

THE Plain Truth

A Magazine Of Christian Understanding

Jul-Aug 2008

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have to offer?**

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THE PLAIN TRUTH

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What does Christianity have to offer?

Whenever we go around shopping complexes our eyes can never miss the vast number of discount offers that are made available to customers. Some claim to give as much as seventy percent discount on their products though no one seems to know what the original prices were. However, this gimmick always works as people are automatically attracted to the products and many end up buying them, thinking that if they miss the chance then they are losing a golden opportunity.

It seems that people today are always attracted to offers. With the rise in the cost of living today, any offer seems attractive. In most cases, business offers are designed to make people part with their money and therefore the 'offers' are in most cases actually a subtle way to trick us into buying something that we may not really need. However, people are not always looking for offers in products only. Many often ask what life has to offer them.

In Asian culture, religion plays an important role in the lives of people. In Malaysia, for example, the various religions like Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism have a large number of followers who take pride in following the teachings and practices of their religions. Often, any insensitive statements made about any particular religion arouse feelings of anger and resentment towards any individual making them. As such people are careful not to hurt the sensitivities of anyone, particularly in matters related to religion. However, that doesn't mean that one cannot ask questions regarding religious matters to gain a better understanding of a particular religion.

When it comes to Christianity, an oft-asked question is "Why are

there so many denominations among Christians?" Some ask why Catholics are different from Protestants, or why Churches are called by different names. Many ask what is so unique about Christianity. What does Christianity have to offer? These are questions worth answering.

To begin with anyone can start a religion. One just has to put forward a few tenets or doctrines and proclaim that it brings peace and a link to God. Some are

Our best efforts can only lead to eternal death. Now, that surely is the worst offer anyone can receive!

However, the Bible tells us that the love of God for humanity is so unfathomable that despite our sin He decided to rescue us from eternal death by sending us a divine Saviour.² This Saviour or Messiah is the one known as Jesus Christ. God calls this Messiah His Son. Jesus Christ being divine took upon Himself all our sins and paid the penalty incurred by sin through His death on the cross. But that is not all. God also raised Jesus Christ from death to eternal life again. In other words, Jesus Christ is alive today! To answer the question 'What does Christianity have to offer?' we need to forget about denominations, or what names churches choose to call themselves. Christianity offers a Saviour who is real! Christianity tells us about this Saviour who sacrificed Himself for all human beings and through that sacrifice; humans can again have a real relationship with God. Christianity which is about God's revelation to mankind culminates in the greatest offer that we can ever receive.³

This offer does not deceive us in any way. This offer is given out of infinite love. It is the offer of guaranteed eternal life when we accept Jesus as personal Saviour in our lives. Nowhere else on Earth is such an offer available. But to you who are reading this, God is lovingly providing you this same offer. His love for you has no bounds. Would you care to take this offer and see what a change it makes in your life? □



just content to bring a sense of meditative peace to themselves. In time, the adherents to the faith may associate supernatural phenomena to their faith and thereby proclaim the greatness of their beliefs. Christianity however begins with the proclamation that all have sinned and the prize of sin is eternal death!¹ Mankind as a whole has displeased God and therefore our disobedience has alienated us from God. This actually means that we of ourselves cannot please God no matter how religious we can be.

¹ Romans 6:23

² John 3:16

³ Romans 10:9

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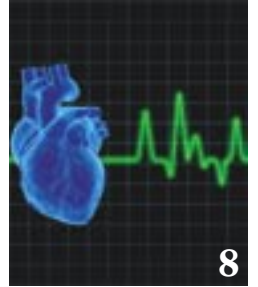
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What our readers say:

THE PLAIN TRUTH talks about today's practicalities. The writers are fantastic, men of God. They are great, very sound in doctrines and theological explanations. I love to read THE PLAIN TRUTH magazine. Now I am a retired man. Thank you so much and may God bless you and your ministry.

A R Alexander
Kuala Lumpur

I find THE PLAIN TRUTH helpful because after reading it my mind became "clean and easy". Thank you for the free subscription.

Thomas Lai
Kuala Lumpur

I'm truly blessed by this ministry. May the Lord continue to use this ministry to bless others.

Charles Wong
Kuala Lumpur

A big thank you and glory to God for initiating a magazine of Christian understanding. THE PLAIN TRUTH is a magazine that serves a wide spectrum of people. Its simplicity and truth not only light up our lives but also transform us to lead better lives. It is indeed the light that brightens our paths and lives. I have gained much after reading it. As it is given free without any obligation, in order to sustain its circulation, it is the responsibility and obligation of the readers/receivers to render support and contribute to this good work. I strongly believe it is better to give than to receive. Enclosed please find a cheque for the good work of this vital ministry and may you richly be rewarded by the Almighty.

Low Cheng Chye
Penang

Ed: Thank you. Your support for our ministry is much appreciated.

I have been receiving THE PLAIN TRUTH for many years, and I am an ardent follower of all its articles. I think it's a wonderful magazine containing actual, truthful, down-to-earth explanations of everyday happenings. I would appreciate



receiving THE PLAIN TRUTH Magazine always.

Deljeit Singh
Kuching

A small gift of \$100.00 for faith sharing, witnessing and articles of inspiration. Thank you for sending me your magazines for many years. I do look forward to receiving and reading them. You are doing a great job. I am 83 years old and a retiree, living on my own and count on God's blessings and goodness day by day.

Joyce Mui
Subang Jaya

Ed: Thank you. Your support for our ministry is much appreciated.

Being a non-Christian, I find THE PLAIN TRUTH magazine very enlightening and refreshing

Lee Yoke Wah
Ipoh

THE PLAIN TRUTH helps me to understand more about Christianity and increase my faith and I can feel the touch of Almighty God. Thank you for keeping me in your mailing list.

Professor Kumaran
University of Malaya
Kuala Lumpur

THE PLAIN TRUTH is a real life experience and a reflection for the day. I give it to the needy and troubled hearts when needed. They find it very interesting, even non-Christians. I love reading it and share with others what I have read. It's a wonderful daily experience reading it.

Maria Bernadette
Seremban

THE PLAIN TRUTH provides spiritual truth not necessarily available in my church and it also provides practical Christian living principles based on biblical scriptures.

Timothy Ley
Singapore

Thanks. I pass my copy to my colleague after reading it

Jean Lee
Singapore

THE PLAIN TRUTH gives me the truth.

Koh Swee Pian
Singapore

THE PLAIN TRUTH is like a spiritual vitamin supplement to my spiritual growth. Thank God for the writers/contributors of all the articles written in each of the issue—indeed it is inspiring, uplifting and great testimonies to share in the body of Christ.

Victor Sng
Singapore

I can grow in my spiritual life with THE PLAIN TRUTH.

Lin Shan
Singapore

THE PLAIN TRUTH is beneficial, exciting Christian community news and helps me to prepare myself for the challenges I face everyday in my Christian social life.

Sheela Peters
Kuala Lumpur

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.

A matter of choice

It's been said we do what we really want to do and the rest is just excuses. This must be true. I can't seem to find the time to do the ironing, but I make time to go bowling once a week. I also manage to see a movie or two each week (usually rented), but can't seem to find the time to clean out the garage. So when I say, "I didn't have time to do such and such," I really mean I didn't want to do it.

Everything we do or don't do involves making a choice. This

the second circle, the third circle and the inner circle. Jesus' outer circle consisted of the 70 He called and sent out two by two to preach the gospel. The 12 disciples made up the third circle. In the second circle were the three who were closest to Him: Peter, James and John. But one was especially close; one seemed to have a special place next to the Saviour.

John described himself as the one "whom Jesus loved".² He was the one who reclined next to Jesus

by
Tammy Tkach

loved him back, recognising John's deep desire to be close. As Sanders says, "Mutual love and confidence are the keys to intimacy".

Have you ever wanted to be closer to Jesus? God puts that desire in our hearts, but we are the ones who choose how close we'll be. Perhaps we feel more comfortable in the outer circle, choosing to keep a little distance. Or maybe the second circle is as close as we've ever been. It feels so good, moving closer doesn't seem possible.



includes our spiritual life. We make a choice every day to pray or not to pray, to read scripture and spend time with God or not. We also choose how close we will be to the Lord. Author J. Oswald Sanders said, "We are now, and we will be in the future, only as intimate with God as we really choose to be."¹

Sanders describes four circles of intimacy with God: the outer circle,

at dinner and through whom Simon Peter asked about Jesus' betrayer.

Did Jesus love John so much because Jesus played favourites? Was John teacher's pet because he was special or perfect? Jesus didn't have favourites, but John did. John chose that special place because he loved Jesus so much and wanted to be as close as he could get to the Master. And Jesus

¹ Sanders, J. O. *Enjoying Intimacy With God*

² John 13:23

³ Matthew 11:28

⁴ Sanders, J. O. *Enjoying Intimacy With God*

Being in the outer circle or the inner circle is up to us. Jesus has already invited us to get closer.³ "The place on Jesus' breast is still vacant, and open to any who are willing to pay the price of deepening intimacy."⁴

If we're willing, we can be close to Jesus in the special place next to His heart. We too can be the ones Jesus loves. It's a matter of choice. □

Is the Lord

“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want” are David’s words, penned when he was a young shepherd tending his father’s sheep.¹

Since shepherding was considered a lowly occupation 3,000 years ago it may seem disrespectful to refer to the Lord as a shepherd. But David, the future king of Israel, was not amiss. Actually he was being respectful.

David realised that his job of caring for sheep was similar to how the Lord cares for us. As a shepherd, he would guide the sheep to green pastures, lead them to clean water when they were thirsty, apply soothing balm to their cuts, bind up their wounds, and bring them safely home. He cared for all of their needs. David also protected his flock from predators, even fighting and killing a bear and a lion.²

David sensed that the Lord was guiding him in much the same way that a shepherd leads sheep. He found security and peace in viewing the Lord as his personal shepherd, knowing that He was ever vigilant, ready to protect, always seeking his eternal welfare, and would bring him to his heavenly home at the end of his physical life.

Other Old Testament figures also alluded to the coming Saviour as a shepherd. The prophet Isaiah eloquently portrayed the Messiah with these words, “He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those who are with young.”³

Jesus is the Good Shepherd

Jesus did not object to being compared to a shepherd. In fact, He often referred to Himself as a shepherd, and His followers as His flock, the sheep of His pasture.

Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”⁴ His disciples probably didn’t understand this shocking statement. Shepherds might risk danger to defend their sheep, but not willingly die. Jesus,



by
Paul Hailey

however, declared His willingness to die to save His flock. He later did just that when He suffered a horrible death to nullify the curse of death for you and me. Just as Jesus was resurrected, we also will rise from the grave to everlasting life where there will be no more death.

Jesus intimately knows all His sheep, and lovingly cares for each one. “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep, and my sheep know me...”⁵ He delights in His flock and He cares for His flock. When we follow Him, we can, as scripture states, cast all of our cares upon Him, because He cares for us.⁶

the long-awaited Messiah who was teaching them the way to everlasting life—a life beyond this physical life. And even after Jesus departed from them, they still followed Him, faithfully preaching His message and inviting others to follow Him.

His call to follow Him is now open to everyone. You too.

Of ourselves, we don’t know the way to those eternally green pastures. We need to be led by the only One who knows the way. Without Him we would get lost. “Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life.”⁹

Let Him be your shepherd

To you Jesus says, “Follow me.”

“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep, and my sheep know me...”

“Follow Me”

When Jesus began His ministry He beckoned Peter and Andrew to “follow me” and they immediately followed Him.⁷ Later He called James and John, and they also followed Him.⁸ Shortly later He invited eight more and they too joined His group of disciples. That probably seems strange. Why would so many dedicate themselves so quickly to follow a man who they knew had been just a local carpenter? But there was something about Him.

And they did follow Him wherever He went, for 3 years. They walked with Him, ate with Him, sat at His feet learning from Him. Their lives were transformed as they gradually realised they were literally walking with God,

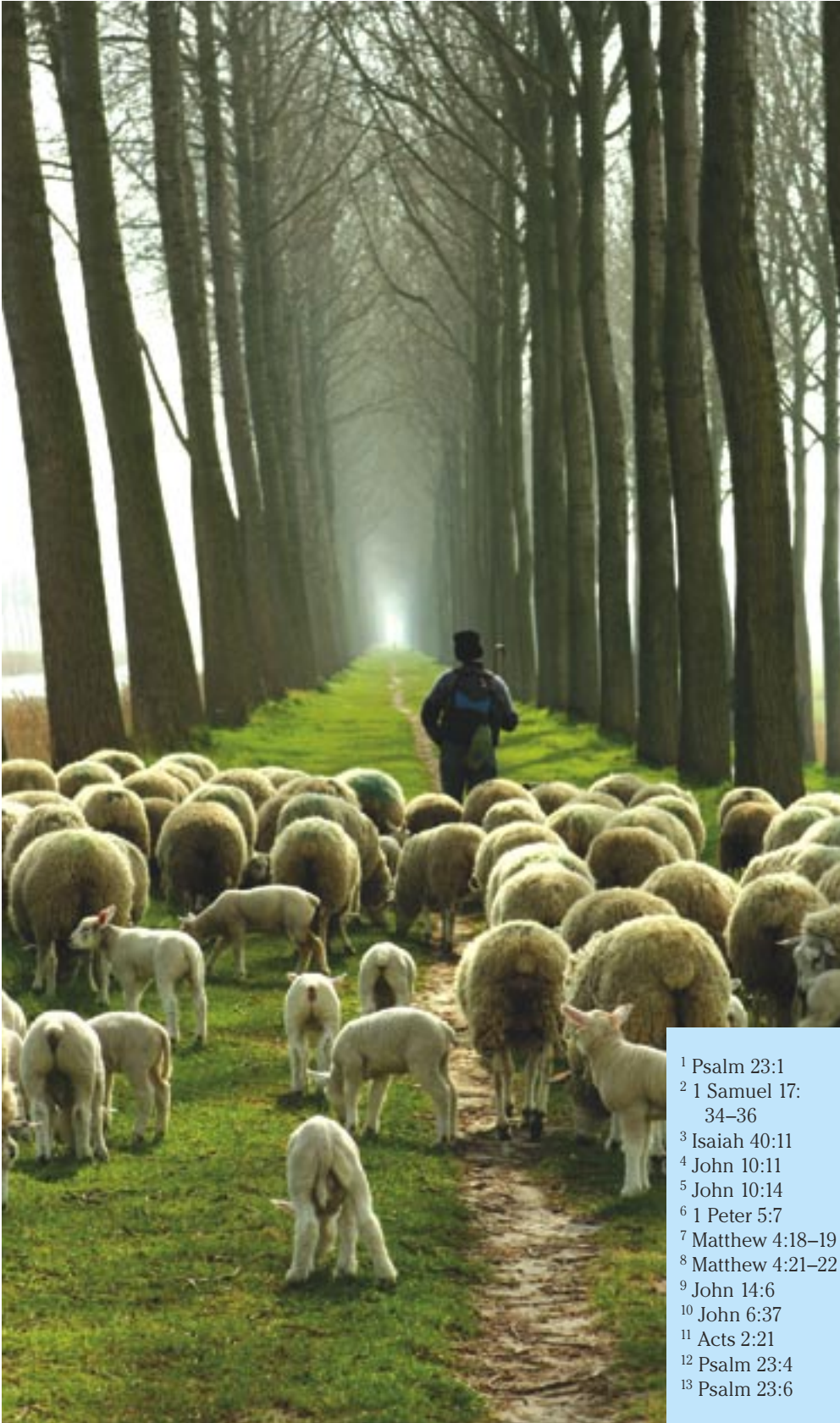
You can be His disciple, one of His sheep.

He rejects no one who comes to Him.¹⁰ God promises through the inspired words of Peter that “...everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”¹¹

Of course, “calling on His name” implies more than simply uttering a few words. It means acknowledging Him as personal Saviour and the Lord (master) of our lives. We need to confess our wrongs and that we need a Saviour. We need to admit we need the Lord to lead us to those green pastures. In simple terms, we need to follow Him as the disciples did, learning from Him, trusting Him, and striving to do what He did.

Jesus may be our Master, but He is a loving Master, a Good

your shepherd?



Shepherd whose purpose is to lead His sheep to eternal green pastures. Once we begin following Jesus, we can be confident that He as the Good Shepherd will lead us to everlasting life.

Obviously we can't follow in His literal footsteps as these twelve men did. Today He leads through the guidance, teaching, and promptings of the ever-present Holy Spirit, and sometimes through circumstances in our lives. Our role is to learn of Him, pray, and yield when we sense Him leading us.

He doesn't require that we walk on all fours and munch grass like sheep, but lest I forget, there probably will be trying times along the way. (Don't we have difficulties anyway? Might as well let Him care for our hurts.) David certainly had many trials and at times felt God's correction. But He knew the Lord was near. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff they comfort me."¹² The rod and the staff were implements commonly used by shepherds. The rod, or club, was used to combat predators. The staff was a longer stick used to prod the sheep to get them moving, or to keep them headed in the right direction. David realised that at times the Lord was leading him, poking and prodding him to go the way he should go. This brought him comfort, knowing that when he went astray as sheep often do, the Lord was still there.

Like David, when we face difficulties, or make serious mistakes, we can be certain that our Shepherd will bring us into His lush green pastures with Him forever, even if it takes some prodding and poking.

Let Jesus be your Good Shepherd. When you do you will be able to join David in declaring, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."¹³ □

¹ Psalm 23:1

² 1 Samuel 17:34-36

³ Isaiah 40:11

⁴ John 10:11

⁵ John 10:14

⁶ 1 Peter 5:7

⁷ Matthew 4:18-19

⁸ Matthew 4:21-22

⁹ John 14:6

¹⁰ John 6:37

¹¹ Acts 2:21

¹² Psalm 23:4

¹³ Psalm 23:6

How is y

Surviving a heart attack and subsequent surgery made me more acutely aware of how important the heart is to our survival. I could not take lightly anymore the health of my heart. A change in lifestyle, for example, becoming more active, being more careful about nutrition and taking medication regularly became my daily concerns.

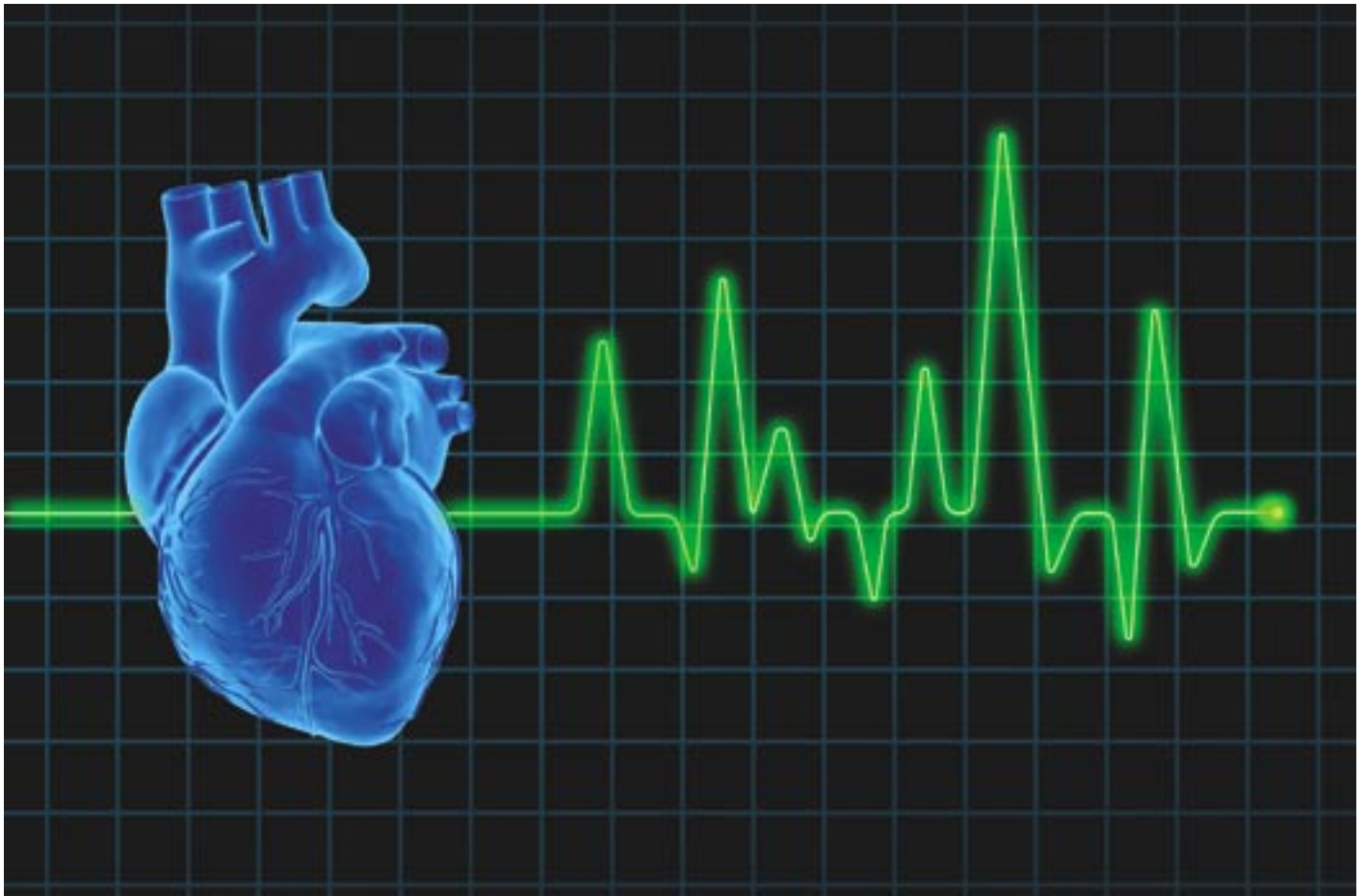
by
Ben David

is unlike anything the world has ever known, or can offer. We can prepare our hearts to receive and understand the message of the Bible. The state of the spiritual heart is much more crucial than that of our physical heart because it truly has permanent ramifications.

How much would you value your heart health when you begin to grasp that eternal life is at stake?

we can have an open and sincere heart to receive His message. We can daily study and think about His word, meditate on it, and commit it to memory and recall. We could write down, talk and sing God's word. As we obey it, it begins to make sense, little by little.

In order to be fruitful we need to hear and accept God's message.² The act of acceptance includes actively receiving and embracing



A greater concern about health, especially heart health, is natural after such a trauma. However, this physical life is temporary, and our best efforts can only do so much to help us get on with life.

When we consider what the Creator God of the Bible is offering, eternal or everlasting life, we should take to heart this opportunity for our spiritual wellbeing. The offer

Jesus, speaking of our heart, gave several pointers on how we could ensure long-term fitness and vigour.

Abide in His word

Jesus likened our spiritual heart to the soil that receives the Word of God.¹ God plants His message in our hearts through the spoken or written word. With God's help,

the word of God with agreement and obedience.³ We learn to treasure and cherish it, and in appreciation submit to it. Like the pearl merchant who discovered a pearl of great value, and sold everything he owned to buy it,⁴ we value God's word, esteem it above all else, and saturate our minds with it. We bring our thoughts in line with God's word. Jesus is

our heart?

received as our Saviour, Lord and Master, and we begin our journey as His disciples. We identify wholly with His message, and follow Him by imitating His life. In fact, the words of Jesus in all its richness can live in our hearts.⁵

While pursuing the path to become mature, we will face frustrations, challenges, upsets and setbacks. Jesus cautions us to *hold fast* in our tending to the seed: we cling to God's word and apply it to every area of our daily lives.⁶ Our hearts provide fertile ground for the seeds to grow in due season. By putting into practice His message or good news, we continue in His love as disciples through fair or stormy weather. God assures us that He is aware of our every situation and can convert all things to His favour in His time.⁷ Our faith and perseverance in God's love endear us to Him.

The power of God's word

Scripture is life-giving. It is dynamic, active, and energising, and can help us in the process of change or transformation. Through the power of God's Spirit we obey it and experience it as a life-force. God's Spirit and Word can expose all our thoughts, intents and motives found within our hearts.⁸ If we allow God to work with us, God can bring about the change right in our hearts and minds and renew us daily. If we are willing to let God mould us, our will can integrate with His will. The process of change and growth will continue till the day God completes His work in us. The word of God is such that it provides us with nutrients for all seasons, whether of joy or assurance in times of success, failure, loneliness and tragedy that seem beyond human understanding. Praise the great God who reveals mysteries and yet is always constant and faithful!

The word of God is planted in our hearts as seeds. These take time to grow and produce fruit.

The fruit is a result of God's work in us. As we commit ourselves to God's work within us through His Word and Son, God will reap His harvest in due season.

Abide in Jesus

Jesus proclaimed discipleship—He invites us to embrace His rest and burden, to walk and work with Him.⁹ By sharing with Him in suffering and death, we also share His life, peace, joy and eventually, His glory. Our hearts find union with Him in our daily walk as we take up our cross and follow Him. He nurtures His word in our hearts as we abide in Him. By treasuring who Jesus is and what He tells us, the newness of our being takes on a divine perspective. Our spiritual growth is possible only as we get our nourishment and strength from God.¹⁰

God assures us that although a battle rages in our hearts and minds to submit our will to Him, it is only through Jesus we experience victory.¹¹ God's word and will empower us through Jesus to remain faithful to Him. Day by day as we fix our hearts and minds on Him, and let His word rule our hearts, our endurance in the journey with our Shepherd is strengthened.¹²

Jesus tells us that we become His disciples by being faithful to His word and revelation.¹³ He reveals to us who He really is, and how He needs to be the centre of our lives. Apart from Him, we amount to nothing. But in Christ, our hearts become the radiant light of God's life bringing health and encouragement to others.

Jesus the living Word of God becomes more and more at home in our hearts as we trust in Him and His Spirit gives us mighty inner strength. This helps our hearts build strong roots that go deep into His love¹⁴ even as we diligently live by His word. When trials and persecution arise as they will, because of God's word, instead of giving up on God, we

hold fast and persevere in our faith.¹⁵ We affirm and confess our loyalty and discipleship in Jesus. We need to build strong roots that confirm our faith so that our hearts do not waver in times of testing. In due time, those who love Him and patiently endure trials will receive the crown of life.¹⁶

God's secret plan has been revealed to us—it centres on Christ.¹⁷ God is intimately concerned with our spiritual health. He wants our hearts to be rightly aligned with Him, and be the residence of His Spirit. As we mature our hearts can become God's control centre over our lives.

Because Jesus defeated Satan, sin and death, we, in 'dying' with Jesus, are set free.¹⁸ God helps to protect us from Satan's evil schemes, the challenges that result from our own human will, and the cares of this world when our hearts remain faithful to Jesus and His word.¹⁹

The heart of God

The gifts of God are priceless. He, out of His abundant graciousness and love, gave us His only begotten Son, the Spirit of Jesus,²⁰ the Word of God, His godly repentance and faith to court us into an eternal relationship with Him. We need daily to saturate our hearts and minds with appropriate sections of God's word. God gives us both the desire and will to obey His word.²¹ The seeds He plants in our hearts are designed to feed, strengthen, assure, grow and nurture us so that we may become like Him: strong in heart, faithful in love, vigorous in devotion, immersed in truth, comforting in sorrow, constant in character, and oneness in unity. As we continue actively in His word, and willingly submit to our Lord and Master, Jesus shall, as only He alone can, produce in our hearts a generous harvest of fruit²² that truly reflects the singular heart of our magnanimous and holy God. □

¹ Matthew 13:23

² Mark 4:20

³ Colossians 2:6–7

⁴ Matthew 13:44

⁵ Colossians 3:16

⁶ Luke 8:15

⁷ Romans 8:28

⁸ Hebrews 4:12–13

⁹ Luke 9:23;

Matthew 11:
28–30

¹⁰ Colossians 3:10;

2:19

¹¹ Romans 7:24–25

¹² Colossians 3:

1–3; Hebrews
12:1–2

¹³ John 8:31

¹⁴ Ephesians 3:

16–19

¹⁵ Mark 4:17

¹⁶ James 1:12

¹⁷ Ephesians 1:9

¹⁸ Colossians 2:20;

2 Corinthians
3:17

¹⁹ Luke 8:11–15

²⁰ 2 Corinthians 3:

17–18

²¹ Philippians 2:13

²² Philippians 1:11

Wise father, smart

A rich man had two sons. They both worked in their father's business. They had different temperaments—the younger son liked to 'live it up' (like many youngsters today) while the older son was frugal and conservative (like some grown ups today). They probably didn't have a good a relationship; maybe it's because of their different temperaments, lifestyles and worldviews.

One day, the younger son asked his father to divide the family property and give him his share. The father wasn't pleased with his request, but he respected his decision. The son took his share of the money and went to a faraway land where he squandered it all. There was a severe famine and he was in dire situation. He had no money and he had no friends to help him. He was forced to take a lowly job—feeding pigs. He received a pittance for his services which was hardly enough to buy a decent meal. So at times he was even tempted to eat the pig's food. He was in the pits!

Reality struck. He realised that he had to do something about his life. He told himself that he would go back to his father and apologise to him for making that foolish decision. He would beg his father to forgive him and hire him as a servant, not as his son. He thought that would be far better than starving in a foreign land. After all, all his father's servants had ample food to eat. So he set off to meet his father.

The father thought that the son had died as it had been a long time since he left home. But he also had a lingering hope that his son might still be alive. When the father saw his son coming, he ran and hugged and kissed him. He couldn't contain his joy. He quickly ordered his servants to organise a big banquet to celebrate this happy and joyous event. He told his servants to take off his son's dirty attire and adorn him with the best robe, sandal and ring. The son was probably embarrassed at the royal treatment given to him—a treatment that he



by
**Dr. P.
Sellappan**

really didn't deserve because he had squandered part of his family fortune. All he did was he repented and returned to his father. And all he wanted from the father was that he would forgive him and accept him as one of his servants. But the son got much, much, more. The father not only restored him to his original status as son but also showered him with very precious gifts.

All this was happening while the older son was still in the field. As he was returning home from his day's work, he heard loud music and dancing and wondered what was going on. He asked one of the servants who then told him that the party was to celebrate his brother's return. He was furious and refused to enter the house. The father came and gently pleaded with him to come in and join the celebration. But the son accused his father for being partial and ungrateful. He told his father that he had been serving him faithfully all these years and that he had never transgressed his commands, yet the father was oblivious to all his contributions. He told his father that he didn't even throw a party so he could celebrate with his friends whereas he was throwing a lavish party to an undeserving son. The father corrected his older son gently, telling him that all that he owned also belonged to him and that it was proper for them to celebrate his brother's return.

You can read this fascinating parable or story in the gospel of Luke.¹

Lessons from the story

The father in this story is our heavenly Father who is full of love, mercy, compassion and kindness. He has infinite resources to share with all His children (i.e., all of us) and none needs to feel that there might not be enough to go round. The Father is most happy when His children, alienated from Him because of sin, return to Him so that He could bless them. Unlike

Isaac who had only one blessing to give (which went to Jacob)², our heavenly Father has infinite number of blessings to give to all who would repent and turn to Him. Scripture tells us that there will be much joy in heaven when a sinner repents and turns to God.³

The younger son in the story who realised his mistake and returned home is us. We all had gone astray—sinned—doing our own thing apart from God and reaping the fruits of disobedience— anxiety, fear, hopelessness, pain and anguish. But if we realise our mistake and turn to God, He joyfully welcomes us and showers us with His precious gifts—eternal life, holiness and an inheritance that will never run out. He tells us that there is great joy in heaven whenever we repent and turn to God. The younger son was foolish at first but he became smart when he admitted his mistake and turned to God. We would be smart to take a page from him.

The older son, however, had a serious character flaw. He was *self-righteous* and *unforgiving*. He denied that he had *ever* sinned and he showed no mercy to his own brother. God tells us that these sins can keep us out of His kingdom. Luke 18:9–14 warns us against the sin of self-righteousness while Matthew 18:21–35 warns us that if we don't forgive others, we will also not receive forgiveness. The older son in the story refers to all those who think that they are good and therefore don't need forgiveness. They are self-righteous and unforgiving. These two sins—self-righteousness and unforgiving attitude—are related. Self-righteousness leads to an unforgiving attitude. These are insidious sins that the 'good and successful' people (e.g., the religious, the do-gooders, and the successful family and business people) must guard against.

Jesus also told a similar story in Matthew 21:28–31. He said a certain man had two sons. The

and foolish sons

father told his first son to go and work in the vineyard. First he refused, but later he changed his mind and followed his father's instruction. He was *willing to serve*. The father went to the second son and told him the same thing. This son said he would, but later he refused to carry out his father's request. He was *unwilling to serve*. The first son pleased the father while the second son didn't. Jesus told His followers that tax

second son in the second story. He couldn't see his sin of self-righteousness and unforgiving attitude, so he didn't repent. He rejected his father's offer 'come in and join the celebration'. He was not willing to work as a *servant*. He wanted to do things *his way*, not according to the father's desire. The younger son was foolish in this world but he became smart for God's kingdom. The older son was smart in this world but he became

foolishness and returned to his father. He accepted his father's love, mercy and forgiveness. He accepted his father's invitation and joined the banquet. He didn't deserve it but he made a smart choice to accept his father's precious gifts.

God who is all-wise, loving and generous, is inviting all of us to a *heavenly banquet*⁵—to a never-ending life of peace, joy, fun and abundance. We all are His children but we had gone astray—sinned.



collectors and prostitutes—people with bad reputation and who are failures in this life—would enter His kingdom first. He said the last will be first and the first will be last.⁴

The younger son in the previous story is like the first son in the second story. He sinned but he repented and returned to his father. He was willing to work as a *servant*. The older son in the previous story is like the

foolish for God's kingdom.

Invitation to heavenly banquet

The older son in this story refused to partake of the banquet even though the father had assured him that everything he had also belonged to him. He pleaded with him to 'come in and join the banquet' but he refused. He chose to remain foolish.

The younger son, on the other hand, acknowledged his

¹ Luke 15:11–32

² Genesis 27:38

³ Luke 15:7,10

⁴ Matthew 20:16

⁵ Luke 14:15–24;

Matthew 22:
1–14

⁶ Romans 8:30

⁷ James 1:17

⁸ Psalm 16:11

God loves us beyond measure and He asks us to be like the younger son who made a smart move. He repented and accepted God's love, mercy and kindness. And as the father in the story adorned his son, so will God *glorify us*⁶ and bless us with *every good and perfect blessing*.⁷ Let's get real—be smart and accept God's invitation to His heavenly banquet where there will be *pleasures forevermore*.⁸ □

Your life—

A recent survey by a major newspaper asked its readers to choose their “watershed” novel, the one book which, above all others, was the turning point of their lives! “The outsider” by Albert Camus won hands down among the men.

Mr. Camus was a French-Algerian writer and philosopher, who won the Nobel prize for literature in 1957, and famous for propounding his theory of “The Absurd” in his writings.

The theory states that the fact of death renders human life meaningless. Life is nothing but an absurdity! Most intellectuals believe it.

Well, he would be absolutely right of course, provided there is no God! But there is one, whether the philosophers, intellectuals, scientists, other experts, and even mankind in general, like it or not!

Actually, it is their intellectual pride and vanity which prevent them from acknowledging the existence of God, and the authority of the Bible, which happens to be the Manufacturer’s handbook which He has sent with His product, that is us, telling us how to handle it!

Once they acknowledge the true God, they will have to obey Him, which they hate to do! They want to do what they like. And, of course, this is not limited to unbelievers. Even the “believers” mostly want to do what they like!

God emphatically states, right at the start, that He created the universe!¹

A creation needs a Creator. But the “wise of this world” believe that the universe came out of “nothing” and everything in it, including ourselves, is a result of accident and blind chance, with no purpose or meaning—except of course to “eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die”!

Well, “only a fool says in his heart: ‘there’s no God’”.² And even those who believe in God usually follow a ritualistic system of worship, not really doing what He tells us to do. “Why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?”³

by
**Dr. Sudhir
Singh**

We can prove the existence of God and that the Bible is His word to mankind revealing the purpose of human life. God Himself asks us to prove all things, not accept them in blind “faith”! “Prove all things, hold fast that which is good.”⁴ “Prove Me now herewith, says the Lord, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down an overflowing blessing.”⁵

Let us consider a few facts:

- (1) Existence of creation: We see a mind-boggling, incredibly complex universe. There are billions of galaxies, each with billions of stars, and the distances are so huge that they have to be measured in “light years” (one light year = about 10 trillion kilometres). Creation demands a Creator. “The heavens tell the glory of God and the firmament proclaims His handiwork.”⁶ “Lift up your eyes and see, who created all these?”⁷
- (2) Law of radioactivity: The discovery of radioactive elements in 1898 proves that there is no past eternity of matter. These elements keep on giving radiation and change into lead when all the radiation has gone off. The radioactive elements in existence today therefore prove that they have not always existed, i.e., they have not been in existence long enough to have turned to lead. It shows that there was a definite time when they came into existence. Even the scientists agree that there was a certain moment of time when the universe “began”, 13–14 billion years ago according to their estimates. But notice, they start with a pre-existing “space”, a compact “core” of stellar matter at the “centre” of it, and of course specific, precise laws of astrophysics (and one may add, those of chemistry and biology

as well) already in place, operating without fail and with mathematical precision. Then this core exploded with a “Big Bang” spewing out all the galaxies.

Can something come out of nothing? Can laws exist without a lawmaker? Can all this come about “accidentally” and by “chance” from an impersonal, unintelligent, mindless “primary cause” or “force” or “nature”? God thunders, “There’s one Lawgiver and Judge who is able to save and to destroy.”⁸ Creation itself is proof of God. “For what can be known about God is plain to them, for God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world, His invisible nature, His eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. Although they knew God, they did not honour Him as God or give thanks to Him. But they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools!”⁹

- (3) Law of biogenesis: This law states that life comes only from life and that too from pre-existing life of the same kind. Life cannot come from dead, non-living matter. And living organisms produce other living organisms “after their kind”.¹⁰ All the advances in modern medicine in the treatment of infectious diseases are based on this law. Just imagine the chaos if typhoid bacteria start producing the plague germs or your blood by itself started producing the pneumonia germs!
- (4) Existence of living creatures: The web of life on earth is incredibly complex and

—absurd?

absolutely inter-dependent. Every creature has a specific place in it and its every attribute has a specific purpose. Can our marvellous human life be without purpose?

- (5) Existence of human mind: Well, there's nothing like it. Even just the physical brain, with its 100 billion neurons, is too much. And over and above it, some neuro-scientists now admit that the human 'mind' is a "non-physical" entity, i.e. something which cannot be fully explained by the physical brain tissue! Can your mind come from something less intelligent than you? Can a monkey, or lizard, or insect, or amoeba produce you? The very presence of the human mind is proof that the "First Cause" is also the supreme intelligence, far superior to the human mind. Yes, the "Primary Force", what we may call "the origin of all origins", has of necessity to be eternal, all-intelligent, all-wise and all-powerful. Yes, "it" must create things out of nothing. Yes, "it" must have a great purpose in bringing this fantastic creation into existence. Yes, "it" has to be nothing but God!

Now let us consider whether the Bible is the word of that great God to mankind, or in other words whether the God of the Bible is the true God.

The Bible is a very unique book. It is written by almost 40 authors over a period of 1,500 years, and probably much more, and yet it is a single, continuous story from Genesis to Revelation. That itself is a remarkable fact. Obviously, it has one real "Author"!

The Book roughly consists of three parts: history, instruction in

right living, and prophecy. Of these three, only fulfilled prophecy can be considered as proof of its divine authorship.

God Himself challenges us: "Declare and present your case. Take counsel together, who told this long ago? Was it not I, the Lord? And there's no other God besides Me!"¹¹

There are innumerable prophecies fulfilled in amazing details. You can check them for yourself with the help of a Bible commentary. Halley's Bible Handbook is especially handy and useful.

There are prophecies of the rise and fall of world empires,¹² detailed descriptions of Greek kings after Alexander and their precise movements, about 400 years before they existed,¹³ and above all, the prophecies of the birth, life, death and resurrection of Christ, in minute details, in the books of Psalms, Isaiah and other prophets, too numerous to mention here.

Let us see just one story—about Cyrus the Great, founder of the Persian Empire. He was mentioned by name 200 years before his birth!¹⁴ History records how his grandfather dreamed that his daughter's son would rule in his place. He didn't like that and told his trusted servant to kill the baby! The servant didn't like to do this horrible thing and told his herdsman to do it. The herdsman's son was just then still born. So he brought up Cyrus as his own son.

Cyrus' identity became known at the age of ten. Surprisingly, the king now accepted him as his son and later Cyrus ascended the throne and quickly built up a great empire.

He had miraculous help in conquering Babylon, the wonder capital of the ancient world. The



city was surrounded by such a strong wall and so well-guarded that it was considered invincible. The wall was 60 miles round the whole city, 300 ft. high, 80 ft. thick and 30 ft. below the ground (so that an enemy could not dig a tunnel under it). There were 250 watch-towers which were guarded round the clock.

However, when Cyrus laid a siege, there was a sudden outburst of rain causing a flash flood in the Euphrates River which passed through the city. The river just broke the walls! Then the rain suddenly stopped and the flood quickly receded, enabling Cyrus' army to enter the city and conquer it.

No wonder, in the very first year of his reign, Cyrus issued a proclamation acknowledging God's help and allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild God's temple!¹⁵

Most of mankind is in a quiet state of desperation not knowing the purpose of life, not knowing the true God, and of course not obeying Him. That is actually the cause of all the world's problems. Doing our own thing will always result in misery, unhappiness and ultimate ruin. As God says,

"There's a way which seems right to a man, but its end are the ways of death."¹⁶

God, who made mankind, can alone reveal this purpose to us, and He does that in His word, the Bible. Briefly stated, the purpose is to ultimately make us, after a process of training, development and transformation in this life, to be His literal sons and daughters, to live with Him forever! The Bible makes this clear over and over again. Just read it for yourself!

Yes, "only the fool says in his heart: 'There's no God'".¹⁷ ❑

¹ Genesis 1:1

² Psalm 14:1

³ Luke 6:46

⁴ 1 Thessalonians 5:21

⁵ Malachi 3:10

⁶ Psalm 19:1

⁷ Isaiah 41:26

⁸ Isaiah 4:12

⁹ Romans 1:19–21

¹⁰ Genesis 1:25

¹¹ Isaiah 45:21

¹² Daniel 7

¹³ *Ibid*

¹⁴ Isaiah 44:28

¹⁵ Ezra 1:2–4

¹⁶ Proverbs 14:12; 16:25

¹⁷ Psalm 53:1

A lesson about

Again Jesus began to teach by the lake... the Twelve and the others around Him asked Him about the parables. He told them, "...to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that, 'they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven.'"¹

At first glance, this passage seems to say that Jesus taught in parables specifically for the purpose of preventing people from understanding what He was talking about. A closer look, however, reveals just the opposite.

Master teacher

Jesus was not deliberately trying to prevent His listeners from understanding what He was talking about. He was doing just the

He was quoting Isaiah 6:9–10, a passage that chided Israel's blindness and deafness to God's love. The translation is easily misunderstood unless the context of Israel's struggle with God throughout its history is taken into consideration.

The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, noted this problem, and took care to include the sarcastic tone of the wording in its translation. The Septuagint, we should note, was the foremost translation of Jesus' day. In his commentary on Mark, William Barclay paraphrased Jesus' intent this way: "Do you remember what Isaiah once said? He said that when he came with God's message to God's people Israel in his day they were so dully un-



by
**Michael
Fezell**

But God knew that in the hardness of their hearts, they would also reject their own Messiah. As John wrote in the fourth Gospel, "He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him." But even that would not stop God from redeeming His people, and through them, the whole world.

In their rejection of Messiah, Israel's sin against God would reach its full measure. They would kill their Saviour, but God would raise Him from the dead, and His death and resurrection would become the very means by which God would transform the hearts of not only Israel, but also the gentiles.

New heart

Jesus was saying that stubborn, hard-hearted people cannot understand the things of the kingdom of God even when they are taught in the plainest possible language. It takes a new heart, a heart only God can give (compare Ezekiel 36:26).

Sin alienates us from God, and since we are all sinners, we are all alienated from God—not because He rejects us (He is eternally faithful), but because we reject Him. In our alienated state, we are incapable of reconciling ourselves to God. We neither know God nor want Him meddling in our lives. Even our concept of God is askew; we think of Him as a great butler in the sky who is not worth His salt unless He does everything we ask, or as an angry super-being who is always ready to dish out punishments.

Unless God Himself takes the initiative to reconcile us to Him, we remain helpless, with no future beyond death. That is exactly what He has done in Jesus Christ. In Jesus we learn exactly what God is like, because Jesus Christ is the exact representation of the Father.²

“He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him.”

opposite—using parables as a means of relating the invisible kingdom of God to everyday, visible, real life examples and situations the common person could easily relate to.

Parables were a teaching method quite familiar to Jewish teachers and audiences. They were tools for making things easier to understand, not more difficult. In the hands of Jesus, the great master teacher, these tools would have been even more effective. He came to bring good news to the poor, not confuse them with stories impossible to comprehend.

Faithful

The key to understanding this passage lies in the scripture Jesus quoted to make His point to the disciples about the use of parables.

understanding that you would have thought that God had shut instead of opening their minds; I feel like that today.” (*The Gospel of Mark*, Westminster Press, 1975)

Israel, as God's own people, had already failed to keep their covenant with God and had ended up a conquered people and an occupied nation, first by the Babylonians and eventually by the Romans.

But God promised to be faithful to His covenant regardless of Israel's unfaithfulness (compare Malachi 4:6). He promised to redeem them in spite of themselves (compare Hosea 11: 8–11), and He would do it through the Messiah, the Anointed One, who would be sent to redeem the people and bring them back to God.

t hard hearts



Gift

We learn through Jesus that God is merciful, patient and full of grace. God is not against humanity; He is for it. "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world," Jesus said, "but to save the world through Him. Whoever believes in Him is not condemned..." Through Jesus, our minds are released from the bondage of sin, and we are freed to put our trust in our Creator and Redeemer.

¹ Mark 4:1-13

² Hebrews 1:3;
Colossians 1:
19-20

³ Mark 4:11

⁴ 2 Peter 1:3

No one understands the things of God apart from the grace He has made manifest in Jesus Christ. "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you,"³ Jesus told the disciples. Yet before His ascension, even they did not understand the parables, because their hearts were still hard, too. The Holy Spirit, who leads us into all truth, especially the truth of the gospel, soon melted their stony hearts into hearts of flesh, just as God had promised through Ezekiel.

God never forces us to love Him, for love forced is not love at all. Instead, God frees our minds and hearts from all the barriers, rooted in sin, that would otherwise stand in the way. "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness," Peter would later write, "through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness."⁴

Freedom, however, is worthless unless it is exercised. □

There is a Captain

When *We Were Bengs* recently won several international awards in the short film category. We speak to Alaric Tay, the Singaporean actor, producer, and director of this film. Born in 1979 and the only child of divorced parents, Alaric has been in the acting business for 12 years now. With a strong Christian background, his mother, a primary school teacher, raised him with a strict legalistic upbringing. Ironically, he would later passionately pursue entertainment as the career of his choice.

Despite firm resistance from his family to embark on an acting career, Alaric began seeking out professional acting work at the age of sixteen. He received his first TV acting job on Channel 8, entitled *Kung Fu Master*—he appeared as the backside of a lion.

After a year of miscellaneous roles on Channel 5 (English medium), his big break came when he landed a supporting role in director Glen Goei's independent feature film, *Forever Fever*, aka *That's The Way I Like It*.

Since then, Alaric has acted in numerous TV programs, including directing and editing short films and documentaries since 2000. To date, he has five short films on his resume.

PT: Could you give us some background about your latest offering, “*When We Were Bengs*”?

AT: It's a 12-minute comedy about two mischievous brothers, a notorious gangster, a very sweet girl, and quite a bit of arcade dancing. It's really a fun piece that's centred on the themes of brotherhood and self-sacrifice.

PT: Where has the movie been screened so far?

AT: *Bengs* has had four local screenings in Singapore, and has travelled to film festivals in Toronto (ReelHeART International & Bridge Fest), Los Angeles (Hollyshorts), New York (Asian American International),

Cambodia (CamboFest), Norway (WT Os International), Germany (International Shorts Detmold), and even the widely publicised Comic-Con International Independent Film Festival, which was held in San Diego last July. We picked up three awards at ReelHeART for Best Film (Experimental Category), Best Sound, and Best Editing.

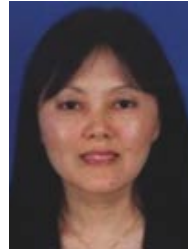
PT: How was the response to its screening?

AT: Feedback was positive, with lots of laughter at every screening, which is somewhat surprising because comedy (unlike the action or horror genres) doesn't have a universal formula. But, my brand of humour seems to work with audiences even in the US, Canada and Europe.

PT: What was your inspiration for the movie?

AT: I think there were several ideas, which finally came together. First, as a Christian I have always known the story of Jesus. It is one of sacrifice and love. His personal *sacrifice* for me is embedded in my heart, and it would only make sense to embed this part of myself into my work. After all, as an artiste, it's not my job to impress upon others that I am Christian, but to merely *express* that I am. Second, when I was in secondary school, I had many classmates who were gangsters, or were associated with them. I have been on the receiving end of some of their acts of kindness and sacrifice. Their sense of loyalty towards their friends is inspirational. This was also the premise for my movie. It is set in a town inhabited by punks and gangsters.

PT: What led you into the entertainment field?



by
Stefanie Tai

AT: Interesting question. I can't say there was anything specific that influenced me, but I knew I didn't want the usual office-type job. Maybe it was simply the desire to make a difference by being different. And I felt acting was something I could be good at. So I gave it a shot. Once I took a step in, more opportunities opened up, including getting into film school and making short films... So here I am.

PT: You have different areas of involvement in the field of entertainment?

AT: I am mainly an actor, but I also host events from time to time. In addition, I have been writing, producing and directing my own short films.

PT: What are some of the documentaries you have produced? What was your inspiration?

AT: I have produced two documentaries, and both had to do with my church. The first, *Journey of Change*, was a brief history and the struggles of the church when it took a leap away from legalistic traditions to mainstream Christianity. The second was called *Moving On: Selling The Journey*. It was about my adventures in Australia while trying to sell *Journey of Change*. At the same time, I paralleled that journey with my journey as a second generation Christian in a church that had just gone through a great deal of turmoil. I guess the inspiration were the stories themselves. There was a great deal of sacrifice that had to be made when the changes took place in the church, yet many remained faithful. That moved me.

PT: Your earlier documentary “*Journey of Change*” was autobiographical in nature.

onboard this ship

Share with us your thoughts on that journey.

AT: I grew up as a member of the Worldwide Church of God (WCG) in Singapore. When the changes in the church happened, I was a teenager—an age where change was welcomed and anything different could become popular. My mind was at the right stage of growth to comprehend the changes and the new understanding (which, to other Christians is common knowledge) of Christianity. I had a unique perspective overall. I was old enough to grasp the seriousness of the changes, yet young enough not to be too attached to them. Or perhaps, to what had existed before. I had a pretty balanced view of the WCG saga. I believe God's plan for me is no accident. I don't think it was a coincidence that I went to film school and learnt how to make films. It's no secret that I was very driven to make *Journey of Change*. It's no coincidence either that God planted in my heart to have a lifetime's desire to inspire people. And long after the film was completed, I still get emails from people all over the world telling me how it has touched them and made a difference in their lives! The journey is clear. There *is* a Captain on board this ship, and I am willing to follow Him.

PT: How has your education and training in Australia and Hollywood helped in your work and achievements?

AT: That training primarily focused on producing. It gave me a different perspective beyond the usual filmmaking skills such as lighting, camera techniques, and sound. I came to understand more about the *business* aspects of the craft—ultimately very useful for anyone who wants to be in

the film industry.

PT: How has being a Christian influenced you in your work and aspirations?

AT: I don't have a basis for comparison because I have never *not* been a Christian, if you understand what I mean. The only thing I can think of is my *partnership* with God. Because I have a personal relationship with God, I can counsel with Him on any matter. And as strange as it might sound, I present my aspirations and dreams to God as well. He is my Counsellor, and my King. My decisions ultimately affect Him. I am His partner, just as He is mine. So it only makes sense to bring my requests before Him, and ask for His wise intervention, blessing and judgement... which definitely supersedes my own, on so many levels.

PT: What has been a significant moment in your personal walk with Christ?

AT: Realising that I cannot do it alone. When I was younger I always thought that things in my life would be peaceful and happy if I simply obeyed God's laws. For example, going to church every weekend religiously, without fail, would make all my problems go away. But somehow it didn't work! I then realised that there was more to it. All God wanted was to save me—and have a personal relationship with me. I soon made a decision to make God my *partner* in life. My perspective of life then seemed to change. My successes and failures, which followed, seem to serve a purpose. I don't always know what the purpose is, but ultimately I believe that God has a plan for me. Many a time, fear stops us from doing many great things. But I am

always encouraged by the words engraved on a wooden sign which hangs on my bedroom wall. It reads "The LORD is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?"¹ This scripture is meaningful in my life.

PT: Is it difficult to be a Christian in an industry that is often characterised by a liberal lifestyle?

AT: Generally speaking, the entertainment industry is more liberal than others. In Singapore, that liberalism exists *within* a somewhat conservative Asian culture. So in essence, it's pretty much "closeted", and not so in-your-face as elsewhere. That makes it difficult to say whether it makes matters more or less difficult. God is in every aspect of my life, and there is no way of taking that away from me. I simply know that I am Christian, and I am not ashamed to admit it. That is who I am. Christianity-at-work is not merely in the words I say. It is embodied in the person that I am, and the way I go about my craft.

PT: Have you had to turn down roles that might have compromised your personal Christian standards?

AT: Yes. In fact, recently I turned down one that I felt would compromise my position, not only as a Christian, but also as an accessible public figure.

PT: Sex and violence seem to be necessary ingredients in a successful movie. But they seem incompatible with the Christian life. How do you handle that?

AT: Truth be told, I don't handle it. It is beyond me and I have no desire to change the way things work. As an actor, Christ is in my *real* life, not the characters I play on screen. Whenever I take on a new job, I am always a blank



canvas where I can create *any* character that is needed for the story. As a filmmaker, my objective is to tell stories of the incredible human spirit. Whether or not sex and violence will be a part of the future movies I make depends on the story. If God leads me to tell a particular story with such content, believe me, it must truly be important.

PT: Share some unforgettable moments that you've had working in TV or movies?

AT: There was one time, on the set of *The Yang Sisters*. We were rehearsing a big scene. Everyone was there, practically the whole cast. Midway through the rehearsal I was supposed to walk across the room towards Mark [Zee], who plays my brother, but I accidentally tripped over the prop sofa, squealed like a girl and landed on top of him instead!

PT: What are your all-time favourite movies, and why?

AT: I love the *Back To The Future* trilogy, and *Indiana Jones* trilogy. A more recent favourite would be *Pirates of The Caribbean*. I guess these movies have somewhat of a fun nature. They are exciting, full of adventure and are accessible to all ages. But the movie that really changed my life was *Dead Poets Society*. It was the movie that inspired me to inspire others.

PT: Which actors and other entertainment personalities have had the greatest influence in your career?

AT: Steven Spielberg and Robert Zemeckis have been influential directors. I like their style of storytelling. Tom Hanks and Chow Yun Fatt are splendid actors who bring a good blend of drama and comedy to their

work. Stephen Chow is my comedy hero, and my personal comedy style is very similar to his. George Lucas and Jerry Bruckheimer are my producing muses.

PT: Is it possible to use the popular media as a force for good?

AT: Definitely. Look at Oprah Winfrey and Ellen DeGeneres. They are doing great humanitarian things with and through their talk shows.

PT: What would you say to young people who seriously want to consider a career in the entertainment industry?

AT: If it is their dream, pursue it. It can be a rough journey, but very fulfilling in the end. □

¹ Psalm 27:1

The trouble with learning from experience is that you never graduate.
Doug Larson

A college degree is not a sign that one is a finished product but an indication a person is prepared for life.
Edward A. Malloy

The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn.
Alvin Toffler

You ain't learning' nothin' when you're talkin'.
Lyndon B. Johnson

You will find as you look back upon your life that the moments when you have truly lived are the moments when you have done things in the spirit of love.
Henry Drummond

The value of marriage is not that adults produce children but that children produce adults.
Peter De Vries

It is also a state of mind. Lasting peace can come only to peaceful people.
Jawaharlal Nehru
Desire is half of life; indifference is half of death.
Kahlil Gibran

A thousand words will not leave so deep an impression as one deed.
Henrik Ibsen

Time is the coin of your life. It is the only coin you have, and only you can determine how it will be spent. Be careful lest you let other people spend it for you.
Carl Sandburg



Growth demands a temporary surrender of security.
Gail Sheehy

Everybody wants to be somebody; nobody wants to grow.
Johann von Goethe

Education's purpose is to replace an empty mind with an open mind.
Malcolm Forbes

A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops.
Henry Adams

The highest result of education is tolerance.
Helen Keller

Try to learn something about everything and everything about something.
Thomas H. Huxley

All appears to change when we change
Henri-Frederic Amiel

It is easier to fight for one's principles than to live up to them.
Alfred Adler

Knowing others is intelligence; knowing yourself is true wisdom. Mastering others is strength, mastering yourself is true power.
Lao-tzu

Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen.
Winston Churchill

Peace is not a relationship of nations. It is a condition of mind brought about by a serenity of soul. Peace is not merely the absence of war.

It isn't how much we do, but how much love we put into what we do that really counts.
Mother Teresa

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.

What did the

The book of Acts shows a dramatic change in the disciples. No more questions, no more doubts, no more arguing among themselves. They boldly preached with confidence to thousands in the temple, defying the religious leaders, risking their lives because they were so zealous for the message.

What turned the fishermen into faith-filled preachers? Two things: they were convinced that Jesus was alive, and that they were given the same power that Jesus had—the Holy Spirit helped them understand and gave them courage.

The Messiah was alive, and His message was true: The time had come. The kingdom of God had come! Turn to God, and believe the wonderful news! Jesus told them to preach, and so they preached!

But what did they preach?

Peter's sermon

On the day of Pentecost, strange sounds came from heaven. Strange things appeared near the disciples. Strange words came from their mouths. Jews from all across the empire asked, "What is going on?" And Peter stood up to explain what was happening: A prophecy of Joel was being fulfilled.¹

A prophecy of Jesus was being fulfilled, too. He had predicted that the Holy Spirit would come upon His disciples, and it was happening. The Holy Spirit had filled Peter, and he preached with power.

What did he say? He preached about Jesus. "Listen to what I have to say," he said. "Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through Him among you, as you yourselves know—this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. But God raised Him up, having freed Him from death."²

And Peter continued to preach about Jesus, and concluded his sermon by saying, "Therefore let the

entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made Him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified."³ He told the people to repent, so they would be forgiven.⁴

In Acts chapter 3, Peter and John speak to another crowd, beginning their sermon by talking about Jesus.⁵ They explain that the Scriptures predicted the suffering and death of the Messiah,⁶ and they called for repentance.⁷ And they ended the sermon by talking about Jesus. This pattern happens throughout the book of Acts (see box).

The disciples did not completely forget about the kingdom of God. It is mentioned a few times, but the overwhelming focus of their messages was Jesus. The most important thing people needed to know about the kingdom is Jesus, specifically that He is the Messiah, the Christ, that He has come, and He has been resurrected to life.

The kingdom in Acts

Evangelism is a major theme of the book of Acts, but the word *kingdom* is not used in any of the sermons. It is used only eight times in Acts.

Although Jews believed in the kingdom of God and had the Old Testament prophecies about it, Paul argued about the kingdom for three months in the Ephesian synagogue.⁸ His concept of the kingdom must have been considerably different from what the Ephesian Jews had believed. And no wonder! Paul's message about the kingdom was coupled with a message about Jesus and grace and faith.

That was Jesus' message, too. For 40 days after His resurrection, He taught the disciples about the kingdom.⁹ What did this include? Luke tells us what He talked about during that time. On the road to Emmaus, "He interpreted to them the things *about Himself* in all the scriptures."¹⁰ Later, He summarised His own message: "These are

by
**Michael
Morrison**

my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written *about Me* in the law of Moses, the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled."¹¹

What was written? Here it is in a nutshell: "*The Messiah* is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that *repentance* and *forgiveness* of sins is to be proclaimed *in His name* to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem."¹² This is the kingdom message: a message about the Messiah who suffers, dies, is resurrected, calls for repentance and brings forgiveness.

Throughout the book of Acts, we see the disciples preaching about Jesus, about His resurrection, about repentance, faith and salvation. Many people accepted the message. Others scoffed, and some became angry. People react in different ways to Jesus.

But wait! How did a message about the kingdom of God get turned into a message about the messenger? Did the disciples get it wrong? Absolutely not! They were inspired to understand what Jesus was really teaching. Jesus had spoken in figurative language; He inspired them to take the next step. They were also inspired to write the books of the New Testament—and the first four are all about Jesus. Jesus is the focus of the Gospels, of Acts, of the Epistles, and of Revelation. He is the focus of the message of the church.

Jesus speaks about Himself

Jesus made some rather astonishing claims about Himself—so bold that the Jewish leaders hated Him for it. They could tolerate talk about the kingdom, but they were really upset when Jesus talked about Himself.

He talked as if He were the Judge of the entire world,¹³ as if everyone had to obey Him just as they obeyed God.¹⁴ He claimed the authority to forgive sins. Of course, anyone can forgive sins that are against themselves, but Jesus

apostles preach?

Preaching in the book of Acts

What did the disciples preach about? Here are the verses in Acts that use the words for “preach”:

4:2—proclaiming that in Jesus there is the resurrection of the dead

5:42—proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah

8:4—proclaiming the word

8:5—proclaimed the Messiah

8:12—proclaiming the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ

8:25, 40—proclaiming the good news

8:35—proclaimed the good news about Jesus

10:36—preaching peace by Jesus Christ

11:20—proclaiming the Lord Jesus

13:5—proclaimed the word of God

13:32–33—bringing the good news that God fulfilled the promise by raising Jesus

13:38—proclaiming forgiveness of sins through Jesus

14:7, 21; 16:10—proclaiming the good news

14:15—bringing good news, that you should turn to God

15:7—the message of the good news

15:35—proclaimed the word of the Lord

17:3—proclaiming the Messiah, Jesus

17:18—telling the good news about Jesus and the resurrection

17:23—proclaim what you worship as unknown

20:24—testify to the good news of God’s grace

20:27—declaring the whole purpose of God

26:23—proclaiming light to Jews and gentiles

claimed to forgive sins that were against God.¹⁵ He claimed to know what the Holy Spirit would do.¹⁶ He guaranteed eternal rewards.¹⁷

Jesus claimed to know how cities would fare in the judgment,¹⁸ and said it was worse to reject Him than to commit the sins of Sodom.¹⁹ He claimed to know more about God than anyone else,²⁰ to be more important than the temple of God²¹ and to have authority over the Sabbath.²²

Yes, Jesus preached about Himself, and it made people angry. He made sure that His disciples knew who He was,²³ and He promised them heavenly rewards.²⁴ He said that devotion to Himself was more important than life itself.²⁵ He claimed that He would return with the glory of God.²⁶ He gave enormous authority to His disciples, which means that He Himself had even greater authority.²⁷ He claims to have all authority, and to have power everywhere.²⁸

He claimed to be the judge and to have the power to appoint His disciples to be judges over all Israel.²⁹ He is the one who can let them enter the kingdom of God³⁰ or sentence them to hell.³¹

Jesus claimed that His life would ransom everyone else,³² as if He were worth more than everyone else put together. He claimed that His blood would institute a new covenant between God and humans.³³ He quoted a psalm about God as if it applied to Himself.³⁴ He claimed to have the power to send angels throughout the world.³⁵ He said His words were infallible and eternal.³⁶

Good news—or blasphemy?

The Jewish leaders thought that these claims were blasphemous. They understood how astonishingly great Jesus claimed to be. The validity of the message that He preached depended on who He was. If what He said was true, He was God. They could not accept it.

We find similar teachings in the Gospels of Mark and Luke: Jesus said He was someone incredibly



important, the focal point of prophecy, the key to everyone's eternity. We cannot enter the kingdom of God unless we accept Jesus as the King. We cannot have one without the other. The good news about the kingdom is that Jesus Himself has arrived. In His actions and in His words, Jesus showed that God accepted people into His kingdom. He forgave them, He welcomed them, He invited them.

It was good news for the poor. It was good news for sinners. Jesus did not come to invite the "good" people—He had come to invite the sinners. They are the ones who know they need help.

But people who thought that they could work their way into the kingdom did not like the message. Their concept of religion was totally opposed to the way that Jesus taught. Wasn't religion a way to keep people in line? Wasn't the threat of punishment necessary for a law-abiding society? Jesus was upsetting the way the world worked.

Jesus was a blasphemer, they thought. He was treating the law of Moses far too casually. He must

be one of the false prophets that Moses said should be killed.³⁷ They felt justified, no doubt, in arranging for His death. It was better for one man to be killed than to plunge the whole nation into rebellion.³⁸ That was the choice they thought they had: kill a blasphemer, or risk Roman retaliation. The choice was obvious.

Little did they know that it was all part of God's plan for the kingdom. The Messiah had to die, to give His life as a ransom, to make it possible for people to be forgiven, to make the kingdom good news of salvation instead of bad news of punishment. For the people to be saved, one man did have to die.

What a man this was! The man sent by God to be the Lamb of salvation,³⁹ so that all who believe in Him are given the right to become children of God, born of God.⁴⁰ We are children of the King—through faith in Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the Saviour, the Messiah, the bread of life, the entry-point of salvation, the light of the world,

¹ Acts 2:1–20

² Acts 2:22–24

³ Acts 2:36

⁴ Acts 2:38

⁵ Acts 3:13

⁶ Acts 3:18

⁷ Acts 3:19

⁸ Acts 19:8

⁹ Acts 1:3

¹⁰ Luke 24:27

¹¹ Luke 24:44

¹² Luke 24:46–47

¹³ Matthew 10:32;
7:21–23

¹⁴ Matthew 7:
24–29

¹⁵ Matthew 9:2–6

¹⁶ Matthew 10:20

¹⁷ Matthew 10:42;
19:29

¹⁸ Matthew 12:41–
42; 11:20–24

¹⁹ Matthew 11:24

²⁰ Matthew 11:27

²¹ Matthew 12:6

²² Matthew 12:8

the shepherd of God's people, the resurrection and life, the way and the truth.⁴¹ If we believe in Him, if we trust our future to Him, eternal life is ours—another way of saying that we belong to God's kingdom.⁴²

Jesus has the authority to give eternal life, to judge the world, to be honoured in the way that God is.⁴³ Jesus had eternal life,⁴⁴ and will raise others back to life,⁴⁵ and raise Himself.⁴⁶ He was just like God.⁴⁷ He claimed eternal existence⁴⁸ and accepted worship.⁴⁹

To enter the kingdom of God, we must trust in Jesus. To understand the kingdom of God, we must understand about Jesus. To preach about the kingdom of God, we have to preach about Jesus, for without Him, it would not be good news. The kingdom is good news only if we have hope of getting in, and Jesus gives us more than hope—He gives us confidence, assurance. We know the supreme price has been paid. We know that we are God's children through faith in Him—and when we are in the royal family, we can be sure that

we are in the kingdom of God.

The kingdom is good only if we are in it, and as part of His good news, Jesus talked about how people get in. That's really the most important thing we need to know about it. God will take care of where it is and when it is and what it will be like. We might like to know those things, but we don't have to know them. What we need to know is how we can be part of it.

We can be sure that the kingdom will be incredibly good—but we also want to be sure that we are in it, and the only way we can be sure is through Jesus. The good news about the kingdom is that Jesus is the way for us to be in it. When Jesus came preaching about the kingdom, the time had arrived. The kingdom was near. Jesus wanted people to believe it, and to enter it.

So He told them how.

Entering the kingdom

"The tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you," Jesus told the priests and elders.⁵⁰ How were they going in? By believing Jesus' words about righteousness and repentance⁵¹ and by doing what God wants.⁵² People enter the kingdom by repenting and believing the gospel.

We must "receive the kingdom", Jesus said.⁵³ He talked about how hard it was for rich people to "enter the kingdom".⁵⁴ The disciples then asked, "Then who can be saved?"⁵⁵ Here, we see several phrases used to indicate the same thing: receive the kingdom, enter the kingdom, be saved. These are different ways of talking about the same thing.

Jesus did not preach much about the details of the future kingdom. Rather, He preached about the way citizens of His kingdom can live and think in *this* age. He told us how our sins are forgiven. He told us to repent and believe the gospel. His disciples preached the same.⁵⁶

The kingdom of God is here, Jesus said. It begins right now. Yes, in the future the kingdom will have great glory—God will see to that. There will be fabulous future rewards, but the question that Jesus brings is, "Are we willing to be in the kingdom right now?" Right now, the kingdom is small.⁶¹ Now, the kingdom has both good and bad in it.⁶² Now, the kingdom

is waiting for growth.⁶³ Eventually, the kingdom will come in power, but now, it is small. The good news is that we can enter it.

Some Pharisees asked Jesus when the kingdom would come.⁶⁴ He replied that the kingdom already existed in their midst.⁶⁵ But they could not yet see it. The kingdom will eventually be seen by everyone, but the King had to suffer and die first.⁶⁶

church, too. Jesus predicted that His followers would do even greater works than He did.⁶⁸ The kingdom is growing.

The kingdom of God is *here*, Jesus said. People did not need to wait for a conquering Messiah—God is already ruling, and we turn our hearts toward Him now. The kingdom announcement demands a decision. It is a call to action. We do not need to wait—there are things to be done

A kingdom yet to come

Jesus announced that the kingdom of God was near; but He also talked about it as something that was in the distant future. He told His disciples to pray that the kingdom would come.⁵⁷ He gave a parable because some people thought the kingdom would appear right away.⁵⁸ Jesus looked forward to the kingdom in the future.⁵⁹ People "will enter the kingdom" on a future "day" of judgment.⁶⁰

Jesus could speak about the kingdom of God as already existing, or He could speak about it as a future event, depending on which aspect of the kingdom He wished to speak about. The time was at hand, the kingdom had arrived, even though it was not yet the glorious kind of kingdom that the Jews were hoping for. Nevertheless, for those who had faith, for those who repented and believed the good news, the kingdom had arrived.

Jesus also told the Pharisees, "If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you."⁶⁷ The kingdom is here, He said, and the proof is in the power. The kingdom of God is demonstrating its authority over Satan's rule—and this proof continues in the church today. Just as the kingdom could be seen in the ministry of Jesus, it is seen in the ministry of His

right now.

The good news about the kingdom is not just that it is near—it is that we can be part of it. Nearness is not good news if we miss out! Our sins would disqualify us, but in Jesus our sins are forgiven. We can believe in Jesus and turn toward God. We can be in the kingdom of God forever, and that is wonderfully good news! □

- ²³ Matthew 16: 13–17
- ²⁴ Matthew 16:19
- ²⁵ Matthew 16: 25–27
- ²⁶ Matthew 16:27
- ²⁷ Matthew 18:18
- ²⁸ Matthew 18:20; 28:18
- ²⁹ Matthew 19:28; 25:31–34
- ³⁰ Matthew 25:34
- ³¹ Matthew 25:41
- ³² Matthew 20:28
- ³³ Matthew 26:28
- ³⁴ Matthew 21:16
- ³⁵ Matthew 24:31
- ³⁶ Matthew 24:35
- ³⁷ Deuteronomy 13:1–5
- ³⁸ John 11:49
- ³⁹ John 1:29
- ⁴⁰ John 1:12–13
- ⁴¹ John 6:35; 8:12; 10:7,11; 11:25; 14:6
- ⁴² John 3:35
- ⁴³ John 5: 21–24
- ⁴⁴ John 5:26
- ⁴⁵ John 6:40
- ⁴⁶ John 10:17
- ⁴⁷ John 5:17–20; 14:8–10
- ⁴⁸ John 8:58; 17:5
- ⁴⁹ John 9:38; 20: 28
- ⁵⁰ Matthew 21:31
- ⁵¹ Matthew 21:32
- ⁵² Matthew 21: 28–31
- ⁵³ Luke 18:17
- ⁵⁴ Luke 18:24
- ⁵⁵ Luke 18:26
- ⁵⁶ Luke 9:6; Mark 6:12
- ⁵⁷ Luke 11:2
- ⁵⁸ Luke 19:11
- ⁵⁹ Matthew 26:29
- ⁶⁰ Matthew 7: 21–23; Luke 13: 22–30
- ⁶¹ Matthew 13: 31–33
- ⁶² Matthew 13: 24–30
- ⁶³ Matthew 4: 26–29
- ⁶⁴ Luke 17:20
- ⁶⁵ Luke 17:21
- ⁶⁶ Luke 17: 22–25
- ⁶⁷ Matthew 12:28; Luke 11:20
- ⁶⁸ John 14:12

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