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Church Highlights

May - October 2010

COMPILED BY PTR. ROSALINE LIM

You are God's Masterpiece (Junior Camp '10)

六月二至五日舉行少年營

God created each and everyone of us differently and uniquely and we should thank God for it because we are His workmanship, fearfully and wonderfully made.

Last June 2-5, the CYF Elementary held a junior camp here in the church. The theme was "You are God's Masterpiece" and 28 children attended the camp. This opportunity allowed the kids to mingle and interact with other kids rather than face the computer or other gadgets all day long.

Speakers were invited to teach the children how to take care of their body, both physically and spiritually, since it is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Romans 12: 1 mentions, "...offering our bodies



"... WE ARE GOD'S WORKMANSHIP..." as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God." The Gospel and worshipping God were also imparted to them. We praise and thank God for giving the children the opportunity to join this camp. We also thank the parents for allowing their children to sign up for this camp and give them the chance to discover their uniqueness as God's creatures and appreciate the persons for who and what they are.

On the last night of the camp, we expressed our gratitude to the parents by having a "Parents' Appreciation Night" wherein the children showed and offered their talents and gifts to God.

After that, we had a family portfolio for each kid and his family who was present that night.

We are happy and grateful to those who prayed for the camp, supported the camp, and helped the camp to be successful. God bless you all. To God be the Glory!



"... FEARFULLY AND WONDERFULLY MADE."

Child Dedication

七月四日之嬰孩奉獻



Psalms 127:3. "Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward." Little Laura Dei Castro and Jerisch Valenzuela were dedicated to the Lord last July 4.

2010. May their parents bring them up in the ways of our Lord Jesus Christ.

May these children grow beautifully in the Lord.

When a Christian
shuns fellowship
with other
Christians,
the devil smiles.
When he stops
studying the Bible,
the devils laughs.
And when he stops
praying,
the devil shouts
for joy.
- Corrie Ten Boom

Church Theme: Serve Christ (2nd Quarter)

七月廿五日，教會第二期主題講座「事奉基督」

On July 25, 2010. Pastor Jay Banzuelo spoke about our church's second quarter theme, "Serve Christ". He encouraged and reminded us that every Christian is called to serve Christ.

Given the opportunity to serve Christ is an honor and a privilege that's been given to us. In some other countries that have been over-powered by other beliefs, the Christians try to hide or limit their service to avoid being caught, persecuted and even executed.

We, who are living in this place, are given the opportunity and freedom to

serve Christ in any way and every way we can. But sad to say, we take this chance for granted and don't use it to serve Him. Many of us still have not realized what serving Christ really is. If we did, either we just really didn't



EITHER WE SERVE CHRIST OR SERVE SATAN ...

want to serve, or were afraid to serve.

Pastor Jay gave each attendee of the seminar a questionnaire to discover the gifts that God has bestowed upon him that he may use them to serve Him for His Kingdom and glory. We are God's workmanship and it is our duty as Christians to serve Him and glorify Him for what He has done for us.

May we not waste the talents and gifts that we have. God can take them away from us and give them to those who want to serve Him. Let's not waste that opportunity. May we have that desire to receive from God the praise. "Well done, my good and faithful servant".

Senior Citizen

八月六日由會友組主持長輩會友郊遊

Last August 6, 2010, the Membership Committee held a Senior Citizen's Outing in Guba, Talamban. Around 40-50 senior church members joined this activity.

After Rev. Un Hock Wee shared a short

message, our seniors played some games. They really had a great time there, from the message to the games and of course, the lunch!

May our senior members continue to live godly lives so that the young ones

may follow their footsteps and give glory to our Father in heaven. May God continue to give them wisdom and discernment and continue to be a blessing to others.



THE GLORY OF YOUNG MEN IS THEIR STRENGTH. BUT THE SPLENDOR OF OLD MEN IS THEIR GRAY HAIR. PROVERBS 20:29

Youth Sunday

八月廿九日為青年主日

The church celebrated "Youth Sunday" last August 29, 2010. Our speaker, Rev. Danny Reyes, exhorted the youth to remember their Creator while they are still young. They will need to face lots of temptations, trials and challenges everyday. The environment has changed a lot and to be a youth in this generation is not easy. So many things can take away their focus from the Christian life (i.e. too much extra curricular activities, too much time spent in malls or

gadgets, but lesser time spent with God and his work.)

Sadly, this is what is happening now and is taken for granted by many young Christians. "Reasons" include: the church is boring, nothing to do, and other so called "valid reasons" rather than asking what they can do to help the church. It's really sad to see that after being baptized, some youths do not want to serve God or do not want to have any responsibility as Christians. A word of encouragement to all

GIVE ALL OUR BEST TO THE MASTER ...



youths: may you remember how God has blessed you and watched over you; and in return, may you give to Him what is due to Him. Remember Him in the days of your youth - before it is too late. Serve! while you can.

Mission Week

宣道週於九月九至十二日舉行

"To love the Lord our God is the heartbeat of our mission, the spring from which our service overflows; across the street or around the world, the mission's still the same; proclaim and live the truth in Jesus' name!" - M.W. Smith

Rev. Jay Hallowell was the main speaker of our mission week. There were seven missionaries who came. Rev. Castillo taught about "The

Principles of Church Planting and the Leadership Role of a Church Planter". Then Pastor Recodo shared about "Emotionally Healthy Pastor or Church". A group of people from ERUF came and taught basic first aid and life support to the missionaries.

Rev. Hallowell taught and shared with us. "In the World and Not of the World Christian" and gave two nights of revival message. He also spoke at the

youth fellowship on Friday night. May we continue to pray for our supported missionaries so God will use them to draw more people to Him. To God be the Glory!



Theological Education by Extension (TEE) by: Rev. Philip Co

九月廿四至廿五日由許書義牧師主持神學延伸制課程

The Christian Education Committee together with BSOP, held the Theological Education by Extension (TEE) and Inductive Bible Study with Rev. Philip Co as the instructor. This course teaches the inductive approach of observation, interpretation and application in studying the Bible. This helps us have a good foundation as we prepare for

Bible Studies and Bible Lessons. Many churches in Manila also encouraged their church leaders, Sunday school teachers or those who are interested to lead Bible studies to take this course because it teaches them the proper way to interpret the Bible and not just rely on their own understanding or knowledge. Some young people joined this course

as well as Sunday school teachers, fellowship officers and counselors. Let us sincerely learn together, have an open mind, a humble and teachable heart as we study the word of God diligently.

May our Father continue to grant us such privilege so we can teach His word accurately and truthfully.

"DO YOUR BEST TO PRESENT YOURSELF TO GOD AS ONE APPROVED, A WORKER WHO HAS NO NEED TO BE ASHAMED, RIGHTLY HANDLING THE WORD OF TRUTH."

-2 TIMOTHY 2: 15 (ESV)

Outreach at Surigao Gospel Church

十月廿一至廿四日往樹里及基督教會開佈道會



Rev. Un Hock Wee, together with the Soul Searchers and the Youth Band, left for Surigao last October 21-24, 2010. They conducted two evenings of evangelistic musicale in our daughter church, the Surigao Gospel Church. Songs were rendered by the Soul

Searchers, a short play was presented by some of our youths, and of course, a message pointed them to Christ, our Redeemer, as the only way to be saved from sin. Participants were also encouraged to become the salt and light for Christ in this dark world.

We hoped and prayed that God would open the hearts of those who joined, that they would positively respond to God's call through the message, songs and the short play. Nothing is impossible with our God.



更正

上期「人生五幅圖畫」之作者應為遠觀。末段(五)之「莫順有」應為「莫須有」。

The Value of Human Life

SCRIPTURE: GENESIS 1:26-28

BY REV. WEE UN HOCK

INTRODUCTION

What if God sends us a bill? Every month, we have to pay bills and these bills are the electric bill, water bill, telephone bills, gasoline bill, cell phone bill and etc. What if God decides to send us His bill?

THE EARS: A piano has 88 keys, but our ear has a keyboard with 1500 keys.

THE EYES: They are both microscopic and telescopic.

THE FEET: Do you know that each foot has 26 small bones and can carry a person weighing more than 300 pounds?

THE HEART: It has the size of our fist but it beats roughly 4,300 times an hour. In a year, it beats around 40 million times.

What if God would one day decide to send us a bill for what He has given us? Do you know how much it would cost? Can we estimate it? Perhaps, we cannot but one thing is for sure, it will be very costly.

I. THE DIVINE PLAN

“ Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.'”
(Genesis 1:26)

As we come to this verse, immediately we notice a difference in the wordings. In all the previous accounts of creation in Genesis 1, the Bible simply tells us, “And God

said..”and it was done. But this time, the text reads, “Let us make man....” The words are of value and with purpose. God gave special importance to the creation of man and woman. He created them also in the image and likeness of God. What is the image and likeness of God?

1. SPECIAL – We are number ONE, the best of the best. Of all the creatures God has created, we are the apple of His eye.

How did God create the world? It was so simple and fast. God just used His Word. “Let there be sun...,” and there was sun. “Let there be light....,” and there was light. But when God created man, He got the dust of the ground and formed Adam and gave him life. As Psalm 139:13-14 states, “For you created my inmost being, you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” God could have also just used His Word, but He did not because God wanted to show that we are *special*. He created us last so we could enjoy and appreciate what He had done. He also sent His Son to die for us on the cross and save us from our sins. God did not send his Son to die for angels or any other creatures but only for human beings. As King David praises God in Psalm 8, “What is man, that you are mindful of him, you made him a little lower than the heavenly beings, and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet...”

2. ABLE TO KNOW GOD PERSONALLY – Of all the creatures on earth, only human beings can intimately know God. Inside each and every one of us, there is an emptiness, a feeling that something is lacking in our lives. This is because life is incomplete until we come to know the Creator and the Giver of life. Only the foolish ones say in their hearts that there is no God (Psalms 14:1).

No other creature on earth can have fellowship with God. This personal knowledge of God is not present in the animals or the fish of the sea, nor the birds of the air.

3. Not only are we special, we are also OF TRUE SIGNIFICANCE – In the eyes of God, we are valued differently from how the world looks at people.

This is how the world often looks at a person: The world looks at who you are, what family you come from, how much money you have, your health, your good looks (or lack thereof), your connections, and above all else, your ability to contribute, to give and to donate. Bottom line is, if you can't make a difference, then, you aren't worth much and out the door you go.

Praise God for this is not how He looks at His children. God does not look upon us on the basis of what we have or we have done or our outward appearance. He sees us as children who have accepted the sacrifice of His Son, and cleansed from our sin with His own precious blood. God calls us His son and we call Him our Father.

In the eyes of God, we are all equal. We belong to the same level, the first class citizens of His kingdom.

4. KNOWING RIGHT AND WRONG. – The moment we come to know God, we learn to see what is right and what is wrong. The closer we are to Him, the more we see things clearly. This is because only God can take away all the hindrances that separate us from Him. As James 4:7-7 states, "Submit yourselves to God, resist the devil and he will flee

from you. Come near to God and He will come near to you."

May the Lord help us and give us discernment to know what is right and wrong, and to be able to do what is right.

II. THE DIVINE PATTERN

*" So God **created** man in his own image, in the image of God he **created** him; male and female he **created** them" (Genesis 1:27)*

In this verse, the word "created" is used three times thus emphasizing the unique thing in creating man and woman. The first woman shared this uniqueness of creation with the first man. God saw that it was not good for the man to be alone; and yet God didn't simply say, "Let there be a woman...." as if performing an act of creation distinct from that of the making of Adam. Instead, we're told that God first let Adam name all the animals so that Adam could see for himself that there was not a suitable companion for him in any of the other creatures. God then uniquely created woman from the rib He had taken out of Adam to be his suitable partner and helper.

Here, we find the basic pattern of life established. Humanity is forever divided into two groups – male and female. God created them different from one another. Men and women of olden times were easy to differentiate by their physical appearances as well as their roles in their homes and community. Now, so much has changed but the fact remains. God created man AND woman, male AND female He created them.

III. THE DIVINE PURPOSE

" God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'" (Genesis 1:28)

...more on page 9



From the Pastor's Heart

BY PASTOR ERIC CHAN

“Church” is a term used in the New Testament to describe a group of people who repented of their sin and professed trust in Jesus Christ. They met together to worship Christ and sought to enlist others to become followers as well.

The pre-eminent characteristic of the church in the New Testament Scripture was its devotion to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. Christ established the church under His own authority (**Matt. 16:13-20**) and created the foundation for its existence in His redeeming death and demonstrated God's power through His resurrection. Consequently, Christ's position as the Lord evoked, sustained, and governed the major characteristics of the church and in the way members were admitted.

In the **Book of Acts**, “church” came to be the regular designation for the society of Christian believers, but it was employed in two distinct senses. First, in the local sense, it denoted the body of Christians in a particular place or district, as in Jerusalem (**Acts 5:11; 8:1**), in Antioch (**Acts 13:1; 15:22**), in Caesarea (**Acts 18:22**) and in the letter to the Seven Churches of the **Book of Revelation**. The second was used in the universal sense - the sum total of existing local churches which were regarded as forming one body in Christ (**Acts 9:31**).

Five out of the seven churches in the **Book of Revelation** were reprimanded and warned by Christ. Only Smyrna and Philadelphia received positive commendation from the Lord. In both instances, Christ's rebuke and recommendation were expressed in the local sense, meaning the believers were addressed as a unit, rather than individually. Perhaps, it will be wise for us to ask why Christ dealt with the seven churches in this way.

The **Book of Revelation** was written as an encouragement or warning for existing churches during the time of John. Certainly there were more than seven churches in John's time, but Jesus cited these seven churches as a representation of the church in the universal sense. “Seven” was used in Scripture to reflect completeness or wholeness. Some churches were doing well, but a majority had compromised. Therefore, in the prophetic sense, the **Book of Revelation** warns that “as the return of Christ nears, many churches will need drastic transformation. On the other hand, in the local sense, Christ's faithfulness is clearly manifested. The positive and negative remarks of Christ for each of the seven churches not only reflect their true and real spiritual condition, but also call for them to take full responsibility of their locality (*“Anyone who has an ear should*

listen to what the Spirit says to the churches,” 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).

Scripture clearly dictates that not all churches have been faithful to Christ's mandate. Just as God expected the nation of Israel to be the bearer of God's message, now the mandate has been given to the church. But sadly, the church appears to be following Israel's footsteps. Perhaps, this explains Peter's contention that judgement would begin with God's household (**1Pet. 4:17**). **SO LET US PRAY FOR THE CHURCH OF GOD.**

On the other hand, in the local sense, Christ knows the very condition of each and every local church. Yes, our personal faithfulness will be appreciated by Christ. But Jesus expects us to carry each other's burdens. We need to rebuke and bring those who are going astray to experience godly grief, so they may show



...continued from page 7 (The Value of Human Life)
Now, we come to the purpose God intended for Adam and Eve. God begins by blessing them. It is as if God said, “Have a great life! Enjoy yourselves. Start a family. Establish a clan. Found a tribe.” The phrase “be fruitful” means “**increase in numbers.**” Be plentiful, fill the earth!

When God bless us with children, we have the responsibility to take good care of them and love them. Do you know how much raising a child would cost? Based on U.S. statistics, raising a child in the average family requires roughly \$24.37 a day. How about in the Philippines? It could cost around P500 per day, or P15,000 a month. In 20 years, parents would have supported a child to the tune of 3.6 million pesos! But then, as Psalm 127:3-4 says, “Sons are heritage from the Lord, children a reward from Him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them.....”

The phrase “be fruitful” also means “**grow and**

repentance that leads to salvation (**2Cor. 7:10**).

God understands our heartaches and pains, and he promises to be with us unto the end of ages. Complacency has no place in the church and in Christ's mandate for us to make disciples of all nations.

In conclusion, I believe, the **Book of Revelation** should be seen as a wake-up call for all churches. Let us learn from the book and keep up with Christ's expectations. Jesus said, “*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*”

The church is God's earthly messenger called to spread of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (**Matt. 28:18-20**). Christ does not expect churches to be PERFECT, but He anticipates them to be FAITHFUL. May the “church” truly be the *light and salt of the world*.

become mature”. In short, be productive!

The purpose of God is for Adam & Eve to take care of his creation. God said to Adam and Eve, “It's all yours. Take care of it. Rule over it. Study it, develop it, and bring it under control. This is the basis of agriculture, industry, commerce, enterprise, exploration, art, music, drama, literature, education, research, technology, progress, and new inventions. It is therefore, each and every Christian's duty and responsibility to fulfil the task God has entrusted to him and to excel in these fields as good steward of his Creator.

CONCLUSION

Knowing how much God values human lives and how much he loves us, let us take good care of ourselves and learn to live for the Lord. At the same time, let us learn to value the lives of other people by reaching out to them and bringing more people to know the Lord.



Serve Christ

BY ANGELO GUTIERREZ

“For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.”—Romans 12:3-5

One of the minor themes of our church for this year, “Serving Christ,” is not a foreign concept for most of us. It brings joy to our hearts, as pastors, to see many of our members serving in different capacities. In my estimate, about a fourth of our members are serving leadership roles and many are active in fellowships, Bible study groups, Sunday school, music ministry, and so on. It’s a good indicator that many of our church members are growing.

Today, many churches struggle in encouraging their members to involve themselves in various ministries. More likely, you’ll see same faces in fellowships, committees, choir, Sunday school, and even in the church leadership. This is actually not bad but like most other setup, there are benefits and drawbacks to this: with only few people serving, their gifts are nurtured faster; but they’ll also end up exhausted, over-burdened, burnt-out. An observant believer would say: “Many believe, but only a handful serve the Lord...”

The Ideal Setup

The ideal setup of our church is that all our members are part of at least one learning-type ministry and one leading-type

ministry. It is possible to encourage each one to become a disciple and at the same time become one who disciples others. Each member should be involved in a ministry where he’s being fed and in another ministry where he’s the one feeding others.

This is part of Paul’s exhortation in his letter to the Romans. After a lengthy discussion of Christian doctrines, Paul urges the believers to offer their bodies as living sacrifices to God – this, done in view of God’s mercy and grace, is the spiritual way to worship God. In other translations, this last phrase is rendered as a “*rational, logical service.*” His exhortation is in a general manner, involving each and every believer to participate.

Modest Opinion of Self

The first step in Paul’s exhortation is to have a modest opinion of self. Sober judgment of self carries with it the humility to see through your own needs and the sensibility to see the needs of others. Being a Christian, however, doesn’t give anyone license to be the boss of anybody for we are called to serve just as Christ came to serve (Matt. 20:28). But some might think that serving in the ministry is just a waste of time or a one-way relationship. You serve and you will not get anything in return. You lead yet no one leads you.

Though we believe that having a reward at the end of the deed should not be the basis for our service, the Lord does provide incentives for our efforts. Part of Paul’s encouragement for the suffering Corinthians is “*Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that*

your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (1 Cor. 15:58). This tells us that committing ourselves to the Lord's work will not go to waste. Working with the young people for many years, my heart continues to fill with contentment as I see them mature in Christ and serve the Lord according to the gifts God has given them. Being used by God in their growth is more than enough reason to motivate me to press on. Indeed, it is a reward on its own.

Everyone has Something to Contribute

God has instituted the church as a community of believers for a reason. People may say "No man is an island," but even islands need the plants and animals for them to become self-sustaining. The church, composed of many people of varying gifts and background, thrives on the willingness of her members to pitch in to better themselves. Our differences in gifts and backgrounds are important reasons for us to complement one another.

In God's great wisdom, he has bestowed in each one of us a different set of gifts for the purpose of mutual edification. And in the same wisdom, God has placed each one of us in this church to fill in that purpose. *"So we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another."* Using the same illustration, a body cannot function well if it lacks a limb, an eye, an ear, and so forth. In order for a church to function well and be able to fulfill its goals and mandate, everybody must give what they have according to what the Lord has given them. Every member of the church is equally responsible to the growth and welfare of the church. In the same way, leaving the church because of problems, misunderstandings, or dissatisfactions will never solve anything.

Available Ways of Serving

I do remember that when we had our second theme seminar, our guest speaker gave a "spiritual gift" quiz for us to determine our gifts. There were at least forty people who took the test and discovered their gifts. In light of this, I would like to propose some ways to serve in our church. Our church, as big as it is in terms of number of members and ministries, provides a lot of opportunities for everybody to use their gifts for God's glory. Please prayerfully consider getting involved in any of the following ministry

opportunities:

- *Youth Ministry* – one that is closest to my heart is constantly growing and is in need of people to guide them. Guiding them would provide immediate and long-term benefits for the church. Bible study and discipleship groups are essential ways to address the spiritual needs of our youth. We need to support and train our youth for they will become the future of the church.
- *Ushering Ministry* – the "welcoming" committee that is vital to bringing warmth not only to our members but also to our guests. Coming from a small church, one of the things that made an impact in my Christian life is the warm welcome the church provided. We can't take this one for granted.
- *Caring Ministry* – a Christian's life is not a problem-free life. We need people who are encouragers and people who could show care and concern for our members, especially to the sick and needy ones. It is a good thing for the church to have regular visitation ministries, and these are done by church and fellowship leaders. We would love to have members of the congregation to take part in this ministry as well.
- *Prayer Ministry* – can't emphasize this more. The early church was able to accomplish a lot of things because they made prayer an important part of their ministry. All of them, both as individuals and as a church, are in constant prayer. The apostles even directed the Christians to select seven among themselves to serve tables so they could devote themselves *"to prayer and to the ministry of the word"* (Acts 6:4). We desire people to take part in praying for the church and for the needs of our members.

There are other ministries that the church can provide for us to be involved. I specifically include those on my list for I recognize that these four can be our "first steps" in helping our church to grow. We cannot say that we have no time to spare for these things. But as a famous saying goes, "You will never find time for anything. If you want time, you must make it." May the Lord grant us a willing and humble heart to "make time" for the ministries.



God's Presence in our Suffering

BY PTR. CHARMAINE GUTIERREZ

Early October, I was able to watch a U.S. TV show popular among teens and young adults of today. The episode highlighted the plight of a self-professed homosexual teenager whose dad suddenly fell into a coma. This teenager's unbelief in the existence of God grew stronger despite his friend's efforts to encourage and comfort him through religious means. Waiting for a happy "Christian" ending, I thought that the story would conclude in such a way that would shed at least some godly light to this teenager's unbelief, and consequently, to the many viewers who dutifully tuned in. To my dismay, the show ended with almost all of the characters feeling hopelessly far from God and alone in their problems.

Plight of all

Disheartening as it might be, the show depicted what most people feel in real life. Christians and non-Christians experience sickness, accidents, tragedies, calamities, abuse or any other type of suffering. Sadly, both Christians and non-Christians do feel alone and hopeless, clouded with so many doubts and questions about what they truly believe in. Believers who were taught that God loves and blesses His people would feel miserable because God has never felt as invisible from their lives as He does now in the midst of their suffering.

The fact is, the world has taught us that pain is so bad that we would be better off without going through such feeling. At times, we even imply in our provoked and desperate words that pain is useless to us. But is that true? I once mixed some recently defrosted meat with my hands as I was preparing a meal

for my family in short notice. Since my hand felt numb handling the cold meat, I did not realize that I had already scratched one of my fingers. The gash would not have been that deep had I immediately stopped what I was doing. But because I did not feel any pain, I wasn't prompted to stop at once.

My simple incident with pain, or lack of it, caused me to have a glimpse of its purpose. Surely, we would be in worse conditions if we don't feel any pain when we touch a hot kettle, sprain our ankle, or have the flu. Physical pain often serves as a warning to something far more serious or even fatal. I know this is crucial for infants and toddlers. My daughter would wail whenever she's in an "accident-coming" situation. That would signal me and her father that she needed immediate attention, otherwise, she might hurt herself more.

Not "why..."

C.S. Lewis described pain in this way: "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains; it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world." So what is God's message to us whenever we are in pain? Often, the word we ask God in this situation is "Why?" *Why am I in this painful situation? Why is God allowing me to suffer like this? Why hasn't God taken this pain away?* With these questions, I came upon a book aptly titled *Where is God When It Hurts?* Its author, Philip Yancey, pointed out that Job uttered similar questions as he struggled with the loss of his possessions and children and with his painful physical problems. The Bible recorded that Job repeatedly asked for an explanation from God as to why he was

suffering. Strangely, even with thousands of years between Job and our generation, in times of suffering, we still ask God "Why?"

But "to what end?"

What's interesting to note is that God did not provide Job nor has He given us the answers to the "why" queries. When it was God's turn to speak and respond to Job, God showed Job that His ways and power are beyond our strength and understanding (chapters 38-41 of Job). Job got the Lord's message in the end. What he uttered in chapter 42 indicates that the answer God gave him was not the reason for his suffering, instead, the purpose for it. Just as physical pain serves its purpose by refraining us from hurting ourselves, God intends for our sufferings to be constructive. To what end or purpose do we suffer? It is to display God in our lives even in the midst of pain, as Job did by praising and accepting God's sovereignty despite his suffering.

This is also Jesus' lesson in John 9 when He encountered a blind man. Instead of giving a reason for the blind man's condition, He simply uttered the purpose of his suffering. "This happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life" (John 9:3b). Suffering indeed is a message from God, a message for us to carry out the purpose of displaying God in our life.

God's unpopular solution

Yet, pain consumes us. Our suffering tends to permeate into all parts of our life that we cannot think of anything else. No matter how much we want to be in synchrony with God's purpose for our suffering, sometimes it simply feels too difficult. But before we conclude that the God who created us is a sadistic being who wants us to suffer in order for Him to be known, we have to keep in mind that He is not a mere spectator in all of these. True, it is impossible to have a "purposeful" suffering if we're alone. But the God in the Bible promises to be with us and

not abandon us. And if He desires for us to glorify Him in our suffering, will He not provide us with what we need in order to do so? It may not be through deliverance or escape from our pain, but it would be according to God's way, and we know that His way is better than all our ideas combined.

God demonstrated to us how He ultimately accomplishes His goal in spite of and even through the presence of pain. Let us recall what Jesus Christ went through when He knew that His death was about to come. He prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42). We know that the Father did not take Jesus away from His suffering; instead, He enabled His Son to die on the cross and rise again for our sake. Deliverance from pain was not God's solution here. But what He did was perfection. Christ's death and resurrection demonstrated God's justice, grace and mercy. Hence, I believe God also enables us to have the strength and wisdom to glorify Him in the midst of our suffering.

The cross: practical help

Yancey said, "The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ provide more than an abstract theological answer to the problem of pain. They also offer us actual, practical help in our own struggles with suffering."ⁱⁱ With this, he shared four insights about suffering in the light of Jesus' cross. (1) Judging the present by the future - Apostle Paul said in Romans 8:18, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." Whatever great pain and suffering we are presently in, Jesus' victory on the cross guarantees that we have something triumphant to look forward to. (2) Seeing the pattern of transformed pain - Insofar as God transformed even the outrage of Jesus' death into good, He surely will be able to use any of our trials for good. (3) Understanding a new level of meaning to suffering - The truth is Christians are expected



to face difficulties here on earth. Called to be partakers in His sufferings, our life's struggles are never in vain. (4) Gaining the confidence that God truly understands our pain - "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). Our cries do not only fall on powerful ears, but on sympathetic ears as well.ⁱⁱⁱ

The sympathizers

The existence of human pain is so pervasive that if we are not the ones suffering, we at least know of someone who is. Yet, whether it be pain from a life-threatening sickness, death of a loved one, loss of properties or other tragedies that have been devastating the world for ages, time has not taught us how to help those who are suffering. Finding ourselves helpless when we know someone having a serious problem, we as family members, friends, church members or colleagues often unintentionally deprive them of comfort. We become like Job's friends who either offer unsolicited advice or make insensitive judgements. Or we become extremely jolly, avoiding the emotional talks and outpouring of heart. Or worse, we become inaccessible to them, making sure that we stay away from awkward situations of seeing them in pain and finding no words to say.

God, however, did not design the body of Christ to be like this. We have the responsibility to care for our brothers- and sisters-in-Christ, to give them comfort in their time of need. Yancey's book highlights that sometimes our mere presence, sincere and unassuming, is what delivers the comfort that their spirits are looking

for. No matter how differently people respond to suffering, the simple knowledge that someone is there willing to lend an ear to what they want to say brings much comfort and assurance. So let us do away with clichés like "I understand what you're going through," "Don't worry, everything's going to be okay" and "Rely on faith." Instead, let us pray for them and sincerely say and show that we are there for them, as God Himself always is.

Finding the way out of the dark

"Where is God when it hurts? He is in *us* – not in the things that hurt – helping to transform bad into good."^{iv} I believe it is not easy to think, behave and act "right" when we are in the midst of pain. Sometimes, these advices and reminders, no matter how good and honourable they are, feel easier said than done. But let us not stop there. This article, at the risk of sounding patronizing to the gravity of human suffering, seeks to sympathize and encourage those whose physical and emotional pain brings them fear, hopelessness and emptiness. Whether we are the victims of pain or the comforter of sufferers, may we all remember to display God in our lives, letting others see that our gracious God has given us something to look forward to. *May our good Lord enable us not to forget in the darkness what we have learned in the light.*^v

ⁱ C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962), 93.

ⁱⁱ Yancey, Philip, *Where is God When It Hurts?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1990), 232.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid, 233-238.

^{iv} Ibid, 111.

^v Paraphrased from the quotation of Joseph Bayly, *ibid*, 233.

Proclaim Christ

PRESERVING AND PROCLAIMING THE UNADULTERATED GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST

BY PTR. KEREN TAN

Martin Luther, the great Reformer once said about Galatians, “The Epistle to the Galatians is my epistle. To it I am as it were in wedlock. It is my Katherine.” Galatians played a huge role in the personal battles of Luther as he mustered to understand what it would take to appease the wrath of a holy and righteous God. And in His providence, the Lord Almighty used Luther's struggles to find peace, not in any popish declarations, but solely in God's Holy Word.

By the grace of God, Luther championed the doctrine of justification, whereby a sinner is declared righteous before God on the basis of Christ's merits alone. This Gospel—the heart of the Christian faith—rests on the assurance that we are saved not by what we have done for Jesus, but what Jesus has done for sinners such as us. This message bleeds through the pages of Galatians, indeed, the whole of Scripture. It is the rediscovery of this all-important truth that propelled a pivotal event in history known today as the Protestant Reformation, which began in October 31, 1517.

Centuries passed between the first writing of the apostle Paul to the Galatians and the time of the Protestant Reformation. 493 years have passed since the day Luther nailed his *Ninety-Five Theses* against the Roman Catholic Church to the door of Wittenberg Church. Nevertheless, today, Christians everywhere are still being swayed

with massive counterfeit gospels.

Unlike his other letters, the apostle Paul bypasses the usual warm greeting in the epistle of Galatians. This time, he bursts forth in astonishment because the believers have been wooed over by a perverted gospel, which is really no gospel at all. There were false teachers in Galatia who were imposing Jewish practices like circumcision thereby diminishing the sufficiency of Christ in salvation. Without the slightest doubt, these teachers believed that Jesus had risen from the dead. They believed, also, that faith in Christ was necessary for salvation. But the trouble was, they believed that the work of Christ needed to be coupled with the believer's own effort to obey the Law in order to be accepted by God. In the other words, these false teachers espoused a distorted gospel of faith *plus* works, instead of faith *alone* in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. For that reason Paul is outraged. And it is with utmost care that he still yearns to bring the Galatians back in the fold. They were on their way to deserting the Gospel of grace, but they have not yet forsaken its claims altogether.

Likewise, if we are not vigilant, we might find ourselves in the same predicament. Let us take heed not to lose the centrality of Christ by preserving and proclaiming the unadulterated Gospel of grace. That is why J. Mack Stiles gives us a stern warning, “Losing

the gospel doesn't happen all at once, it's much more like a four generation process: the gospel is accepted, the gospel is assumed, the gospel is confused, the gospel is lost.”ⁱ

Our present generation may not be denying the Gospel, but assuming it has perilous ramifications for our children. Here is a series of diagnostic questions provided by Stiles to help us be aware if we are *en route* to assuming the Gospel:

Was the gospel in the sermon Sunday morning?
Could the uninitiated hear that sermon and come to real faith in Christ?

Are gospel principles governing organizational decisions?

Do you hear the gospel in people's prayers?

Does your fellowship encourage you to say the gospel? And then is it more than just a memorized sketch? Sure, it may follow the form of “God, Man, Christ, Response,” but is it in people's own words?

Furthermore, do you see it in their actions? Is the gospel lived out?

Is membership based on a true commitment to the gospel or just because someone wants to join an organization—or maybe write an expose?

The healthy evangelist is asking these questions and looking for answers so as to guard the gospel. Here is the critical test.

Could you have preached that sermon if Christ had not died on the cross?

Could you have developed that leadership principle had Christ not been crucified?

I'm not saying be impractical—the Bible has much to say about being practical—but make sure that the practical is tied to the message of Jesus. Otherwise we are on the road to an assumption that will lose the gospel.ⁱⁱ

Not only that, “the Gospel assumed is the Gospel denied.”ⁱⁱⁱ As Rev. Herbert C. Mueller, Jr. clearly explains:

Assuming the Gospel is the height of arrogance. It is as if we were saying, “We all know what God has done for us in Jesus, so we can go on to teach and learn other things today.” St. Paul gave much apostolic direction for living the Christian life – “bearing with one another” (Colossians 3:13), “speaking the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15), “walking by the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16), and seeing the “more excellent way” (1 Corinthians 12:31). Yet Paul always put such admonition in the context of Christ's saving work for us. In fact, Paul was adamant about the priority of the cross: “I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” (1 Corinthians 2: 2)... No matter what else Paul had to say, *the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ for our salvation are the center, the essence, the focal point of all Christian preaching*. Whether the subject is justification or sanctification, it all comes back to the cross. *No preaching, no Christian teaching is complete unless it brings us back to what God has done for us in Jesus Christ on the cross*. Indeed, anything else the preacher might proclaim is meaningless, unless it flows into or out of the message that Jesus died and rose for us. Every doctrine of Scripture is designed by God ultimately to bring the comfort of sins forgiven and eternal life in Christ to the penitent sinner (emphasis added).^{iv}

Oblivious to these alarming effects, some church leaders claim to understand what it means to be saved in Christ, but drive their congregants to rely on works-based salvation in their Christian lives. This gross misunderstanding has produced the legalist (moralist) and the licentious (relativist) in our churches today. Todd Wilken sheds light on these two groups, “Both the legalist and the licentious, whether they deny sin's depth or sin's danger, ultimately ignore the saving work of Jesus Christ.”^v He goes on to say:

The legalist believes he can avoid sin, and manage (if only occasionally) to live sinlessly. If he

is right, then the legalist doesn't need the sinlessness of Jesus, or if he does, he only needs it when he fails to avoid sin. The licentious person believes he has permission to sin. If he is right, then the licentious person doesn't need Jesus to suffer the penalty for his sin... Only the Gospel gives both the legalist and the licentious freedom from their error, not by avoiding sin, nor by indulging sin, but by *forgiving* sin. Only the Gospel shows the legalist the sinlessness of Jesus Christ, and the licentious the penalty Jesus paid for sin... The Gospel replaces all the legalist's efforts to be sinless with the sinlessness of Jesus. The Gospel shows the licentious person the true penalty for his sin, taken entirely by Jesus.^{vi}

These are subtle errors, but the effects are devastating. It is, therefore, crucial for us to preserve and proclaim the unadulterated Gospel of Jesus Christ so that we will not mislead fellow pilgrims along the way. Let us not distort the Gospel by focusing on our achievements. Just because we manage to get a few things right in our Christian life (*i.e.*, keeping spiritual disciplines like prayer and Bible study) doesn't give us the license to boast in our spiritual successes. If we trust on our performances, we will eventually become like the Pharisees who pride in their spiritual superiority. If we rest on our achievements and performances, we forget the meaning of grace and its blessings to sinners like us who deserve nothing but God's wrath and judgment.

On the other hand, there are those who struggle in the failures of their Christian walk. They torment themselves with guilt, thinking that God is displeased and unhappy with them. Let us not think that we have forfeited God's favor because of our disobedience or lack of discipline. Be reminded of His abounding grace. Be reminded of the cross on which the Prince of glory died. Be reminded of what Christ has already accomplished in your stead. Take into heart and rest in the hope that we are accepted and forgiven by God because of the obedience and death of Jesus Christ *alone*, not by our own works or efforts.

There is undoubtedly no other gospel other than the Gospel of Christ whereby transgressors like you and me are saved from eternal damnation. For the Gospel of God's amazing grace is the music that renders the sweet sound, calling wretched sinners to put their trust only in the saving work of God in Christ. That is the good news. That is the Gospel.

Consider the implications of preserving and proclaiming the unadulterated Gospel of Jesus Christ. Peoples' lives are at stake. Therefore, we must rediscover the true Gospel, preserve it, and proclaim it as it is; in order that we, together with the saints, would resound the words of the hymn, singing: "Not the labors of my hands, can fulfill Thy law's demands; Could my zeal no respite know, could my tears forever flow. All for sin could not atone; Thou must save, and Thou alone."^{vii}

ⁱ J. Mack Stiles, *Marks of the Messenger: Knowing, Living, and Speaking the Gospel* [book review on-line] (IVP, 2010) accessed 6 October 2010; available from <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justintaylor/2010/04/16/how-to-avoid-assuming-the-gospel/>; Internet.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid.*

ⁱⁱⁱ This statement is attributed to Robert Preus.

^{iv} Herbert C. Mueller, Jr., "The Gospel Assumed is the Gospel Denied" in *Concordia Pulpit Resources* 15, no. 3 [journal on-line] accessed 6 October 2010; available from <http://sidlcms.org/Documents/GospelAssumedGospelDenied.pdf>; Internet.

^v Todd Wilken, "Legalism and License" in *Issues, Etc. Journal* [article on-line], accessed 6 October 2010; available from <http://steadfastlutherans.org/?p=8825>; Internet.

^{vi} *Ibid.*

^{vii} Augustus Toplady, "Rock of Ages", 1775.





*"Mom, You Hold Your Children's Hands
For a While, Their Hearts Forever"*

BY CLETO MARCELINO UY

My beloved Mother, this morning from Bacolod, I went to Cebu for the observance of All Saints Day. I entered your room, and there before my eyes were your bed, the table and chair you used during your devotional hours. Nearby at the corner of the room was the wheelchair waiting silently for an occupant, for your favourite moment in an afternoon stroll around the garden. Mom, there was the deep feeling of grief and loneliness in my heart for I could see your kind countenance no more.

You would often remind us of Proverbs 22:6 – "Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it." I recalled one of your younger sons at the age of 7, who was convinced by his friends to shoplift a small notebook from a department store, not knowing it was a violation of one of God's Ten Commandments – Thou Shalt Not Steal. He came home with his adventure. In response, you, with an angry and stern look, asked him to come to the library, put his hands on the table and proceeded to pick up a heavy stick and started whipping his hands so many times until they were red and swollen. You displayed a very strong disciplinary teaching, but along with these, there was a profound

manifestation of love. For it really hurt inside you to execute your unsparing punishment. "Spare the rod and spoil the child."

Mom, you would often advise us, "A bundle of arrows is difficult to break, but a simple piece of arrow can easily be broken," to encourage us your children to have heartfelt concern in unity, for there is abundant blessing which the Lord will bestow upon us. You would say, "Parents never complain the ugliness of their children; children seldom condemn the poverty of their parents," to show that among the family, there is everlasting love. Regarding our worldly pursuit of accomplishments, you said, "Fame and position are words written on blackboard, no trace will remain when erased and turned to chalk dusts." Again you said, "Children are like wet cement, whatever falls on them makes an impression." This is to tell us that what is stated by parents positively or negatively will always make an imprint on the youth's mind. We, your children, would wonder how in spite of your limited proper knowledge - in your young days women were not allowed to have appropriate education - you enthusiastically and patiently learned to read the Bible by phonetics. Through the

word of God, you found the secret of strength and the joy of living in loving submission to the Lord. From God, you derived wisdom and the valuable teachings of Christian Virtues to lead us in our lives.

You would frequently refresh our memories with, "Honesty, Honour and Loyalty are the best business policies." You would, time and again, quote the wise formula of our grandfather, who was a very successful copra businessman and entrepreneur: "Talent with diligence, personalized with perseverance, and capitalized with enough resources to conduct an operation." It was not a surprise that grandfather would often mention about you: "My eldest daughter, if she had been born a man, I would have been the happiest and most fortunate person, as I would have had a reliable and trusted son to handle my business." Mother, if we should have any achievement in our establishment, it was by your guidance through Christian teachings.

Your words and deeds were eloquent testimony of your abiding faith in God's grace and loving mercy. You quoted I John 4:20-21: "For he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment we have from Him, that he who loveth God loves his brother also." Your immovable devotion for the spreading of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ brought blessings to many whose lives you had touched. You would never spare a soul from the saving knowledge of our Lord. Your sisters-in-law, brothers-in-law, brothers, sisters, your cousins, nephews, nieces, sons-in-law, daughters-in-law, relatives and friends, majority of them were your seeds of outreach. We will always remember when for your son-in-law's baptismal ceremony in the far

site of the rocky seashore, you, an old lady with tiny feet, had to negotiate inconveniently in pain and hardship to be with him spiritually and physically. What an ardent soul-saver!

Mom, you played a vital part in moulding our lives, you were not just our biological mother, you were also our spiritual mother.

I will always treasure the memory of more than seventy years ago of one Sunday afternoon worship service in Cebu Bradford Church used by some American Christians. It was a rainy day and only three people attended the service: the speaker behind the pulpit, Mr. Tan Yiok Peck, a businessman, father of our 2nd term Rev. Livingston Chen of Bacolod Trinity Christian Church. At the right side of the pulpit was the organist Sen Hong Huang whose two sons are church ministers, Pastor John Huang of Cebu Living Church and Rev. William B. Huang of an evangelical church in Manila and whose daughter, Ester, and grandson Yorkson are church members of Bacolod Trinity Christian Church. Lastly, the third person sitting in the pew in front of the preacher was Elder Cang Chui Siok, my mother.

Dear Lord, we thank YOU for giving us such a great and loving mother. Our lives knew not about emptiness until the hour of her departure. We seem to give her back to YOU, dear GOD, who gave her to us. Yet, as YOU did not lose her in giving, so have we not lost her by her return.

(Composed on All Saints Day, November 1, 1975, in loving memory of our beloved mother, who had gone to be with our Lord Jesus Christ.)

Becoming and Leading Others to Become World Christians not Worldly Christians

BY REV. JAY HALLOWELL

Are you a Worldly Christian? Worldly Christians act like Christians while at church. Then they act like the people of the world the rest of the week. The whole letter of 1 Corinthians is written to a church with many Worldly Christians for the purpose of helping them to stop being Worldly Christians but live as God's children. John 14:14-16 is another helpful passage about this topic.

Are you a World Christian? World Christians act like Christians while at church. They also know the plan of the triune God for the whole world. They act like Christians outside the church, making decisions about their calendars, budgets, relationships, use of media, studies, work and all other aspects of their lives according to how it will glorify God by achieving maximum impact toward fulfilling God's plan for the whole world, especially the communication of the gospel to those of other cultures who have never heard of Jesus.

One lives as a World Christian by the following seven activities. I will put these in bold. *One leads others to become and live as World Christians by the following seven actions. I will write these in italics.*

1. *Inform (Learn)*
2. *Introduce (Meet)*

3. *Intercede (Pray)*
4. *Involve (Give, Go)*
5. *Influence (Send)*
6. *Institutionalize (Participate)*
7. *Inspire (Be inspired)*

1. *Inform (Learn).* World Christians regularly learn about:
 - a. God's plan for the world as revealed in the Bible (this starts in Genesis!)
 - b. The needs of the world, different nations and peoples.
 - c. What God has done (history of missions).
 - d. What God is doing around the world (the current work of missionaries, ministries, and missions).
 - e. How to become a missionary (the character, work, challenges, and opportunities of missionaries).
 - f. How to find God's will in missions.
 - g. How God can use us--as church members, students, professionals, supporters, in prayer, etc.
 - h. How to support missions, how to pray for missions, how to help your church catch a missions vision.
 - i. How to reach out to international students, businessmen, etc.
 - j. What will happen to those who don't hear or accept the gospel.
 - k. What is culture, how does one relate to people of other cultures.
 - l. And similar topics.

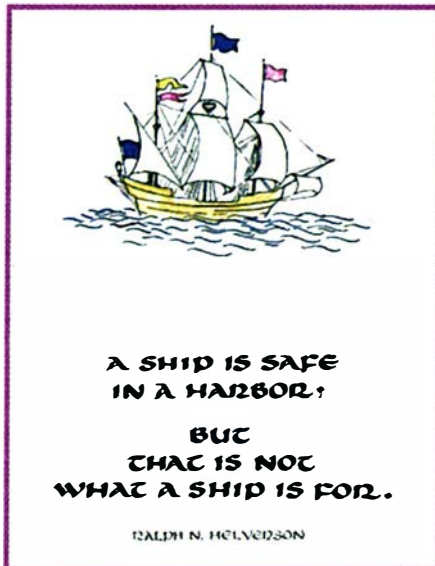
What are you regularly learning?

2. *Introduce (Meet)*. Missionaries are wonderful, interesting people. Meet them! Your friendship will encourage them. You will also find yourself encouraged. Modern technology makes continuing this friendship when they return to the field easier than it has ever been.

**How many missionary friends do you have?
How can you befriend more?**

3. *Intercede (Pray)*. A World Christian prays for God's interests, not only his or her own interests or needs. God is interested in every country in the world. God is interested in every kind of human group. He is especially interested in those who have never heard about Jesus, those who have no church nearby. God wants to answer the prayers of His people in this area.

What are you praying for every day?



4. *Involve (Give, Go)*. It takes courage to be a World Christian. World Christians give sacrificially, even when it hurts and even when they are not quite sure they can afford to give that much. Jesus gave all! It takes courage to witness to a non-believer, especially one from the Muslim part of Mindanao, or a foreign student from a country like Iran. Be courageous in sacrificial giving and bold witness.

Are you giving and witnessing courageously?

5. *Influence (Send)*. "How will they preach

unless they are sent?" (Rom. 10:15). It is great to send members of other churches, such as the missionaries CGC is currently supporting. It is also great to send your own church members. While one thinks naturally of sending gifted and called young people, in truth, there is no age limit on serving God in a new place. (One could ask Moses about his. He was called at age 80! See Exodus 3-4 and Acts 7:23 and 7:30.)

**Are you helping to send those God has called?
Are you open to His call?**

6. *Institutionalize (Participate)*. The leaders at the workshop on September 11, 2010 during the CGC Missions Emphasis came up with many ideas for how to help the members become World Christians. World Christians support, cooperate and participate with their leaders.

Are you participating in what your church leaders are asking you to do? Will you volunteer when they approach you?

7. *Inspire. (Be inspired)*. The visionary plan of the Triune God to reach even the hardest people in the furthest place with the most difficult language and the most ungodly culture by using His children is both humbling and inspiring. He wants to use the members and leaders of CGC.

Are you inspired to be all that God wants you to be, a World Christian?

人生與財富

潘再恩牧師

“財富”是許多世人夢寐以求的。在中國各地，每逢農曆新年，朋友見面時，都說“恭喜發財”。這可說是許多人的心願和期望。幾乎大多數人都視財富為第二生命。

財富的重要

- 一. 財富可使人得到享受：有了財富，“衣”可穿尼絨綢緞，時裝洋服；“食”可嘗山珍海味，佳餚美酒；“住”可居高樓大廈，豪華別墅；“行”有名貴汽車，私人飛機。尤其是在今天，科學發達，有許多新奇的東西可供玩樂，也可到世界各名勝地區旅遊，享受到比以前的帝王更舒適的生活。
- 二. 財富可使人朋友增多：俗語說：“貧在鬧市無人問，富在深山有遠親”。所羅門王也說：“財富使朋友增多，但窮人朋友遠離。”因為許多世人都有勢利的眼光，現實的思想，交朋友也以利益為前提。
- 三. 財富可使人地位高昇：古今中外的社會，很少不重富欺貧。俗語說：“有錢昇三分，無錢降輩份。”富人說的話是句句金玉，窮人的意見常被人輕視。正如俗語所說：“先敬衣冠後敬人。”“不信但看筵中酒，杯杯先敬有錢人。”

財富非萬能

- 一. 財富不能使人得到真正的快樂：金錢雖可買到名貴的床褥，卻未必能得到安甜的睡眠；金錢雖可買到山珍海味，卻未必有良好的胃口可以享受；金錢雖可買到許多新奇的娛樂器材，卻未必有愉快的心情可以消遣；金錢雖可建造豪華的住宅，但未必有溫暖甜蜜的家庭。美國柯達照像器材公司的主人，他的產品暢銷全世界，擁有無數的財富，但心

中卻十分煩悶，曾藉旅遊想排解心中的苦悶，卻是以遊消愁愁更愁，最後走上自殺的道路。

- 二. 金錢不能使人享有真正的平安：富人常是歹徒綁票劫殺的對象，雖小心謹慎，仍不免受暗算。許多被綁票劫殺的人雖是良善的公民，與人無仇，然而，“匹夫無罪，懷璧其罪。”象因牙被殺，人因財遭害。可見財富雖可帶給人許多享受，也會帶給人許多危險。

- 三. 財富不能作人長遠的依靠：如以前我們中國有一個人，名叫鄧通，他得到漢文帝的寵愛，官至上大夫，並將四川的銅礦賜給他，且允許他鑄錢，於是他成為巨富。後來文帝死了，景帝即位，沒收他的財產，他最終因貧困而餓死。所以聖經說：“不要勞碌求富，休仗自己的聰明。你豈要定睛在虛無的錢財上麼，因為錢財必長翅膀，如鷹向天飛去。”（箴言23章4至5節）

- 四. 財富不能使人享有健康與長壽：財富雖被稱為人生的第二生命，但遠不如健康與長壽。因為那是第一生命。

1970年代，菲律賓有一位富有的僑領，他的事業遇到挫折，身體又患了嚴重的疾病。他的摯友寫信安慰他說：“金錢損失，沒有損失；健康損失，有點損失；品德損失，完全損失。”但他回信說：“金錢損失，沒有損失；品德損失，有點損失；健康損失，完全損失。”我覺得兩個人所說的都對，只是觀點的不同。金錢是身外之物，雖然損失，還能復得；只要有健康，有生命氣息，不怕沒有金錢。如果喪失健康和生命，一切都完了。耶穌曾說：“人若賺得全世界，賠上自己的生命，有甚麼益呢？”（馬太16章26節）

財富的危害

世上的事物，常有正反兩方面，財富也是如此。俗語說：“磨刀恨不利，刀利傷人指；求財恨不多，財多害人己。”財富對人有許多好處，但也有許多害處，有時它的害處比好處還多。到底它對人對己有甚麼害處呢？

一. 對品德的危害：哲學家培根說：“財富是品德上的行李，是走向美德的一大障礙。因為財富之於品德，正如軍隊的輜重一樣，沒有它不行，有了它又妨礙前進。有時甚至因為要照顧它，反而失去了勝利的機會。”也有人說：財富是人品德上的陷阱，使許多富有的人及其子女，落入驕奢淫逸的羅網中。

二. 對於道德的危害：道德就是一種大家所應循的法則，以及合於倫理的行為。以往的人認為“男盜女娼”是不道德的，是犯罪的行為。但在今日的世界，到處都是金錢掛帥，很多人都在“向錢看”，只要能得到金錢，就不擇任何手段，也不管它甚麼盜與娼。

盜，就是賊與匪的一夥，包括偷竊，搶劫和以非法手段取得金錢，許多窮人為了生活，不惜挺而走險，幹下偷，搶和綁架的犯行；但有些人卻是為了享受，為了財富，不惜作奸犯科，幹著販毒，走私，偷稅，漏稅，貪污舞弊的丑行，竊國盜民。這類的消息，我幾乎每天都從日報上看到。許多國家的政要被揭出丑聞。這些人在年輕求學的時代，幾乎都有崇高的理想和偉大的心志，準備將來做個福國利民，造福社會而留芳百世的人物；但一踏入社會，因經不起金錢的試探和財富的誘惑，以致所作所為，反而禍國殃民，致為社會所摒棄，身敗名裂，遺臭萬年。

娼，是指那些以賣淫為工作的女子，素來為人所鄙視。但在今日“笑貧不笑娼”的社會，有許多良家女子不是因為貧窮而出賣自己，而是在物質享受和金錢的誘惑下自甘墮落。

高新覺先生說：“金錢是一個無底的海，廉恥，天良，真理，都會沉在這裡面。”

三. 對家庭的危害：財富雖能給家人帶來許多享受，但也可能給家人帶來許多危害。俗語說：“夫婦和其中自樂，子孫賢此外何求。”又說：“父慈子孝全家福，兄友弟恭滿堂春。”但財富對於家庭和諧的生活，常是幫助不足，而破壞有餘。許多富有的丈夫若不是公然的三妻四妾，就是秘密的金屋藏嬌，使恩愛的夫妻反目成仇。不少富有的家庭因為家產而兄弟鬩牆，同室操戈。有人說，金錢雖是萬能，也是萬惡，

它能使人滅絕親情，破壞家庭的幸福，破壞至親的情誼。

四. 財富對自身的危害：

1. 對自己靈魂的危害：史克基說：“物質的富足，常會引人到靈性的破產，金錢非常容易毀滅一個人的靈魂。”莎士比亞說：“黃金對於人的靈魂較諸任何毒藥更可怕，而且在這可惡的世界上殺人更多。”有不少的人願意以自己的靈魂，向魔鬼換取今生的財富。

2. 對將來永福的危害：一個信徒對來世所存的希望不但是到天堂和享永生，更重要的是得主的稱贊與獎賞。上天堂享永生的方法簡單，只要你接受耶穌為你的救主。但要得到主的稱讚和獎賞就不簡單了。你一定要做一個良善和忠心的管家，把祂托付你的生命，時間和財富管理好，經營好。不要把祂的托付擁為己有。應大力支持各種傳福音的事工，投資於拓展天國的事業，並要盡力幫助貧窮的人。因為作在一個微小的人身上，就是作在主的身上。參與各種傳福音的事工，是積財於天；濟助貧苦的人，也是積財於天；聖經說：“憐憫貧窮的，就是借給耶和華，他的善行耶和華必償還。”（箴言19章17節）

聖經並沒有說，信徒不可擁有財富，也沒有說財富是萬惡的根源，而是說：“貪財是萬惡的根源。”並說：“有人貪戀錢財，就被引誘離了真道，用許多愁苦把自己刺透了。”（提摩太前書6章10節）

貪財會生出很多的罪。有人因貪財而不惜挺而走險，作奸犯科，走私漏稅，搶劫販毒，貪污舞弊，導致身敗名裂。有時也會受到法律的處罰，陷入牢獄之災。耶穌教導信徒說：“一個人不能事奉兩個主人，不是惡這個愛那個，就是重這個輕那個，你們不能事奉上帝，又事奉財物。”“事奉”原有為奴的意思，一個基督徒最容易犯的拜偶像的罪，可說是事奉錢財。信徒可以有金錢財物，但必須善於管理，要作財富的主人，不要作財富的奴僕。並絕對不可把真神和財物一同敬拜，一同事奉。

上帝對以色列人說：“除了我以外，你不可有別的神。”祂今天也同樣對每一個基督徒這樣說：你不可有別的神，包括你的財富。因為上帝是忌邪的上帝。如果我們能盡心盡性盡力愛我們的上帝，單單的事奉祂，先求祂的國與祂的義，祂必定能將我們所需要的賜給我們。



大癩瘋的疾病

許郭錦繡

在舊約的時代，大癩瘋是一種極可怕驚人的病症。因它不但不可治療，而且具有傳染的厲害作用。所以患者必須受趕出，離開群眾，被稱為「不潔」。

聖經所記載的大癩瘋，是預表靈裡有罪，舊約中患著大癩瘋有三個人。現在我們要從這三人中，認識其病因，療法及結果。

(一) 米利暗(民12:1-16)

•病因：論斷及毀謗之罪

摩西娶了古實女子為妻，米利暗和亞倫因他所娶的古實女子就毀謗他說：「難道耶和華單與摩西說話，不也與我們說話麼？」(民12:1-3)。耶和華聽見了，就向他們兩人發怒，米利暗就長了如雪那樣白的大癩瘋。

•療法：悔改，代求，關鎖

亞倫看見米利暗長了大癩瘋就對摩西央求，不要因他們愚昧的罪加在他們的身上。摩西便哀求耶和華，求祂醫治米利暗。耶和華便將米利暗在營外關鎖七天，潔淨後才把她領出來。亞倫之悔改，摩西之代求，及米利暗之關鎖，終於使她得了醫治。

•結果：得以潔淨

米利暗犯了論斷及毀謗的罪，不但自己受了責罰，而且也連累了全以色列百姓。在她關鎖七天的時間，百姓沒有行路，直等到把她領出來。(民12:15)

一個人心靈有了病，全教會會受影響。教會是一個群體，若有一個肢體受苦，所有的肢體也被連累。所以務要當心，不可隨便論斷，毀謗他人。因為教會的分裂，往往是由論斷或毀謗而引起的。雅各書告訴我們「舌頭是百體裡最小的火，能點燃最大的樹林。它是個罪惡的世界，能污穢全身，也能把生命的輪子點起來，並且是從地獄裡點著。舌頭是沒有人能制伏，是不止息的惡物。滿了害死人的毒氣。」(雅各3:5-8)；所以當我們每次要開口說話時，首先問問：(一)這些話是否真的？(二)這些話是否真正需說出來？(三)這些話是否能榮神益人？

摩西是被論斷的對象。但是「他為人極其謙和，勝過世上的眾人」(民12:3)。他並沒有發怒，也沒有為自己辯護，更沒有存報復之心，反而為論斷他的人代求。求上帝醫治米利暗。摩西這種仁愛，寬容，忍耐的美德，實值得我們來效法的。所以當人若論斷我們時，我們要學習摩西，為論斷我們的人代求，讓主為我們伸冤。

(二) 乃縵(列王紀下5:1-14)

•病因：自高驕傲之罪

乃縵是亞蘭王的元帥，是一位大能的勇士。可惜他長了大癩瘋。幸得他家中有一個從以色列國被擄的女子，她在家中服事乃縵的妻子，便將她所認識的神人以利沙介紹

給他。

•療法：謙卑，聽從，順服

乃縵心靈的疾病是驕傲。而驕傲有三個大支柱：

A. 架子

驕傲的人自以為他比別人富有，高明，能幹。所以往往有輕視人的態度。乃縵是一位有名的大將軍，他能夠聽從一個毫無地位被擄之女子的意見，就顯出他能夠謙卑地將架子脫落了。

B. 面子

乃縵帶著車馬到了以利沙的家，站在門前，他相信以利沙必親身出來迎接他。而站著求告耶和華的名，在患處以上搖手，治好了他的大癩瘋，(王下5:11)，想不到以利沙只打發一個使者叫他去約但河沐浴七回。因此，乃縵之驕傲上升，就發怒，氣忿的轉身去了。他僕人進前來，對他說：「我父啊，先知若吩咐你作一件大事，你豈不作麼？何況說你去沐浴，而得潔淨呢。」於是，乃縵聽了僕人的勸告，照著神人的話，在約但河沐浴七回(王下5:13-14)。他這樣做就證明了他願意放下了他的自尊和面子。

C. 法子

驕傲的人相信他的辦法一定比別人高超。當乃縵聽見以利沙叫他去約但河沐浴時，他心裡不服，因為他認為大馬色的河總比以色列一切的水更好。然而，他最後終於放棄了他的辦法，願意遵照神人以利沙所吩咐的去行。

•結果：得以復原

因為乃縵之謙卑，聽從及順服，神就醫好了他的癩瘋。他的肉好像小孩子的肉，終於潔淨了(列下5:14)。

願我們學習像那位小女子，將福音的好消息介紹給人，拯救失喪的靈魂。願我們除去高驕的心態，學習謙卑，肯聽從順服，因為「上帝阻擋驕傲的人，賜

恩給謙卑的人。」(彼前5:5)。

(三)基哈西(列下5:20-27)

•病因：欺哄貪財之罪

乃縵帶上餽物以報答以利沙。以利沙沒有接受，其僕人基哈西因貪心，愛慕銀子及衣裳，便追趕跑去對乃縵這樣說：「我主人打發我來說，剛才只有兩個少年人，是先知門徒，從以法蓮山來見我。請你賜他們一他連得銀子，兩套衣裳。」乃縵便將二他連得銀子及兩套衣裳交給僕人(王下5:20-23)。基哈西以欺哄得銀子，向乃縵及以利沙說了謊話。因此，以利沙就對他說：「乃縵的大癩瘋必沾染你和你的後裔，直到永遠」(王下5:27)。

•治療：沒藥可醫

•結果：患癩瘋而死亡

提前6:10「貪財是萬惡之根。有人貪戀錢財，就被引誘離了真道，用許多愁苦把自己刺透了。」古人言：「人為財死，鳥為食亡」，這話真可信！新約使徒行傳記載亞拿利亞及其妻撒非喇變賣田產，把價銀自留下幾分，欺哄了聖靈，因此就仆倒斷了氣死了(使5:1-10)。由此可見，欺哄與貪財是多麼可怕呀！

願主幫助我們藉著三位長大癩瘋的人得了警戒。要切切記住：

(一)不要論斷，也不可毀謗。因為你在甚麼事上論斷人，就在甚麼身上定自己的罪。神必照真理審判你。(羅2:1-3)

(二)不可自高驕傲，因為我們所擁有的一切，都是從神領受的。沒有一項東西是值得我們自誇的。

(三)不要欺哄貪財，要凡事知足，因「主恩夠我們用。」(彼後12:9)，「要想念上面的事，不要思念地上的事。」(西3:2)，因為世上一切榮華富貴都是暫時的，萬物皆成為虛空，唯有在基督裡才是永恆的。



A Rare Experience: Surigao Missions Trip

BY DERWIN Y. CHAN

October 21, 2010: Already in the church bus to catch the 7 pm boat for Surigao. In the bus were eleven other young people, all excited for the trip ahead. Microphones...check. Songsheets...check. A well practiced program...yeah, this evangelistic trip will be "business as usual"...or so, we thought.

A couple weeks back, the CGC Missions Committee saw it fit to assign the Soul Searchers and the CYF Praise Band to prepare for an evangelical program for two nights in Surigao Gospel Church, a sister church of CGC. The Praise Band was to lead the praise and worship for two nights and for the coming Sunday church service. The Soul Searchers planned to do a skit and sing three songs for the three day evangelical meet. October 22–25, 2010 would be an opportune time for the group to go since it was semestral break for the student members. As for the working members, prayers were needed to allow our bosses to approve of our vacation leave. And thankfully, with God's grace, majority of the group were available for the trip.

As we finished packing the things needed for the trip, we opened up with a word of prayer asking God to guide and to protect us and trusting everything upon His will. Little did we know, that was exactly the lesson we were going to learn.

We arrived in Surigao after a very fun and sleep-deprived boat trip (we were not surprised by the lack of sleep considering we were with a group of young excited people). There at the arrival area of the port, we were met by Atsi Paz and Ahia Raymond who were



kind enough to wait for us with transport to Surigao Gospel Church. The group packed into the bus and we were off, singing songs as loud as we can all the way.

The smell of breakfast welcomed the group as we entered the church, a feast lovingly prepared by Ptr. Rosalinda Ng, who some of us remembered as Siansi Ni-it, from her days as counselor of the elementary CYF. After the scrumptious meal, we unloaded our stuff and ran-through a couple of songs to get ready for our first evangelical night.

The first night went smoothly, the band led a couple of songs and Bok Su Un Hok preached to a crowd of around 20-30 people. The church was cozy and roomy enough to fit the members with space to spare. Ace Te gave a testimonial on how God touched his life and how faithful our Heavenly Father is. The night ended with Pastor Ni-it saying a word of prayer. As the program was finishing, she approached us and asked if we should remind the attendees of the musical concert we were going to have the next night.

Concert...concert? The word shocked the group! It turned out that the attendees were

expecting a lengthier musical program which the group didn't prepare. Amidst the panic, the confusion and frustration, the song "Still" came into my mind...It turns out that for all the times we Christians pray for God's will to be done, many times we still want to keep the control until God gets the driver's wheel from us and tells us to sit and relax. This was one of those times.

The group stayed up late for a totally different reason that night. No jokes...no fun talk...this was a time for planning and prayer. Before the night got too deep, with God's grace and help from the Soul Searchers who stayed in Cebu, the group expanded a two-song, one-skit program to a lengthier seven-song program with one skit.

The next day, the group woke up well rested and ready for a day of practice. The singing during the bus rides hardly stopped, it actually became louder. As we arrived at church, we proceeded on practicing on our impromptu concert, only stopping for lunch at the house of Auntie Annie, who was celebrating her birthday on that day. We thank God for her, her hospitality and for her willingness to feed and take in a bunch of youngsters who sang *happy birthday* to her countless of times.

Practice went on until it was time for the second night. We were ready despite the rush practice. We opened with a prayer asking God that no matter what happened that night, we knew that it was in His hands and the blessing of the night was according to His saying so. We also prayed for the sound system since it started to malfunction during the program time.

The Soul Searchers opened with a song, "How Great is our God". Then, the sound system started to malfunction. It didn't stop the group from singing though, we kept on singing even without accompaniment. To the side, we could see the group praying for the sound system to be okay. The malfunction actually added meaning and purpose to the singing: that even if others won't sing, even if things go wrong, we Christians should keep on singing that truly our God is great. Thankfully, the sound system became okay after the first song and the program went on. Some of the members were assigned to speak in between songs. This, too, wasn't planned but despite the lack of preparation, the lack of scripts, God saw it fit to use some of the members to give a powerful message through the words being said through them.

The night went on and the songs were sang....the skit was performed and Bok Su gave his message...At the end of the night, I'm not sure how many members were touched by the program but that's totally between them and God. I'm not sure if the words of the songs spoke to them but that depends on how opened they were to God's leading. But one thing is for sure... I know that as the group finished the program that night, each one realized that it really isn't about how good we are, how talented or skilled we are, or even how well prepared we are. That night, God was in control of us, and He taught us what surrendering to His will really is.

TO GOD BE ALL THE GLORY FOREVER AND EVER!



基督徒的品德

經文：詩篇第十五篇

小山

這詩的作者大衛作王四十年，所住的王宮是富麗堂皇，環境優美，而且充滿了一切的財物。他享受普通人所沒有的起居飲食。但是他雖住在王宮裡卻渴慕寄居在上帝的帳幕中，住在上帝的聖山。為甚麼呢？這表明與上帝同是在好得無比的。正如使徒保羅在腓3:7-8所說的「只是我先前以為與我有益的，我現在因基督都當作有損的。不但如此，我也將萬事當作有損的，因我以認識我主基督為至寶。」

一. 二個問題。(詩15:1)

在第一節，大衛王問了兩問題說：「耶和華啊，誰能寄居在禱的帳幕？誰能住在禱的聖山。」當時以帳幕為預備安放約櫃的地方，就是在大衛王所設帳幕裡(撒下6:17)。聖山呢？是在耶路撒冷建築聖殿的地方。

二. 基督徒的十一種品德。(詩15:2-5a)

在第二節講到三個正面的品德。就是行為正直，作事公義，心裡說實話的人。

行為正直。作這詩的大衛王配得是行為正直的人嗎？我們知道大衛王是合神心意的人，卻不是完全人。可是從他兒子所羅門的見證說他父親是怎樣的人呢？請看王上3:6「所羅門說：你僕人我父親大衛用誠實、公義、正直的心行在禱面前…」這是所羅門在夢中向上帝的禱告，提到他的父親大衛在上帝

面前有正直的心。

作事公義。公義是上帝的本性，是完全無罪。但世人沒有一個義人，都是犯罪作惡的人。虧欠了上帝的榮耀。因此主耶穌要道成肉身，降世作人，為罪人捨命，流出寶血來救贖信祂的人，不至滅亡，反得永生。主耶穌的捨命，無罪代替有罪的是為著滿足上帝公義的要求。這樣，要到上帝的帳幕，住在上帝聖山的人，應該是重生得救的人。有以主的義為義的人，過著成聖的生活的人。也是靠聖靈作事的人。

心裡說誠實話的人。世人說話大多口是心非，作基督徒的話語應該是就說是，非就說非。禱求上帝更應該為是非分明的人。如果不從心裡說誠實話的人，就沒有資格寄居在上帝的帳幕和住在上帝的聖山。

偉大的Emmanuel Kant有一位年老的父親，這老年人在波蘭經過曠野危險的路。要回到他的原籍Silesia，在途中他遇到一群的強盜，搶了他所有貴重的東西。最後問「你有給我們所有的東西嗎？」直到他回答「所有的」才去。強盜去後，他發現有一金塊縫在他的外衣。他立刻回頭去追那些強盜，找到了，告訴他們在外衣還有這金塊。奇怪的，這些強盜沒有一個拿他的金塊。一個將他的皮包送回，另一個給回他的祈禱冊，另一個牽了他的馬幫他坐馬。最後同聲的懇求他

的祝福。這年老人是心裡說誠實話的人。

在第三節有三個負面的品德。就是他
不以舌頭讒謗人，也不惡待朋友，也不隨
夥毀謗鄰里。

不以舌頭讒謗人。我們的舌頭常常讒
謗人。在舊約民12:1-11，我們看到摩西
的姐姐米利暗和哥哥亞倫因他娶了古實
的女子為妻就毀謗他。讒謗和毀謗的意義
差不多。就是心裡不滿，說人壞話。後來
上帝發怒使米利暗長大癡瘋。我們若用舌
頭讒謗人，就不配寄居上帝的帳幕和住在
上帝的聖山。

不惡待朋友。朋友應當彼此相愛，彼
此以愛心相待，才配稱為朋友。基督徒不
但是朋友而且是互為肢體。若左手打右手，
左腳踢右腳，彼此惡待，都不是祂所喜悅
的。這樣的人怎能寄居上帝的帳幕和住在
上帝的聖山？

不隨夥毀謗鄰里。基督徒的鄰里不但
是住在附近的人。而有更廣闊的意義。在
路10:29-37記載了主所設的比喻，就是
「好撒瑪利亞人」的故事。主耶穌在回答
一個律法師所問的問題：「誰是我的鄰舍
呢？」說，有一個人被強盜打得半死。有
一個祭司和利未人經過那裡沒有幫助他！
後來有一個撒瑪利亞人經過那裡，才上前
用油和酒倒在他的傷處，包裹好了，扶他
騎上自己的牲口，帶到店裡照應他。你想
這三個人，那一個是個落在強盜手中的鄰
舍呢？當然是那撒瑪利亞人。

鄰舍就是鄰里，基督徒如果看到鄰舍
被人毀謗引起糾紛，應盡力調解，幫助安
慰，不要加柴加火。隨夥毀謗鄰里的人怎
樣寄居上帝的帳幕和住在上帝的聖山呢？

第四節提到三個正面的品德。就是他
眼中藐視匪類卻尊重敬畏上帝的人，他發
了誓雖然自己吃虧，也不更改。

他眼中藐視匪類。匪類不只是指那些
打劫奪食的土匪而已，更是上帝的敵人。
上帝的敵人就是撒但，敵基督，說謊的，
不認耶穌基督的等等。（看約一書2:18, 22）

撒但第十七章記載以色列人的敵人歌
利亞來罵陣。以色列人看見他都逃跑了。
但大衛卻藐視他說：「這未受割禮的非利
士人是誰呢？竟敢向永生上帝的軍隊罵陣
麼？」他看見大衛上陣就指著自己的假神
咒詛大衛。但大衛卻不怕他，因為他靠永
生耶和華的名；他眼中藐視匪類歌利亞
說：「你來攻擊我是靠刀槍和銅戟。我來
攻擊你是靠永生耶和華的名，就是你所怒
罵帶領以色列軍隊的上帝。」結果大衛用
甩石的機器去攻擊歌利亞，用石打中歌利
亞的額，他就打倒在地。大衛上前用歌利
亞的刀砍下歌利亞的頭。

卻尊重敬畏耶和華的人。基督徒無論
在甚麼地方遇到另一位基督徒；雖然生活
習慣不同，語言風俗不同，卻是一見如故，
因為他們是尊重敬畏耶和華的人。一位敬
畏上帝的人就可以寄居上帝的帳幕和住
在上帝的聖山。

他發了誓雖然自己吃虧，也不更改。
人起了誓，因為吃虧便反悔，佔便宜，
不肯吃虧，不守自己的諾言。世上的人多
是如此，但是我們知道，上帝是信實的
上帝，人自己不信實，怎能到信實的上帝
的面前呢？

第五節提到二個反面的品德；就是他
不放債取利，不受賄賂以害無辜。

不放債取利。世人怎樣我們不去管他
們，基督徒應當怎樣呢？基督徒不應欠人
不還，也不要借錢給人。有人需要錢濟急，
你最好不是借給他而是幫助他。借而不還，
好友也成為仇敵。古語說得好「仁義莫交
財，交財仁義絕」。通常是借易還難。為
著借錢，至親反目，那倒不如量力幫助他。

不受賄賂以害無辜。地上貪官污吏很
多。不管是非為了錢去害人的人不少。只
要錢，不管別人死活。這種人當然不配就
近上帝。

基督徒應照以上的十一個品德去行這
詩的最後兩句話「行這些事的人，必永不
動搖。」



Welcome to the third 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 saw how the nation of Israel split in half, and gradually deteriorated into very weak client states for the major powers in the region: the Assyrians, Babylonians, and the Egyptians. Southern Israel lasted 136 years longer than the North, but would eventually fall to the might of the Neo-Babylonians. The victorious Nebuchadnezzar deported the nobility and priests to Babylon - how will the Judeans survive their greatest test ever?

“Part 3: Dark Days of the Diaspora”

After the Assyrians destroyed Samaria, the Ten Northern Tribes of Israel disappeared forever. They scattered into the four winds, and never reorganized themselves into a country ever again. Some might have fled South into Judea. Those who were forced to live in other places mingled with the local populace. As time passed, they lost their original identities and became part of their new community. Those who stayed intermarried with other Assyrian deportees, and adopted a more Mesopotamian culture.

Many people today claim to be descendants of the “Ten Lost Tribes”. These include certain ethnic groups in Afghanistan, China, India, Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Yemen. Perhaps the most famous of these claimants are a group called the Samaritans, who claim to be direct descendants of the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. The Samaritans practiced a religion very similar to pre-exile Israel, but often came into conflict with their Jewish neighbors (more on that later).

The destruction of Jerusalem, and the subsequent exile of its nobility and educated class, was a great blow to their psyche as a people. It was bad enough that the Judeans lost their homes, belongings, their Temple, and their country. Worst of all, their God lost to the gods of these uncircumcised Babylonians! Does it mean that their god was weaker? After all, that was indeed what the people at that time believed.

The exiles seized on a face-saving explanation: their God wasn't weak, he just abandoned them. Why *wouldn't* he forsake them? They broke many of his commandments. They had been sinful and wicked, They worshiped

many gods from him. And now they were reaping the consequences of their actions!

Archaeologists have found plenty of idols (particularly of Asherah, who ancient Israelites may have believed to be Yahweh's consort) in Israelite homes dating back to the pre-Exile period. No idols dating after the Exile were ever found. Could it be that at long last, the Judeans have finally learned to obey?

Babylonian Living

How difficult was life under captivity? As it turned out, it wasn't so bad after all. Keep in mind that this wasn't the first time the Babylonians invaded Judea and deported its people – the famous Daniel and his friends were taken to Babylon during the time of King Jehoiakim. So there was already a support system when the final deportees arrived in Babylon. This made it much easier for them to adjust to their new lives.

Of course, life was no bed of roses. They didn't have complete religious freedom. At times, they were persecuted. Daniel had a date with a few hungry lions; his friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednigo were tossed into a very hot oven. But by the by, the Babylonians didn't treat them too harshly.

As it turns out, the real danger facing the Judeans was assimilation, not persecution. If they felt safe and comfortable, they might decide to stay and adopt the culture of their new home. Why go back to quaint provincial Jerusalem when you're in the cosmopolitan capital of Babylon? If they were not careful, the Judeans would easily lose their customs and way of life as time passes, just as what happened to the Israelites.

Thus, the religious leaders looked for ways to ensure the survival of their beliefs and traditions while in exile. Previously, they had to go to the Holy Temple to worship God and offer sacrifices. This was no longer possible after the Temple was destroyed. Burnt offerings were substituted with prayer – it was easier to hide. It became legal for them to worship God from wherever they are, giving rise to houses of worship later on.

The priests wanted to make sure that their children and grandchildren would never forget their original roots. Judah's religious edicts and oral history were put into writing, finalizing what is today the *Torah*, first five books of the Bible. The books of *Chronicles* were also written during this time.

When you first read it, *Chronicles* seems to duplicate what was already written in *Samuel* and *Kings*. But there is a difference: *Chronicles* was written by the priests, so Israel was viewed as a religious community instead of a nation. *Chronicles* was less harsh in judging kings of the past, and it was more optimistic on the future. It ended where the book of *Ezra* begins – on a happy note. The exile was about to end!

Homeward Bound

Under the leadership of **Cyrus the Great**, the Persians (people from Iran) started a campaign to conquer the empires around them. Babylon fell quite quickly, in 539 BCE. You may recall the famous "Writing on the Wall" story told in *Daniel 5:1-31*, where king Belshazzar was slain by the invading Persians.

Cyrus the Great was different from the Assyrians and the Babylonians – he gave limited freedom to his new subjects. He allowed the exiles to return home to Jerusalem, letting them take back the relics taken by Nebuchadnezzar from the Temple. And they did – over 42,000 of them. The Exile turned out to be less than 50 years long.

Why was Cyrus so generous? Perhaps he felt a kinship with the Judeans, since their religions both believe in a single god (before their conversion to Islam, the Iranians practiced *Zoroastrianism*). Or maybe he wanted to be loved by all as a magnanimous ruler. In any case, Cyrus was viewed as a heroic figure in the Hebrew Bible (Isaiah even called him a Messiah). In fact, the Judeans never rebelled against the Persian empire like they did with future occupiers.

The rebuilding of the Temple began, but there was some opposition from the **Samaritans**, who were now living in the land of Israel. Samaritans were viewed as mixed-breed foreigners – their ancestors married people from other lands who were deported there by the Assyrians. When the Samaritans offered to help in rebuilding, the Jews, who viewed religious purity as very important, rejected it.

The Samaritans did not take this rejection very well. They tried to block the Temple from being rebuilt, and managed to completely stop all construction work until 521 BCE. The prophets *Haggai* and *Zechariah* actively pushed the people to rebuild the temple, taking advantage of a new regime in Persia.

When **Darius**, Cyrus' son-in-law, took over the throne in Persia, Samaritan leaders sent him a letter hoping to make him kill the project entirely. The plan backfired; Darius even funded the temple's completion. Six years later, in 515 BCE, the Temple was finally finished to great joy.

A plot to kill off all the Jews surfaced during the reign of **Xerxes**, the son of Darius. Fortunately for them, the plot was foiled by a beauty contest winner with the help of her uncle Mordecai. This story, told in *Esther*, explains the origin of an important Jewish festival called *Purim*. Incidentally, Xerxes tried to conquer all of Greece. The movie "300", which tells of a battle between Persia and Sparta, featured Xerxes as a villain.

Reconstruction

Artaxerxes, Xerxes' son and successor, sent two very important emissaries to check on the city's reconstruction. There is an ulterior motive here. The war against Greece ended humiliatingly for Persia, and the Egyptians were taking advantage of Persian weakness. Artaxerxes needed eyes in Israel to make sure the people living there would remain loyal to Persia (they had a habit of siding with Egypt against the Assyria and Babylon.)

The first emissary sent was **Ezra**, who was a scribe by profession (someone who copies scrolls by hand). He was a descendant of *Seraiah*, high priest during Jeremiah's time. Ezra was sent to Jerusalem to teach the law of Moses to the Jews living there.

The second emissary was **Nehemiah**, who was Artaxerxes' personal cupbearer. Most likely a

eunuch, Nehemiah was very sad that Jerusalem still had no walls after Babylon destroyed them. So the king appointed him Jerusalem's governor, and gave him the task to rebuild the city's walls.

Both men didn't like what they saw in Jerusalem. Nehemiah saw a weak and defenseless city whose walls still laid in rubble. Ezra saw the people intermarrying with foreign wives, in danger of losing their cultural identity just like the people from the northern kingdom.

Ezra acted decisively, quickly enforcing a policy of racial purification. Jews who married foreign women had to divorce their wives and send away their children if they wish to remain in Jerusalem.

Even by the standards of the past, it was a controversial measure. But it worked to preserve Jewish "purity". Think about it: the Jews survived mass deportation with their culture intact. Nobody else was able to do this in history.

As governor of Jerusalem, Nehemiah immediately began to rebuild the city walls. Although the Samaritans, Ammonites, Arabs and Philistines tried to sabotage the project, it was finished in record time, rebuilt in less than two months.

Ezra and Nehemiah had a fruitful collaboration. Ezra taught and enforced the law of Moses, and focused on keeping the Jews set apart from the non-Jews (gentiles). Nehemiah sponsored programs to repopulate Jerusalem, and supported Ezra's purification programs.

The effort was not a complete success. Nehemiah completed his 12-year term and returned to Persia. Years later, he was reappointed by Artaxerxes and returned to Jerusalem. He had to repeat the purification programs after the people lapsed into their "sinful" ways of marrying foreign women and not keeping the Sabbath and Temple holy.

Malachi, who prophesied during the time of Nehemiah's second return, was the last prophet of Israel. The *Great Assembly*, a body of 120 scribes, prophets, and elders was constituted as the main authority in Judaism. It standardized religious practices and the Hebrew canon, and was the forerunner of the body called the *Sanhedrin*.

Towards an Uncertain Future

The Jews emerged from their Exile with their heritage intact and faith strengthened. Although

Hebrews, Israelites, Judeans, Jews. What's the Difference?

As we dig deeper into the history of Christianity, you might be wondering what the difference is between the Hebrews, Israelites, Judeans, and Jews. Here's a short primer!

- **Hebrews.** The term originates from the word "עברי", which means to pass over. This is used to refer to the descendants of **Abraham**, before they invaded Canaan with Joshua's leadership.
- **Israelites.** Essentially, this means *child of Israel* (also known as **Jacob**). This term is synonymous with Hebrews, and is used to refer to the people after they invaded Canaan. This indicates division by *blood relation*.
- **Israelites and Judeans.** After the kingdom split into two, we had two countries, the North (called **Israel**) and the South (called **Judah**). People from the North were still called *Israelites*, but people in the South were now *Judeans*. The division has shifted to *location*.
- **Jew.** This refers to adherents of *Judaism*, the religion created by the Judeans who returned from the Exile. This is division by *religion*.
- **Semite.** The word comes from **Shem**, one of the sons of Noah. This is a broad term that includes many people from Mesopotamia, including the Hebrews. Today, the term *anti-Semitic* means someone who is against all *Jews*.
- **Zionist.** The root word is **Zion**, another name for **Jerusalem**. It refers to the people who campaigned for the establishment of an independent Jewish state in the land of Israel. Their effort succeeded when modern Israel was established by the United Nations in 1948.

People who live in today's Israel are called *Israelis*. They can either be *Jewish* (by blood or religion) or non-Jewish (*gentile* in the Bible). Israel is the only country in the world with a Jewish majority today, although this may change in the future.

Israel would not be an independent country for thousands of years, its people enjoyed relative protection from outside invasion.

But all was not well with the Persian empire. A great power would soon emerge from Europe, an empire led by an ambitious and brilliant young king from Macedon.

Find out what happens to the Jews in our next irreverent installment, as **Alexander the Great** begins his long march to Asia.

漫談過新年

白鴿

聖經：「耶和華在埃及地曉諭摩西亞倫說：你們要以本月為正月，為一年之首。」（出12:1-2）

因此，以色列人每年慶賀新年度的習俗，與他們民族蒙神救贖的歷史有密切的關係。他們出埃及時本是四月，因遵從神的旨意，便改為正月，稱為「亞筆月」，表徵新生活的開始。

追溯當時以色列人，處在埃及法老的權威下，被迫為奴工，受盡轄制，虐待，苦不堪言，他們唯有向神哀嘆訴苦。於是耶和華便向摩西顯現諭知說：「我的百姓在埃及所受的困苦，我實在看見了。他們因受督工的轄制所發的哀聲，我也聽見了。我原知道他們的痛苦。我下來是要救他們脫離埃及人的手，領他們出了那地，到美好寬闊流奶與蜜之地……」（出3:7-8）。於是摩西便奉行神的諭示，率領以色列全會眾脫離埃及地，向著神所應許之地邁進，開始承奉新生的篇章。

埃及是多神教，並且也是罪惡充斥的國家。神因為埃及法老的心固執剛硬，不讓以色列人離開埃及，便先後逐一使出九個災殃的神蹟，擊潰埃及人所崇奉的假神，作為警戒他們，唯有耶和華是獨一無二的真神。

但是埃及法老的心，仍然頑固剛硬。不肯謙虛讓步，讓以色列離開他的境界，反而更加嚴厲苛刻地加重他們的奴役。於是耶和華便對摩西說：我要再使一件災殃臨到法老和埃及人，然後他必容許你們離開這地。（出11:1）。同時耶和華便向摩西亞倫宣佈逾越節之禮。

並吩咐以色列全會眾申明說，要在正月十日，每家逃選一隻一歲的無殘疾羊羔。要留在十四日宰殺，各家要取點血，塗在喫羊羔的房屋左右的門框和門楣上。出埃及十二章第八節說：「當夜要喫羊羔的肉，用火烤了，與無酵餅和苦菜同喫。」

逾越節，在以色列的歷史中，一直延續著，預表耶穌是後來逾越節的羔羊。正如使徒保羅說：「……因為我們逾越節的羔羊－基督，已經被殺獻祭了。」（林前5:7）。所以，神吩咐說，不可把羊羔切開喫，要喫完整的。表明主耶穌死時，一根骨頭也不拆斷。象徵著基督徒在信仰上是一致的。

出埃及記十二章十一節說：「你們喫羊羔當腰間束帶，腳上穿鞋，手上拿杖，趕緊的喫，這是耶和華的逾越節。」可見守逾越節，必須腰間「束帶」，束帶是要有動作。基督徒蒙救贖後，在行為上要有謙虛儆醒地等候的意思。守逾越節，腳上必須穿上鞋。「穿鞋」是預備走路。是走福音的路。使徒保羅說：「又用平安福音，當作預備走路的鞋穿在腳上。」（弗6:15）。這些人所走過的路，就留下佳美的腳踪。所以信徒必須特別重視屬靈行裝的裝備，要有完善穩健的基本，才能對抗仇敵暗地裡的突擊。守逾越節，手中必須拿杖。「拿杖」就是要手捧著讀聖經。「聖經」是象徵我們的杖，也是屬靈的寶劍。保羅勉勵我們說：拿著聖靈的寶劍，就是神的道－聖經。（弗6:17）往昔聖靈不但默示先知和使徒寫成聖經，而且還隨時隨地感動信徒以聖經對抗魔

鬼的攻擊。昔日以色列人，本認為出埃及是十分艱難，但他們遵從神的吩咐，竟毫無難處。所以我們無論處在任何逆境，只要不懷疑地專心仰望神，一切難題必能化險為夷。

神的訓喻：「你們要守無酵節，因為我正當這日把你們的軍隊從埃及地領出來，所以你們要守這日，作為世世代代永遠的定例。從正月十四日晚上，直到二十一日晚上，你們要喫無酵餅。」(出12:17-18)。「酵」是象徵腐敗，污穢，也就是罪。從十四日到二十一日，整整七日，是屬靈的整數。除酵節，也是神要清除人世間一切罪孽。當主耶穌被釘十字架的頭一日，便是無酵餅的節日，也是逾越節。在屬靈的意識上，主耶穌是逾越節的羊羔，主耶穌也是生命的糧。這是主耶穌親口所說的：「我是從天上降下來生命的糧。人若喫這糧，就必永遠活著。我所賜的糧，就是我的肉，為世人之生命所賜的。」(約6:51)；「喫我肉喝我血的人，常在我裡面，我也正常在他裡面。」(約6:56)；當主耶穌被賣的那一夜，拿起餅來，祝謝了，親手擘開說：「這是我的身體，為你們捨的，你們應當如此行，為的是記念我……這杯是用我的血所立的新約，你們每逢喝的時候，……為的是記念我。」(林前11:24-25)。因而每當我們想起我們敗壞不堪的人，得蒙神的憐恤，成為罪人蒙恩典。所以我們應該領會使徒保羅的勸勉說：「要脫去你們從前行為上的舊人。這舊人是因私慾的迷惑，漸漸變壞。又要將你們的心志改換一新。並且穿上新人。這新人是照著神的形像造的，有真理的仁義和聖潔。」(弗4:22-24)。「舊人」是指人得救以前的舊生命；脫去舊人即棄絕過去罪惡的生活。所以使徒保羅一方面勸戒信徒不要像外邦人行事，目空一切的說大話；另一方面積極地勉勵信徒要更新行為。就是要以愛為出發點，作神光明的子民。「新人」是指在基督裡的新生命；穿上新人，就是按照真理使心志更新，過仁義聖潔的生活。使徒保羅接連勸勉說：「不要彼此說謊。因你們已經脫去舊人，和舊人行為，穿上新人。這新人在知識上漸漸更新，正如造他主的形像。」(西3:9-10)。所以在我們新生命的開始，應該互相呼應這三個願望：

一. 要杜絕偶像 - 出埃及記二章二至三節說：「我是耶和華你的神，曾將你從埃及地為奴之家領出來。除了我以外，你不可有別的神。」這雖然是昔日神鄭重的警告以色列百姓說的，照樣也是提醒後世信徒要格外地警惕！因為神是忌邪的，祂的原委是：

1. 祂絕不容忍祂的子民，將祂應得的尊榮歸給人手所造的偶像
2. 祂更不能容恕祂的子民，昏昧地去膜拜虛假的偶像。
3. 若是糊塗無知地去膜拜偶像，對他的身心，是得不到益處，僅是徒勞無功的。

二. 要認識神 - 何西阿書六章三節說：「我們務要認識耶和華，竭力追求認識祂。」倘若我們能切實的追求認識神，我們就會衷誠地愛神；我們若虔誠地愛神，我們便會自然而然愛所有的芳鄰。所以所羅門說：「敬畏耶和華是智慧的開端，認識至聖者便是聰明。」有些學者曾領悟到認識神是至上的榮耀！所以我們且從先知以賽亞在以賽亞書十一章裡，所預言基督作王的靈異事跡；

1. 基督賦有神的靈 - 以賽亞書十一章二節說：「耶和華的靈必住在祂身上，就是使祂有智慧和聰明的靈，謀略和能力的靈，知識和敬畏耶和華的靈。」當基督作王，有堅卓的大德行，大才能執掌祂的職權。因祂尊敬神，並以神的旨意為依歸。
2. 基督是公義信實的君王 - 以賽亞書十一章四至五節說：「卻以公義審判貧窮人，以正直判斷世上的謙卑人。以口中的杖擊打世界，以嘴裡的氣殺戮惡人。公義必當祂的腰帶。信實必當祂脅下的帶子。」基督以明辨是非，審判公正為準則。祂絕對不寬容作惡的人，對於犯案的必定施以審判懲處。
3. 基督是和平的君王 - 以賽亞書十一章第九節說：「在我聖山的遍處，這一切都

不傷人，不害物；因為認識耶和華的知識要充滿遍地，好像水充滿洋海一般。」當基督作王治理的局勢下；兇狠的野獸能與純良的動物和平共處，吃肉的動物轉變為吃草，不再有互相殘殺的形跡。那時小孩子要牽引牠們走動，呈現出人獸和諧相處。恢復起初人類未犯罪時的大自然的壯觀。這是描述末世基督作王的昇平景象。因為大多數的人們都一致的高舉神，忠心遵守神的旨意。

三. 要獻上感恩的祭 - 大衛在詩篇一百六十六篇十七節說：「我要以感謝為祭獻給禱。」大衛的閱歷，滿有神的同在，滿有神的恩惠。由於他因感佩神的恩典，寫下了詩篇一百零三篇。人們稱它為「感恩」的詩篇。他在詩篇裡，開門見山頌揚地說：「我的心哪，你要稱頌耶和華，凡在我裡面的，也要稱頌祂的聖名。我的心哪，你要稱頌耶和華，不可忘記祂的一切恩惠。」(詩103:1-2)。且參閱大衛對神讚許的感遇：

1. 神有赦罪之恩 - 「祂赦免你的一切罪孽。」(詩103:3上半節)。在約翰福音三章十六節說：「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絕，反得永生。」
2. 神有醫治之恩 - 「祂醫你們一切的疾病。」(詩103:3下半節)。神不但醫治我們身心的疾病，更要醫治我們心靈的疾病。昔日主耶穌曾經醫治大痲瘋，癱瘓，婦女患血漏，瞎眼，啞吧，癩子等病症。
3. 神有救命之恩 - 「祂救贖你的命脫離死亡。」(詩103:4上半節)。大衛一生的經歷：前有掃羅的追逐，後有押沙龍的悖逆，續有鄰邦的攻擊。但全能的神，都逐一施行拯救，使他擺脫一切凶險的危難。
4. 神有賞賜之恩 - 「祂以仁愛和慈悲為你的冠冕。」(詩103:4下半節)。「冠冕就是賞賜的表徵。」使徒保羅說：「那美

好的仗我已經打過了，當跑道的路我已經跑盡了，所信的道我已經守住了。從此以後，有公義的冠冕為我存留。……」(提後4:7-8)。這冠冕是神將要賞賜那些忠心恪守真道的人。

5. 神賜予長壽之恩 - 「祂用美物，使你所願的得以知足，以致你如鷹反老還童。」(詩103:5)。「如鷹反老還童」- 向來老鷹每逢春天時節，就要脫去舊的羽毛，隨後就要長出新的羽毛來。其寓意是人的青春常駐，滿有生命的活力。使生命延長。
6. 神有伸冤之恩 - 「耶和華施行公義，為一切受屈的人伸冤。」(詩103:6)。神憐惜那些被人輕蔑，委屈的人。就是被人無緣無故受誣罔，毀謗，挑剔，排擠，冤屈的人，神必為他們伸張公義，施審判，並懲罰那些作惡的人。
7. 神有應許之恩 - 「但耶和華的慈愛歸於敬畏祂的人，從亙古到永遠，祂的公義，也歸於子子孫孫，就是那些遵守祂的約，記念祂的訓詞而遵守的。」(詩103:17)。神曾經應許亞伯拉罕三件事：一. 他的後裔要承迦南地為業(創12:7; 15:18; 26:3)。二. 他們要成為大國(創17:6)。三. 列國都要因他們得福。「亞伯蘭(亞伯拉罕)信耶和華，耶和華就以此為他的義。」(創5:6)。神後來也向以撒，雅各重複祂的應許。因他們遵守神的約和訓詞。

大衛因感佩神一切的恩惠，他再三重複地說：「你們作祂的諸軍，作祂僕役，行祂所喜悅的，都要稱頌耶和華。你們一切被祂造的，在祂所治理各處，都要稱頌耶和華。我的心哪，你要稱頌耶和華。」所以，凡是承受神的恩惠，都要以感謝為祭獻給神！

但願我們在過新年之際，慎重地數算神一切的恩惠；我們要澈底地感悟，我們的身心要煥然更新，以迎合神的喜悅！





An Ambiguous World

BY RICHARD JOSEPH LI

We live in a world that is filled with Ambiguity. But what does ambiguity really mean? How does it affect us? Are we scared of it? Should we be excited about it? How does it shape the person who we are today? How does it affect our thoughts or our beliefs? Is it even relevant? Does ambiguity really matter?

Ten years ago, it would have been hard to imagine that first year high school kids all over our country would consider having a cell-phone as a normal thing. Twenty years ago, it would have been considered a taboo for a girl to ask a boy out for a date and even more so if she were the one to pay for the bill for their first date. Thirty years ago, it would have been impossible to think of having a black President of the United States of America.

In all three circumstances, ambiguity has shown its skin and done its work. Whether it is for good or bad, that is for you to consider. Though we do not like the word ambiguity so much, the truth of the matter is, we live with it day by day. Ambiguity is often the wind that slaps our face the moment we wake up. It is the plain and simple truth. It is something we have to live with. It is something that really matters.

Yet for us Christians, there is a silver lining in this ambiguous world. The thought of knowing the one simple yet powerful truth has stayed the same throughout the millennia: the truth of God's love for us and Christ's saving grace for those who believe in Him and accept Him as Lord and Savior.

This saving grace, which is a gift, is the biggest thing that sets us apart from non-believers. It is our treasure. It is our secret. But it is not the kind of secret we keep only to ourselves. It is something we are supposed to share with all mankind. The question is: are you sharing this secret with all your friends and family? Or are you keeping this secret to yourself?

Being a Christian in these ambiguous times is a bigger burden for those who truly understand God's will. As Christians, we have the responsibility not only to spread God's word but also to be a light in this vague world that is often filled with many false hopes and meaningless promises.

Back in college, my philosophy teacher who was an atheist challenged our class to prove to him that there really was God. He said that before he would consider

accepting God as his Lord and Savior, we would have to prove to him that God existed. It was hard to convince an atheist to believe in God's promise, let alone a philosopher by education. He said that the more he studied, the more he believed there was no God. He believed that there were more unanswered questions than answers in the Christian faith. He said that it was too vague and ambiguous.

Fast forward to shortly before my graduation, I heard that he had lost his wife to a tragic boating accident. Apparently, it was at that time when a former student of his visited him at his wife's wake and talked to him about giving God another chance. Apparently, his wife's death changed the way he looked at life. And he not only accepted God as his Lord and savior but is now very active in one of the Filipino Churches in Manila. It was his wife's death and the persistence of a former student that made his ambiguity concerning God's truth disappear.

Mind you, this was the student who he flunked in his class not once but twice! This was the student who many times in the course of the school year stood up to what she believed in regarding her faith. I heard that she even spoke out and debated with our teacher more than once regarding God's existence. No wonder this student stood out when she visited the teacher's wife's wake. No wonder the teacher listened. That student might have failed the course twice, but she sure did pass in God's scorecard and she passed it with flying colors.

How about you? Have you ever stood up and been persecuted for something you believed in? Have you ever been put in the hot seat because

of your belief or faith? Do you have what it takes to be a light in this ambiguous world?

You do not need to be rich, powerful or a person of stature to make a real difference in God's own eyes. In fact, God's definition of true wealth and power might actually be something very different from our own worldly values.

What matters to God most is the true desire of our heart. In Mark 12: 41- 44, we have a story of how a poor widow gave only two copper coins worth a few cents. In verse 43, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others." In verse 44, He continued, "They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on."

This verse tells us that God can see right through those who give or help for the sake of giving or helping. It tells us that although the giving of wealth and money is good for the Church, what God wants most is for us to surrender and offer our entire lives to him as the ultimate offering. It tells us that whether you are rich or poor, famous or not, in a position of power or just an ordinary person, we are all equal in the eyes of God. This is because the measure of what we give to Him is not the zeros in our cheque books nor the size of the land we donate but rather the fullness and wholeness of our very own hearts.

So let us not wait too long, my friends. Let's start giving back and in as much as we can of ourselves. And in the process of doing so, we may become a true light in this ambiguous world.





Proclaiming, Serving, Loving Christ - Mission Impossible?

BY REV. ANNA CHANG WRIGHT

When I was training for ministry, I learned to take a new, refreshing perspective on the meaning of Christian mission. Mission springs from God's purposive Will; God's Will of making the world know *all* that He has done throughout history (and continues to do) for his beloved world is called '*Missio Dei*'. From *Missio Dei* naturally flows the church's mission. Mission is more than an adjunct to the church's normal activities of worshipping, discipleship, fellowship and pastoral care. It is more than 'evangelical outreach' taking place outside the church's boundary. Indeed, it can be said that the church's very heart and existence depends on God's mission. Without God's mission, a church is simply an organization of well-meaning moral men and women. A church that is interested only in its members, its internal well-being and its local affairs will shrivel in its roots and die. But a church that looks outside itself and embarks on God's real mission will flourish like a tree beside a stream. Therefore, it is crucial to have timely reminders on the real purpose of our being church together and what truly constitutes God's mission.

Put simply, God's mission can be broken down into five key tasks: (1) *tell* the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ, (2) *teach* people the fundamentals of Christian faith, (3) *tend* with loving service all those

who suffer, (4) *transform* all structures of injustice and inequality and finally (5) *treasure* the earth and all its resources that our Maker saw 'was good'. A shorthand for remembering these tasks is that they all start with the letter 't'.

Reflecting on these five tasks reveals that God's mission goes beyond the notions of 'individual responsibility' and 'individual salvation' that we frequently hear and read about. In both oral and written materials, there seems to be great emphasis on individual transgressions against God's laws. We are often led to think that our salvation rests entirely on avoiding or expiating 'personal' sins. Of course, every 'personal' sin is a serious matter. The sinful things that we think, say and do as well as the good things that we fail to think, say and do, have their cumulative debilitating effects on our consciences, on the relationships in our everyday and church life, and ultimately, on our relationships with God. However, engaging with our 'personal sins' tells only half the story of our fulfilling God's Will.

In his time, Jesus inaugurated his ministry by opening the scroll of the book of Isaiah and reading the passage: '*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the*

oppressed to free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.' (Luke 4:18ff) It seems that, in Jesus' eyes, good news and salvation was very much a communal reality. Note that he used human references that were plural in form, rather than singular or individual. During his ministry, Jesus left his own home to embrace and heal the marginalized people of his larger society – the poor, the infirmed, the social outcasts (e.g. tax collectors), and the inferior female sex. When Mary sat attentively at his feet, listening and learning like male disciples instead of performing traditional chores reserved for women like her sister Martha, Jesus affirmed Mary's bold '*right*' choice and vowed that it would '*not be taken away from her*' (Luke 10:42)

Jesus Christ tried to tell the religious teachers of his day that it was not sufficient to focus on their personal '*cleanliness*', to be obsessive about their adherence to the stringent Mosaic laws, and their own desirable state of impeccable holiness. He criticized them by saying, '*You Pharisees clean the outside of cups and dishes. But inside you are full of greed and evil. Give what is inside as a gift to the poor and everything will be clean for you...You give God, one tenth of your mint, spices and every garden herb. But you have ignored justice and the love of God. You should have done these things without ignoring the others.*' (Luke 11:39-42)

No doubt, the Pharisees were sincere in their search for truth and God. They thought they had the right interpretation of God's will. In trying to please God, they created a whole edifice of rules on what they considered as '*sinful*' and '*not sinful*'. Consequently, they built a wall of casuistic laws that kept them '*holy*' but separated them from the real world outside – the messy, dirty, chaotic world into which Jesus plunged himself willingly and rescued lovingly. For Jesus, the deep structural sins of social injustice and inequality were as grave and compelling as

'personal sins'. Both kinds of sin needed to be faced, renounced and overcome.

Certainly, it is edifying to tell the good news of Jesus Christ, to teach people the Christian faith, to encourage people to love the word of God, to worship God with praise and adoration, and to give ourselves in loving service to those who are suffering. These tasks constitute a living witness of having Christ in our lives. Yet, to *fully* please God, we need to engage with the last two tasks of *Missio Dei* as well.

To transform the unjust and unequal structures in society is not an '*optional extra*' in Christian living. It is to follow God's example of freeing the enslaved Israelites from the clutches of their exploitative Egyptian masters, of choosing Saul - the weakest member of the weakest family in the weakest Benjamin clan – as the first Israelite King, of appointing the young shepherd David over his stronger and more appealing brothers, of rescuing (yet again) the Israelites from the hands of the Assyrians and Babylonians, and of choosing the young, vulnerable Mary to be the mother of His Son. The whole Bible is shot through with examples of God displaying a preferential option for the weak, the poor, the helpless, and the vulnerable. Even in the scene of his death, Jesus hanged on a criminal's cross between two thieves, rather than died in a luxurious bedchamber befitting a king. Jesus Christ revealed the true face of God by confronting and immersing himself in all that was ugly and marred his society.

Today, we must cultivate sensitive eyes and consciences to engage with the continuing inequality and injustice in society. If we live in a gated community with its own security guards, then we know that somewhere in society, others are living in unsafe areas. If we pay hundreds of thousands of pesos for our relatives' hospital bills, then we should feel disturbed when we



read the pleading cases of sick children on the local newspaper (see The Freeman Foundation page, for example). When we spend half-a-million pesos to celebrate our son's wedding, then we share in the common shame that some poor man's daughter has to cease her high school education to become a maid in one of the houses in a gated community. A true Christian cannot ignore Jesus' challenge to the rich young man: 'Sell everything and follow me.' How much can we give up of our current lifestyle to be a true disciple of Christ, to fulfill the fourth task of God's mission?

The fifth and last task - treasuring the earth and its resources – is equally, if not more, important. As Montefiore said, 'What's the point of speaking about faith and human salvation if human life is not guaranteed on earth by our rampaging consumption?' Also, the fourth and fifth tasks are inextricably linked: in the event of an environmental disaster, it is the poorest who suffer most. Consider the victims in Aceh (tsunami), New Orleans (flooding), Haiti (earthquake), and closer to home, those living at the foothills of volcanic Mt. Bulusan. A recent TV program showed a desperate woman harvesting ash-smothered, leafy vegetables for her family's food. Nearby, a river is equally muddied by fallen ash. If we are careful (and able) to buy clean filtered water to drink in our own homes, shouldn't we care about other families who have little access to clean water to wash their vegetables let alone drink? In 35 years' time, given its current rate of increase, the Philippine population will double to 180 million people. There will be competing demands on dwindling supplies of water, food, housing, power/energy, education, medicines. What do you think should our Christian response be to this scenario?

Made in the divine image, each man, woman and child is imbued with an inherent right to the God-given, natural bounties that make earthly

existence possible. Yet our economic system has 'commercialized' everything. People have to pay to acquire the most basic level of human living and comfort. The problem is more pronounced in the Philippines because the disparity between rich and poor is a great deal worse than say, in Western Europe. There seems to be too little social welfare to provide a robust safety net for the poorest members.

As they say, it is better to light a candle than to complain in utter darkness. We can start by examining our own lifestyles, homes and businesses. *Live simply, care deeply, give generously.* Another helpful slogan is: Reuse, reduce, recycle. Turn off all unnecessary lights/air-con/fan, don't leave the TV on when no one's watching, plan car journeys carefully, re-use plastic bags (better still, use an eco-bag), encourage people to reduce their carbon footprint by shopping and traveling less, be fair in giving wages and incorporate annual wage reviews, support educational institutions that help improve social mobility, resist activities/projects that lead to environmental damage.

Most of all, reflect and pray deeply so we may embrace simplicity to enable others to 'live abundantly.' We do this not as an occasional response to the pangs of conscience but on a daily basis. The daily embrace of Christ-like simplicity can be only wrought by our authentic personal transformation by the Holy Spirit. With the Spirit inspiring us, we shall find that God's mission, with all its demanding tasks, is not impossible at all. Here lies the true meaning of proclaiming, serving and loving Christ today.



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