

# THE Plain Truth

PP 12578/3/2007

A Magazine Of Christian Understanding

Feb-Mar 2007

**Guess who is coming  
to dinner?**

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**Take the leap**

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**Put on the armour  
of God**

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THE PLAIN TRUTH

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# The Bible's integrity under attack

One of my favourite biblical characters is the unnamed man who brought his demon-possessed son to Jesus and asked for healing. The disciples had been unable to drive out the demon, and the desperate man asked Jesus directly:

“...if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.”

“If you can?” said Jesus. “Everything is possible for him who believes.”

Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”<sup>1</sup>

Now, there was an honest man. And if we are also honest, we will admit that there are times when our belief needs some help. We want to be so sure in our faith that nothing can shake us. Then something comes along and the cold, clammy fingers of doubt start clawing at our belief in God and his word. For example, ever since *The Da Vinci Code* hit the headlines, the integrity of the Bible has been under attack.

Although most of us realise that *The Da Vinci Code* is a work of fiction, and that there is no basis to the allegations of the story, the book and movie raised the profile of some awkward questions about the Bible. Questions such as, How do we know the Bible is the inspired word of God? How can we be sure it has been translated accurately? And what about all those extra Gospels and epistles? Why didn't they make it into the Bible? Who decided what went in and what was left out?

These are questions most of us have never really asked, and they can be a bit unsettling and faith-eroding for some. It is tempting to just ignore the concerns and hope they will go away. But many people are made uneasy because of the biblical issues that have been raised. Perhaps you are too. So we need to talk about them. First, I must give you

a word of warning. If you like neat, packaged answers with all the T's crossed and the I's dotted, you won't find that here. As they say on TV, turn the channel now. But if you want to face some important issues, and come away still trusting the Bible as God's inspired word that is able to make us “wise unto

find some things beautiful and others ugly, or why some music is inspiring. We know these things are facts, but they are not subject to scientific proof.

The existence of God cannot be established beyond all doubt by the methods we use to prove things scientifically. I once

asked a prominent Christian scientist what he would tell a genuine seeker who asked him to devise an experiment that would help him know if God existed. He thought for a moment, and then said gravely, “I think I would ask him to pray.”

What at first might seem a cop-out is actually profound insight. God is not interested in being the result of a successful experiment. He wants our encounter with him to grow into a relationship. A relationship based on faith.

There has been a tremendous expansion of information about the early manuscripts and history of the Bible in recent years. These discoveries have altered our understanding about many aspects of the Bible. Much of the 19th-century scholarship that so vigorously asserted the absolute inerrancy of Scripture or its historical accuracy has been shown to be inadequate.

We now have a much better appreciation of how and when the books were written and how they all came together in the book we call “the Bible.”

The picture that emerges is more complex than we thought. But it in no way diminishes the Bible as the inspired word of God, a reliable guide to matters pertaining to salvation.

There is nothing to be gained by denying the facts. And nothing to lose by looking at them. I believe that you will see the Bible's relevance and meaning in a new way □



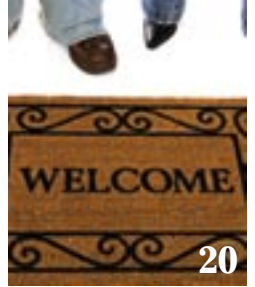
salvation,” then I think you are in for a pleasant surprise. The truth—about anything—has nothing to fear from facts. But let's be clear what we mean by facts.

Science and mathematics can prove that two and two make four, and that sodium and chlorine make salt. However, not all facts can be established by scientific methods. Science can't prove why you love your children, or why we

<sup>1</sup> Mark 9:22–24

# THE Plain Truth

A Magazine Of Christian Understanding



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# What our readers say:

Thank you for sending me the latest issue of THE PLAIN TRUTH. The cover is particularly striking. It is good to see the column, "What Our Readers Say", extended to a full page with editor's comments too. It is a welcome change. As usual, all the articles are well written and make good reading. The one on Katrina and its effects on New Orleans is superbly handled. It doesn't condemn the victims as great sinners. Instead, it presents a 'heavenly view' of things that a fallen humanity has to contend with. Thank you for your labour of love and keep up the good work!

**Reader**  
**Petaling Jaya**

THE PLAIN TRUTH helps me to be more knowledgeable on many different topics. Some are thought-provoking and relevant. Some are very encouraging and helpful in my Christian walk with God.

**Lim Liang Meng**  
**Singapore**

The articles are inspiring and strengthen my faith. I have benefited from your magazine and have been sharing the truth with my friends and colleagues. Thank you and God bless.

**Jeraem River Ho**  
**Singapore**

THE PLAIN TRUTH is a source of inspiration to read most of the articles, giving a different perspective of the world around us. Well done and keep up the good work.

**Leong Yew Weng**  
**Singapore**

THE PLAIN TRUTH discusses current issues faced by our societies. More importantly, it offers biblical solution and advice. May God bless the team behind THE PLAIN TRUTH publication.

**Bernard Low**  
**Kuala Lumpur**

THE PLAIN TRUTH covers not only religious topics, but also a wide range of other topics. I find the articles beneficial to both young and



old. Well done and keep it up!

**Serena Goh**  
**Singapore**

THE PLAIN TRUTH has many interesting articles and offer biblical insights on secular issues. Thank you for your dedication.

**Jaime Chia**  
**Singapore**

About a week ago, I came to know about your magazine in a local clinic reception area. I am thankful to the Lord Jesus that I have a chance to read your gospel articles found in THE PLAIN TRUTH even though it was a Dec-Jan 2003 issue. I wish to subscribe to your magazine.

**Jeffrey Goh Chee Keong**  
**Puchong**

THE PLAIN TRUTH enriches and widens my knowledge. It is a wonderful magazine in itself. I would certainly love to continue reading it.

**Ah Peow Lee**  
**Singapore**

Most of THE PLAIN TRUTH articles concern me and the Bible. They help me to reflect about myself and to be righteous with God. I find the articles invaluable, without which Bible reading would be a chore. The articles elaborate on God's truth and His commands which help me greatly appreciate what God has done for me. In fact it is a guide. Verses which are difficult to understand may come to light after reading the magazine. I think the magazine is God's gift and it has helped me tremendously as a lay person to fully grasp the Bible. Thank you for a wonderful magazine.

**Michael Lee**  
**Singapore**

We know God better and draw closer to Him as a result of applying the truths of God's word explained in THE PLAIN TRUTH.

**Peggy Lee**

**Subang Jaya**

It is always a pleasure to participate in the ministry of God. The work you are doing is very meaningful and it definitely helps change the life of many people. We are a food manufacturer and we supply the very popular "Ipoh White Coffee". We used to supply food products for idol worshipping, but by God's mercy, we have given up manufacturing those food products and our family have all become Christians. Even the "Ipoh White Coffee" we are selling is a blessing from God. We have built a new factory to produce this product and we are currently exporting to several countries overseas. May God continue to bless your work and guide you in every way.

**Tan Huang Kew**  
**Ipoh**

To begin with, I wish to salute the staff of this wonderful magazine for the Work well done. A happy and holy Christmas and a happy and fruitful New Year 2006 to you! I have been a regular reader of THE PLAIN TRUTH for some time now and it has changed my life for the better. The stories and articles are thought-provoking and give us insights into what God expects of us. Thank you God for giving us good people who are willing to go all the way to spread the good news. I am happy to contribute a small donation for the running of this ministry.

**William Gomez**  
**Bagan Ajam**

*Although THE PLAIN TRUTH is sent free of charge, it is not without cost. Each copy is made possible by the generosity of others. So we are very grateful for those readers who send a donation, and make it possible for us to continue to publish the good news of the Gospel.*

# Finding God in silence

The 21st century is indeed a noisy one. We live in a world today where quietness and silence are rare commodities. Since the advent of the Industrial Revolution noise pollution has been with us as part of our lives and, by the look of things, this can only become more acute in the future. Just like the pollution of the physical environment earlier (land, air and water), noise pollution is the new 'by-product' of modern living.

We are woken up every morning by our alarm clock or the radio. As we drive to work, music from the car stereos invades our ears. At the workplace we are constantly assailed by the sound from ringing telephones and other office equipment, the voices of colleagues talking, discussing or even shouting at the top of their lungs, the noise of factory machinery running at full speed and a host of other distractions that will impact on our hearing sensation. As we return from work, there will be no quietness in our cars. At the gym, loud music keeps us company as we exercise. At home the television will be switched on. Should we choose to go out later in the evening for some entertainment (movies, karaoke pubs, shopping, for example), rest assured that it will not be a quiet one. When it comes to bedtime, some even need soft music to lullaby them to sleep. And so ends another day, with hardly a moment of silence.

With so much noise surrounding us in our physical lives, how does it affect our spiritual lives? Can we seek God amidst all the cacophony of confusing sounds? Or has our society become so used to disquiet

that we are uncomfortable, even uneasy when faced with total silence? We seem to have forgotten the beauty of silence.

Finding God and getting to know Him demands our full attention and being. That means getting rid of hindrances that divert our active thinking, including unnecessary noise. To meditate on God's Word, to pray to Him and to study the scriptures are ways to build a better relationship with our Creator. We can only do these in conditions of relative quietness. As someone

by  
**Wong  
Teck Kong**

it is during the stillness of the early morning, in the hushed room at home that we can hear God most clearly. Christians should welcome the quiet breaks in their daily lives. We should use such precious moments to think, meditate and to reflect on our relationship with our creator. But to benefit from such circumstances, we must be free from distractions so that we can concentrate fully both mentally and spiritually. We must learn to enjoy each other's company without the constant need to talk to each other, to appreciate nature's

music rather than some man-made noise that tries to pass itself off as a song, and to be happy being alone occasionally while not feeling lonely.

Being balanced or moderate is a fruit of a Christian life.<sup>3</sup> We should know that there is a time to speak and a time to remain silent.<sup>4</sup> Even the writer of the book of Revelation, who was taken to God's throne in vision, said that the heaven was silent for half an hour.<sup>5</sup> In the story of the confrontation between the prophet Elijah

and the followers of Ba'al, the idol worshippers had to shout themselves hoarse and went into a frenzy to make sure that their god could hear them.<sup>6</sup> In contrast when God spoke to Elijah He did so in "a still small voice".<sup>7</sup>

The present lifestyle is fast-paced and hectic. There is no time to build up relationships, let alone to be 'idle' in silent meditation. For many people, seeking God means just attending church services every Sunday. But the most productive part of our lives is the quiet time we spend alone with God, talking to Him, praying to Him, thinking deeply about Him and getting to know Him. Without this part, we can never really 'find' God. The choice is ours. □



once said, "To hear God's voice, turn down the world's volume".

What does God have to say concerning the way we worship Him? In the Old Testament it says "But the Lord is in his holy Temple; let all the earth be silent before Him."<sup>1</sup> King David of ancient Israel wrote the following words: "But I stand silently before the Lord, waiting for him to rescue me."<sup>2</sup> Those words are just as relevant today as they were then. King David knew the importance of silence. It is during such quiet moments of contemplation that we learn more of God's nature and His will for us. An experienced Christian will realise the wisdom of having quiet time with God. For

<sup>1</sup> Habakkuk 2:20;  
Zechariah 2:13

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 62:5

<sup>3</sup> Galatians 5:23

<sup>4</sup> Ecclesiastics 3:7

<sup>5</sup> Revelation 8:1

<sup>6</sup> 1 Kings 18:26–29

<sup>7</sup> 1 Kings 19:12

# Guess who is c

**W**hat would you do if the President invited himself to your place for dinner? Actually, do you know that you have a much more important invitation already extended to you?

What would you think of a wealthy, well-known, grown-up climbing a tree at a crowded place just to get a better view of a 'passer-by'? Curious? Courageous? Desperate? Uninhibited? Who might this passer-by be that could have caused such a response in an otherwise 'normal' person? Here's a summary of the story:

'Jesus went to Jericho. A man lived there by the name of Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was very wealthy—and a crook! He was curious about this man he'd heard of, Jesus, and wanted to see Him, but being short, and because of the crowds, he couldn't. Being resourceful and determined, he ran ahead and climbed a tree to see Him.

When Jesus reached the spot, He looked up at him and said, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today."

The people who saw this began to mutter, "He's gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.'"

But Zacchaeus said to the Lord, "Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and save what was lost."<sup>1</sup>

More importantly, who is this Jesus that draws such a crowd of motley people? And invites Himself to the wealthy Zacchaeus' home as a house guest?

## Who is Jesus?

How would you introduce one of your closest friends? Writer Saint John acquaints us with Jesus this way: "In the beginning the Word already existed. He was with God, and He was God. He was in the beginning with God. He created everything there is. Nothing exists

that He didn't make. Life itself was in Him, and this Life gives light to everyone."

by  
**Ben David**

"But although the world was made through Him, the world didn't recognise Him when He came... But to all who believed Him and accepted Him, He gave the right to become children of God... So the Word became human and lived here on earth among us. He was full of unending love and faithfulness. And we have seen His glory, the glory of the only Son of the Father."<sup>2</sup>

Saint Paul presented Him to the Colossians as "the visible image of the invisible God. He existed



before God made anything at all and is supreme over all creation. Christ is the One through Whom God created everything in heaven and earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can't see... Everything has been created through Him and for Him. He existed before everything else began, and He holds all creation together."<sup>3</sup>

That's why it's imperative for the Christian, for anyone, seeking meaning and purpose in life to know the true identity of Jesus. Because who He really was, the things that He did, and what He taught cannot be separated into different compartments. What Jesus said, and what He did for each one of us has meaning and significance only when we view

them as coming from God, the Source of Life.

To receive any benefits or blessings from Jesus, we need first to acknowledge Him as our Creator God. Otherwise, it would be difficult to accept His great gifts of godly repentance, faith and eternal life.

Like Saint John, many people then and now benefited from the rich blessings Jesus brought.<sup>4</sup> His work and teachings amazed the people with whom He came into contact. Undoubtedly, Zacchaeus would have heard of Jesus by reputation and from fellow tax collectors,<sup>5</sup> and wanted to see for himself what Jesus was all about.

Zacchaeus may have been unhappy about his stature, his lack of friends, and the general attitude the Jews had towards him. Whatever was causing him discontent; he certainly was quite open-minded to what Jesus offered.

## The Son of Man and salvation

Jesus often referred to Himself as the Son of God, and the Son of Man. One instance is found in John 5:25–29 where He reveals His divine nature, and His authority to judge all humankind, and give eternal life to those who follow Him. Jesus tells His audience that He has both divine nature and human nature. The Son of Man is also a direct reference to Daniel's prophecy concerning an everlasting kingdom, where everyone would worship the Son of Man. These references would have identified Jesus to His listeners as the prophesied Messiah.<sup>6</sup>

God alone can be worshipped, and obviously Jesus makes a valid claim to His being God. Jesus came in human form to fulfill some of the tasks that God could only humanly accomplish—for example, to experience human life, to reveal God's true nature, to die for our sins, to be our Mediator and reconcile us to God. Also, to live a perfect life under the terms

# Coming to dinner?

of the Old Covenant, and the terms of the New Testament. Because He did that, His life when 'waved' in offering before God, was accepted in our stead on that Sunday morning or wave sheaf offering day when He was resurrected from death. During His ministry, Jesus forgave sin. He also sought out people who were suffering and needed help. He readily associated with people who were called 'sinners' and 'publicans'. Those who responded to Him experienced the genuine humanity and divine love that formed His natural persona.

Jesus is not merely a great teacher. He is today able to give eternal life to those who choose to believe Him, and follow His example.<sup>7</sup> What Jesus offers is for all human beings, regardless of parentage. Zaccheus was a descendant of Abraham. You and I are probably not. In God's plan, however, all followers of Jesus are also 'automatically' children of Abraham.<sup>8</sup> Our eternal life and salvation is possible only because of the work done by Jesus.<sup>9</sup> God's plan for you is based on His unconditional love and mercy towards all of us.<sup>10</sup>

God's love is unending; and deeply, immensely and intensely personal. He is mindful of each one of us.<sup>11</sup> Jesus proved it when He went to be a houseguest of someone despised by the general public. Nothing in this world can come between the love and mercy God has for you and me. There is no greater evidence of this than God sacrificing His God-life for us in the Person of Jesus the Christ.<sup>12</sup> The onus then is on you and I to choose His path so that the work God has done through His Son can bear life-changing fruit in us.

This is possible if we believe the good news that Jesus offers us eternal life. Believing Him would mean that we follow His teachings and His footsteps, so that through the Spirit of Christ working within us, our salvation is assured in Jesus.<sup>13</sup>

## God's great love

Jesus illustrated God's great love and joy when He seeks the lost. Each one of us is precious in God's sight. Jesus said that there is rejoicing in heaven when even one person turns to God with a change of heart.<sup>14</sup>

As a whole, the human race has chosen to ignore God and make its own choices. In doing so, we have distanced ourselves by our own actions and sins. The love of God can be seen in God making the first move to save us while we were still disobedient and sinning against Him.<sup>15</sup> What is sin? Pastor and writer, John Stott, offers this biblical perspective of sin: Sin is the rebellious assertion of 'the self' against the love and authority of God, and against the welfare of my neighbour.<sup>16</sup> The great gap between God and us caused by our sins can be bridged only by the saving grace of Jesus.

Salvation comes in the Person of Jesus, no less, just as He announced to His audience in Zacchaeus' home. Jesus paid the price of sin on our behalf by giving up His life. The price He paid is for each and everyone of us, no matter who we are, or what our sin may be.

## A genuine change of heart

William Barclay, noted Bible commentator, calls Zacchaeus 'a little man with the courage of desperation'. His curiosity led him to 'outrun' the crowd and climb a tree to get a better view of someone he had heard of. It took courage for him to go through a crowd and climb a tree. It is difficult for an adult, let alone a public figure, to be uninhibited in crowded places, but he chose to ignore what other people might think. How much did he want to see Jesus? He was desperate enough to do what he did in broad daylight revealing that his 'interest' in Jesus was greater than the public thought of him. His actions disclosed something that was in his

heart. Are we that motivated to seek Jesus in our lives?

Zacchaeus was able to have a personal encounter with Jesus perhaps because of the trouble he took to see Jesus. He was also blessed to have Jesus as his houseguest. Jesus had such a great impact on Zacchaeus that he became that much 'poorer' for it! When Zacchaeus chose to give away more than half of his possessions and make retribution, it revealed a genuine change of heart. We need to have faith in Jesus so that He can make changes in our innermost being in response to God's love and mercy. There is nothing each one of us can do to earn salvation. Our response, however, to God's love, mercy and calling almost always is accompanied with changes that reveal the beginning of a new nature working in us.<sup>17</sup>

## Jesus' divine invitation

Today, Jesus seeks to enter into our lives so that He can reside and preside over us as our honoured Guest.<sup>18</sup> Zacchaeus was able to enjoy His divine presence and fellowship for a day, but Jesus seeks to invite Himself into our lives for a lifetime of fellowship. Zacchaeus responded promptly when Jesus invited Himself. How about us? Are we able to see how desperately we need His saving grace and His lead in our lives?

John Stott puts in 'poetic prose' what Jesus can do: For the living Jesus by His Spirit can enter our personality, establish Himself there as our permanent Guest, subdue our sinful desires and transform us into His own likeness from one degree of glory to another.<sup>19</sup>

All Jesus needs is for us to respond positively. Zacchaeus did not remain on the tree, but hastily obeyed Jesus. Will we keep Jesus waiting outside the door? Or, will we quickly let Him in? Our response could mean the difference for us between eternal life and eternal death. God wills us to choose eternal life. □

<sup>1</sup> Luke 19:1-10

<sup>2</sup> John 1:1-4, 10, 12, 14

<sup>3</sup> Colossians 1:15-17

<sup>4</sup> John 1:16

<sup>5</sup> Luke 5:27-32

<sup>6</sup> Daniel 7:13-14

<sup>7</sup> John 11:25; 14:6, 19

<sup>8</sup> Galatians 3:26-29, Romans 4:16, 9-13

<sup>9</sup> Romans 6:23

<sup>10</sup> Romans 3:23-26

<sup>11</sup> Psalm 139:1-18, Isaiah 49:15-16,

Matthew 10:30-31

<sup>12</sup> Romans 8:31-32

<sup>13</sup> John 17:3

<sup>14</sup> Luke 15:1-7

<sup>15</sup> Romans 5:8; 3:10-12

<sup>16</sup> Stott, J. 2003. *Why I Am A Christian*, InterVarsity Press, Leicester, p. 89

<sup>17</sup> Luke 18:13

<sup>18</sup> Revelation 3:19-20; John 14:23

<sup>19</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:18; Stott, p.90

# A new look at th

The Good Samaritan is one of Jesus' most popular parables. We preachers often use it to encourage people to be unselfish and to be proactive in serving others. But there is more to the story than that. Jesus was doing far more than putting hypocritical religious leaders in their place. Let's take a closer look.

"A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead.

"A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

"But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own

donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

"Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"<sup>1</sup>

The answer to Jesus' question was obvious. But I want to show you that Jesus was teaching far more than a straightforward lesson in social responsibility. Let's consider the context. Jesus was answering a



by  
**Joseph Tkach**

lawyer who had asked, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"<sup>2</sup>

This man was a religious lawyer, priding himself in his understanding of all 613 points of the Torah. The religious leaders of Jesus' day were the inheritors of a system that had turned obedience to God into an obstacle course, so strewn with picky dos and don'ts that it left the average person on a permanent guilt trip.

This approach contradicted what Jesus taught, and confrontation became inevitable. The lawyers,

"You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."<sup>5</sup>

It was a good answer, as far as it went. But you know what lawyers are like. They are trained to look for some extenuating circumstance that might in some way limit the extent of the law. The lawyer knew that the command to "love your neighbour as yourself" was difficult, in fact, impossible to fulfil. So he thought he had found a loophole.

"And who is my neighbour?" he asked Jesus. That is when Jesus gave his famous parable.

## Cast and location

Jesus set his story on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, a distance of about 17 miles. Jerusalem was where the Temple was located, the centre of the Levitical priesthood. The priests were the highest class of the Levites. They were supported by thousands of other Levites

along with the Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes and others in religious leadership, were constantly trying to discredit Jesus. There was a motive behind the lawyer's apparently innocent question.

So Jesus answered wisely, "Do what is written in the law. How do you read it?"<sup>3</sup>

The lawyer knew the answer to that. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"; and, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'<sup>4</sup>

who served at lower levels, doing such tasks as keeping the altar fire going, lighting the incense, singing in the Temple chorus and playing musical instruments.

When they were not on duty, many of these priests and temple workers lived in Jericho, which had become a "bedroom community" of Jerusalem. They often travelled this road between Jerusalem and Jericho.

Travel in those days could be hazardous. One stretch of the Jericho road was known as the "Way of Blood" because so many





# The good Samaritan

people were robbed and killed there. This was where Jesus set the scene for His parable. People knew exactly where He was talking about.

In Jesus' story, the first to see the victim is a priest, but rather than get involved, he passes by on the other side of the road. He is followed by a Levite, a temple-worker. The Levite does the same—he passes by. Then along comes a Samaritan. A what?

Jesus would have caused a stir with that. The Jews of that time did not often hear the words "good" and "Samaritan" used in the same sentence.

The Samaritans were a mix of Jew and gentile, and the Jews did not like them. They had names for Samaritans like "half breeds" and "heathen dogs," and considered them to be spiritually defiled. But in Jesus' story, it is this outcast who stops to help.

Not only does this Samaritan help, but he goes far beyond what most people do. He cleans the victim's wounds with oil and wine. Then he bandages them. People didn't carry first-aid kits back then. He likely would have had to tear up some of his own clothing to make a bandage. Next, he puts the injured man on his donkey and takes him to an inn. He takes two silver coins, a considerable amount in those days, and promises to reimburse the innkeeper for any further expense.

This is an exceptional level of assistance, especially as the victim is a total stranger and someone who is supposed to be a social

enemy. But the Samaritan did not let that stand in the way.

With this deceptively simple little story, Jesus impales the lawyer on his own hook. He asks him, "Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"<sup>6</sup>

What can the expert in the law say, except, "The one who had mercy on him."

Then Jesus delivers the knockout blow. "Go and do likewise," He

was, in effect, "You have to do the impossible."

How could anyone be expected to live up to the standard of the Samaritan in this story? If that is what God expects, even the meticulous lawyer was doomed. But Jesus had chosen his words carefully. He was showing that humans cannot meet the perfect requirements of the law. Even those who fully dedicate themselves to it fall short. Jesus is the only one to fulfil the law in its

deepest intent. Jesus alone is the Good Samaritan.

The robbers correspond to sin and the forces of evil, the devil and his dominion. The man who was beaten and robbed is representative of all humanity, helpless, hopeless and left to die.

The priest and the Levite represent the laws and the sacrifices of the old covenant. They are ineffective. The Good Samaritan is the only one who can help. The wine and the oil correspond to the blood Jesus shed for us and the Holy

Spirit who dwells in us.

The inn could then represent the church, where God puts His people to be spiritually nurtured until He returns for them. Perhaps the innkeeper signifies the elders of the church.

Jesus used the lawyer's question to show how inadequate for salvation even the best human effort is, and how wonderful and sure is His work of redemption for humanity. Jesus, and only Jesus, can rescue us from the "Way of Blood". And He did it by way of blood. □



says.<sup>7</sup>

Remember, this "teacher of the law" was from a class of people who prided themselves on how carefully they obeyed God. For example, they would not even pronounce God's name, considering it too holy to utter. They would even take a ritual bath to ensure purity before writing God's name. Along with the Pharisees, they were fastidious about observing the law in every detail.

The lawyer had asked what he needed to do in order to inherit eternal life. Jesus' answer

<sup>1</sup> Luke 10:30–37

<sup>2</sup> Luke 10:25

<sup>3</sup> Luke 10:26

<sup>4</sup> Luke 10:27

<sup>5</sup> Luke 10:28

<sup>6</sup> Luke 10:36

<sup>7</sup> Luke 10:37

# Is the Temple of Go

When visiting an Asian country one can never ignore the fact that there are numerous structures, monuments, complexes and buildings dedicated to various gods, thereby signifying the unique role of religion in the lives of the people in these countries. In a multicultural nation like Malaysia, for example, tourists are greatly attracted to the variety of structures dedicated to the worship of various gods. Magnificent mosques present an impressive display of the role of Islam in this nation. Besides these, the country also has many outstanding structures dedicated to other religious beliefs—Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Taoism. These provide a wonderfully unique picture of the multi-religious composition of the various races in the country.

People have great respect and regard for these places of worship as such buildings are often regarded as objects of religious reverence in their own right. The term 'temple' is often used to refer to these complexes devoted to God. Historical records show that temples have existed for centuries not only in Asia but also in ancient civilisations such as Rome and Greece. Archaeologists are fascinated by historical temples that are now in ruins—the Parthenon in Athens dedicated to the Greek goddess Athena and the Temple of Artemis in Ephesus, for example. It is also very interesting to note that the word 'temple' is used in the Bible as well.

References to a temple are made in the Old Testament as well as the New Testament. What is most interesting is the purpose of the temple in relation to an omnipotent God who makes His presence real in the affairs of man.

The Bible records that King David had an intense desire to build a house for the name of the Lord. That desire, however, could not be fulfilled due to the constant wars that he had to fight during his lifetime. King David was succeeded by his son Solomon and during the reign



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of Solomon there was peace in the land of ancient Israel and Solomon proposed to fulfil what King David had desired.<sup>1</sup> This temple that was to be built was for the glory of God and to honour His name. Therefore the preparation and work involved in its construction was monumental. King Solomon raised up a labour force of 30,000 men. Only the best materials were used such as cedars and cypress logs with stones quarried from the mountains. The entire effort put into the construction of this magnificent temple is recorded in 1 Kings 6 in the Bible. Just to give an idea of how glorious it would have looked, the Bible states that Solomon overlaid the whole temple with gold including the entire altar that was by the inner sanctuary.<sup>2</sup> It took seven years to complete the construction of the temple.

When the temple was ready, Solomon did not boast about its grandeur but rather showed humility when he realised that no temple on earth could be sufficient for Almighty God. In humble prayer he said, "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built!"<sup>3</sup> More than the temple, God was well pleased with Solomon's attitude and the way he beseeched God to listen to his prayer. The great God who owns all in existence accepted the house that Solomon had prepared for Him and said that His presence would be there perpetually.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, this temple became a place where God Himself resided and His presence was always felt in the temple. The people could now come there to worship. It became a meeting place between God and men.

But God also gave the people a warning. If Solomon or the people began to turn their attention away from Him and do that which was displeasing in His sight, then the temple would become worthless. Although the temple was

consecrated for His name, the Lord said that He would cast it out of His sight.<sup>5</sup> No matter how beautifully the temple was constructed, no matter how expensive the furnishings, if the people who came to the temple wilfully sinned against Him God would ultimately find the temple repulsive. God, you see, isn't impressed by buildings and doesn't fall in love with them. When the people obeyed and pleased Him, however, then His presence would always be available in the temple.

Moving forward to the time of Jesus Christ we find that the temple played a significant role in the lives of the people in Jerusalem. The gospels record that people gathered there for the Feast of Tabernacles and other Holy days. Christ Himself preached in the temple and held it with the utmost respect. It becomes clear as we read the gospels that God still had great concern for how His temple was to be used.

Jesus Christ demonstrated His love for the house of God in a remarkable incident which occurred during a confrontation with the Jewish authorities. It was the time of the Passover and Jesus entered the temple in Jerusalem. However, when He noticed people carrying out business activities in an area of the temple that was sacred, He made a whip of cords and drove out of the temple all those who sold oxen, sheep and doves and also overturned the tables of the money changers.

When the Jewish authorities confronted Him on His behaviour, He challenged them to destroy the temple and that He would raise it up in three days. Those who heard this ridiculed Him. But He was not talking about the physical temple made of stone.

At this point, Jesus introduced a totally new concept, one that had never before been conceived in the minds of men. He claimed that His body was the temple!<sup>6</sup>

How could anyone claim himself

# and significant today?

to be a temple? As amazing as it sounds, Jesus Christ had every right to be a temple, for He was God in the flesh. The divine Word who was in the beginning with God became the human Jesus Christ with His divinity intact.<sup>7</sup> Jesus was a walking, moving, talking temple to whom

died for our sins and was raised. Jesus took upon Himself the sins of mankind and shed His blood for our sins thereby giving us the opportunity to be saved and have a true relationship with Almighty God. Through repentance and accepting Christ as Saviour, all humanity can be reconciled to God.

But was Christ the only living temple on earth? The answer to this is almost unbelievable!

In a letter to the Church at Corinth, the apostle Paul introduces another concept previously unheard of. Referring to the people he said, “Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” He further states, “For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.”<sup>8</sup> Sounds preposterous, doesn’t it? How could ordinary people be a temple of God? How could sinful flesh and blood be a temple of God?

Let’s examine this concept further. On the Day of

Pentecost, the apostle Peter and those who believed in Jesus were all gathered together. Suddenly, a miracle occurred when, with a sound like a rushing mighty wind, all the people gathered there were filled with the Holy Spirit.<sup>9</sup> And just as these individuals received the Holy Spirit so can every human being who surrenders his or her life to Jesus Christ in repentance of sins.

Thus, an ordinary person who

receives the Holy Spirit becomes a temple where the Spirit of God resides.

Is this true or is it just figurative language or scriptural words meant to make us feel holy? The scriptures mean exactly what they say. The temple of God exists today in the hearts and minds of the people who have received the great God into their lives through Jesus Christ. Just as Jesus was loving, kind and compassionate, the very divine characteristics of Jesus will begin to form in the character of the people who have received Him and they in turn would become a source of comfort and help to all others who come into contact with them.

Just as people would want to go to a physical temple to be blessed, those in contact with a Spirit-filled child of God would be enriched. People should be able to see and experience Christ through the character of those who represent Him. The fruits of the Holy Spirit should be evident in their lives, such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.<sup>10</sup> Their presence would be the balm that the world needs in this violent era of man’s existence, for they are the representatives of the Kingdom of God today.

Until the time in the future when Jesus Christ returns in all power and glory these temples of God—that is, the people who represent Him—are the hope that points to the peace that will come. The ways of God are truly fascinating and His solutions to our problems are unlike anything we can conjure. Almighty God is continually adding more people daily to His number of Spirit-filled servants. They are the spirit-filled temples who are His vessels for His work and purpose, whose lives already experience the peace of God. The Bible offers all humanity this opportunity. Take a look for yourself. You’ll never regret it. □

<sup>1</sup> 1 Kings 5:1–5

<sup>2</sup> 1 Kings 6:21–22

<sup>3</sup> 1 Kings 8:27

<sup>4</sup> 1 Kings 9:3

<sup>5</sup> 1 Kings 9:6

<sup>6</sup> John 2:21

<sup>7</sup> John 1:1–10

<sup>8</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:16–17

<sup>9</sup> Acts 2:1–4

<sup>10</sup> Galatians 5:22



a multitude of people came. He healed the sick, fed thousands miraculously, raised the dead and preached the Kingdom of God. Could there have been a greater temple in existence than this living Holy Temple? True enough people worshipped Him, witnessed astonishing miracles and received a message that is being proclaimed to this very day; that is, the message of the Kingdom of God. Not only that, this living Temple

# Put on the armor

**R**ich, bustling, cosmopolitan Ephesus—a city of 225,000 people in the first century—was one of Satan’s strongholds in antiquity. Historians called it “the throne of idolatry”.

## ‘Beasts at Ephesus’

For generations the merchants of Ephesus had hawked their silver idols without hindrance until AD 52. In that year the apostle Paul, the first century’s greatest one-man threat to idolatry,<sup>1</sup> walked into town.<sup>2</sup> A mighty work of evangelism blanketed the province of Asia.<sup>3</sup> Paul spoke out, proclaiming the empty corruption of idol worship and calling the people to repentance.<sup>4</sup>

Multitudes responded to the gospel. They dumped their astrological guides and esoteric charts associated with the goddess Diana—worth 50,000 pieces of silver.<sup>5</sup>

But the silversmiths struck back.<sup>6</sup> They used their influence to trigger a great religious hysteria against the work of Paul.<sup>7</sup> Paul wanted to face the mob—which he referred to as beasts—but his friends wisely persuaded him to retreat.<sup>8</sup>

## Rallying the church

In AD 61, while under house arrest in Rome, Paul tried to steady the Ephesian church for the tough years ahead; a time when, as he had already warned, they would have to carry on without him.<sup>9</sup>

Materialism, commercialism, a cynical sensuality—these constantly threatened the faith of Paul’s converts at Ephesus. Religious deception was rife. How could Paul rally the church to carry on their spiritual battle without him? Near the

by  
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end of his letter to the Ephesians, the Holy Spirit filled Paul with a stirring word picture drawn from Paul’s prison experience.

We can almost see the creative fires burning inside Paul as he neared the end of his letter. “Put on the full armour of God,” Paul concluded, “so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.”<sup>10</sup> “The Roman soldier has his armour,” Paul was saying, “so does the true Christian.”

With the armour of God we can brace ourselves for the battles we will face in our Christian lives.<sup>11</sup>

battle! That is why Paul counselled young Timothy: “Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Jesus Christ.”<sup>12</sup>

## Belt

“Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist.”<sup>13</sup> The Roman soldier’s two-edged sword hung from the protector belt around his waist. The belt protected his loins, but also put his sword within quick and easy reach. In Paul’s analogy the sword is the word of God, the sure promises and faithful instruction of the

gospel recorded in the Bible.

God’s Word is the Christian soldier’s offensive weapon. It cuts through negativism, accusation, doubt, hopelessness—those favourite “wiles of the devil.” While the belt of truth protects our vitals, we also draw inspiration and hope from the living scriptures, “the sword of the Spirit.”<sup>14</sup>

With the Bible as our sword, we switch from the defensive to the offensive.<sup>15</sup> Bible study bathes our mind and spirit in hope and enthusiasm.<sup>16</sup>



We, like the Ephesians, are up against Satan’s wiles. But we, like them, will win!

2 Corinthians 4:4 exposes Satan as the “god of this age.” It’s no stretch to see what Paul means in Ephesians 6:12: “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”

Soldiers who have been briefed by their commander-in-chief are on spiritual alert. They expect

## Breastplate

“Stand firm then ...with the breastplate of righteousness in place.”<sup>17</sup>

In our battles to put down lust, anger, fear, pride and doubt we often set ourselves up for discouragement when we don’t make the progress we would like.<sup>18</sup> Even the veteran Paul faced this.<sup>19</sup> But he excelled as a Christian soldier because he tapped into “the hope of righteousness by faith.”<sup>20</sup> God gives us righteousness through Jesus Christ living inside us by the

# Armour of God

power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>21</sup>

This righteousness goes beyond mere human righteousness, willpower and self-instilled emotional highs. It engenders a relaxed, calm and blessed assurance in God as our Redeemer and Ally.

The righteousness of God is ours by faith.<sup>22</sup> The Roman soldier wore a tough leather breastplate strengthened with metal strips. It was difficult to pierce. So it is with the Christian. The certain conviction that Jesus Christ's own righteousness is at work in us through the Holy Spirit wards off Satan's "fiery darts", the crafty whippersnappers that tell us: "See, you've sinned again. You'll never make it. Why don't you give up?"

## Sandals

The Roman soldier's leather sandals were essential in battle. Solid footing on difficult terrain often gives the winning edge in battle. Three times Paul encouraged Christian soldiers to stand, "your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace."<sup>23</sup>

Julius Caesar's watchword as a general was *celeritas!*—swiftness! The Roman sandals symbolise mobility, preparedness, speed. "A moving target is harder to hit," is still a good military maxim. So it is with Christian soldiers. Those actively living out the gospel of peace are hard for Satan to pin down!

## Shield

Incredible stories survive of the massed strength of the Roman shields. Take the "tortoise"



formation, for example. Squads of Roman legionnaires would align their shields over their heads while the outer ranks held their shields in front of their bodies forming an impenetrable square called the tortoise. A crack unit could form a tortoise so securely that a horse and chariot could ride on top of it.

No wonder, then, with this in mind, Paul counselled us: "In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one."<sup>24</sup> Christian soldiers are shielded by faith, the unshatterable conviction that our ultimate victory is assured.<sup>25</sup>

Are there fiery darts in the Christian life? Yes, plenty. Gossip, evil reports, sly innuendos, the bitter faith-destroying attacks on doctrine. There are unwanted health reports, quarrels with neighbours, unexpected personal clashes at work. Some of the cruellest and most effective darts come from the people closest to us. But the shield of faith—knowing that God has already secured our ultimate victory—extinguishes Satan's darts every time.<sup>26</sup>

## Helmet

Even today in potentially violent sports such as car racing and ice hockey, a helmet is mandatory. In

1 Thessalonians 5:8 Paul highlights "the hope of salvation" as vital Christian armour. Our warfare is so constant, so incessant, so fierce that we could easily collapse under the strain of battle fatigue. This is why good morale is so important in the Christian fight.

## Sword

"Take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."<sup>27</sup>

A stirring battle

order inciting to combat is usually the last stage in galvanising soldiers for victory. From where do we get our battle orders? From Jesus Christ, our Commander-in-Chief, who is the living Word of God: that "through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."<sup>28</sup> This spiritual headgear protects the head, the brain, where the Christian soldier aims to "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."<sup>29</sup>

What hope God gives us in His Word! For centuries Christians have gleaned inspiration from such stirring passages as Joshua 1, 1 Peter 1–3, Hebrews 11 and the books of Ruth, Esther and Psalms. And we need it. Sometimes the battle is intense indeed.

## Prayer

Paul ends the paragraph by recognising our need for divine help: "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests."<sup>30</sup>

Paul knew that his Ephesian brothers and sisters—and we too—can stand through all the shocks and alarms of the Christian life. Jesus Christ, the Captain of our salvation,<sup>31</sup> has promised us the victory. □

<sup>1</sup> Acts 17:16

<sup>2</sup> Acts 18:19

<sup>3</sup> Acts 19:10

<sup>4</sup> Ephesians 5:5

<sup>5</sup> Acts 19:19

<sup>6</sup> Acts 19:24–28

<sup>7</sup> Acts 19:34

<sup>8</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:

32; Acts 19:

31

<sup>9</sup> Acts 20:17–28

<sup>10</sup> Ephesians 6:

10–11

<sup>11</sup> 1 Timothy 6:12

<sup>12</sup> 2 Timothy 2:3

<sup>13</sup> Ephesians 6:14

<sup>14</sup> Ephesians 6:17

<sup>15</sup> Hebrews 4:12

<sup>16</sup> Psalms 119:97

<sup>17</sup> Ephesians 6:14

<sup>18</sup> Philippians 3:12

<sup>19</sup> Romans 7:19

<sup>20</sup> Galatians 5:5

<sup>21</sup> John 14:23

<sup>22</sup> Romans 3:22

<sup>23</sup> Ephesians 6:15

<sup>24</sup> Ephesians 6:16

<sup>25</sup> Romans 8:

38–39

<sup>26</sup> Romans 1:16

<sup>27</sup> Ephesians 6:17

<sup>28</sup> Romans 15:4

<sup>29</sup> 2 Corinthians

10:5

<sup>30</sup> Ephesians 6:18

<sup>31</sup> Hebrews 2:10

# Christianity is fo

Last night, the first batch of students whom I taught when I first started teaching, some 30 years ago, invited me to a reunion Satay Party. (For those of you who don't know what Satay is, it is a kind of meat chopped into slender pieces and pierced through a thin piece of bamboo stick. It is scrubbed with a layer of cooking oil and cooked over a charcoal stove barbecue style.)

There were the usual expressions of how long since we last met, how we have changed, or how we have not changed. Some have managed to maintain their youthful looks all these 30 years, and some have aged with more white hair than their teachers. There were those startling revelations that those homework assignments, which were so perfectly done by all of them, actually originated from only one of them, who happened to be the most hardworking of the lot. There he was standing there grinning widely with a perfect smile without any guilt in his eyes. So much would not have been done without this highly industrious young fellow. Surely he must have made it somewhere in life? And he did.

## A perfect reunion after 30 years

I taught this class Physics, which is the study of how everything works, seen and unseen. One of the students remarked that he is still struggling with the meaning of the phrase "infinitesimally small". He still can't grasp how small that infinitesimally small really represents. It is so small that you cannot possibly imagine how small it is. In addition, another student said, "Sir, I don't understand what a projectile is..." Surely, there must be some form of success in teaching these students when they can still remember such unfathomable terminology all these 30 years.

As the conversation progressed, the topics became more "religious". "Sir, are you still a Christian?" In those days, my Christianity was well known; we would disappear for a week or two to go somewhere

overseas, or somewhere far away, for a religious convention, known as the Feast of Tabernacles. Yes, I am still a Christian. Still in the same church, all these 30 years. Some of them are Christians as well, whether it was because of me, or someone else, I do not know. They all go to different churches. "To which church do you go?" "It doesn't really matter". "What is most important is that you get to know Christ; that He is God, and that you have the right relationship with Him". "Christianity allows people of all types to worship God in different ways, but there is only one path to God". "Yes there is only one path, and that is through Christ". These were perfect responses.

Then it was the turn of the owner of the house who hosted the Satay Party to share his views. "I am still searching..." "I met this guy at the airport, and we had a series of conversations." He could answer all his questions on Christianity with a degree of meticulousness that he admired. He is, however, not convinced.

He also met another person who brought him to church to watch a Good Friday presentation. They acted out going to heaven and hell, at the end of which there was an altar call for all who did not wish to be sent to hell, to proceed to the front, as is usual in many churches. He refused to move to the front in spite of being prompted by his friend, citing that this was a hard sell marketing technique, which he uses in his business. "I am still searching..."

With a cursory reference to Islam and Judaism, his discourse continued with his awe of the mysteries of Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism. He admired the efficacy of acupuncture and the relevance of *feng shui*. These "faiths" came 500 years before Christ walked on this earth. There was this story of a Frenchman; let's call him Jacques. Jacques was mystified by the reverence of the

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Yip Chi Kiong

Dalai Lama, and sought to seek out the secrets of happiness in the monasteries of Tibet resulting in his becoming a monk. Later a French scientific team sought to find the happiest man alive, and after a long search through many continents gave Jacques the highest readings of happiness after comparing his brain waves with scores of other happy people on earth.

Silence fell on the listeners. Here was the result of the search for one of the most desired of human feelings, nested deep within the vaults of the Tibetan mountains. Who does not want to be happy? Are Christians happy people?

Then the voice of another man spoke. Inasmuch as what we have spoken is imperfect, we must realise that Christ came 2,000 years ago as a human being; He came as an incarnation of God, who lived long before Confucius, even long before the beginnings of Chinese civilisation, or any of the earliest human civilisations.<sup>1</sup> God came to earth to live as a human being. The vast majority of people experience a wide spectrum of human feelings. People are happy at times. People are sad at other times. There are moments of immense happiness, such as perfection in scoring the highest number of distinctions with twelve A1s or seventeen A1s in public examinations. There are moments of unspeakable sadness such as not scoring any As, or even getting a devastatingly 'imperfect' score of eleven A1s and a single A2. Such is the joy and suffering of students. Christ came to earth as a man, even as He was God and perfect, to experience this range of human experiences. He knows us, because He has been one of us.

Only a small number of people, an infinitesimally small number of people, can claim to be perfectly happy, and actually be happy all the time. Such is not an experience for the infinitely vast majority of us, living on this imperfect earth. Most of us are happy at times

# r the imperfect

and miserable at other times, without missing a heartbeat. That is what life is about. It is a flawed life, seeking after God, who can lead us to that same perfection.<sup>2</sup> Christianity is not for the infinitesimally small number of people who are perfect.

Christianity is for the imperfect, the vast majority of us who are deficient in one way or another, at

called life. All these experiences of emotions are to help us build the same character as God.<sup>3</sup>

Only a few Christian churches do hard sell. Some do soft sell. There are many other approaches to guiding people to God. The wonderful thought about Christianity is that God tolerates multiple ways to search for Him and to reach Him. God even

draws us to Christ.<sup>4</sup> If, however, you search with a right heart, God will lead someone to guide you to Him.<sup>5</sup>

Christianity is for all of us who are fittingly human, with all of our frailties and human weaknesses, to become perfect in God through living and believing in Christ. Christianity is not a mystery hidden in inaccessible and unsearchable caves somewhere up in the highest mountains on earth.

Christ is with us where we are.<sup>6</sup>

We do not have to be great thinkers to become a Christian. Christ is with us, whether we have great powers of thought, or lack thinking abilities. Some find Christ through an exhaustive search of the writings of the religions of the world in the archives. Some encounter Christ through life experiences. Christianity is living His way of life, imperfect but faithful. So keep searching, for wherever you go, and wherever you may come from, some day you will find God. Now, you may not believe that there is a God in heaven, but perhaps some day in your search for Him, and if you search for Him diligently, you will find God. Whether you are now a Buddhist or a Taoist does not matter,

one time or another. In Christianity, we experience every kind of joy as we get to know Christ better each day. We experience sadness as we stumble and we fall. Nevertheless, we get up again as God leads us by His hand to keep us going, sometimes easy, sometimes against all kinds of hardship in all kinds of circumstances in the varied society in which we live. If we experience only happiness and no sadness, our lives are not balanced. Happiness and sadness, triumph and defeat, gain and loss, and many other contrary emotions, are all part of the same parcel,

<sup>1</sup> John 1:1–2

<sup>2</sup> 2 Corinthians 12:9

<sup>3</sup> James 3:2

<sup>4</sup> John 6:44

<sup>5</sup> Acts 10

<sup>6</sup> Ephesians 3:16–17, Colossians 1:27

<sup>7</sup> 1 Timothy 2:4

allows us to be wrong, and yet be Christian; however, we must seek change once we realise that we are wrong. There is no rigid rule or ritual to follow. All true Christian churches, however, point a person to Christ.

We have to approach Christianity with an open mind. We have to experience Christ and let the Holy Spirit guide us in worship and in living this way of life. No amount of meticulous study, extensive search or conversation can convince anyone to be a Christian. You cannot come to God by yourself. Ultimately, God the Father first

it is God's desire for all men to be saved<sup>7</sup>, whether it be tonight, or 30 years from now, or even a thousand years. God has a different time for each of us individually. Only a small number will not make it, small but sadly not infinitesimally small!

My description of what Satay is may be inadequate, so are the recollections of all that were being said and thought about in our conversations, these only show the imperfections within us and we need God in our life! □



# Take t

Jesus once told an allegory (*OK, a parable*) about two kinds of people who went to the temple to pray. One of them was a Pharisee, and the other was a tax collector.<sup>1</sup> Now, these days, 2,000 years after Jesus told the story, we might be tempted to nod knowingly and say, “Yes, of course, the Pharisees were the self-righteous hypocrites, right?” Well, maybe, but let’s put that assessment aside for the moment and consider what Jesus’ listeners would have been thinking.

First, Pharisees were not thought of as hypocritical bad guys, as we 2,000-years-down-the-road-Christians tend to think of them. Pharisees were, as a matter of fact, the devoted, careful, faithful religious minority of the Jews who were standing heartily in the breach against the growing tide of liberalism, compromise and syncretism with the Roman world with its pagan Greek culture. They called the people back to the law and committed themselves to faithfulness in obedience.

When the Pharisee in the story prayed, “God, I thank you that I am not like other people,” he was not just whistling Dixie. It was true. His respect for the law was impeccable, and he and the Pharisee minority devoted themselves to keeping it in a world where its importance had become seriously eroded. He was not like other men, and he was not even taking the credit for that—he was thanking God that it was so.

Tax collectors, on the other hand, were notorious crooks—Jews who worked for the Roman occupation forces collecting tax revenues from their own people, and worse, men of few scruples who routinely inflated the bills for their own profit (compare Matthew 5:46). Those listening to Jesus’ story would have instantly pegged the Pharisee as a man of God—the white hat—and the tax collector as the archetypal wicked man—the black hat.

But Jesus, as usual, was making an entirely unexpected point: God isn’t helped or hampered by who you

are or what you’ve been up to; He forgives everybody, even the worst sinners. All we have to do is trust Him. And equally as shocking, people who think they are more righteous than others (even with ample physical evidence of it) are still in their sins, not because God hasn’t forgiven them, but because they won’t receive what they don’t believe they need.

### Good news for sinners

The gospel is for sinners, not for righteous people. Righteous people just don’t get into the gospel as it really is, because they have the notion that they don’t need that kind of gospel. To righteous people, the gospel is the good news that God is on their side. They feel confident in God because they know they are behaving in a godlier manner than the overt sinners in the world around them. They give a good deal of attention to the terribleness of the sins of others, and they are glad that they are close to God and not living like the adulterers, murderers and thieves who they see on the streets and in the news. To righteous people, the gospel is a trumpet of condemnation toward the sinners of the world, a warning message that sinners should stop sinning and begin living like they, the righteous people, do.

But that is not the gospel. The gospel is good news for sinners. It declares that God has already forgiven their sins and given them a new life in Jesus Christ. It’s a message that causes sinners who are sick of sin’s cruel tyranny over them to sit up and take notice. It means that God, the God of righteousness, who they thought was against them (since He has every reason to be), is really for them and in fact loves them. It means that God is not holding their sins against them, but has already in Jesus Christ paid for their sins and broken sin’s death grip on them. It means they don’t have to live another day in fear, doubt



by  
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Fezell**

or guilt. It means they can trust God to be for them in Jesus Christ everything He says He is—forgiver, redeemer, saviour, advocate, provider, friend.

### No mere religion

Jesus Christ is not just another religious figure. He is not a cow-eyed weakling with a nice, but in the end unrealistic, idea about the power of human kind-heartedness. Nor is He just another great moral teacher who stirred human hearts to rise to a higher level of social responsibility.

No, when we talk about Jesus Christ we are talking about the eternal source of all things,<sup>2</sup> and more than that, He is also the redeemer, the purifier, the fixer of all things, who by dying and rising reconciled the whole out-of-kilter universe to God.<sup>3</sup> Jesus Christ is the one who made everything that is, who keeps it all in existence every moment, and who takes all its sin on Himself to completely redeem it—including you and me. He came to us as one of us to make us into what He created us to be.

Jesus is not just another religious figure, and the gospel is not just another religion. The gospel is not a new and improved set of rules, formulas and guidelines to get us in good stead with an otherwise bilious, ill-tempered Supreme Being; it is the end of religion. Religion is bad news; it tells us that the gods (or God) are hopping mad and if we do this, that and the other thing just right, then they (or He) will change their minds and smile on us. But the gospel is not religion: it is God’s own good news to humanity. It declares all sins forgiven and every man, woman and child God’s friend. It is a golden invitation on a silver platter to anybody and everybody who has sense enough to believe it and accept it.<sup>4</sup>

“But there’s no such thing as a free lunch,” you say. Well, actually, there is, and this is it. It’s not only a free lunch, it’s a free banquet,



# he leap

and it lasts forever. You don't need anything to get in but trust in the One who is throwing the party.

## **God hates sin—not us**

God hates sin for one reason only—because it destroys us and everything around us. You see, God is not out to destroy us because we're sinners; He's out to save us from the sin that destroys us. And the good news is—He's done it. He did it in Jesus Christ.

something about sin. And what God has done about sin is forgive it—He has taken away the sins of the world<sup>5</sup>—and He has done it through Jesus Christ.<sup>6</sup>

The fact that we are sinners doesn't mean God turns up His nose at us, contrary to what you may have heard; it means that as sinners, we don't want to be around Him. Yet without Him, we are nothing—our very being, all that we are, depends on Him. The

blast you with a curse if you blow it, or to let you into heaven if you measure up. But the gospel gives us the good news that God is not a stern judge at all; He is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, the Bible tells us, is the perfect representation to us humans of exactly what God is like.<sup>7</sup> In other words, when God stoops low to come to us as one of us to show us exactly what He is like—how He thinks, how He acts, who He hangs out with and why—He is Jesus Christ.



Sin is evil because it cuts us off from God. It makes us afraid of Him. It keeps us from seeing reality as it really is. It saps our joy, scrambles our priorities and turns what ought to be serenity, peace and satisfaction into chaos, anxiety and fear. It makes us despair of life, and never more thoroughly than when we actually achieve and possess everything we think we want and need.

God hates sin because it destroys us—but He doesn't hate us. He loves us. That's why He has done

treacherous blade of sin cuts both ways: On one side, it compels us out of fear or mistrust or both to turn our backs on God and His love for us, and on the other side it leaves us starving for that very love. (Parents of teens understand this very well.)

## **Sin removed in Christ**

Maybe during your childhood you got the idea from the grownups around you that God is a sort of stern judge, holding your every action in the balances, ready to

Yes, God made Jesus judge of the whole world, but He is anything but a stern judge. He forgives sinners; He doesn't condemn them.<sup>8</sup> Sinners get condemned only if they refuse to come to Him for forgiveness.<sup>9</sup> This is a judge who pays everybody's penalties out of His own pocket,<sup>10</sup> declares all charges dropped against everybody forever<sup>11</sup> and then invites the whole world to the greatest celebration in history.

We can sit on our duffs and debate all we want about who will or who won't believe Him and accept His

mercy and come to His party, or we can leave all that to Him (He can handle it), jump to our feet and scramble on down to the party ourselves, spreading the good word to and praying for whoever crosses our paths along the way.

### Righteousness from God

The gospel, the good news, tells us: You already belong to Christ—receive it. Enjoy it. Trust Him with your life. Enjoy His peace. Open your eyes to the beauty, the love, the peace, the joy in the world that can be seen only by those who are at rest in Christ's love. In Christ, we are free to face and admit our sinfulness. Because we trust Him, we are not afraid to confess our sins and unload them on His shoulders. He is on our side.

“Come to me,” Jesus said, “all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”<sup>12</sup>

When we rest in Christ, we get out of the business of measuring righteousness; now we can be completely honest and uninhibited in freely confessing to Him our sins. In Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector,<sup>13</sup> it was the sinning tax collector, who freely admitted his sinfulness and wanted God's mercy, who was made righteous. The Pharisee, who was devoted to righteous living and kept track of his holy successes, had no clear view of his sinfulness and his correspondingly acute need for forgiveness and mercy, so he would not reach out and receive the righteousness that comes only from God.<sup>14</sup> His very success in “holy living” became the blinding fog that prevented him from seeing how badly he needed God's mercy.

### Honest assessment

Christ meets us with grace in the very midst of our deepest sinfulness and ungodliness.<sup>15</sup> It is precisely there, in our blackest unrighteousness, that He, the Sun of righteousness, arises for us with healing in His wings.<sup>16</sup> Only when we can see ourselves as we really are in our real need, as did that extortionist tax collector in the parable, only when our daily prayer can be, “God, have mercy on me, the sinner,” are we able to allow ourselves to rest

peacefully in the warmth of His healing embrace.

We don't have anything to prove to God. He knows us better than we know ourselves. He knows our sinfulness and He knows our need for mercy. He has already done for us everything that needed to be done to secure our everlasting friendship with Him. We can rest in His love. We can trust in His word of forgiveness. We don't have to measure up; we only have to believe Him and trust Him. God wants us to be His friends, not His electronic toys or His tin soldiers. He is looking for love, not cowering or pre-programmed servitude.

### Faith, not works

Good relationships are based on trust, faithful commitment, allegiance, and above all, love. They are not based on mere obedience.<sup>17</sup> Obedience has its place, but it is, we ought to understand, a side effect of the relationship, not the cause of it. If you allow obedience to be the ground of your relationship with God, you will sink either into sticky pride, like the Pharisee in the parable, or into fear and frustration, depending on how honest you are with yourself about your true reading on the perfection scale.

As C. S. Lewis wrote in *Mere Christianity*, “There would be no sense in saying you trusted a person if you would not take his advice.” When you trust Christ, you will listen to His advice and do your very best to live by it. But when you are in Christ, when you trust Him, you will do your best without fear of rejection when you fail, as we all so often do. Fail, that is.

When we rest in Christ, our striving to overcome our sinful habits and thoughts becomes a commitment rooted in the faithfulness of God in forgiving us and saving us. He has not thrown us into the middle of some never-ending battle to measure up.<sup>18</sup> Quite the contrary, He is bringing us with Him on a journey of faith in which we learn to stop dragging around the chains of slavery and pain from which He has already freed us.<sup>19</sup> We are not doomed to an impossible uphill struggle to prove ourselves worthy; instead, we are given the grace of a new life

in which the Holy Spirit teaches us how to enjoy the new us created in righteousness and hidden with Christ in God.<sup>20</sup> Christ already did the hard part—dying for us; how much more will He do the easy part—bringing us home?<sup>21</sup>

### Leap of faith

Faith, we are told in Hebrews 11: 1 is our assurance of the things that we, the beloved of Christ, hope for. Faith is the only reality we currently sense of those good things God has promised—things that remain, as yet, quite invisible to our five senses. In other words, we see with the eyes of faith, as though it were already here, that wonderful new world in which voices are kind, hands are gentle, there is plenty to eat and no one is an outsider. Things for which we have in this present evil world no tangible, physical evidence. But the faith generated by the Holy Spirit, who enflames in us this hope of salvation and the redemption of the whole creation,<sup>22</sup> is the gift of God,<sup>23</sup> and in it we are swaddled in His peace, His rest and His joy by the incomprehensible assurance of His overflowing love.

Have you taken the leap of faith? In a culture of acid stomachs and high blood pressure, the Holy Spirit urges us toward the path of serenity and peace in the arms of Jesus Christ. More than that, in a world of shocking poverty, disease, starvation and brutal injustice and war, God bids us (and enables us) to open our eyes of faith to the light of His word, which promises the end of pain, tears, tyranny and death, and the creation of a new world in which righteousness will be at home.<sup>24</sup>

“Trust me,” Jesus tells us. “Despite what you see, I am making everything new—even you. Quit worrying, and trust me to be for you, for your loved ones and for the whole world exactly who I told you I am. Quit worrying, and trust me to do for you, for your loved ones and for the whole world everything I have told you I will.”

We can trust Him. We can give Him our burdens—our burdens of sin, our burdens of fear, our burdens of pain, disappointment, confusion and even doubt. He will carry them, just as He carries us, even before we ever knew it. □

<sup>1</sup> Luke 18:9–14

<sup>2</sup> Hebrews 1:2–3

<sup>3</sup> Colossians 1:20

<sup>4</sup> 1 John 2:2

<sup>5</sup> John 1:29

<sup>6</sup> 1 Timothy 2:6

<sup>7</sup> Hebrews 1:3

<sup>8</sup> John 3:17

<sup>9</sup> John 3:18

<sup>10</sup> 1 John 2:1–2

<sup>11</sup> Colossians 1: 19–20

<sup>12</sup> Matthew 11: 28–30

<sup>13</sup> Luke 18:9–14

<sup>14</sup> Romans 1:17; 3:21,

Philippians 3:9

<sup>15</sup> Romans 5:6, 8

<sup>16</sup> Malachi 4:2

<sup>17</sup> Romans 3:28; 4:1–8

<sup>18</sup> Galatians 2:16

<sup>19</sup> Romans 6:5–7

<sup>20</sup> Ephesians 4:24,

Colossians 3: 2–3

<sup>21</sup> Romans 5:8–10

<sup>22</sup> Romans 8:

23–25

<sup>23</sup> Ephesians 2:

8–9

<sup>24</sup> 2 Peter 3:13

Influence is like a savings account. The less you use it, the more you've got.  
**Andrew Young**

Love is a fruit in season at all times, and within reach of every hand.  
**Mother Theresa**

It is not what you do for your children but what you have taught them to do for themselves that will make them successful human beings.  
**Ann Landers**

That old law about "an eye for an eye" leaves everybody blind.  
**Martin Luther King Jr.**

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things.  
**Philippians 4:8**

In love you must give three times before you take once.  
**Brazilian Proverb**

A gossip is one who talks to you about others; a bore is one who talks to you about himself; and a brilliant conversationalist is one who talks to you about yourself.  
**Lisa Kirk**

**IMPORTANT LIST**  
*The most destructive habit is WORRY.*  
*The greatest joy is GIVING.*  
*The greatest loss is loss of SELF RESPECT.*  
*The most satisfying work is HELPING OTHERS.*  
*The ugliest personality trait is SELFISHNESS.*  
*The most endangered species is DEDICATED LEADERS.*  
*Our greatest natural resource is our YOUTH.*  
*The greatest "shot in the arm" is ENCOURAGEMENT.*  
*The greatest problem to overcome is FEAR.*  
*The most effective sleeping pill is PEACE OF MIND.*



*The most crippling failure disease is EXCUSE.*  
*The most powerful force in life is LOVE.*  
*The most dangerous person is a GOSSIPER.*  
*The world's most incredible computer is the BRAIN.*  
*The worst thing to be without is HOPE.*  
*The deadliest weapon is the TONGUE.*  
*The two most power-filled words are "I CAN".*  
*The greatest asset is FAITH.*  
*The most worthless emotion is SELF-PITY.*  
*The most beautiful attire is SMILE.*  
*The most prized possession is INTEGRITY.*  
*The most powerful channel of communication is PRAYER.*  
*The most contagious spirit is ENTHUSIASM.*

**Anonymous:**  
Never try to impress people with the profundity of your thought by the obscurity of your language. Whatever has been thoroughly thought through can be stated simply.  
Tact is the ability to see others as they wish to be seen.

Never get so busy making a living that you forget to make a life.

Most people would learn from their mistakes if they weren't busy denying they made them.

The person who won't read has no advantage over the person who can't.

If you want to be well liked never lie about yourself—and be careful when telling the truth about others.

There are two ways to be clever. First, think of a bright remark in time to say it. Second, think of it in time not to say it.

There is no doubt that it is around the family and the home that all the greatest virtues, the most dominating virtues of human society are created, strengthened, and maintained.  
**Winston Churchill**

Service is the rent you pay for room on this earth.  
**Shirley Chisholm**  
Set me a task in which I can put something of my very self, and it is a task no longer; it is joy; it is art.  
**Bliss Carman**

*When we are reading, we often find something that attracts our interest. It's not earth-shattering, or life-changing. But it's worth cutting out and keeping, or sticking on the refrigerator door; or maybe sending to us for this page!*  
*We invite all our readers to contribute news items, quotes, or poems, that make you say 'Hmm'. It could be in today's paper, or in a book hundreds of years old. Try to send the original clipping, or a copy of the page to:*  
**Hmm... The Plain Truth, Locked Bag 2002, 41990 Klang, Selangor, Malaysia.**

# Why practise

The hospitality industry is big business. Hotels provide a wide range of services from basic bed and board to organising elaborate functions, banquets and tours. They know how to take care—even pamper—their guests, all for a fee.

What about individuals like us? Does God’s word—the Holy Bible—tell us anything about practising hospitality?

## Definition

Webster defines hospitality as “The act or practice of receiving and entertaining strangers or guests without reward, or with kind and generous liberality.”

This definition tells us to practise hospitality as a way of life, without expecting anything in return. It also tells us to do it with a kind and generous heart. The guests can be strangers or known people. It leaves out, however, the details on how or when or where to entertain. It leaves these details to our creativity and imagination.

What are God’s thoughts on this seemingly trivial topic?

## Bible teaching

In Old Testament times, hospitality focused on receiving foreigners or strangers in need. The foreigners lacked membership in the community of Israel and their plight was desperate. As alienated people, they needed food and lodging. Widows, orphans, sojourner and the poor from other lands lacked community status that provided a landed inheritance, the means of making a living, and protection. The practice of hospitality meant graciously receiving a stranger into one’s land, home or community and providing directly for that person’s needs. Sharing food was to share one’s life.<sup>1</sup>

The New Testament also instructs us to practise hospitality, as in the following scriptures:

“Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly

love. Honour one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.”<sup>2</sup>

“Keep on loving each other as brothers. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.”<sup>3</sup>

Hospitality is one of God’s gifts to us and He wants us to use it to build the Body of Christ—the Church. That’s why the Apostle Peter tells us: “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.”<sup>4</sup>

God considers hospitality so important that He even makes it a requirement for His servants. Through the Apostle Paul, He instructs church elders thus: “Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.”<sup>5</sup> This instruction obviously extends to everyone, not just for church elders only.

## Benefits

God wants us to practise hospitality sincerely, willingly and cheerfully and with a generous heart. Doing it grudgingly—complaining about the money, time and effort spent—robs us of the joy that God wants us to experience.

When we invite people over, we are telling them that they are important to us and that we value their friendship. They feel honoured, respected and loved.

Sharing our lives with one another makes us vulnerable, but



by  
**Dr. P.  
Sellappan**

it draws us closer to one another. It strengthens bonds, deepens relationships, builds friendship and promotes community. Hospitality can help to heal broken or strained relationships. Estranged parties, after they have forgiven and reconciled with each other, often end up celebrating with a meal. That’s why the Apostle Peter exhorts us to “...love each other deeply, because love covers a multitude of sins.”<sup>6</sup>

We can invite people to celebrate happy occasions, for weddings and anniversaries. Or we can do so to encourage one another when we go through trials such as loneliness, fear, doubt, rejection or loss.

There are many examples of hospitality in the Bible

## Old Testament examples

- 1) One day, as the prophet Abraham and his wife Sarah were sitting by their tent, three strangers (actually, the Lord and two angels) made an impromptu call. Abraham and Sarah didn’t complain, but received their guests enthusiastically. Quickly they prepared a tasty meal for them—all without the help of modern gadgets like microwave oven, fridge or blender.<sup>7</sup> They were blessed for their hospitality. The Lord promised to make Abraham into a great nation and He also told Sarah that she would bear a son even though she was 90 years old.
- 2) A severe famine in Israel caused the prophet Elijah to go to a widow for food. But she didn’t have any except a little flour and oil—barely enough to make a meal for herself and her son. Elijah insisted that she first prepared a meal for him but he also assured her that God would provide for her needs. She believed Elijah and obeyed him. Miraculously, the flour and the oil didn’t dry

# hospitality?

up and all three survived the famine. Some time later her son died. Elijah prayed and God raised him to life.<sup>8</sup> God blessed the widow for her hospitality.

return. He came to know that she didn't have a son and her husband was old. He called the woman and assured her that by next year she would have a son. Sure enough, God

Israel in the wilderness for 40 years after delivering them from their slavery in Egypt,<sup>10</sup> and (2) God sent His angel to feed distraught Elijah as he was fleeing from a death threat from Jezebel.<sup>11</sup>



3) Elijah's successor, Elisha, had a ministry that required him to pass through Shunem. A lady there saw his need, so she built a guest room and entertained him every time he passed through the town. Elisha was touched; he wanted to give her something in

blessed her with a son. Some time later the son died due to sickness. Elisha prayed over her son and God restored him to life.<sup>9</sup> Again, God blessed the woman for her hospitality. The above are only three examples. There are many more. For example: (1) God fed ancient

## **New Testament examples**

1) On their way to Galilee, Jesus rested at a well while His disciples went to get some food. A Samaritan woman came by to draw water from the well. Jesus started a conversation with her and He surprised her by telling her some of her private life



even though it was their first encounter. Convinced that Jesus was a prophet, she went and called her neighbours to come and meet Him. They invited Jesus to their home and there He stayed for two days, sharing the gospel.<sup>12</sup>

God blessed these Samaritans for their hospitality. They came to know who Jesus was and gladly accepted Him as their Saviour!

- 2) The Apostle Paul was taken as prisoner to Rome along with other prisoners. A violent storm hit their ship and it ran aground at the island of Malta and all 276 people on board (mostly prisoners) escaped death miraculously. Stranded, they were helpless. How did the natives treat them? The natives could have taken advantage of them but, no, they treated them kindly they kindled a fire so they could keep warm. And a man named Publius entertained all of them for three full days. He cared for them and was willing to spend his money, time and effort to serve them.<sup>13</sup> Did God bless the natives for practising hospitality? You bet!

And God treated the natives kindly. Publius' father was dying of a terrible fever and dysentery. Paul prayed and God healed him. Seeing this miracle, many brought their sick to Paul and God healed them all. What a blessing they received for practising hospitality!

The above are only two examples. There are many more. For example:

- 1) Jesus welcomed two of John the Baptist's disciples at a time when they were confused as to who the Messiah was<sup>14</sup>,
- 2) Jesus fed 5,000-plus people who were going about their life like sheep without a shepherd and who needed encouragement and hope<sup>15</sup>, and
- 3) After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples and invited them for breakfast at the beach at a time when they were discouraged. They were disappointed that Jesus had died and He did not deliver their nation from the slavery to Rome as they had expected.

#### **A Malaysian example**

Recently, a fly-by-night syndicate recruited around 100 Indian nationals to work in Malaysia promising lucrative jobs. The Indians paid a big sum of money to the syndicate for this service. The syndicate took their money and disappeared, leaving them penniless. Stranded, they didn't have any money to support themselves. One kind Chinese family noticed their plight and had pity on them. They fed them and housed them for the three days they were stranded. Thank God there are still some good Samaritans around. God will bless them for their kindness.

Although God instructs us to practise hospitality without expecting anything in return, He invariably seems to bless those who do so joyfully—especially caring for the needy, encouraging people, building friendships and sharing His Word. He is not so concerned with the place, frequency or type of hospitality we practise. He is more interested in whether we have a heart for people.

### Jesus' final instruction

At the close of His human ministry, Jesus instructed His disciples to care for the (physically and spiritually) poor and needy. He promised to bless them. He said: "Then the King will say to those on his right hand, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'"<sup>16</sup>

### We were strangers

Our sin cut us off from God. We had no knowledge of God or His plan of salvation. As foreigners and strangers ourselves to the Kingdom of God, we were without God and without hope—doomed!

The Apostle Paul puts this eloquently: "...at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ."<sup>17</sup> Again he wrote: "Now, therefore you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God... in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit."<sup>18</sup>

But God is gracious. He sent His son Jesus to pay the penalty of our sin (which is eternal death) and reverse our destiny. He is offering us eternal life in His Kingdom—to a life filled with love, joy, peace, happiness, fun and laughter. He is calling us to a life where there will be no sorrow, pain, weeping or death.

### Ultimate hospitality

On the night before His crucifixion, Jesus ate a meal with His disciples. He offered them bread and wine. He told them that He was eagerly looking forward to eat this meal with them. During the meal, He had a long discourse with them. He recounted His life with them and shared some of His deepest thoughts. He warned them of His impending death, but assured them that He would rise again and would not leave them as orphans. He assured them of His father's love for them and told them that He would send the Holy Spirit to come and dwell with them. It was a very moving dinner time sharing.

Jesus said, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfilment in the kingdom of God." After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes."<sup>19</sup>

The story of the prodigal son pictures God's ultimate hospitality to us—our hopeless condition and His redeeming grace. In the story, the son wasted all his resources and was in dire need. He had no food, no home, and no friends. He realised his mistake and returned to his father, repentant and sorrowful. The father welcomed him with open arms and ordered a celebration because his son whom he thought was lost had come back.<sup>20</sup> In the story, the prodigal son represents all of us and the father represents our heavenly Father. Even though we all have gone astray, God loves us so much that He is ready to forgive our sin and welcome us to His Kingdom.

The parables of the Wedding Banquet and of the Great Supper also talk about God's invitation to His Kingdom. In these parables, the king invites many people but some give excuses and turn down the invitation.<sup>21</sup> God is inviting everyone to a heavenly banquet—His Kingdom—irrespective of one's station in life. Would we accept His invitation or turn it down as some did in the parables?

The Old Testament Prophet Isaiah also spoke about God's invitation to His Kingdom. He wrote: "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and

you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good and your soul will delight in the richest of fare."<sup>22</sup>

Returning to the New Testament again, the Apostle John confirmed God's blessings on all who would accept His invitation. He writes: "Then the angel said to me, Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'"<sup>23</sup>. He described the Kingdom thus: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.' He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!' Then He said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.' He said to me: 'It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life.'"<sup>24</sup>

God wants to share His life (which is eternal and abundant) and His resources (the whole universe with billions of galaxies, milky ways and stars) with all of us. That's the ultimate in hospitality.

God is the most hospitable being in the universe and He wants us to imitate Him. He wants us to share our (albeit) limited resources—our homes and our churches—with the (physically and spiritually) poor and the needy. God promises to bless us with His abundant life here and now and forever in His Kingdom. Why not give it a try? □

<sup>1</sup> Leviticus 19: 33–34

<sup>2</sup> Romans 12:9–13

<sup>3</sup> Hebrews 13:1–2

<sup>4</sup> 1 Peter 4:8–10

<sup>5</sup> 1 Timothy 3:2–3, Titus 1:8

<sup>6</sup> 1 Peter 4:8

<sup>7</sup> Genesis 18

<sup>8</sup> 1 Kings 17:8–16

<sup>9</sup> 2 Kings 4:8–37

<sup>10</sup> Exodus 16:35

<sup>11</sup> 1 Kings 19:1–8

<sup>12</sup> John 4:39–22

<sup>13</sup> Acts 27:13–44; 28:110

<sup>14</sup> John 1:35–39

<sup>15</sup> John 6:1–40

<sup>16</sup> Matthew 25: 34–40

<sup>17</sup> Ephesians 2: 12–13

<sup>18</sup> Ephesians 2: 19–22

<sup>19</sup> Luke 22:15–18, Matthew 26: 26–29

<sup>20</sup> Luke 15:11–32

<sup>21</sup> Matthew 22: 1–14, Luke 14: 15–24

<sup>22</sup> Isaiah 55:1–2

<sup>23</sup> Revelation 19: 6–9

<sup>24</sup> Revelation 21: 1–6

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