" Only two people saw the desperate condition of Nicky's heart. One was a psychologist who five times told Nicky, "There's a dark side in your life that nobody can penetrate. You are walking straight to jail, the electric chair, and hell. There's no hope." But there's another person, a pastor by the name of David Wilkerson who risked his life to tell Nicky that there was hope and that God had the power to change his life. "I started to curse loud," said Nicky. "I spat on his face and hit him. I told him, 'I don't believe in what you say. Get out of here!'" Nicky never expected what Wilkerson said next. Wilkerson replied, "You could cut me up to ten pieces and lay them on the street. I still love you with every piece of me!"

For two weeks, what Wilkerson said bothered Nicky and he couldn't sleep. He couldn't understand why Wilkerson could still love him after all these. Every time the pastor visited Nicky, he trembled, sweated, and prayed hard. He simply put each soul in the hand of God. One day, Nicky and his gang showed up at one of Wilkerson's Bible study. It was the crucifixion - Jesus' death on the cross - that captured Nicky's heart. One by one, they gave their lives to Christ and the group finally came to know the Lord.

Church: Together for the Gospel

BY PTR. ANGELO GUTIERREZ



“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (John 17:20-23).

This part of Jesus' prayer for the believers remain, for some, unanswered. Whether we see it through our own church or churches throughout the whole world, disunity is a constant thorn of the Church. It seems that all hope has lost for the only time this prayer can become a reality is when the Lord comes on His second advent.

However, we can see that throughout the first century Church, the apostles had labored hard to see the fulfillment of the Lord's prayer. The Apostle Paul himself had written many exhortations to unite churches; chief among them was Ephesians 4:4-6 (our church theme verse for 2009). Paul says, *“There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you*

were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” Therefore, why can't we, as descendants of the faith, strive to imitate and continue what Paul and the rest of the apostles did in the past?

We have to admit, the task is enormous, and we cannot solve world-wide discord if we haven't successfully addressed our in-house challenges. I'm hoping and praying that through this article and through God's Word, He would cause all of us to exert a stronger effort to unite members of each local church, at the least, *“to let the world know that [God] sent [Jesus] and have loved [us] even as [God] have loved [His Son].”* To encourage us to take the first step towards unity, we'll use Paul's words in Philippians 1:27 to 2:11.

As was mentioned a while ago, unity in the church is of utmost importance for Paul and the other apostles. Paul even mentioned the names of two women, Euodia and Syntyche, *“to agree with each other in the Lord”* (Phil. 4:2). Now, imagine the shame these two women had felt when the apostle mentioned their names in his letter for epistles were commonly passed on, copied, and read publicly in different house churches. As a

result, all Christians in the city of Philippi knew of their conflict. We have to understand that Paul wrote their names not to slander them, but to make them accountable to the whole body of Christ because that way, we can help build each other up in Christ.

You can feel Paul's appeals for the Philippian church to be united: *stand firm in one spirit contending as one man (1:27), [be] like-minded... [be] one in spirit and purpose (2:2).* Paul exhorts Christians to be “together.” Why was this important and what does it matter to us? We have to recognize that we cannot contend for the Gospel if we're fighting against each other, let alone on our own. We have to depend on each other for encouragement and strength because the battle we are in, in most cases, is bigger than ourselves. If we fight against it alone, it's easy for us to be discouraged, shaken, or worse, give in to the temptations of the enemy.

The writer of Ecclesiastes has put it this way: *“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm.*

But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken" (Ecc. 4:9-12).

Why do we have to join forces with each other for the Gospel? Well, Paul says, "*For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him*" (1:29). A Christian's life is not always smooth-sailing or always running on an even highway. We will suffer for Christ; and according to this verse, the suffering that we will encounter in our lives is a gift that "*has been granted to [us] on behalf of Christ.*" It is a gift, not a curse, because it serves to discipline us, encourage us, and mold our characters so that we can live or "*conduct [ourselves] in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ*" (1:27).

Why can't we team up with each other? As sinful beings, we "can" come up with silly reasons not to do so. However, for Paul, there's no reason not to for he says, "*If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose*" (2:1-2). He's not saying that some of you may have this, while some of you may have not. He's saying that "since" you all have these, then the appropriate response should be to be united with one another. Seeing this on another perspective, if we don't have

unity with each other, then what does it say about our relationship with Christ? Let us revisit Jesus' prayer in John 17:23 and meditate on it thoroughly: "*May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.*"

Disunity affects our witness to others! It reflects not just our relationship with Christ, but who Christ is to the rest of the world! Therefore, how are we going to correct this and change our route? To bring unity to the church, we must identify first its worst enemy and it does not come from the outside of the church, it is from within: Pride.

One author describes its affects in this way: "It makes us want to compare ourselves with others; it makes us jealous when our friends do well; it keeps us from asking for help because it's a sign of weakness; it drives our demand for recognition and applause and makes us depressed and bitter when we don't get it; it makes us cling to our low self-esteem and use that as an excuse for self-pity; it stops us from apologizing when we're wrong; and makes us blame everyone else for our own failures."

To address this problem, Paul immediately urges the Philippians to "*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others*" (2:3-4). Humility is the answer against pride. And what better way to do it through following the example of Christ? "*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ*

Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!"

It is interesting to note the word Paul used for servant: "doulos." For them, it signifies slavery, and slaves don't have any rights at all. Christ surrendered all his rights as God and he took on the form of a man and depended on God for everything. Therefore, since our goal is to be more like Christ, we also have to surrender all our rights and to be like a servant.

Paul also followed the example of Christ that is why he can exhort Christians to "*Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ*" (1 Cor. 11:1). He also said in Ephesians 4:1-3, "*As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace*" (emphasis mine).

Church: Together for the Gospel – in humility, in patience, in love, and in unity. May God grant us grace to demonstrate these virtues in our church so that we can be effective witnesses, "*to let the world know that [God] sent [Jesus] and have loved [us] even as [God] have loved [His Son].*"

Let the Little Children Come

BY PTR. KEREN TAN



Growing up, I had the fondest memories of spending time together with family on a Lord's Day afternoon, usually buying groceries. Yet even as a child, I saw with my own eyes how my parents displayed their love for Jesus through their daily living and generous support of ministry and missions. My father would wake up in the early morn to pray and to read the pages of his Bible covered with yellow markers as he highlights Scripture each day. My mother does the same by having her devotions and ending in prayer before she rushes to run the store with my father.

What made a distinct impression on me, however, was when my parents would gather us all four children in their bedroom for a few minutes, and each of us were given a task of either leading the prayer or reading the Scriptures. Furthermore, supertime was always a delight since it was when they would seize the opportunity to share about how the Lord is good, faithful and true by ceaselessly providing for the family's needs through the business.

Throughout these years, I praise the Lord for the leadership that my father embraced as he brought us children up "in the discipline and instruction of the Lord," (Eph. 6:1) just as my mother's reverent and humble submission to my father modeled

to me what biblical womanhood is all about. Certainly, the words of Deuteronomy 6 and Joshua 24:15 became real to all of us. More importantly, the Gospel became real as well.

As history would illustrate, God uses means to save His people and it is primarily through the preaching of His Word. But God is also able to use households of faith in this regard. I reckon that the seeds of the good news were planted in my heart during my formative years for it was at home where the Gospel was first proclaimed, emphasized and lived. In fact, by the grace of God, my families are the very ones who greatly encouraged me to serve the Lord in full-time ministry.

"Church growth books and manuals flood the market. Surprisingly few address internal growth through the Holy Spirit sovereignly blessing the raising of children in covenantal truth," writes Joel Beeke as he opens his book *Bringing the Gospel to Covenant Children*. He continues, "Yet, historically, Reformed Christians have acknowledged that their most solid, genuine church growth has been through the conversion of youth reared in the church... Children raised in the church need to hear the gospel... every bit as much as adults. They too need to be born again. They too need to be evangelized."

In effect, Dr. Beeke directs

this task to the home by enjoining parents to teach their children the whole gospel and counsel of God. "Fathers," he adds, "you especially are to be ministers in your own houses. Your home is a little church, a little seminary, in which together with your wife, you are to serve as an instructing prophet, an interceding priest, and a guiding king... You must also explain how God's truth is experienced by His people—that is, how matters should and do go in the lives of those who know God in Jesus Christ. Aim to apply divine truth to the whole range of your children's experience. Teach them how God's people repeatedly experience the depths of their sin and misery, the fullness of deliverance in Jesus Christ, and the magnitude of gratitude to God for such deliverance."ⁱⁱⁱ By way of doing so, Dr. Beeke suggests specific doctrines to help parents bring their children in the whole gospel and counsel of God:ⁱⁱⁱ

1. Teach them who God is and what He is like.
2. Teach them the seriousness of sin.
3. Teach them what the Bible says about unrepentant sin.
4. Teach them that they must be born again (Ps. 51:6,7,10; John 3:3-5).
5. Teach them about the moral law and its uses

(i.e., civil, evangelical and didactic).

6. Teach them that the atoning blood of Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation.
7. Teach them the necessity of faith in Jesus Christ.
8. Teach them about Jesus Christ.
9. Teach them about sanctification and holiness.
10. Teach them about the joy of heaven.

Most assuredly, the importance of raising children in *“the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints”* (Jude 3) cannot be more emphasized. Just as one mother's desire and dedication to bring her children into faith was depicted one night as she prayed earnestly for her wayward children, “Now, Lord, if my children go on in their sins, it will not be from ignorance they perish, and my soul must bear swift witness against them at the day of judgment if they lay not hold of Christ.” Upon hearing the prayer, the words deeply impacted the eldest son that he later wrote, “The thought of a mother bearing swift witness against me pierced my conscience and stirred my heart.”^{iv}

The boy eventually turned out to be Charles H. Spurgeon, the great Baptist preacher known today as the “Prince of Preachers.” In his first sermon published in London, Spurgeon said, “There was a boy once—a very sinful child—who hearkened not to the counsel of his parents. But his mother prayed for him, and now he stands to preach to this congregation every Sabbath. And when his mother thinks of her firstborn preaching the Gospel, she

reaps a glorious harvest that makes her a glad woman.”^v

Not only that, Spurgeon recognized the weight of this responsibility as he entreated his congregation, “How can a man be a Christian, and not love his offspring? How can a man be a believer in Jesus Christ, and yet have a cold and hard heart in the things of the kingdom towards his children?... It is our business to train up our children in the fear of the Lord; and though we cannot give them grace, it is ours to pray to the God who can give it; and in answer to our many supplications, he will not turn us away, but will be pleased to regard our sighs.”^{vi}

I hope to do well by the grace of God, in following my parents' godly example if the Lord wills that I have my own family. At the present, while I still look forward to that day, I only echo the wise words of those who have gone before me and all the more as the Word of God calls us to, *“Train up a child in the way he should go...”* (Prov. 22:6) Even so, Starr Meade, an author of a family devotions book, brings this significant task to light, “Those of us who care about passing on the baton of historic Christian truth must awaken to the importance of faithfully imparting

its doctrines to our children... Children need a grid through which to sift all that they see and hear. We must provide this for our children while they are still young. Doctrine cannot wait until children are teens, because adolescents are making major life decisions. The theological framework on which to base those decisions, the biblical worldview, must already be in place.”^{vii}

It is a longing in my heart that each family represented in Cebu Gospel Church would be committed in the same way as the Puritan congregation in Dorchester, Massachusetts in 1677, “to reform our families, engaging ourselves to a conscientious care to set before us and to maintain the worship of God in them; and to walk in our houses with perfect hearts in a faithful discharge of all domestic duties, educating, instructing, and charging our children and households to keep the ways of the Lord.”^{viii}

For as it is, our dear Savior continually speaks to us in His Word, saying, *“Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.”* (Matt. 5:16, ESV)



ⁱ Joel Beeke, *Bringing the Gospel to Covenant Children* (Grand Rapids: RHB, 2001), 3.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid.*, 12; cf. *Heidelberg Catechism*, Q2: What do you need to know in order to live and die in the joy of this comfort?, A: First, how great my sins and misery are; second, how I am delivered from all my sins and misery; third, how I am to be thankful to God for such deliverance.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid.*, 12-20.

^{iv} W. Y. Fullerton, *Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, Chapter 2.

^v *Ibid.*

^{vi} *20 Centuries of Great Preaching*, 6:93-94.

^{vii} Starr Meade, *Training Hearts, Teaching Minds: Family Devotions Based on the Shorter Catechism* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2000), 6.

^{viii} Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans As They Really Were* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 80; as quoted in Joel R. Beeke, *Family Worship* (Grand Rapids: RHB, 2002), 3.

Till We Meet Again

BY PTR. ERIC CHAN



In over a year of ministry here in Cebu, I have conducted a number of memorial services. In each service, I would be sharing specific passages in the Scripture. I have spoken from the Gospel of John, Psalms, and the Book of Revelation. I am particularly fond of the Book of Revelation, especially that of Revelation 14:13. The Book of Revelation was written during a time of trial and suffering. Just as the book was named, Apostle John wrote the book through a direct revelation from Jesus Christ. Revelation is the last of the sixty-six books in the Bible. We may therefore say it is the last and final words of Jesus Christ to all of us. And as such, it should be of utmost importance to us and it is best that we take Jesus' words to our hearts.

Revelation is a book full of

symbols and often causes confusion amongst readers. However, the passage I mentioned earlier, Revelation 14:13, is clear and precise. It is not symbolic, but straightforward in its message. It is a direct promise from God, for John said he heard a voice from heaven. And herein are God's comforting words to us, *"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on ... they will rest from their labor, and their deeds will follow them."*

At this point, perhaps the question we need to address is, "How is it that the Bible say **death is a blessing**? Death is one of the most dreaded subjects and is avoided by many of us. Possibly, this is because of the uncertainties attached to the topic of death. For this reason, many of us are uncomfortable with it. However, make no mistake that there are many

misconceptions about death. We thank God that the Bible is clear about what happens after death.

Death is not an end in itself; instead, it is the beginning of a life in eternity. However, the question is, "Where in eternity?" The Bible clearly teaches the immortality of our soul. In other words, we humans will continue to live on even after the termination of our physical lives. We will only move from one existence to another. In reality, earthly life is merely a period for a person to decide his/her final destiny. Are we to live in the presence of God, or in the absence of God? To live in the absence of God does not mean a person will be free to do just about anything. Instead, it is a life apart from the care and love of God. To put it in a more negative sense, to live apart from God is to live under God's

condemnation. Since it is a life in the absence of God for eternity, therefore, it means there will be no more second chance. That person will eternally be condemned. God's judgment on him/her is final. This is also referred to as the "Second Death" (Rev. 20:6, 14-15). In other words, when a person's life on earth ends, there will be no more opportunity for him/her to repent. God's judgment on him/her will be final and executory.

On the other hand, to live in the presence of God is to be restored to fellowship with God. God will again be in a loving relationship with the person, and he will again enjoy the wonderful blessings of God. This, by the way, is the Good News of the Bible: *"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, JESUS CHRIST, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16)."*

The devil knows that God will never allow sins committed to go unpunished. He tempted Adam and Eve and

led them astray. His purpose was to destroy God's created being and let them be eternally condemned. For indeed the Bible says, "Death is God's penalty for sin (Rom. 6:23)." Supposedly, death is to be a dead end for us humans. The devil thought he had outwitted God, but *God's thought are not our thoughts, neither are our ways His ways ... as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are God's ways higher than our ways and His thoughts higher than our thoughts (Isaiah 55:8-9)*. God, in His infinite wisdom, purposed a salvation plan centered on the ultimate penalty that was to be mankind's dead end, death. God sent forth Jesus Christ to be born man, and to live a sinless life. Henceforth, to allow Jesus to die will be an injustice as Christ was sinless and did not deserve the penalty of sin (that is death, Rom. 6:23). Therefore, in God's own righteousness, He rectified that injustice by raising Jesus to life. Now, whoever believes in God's righteousness (the saving work of Jesus Christ) is accounted righteous. Look and see

Romans 1:17, *For in the Gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it was written: "The righteous will live by faith."* For this reason, death becomes a blessing for those who are in Jesus Christ. Because in death, we paid the righteous punishment of God for our sinfulness, but through faith in God's righteousness, we are declared righteous and given a new life. Therefore, Paul declared in 1 Corinthians 15:55-58, *"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."*

Having said all these, indeed, we Christians can confidently declare, *"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on ... they will rest from their labor and their deeds will follow them."* So now, each time a fellow believer departs to be with the Lord, we can confidently proclaim, *"Till We Meet Again!"*

Community: Bringing the Gospel to the World

BY PTR. CHARMAINE GUTIERREZ



Missions. Evangelism. Sharing the Gospel. It does not matter what term we use, we know they are big words with heavy meanings. The effort, challenge and the seriousness of telling the Gospel to other people are undoubtedly tremendous and are experienced by missionaries, ministers and lay people alike. I believe a number of Christians, in fact, would do away with this task if given the opportunity. We tell ourselves that we are "technically" excused from such responsibility and justify that this task is primarily for the missionaries and pastors to perform. After all, not all of us are called to be preachers, right?

The universal command

I was one of those who stood by this conviction for quite some time. Until, with much shame, I later realized and admitted that this was a lie. God made me understand more and more His command to us to bring the Gospel to the world. The familiar verse found in Matthew 28:18-20 is for *all* Christians. "Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'" This command by our Savior Jesus Christ is clearly not limited to missionaries and pastors, rather, it is given to each and every believer. We can see this truth in the actions of the early believers in the book of Acts

Ordinary believers' eager participation

The Gospel spread through the words and deeds of Christians back then, Christians who certainly came from different backgrounds and held different types of occupation. We find the likes of Stephen, Philip, Priscilla and Aquila among many others who came to faith and willingly participated in proclaiming and teaching the Gospel to others even though their primary occupations were not as missionary like Paul or pastor like Peter. These believers were not extraordinary people with extraordinary gifts and rare

callings. Rather, they were regular people with their own sources of living who became believers of Christ and thus were eager to share *the* Message to people around them. They experienced the beauty and satisfaction of having all their sins graciously forgiven by God Himself; therefore they wanted others to know Christ and go through the same thing. The book of Acts is able to show us 21st century Christians that the early believers understood that proclaiming the Gospel to all nations is a task for all who put their faith in Jesus Christ.

The example of Philip

I cannot help but think of Philip, whose ministry was recorded in the first few chapters of Acts, whenever I ponder upon the significant contribution of lay people in the spreading the Gospel. Philip was one of those seven who were chosen to handle the concerns of the members of the church (Acts 6:1-6). Despite his administrative responsibility to the believers, he was, just like most Christians of our time, an ordinary member of the church. Yet, he actively shared the Gospel

to other people, even to an Ethiopian eunuch, a stranger who had a totally different background from his (Acts 8:26-39).

Right here, right now

Philip, due to the persecution in Jerusalem, went to Samaria (Acts 8:5-13), to Gaza (Acts 8:26-39), to Azotus and Caesarea (Acts 8:40) as the Holy Spirit actively led him. Just like the other Christians at that time, wherever he went, he preached the Gospel. I believe sometimes we get too wrapped up as to *where* God wants us to preach the Gospel. There is this sort of a waiting period amongst Christians for the exact ministry, tribal group or country that God is leading each one to go to before he/she will share the Gospel to another person. Sadly, this “waiting” stage extends significantly at times. The truth is, not every one of us will have an extraordinary missionary leading similar to Philip. Not every one of us will be led to go to China, or to the indigenous people in Mindanao, or to reach out to the street children. We are, however, put in places at the moment where we are to proclaim Jesus Christ. So the question should not be “where should I go?” instead, “what am I doing at present in this place that God has placed me?” Ironically, our families, friends, neighbors, co-workers are some of the people we meet regularly and have fairly easy connection, but

they are also the ones to whom we spend less conscious time and effort to reach out and share the Gospel. Perhaps we have forgotten that Jesus' command in Matthew 28:18-20 surely includes these people in its scope.

But... isn't it scary?

The target audience may be countless and accessible to us, but it does not take away the fact that sharing the Gospel to others is difficult and sometimes frightening to execute. Anyone who has told another person that he/she is a sinner and that Jesus Christ is the only One who can save him/her from this state knows that this is not a walk in the park. Nonetheless, it is important to keep in mind that Christians are never alone in this endeavor. The Holy Spirit empowers us to execute this task by giving us a way to proclaim the Gospel. The Holy Spirit also empowers us by preparing people to understand and accept the Gospel. Take the account of Philip in Acts 8 once again. It was the Holy Spirit who opened the way for Philip to explain the Bible to the Ethiopian eunuch. It was certainly not a happenstance that Philip met the eunuch at the same time he was reading the book of Isaiah. The Holy Spirit was also the one who prepared this eunuch to understand and eventually accept the Gospel. This amazing thing is happening to us as well. The Holy Spirit *actively* works in the before, during and after stages of our Gospel sharing, just as He did

when Philip met the eunuch. We are never on our own in obeying the Great Commission of Jesus Christ.

It is just like when a little boy gets lost in a busy mall. One moment he is holding his mother's hand, the next, he is alone, unable to find his mother. Despite the busyness of that place, the boy suddenly feels isolated and afraid. He does not know where to go or how to get there. The boy feels like a lonely traveler. Then, a familiar gentle hand takes his small right hand. Looking up, he sees the beautiful face of his mom and he knows he is going to be okay. His mom led him to walk along this same busy mall. The boy still doesn't know where they are heading, but the difference now is that he is not afraid anymore. He trusted the one that takes his hand.

In sharing the gospel to others, we usually feel the fear and loneliness that the lost boy feels. Our path and destination seem scary whenever it is about telling Jesus to others. But when we realize and remember that the One who takes our hand in this road is the One who made the way to save us from our sinful self, then those fears would subside. Just like the boy who willingly and gladly follows his mom, we would also obediently and gladly share about Jesus Christ.



過去，現在，將來

許郭錦繡



在每一個人的人生中必有過去，現在，及將來的過程。過去是已往的昨天，現在是今天的日子，將來是明天的年日。

詩人亞薩在詩篇 78:4-7: 「我們不將這些事向他們的子孫隱瞞。要將耶和華的美德和祂的能力並祂奇妙的作為述說給後代聽。因為祂在雅各中立法度，在以色列中設律法，是祂吩咐我們祖宗要傳給子孫的，使將要生的後代子孫可以曉得，他們也要起來告訴他們的子孫，好叫他們仰望神，不忘記神的作為，惟要守祂的命令。」

在詩篇七十八篇第七節，詩人特別教導我們要怎樣面對將來，回想過去，及應付現在。

(一)將來→要仰望神(詩78:7a)

【希望】是一種極大的原動力，它能促進人的進取心，激發人的熱心，並鼓勵人完成所要追求的目標。一個人若失去了【希望】，他的人生必然是單調，消極，寂寞，孤苦，毫無有趣味的。根據心理學家的統計，一個犯了病的人，如果抱着【希望】的心情，他的病症自然容易得到痊癒。反之，如果他抱着【絕望】的態度，不但復原的機會遲慢，甚至有時候就永遠不能恢復康健了！

為什麼我們應該仰望神？仰望神有何益處？

•永生的應許(約壹2:25)

自從亞當夏娃犯罪以後，人類該受永恆的死亡。但因為神愛世人，就差祂的獨生愛子耶穌，道成肉身，為我們擔當應得的刑罰，釘在十字架上，流出寶血，救贖了我們，使凡肯相信接受祂的，可得到最有價值的盼望，就

是永生的應許。

•穩固的安息(伯11:18)

如今世界各國所遇到數不盡之天災人禍，各地有戰爭，飢荒，地震，森火，颱風，旋風，暴風，水災，流行疾病等等，實令我們產生了驚慌，恐怖，不安的感覺。然而，神是一位永遠不會改變的上帝。「祂是我們的力量，巖石，山寨，救主，神，磐石，所倚靠的，盾牌，拯救的角，及高臺」(詩18:1-2)。所以我們若在祂保守之下，必定得到穩固的安息。

•基督的再來(多2:13)

等候基督的顯現是每一位屬主兒女所渴望的。當祂再來的時候，我們就可以與祂共同享受在祂榮耀的國度裏。

•將來的審判(哥後5:10)

在這邪惡的世代，人心詭詐，惡人興旺，是非顛倒，公義不明，義人受苦，弱者受欺，如果沒有將來的審判，義人是多麼的吃虧呀！人生是多麼的不公道呀！感謝主，祂應許要為義人伸冤(羅12:19)。祂確定我們「眾人必要在基督臺前顯露出來，叫各人按著本身所行的，或善或惡受報」(哥後5:10)。正如傳12:14:「因為主說，人所作的事，連一切隱藏的事，無論是善是惡，神都必審問。」

願我們不要將我們的盼望寄託在屬世之事上，因為這世界只是暫時的，世上的一切總有一天會朽壞，成為虛空。只有仰望神，才能使我們活着有意義，有永恆價值的人生。

(二)過去→不忘記神的作為(詩

78:7b)

何謂忘記神？

•背了與神所立的約

以色列人沒有遵照摩西所吩咐他們的，就是：「你們要謹慎，免得忘記耶和華與你們所立的約，為自己雕刻偶像，就是耶和華你神所禁止的偶像。因為耶和華乃是烈火，是忌邪的神」(申4:23-24)

你是否與神立過約？如果有話，切切要遵守所立的約。

•離棄耶和華去事奉別神

約書亞卒後，「以色列人行耶和華眼中看為惡的事，去事奉諸巴力，離棄了領他們出埃及地的耶和華他們列祖的神，去叩拜別神，就是四圍列國的神，惹耶和華發怒。」(士2:11-13)

請問，你有否讓神在你的心中居首位？有沒有任何的偶像代替了你的上帝？

•心裏高傲，居心自比神

「尼布甲尼撒王製造金像命通國敬拜。凡不俯伏敬拜的必立時扔在烈火的窯中」(但3:1-6)

推羅君王靠自己的智慧聰明得了金銀財寶，又因貿易增資財，心裏高傲，居心自比神說，我是神，我在海中坐神之位。(結28:2-5)

願我們省察自己，是否像尼布甲尼撒王或推羅王一樣，以自我為先，意氣高傲，眼中無人，與神脫離了關係？

•忘了過去神所施行的奇事

上帝顧念以色列人在埃及為奴之苦楚，就差遣摩西到法老王面前，經過了十災(水變血，蛙災，虱災，蠅

災，畜疫之災，瘡災，雹災，蝗災，黑暗之災，殺埃及長子之災)後，才領他們出埃及，進入流乳和蜜的迦南地。在出埃及的過程中，上帝將海分裂使他們過去，又叫水立起如壘，祂白日用雲彩，終夜用火光引導他們，為他們在曠野分裂磐石給他們打水喝，每天降嗎哪像雨給他們吃得飽足，並救他們脫離敵人的手(詩78:13-24)。可惜，這一切奇事，他們竟全都忘掉了。

請問，你是否經歷到神在你身上施行了奇事？你有否把那些奇事忘了？你有否把那些神蹟述說給後代知道？

- 在飽足富有時忘了上帝
神再次警告以色列人勿起驕傲以致忘了神恩。申8:11-14：「你們要謹慎，免得忘記耶和華你的神，不守祂的誡命、典章、律例，就是我今日所吩咐你的。恐怕你喫得飽足，建造美好的房屋居住，你的牛羊加多，你的金銀增添，你所有的全都加增，你就心高氣傲，忘記耶和華你的神，就是將你們從埃及地為奴之家領出來的神」。當我們在平安飽足時，常常忘記了神，怪不得亞古珥向主這樣的禱告：「我求禱兩件事，在我未死之先，不要不賜給我。求你使虛假和謊言遠離我，使我也不貧窮也不富足，賜給我需用的飲食，恐怕我飽足不認你說耶和華是誰呢？又恐怕我貧窮就偷竊，以致褻瀆我神的名」(箴30:7-8)

很多時候我們將應該記住的事情忘了，而將不應該記住的仇恨永銘在心。神高深的大愛，豐盛的恩典，無比的憐恤，濶大的慈悲，不惜的犧牲，奇妙的作為，驚動的神蹟，以及無限的祝福，豈不值得我們來記念啊！難道我們要做一個忘恩負義的人嗎？

以色列若忘記神，將承受的結局如下：

- 所栽種的，所收割的，盡都飛去(賽17:10-11)
- 命定他們歸在刀下(賽

65:11-12)

- 揭起衣襟，顯出醜陋(耶13:25-26)
- 在仇敵面前分散他們(耶18:15-17)
- 擔當淫行和淫亂的報應(結23:35)
- 神要降火燒城邑毀滅宮殿(何8:14)
- 忘神的外邦人都必歸到陰間去(詩9:17)
- 被上帝撕碎，無人搭救(詩50:22)

(三)現在→要守祂的命令(詩78:7c)

主耶穌從死裡復活後，在加利利和門徒會面就對他們說：「所以你們要去，使萬民作我的門徒，奉父子聖靈的名給他們施洗，凡我所吩咐你們的，都教訓他們遵守，我就常與你們同在，直到世界末了」(太26:19-20)。這是主委託我們最大的使命，就是不但要引人歸主，而且也教訓他們遵守祂的話。可見耶穌對遵守祂的道極其重視。雅各書一章廿二節：「只是你們要行道，不要單單聽道，自己欺哄自己」。千萬不要效法以色列人，他們聽先知以西結的話卻不行，口多顯愛情，心卻追隨財利(結33:31)。結果受了非常悲慘的刑罰。

「遵守神命令的就住在神裡面。神也住在他裡面」(約壹3:24)。「我們遵守神的誡命，這就是愛祂了。並且祂的誡命不是難守的」(約壹5:3)。「凡越過基督的教訓不常守着的，就沒有神。常守這教訓的，就有父又有子」(約貳:9)。

遵守祂誡命的人，必得神所應許下列的恩典和福氣：

- 神向他發慈愛直到千代(出20:6)
- 神降下時雨，地出土產，樹木結果(利26:3)
- 在萬民中有智慧和聰明(申4:6)
- 日子得以長久(申6:2)
- 可以蒙福(申11:27)
- 神必使你超乎萬民之上(申28:1)
- 手所辦的一切事，身所生

的，牲畜所下的，地上所產的，綽綽有餘(申30:9-10)

- 可以存活，人數加增，賜福與你(申30:16)
- 無論往那裡去，都可以順利(約1:7)
- 可以承受美地遺留給子孫永遠為業(歷上28:8)
- 神以慈愛誠實待他(詩25:10)
- 可得安慰(詩119:52)
- 有大平安，甚麼都不能使他絆倒(詩119:165)
- 長久的日子，生命的年數與平安加給你(箴3:1)
- 必得善報(箴13:13)
- 保全生命(箴19:16)
- 可得存活(箴4:4, 7:2)
- 必不經歷禍患(傳8:5)

對於難以測度的將來，要仰望神，以信心將萬事交託給創造天地統管萬有的主宰。因為祂是我們的牧者，我們必不至缺乏。因為祂是我們的避難所，我們必蒙祂看守與保護。因祂是我們的力量，我們可以安然自在。因為祂是最大的醫生，我們必得祂的醫治。只管讓祂掌管我們的將來，就可免去了一切的掛慮，憂愁，害怕和煩悶，而以穩定的心來面對將來。

對於以往的過去，記得古人之諾言：「施人勿念，受施勿掛」。我們從神所領受的恩惠，所經歷的神蹟，所看到祂奇妙的作為，應該懂得感謝，以神所賜給我們的時間，金錢，才幹，多多事奉祂，以報主恩。

對於今日的現在，應該「盡人所當盡的本分，敬畏神，謹守祂的命令」(傳12:13)，好叫我們行在正路中，過着聖潔無瑕疵的生活，有美好的見證，來高舉基督，榮耀主名。

希望我們將詩篇七十八篇七節：「好叫他們仰望神，不忘記神的作為，惟要守祂的命令」背念起來，牢牢記在心裡，作我們餘下日子的準繩。願我們以喜樂的心仰望神，以感謝的心不忘記祂的作為，以順從的心來遵守祂的命令。那麼我們的將來，過去和現在，必蒙上帝的喜悅和祝福。

The Second Man on the Moon

BY CHRISTOPHER TIO



How many young people remember a time when space was an impossibility. We read in today's newspapers talking about a hotel soon rising on the moon, or a space elevator in 20 years. People believe that this will happen, after all, there already are space tourists. Millionaires that have the cash as well as the physical conditioning can actually purchase a seat into space.

But during the early 1960's, it was a frontier that people wondered if it could be reached. The then US president John F. Kennedy made a commitment to put the first man on the moon and bring him back safely. In 1969, it finally happened. Apollo 11 landed on the moon.

Everybody is familiar with this phrase uttered by Apollo 11 astronaut Neil Armstrong upon

stepping on the moon, he uttered the famous line, "That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind." It was a historic moment defined by a perfect phrase, capturing the importance of that step for mankind and for history.

But many people are not that familiar with the second astronaut that was with Neil that fateful moment in history. Buzz Aldrin was the second man on the moon. He later radioed, "Houston, this is Eagle. This is the LM pilot speaking. I would like to request a few moments of silence. I would like to invite each person listening in, whoever or wherever he may be, to contemplate for a moment the events of the last few hours, and to give thanks in his own individual way."

Buzz Aldrin then proceeded to

do something very special. He had brought with him a special package from his pastor, a small pack containing the holy sacrament, the bread and the wine. Buzz Aldrin was sworn to secrecy by NASA and the record of this event was sealed. 20 years later, Buzz wrote about it, he said, "In the radio blackout, I opened the little plastic packages which contained the bread and the wine. I poured the wine into the chalice our church had given me. In the one-sixth gravity of the moon, the wine slowly curled and gracefully came up the side of the cup. Then I read the Scripture, 'I am the vine, you are the branches. Whosoever abides in me will bring forth much fruit.'"

Buzz added, "I had intended to read my communion passage back to earth, but at the last minute Deke Slayton had

requested that I not do this. NASA was already embroiled in a legal battle with Madelyn Murray O'Hare, the celebrated opponent of religion, over the Apollo 8 crew reading from Genesis while orbiting the moon at Christmas. I agreed reluctantly..." He concluded, "It was interesting for me to think: the very first liquid ever poured on the moon, and the very first food eaten there, were the communion elements."

But this was not the first time God was mentioned in space, Colonel Aldrin mentioned that the crew of Apollo 8 read from the Book of Genesis during the very first orbit around the Earth. That fateful day on December 24, 1968, Christmas Eve, the crew, astronauts William Anders, Jim Lovell, and Frank Borman read from the Bible. What they read and said was broadcast live and heard around the world. This is the transcript:

William Anders starts, "We are now approaching lunar sunrise and, for all the people back on Earth, the crew of Apollo 8 has

a message that we would like to send to you.

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, 'Let there be light' and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness."

Jim Lovell continued, "And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day. And God said, 'Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.'

And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament; and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day."

Frank Borman concluded, "And God said, 'Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear' and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas; and God saw that it was good. And from the crew of Apollo 8, we close with good night, good luck, a Merry Christmas – and God bless all of you, all of you on the good Earth."

Many of the first Astronauts were Christians. NASA had decided to keep records of Colonel Buzz Aldrin's first communion on the moon a state secret until it surfaced in the latter's memoirs. When Colonel Aldrin was asked why he did that, he replied, "Because my soul does not belong to NASA."

Isn't this story amazing? Isn't the power of God's word incredible? Psalm 119:105 says, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." Even in the darkness of space, God's word still shines brightly.

One Christ, One Church, One Gospel...
 Many Faces, Many Hands, Many Tongues

BY DR. WANDA PO



This year, our church has adopted a theme that underscores ONE-ness or UNITY. The basis for this unity is Christ. "There is neither Jew or Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all ONE in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). ONE CHRIST, *but* the world to which Christ came to save bears many faces – diverse cultures, multiple spiritual perspectives, manifold experiences, and a host of other differences. In a world characterized by diversity and multiplicity, what do we do with the ONE Christ? In Isaiah 1:18, God invites the nation of Judah to "Come now, let *us* reason *together*..." Here, I see God initiating to dialogue with Judah. Let's talk ... let's be open ... let's share our convictions ... our doubts ... even our questions! Christ *came* to seek and save that which was lost; Christ came.

He sought. He saved. In the Book of Acts, the Apostle Paul's evangelistic approach was always engaging. He would invite both Jews and Gentiles to a discussion (17:2-3, 17f; 18:4f; 19:8f).

The massive migration of peoples has dramatically changed the religious landscape of our world. This development is more pronounced in some countries than in others. Today, it is not surprising to find on the *same* street or neighbourhood a Roman Catholic cathedral, Buddhist or Hindu temple, Muslim mosque, Protestant church and many others. I believe that there are more reasons for us today than at other times in history, to actively seek to understand (*not to agree or compromise*) peoples who profess a different belief system as ours. Actively seeking to understand others

doesn't mean giving up our personal convictions and loyalties; rather, it means embracing our differences without seeing the other as an opponent or rival. Much like Christ, we should see everyone not as a foe but as a potential friend; not accursed but to be blessed; not condemned but to be redeemed.

The Bible says that everyone who belongs to Christ is called a saint; all the saints around the globe make up Christ's CHURCH. But today this CHURCH is mistakenly known as a religion, denomination it comes under various names. Someday however, in heaven there is no such distinction. Although ONE CHURCH, yet she has many members with many hands. At the height of Typhoon "Ondoy," we see many hands at work; hands reaching out to another hand;

hands throwing out a lifeline; hands catching a baby; hands struggling to stay afloat in rising waters; hands extending relief goods, etc. But sadly, there were also hands looting, hands stealing, hands destroying, hands fighting over relief goods, etc.

ONE CHURCH ... many members many hands. I believe that the Church of Christ is called to extend a helping hand to the needy; a praying hand to intercede for and on behalf of the lost; a working hand to serve, a clean hand to praise, a pointing hand to teach and guide; a caring hand to encourage, outstretched hands to reach out, etc. And like the song I learned during my high school days – that goes something like this – “One man's hands can't bring a prison down; two men's hands can't bring a prison down. But if two and two and fifty makes a million, we'll see that they come down... we'll see that they come down.” There is strength in numbers, numbers that work as ONE, moving toward the same goal. *If only* the CHURCH of Christ with her many members and many hands would unite and bond themselves to reach out to help, reach up to pray, reach far to serve, reach in to care and

encourage What power would be unleashed; what works would be accomplished; what impact would be produced; what difference she would make. The CHURCH would once again be living out and perhaps even surpassing the signs and wonders wrought by the first century saints!

The CHURCH has another mandate – to take the gospel to the ends of the world. Jesus gave this final charge to his disciples just before He ascended to heaven – “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them” (Matthew 28:19-20). Paul explained what this gospel was – “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9). This was the gospel preached by the first century church; the same gospel preached by missionaries like Robert Morrison, William Carey, Hudson Taylor, Adoniram Judson, and a multitude of other saints. This is also the same gospel that we bear witness to. So that when some of the saints in Galatia started to turn to “another” gospel, Paul sternly warned them lest they be eternally condemned.

In other words, there is only ONE GOSPEL – Jesus Saves!

ONE GOSPEL ... but many nations many tongues. Jesus seeing the multitudes, who looked harassed and helpless, turned to his disciples and said, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field” (Matthew 9:37-38). The CHURCH of Christ must stand up to the challenge. Evangelistic efforts must be aggressively carried out using every form of media (radio, television, drama, arts, literature, etc.) to effectively reach out and communicate Christ's gospel. The church must *bring* the gospel to every sector of society, regardless of gender, social status, race, or creed. Today, encounter with other peoples of other nations that speak another tongue is made easier by the speed of communications in the Internet Age. God's kingdom has no boundaries; God's grace knows no boundaries, too. Throughout the ages, there is only ONE GOSPEL, the eternal gospel – “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved!”



Welcome to the second of our irreverent history series on the history of Christianity. We hope to eventually cover the origins, development, and current state of Christianity. try to provide a general understanding of the topic – so, what you read here will be quite general. We try to cover history in general terms and present the majority view, but our research is not perfect. Brickbats (and much more preferably bouquets) can be directed to our e-mail address at history@cebugospelchurch.com.

In our previous installment, we traced the history of Israel, starting from its founder Abraham. We ended during the reign of King Solomon, a time that was considered as ancient Israel's Golden Age. It was when the kingdom was at its peak – its richest and most powerful era. Part two picks up from King Solomon's reign up until the destruction of ancient Israel, a chaotic period where religion, politics, and foreign affairs clashed...

Part 2: Kings, Vassals, and Exiles

Solomon inherited the kingdom from his father, David. Solomon was not a warrior king like his Dad, but he was cunning. To protect Israel from her many enemies, he made political alliances with neighboring kings. To seal these alliances, he married their daughters. Solomon made lots and lots of alliances, because he had seven hundred wives!

But by marrying foreign women and worshipping their gods, Solomon broke God's commandments. As punishment, Israel would be split into two. In honor of his father David, this split would happen after Solomon died, making him the last king of United Israel.¹

Solomon's reign brought prosperity to the country. But in order to pay for all of it, people had to pay heavy taxes. After Solomon's death, the people thought his son would give them a tax break. But **Rehoboam**, Solomon's son and successor, did the opposite. The people were angry, and all except two tribes withdrew support from the king. Instead, they crowned a man called Jeroboam as their king.

Before we continue with the history lesson, it is useful to look at the big picture. How does the known world look like at this stage, and who are the major players in the region? The answer is important, because the split has left both countries weakened.

Survey of the World

The Pre-historic world is usually split into three Ages. These are named after the things people use to make tools and weapons. When Solomon died in 931 BC, the world has moved from bronze to iron. Bronze, a metal alloy of copper and tin, was stronger than iron. Bronze has a lower melting point than iron, and was therefore easier to shape into weapons.

But copper and tin are rarer than iron, so people who knew how to forge iron (and its stronger carbon alloy, steel) had an advantage against people who cannot. The ability to smelt iron was one of the reasons why the Philistines were so powerful during the time of King Saul and David.

North of Israel lies **Aram** (now modern-day *Syria*). To its southeast was Moab, hometown of the famous *Ruth*. Both countries were vassals to Israel, which means they had to pay taxes in the form of a tribute. Aram broke free from Israelite rule during the final years of Solomon's reign, and was the major military power in the area for most of the time covered in this installment. The Philistines, who bullied the Israelites during Saul and David's reigns, lived to the west of both Israel and Judah.

The land of **Edom** lies to the south of Judah, and was its vassal state. Southwest of Edom was a land the Israelite forefathers are familiar with, **Egypt**. The Egyptians desire to influence events in the area, and even helped Solomon fight the Philistines.

But they were facing their own internal conflict after the death of Pharaoh Ramses XI, and did not exert much influence until later.

The region to the north of Aram was a region called Mesopotamia (now Iraq). The **Hittite** Empire used to dominate the area, but was weakened at the end of the Bronze Age. Two city-empires, **Assyria** and **Babylonia**, fought each other for superiority in the region. Neither was strong enough to dominate the **Levant** (see map). Up until the military reforms of King Tiglath-Pileser III, Mesopotamia was constantly invaded by Aram.

Israel Divided

The country was now divided into two. The Northern country **Israel**, which consisted of ten tribes, was ruled by Jeroboam. Its capital was initially in Shechem, but was later moved to Samaria by King Omri. The Southern country, now known as **Judah**, consisting of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, remained loyal to Rehoboam. Its capital remained in Jerusalem.

Although the newly-divided kingdoms still have the same territory and number of people, they were sometimes at war with each other. Judah was militarily and economically weaker than Israel.

¹It is debatable whether Israel was truly united in nationhood. During the reign of Saul and David, the North-South split could be seen with the Saul-David civil war (2 Sam. 2-3), a coup d'état by prince Absalom (2 Sam. 15-16), and a localized rebellion (2 Sam. 20).

The Levant at the time of the Divided Kingdom



Israel and Judah were enemies as long as Jeroboam and his descendants ruled Israel. There was only peace after **Athaliah** (either the daughter or sister of the notorious King Ahab of Israel) was married to **Jehoram**, the son of Judah's King **Jehoshaphat**.

Travails of Northern Israel

Whoever wrote the books of Kings were quite biased against **Ahab**. He was called the wickedest of all Israelite kings. This was mostly due to Ahab's strategic marriage to the Phoenician princess **Jezebel**, who spread Baal worship throughout the land. Ahab and Jezebel's struggle with the Arameans on one hand, and the prophet **Elijah** on the other, are given more space in the Bible than any other northern king.

Ahab's legacy, and the Israel-Judah alliance, ended with the coup d'état staged by **Jehu** (this was sanctioned by God through **Elisha**, Elijah's famous successor.) Jehu killed Ahab's family, murdering King **Joram** (Ahab's son) and King **Ahaziah** of Judah, who had the bad luck to be visiting Israel at that time. For his services in killing all of Jezebel's Baal priests, Jehu was promised a longer legacy by God.

The house of Jehu continually struggled against the kings of Aram, sometimes winning and sometimes losing land to the northern invaders. Relationships with Judah were mostly peaceful. Jehu's great-grandson **Jehoash** did briefly go to war against King **Amaziah** of Judah, and completely humiliated him. But it wasn't his fault – Amaziah literally asked for it.

Four kings (and two coups) later, Israel faced, for the first time, the power of the Assyrian empire. Under **Tiglath-Pileser III**, the

It has less people, and hence a smaller army. Its lands were not as fertile as the Northern kingdom, and so the Judeans have to work harder than the Israelites to produce the same amount of food.

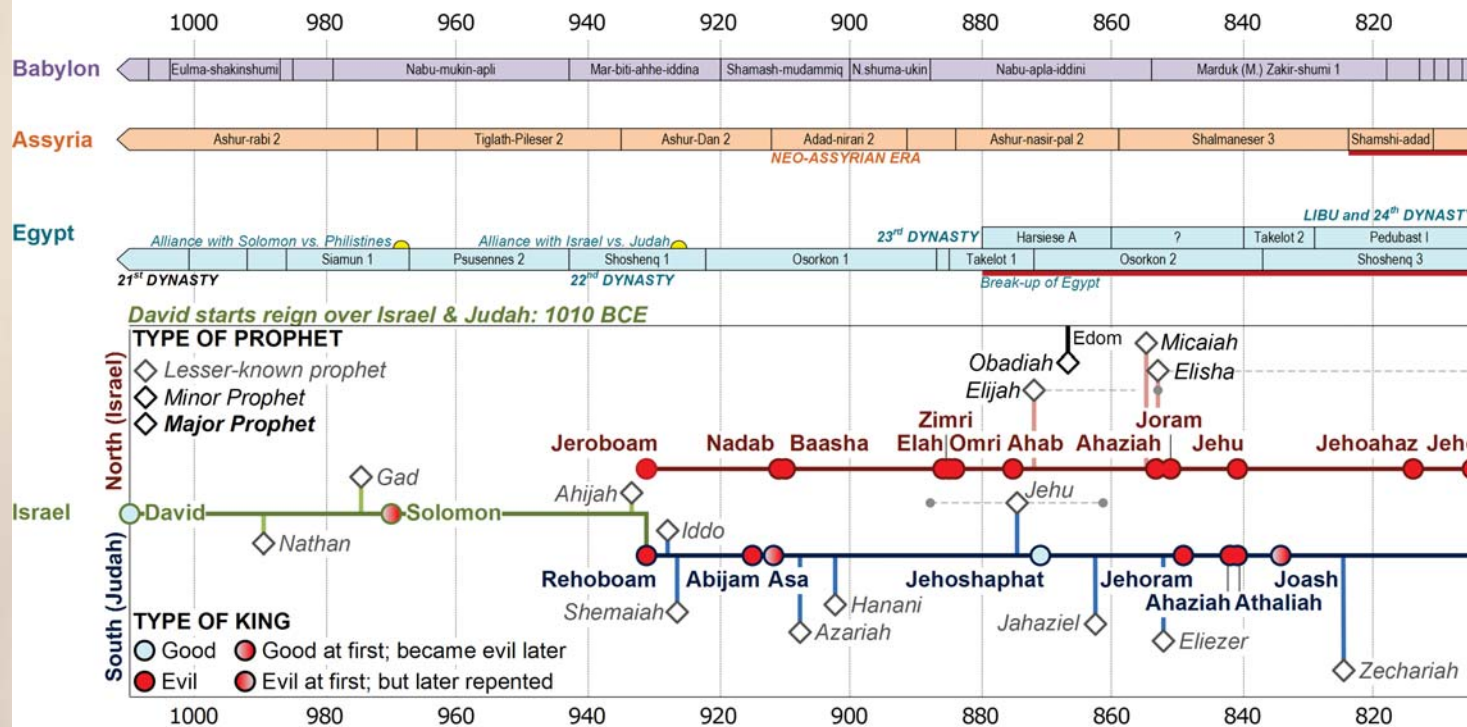
Solomon's Temple was located in Jerusalem. This made Judah the religious center for all Israelites who worshiped God. But Jeroboam didn't want his subjects visiting Jerusalem for religious festivals. Why, they might not return to him! So, Jeroboam promoted the worship of other gods. All the kings who

succeeded Jeroboam did this, and were considered wicked by the writer of the books of Kings and Chronicles for this very reason.

Judah has fewer enemies around it. With Israel as its northern buffer, the only major threat came from Egypt. King Jeroboam, a friend of Egypt, took advantage of this. He made an alliance with his pal Pharaoh **Shishak** to weaken Judah. When the good Pharaoh invades Jerusalem as a five-year anniversary gift for Rehoboam, there was nothing the poor king could do about it.

² During the invasion, Shishak was said to have carted off all the treasures in the temple and the royal palace. This seems to be a repeated theme in Jerusalem's history – each time, invaders come and take all the goodies from the temple/palace as tribute or spoils. One can only wonder why Judeans even bother to replace their often-stolen treasure!

A Timeline of Kings and Chronicles



Biblical regnal dates taken from the chronology by Kenneth Kitchen, available from <http://my.execpc.com/~stephwig/timeline.html>

weak country of Assyria became the most powerful in the region. The Assyrians invaded Israel, and only agreed to leave it alone after King **Menahem** paid a tribute of 37,000 pounds of silver.

Another coup later, Israel tried to break its vassalage to Assyria by allying with their former enemies the Arameans. They marched on Judah, trying to “persuade” King **Ahaz** to fight against the Assyrians. Ahaz instead placed Judah under Assyrian protection, paying them off with temple treasure. Tiglath-Pileser came back, smashed the Aramean empire, and annexed large parts of northern Israel. Israel was now a vassal state of Assyria.

After yet another coup, the new king **Hoshea** stopped paying tribute to the Assyrians again. He tried to contact Egypt to the Assyrians, but Assyria learned about it first. This time, they gave the Israelites no more chances. The army under **Shalmaneser V** swarmed the entire land of Israel, and besieged Samaria for three years. The city was finally destroyed by **Sargon 5** in 722 BCE.

Hoshea, the last king of Israel, died in exile as an Assyrian prisoner, and the Assyrians scattered ten northern tribes to various Assyrian lands, never to return. Despite repeated warnings from prophets like *Hosea* and *Amos*, nobody took heed. After a little over 200 years of existence, the Northern Kingdom was completely wiped out.

Righteous Kings of Judah

Judah was a lot more stable than Israel. Except for one occasion, succession from father to son was orderly. This was in keeping with a promise God made to David, and the need to maintain straight ancestral ties from David all the way to Jesus.

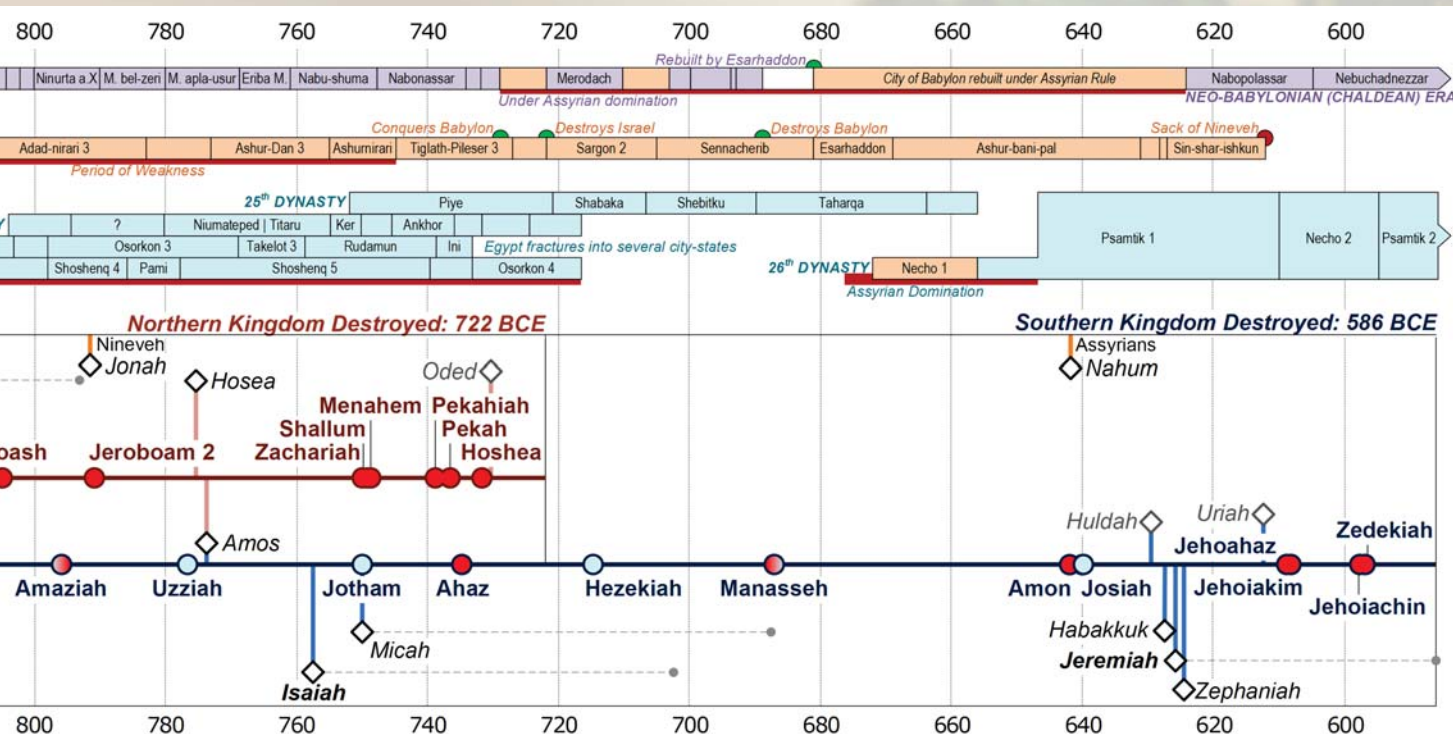
Although most Judean kings were “wicked” and did not adhere to the law of God, there were some who “did what was good and right in the eyes of the Lord.”³ King **Asa**, Rehoboam’s grandson, was the first such man. Unfortunately, this did not last. Due to his reliance on man (he bribed King Ben-Hadad of Aram to backstab and attack Israel, and later relied on doctors instead of God to cure his foot disease), he lost divine favor later in his reign.

Jehoshaphat, his son, was also considered upright all through his life. His only mistake, perhaps, was to marry his son to princess Athaliah of Israel. While it guaranteed peace between both countries, this political marriage would later turn out to be a mistake.

After hearing of her son **Ahaziah's** death at the hands of Jehu, **Athaliah** seized control over Judah. To make sure nobody challenged her rule, she massacred all of the male heirs. Luckily, her infant grandson **Joash** was rescued by his aunt, and hid away in the temple for six years. At age seven, he became the youngest king of Judah when **Jehoiada** the priest successfully organized a counter-coup against the evil queen.

Joash ruled justly and restored the temple, at least while Jehoiada was alive. After the priest's death, he

³ As written in *Kings and Chronicles*, this mostly applies in the religious sense. Any king who chose to worship other gods is considered evil. Their opposites who tear down altars are good and just. The writer of the books of *Kings* rues that all of Judah's kings did not tear down the “high places” – places of worship for heathen gods located in elevated locations such as mountains and hilltops.



All other dates taken from Wikipedia, the free online encyclopedia. Plotted by the Irreverent Historian

turned away from the Lord and even had the priest's son killed. Divine punishment for this evil act is said to be the cause of Aramean attacks on Judah. Joash was later assassinated by his own officials.

Joash's son **Amaziah** was initially righteous (though not wholeheartedly). He was granted victory over a rebellious Edomite army, and gained a swelled head because of it. He brashly (and stupidly) challenged Israel's King Jehoash to a fight, suffering a humiliating defeat.

His son **Uzziah** was also righteous, but also suffered from the same pride that led to his downfall. Uzziah stubbornly insisted on doing the job of a priest, and was rewarded with leprosy until his death.

Uzziah's son **Jotham** was yet another righteous king. Jotham expanded Judah's economic influence by militarily dominating the neighboring Ammonites.

But Jotham's son **Ahaz** was really evil, evil enough to depose his own father and sacrifice his sons to foreign gods. When attacked by an

alliance of Israelites and Arameans, he bribed the Assyrians to help him. They complied, destroying Damascus and carving up Israel, but their assistance was costly. Like Israel, Judah had to pay tribute to the Assyrians.

Hezekiah was a righteous sort, although rebellious. Like the ill-fated King Hoshea of Israel, he rallied against the Assyrians and sought an alliance with Egypt (which never came). This brought the wrath of **Sennacherib** down upon Judah, and 46 fortified villages were destroyed. Realizing the error of his ways, Hezekiah *then* sent tribute.

What happened next is a disputed matter. The Bible states that Sennacherib was not swayed by the tribute, and continued on to besiege Jerusalem. Divine intervention saved Hezekiah, as an angel slaughtered 185,000 enemy soldiers. This caused Sennacherib to retreat.

Sennacherib's own clay records, excavated in northern Iraq, begged to disagree. He boasted that after receiving tribute, he went home after having taught Hezekiah a lesson.

Still, Judah was permanently weakened regardless of who was telling the truth.⁴ Having brought the country some breathing room, Hezekiah was widely praised in the Bible for his actions. He cleansed and rededicated Solomon's temple after years of neglect at the hands of his father Ahaz, and promoted the worship of Yahweh.

Hezekiah's son **Manasseh** was as evil as his father was good, though with a twist. He reversed Hezekiah's reforms and followed his grandfather's ways. Like his father, he was also rebellious, and turned good at the end of his rule. All it took was to parade him in Babylon, led like a bull with a hook in his nose.

Josiah, the last of Judah's good kings, ascended to the throne after his evil father Amon was assassinated. The book of

⁴ The Bible seemed to link the defeat at Jerusalem to Sennacherib's downfall, stating that he was later assassinated by his own sons. Assyrian records suggest that after he destroyed the rebellious city of Babylon by turning it into a swamp, public sentiment turned against him. He really was assassinated by two of his sons, and Esarhaddon, another son of his, ascended to the throne.

Deuteronomy, parts of which were long forgotten, was rediscovered during his reign. Upon reading it, Josiah enforced the worship of God and desecrated shrines built to worship other gods. But it was too late for Judah, as events begin to heat up in Mesopotamia.

Fall of Jerusalem

After “teaching Hezekiah the Jew a lesson”, the Assyrians turned their attention towards Egypt. Egypt was meddling in the region, and allied with the Phoenicians to fight against the Assyrian empire.

By now, nonstop war has exhausted Assyrian resources. An alliance of *Medes* and *Scythians* (from Persia, now modern-day Iran), with **Nabopolassar** from Babylon laid siege to Nineveh, the Assyrian capital. The city fell in 612 BC, fulfilling the prophecies of *Jonah* and *Nahum*.

In a strange case of the preferring the enemy you know to the enemy you don't, Egypt under Necho II sided with Assyria against the Northern invaders. He led an army

to reinforce a remnant of the Assyrian army, but King Josiah (who must have really hated the Assyrians), intercepted the Egyptian army.

The Judeans were trounced, and Josiah died in battle. The Babylonians trounced the alliance, and a defeated Necho limped back to Egypt. He stopped by Jerusalem in a fit of rage, captured Josiah's son and successor **Jehoahaz**, and replaced him with another son **Jehoiakim**.

Judah at this time bounced between being a vassal to Egypt and to Babylon. After the Egyptians were soundly defeated in a battle in 605 BC, Jehoiakim switched sides to Babylon. He switched back to Egypt three years later when he thought the Egyptians were winning.

Fed up with this ping-pong behavior, Nebuchadnezzar sieged Jerusalem in 597 BC. In a case of really bad timing, Jerusalem fell three months after Jehoiachin succeeded his father, and he was deported to Babylon. Zedekiah, yet another of Josiah's sons, was installed as puppet-king by the Babylonians.

The end was nigh. Despite the example of his nephew, and the advice of his family and advisors – including the prophet Jeremiah and his scribe Baruch, Zedekiah rebelled against Babylon again.

Nebuchadnezzar came back, and this time he meant business. The Babylonians besieged Jerusalem for thirty long and hard months, and the people trapped inside suffered and starved.

The city fell in 586 BC, and the Babylonians destroyed everything, including the Temple. Zedekiah tried to run, but was captured and struck blind. After 345 years of independent existence, and unheeded warnings from Isaiah, Jeremiah, Zechariah, Micah, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah, the southern kingdom of Judah has ceased to exist.

Exiled from their homes, and strangers in a foreign land! Unlike the Assyrians, the Babylonians were more lenient and allowed the Jews to cluster together. Find out how Judaism survived in Babylonia, in our next irreverent installment: *Dark Days of the Diaspora*.



Mapping a Biblical Timeline

Trying to assign dates to Old testament Biblical events can be a tricky business. We could slowly and painstakingly add up a whole lot of numbers. For example, so-and-so lived for hundreds of years, and begat so-and-so Jr, who lived for more hundreds of years. And so on.

When was the Earth created if we adhere strictly to this policy?

It depends on who you ask, really.

Estimates are off the charts, ranging from 6,934 years BC to a relatively more youthful 3,483 BC, a rather large divergence of 3,451 years!

Let's put aside scientific rigor for the moment. After all, we know through radiometric age dating that Earth is over 4.5 billion years old.

Why are the calculations so 'off'?

First, the genealogies in the Bible are not all-inclusive. It is quite possible that a generation or two have been omitted, and a few liberties may have been taken for poetic license.

Compare how different the ancestral lineage of Jesus is between Matthew 1:1-17 and Luke 3:23-38 after the line of King David. Notice how a few kings (e.g. Ahaziah, Joash, Amaziah) are omitted from Matthew's account. He probably wanted to show three sets of fourteen generations, 14 being seven doubled, for greater impact.

Second, not everyone had their life spans recorded in the text. Therefore, most efforts at dating the Bible start attach a date to some important event, and then count from there.

There is a problem with this approach. Our modern calendar system, the BC/AD system, is fixed on an important event - the birth of Jesus at 1 AD (due to a calculation error, the actual year of birth is thought to be around 4 BC).

The Old Testament doesn't have this kind of convenience, so an alternative is to link this into the records left by other people. We have previously discussed how Egyptian and Assyrian records did not sync up to the Biblical account, so the possibility of bias is one of the weaknesses of this approach.

The final reason why calculations can be off is due to certain Hebrew terms that are vague or don't translate well into English.

For example, the word for son, *ben*, can actually mean a son, grandson, or any other male descendant. The same is true with the word for daughter, *bath*. This is why there is still confusion whether Queen Athaliah of Judah was a sister (2 Kings 8:26, 2 Chronicles 22:2) or a daughter (2 Kings 8:18, 2 Chronicles 21:6) of King Ahab.

Having made all those caveats, let us explore how the chronology of Kings, as printed on the preceding page, came to be.

The generally accepted dating of the Kings of the Bible is mostly derived from the 1943 doctoral dissertation of Dr. Edwin R. Thiele, an American missionary, archaeologist, and a professor in Old Testament Studies. The dissertation, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, was later published as a book.

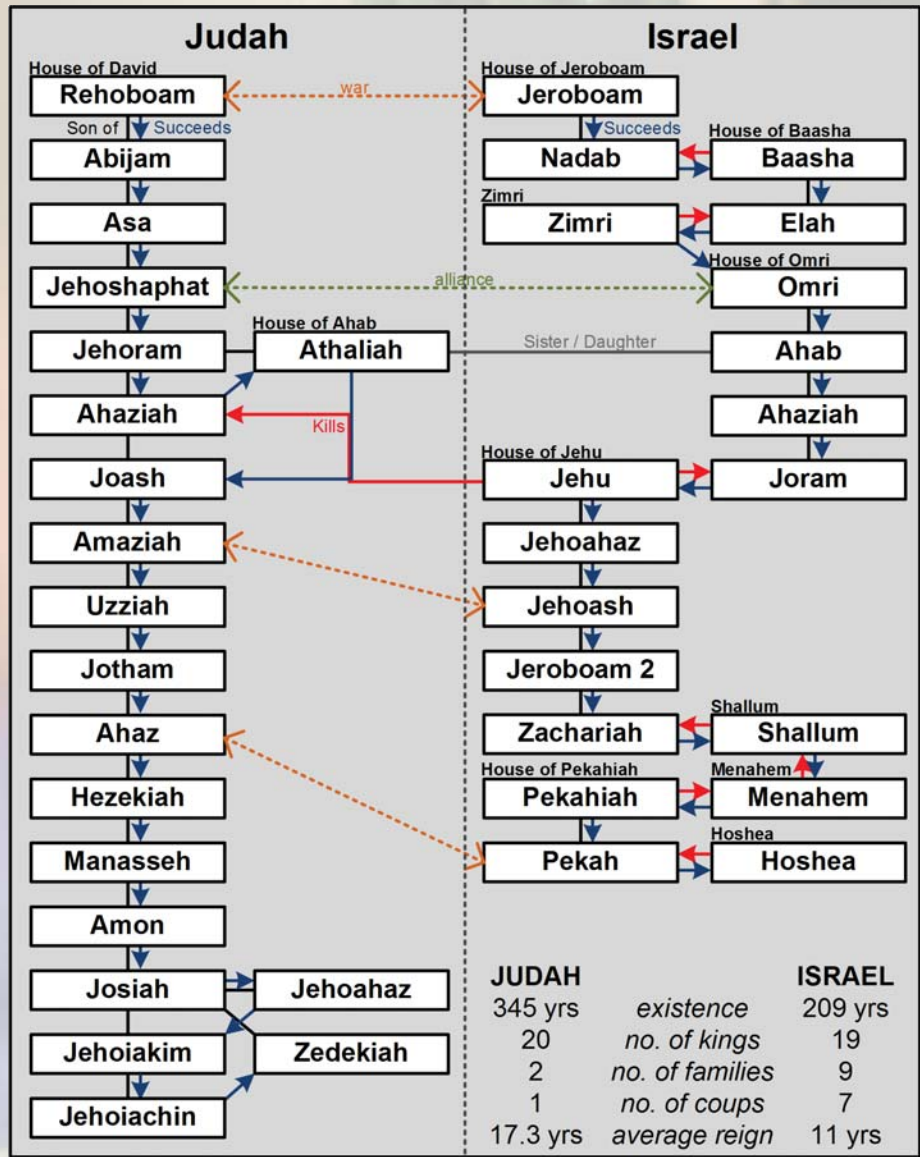
Thiele derived his chronology based on a series of reign lengths (King X ruled for Y years) and cross-references between the reigns of Judean and Israel kings (in the Xth year of King Y, Z came into power).

He noticed a peculiar problem when tabulating the dates. Starting from the reign of Asa, the cross-references were off by 1 year. And this increased by 1 after every king.

From this, Thiele concluded that Israel has been using a different dating system from Judah. Israel was using a system whose new year started in spring (*Nisan*), while Judah was using an autumn festival (*Tishri*). Adjusting for this gives a reasonable precision of six months.

Israel was also using non-accession years, meaning that if someone took over in the middle of the year, it's counted as his first year.

The system in Judah is different. Your first year is counted after the closest new year, so if someone took over at mid-year, that's his year zero. After the adjustments were applied, almost everything else fell neatly into place.



The exceptions were the reigns of Athaliah and Hezekiah. Thiele explained the discrepancy of Athaliah by conjecturing that the Israel system was adopted by Athaliah during that time. She was, after all, a princess of Israel. He was unable to explain a discrepancy in a cross-reference between King Hoshea (*Israel*) and King Hezekiah (*Judah*).

Others after him, such as Siegfried Horn, T. C. Mitchell and Kenneth Kitchen (whose chronology we used), built upon Thiele's work and corrected his Judah chronology.

It seems that Kitchen forgot that kings often had co-regencies with their sons. This means that both men were kings at the same time, and thus there was some overlap. This was true for

Uzziah and Jotham as well as Ahaz and Hezekiah.

How has the Thiele chronology held up over time? Pretty good, actually. There is definitive agreement for key dates (such as the fall of Israel at 721 BC). Excavated records from Egypt, Tyre, Assyria, and Babylon and reconstructed chronologies of *their* kings also match the Bible.

What's our moral lesson? Thiele used an approach that assumed the Bible is accurate, and it pretty much worked out for him. This is in contrast to an approach which assumes the Bible is not 100% correct, something used in a controversial theory called the *Documentary Hypothesis*, covered next issue!

Romans 8:28

BY MONA LI



To say that it has been an eventful year is an understatement. In my little over half a century of existence, year 2009 comes in at TOP 3 of my Most Eventful Year chart. The other one happened three decades ago, year 1979, when two great events occurred. First, I got married to Richard, who I fondly call Boss, and then gave birth to our firstborn son, Bonuy. His birth was a little miracle for us because of sere placenta, he was prematurely delivered. The obstetrician said that a few more days in my womb, we would have lost him. Indeed, all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28). Fast forward to present year...

After almost two years of waiting, my son Bonuy and daughter-in-law Kiam

presented us with our firstborn grandson, Kenzie Rhys, on June 23, 2009. An easy delivery was expected as Kiam had the physique for it as well as careful pre-natal monitoring. However, despite Kiam's great effort to have a normal delivery – the doctors gave her A++ for trying - Zie was brought into this world through caesarean section. We were so blessed that despite Kiam's considerable blood loss, her baseline blood count remained high and therefore blood transfusion was not needed. Moreover, Zie was a healthy 6.8 pounds baby. Again, Romans 8:28 came to mind.

On July 31, 2009, a series of events happened resulting in Bonuy's second chance in earthly life, and we thank God for His tender mercies and grace. Bonuy had secondary dengue and on 4th day of fever, he went into

dengue shock. The shock came at the right time and in the right place, the Emergency Room of Chong Hua Hospital with Dr. Ching Yee and my sister, Dr. Lydia Chang, in attendance. While the doctors and critical care team did everything they could to revive Bonuy whose blood pressure had dropped to 40/0, Kiam and I did what we believed was most important at the time - we prayed for help from our Lord Jesus Christ. With a few text messages sent to relatives and friends requesting for prayers, we soon had people everywhere bombarding heaven with prayers. Once again, we were extraordinarily blessed because Bonuy survived the ordeal and for the nth time, Romans 8:28 came to mind.

This year might have been full of trials for our family, but Christ with His infinite love and care, brought us through

all ordeals. We rejoice over the fact that 'all is well that ends well'. Sadly, hundreds of thousands of our countrymen do not have the same happy ending. Successive typhoons and weather disturbances resulting in massive flooding and landslides have wrecked havoc to lives and properties. To this day, my mind cannot shake off those heart breaking images of people clinging to dear life in the face of death, people trying to save what little was left of their material possessions. A sense of helplessness sweeps over me. While the *bayanihan* spirit that is so PINOY soothes like a balm to my bruised heart, I cannot help thinking of and indeed, dread what is yet to come. Natural calamities and the once-in-a-generation rainfall may be phenomena we have no control of, but we cannot attribute flooding to an act of God. In fact, if we were to face the truth squarely, we would see that flooding was an end result of men's relentless pursuit of progress with little regard for Mother Earth. We've heard of global warming as a result of greenhouse gas emission and thinning of the earth's ozone

layers. We've read about rising sea levels as a result of melting glaciers, hence the paradoxical desire to go on Alaskan cruises 'while it is still there.' Years ago, when I finished watching Al Gore's documentary 'The Inconvenient Truth', I promised to get myself involved in saving Mother Earth. How? Nothing too dramatic, just my own small ways.

As a third world country, plastic products are perhaps the cheapest source of packaging. From water to ice, from food bought at '*hupo-hupo*' *carenderia* to leftovers at posh restaurants, from things bought at sari-sari stores to groceries at supermarkets and even to keeping new furniture in its pristine state, we see plastic everywhere. After the floodwater receded, we saw tons of plastic products clogging the waterways. The sight made me even more resolved not to buy less than 5-gallon capacity bottled water, to use eco-bags for groceries, and to recycle the use of plastic products whenever possible. Moreover, I will try even harder to minimize the use of

electricity and gas.

Indeed, there are countless ways of helping preserve our fragile earth. In this age when information is just a 'mouse-click' away, the important question is: Are we really doing something about it? Remember the saying: the smallest good deed is better than the grandest good intention. Michael Jackson's song 'In Our Small Way' comes to mind and the refrain goes like this: 'Maybe you and I can't do great things. We may not change the world in one day but we can still change some things TODAY, in our small way.'

In the aftermath of the typhoons that battered Luzon, as a member of an organization which received relief goods for the victims, I was humbled by the spontaneous giving of people in all walks of life. There was no big or small donation, only donors with BIG hearts. Again, Roman 8:28 came to mind. It is my fervent hope that these events, tragic though they were, would stir us into becoming better stewards to God's beautiful world. Amen and amen.

玻璃海

陳終道 牧師



這是年老的使徒約翰為神國的道受苦難中，得著神啟示而寫給眾教會的一篇珍貴的信息(啟1:9)，以下是他領受的啟示與異象：「我看見彷彿有玻璃海，其中有火攪雜。又看見那些勝了獸和獸的像，並牠名字數目的人，都站在玻璃海上，拿著神的琴，唱神僕人摩西的歌，和羔羊的歌，說：主神 - 全能者啊，你的作為大哉！奇哉！萬世[或譯：國]之王啊，你的道途義哉！誠哉！」啟示錄15:2-3

海象徵甚麼？

海常是苦難和不安的象徵，海水是從來都不會平靜的。縱使表面上看來海不揚波，其實並非真正平靜。因為：①地球與月亮的引力，使地球上的海水每早晚有潮漲潮退，使海水蕩漾不息。②海底有不少高山深谷，大山洞，地球單單自轉就可使海水不斷的有暗流或漩渦，激浪等。③地震或颶風都會引起狂濤巨浪。④四季氣候之寒暑，氣流，雨雪，以及山川，江河的水流使海不平靜。⑤其他人為的因素.....面對無邊無際的汪洋大海，人生常感到無助，

迷茫，那裡可以有安詳平穩呢？

另一方面，海卻象徵偉大無比，廣闊無邊。無限量的豐富寶藏，在柔弱中無視於一切刀劍鎗砲，甚至高山，島嶼都可以從容吞噬。無論平靜或洶湧的海，都把人顯得如滄海一粟！

神的寶座與玻璃海

「玻璃海」聖經中的啟示錄告訴我們，有一種非常穩定的海叫做玻璃海。例如：①啟四6「寶座前好像一個玻璃海，如同水晶。」②啟十五2上「我看見彷彿有玻璃海，其中有火攪雜」。③啟十五2下-3「勝了獸和獸的像，並他名字數目的人，都站在玻璃海上，拿著神的琴，唱神僕人摩西的歌和羔羊的歌...」（參啟廿一18,21,廿二1）。

聖經又告訴我們，在新天新地裡不再有海(啟廿一1)，但在神寶座前四周卻有玻璃海，那玻璃海是光耀穩定的，有的不是水浪或風浪，而是能把坐在寶座上的主神的榮耀，不斷的折射映照，發出美妙

光輝，如波似浪，在柔和中有無限的威榮，一望無際，光波的閃動，加上許多得勝者「站在玻璃海上」本句證明玻璃海不是虛幻的，而是實有，彈琴唱歌，他們美妙詳和的歌聲，動盪了屬天的聲波，與光浪一齊繞揚輝耀，這種景象與地上可怕的大地震，大海嘯相比，正是天堂與地獄的另一種對照。

誰能站在玻璃海上？

在這麼明顯的對比中，誰可以站在神寶座前玻璃海上？就是「那些勝了獸和獸的像，並他名字數目的人」（啟十五2上）。這玻璃海既明如水晶，又有最高級的天使 - 四活物與二十四位長老，圍繞在寶座周圍(啟四4-11)，這樣，那些可以站在玻璃海上唱歌的人，也必然是明淨通透的人了。在明如水晶的玻璃海上，若有人是不明淨也不折光，就會變成一個黑影，用不著天使把他趕走，也必無地自容了！祂卻使我們聖潔無瑕(參弗1:4-6)。

注意：在啟示錄七章，即上文羔羊揭開第七印與吹第一號

之間,也有插入的異象。其後半章的異象,有無數被羔羊血洗淨的人,在神寶座周圍讚美神的救恩;與本處的得勝者讚美神的公義,此唱彼和,異曲同工。雖未必是同一群人,但都必然是在神寶座周圍的人。而本處既用玻璃海形容神寶座坐落之處,除榮耀之外,更有無比寬廣的意義。所以這些得勝者的數目,必然不少,你我可能有分。

誰是勝過獸的得勝者?

勝過獸的得勝者,雖按上下文似偏向指大災難中的得勝者,但啟十五章仍在吹七號至倒七碗之插入的異象。這些異象所啟示的人與事,未必限於大災難期間中的人,也未必照七印的次序發生。在早期教會的使徒約翰曾說:「那敵基督要來」,同時又說:「現在已經有好些敵基督者已經出來了」(約壹二18)。可見雖然「那敵基督」在大災難中才出現,但在初期教會中,已有「好些敵基督者」出現了。照樣,那海中上來的「獸」,雖在啟十三章才出現,並非說那獸和獸的類屬到啟十三章才存在,他們早在使徒時期已經存在了。所以在此勝了獸的人也不限於災期中的得勝者。下文啟十五3說他們「唱神僕人摩西和羔羊的歌」,證明這些人中包括舊約與新約各時代的得勝者。敵擋神的黑暗權勢魔鬼,利用各種不同時代之潮流與途徑出現,但其最終的目相同,就是使

人更大膽的偏離神,更高抬自我,更多的異教邪說,使多人迷失了人生的方向!

從短暫的今天到永恆的明天

玻璃海最大的特點是:「如同水晶」(啟四6),「如同明淨的玻璃」(啟廿一18),自然形成榮光閃耀的光海,皆因那坐在寶座上的神發出的榮光,有互相反照的結果。每個得勝者必然曾被這位生命之主的真光一再照耀過。合主心意的大衛說:「在你的光中,我們必得見光」(詩卅六9)。我們得救,是因聖靈藉福音真光照明我們的心眼,我們要在靈命上不斷長進,同樣要靠聖靈的光照,才不會停滯在自滿自是圈子裡。

浪子回頭之前先有內心的「醒悟」(路十五17)。這種醒悟是聖靈光照人的內心的效果;反之,當時的宗教領袖,在安息日利用一個枯手病人窺探耶穌是否在安息日治病。結果,病人得醫治,他們竟因此要「除滅耶穌」(可三1-6)。他們認為別人在安息日醫病是犯安息日,竟不覺自己在安息日設計謀害人才真正犯了安息日。因為他不接受聖靈光照,瞎了心眼,看不見自己的醜惡。但那些不斷在神的光中看見自己敗壞,軟弱,而不斷在光明中長進的人,像苦海中的燈塔,不斷照明苦海中的航行者。指出人生的正確方向。有一天,他會成為站天上玻璃海上的得勝者。「今天」,他們為天父

的旨意所受各種苦難和波折,會成為「明天」在天上的樂曲!

總結

今世的學術,可以單憑理性,聰明學習,但明白聖經必須靠聖靈的啟迪與教導。大衛「在你的光中,我們必得見光」,這是他從靈命體驗中得到的結論。就像人若沒有鏡子不能看見自己的面貌那樣,只有聖靈的光照,能使人內心有真正的醒悟。大衛又說:「你的話是我腳前的燈,是我路上的光」(詩一一九105)。神的話也可以成為我們腳前燈,路上光嗎?注意,這句話已經顯出說話的人是願按神的話的光亮而行的人,是已經在心靈中獲得神的話語光照的人。

你我願常從神的話語得著光照嗎?要常提醒自己願意行在祂的光中,又經常學習把神的話存在心中,常常反覆思想,就像神在你我心中的「聖所」安置一盞明燈,可以在心中不斷發出光亮,不斷潔淨,照耀我們的心,使我們從心靈深處有悟,靈命就會隨著歲月一同長進,有一天,我們可以帶著明如同水晶的心靈,安然見主,甚至可以站寶座前的玻璃海,同唱羔羊的歌呢!唱摩西歌的是舊約信徒(參出15章)唱羔羊歌的是新約信徒(參約1:29)。





BY RICHARD JOSEPH LI



It has been three months since “IT” happened to me. I have been so busy lately that I never really had a chance to think about “IT”. “IT” was a life threatening event. “IT” was what many people would call as a life changing moment and because of “IT”, life is so much sweeter and so much more meaningful now. As a result, it has made me work harder than before, living life to the fullest and if given the opportunity, to find out why “IT” happened to me in the first place.

“IT” was what medical professionals would call D.S.S. or Dengue Shock Syndrome. According to Mr. Google, D.S.S. happens to only 5 – 15% of the people with dengue. Moreover, mortality rate can go as high as 44% for patients with D.S.S.

Now that I finally have the time to tell you my story, I do this with a grateful heart and a sincere hope that it will convey to you just how great God is. I have learned three important things from this experience. First, that God's timing is perfect. I say this because it was not by accident that I survived. On the fourth day of fever, I took sweet time in going to the hospital for CBC

exam. When the result came out, Mama also took her sweet time in getting the result and when it was decided that I should be admitted to the hospital, it was already 2:00 p.m. Cebu is a small city. It would normally take just twenty minutes for me and my wife Kiam to travel from the house to the hospital. However, on that particular day, the traffic was terrible. In fact, I remember complaining to Kiam why traffic was so bad along Barracks Street. There were people putting up cable wires on the road for a traffic light under the bridge and they had to do it during day time. Little did I know that the traffic would later be a contributing factor in saving my life.

An hour after we left the house, we finally reached the hospital. As usual, I had to be admitted through the emergency room. It was at the ER when two important things happened which actually saved me. First, both primary doctors were in the hospital at that time. Dr. Ching Yee, a hematologist, was at the hospital visiting her ailing father. My auntie, Dr. Lydia Chang, was waiting at the ER with my mom, who is also known as MD Mona (Murag Doctor). It was by all

accounts, an ordinary and normal admission. I remember waiting for the Orderly personnel to wheel me up to my room and rest. Like the traffic, the orderly took so long that Dr. Yee decided to come down at the ER to check on me.

At that moment, all my vital signs were normal. They even decided to repeat the blood test next morning. Suddenly, I felt dizzy, and then I wanted to throw up. I told Auntie Lydia how I felt. She immediately asked the nurse to check on my pulse and blood pressure. It went from 120/80 to 90/60 in a few seconds. After that... chaos erupted for my BP dropped even further from 90/60 to 40/0. Yes, you read it right. Forty over zero. That simply means BP can't be heard but only felt through the pulse. I was rushed to the critical care unit in the E.R. which was thankfully just a few feet away.

It was there when everything that had happened earlier made sense. The sweet times we took in blood testing and getting the result, the monstrous traffic, the busy orderly, the late transport to the room and the fact that the doctors

were all there. It was a miracle! God had saved my life through little events that when added up, literally made all the difference in the world. Who would have known? Who would have guessed? How great is our God!

The second thing I experienced that helped me through those dreadful days was the fact that God had sent angels to lift up my spirit while I was confined at the hospital. My angels didn't have wings nor did they have halos on top of their heads. They didn't come to me surrounded by shining light. They came in the form of family members and friends, doctors and pastors, and loved ones.

When I was at the ICU, I realized how close I was to being gone and that death was literally at the doorstep. I felt so sad and scared knowing that it wasn't over yet. When Ninang Livian came to the ICU, I was very touched for she just came back from a trip abroad. Her prayer was so powerful that it gave me strength and peace. Another angel was in the person of Pastor Eric Chan. You see, we are what you would consider as acquaintances. We say hi and hello in the halls of our church but we were never really close. However, he did one thing I never expected him to do and that was to visit and to pray for me, not just once but almost daily during my confinement. That kind of devotion moved me and I am very grateful to Pastor Eric Chan. I thank God for placing people like him in the service of our church

and community.

The third thing I learned is never to underestimate the power of prayer. My mom once said that a person can never have too much of prayers. Amen to that. During that crucial time, all we could do was to pray. I thank God for surrounding me with prayer warriors. From my wife Kiam who prayed for me all night long that first day, to my parents who prayed unceasingly, to families and friends, to Pastor Ed and Irish Borja who led their community in Tacloban City to pray for me after learning of my D.S.S. from Tita Lynn Lopez, mother of my business partner Paj who lives in Manila. Indeed, great is the power of love and prayers.

I remember Auntie Lydia saying that everything that could have gone wrong with D.S.S. patients had actually happened to me. Despite blood transfusions, platelet count was erratic and went up and down like mountain range. There was bleeding and my internal organs were slightly affected. It was scary and it was hard to understand the tiredness I felt. Love and prayers carried me through. At the end of the day, I bring with me a thankful heart. I am thankful to all those who in one way or another cared for me. Thankful because God had given me a second chance to live.

People asked me if I saw white light at the time doctors were reviving me. They asked me if my life flashed back like what you see in the movies. I tell you, it

happened so fast that the only thought I had was of my wife, my one month old son Kenzie and of my immediate family whom I thought I would never see again.

One doesn't need a life threatening experience to be thankful of the things God has done for a person's life. One doesn't need "IT" to appreciate His goodness and mercy. Take it from me. Be thankful now and not any later. Make the most because life is short and when the goings get hard, always remember that "I can do all things, through Him who gives me strength." (Philippians 4:13).

Thank you so much for your time. Thank you for all your prayers. Thank you God for making "IT" happened to me and I thank the church for the support and prayers and this chance to share my story.

It has been a tough and challenging year for me. At the end of it all, I looked back and realized that although I almost lost my life, I am now blessed with a beautiful son Zie. I looked back and realized that I am doubly blessed to have married a faithful and patient wife Kiam who makes me strong. Lastly, that I am surrounded by the love of a family who is there for me at all times, a family where the love of God always comes first, a love where hopes spring eternal. Indeed, life has become so much sweeter because of "IT" and so much more meaningful because of love.

無限的愛

小山



無限的愛詩歌之作者林和成弟兄作見證解釋他為何殘而不廢。

他說：有慈濟的人來問我，許多殘障的人消沈頹喪；為何我在成為輪椅傷殘人士之後能重新站起來？那天我剛好要在「有情天音樂世家」的「本土詩歌異象音樂會」中分享見證一首詩歌。我就請他們來聽。沒想到他們真的來了，在音樂會中還特別為我獻花攝影。

音樂會滿有神的同在，感謝神使用我向慈濟的人作美好的見證！哈利路阿！是神無限的愛使我殘而不廢！

無限的愛

主禱是我的生命，
風雨同心逗陣走；
夢中有禱甲阮來作伴，
腳步有禱的引導。
感謝禱對阮的愛，
給我機會對頭來；
天頂白雪伴阮走天涯，
天使永遠和我同在；

我欲大聲唱乎人知，
耶和華有無限的愛；
世間的人攏來敬拜，
耶和華是完全的愛。
主耶穌有無限的愛

一. 主耶穌愛罪人

在上帝的救贖計劃中，在祂所定的時候，主耶穌為不敬虔的罪人死。主耶穌基督的愛是上帝白白賞賜的恩典，而不是從人已有的本性找到的。事實上，人還犯罪作惡的時候，主就為罪人捨命。

我們不是義人或是好人，而只是罪人，主耶穌在我們還是罪人的時候就為我們死了！主耶穌的愛就在此顯明了！

二. 主耶穌有莫測的愛

以弗所書 3:18 說：「能以和眾聖徒一同明白基督的愛，是何等長闊高深。」

1. 長 - 主耶穌的愛是永

遠無止息，意思是說主的愛是永永遠遠；永沒止息。因為祂不停止愛世人；對重生得救的基督徒更是直到永世愛他們。

2. 闊 - 約 3:16 說：「神愛世人甚至將祂的獨生子賜給他們，叫一切信祂的不至滅亡，反得永生。」這是聖經中最被人熟念的經節，因為這經文將福音很清楚地講明。世人就是全人類，上帝沒有愛人的罪或是世界邪惡的制度；但祂愛世人，不願一個人沉淪。

這不是說每個人都得救，而是說凡相信主耶穌的人，就是接受祂做救主和生命主的人就不至滅亡反得永生。是的，主耶穌的愛達到全世界全人類；是極其廣闊的。

3. 高 - 弗 1:6 說：「祂又叫我們和基督耶穌一同復活，一同坐在天

上。」主耶穌現在坐在上帝右邊時刻為我們代求。天上就是主耶穌的居所；這不是我們看到的天空，也不是太空人升到的星際第二層天，而是第三層天，三位一體慈愛神的居所，就是最高的地方。

4. 深 – 在我們還沒有相信主耶穌的時候；我們墜落在罪惡的深坑。主耶穌為我們來到這深坑捨命，釘死十字架上，流出寶血來救贖我們；使我們不沉淪在地獄黑暗的深坑！

三. 主耶穌愛祂的門徒

約 13:1 說：「逾越節以前，耶穌知道自己離世歸父的時候到了；祂既然愛世間屬自己的人，就愛他們到底。」就是愛祂的門徒到底。

主耶穌既知道祂要離世到天父那裡去，就起來為門徒洗腳，祂洗完他們的腳就穿上衣服坐下問門徒：“我向你們做的，你們明白嗎？”約 13:13-14 說：「你們稱呼我夫子，稱呼我主，你們說得不錯！我本來是。我是你們的主，你們的夫子，尚且洗你們的腳，你們也當彼此洗腳。」彼此洗腳的意

思就是彼此服事。基督徒應樂意服事主裡的弟兄，謙卑地事奉他們。主耶穌快要離世的時還作榜樣教導門徒。實在是愛門徒到底。

四. 主耶穌愛自己的母親

主耶穌雖然釘在十字架上，在極其痛苦的時候仍然帶著慈愛的心來對待他人；看到自己的母親和祂所愛的門徒約翰；就將約翰介紹給母親；就是要約翰以後以兒子的本份來奉養母親。約翰順服主，就將主的母親接到自己的家中奉養她。

五. 主耶穌愛祂的仇敵

在 1947 年，Corrie Ten Boon 來到德國慕尼黑 (Munich) 一個教會講上帝的赦免。她說：“當我們承認我們的罪的時候，上帝就將我們的罪投在最深的海洋去。”

散會後她看到一個禿子，身穿灰色的外衣，手拿著赤色的帽子走到她的面前，伸出手來對她說：“朋友，很好的信息，知道照你所說的，我們的罪被投在深海真好。”又繼續地說，“戰後不久我成為一個基督徒，上帝已赦免我的罪，但未能從你口中聽到你赦免我，朋友，

妳肯赦免我嗎？”在一剎那間，我的腦海浮出他是 Ravenbruck，集中營中最殘忍和兇惡的守衛。但主說：

“你們要饒恕人，就必蒙饒恕。”赦免不是情感的事，而是意志的行動，我就伸出手來對他說：“弟兄，我赦免你，我完全地赦免你了。”我帶眼淚與他握手。然而我體會到，這不是我的愛心乃是上帝的作為。

主耶穌被釘的地方叫各各他，這在拉丁文意思是髑髏地。當下有二個強盜，一個在左，一個在右，與主同釘十字架，應驗先知以賽亞 53:12 的預言「主死的時候，與罪犯同釘在十字架上」，主用祂的慈悲憐憫說：“父阿，赦免他們，因為他們所做的他們不曉得。”這裡的他們包括那些猶太人的宗教領袖，就是祭司長，長老，文士；不敢仗義執言的彼拉多；猶太的眾人回答彼拉多說：“祂的血歸到我和我們的子孫；和釘主在十字架的羅馬兵丁。”我們看到主耶穌愛祂的仇敵。然而五百萬猶太人被納粹 (Nazi) 德國殺死了；應驗了他們回答巡撫彼拉多的話。

是的，主耶穌有無限的愛！

Get Real in Baguio

BY ANN MARIE SU



Last March, I got an invitation from FCCF (Filipino-Chinese Christian Foundation) to be one of the counsellors for the upcoming Summer Youth Conference to be held on May 25-29, 2009 at Hotel Supreme, Baguio City.

I was excited. However, questions came rushing into my mind, i.e., Could my body make it the whole week? Wouldn't I be stressed out? What if all of a sudden I would have breathing problems? And so on and so forth... But I prayed and overcame my doubts and fears. I told the Lord that as long as I am well, I will do what I could to serve and honor Him. I will never allow my physical condition to hinder me from doing so. And as long as He will let me, I will do it! I finally set my heart and mind on it, even forgoing the Bethany teacher's trip to Bantayan. Everything turned out fine despite one little "trial" which was also resolved easily.

May 24, 2009, about

twentysome youth flew to Manila and stayed for the night at BSOP. The following day, we left at 6:30am for the 7-hour drive to Baguio. Upon arrival, lunch was ready. Then, we checked in and rested for a while before the Opening Ceremony at 3:45pm.

There were several old faces and a lot of new ones. The theme for this year is **GET REAL** based on 2 Corinthians 13:5 & 8, "*Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize that about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you. For we cannot do anything against the truth, but for the truth.*" Thank God for blessing us with two very dynamic speakers, Rev. Stephen Tan and Jonathan Edwards Banzuelo. They shared so many helpful insights and personal testimonies which were quite relevant for the youth.

One of them expounded on three chapters from the Book of Ecclesiastes. First, **life is**

meaningless apart from God (Ch 2). Second, **enjoy life as God meant it** (Ch 9). Third, **balancing life in the fear of the Lord** (Ch 12).

There was also a two-session seminar on Apologetics by Ptr. Jun Diverte. Somehow, I could feel the Holy Spirit working especially seeing how each of the messages, songs, special presentations and devotionals seem to connect to each other.

But to top all these, I would like to share how God manifested His love and faithfulness to me while I was there.

As per my doctor's advice, I have to put on my mask while in the airport, plane and bus. I was quite anxious about it, thinking I will have a hard time eating, especially with the long drive. But then God is good! He allowed me to take quick bites whenever we made stopovers. Moreover, I did not really feel any hunger or thirst during the ride. This was rather a miracle,

considering I have a hyperacidic tummy.

Finally, we arrived in Baguio where I could indulge my nose and lungs with fresh cool air. When I went up to my room, lo and behold, there was no aircon! Strange? NO! God prepared it for me – that benefited me much – good ventilation.

Another amazing thing He did was regarding my place at the session hall. I never told the organizers about my case. But my doctor did advise me to sit in the very front or back of the room, never in the middle. I wanted to request for it but I did not. He did it for me – we had a seat plan and when I looked, my name was posted at the very last row, where I should sit. Presto! I had all the free space at the back.

The weather up there was cold and it was rainy and somehow more and more people were coughing and sneezing. Yet, our loving God has kept me safe in His loving arms.

We also had a half day city tour on our last day, May 28. Then, we had the altar call, testimony and the closing ceremony on that same day. The following day, by 9:30am, we headed down for Manila. Everyone came home to Cebu safe and sound by 9:20pm. Thanks be to God who always keeps



watch over us.

I had a deep refreshing sleep after the long trip. I woke up with a text message on my cellphone which read, "Study shows that the swine flu virus (H1N1 influenza A) is acquired through air. Ecologists say that the best way to clean the air is through rain. You wonder why there is rain this summer? Now you know.

Isn't He wonderful?" Indeed He is – He knew I was going to be in Baguio and He made it rain there every day.

Thinking about all these makes me want to just praise the Lord. That is why you are reading this. Let us rejoice in Him altogether. **Hallelujah Praise the Lord!!!**



降生節與耶穌

邵晨光博士



降生節是個很重要的日子，在菲律賓的九月已經開始聽得到降生節的樂曲，來到十一月城市處處更是充滿了節日的氛氳。商店裡的節日禮品琳瑯滿目，人行馬路上購物人群來往絡繹不絕，突顯降生節喜慶的主角耶穌。

馬槽的耶穌

每逢降生節，我們經常注目重視馬槽裡的耶穌。是的，祂降生在世界，給人類帶來希望，尤其是給予在羅馬統治下的猶太人，有得蒙救贖的盼望。馬槽的耶穌雖有牛羊喧囂的聲音，卻安睡在上帝為祂預備的馬槽中。

在後現代化的今天，我們面對接踵而至的天災人禍，馬槽的耶穌賜給我們明天的盼望是一份平安的禮物。耶穌的降生使人與人和好，也使人與上帝和好。耶穌在馬槽裡的那份安穩平靜，是今日我們每人所必須學習的，讓我們也可以在不平靜的環境中靠著主的恩典，在上帝的懷抱中安穩過日子。

猶太人的王

「猶太人的王在哪裡？」此

片語，第一次出現在東方博士特地來耶路撒冷朝拜祂。聽到消息的希律王，為何那麼緊張呢？原來希律王不是猶太人，他心中十分懼怕有一位王要興起，並取代他。他的心態與來朝見耶穌的博士非常地不一樣：他驚慌失措地探聽猶太人的王之消息；而博士卻帶上當時最貴重的黃金、乳香、沒藥為禮物，從東方千里迢迢來到耶路撒冷朝見猶太人的王。

在這降生節裡，我們的重點在那裡呢？是忙亂勞碌，毫無目的的打發在世的日子，還是以朝見猶太人的王之心態，預備禮物迎見猶太人的王呢？

「猶太人的王」，此片語在福音書中再次出現是在耶穌被釘的十字架上。對敵人來說，雖然含有嘲諷的意思，但在信主的人來看，卻是一個很重要的提醒。耶穌實實在在是猶太人的王，祂為人類犧牲了生命，成為代罪的羔羊，做「耶和華的僕人」，為人類完成了救恩！

我們若要做王的兒女，就必須有肯犧牲自我的精神，與

耶穌同釘十字架，因為耶穌偉大的愛，正是在於祂肯為人類把自己的生命傾倒。在這降生節期，我們可否願意為主原故倒空自己，讓耶穌在我們生命中居首位，並傳揚祂救贖人類的福音？！

救主的耶穌

「耶穌」名字的意思，就是「將自己的百姓從罪惡中拯救出來」。因為祂的鞭傷，我們得到醫治；因為祂的降生，我們得到一份珍貴的禮物。在這感恩的佳節裡，我們應當四處傳揚耶穌拯救世人的好消息，把我們的家人、朋友、同事等，都帶到以耶穌為王的國度裡，同享天國福音的好處。

結語

在這降生節，願我們效法馬槽裡的耶穌，在不安寧的世代中享受平安。願我們天天迎接猶太人的主，把最好的禮物獻給祂。為了祂在十架上的救恩，我們也肯自我犧牲。願把救主耶穌的好消息廣傳於菲律賓，亞洲，至全地極！



When Your Fire Flickers

BY PTR. ROSALINE LIM



The time will come when we get tired or grow weary/cold in our service and ministry. While we would never lose our salvation, it is a possibility for our spiritual passion to cool or become lukewarm.

Every Christian goes through such stage. Timothy, a young pastor who went with Paul in some of his missionary trips, experienced the same. That is why Paul wrote to him and encouraged him using his mother Eunice and grandmother Lois as a reminder of their faith in Christ Jesus.

It is normal for a Christian to experience spiritual "cooling". Oftentimes, it starts when tragedy, hurts or disappointments distract our attention. Instead of crying out to the Lord and finding shelter and comfort in Him, we slowly stop reading the Bible. The Word of God is like wood in a fireplace: the flame is kept alive only when there are logs to burn. As less time is spent in Scripture reading, other aspects of our relationship with God are affected, e.g., church attendance diminishes, giving becomes irregular, lots of excuses not to attend fellowships ; and prayer--which seems increasingly stale--is used only for emergencies.

No longer willing to stand up for what we once reckoned/believe is important, we soon start to compromise, e.g., "*Bahala na oi*, I

don't care anymore." We should remember that God put us in this position to hold responsibility, accomplish His plans & be accountable towards each other in what he entrusted us until He comes. Sadly, we are more afraid of what people might or would think & say of us rather than what God would think & do to us. We may feel overwhelmed by guilt and become defensive about the way we are living. Finally, the joy, contentment, and peace from God are replaced by worry, doubt, and fear.

A believer who allows himself to drift will miss out on the joy and fulfilment of a rich relationship with the Lord. It's ok to take a break. We need rest – even robots need to rest or become overloaded/malfunction. Jesus even asked His disciples to bring him to the other side of the Sea of Galilee that He may take some rest-



" it only takes a spark ... pass it on..."

which shows His true humanity. After that rest or break , we should continue to serve Him in any way we can. Let us not use the tiredness, disappointments, or hurts as excuses not to serve anymore – easier said than done.

Man's response to God's calling: "Thank you for calling Mr./Ms. so & so. If you know the local number of the person you are calling, please enter it now. You can also press 1 for business meetings, 2 for golf or lunch dates, 3 for business travel, 4 for night outs, and if you can't reach them, please try your call again later. Thank you-goodbye."

God's response to men's calling: "Thank you for calling Me – this is God. How may I help you?"

Being a Christian is not contractual – it is a lifetime commitment with God. God never told us, "Ok our relationship or your being a Christian will expire in 10 years or in 2019 – I need a break from you & would just come back to you for renewal or whenever I feel like it."

Think back. Is your enthusiasm about the things of God stronger than ever before? Or has it faded away over time? If your fire needs to be fuelled up, ask the Holy Spirit to show you how. Ask God for help to let go of whatever is holding you back!

Keep the faith!

聖誕節的感遇

白鴿



光陰似梭，如白駒過隙，一年一度的聖誕佳節即將來臨了。世界上每一個角落都在欣悅地迎迓這個節日！但是我們不是單單地期待這個佳節。我們乃是在追溯主耶穌降生的緣由？聖經告訴我們說：祂來乃是要將百姓從罪惡中拯救出來。這救贖的計畫，是萬古以先預定的。到了時期，祂便來履行這神聖的救贖任務。其次，主耶穌來到世上，是要向世人彰顯神無比的愛。約翰福音一章十八節告訴我們說：「從來沒有人看見神，只有在父懷裡的獨生子將祂表明出來。」主耶穌是要表明神的榮耀，神的權柄。大衛也曾在詩篇裡表明說：「諸天述說神的榮耀。穹蒼傳揚祂的手段。」（詩19:1）。由此看來，整個宇宙，都在彰顯神的作為及權柄。因而在人的心目中，神是公義的，威嚴的，可畏的。然而對於神的愛，無比的愛，人們或許只有一知半解。因此主耶穌來到世上，將神的愛表明完完全全。使徒保羅說：「因我們還在軟弱的時候，基督就按所定的日期為罪人死。為義人死，是少數有的，為仁人死，或者有敢作的。惟有基督在我們還作罪人的時候為我們死，神的愛就在此向我們顯明了。」（羅5:6-8）

主耶穌是為罪人來到世上，世人卻不接待祂。祂降生在伯利恆，客店竟沒有住宿的地方。當

祂長大後，回到拿撒勒傳福音，祂家鄉的人，不但不接待祂，卻將祂從山上推下去。主耶穌一生被人們厭棄，拒絕，不接待。惟祂是為了表明神的愛而容忍著。

所以主耶穌勸勉祂的門徒說：「人接待你們，就是接待我，接待我，就是接待那差我來的。人因為先知的名接待先知，必得先知所得的賞賜。人因義人的名接待義人，必得義人所得的賞賜。無論何人，因為門徒的名，只把一杯涼水給這小子裡的一個喝，我實在告訴你們，這人不能不得賞賜。」（太10:40-42）

所以，使徒彼得勸勉我們說：「最要緊的是彼此切實相愛。因為愛能遮掩許多的罪。你們要互相款待，不發怨言。各人要照所得的恩賜彼此服事，作神百般恩賜的好管家。」（彼前4:8-10）。因為我們已經是基督徒，有主的生命，彼此感情要融合和睦，和平共處，讓聖靈掌管，使弟兄姊妹之間，過著和藹親切的屬靈團契生活。所以在彼此相愛之間，就不致發現彼此嫉忌，紛爭的事端，且能化戈為玉帛。進一步便能互相服侍。就是互相款待。是甘心樂意而不發怨言，且不是半途而廢。主耶穌說：「我來不是被人服侍，乃是要服侍人，並且要捨命作多人的贖價。」（太20:28）。故此，我們的人生，應該

是以「服務人群」為目的。所以我們身為基督徒，更應該彼此服侍。你關心別人，別人也照樣的關心你。你若樂意幫助別人，別人也照樣甘心幫助你。你若不厭棄別人的貧賤，別人將會敬重你。並且更能促進益人榮神的標率。

當時使徒保羅知悉哥林多教會出現了分門結黨，不道德的行為，訴訟的事件，妄用主的晚餐，有關主耶穌復活的異端。甚至那些知識份子，倨傲傍視，目空一切。用哲理解釋基督教真理，演成教會的混亂。

因此，使徒保羅寫信給哥林多教會，提出有三種人：一種是屬肉體的，一種是屬血氣的，另一種是屬靈的。這三種人，且讓審慎互相觀摩：

一、屬肉體的人：屬肉體的人，雖然已經受浸皈依基督，但在靈性上卻是失敗的基督徒，他的行為能力，單憑自己的理智與才幹，執行屬靈的事工。使徒保羅說：「他們好像嬰孩一樣，需要餵奶。」他內心涵蓄著嫉妒紛爭。並且竟懵懂無慮地坐在生命的寶座上，無異促基督退讓寶座。他的心迹是唯我獨尊。他竟抹煞神的話語。顯而易見，現出種種敗壞的現象。例如，他竟不知自己是屬於屬靈的產業，他還不領悟聖經的真理，有時依舊在

批評論斷，無中生有，製造事端，推波助瀾，使其他會友冷淡退縮，使福音工作遭受損害。他不清楚神是有恩慈，有憐憫，有赦免的大能。他的靈性是起伏不定的。他雖然有意要做好，卻是毫無辦法做出來。照樣，他雜亂的行為，竟然不知悔悟向神支取能力，剷除敗壞的途徑。這樣的人，唯有曾被聖靈充滿的人，為他禱告，給他指點，輔導，使他感悟改過。

二. 屬血氣的人：使徒保羅說：「然而屬血氣的人不領會神聖靈的事，反倒以愚拙。並且不能知道，因為這些事惟有屬靈的人才能看透。」(林前2:14)。屬血氣的人，未必是清楚得救的人。是未具有基督徒品格的人。他的個性是倨傲傍視，目空一切。他或許是生長在基督徒的家庭裡；也許是得救後未有追究聖經真理的人。對於聖經及宗教知識淺陋，便自持基督徒的神態，以非分的慾望，在教會裡爭取地位及權勢。他在事奉及禱告只是表面化，極盡賣弄手腕，以混水摸魚的技倆，挑唆離間，結黨紛爭，使教會陷入混亂。他這種高視闊步的姿勢，竟不知是在辱沒神的榮耀，應及時悔恨改過。然而對待這種人，正如使徒保羅說：「然而主的僕人，不可爭競，只要溫溫和和的待眾人，善於教導，存心忍耐，用溫柔勸戒那抵擋的人，或者神給他們悔改的心，可以明白真道，叫他們這已經被魔鬼任意擄去的，可以醒悟，脫離牠的網羅。」(提後2:24-26)。

有一個故事：曾有一位熱心事奉主的人，當他臥病在病榻上，悔悟他在事奉聖工上有所虧負，唉歎怨恨。他的好友知悉，便來探望並安慰他說：「你已經為主的緣故，付出了代價，甚至曾將你的產業奉獻給教會，為何還感到

痛苦呢？」他回答說：「哎！這一切都有私心！」他的好友接著說：「但是你也曾為主救了不少靈魂啊！」他還是搖頭說：「正是我在那些事工上，依然是為自己謀取利益，只有極少部份，才是為愛人，愛神而服事啊！」他的好友連續越多的稱許，他越發感到愧對良心。

所以，我們在事奉的聖工上，應當要懷著戰戰兢兢的心志。要有清潔的心和純一的志向。所有一舉一動必須及時對付，以免後悔莫及。

三. 屬靈的人：使徒保羅說：「屬靈的人能看透萬事，卻沒有一人能看透他。誰曾知道主的心去教導他呢。但我們是有基督的心了。」(林前2:15)。屬靈的人，是遵循聖靈的管治，他的一切設施，都是依賴聖靈而得到能力的。基督在他生命寶座上，掌管一切活動。結果他所作所為，都能合乎神的旨意。顯揚了仁愛，喜樂，和平，忍耐，恩慈，信實和良善果子。他有一個謙恭且樂意事奉神的胸臆。若教會裡的聖工，有需要他協助，他會很熱誠地接受。他的心願，惟有倚靠神，仰望神，信靠神。他無論在任何惡劣環境中，都能從神那裡得到能力，作為隨時的幫助。他經常帶領人認識主耶穌。若有靈性軟弱的弟兄，他會熱忱地指點他，教導感化他，並耐心地勉勵他；若有生活困乏的弟兄，他會自動地給他援助。他的作為能夠活出神的真生命！

故事一則-真生命的比喻

早時非拉鐵非的人民，為愛戴史克來氏，公贈他一把寶劍，這把劍價值數千。但大部份的金錢，卻是用在劍鞘的裝飾上，是用寶石鑲散在劍鞘上，使它顯出高

貴美觀。

同樣的，多年前，司各將軍接受愛羅以新阿那的人民，贈給他的寶劍後，他感慨的說：「此劍雖然極為名貴，但是有一點我與你們的意見略有不同。我認為字應該刻有劍上，不適宜刻在鞘上。因為有可能會損壞，遺失，劍卻永遠保存。」

有位東方的作者說：「世人花太多的金錢，光陰，在生命的鞘上，可是用在生命的劍上，卻是非常少！」鞘是虛偽美觀的外表，劍則是人生真價值；鞘是空殼的，劍則是人生的寶質；鞘表明短暫的生命，劍則表明永生的生命；鞘尤如人的身體，劍宛如人的靈魂；鞘如人生虛浮的物質，劍則是人生屬靈的真生命！

所以，將要撞而來的新年，我們應該審慎檢討我們的生活，有沒有被那惡者魔鬼所虜掠，為牠服役，叛逆神的旨意。但我們在新來的年日之前，要切切實實的反省檢點。我們更應該思考古先賢們的好榜樣，作為我們的借鏡。他們在生命的歷程上，不是靠他們的智能，也不是靠他們的學術，更不是靠私謀詭計。惟有遵循神無比的愛。他們的舉止有極大的恩德。迎合神的旨意。他們所表現的毫無瑕疵的德性，我們應該步入後塵而效法他們。

因為那些先賢們，無論處於飢渴，寒冷赤貧之中，在疲乏無助之中，遭遇各種逼害和凌辱之中，曾經多少使徒，殉道者，承認基督的信徒，無端的痛苦，患難加在他們的身上。他們毫無感到反悔的意念。因為他們恨惡這污濁塵世的生命，盼望持守已身於永生之中。

compiled by Ptr. Rosaline Lim

CHURCH HIGHLIGHTS

Community: Taking the Gospel to the World by: Dr. J. Shao



This is the last sub-title of our church's Year 2009 theme, "One Christ, One Church"... encouraging and reminding us of our Christian duty as children of God to share His Living Word, as he had commanded His disciples to "go to the world and preach the gospel and baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, amen." Dr. Shao, the president of BSOP, came and shared to us on how to reach out to those who are unreachable.

There are so many ways to reach out to many people in different places, unlike before when there were limited ways of communication such as writing letters or telephone. In this age, there are hi-tech gadgets to reach people in different places and in different time zones. We have emails, Yahoo Messengers, Skype, Twitter, Facebook, Friendster and many more. The Bible tells us to obey the following: 1.Christ's Great Commission (bringing people to

Christ) - meaning we are ordered to promote God's Word, and 2. The Great Commandment (loving people in Christ) - meaning we are commanded to practice it and do it. The objective content of the gospel is:
1. God's *plan* which is to save us
2. Man's *path* which is going to eternal damnation
3. God's *present* which is sending His Only Son to die for our sins
4. Man's *pledge* which is to worship only God alone & serve Him.

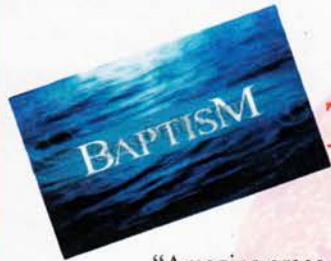


Sunday School Sunday

Last September 27, 2009, the church celebrated Sunday School Sunday in which the children gave special numbers and the principal, Judge Jocelyn Po, gave a report on the development of the ministry and gave awards to five high school graduates. After the worship service, there was an inauguration of the newly renovated Sunday School building

with new Sunday School classrooms on the 3rd floor and the new teacher's lounge. The ribbon cutting was done by Elder Valentin Uy as representative of the church council, Dea. Lili Gothong as principal of the Sunday School Department, Bro. Daniel Ong as head of the construction committee and Rev. Un Hock Wee, our church pastor. A prayer of dedication was given by Elder Frank Sy followed by a lunch fellowship together with the

board/council, Sunday School teachers and their family. May this dedicated building give back all the glory to our God.



The 7 Candidates

"Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me; I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see."
Six guys and a gal announced publicly their faith in our Lord Jesus Christ last September 5, 2009 at Dea. Tony Yap's place. They were Sis. Kate Marielle Aviso (college student), Harold Reg Aviso (4th year high school



"... the old is gone the new has come."
student), John Davidson Tan, Jed Earl Go, Samuel Eliezer Uy, Fredric Carl Te and Edward Dybuco (3rd year high school students).

Church pastors, leaders, parents and relatives of the baptized came to support their commitment and dedication to the Lord. May we continue to include the newly baptized in our prayers that they may live their lives according to the purpose of God, that their lives will be like salt and light to this world, and that they may influence others to follow Christ as they have done.

"This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine."

Mission Week

Doing the work of God in unfamiliar places especially in remote areas is not easy and can be a bit scary. The first thing that comes into the mind of most people who hear the word *missions* or *missionary* is "these people must be in hiding or probably crazy of going to an unsafe place."

Well, as ambassadors of Christ, we do things that are crazy in the eyes of people but what we reap from it is a never ending joy and contentment in our lives.

Last September, our church celebrated its



"There are three indispensable requirements of a missionary: 1. patience, 2. patience, & 3. patience." - Hudson Taylor

43rd Mission Week. For the past years, our church has been supporting many missionaries and some Christian organizations to help spread the good news in every possible way.

Eight missionaries together with their wives came and had fellowship with various church fellowships. Some shared their testimonies while others were asked to handle some activities from the various church fellowships. May the lives of our missionaries bring glory to our God.

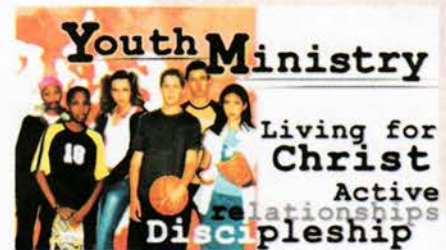
Youth Sunday (Col. 2:6-7)

One of our youth pastors shared Col. 2:6-7, encouraging the youth today to walk in Christ, be well rooted in His Word, and establish deeper faith in our Lord.

Being a young Christian today is quite challenging. Influences of some friends, all kinds of distractions like computer games, hi-tech gadgets, television and other media influences pull the youth away from church activities, their time alone with God and even interactions

with their families and other people. That is why it is very important to reach out and guide the young people and encourage them rather than criticize them. May we, the older ones, live our lives in such a way that would inspire them to continue the work that God has entrusted to us.

May we continue to include the youth ministry in our prayers that God will use them to finish what we have started.



"... take root downward, bear fruits upward ..."



Sacred Music Sunday

Beethoven was a man not known for his social graces. Perhaps it was because of his deafness that conversation was quite difficult for him and he felt humiliated by it. Upon learning that his friend's son died - he knew he didn't have any comforting words to say. Overcame with grief, he hurried home, saw the piano and played for the next half hour. He expressed all his feelings on his piano. After playing, he rushed back to his friend and gave him the song he composed. His friend commented that from all the visits he had, it was Beethoven's visit that meant

so much. Music is one of the most powerful tools to reach the heart of man.

"Here I am to worship, here I am to bow down, here I am to say that you're my God ... I'll never know how much it cost



to see my sins upon that cross ..." was one of the songs rendered by the young members of the church choir in praise and worship.

One of the best service or gift is

"Shout to the Lord all the earth let us sing ... power and majesty, praise to the King ..."

music and not everyone has this. Singing praises to God through worship songs allow us to express our gratitude, love, sorrow to Him, the strength He gave us and etc...

On July 26, 2009, our church celebrated "Sacred Music Sunday". The choir tendered "Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee", a beautiful song written by Henry Jackson Van Dyke declaring God's glory and amazing works through His creation and the wonders of this world.

"O, Lord our Lord, how majestic is Your Name!"

Special points of interest:

- Last May 25-29, 2009, 27 of our youths attended the FCCF Youth Camp in Baguio.
- Membership Committee held a free clinic & blood testing to the 45 years old and above church members last August 16, 2009.
- Our JLY Operation group extended the love of God to the people in need at Mandaue area. PTL!

A STORY FROM THE HEART

“I Want That One”

BY CHARLES STANLEY



A story of compassion ...

I heard a story once about a farmer who had some puppies for sale. He made a sign advertising the pups and nailed it to a post on the edge of his yard. As he was nailing the sign to the post, he felt a tug on his overalls. He looked down to see a little boy with a big grin and something in his hand.

“Mister,” he said, “I want to buy one of your puppies.” “Well,” said the farmer, “these puppies come from fine parents and cost a good deal.”

The boy dropped his head for a moment, then looked at the farmer

and said, “I’ve got thirty-nine cents. Is that enough to take a look?”

“Sure,” said the farmer, and with that he whistled and called out, “Dolly. Here, Dolly.” Out from the doghouse and down the ramp ran Dolly followed by four little balls of fur. The little boy’s eyes danced with delight.

Then out from the doghouse peeked another little ball; this one noticeably smaller. Down the ramp it slid and began hobbling in an unrewarded attempt to catch up with the others. The pup was clearly the runt (weakest) of the litter.

The little boy pressed his face to the

fence and cried out, “I want that one,” pointing to the runt.

The farmer knelt down and said, “Son, you don’t want that puppy. He will never be able to run and play with you the way you would like.”

With that, the boy reached down and slowly pulled up one leg of his trousers. In doing so, he revealed a steel brace running down both sides of his leg attaching itself to a specially made shoe. Looking up at the farmer, he said, “You see, sir, I don’t run too well myself, and he will need someone who understands.”

“The value of compassion cannot be over-emphasized. Anyone can criticize. It takes a true believer to be compassionate. No greater burden can be borne by an individual than to know no one cares or understands.”

Arthur H. Stainback

教 會 消 息



五月十日-母親主日, 記念母愛偉大, 求神祝福她們

五月三十日-J. Banzuelo 牧師主持「福音齊備」講座

六月廿一日-父親主日, 為敬虔之父懷著感恩的心

七月廿五至廿六日-許書義牧師蒞臨主持特會及於聖樂主日證道

八月六日-教會會友組為會友舉行血液檢驗

九月五日-七位青年人受洗歸主, 為神而活.

九月十至十三日-第四十四屆宣道周, 主題為「唯一基督, 合一宣道」, 講員為陳安立牧師

九月廿七日-主日學主日, 奉獻修建之主日學樓於主前

十月廿四日-邵晨光博士主持「福音遍傳」講座

十月廿五日-敬老主日, 特別致敬教會前輩, 記念主恩

十一月廿六日-各團契聯合在感恩節聚會供獻節目, 讚美主名

十二月廿日-崇拜會將有聖誕音樂演唱, 一同慶祝救主的降臨



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