

# THE Plain Truth

PP 12578/3/2008

A Magazine Of Christian Understanding

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p.8

**Unlike anything you have  
seen, heard or believed**

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THE PLAIN TRUTH

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# Who needs God when life is good?

There are those who say that God does not exist. There are also those who say that no one can be sure whether God exists. Then of course there are those who say that God definitely exists and His influence is in every aspect of life. This now leads to the next question, that is, which God among the numerous religions is really God.

A more pertinent question would be, "Who needs God?" Every day when we set out to work we see hundreds of cars jamming the roads, with people rushing off to their respective jobs. At the end of the day many are exhausted as they also have to fetch their children from school, do all the errands for the day and worry about the problems that they encounter. Yet despite all this, life is good. People seem to enjoy such a high standard of living. There's more than enough to eat and many have time and money to enjoy exotic delicacies. Living standards are so good that many have beautiful and expensive cars, homes and they often have the opportunity to enjoy vacation trips abroad.

For the average person, the term God is not the most important aspect of their lives. Many have a religion that they adhere to and often partake in religious ceremonies as a matter of custom or social obligation. Certainly if a more pressing need abounds such as a business engagement to clinch a deal, then even that religious obligation can be put on hold. People often talk about enjoying life to the fullest. In this aspect, enjoying life for some includes excessive consumption of alcohol, going on sex tours, getting high on drugs, racing madly along the highways and a host of other 'exciting' things that they can do. Very often they have no concern if what they are doing is right. After all, who determines what is right or wrong? As long as we don't break the law or if we can get away with it, life certainly is good!

Any discussion of God or about God would bring on an immediate frown. Many say that they will think about God when they are retired and have time on their hands. Even the sick do not really think about God as they have excellent medical facilities and extremely competent doctors who can handle all their medical problems. But how enjoyable is life when all that is available vanishes when death comes a calling?

Strangely, when one has enjoyed all that there is to enjoy in life, a deep emptiness sets in. Additional

life still seek meaning for their lives eventually. King Solomon of ancient Israel had the means to have anything that he desired. Indeed, he took whatever his eyes desired and withheld no pleasure from himself.<sup>3</sup> He enjoyed the good life just as many people today seek. Yet for all that he enjoyed, his conclusion was that everything was vanity and grasping for the wind.<sup>4</sup> Just like Solomon many today are grasping for the wind.

The first step to really enjoying life is to have the right knowledge about the giver of life. As long as we despise this knowledge, we will continue to experience the emptiness in our lives despite whatever we have achieved.<sup>5</sup> Jesus Christ came that we would really understand the reason why we exist and His purpose was to let us enjoy a full life for eternity. His purpose is for humanity to enjoy life abundantly as it was really intended.<sup>6</sup> The enjoyment that comes from a life with God by our side is an experience that can only be realised when one puts it into practice. It is not to be experienced only

when we retire, or when we are on the brink of death. Rather, it is a life-long relationship with our creator who has a purpose for each one of us. The true enjoyment in life comes only through a knowledge and willingness to follow Him.

Following God does not mean living in poverty or like a recluse away from people. It also does not mean giving up all pleasures and putting on a look of 'holiness'. What it means is to live life as it was really intended for us through the guidance of the Eternal. Such a life will never be empty. Would you be willing to allow God through Jesus Christ to give you that abundant life? Take up the challenge, and see what a difference it would make. □



pleasures may temporarily give relief, but the emptiness always returns. Some seek to get involved in works of charity hoping that comfort can come through doing good deeds. Though the intention is noble there still remains a basic need that has not been fulfilled. Perhaps the very thing that people have always been putting off, ignoring and denying is in reality the essence of a good life.

The Bible clearly states that only the fool believes that there is no God.<sup>1</sup> The bigger fool is the one who thinks that he has created himself and as such life is synonymous with pleasure. As he walks along the way of life, he displays a lack of wisdom and that becomes evident to everyone.<sup>2</sup> Even the super rich who can afford everything that there is in

<sup>1</sup> Psalm 53:1  
<sup>2</sup> Ecclesiastes 10:3

<sup>3</sup> Ecclesiastes 2:10

<sup>4</sup> Ecclesiastes 2:11

<sup>5</sup> Proverbs 1:7

<sup>6</sup> John 10:10

# THE Plain Truth

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# What our readers say:

THE PLAIN TRUTH has many interesting articles that I can relate to in everyday life.

**Chin Chan Kee**  
Kuala Lumpur

THE PLAIN TRUTH provides timely and positive reminders in these trying and stressful times.

**Khor Yee Lin**

THE PLAIN TRUTH fills my day and night with the love of the Almighty. THE PLAIN TRUTH is informative, motivational and spiritual. I have gained a lot of guidance from it. It has taught me the way of life and it is valuable to my spiritual life. Thank you for the fantastic job. All the articles brought forth are clear and concise, positive, thought provoking and encouraging. The articles helps us to appreciate God's goodness and His wonderful plan for mankind—that we can become children of God and live with Him forevermore free from bondage, pain and suffering of this life. God bless everyone who is doing this wonderful work. May The Almighty God continue to bless your work richly. Glory to Jesus.

**Rayappan s/o Joseph**  
Ipoh

As an ophthalmologist, I found some patients like to read THE PLAIN TRUTH while they are waiting for their turns.

**Chang**  
Bukit Mertajam

As a layman, the articles written always help me understand my practising faith better. I am also aware that THE PLAIN TRUTH is generally more acceptable by people of other faiths who find it enriching and interesting. Some actually pick it up to read in public places e.g. the Indian barber shop.

**Joshua SR**  
Petalin Jaya

Reading through all the articles in THE PLAIN TRUTH gives me strength and courage to carry on with my daily life in the faith and it also helps me to care for others.



**Emely Julius Makajil**  
Kota Kinabalu

THE PLAIN TRUTH helps me to deepen my understanding of Christianity and humanity.

**Jennifer Lim**

I found many articles very enlightening and thought-provoking at times. I do enjoy reading THE PLAIN TRUTH articles and have been sharing the magazine with my friends and relatives as well. Do keep up the good work. I hope to receive your regular magazine for many years to come. Thank you!

**Dz Chyu Ng**  
Singapore

THE PLAIN TRUTH has very good reading materials. I like it very much. I recommended it to a few of my friends

**Veronica Loo**  
Petalin Jaya

THE PLAIN TRUTH articles are practical and the principles can be applied in our daily lives.

**Khoo Gim See**  
Penang

THE PLAIN TRUTH helps me to understand better about God and about life. It covers a wide range of topics that help me to see things from God's perspective. It contains beautiful articles that give insight to the soul. Keep up the good work.

**Alice John Gending**  
Kota Kinabalu

THE PLAIN TRUTH helps me to cope with the "ups and downs" of life. May your message spread to more people.

**Francis See**

THE PLAIN TRUTH presents the views of Christians of different Christian denominations and is issued free. Thanks to the voluntary contributors.

**Julia Gomes**  
Ipoh

THE PLAIN TRUTH articles are knowledgeably written. They also give about a better understanding of life and how to adapt to the unforeseen circumstances that are happening around the world.

**Lee Ka Peng**  
Plan Hulu

THE PLAIN TRUTH is very educational and interesting. It provides a deeper knowledge of the bible and the world at large. At the same time THE PLAIN TRUTH inspires me. It enlightens readers on the important ways of life and the articles are always thought provoking. Carry on the good work.

**Lee Chai Yong**  
Kuantan

THE PLAIN TRUTH is very enriching. It helps me to understand the word of God better. Certain stories and examples make me feel that God has been so kind and merciful. It makes me grateful and thankful to God for the wonderful people who contributed to this magazine.

**Pius Ho**  
Kulim

THE PLAIN TRUTH is very helpful to me spiritually in my daily walk as a Christian.

**Thomas Ting Min Su**  
Sitiawan

THE PLAIN TRUTH helps me in my sermon preparation especially for illustration and practical examples.

**Verdamanickam**  
Kampar

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# Why not surrender?

In 1940 Winston Churchill addressed the British House of Commons with the story of the defence of Dunkirk and the evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force. Toward the end of this dramatic speech, he stated that England would defend itself no matter the cost, fighting on the beaches, on landing grounds, in fields, streets and on the hills. "We shall never surrender," he promised.

Surrender is usually the last thing on the mind of any commander.

He did and said many things that seemed opposed to the traditional ways of doing and thinking. Some have even said He turned the world upside down. Consider these sayings of Jesus: To be great, one must first become a servant; the first shall be last and the last shall be first; in order to live, we must first die. He suggested outrageous things such as turning the other cheek, walking an extra mile with someone, giving someone an extra coat and helping a neighbour, even if we think he or she doesn't

by  
**Tammy Tkach**

with my own power.

Andrew Murray in his book *Absolute Surrender* says the first step to surrender is realising this truth. Surrender is humanly impossible. It is possible with God, but only after we admit our weakness and truly believe we can do nothing without Him. God is the one who first wills us to surrender, then gives us the strength through the Holy Spirit to do it.<sup>1</sup>

When we surrender to God, we're giving up everything that makes up the self-will, self-determination, vanity, pride and arrogance. God



Rather, he tells the troops to keep fighting, no matter what. Even if captured, a soldier maintains his loyalty and determination not to give up to the enemy.

Most of us are the same. We're taught from an early age that giving up is not a desirable trait. We should keep going, no matter what the odds, no matter what difficulties come our way. Tenacity and stick-to-itiveness are admirable qualities. But giving up is usually seen as weakness.

When Jesus walked the earth,

deserve it.

If Jesus turned all of these things upside down, why not surrender? As Christians, we would do well to consider giving up, not as a last resort, but as a beginning strategy.

Surrendering ourselves—all of ourselves—is the first and best step toward living in the will of God everyday. But if you're like me, you've discovered this is absolutely impossible. I can't ever seem to completely surrender because a part of me always wants to believe I can do good things on my own,

desires our acknowledgement of His superiority and the lordship of Jesus in our lives. And He's more than willing to give us whatever it takes to make total surrender to Him possible.

Instead of fighting to the bitter end, like soldiers who only consider surrender when they're outnumbered, surrounded or out of ammunition, let's employ the strategy of Jesus. His battle plan for Christian soldiers calls for absolute surrender to the will of the Father before the fighting even begins. ■

<sup>1</sup> Philippians 2:13,

# Can you trust the Ho

A friend recently said that the main reason he was baptised 20 some years ago is that he wanted to receive the power of the Holy Spirit so that he could overcome all his sins. His intentions were good, but his understanding was a bit flawed. (No one understands perfectly, of course, and we are saved by God's mercy despite our misunderstandings.)

The Holy Spirit is not something we can "switch on" to achieve our overcoming goals, like some kind of supercharger for our willpower. The Holy Spirit is God, present with us and in us, giving us the love, assurance and close fellowship that the Father has for us in Christ. Through Christ, the Father has made us His own children, and the Holy Spirit gives us the spiritual sense of knowing that.<sup>1</sup>

The Holy Spirit gives us intimate fellowship with God through Christ, but He does not suspend our ability to sin. We still have wrong desires, still have wrong motives, still have wrong thoughts, words and actions. Even though we may want to stop a particular habit, we find that we are still unable to do it. We know that it is God's will for us to be freed from this problem, but for some reason we still seem to be powerless to shake its influence over us.

Can we believe that the Holy Spirit really is at work in our lives—especially when it seems like nothing is really happening, because we are not being very "good" Christians? When we struggle with sin again and again, when it seems like we are not changing much at all, do we conclude that we are so messed up that not even God can fix the problem?

## Babies and adolescents

When we come to faith in Christ, we are born again, regenerated, by the Holy Spirit. We are new creatures, new persons, babes in Christ. Babies are not powerful, not skilled, not self-cleaning. As they grow, they acquire some skills, and they also begin to realise that there is a lot they cannot



by  
**Joseph Tkach**

do, and this sometimes leads to frustration. They fidget with the crayons and scissors and fret that they cannot do as well as an adult can. But the fits of frustration do not help—only time and practice will help.

This is true in our spiritual lives, too. Sometimes new Christians are given dramatic power to break a drug habit or a bad temper. Sometimes new Christians are instant "assets" to the church. But more often than not, it seems, new Christians struggle with the same sins they had before, have the same

complete victory. We do not yet see His power over death, nor the complete end of sin in our lives. As Hebrews 2:8 says, we do not yet see all things under our feet. What we do is trust Jesus. We trust His word that He has won the victory, and we trust His word that in Him we too are victorious.

Still, even though we know we are clean and pure in Christ, we would also like to see progress in overcoming our personal sins. Such progress may seem excruciatingly slow at times, but we can trust God to do what He has promised—in us



personalities they had before, have the same fears and frustrations. They are not spiritual giants.

Jesus has overcome sin, we are told, but it sure seems like sin still has a grip on us. The sin nature within us has been defeated, but it still treats us like we are its prisoners. O wretched people that we are! Who will save us from the law of sin and death? Jesus, of course.<sup>2</sup> He has already won the victory—and He has made that victory ours.

Alas! We do not yet see the

as well as in others. After all, it is His work, not ours. It is His power, not ours. It is His agenda, not ours. When we submit ourselves to God, we have to be willing to wait on Him. We have to be willing to trust Him to do His work in us in the way and at the speed He knows is right.

Adolescents often think they know more than Dad knows. They think they know what life is all about and that they can handle it all pretty well on their own. (Not all adolescents are like that, of course,



# ly Spirit to save you?

but the stereotype is based on some evidence.) We Christians can sometimes think in a way similar to adolescents. We may begin to think that “growing up” spiritually is based on right behaviour, which leads us to start thinking of our standing with God in terms of how well we are behaving. When we are behaving well, we might tend to look down on people who don’t appear to have their act together so well. When we aren’t behaving so well, we might fall into despair and depression, believing God has left us.

But God does not ask us to make ourselves right with Him; He asks us to trust Him, the one who justifies the wicked<sup>3</sup>, who loves us and saves us for the sake of Christ. As we mature in Christ, we rest more firmly in God’s love demonstrated supremely for us in Christ.<sup>4</sup> And as we rest in Him, we look forward to the day described in Revelation 21:4: “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.”

## Perfection!

When that day comes, Paul says, we will be changed in the twinkling of an eye. We will be made immortal, imperishable, incorruptible.<sup>5</sup> And God redeems the inner person, not just the outer. He changes our innermost being, from weak and corruptible, to glorious and (most important of all) sinless.

Instantly, at the last trump, we will be changed. Our bodies will be redeemed<sup>6</sup>, but more than that, we will finally see ourselves as God has made us to be in Christ.<sup>7</sup> We will then see plainly the as-yet-invisible reality that God has made true in Christ.

Through Christ, our old sin nature has been defeated and demolished. In fact, it is dead. “For you have died,” Paul puts it, “and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”<sup>8</sup> The sin that “so easily

entangles us” and which we strive to “throw off”<sup>9</sup> is not part of the new person God has made us to be in Christ. In Christ, we have new life.

At Christ’s appearing, we will at last see ourselves as our Father has made us in Christ. We will see ourselves as we really are, as perfect in Christ, who is our true

*“Jesus has overcome sin, we are told, but it sure seems like sin still has a grip on us.”*

life.<sup>10</sup> It is for this reason, because we have already died and been raised with Christ, that we work to “put to death” whatever in us is earthly.<sup>11</sup>

We overcome Satan (and sin and death) in only one way—by the blood of the Lamb.<sup>12</sup> It is through the victory of Jesus Christ, won on the cross, that we have victory over sin and death, not through our struggles against sin. Our struggles against sin are expressions of the fact that we are in Christ, that we are no longer enemies of God, but His friends, in fellowship with Him through the Holy Spirit, who works in us both to will and to do God’s good pleasure.<sup>13</sup>

Our struggle against sin is not the cause of our righteousness in Christ. It does not produce holiness. God’s own love and grace toward us in Christ is the cause, the only cause, of our righteousness.

We are made righteous, redeemed from all sin and ungodliness, by God through Christ because God is full of love and grace, and for no other reason. Our struggle against sin is the product of the new and righteous self we have been given in Christ, not the cause of it. Christ died for us while we were still sinners.<sup>14</sup>

We hate sin, we struggle against sin, we want to avoid the pain and sorrow for ourselves and others that sin produces, because God has made us alive in Christ and the Holy Spirit is at work in us. It is because we are in Christ that we fight the sin which “so easily entangles us”.<sup>15</sup> But we gain the victory not through our own efforts, not even our own efforts as empowered by the Holy Spirit. We gain the victory through the blood of Christ, through His death and resurrection as the incarnate Son of God, God in the flesh for our sakes.

God has already done in Christ everything that needed doing for our salvation, and He has already given us everything we need for life and godliness simply by calling us to know Him in Christ. And He did this simply because He is so almighty good.<sup>16</sup>

The book of Revelation tells us that there will come a time when there will be no more crying and no more tears, no more hurt and no more pain, and that means no more sin, for it is sin that causes pain. Suddenly, in the twinkling of an eye, the darkness will end and sin will no longer be able to deceive us into thinking we are still its prisoners. Our true freedom, our new life in Christ, will shine forever with Him in all its glorious splendor. In the meantime, we trust the word of His promise—and that is something worth thinking about. □

<sup>1</sup> Romans 8:16

<sup>2</sup> Romans 7:24–25

<sup>3</sup> Romans 4:5

<sup>4</sup> 1 John 4:9

<sup>5</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:52–53

<sup>6</sup> Romans 8:23

<sup>7</sup> 1 John 3:2

<sup>8</sup> Colossians 3:3–4

<sup>9</sup> Hebrews 12:1

<sup>10</sup> Colossians 3:3–4

<sup>11</sup> Colossians 3:5

<sup>12</sup> Revelation 12:11

<sup>13</sup> Philippians 2:13

<sup>14</sup> Romans 5:8

<sup>15</sup> Hebrews 12:1

<sup>16</sup> 2 Peter 1:2–3

# Lonely

When you were single, you may have expected marriage to solve your problem with loneliness. After all, didn't God say, "It is not good for the man to be alone."<sup>1</sup> Marriage was God's solution to loneliness. But now, perhaps you've learned that marriage isn't an automatic solution to loneliness. Your expectations of intimate companionship haven't come true. Your marriage may even have left you more lonely than before.

All marriages go through rough times and hardships, of course. With careers, children, education, church activities, community service and the thousand-and-one other demands on you, your relationship is stretched to its limit.

Marriage is dynamic. All marriages are moving toward either intimacy or isolation. But if you as a couple understands that these stressful times are temporary, then they needn't cause major marital problems. It's when the occasional moments of loneliness become the standard that you worry.

Loneliness often begins with small decisions. "He will understand if I stay late at work again." "She doesn't mind if I go out with the guys."

You still love each other, but other priorities take up more and more of your time. You may end up seeing each other at home only between other responsibilities.

You share your house, your expenses, your children and your church, but you aren't sharing your love, your goals, your dreams and your life. Rather than husband and wife, you feel like roommates.

Men feel loneliness as often as women. Many men will not define the discontent that they feel as loneliness, but that's what it is.

One husband explained it like this:

by  
**Worldwide  
Church of  
God**

"I have a stressful job. Sometimes the pressures are so great that I can't help but want to bring the frustrations home with me. However, I don't feel comfortable telling my wife about work. She just wants to talk about how hard she has it with her own job and the kids. But I miss all the discussions we used to have about our plans and goals. There was a time when all we wanted to do was be together. Oh well, I guess we have

*"All marriages go through rough times and hardships, of course. With careers, children, education, church activities, community service and the thousand-and-one other demands on you, your relationship is stretched to its limit."*

hit real life."

Some women identify loneliness quickly and may respond emotionally. This young wife explains: "When we are able to come home together, he finds the newspaper, sits in front of the television and waits for dinner. When we do eat together, it is in front of the television set. After we finish, I clear the dishes and straighten the kitchen. Then we settle in for an evening of more television. I don't want to change my husband—much. I don't think

it is too much to ask him to talk to me. But when I bring up spending more time together talking, he thinks I'm emotional and overreacting."

Sound familiar? You can tell you are heading toward loneliness in marriage when you need to turn to others for support, when you want to be with your friends more than your spouse. You slip into a routine of separate hobbies, separate schedules, separate goals and separate lives. You become separate.

Most husbands and wives do not intentionally neglect their marriage. But family counsellor Dennis Rainey, in *Staying Close*, warns: "Unless you lovingly and energetically nurture and maintain your marriage, you will begin to drift away from your mate. You'll live together, but you will live alone." Marriage is a dynamic relationship. In Dr. Rainey's opinion, all marriages are moving toward either intimacy or isolation.

You can make your marriage relationship happier by understanding and being tolerant of the differences between you and your spouse. What can you do if your marriage is moving toward isolation?

Discuss your feelings of loneliness with your spouse. Pick a good time when you won't be interrupted, and talk with your mate about your needs and concerns. Avoid accusing your spouse or over-dramatising your feelings. Simply explain how you feel about the problem. You may even discover that your spouse has also felt the distance in your relationship, and that he or she also wants to improve the situation.

Reassure your spouse that you do love him or her. Change will take



# in love

effort from both of you, so both of you must commit yourselves to improving your marriage with love and patience. Consider praying together. The old saying, "The family that prays together stays together" is true.

This may be a difficult area to share. Begin small: before meals, in preparation for special activities, before a trip. Realise that it may take time, but praying together can be the springboard for an improved God-centred relationship.

These are some other things you can do:

- d. Discuss what you need. Don't assume that he should know, or she won't understand. Be honest.
- e. Discuss specific areas that both can improve to support each other.
- f. Try to become receptive to ways to improve yourself for your spouse. What can you do to improve the level of communication? How can you make your mate happier when you are together?
- g. Learn to understand the differences between you and

appreciate, from positive experience, why God said it is not good that a person should be alone.

## **"But what if..."**

What if your spouse doesn't respond to your needs? There are still ways to improve your situation:

1. Pray for your mate. Praying for your mate's growth, happiness and success is a positive first step. Pray that your mate will learn to understand and respond to you with God's help.
2. Love your mate. It is more difficult to give to someone who does not respond. But if you can avoid seeking revenge for the hurts inflicted on you and return good for bad, you will improve yourself and your relationship.
3. Make it easier for your mate to love you. Are you consistently complaining and overly critical? If you are, these traits will make your mate defensive and cause your spouse to want to push you away. Instead, be a good companion. If the time you are together is enjoyable, your mate will want to be with you.
4. Seek advice from a close friend or minister on how to remain loving without becoming resentful of your mate. Complaining to friends about your mate's shortcomings is not constructive.
5. Realise that you can change only yourself. This is one of the most difficult lessons for any of us to learn. Even though you cannot force your spouse to change, you can change how you view your situation. With God's guidance and help, you can overcome the loneliness you feel.

Finding the right type of help is important. In some cases, you may need to get professional counselling. Marriage counselling can help husbands and wives learn how to communicate better with each other. □



- a. Put your marriage second only to your relationship with God. If you are extremely busy with separate activities, then plan time when you can be together.
- b. You develop communication and intimacy by spending both quantity and quality time together. If your schedules are overbooked, you may need to evaluate your priorities and forgo some activities.
- c. Listen to what your spouse doesn't say. What does this tell

- your spouse. Then be tolerant.
- h. Recognise and accept the limitations in your relationship. Your mate cannot provide 100 per cent of your emotional needs and should not feel pressured to do so.

Marriage is not a guarantee that you will never be lonely. But learning to love, give, share, sacrifice and grow alongside the man or woman you love is a guarantee for fulfilment and happiness. You will come to

<sup>1</sup> Genesis 2:18

# Evidence of Jes

Christians, Jews, and atheists agree that Jesus was crucified and buried. The crucial belief for Christianity is that He was also resurrected—as evidence that He is the Son of God, the teacher of truth, the door and the way of salvation, the first-fruits of the resurrection. Here is the evidence for His resurrection:

First, most historians agree that the early disciples *believed* that Jesus had risen from the dead. Although at Jesus' death they were dejected and fearful, they were soon dramatically different: They risked their lives repeatedly to preach about Jesus. Even Christians in the second and third centuries (as well as many today) put their lives on the line to preach about Jesus. Of course, erroneous ideas abound, and people sometimes give their lives for erroneous ideas—but only if they *think* they are true. People do not put their lives on the line for things they don't believe. The disciples never wavered in their belief in Jesus' resurrection. None of them ever changed his story under the pain of persecution. Even agnostic historians will admit that the disciples believed that Jesus had been resurrected.

Then, we can consider how dozens of disciples could come to such a conviction. Perhaps the first possibility we could consider is that Jesus didn't really die. Perhaps it wasn't really Him on the cross. Maybe Judas led the soldiers to the wrong man, or a substitution was somehow made at the last minute (as Muslims believe). Is it possible that the disciples were in such a state of shock that they did not recognise the substitute on the cross, nor when they took Him down to anoint and wrap His body for burial? Was it then a coincidence that the tomb somehow became empty, and His disciples thought He had reappeared? No, all this stretches the imagination so much that this is not seriously considered.

Well, then, perhaps Jesus did not die on the cross—He just went into a coma, and then later revived. Is this a plausible historical possibility?

by  
**Michael  
Morrison**

Would Roman soldiers botch a crucifixion and take down a body without noticing that it was still alive? Would this severely injured person then be able to revive, unwrap His own grave clothes, roll away His own tombstone, and convince His disciples that He had good health? Then after 40 days He would never be seen again? No, this borders on the preposterous.

Perhaps the disciples helped Jesus revive. They rolled away the stone, unwrapped the clothes, bandaged the wounds, and told a story about getting their leader back alive out of the grave—a story that turned quickly into a tall tale about resurrection and miraculous appearances, a story that the disciples never tried to set straight. Not only is this historically implausible, it turns the disciples into frauds and deceivers—and yet, as we mentioned above, people do not give their lives for something they know is false. This does not provide a believable explanation for the rise of Christianity, rooted even in the early first century in the conviction that Jesus had risen from the dead—and this faith spread first in Jerusalem, where the facts could be investigated most easily!

It is not historically likely that Jesus could have survived the crucifixion. Well then, could the disciples have made up the resurrection? Did they steal the body, hide it somewhere, invent the story of a guard, and then preach a resurrection with conviction? This does not make sense, either. These fishermen did not make up the biggest lie in history, going against all the facts of life and death as they knew it, going against all religious beliefs of the day, going against Jewish and Roman authorities, risking their lives to tell the story they made up, without any of them ever betraying the conspiracy. No, these people were not conniving liars. Their words and deeds do not suggest any such deception. Their behaviour

matched their message.

As an interesting side point, we might also observe the indirect evidence of the empty tomb. (If it wasn't empty, then the Jewish leaders could have stopped the whole problem by producing the body.) And yet according to the Gospel stories, the empty tomb did not convince all the disciples. They were convinced only when Jesus appeared, and it is on the basis of the appearances that they preached the resurrection. If they had gone to the trouble of stealing the body, surely they would have used the empty tomb as part of their evidence. The fact that they didn't, tells us that they had what they thought was much better evidence: eyewitnesses of a living Jesus.

As another indirect evidence of the authenticity of their faith, we can observe that the Gospels report that women were the first eyewitnesses of the empty tomb and the risen Christ—and the testimony of women was not accepted in that culture. If the disciples were trying to make up a story, they would have invented witnesses who had more authority. It is not likely that these fishermen would have been so subtle in creating evidence, and yet be so bold in preaching. And what about the fact that the Gospel stories vary somewhat? If this had been an enormous conspiracy, wouldn't they ensure that the story was told in exactly the same way by everyone? The most believable explanation again is that the disciples genuinely believed Jesus to be resurrected, and told it the way they remembered it.

Now let's consider another scenario: grave robbers (hoping for riches in the rich man's tomb) got the guards to drink so much wine that they fell asleep; then the grave robbers took the body and dumped it in the desert. The guards, wanting to cover up their failure and knowing the fears of the religious leaders, made up the story

# us' resurrection

of the angels and the resurrection, and were bribed to blame the disciples. Then the disciples had hallucinations of a risen Jesus.

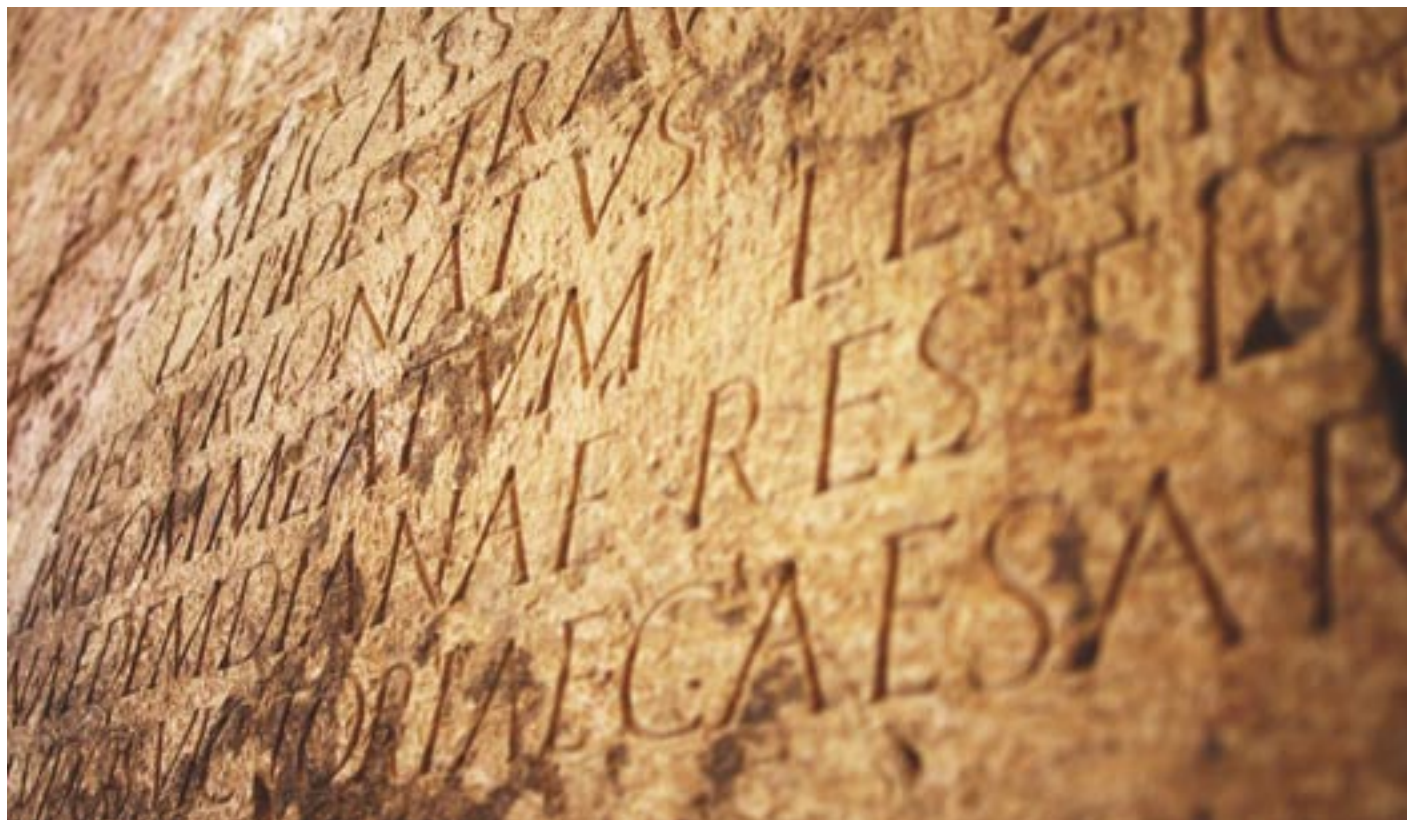
However, did all the disciples have the same hallucination, several times, against their expectations, against their religious beliefs? Did the hallucination eat and drink, speak, and then suddenly cease 40 days later? This is not the way hallucinations work. The evidence does not match this hypothesis, either.

when eyewitnesses of Jesus were still available to either support or refute the story. There was no time for legends to develop. The biblical writers give us history: This is what I saw. This is what it meant. They denounce the idea of myth. They are presenting what they saw.

The disciples were not deceived. nor were they deceivers. They just tell us what they believed, and it is clear that they believed that Jesus died and was buried and was resurrected. And it is clear that

what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup>

The disciples clearly believed that Jesus rose from the dead. Why did they believe this? The most plausible explanation is to accept their testimony. All other theories are far-fetched and historically unlikely. When we also take into consideration the need for God to intervene in humanity to save us, and the Old Testament predictions of a



Let's consider one more idea, that the idea of resurrection was just a religious allegory (sometimes described as a "myth", meaning religious ideas expressed in allegorical stories), and Christianity made a big mistake in taking it literally for almost 2,000 years. There are several problems with this idea. First, the Gospels are not written in a mythological style. And it is clear that the resurrection was understood in a literal way even in the first century.

the reason they believed this is because they saw it with their own eyes.

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you

suffering servant who would give His life for His people, the explanation that makes the most sense is that the disciples believed that Jesus was resurrected because Jesus appeared to them and *told* them He was resurrected. That is why they had such a transformation in their beliefs, and why they preached with such conviction. As Luke puts it, by looking at the evidence we “may know the certainty of the things we have been taught”.<sup>2</sup> □

<sup>1</sup> 1 John 1:1–3

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



# Finding pe

Time and again our newspapers and television news bombard us with the horrifying incidents of violence that are occurring on a daily basis. Innocent people are being killed all over the world by those who proclaim to be fighting for a cause. In their efforts to achieve their political and personal goals the lives of other human beings are being sacrificed routinely to the extent that it now seems to be a part of 'normal' everyday existence in many parts of the world. Many people have developed deep psychological problems due to constant fear as they don't know if they can live through another day without being killed. Terrorism, war and hatred have become entrenched in most parts of the world.

In peaceful nations like ours, we padlock our homes with the most expensive locks and install the most elaborate alarm systems. Some even carry a big stick or an iron rod in their cars just in case they encounter a road bully. Why do we live like this? Well, one reason is that criminals have become extremely vicious and have no qualms about injuring or killing their victims. Let's face facts; we too are living in constant fear daily as we never know when we may become victims of violence. If there is one thing that everyone desires it must be peace. We want peace among nations and peace among peoples of differing race, culture and religious beliefs. We want peace with our neighbours and above all we want to *live in peace*.

Many of us, however, equate peace with the absence of violence; no thefts, no fighting, no despair, no stress and no worry. To some peace means financial stability, good health and material wealth, just to name a few. Well, none of these actually brings about peace. What about religious people? Do they live in peace? Sadly, many people who attend worship congregations in their respective religions still return home to their fears. Let me ask you a question. How is it that many who go



by  
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to church, mosques, temples and other places of worship still have no peace? Many are divided among themselves. Many professing the same religion bear hatred towards each other. Where are we going wrong? Why is it that we are always troubled? Why are so many of us disturbed emotionally and mentally? Why do so many of us fail to find true peace?

## The Peace from God

Jesus Christ began His ministry by preaching about a Kingdom of God. Yes, peace will definitely come when Christ returns but why shouldn't there be peace in the lives of those who believe in Christ now? Perhaps we have not realised a significant fact about peace. No matter how hard we try, we cannot *find* true peace. You see, peace has to be given to us. It is a gift from God! In the book of Psalms of the Bible there is an eye-opening verse that reveals that it is the Lord who blesses His people with peace.<sup>1</sup> It says that the Lord will bless His people with strength and peace. Peace is a precious gift that God chooses to give to people. Those who have this peace will realise that it is quite different from the peace that the world defines, for the peace that comes from God exists where the Holy Spirit is present. The Bible teaches that one of the fruits of God's Holy Spirit is peace.<sup>2</sup> Peace exists as a result of the presence of the Holy Spirit of God. Did you know that Christ offered peace to those who believe in Him through the Holy Spirit that would also be given? Christ said that He would leave peace with us as a gift.<sup>3</sup> That is a promise from Christ. It is an interesting fact to consider

that Christ also encouraged His followers not to let their hearts be troubled or afraid. The world's idea of peace is nothing like this.

The peace that Christ offers is a far more encompassing and deeper peace. It is a peace that transcends all physical boundaries that we encounter. It is not affected by health, finances, relationships or the unrest around us. Neither is it a peace that is attained through



years of self-realisation as some would claim. To get an idea of this kind of peace offered by Christ we need to see it demonstrated by Christ Himself. Jesus was giving His peace to the disciples just before an event that would have disturbed anyone's peace. Throughout His ministry Jesus faced much opposition from the religious leaders of that time. This culminated in them deciding to arrest Jesus and have Him killed. Jesus knew that this was coming

# Peace in God

but it never deterred Him from carrying out His mission to preach the gospel. To His disciples He said, "Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you."<sup>4</sup> He was always at peace even though He knew the horrible pain that He was about to suffer at the hands of the authorities. Any one of us would have been paralysed with fear at the thought of torture, humiliation and death that was sure to come.



How did Jesus feel at peace during this frightening time of His life?

The answer is that Christ's mind was at perfect peace because it was constantly stayed on God the Father. In other words His mind was always connected to God. He never functioned away from God. The same is true for us also. The Bible assures us of this.<sup>5</sup> See for yourself! God says that He will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is constantly on Him because such an individual

trusts in God alone. The peace that God offers is called perfect peace. Jesus had this perfect peace under all circumstances, under all persecutions and under all sufferings because His mind was always stayed on God the Father. We too are given this same peace provided we put our minds on God. The problem with us is that we allow our minds to get caught up with our own ways thereby

often straying away from God instead of staying on Him. We need to yank our thinking back to God.

Let's be honest. We are stayed on God for a while, perhaps when attending church or when praying for a need. But quite often we drift to our own understanding and leave God totally out of our lives. We leave God aside and go through the day and then come back to complain to Him. Jesus was different. He kept God at His side through the day and was therefore at complete peace. Notice that having peace doesn't eliminate suffering. We will still have problems, pain and suffering but despite all these we remain at peace. Such a peace cannot be obtained by our own efforts. It is a peace that surpasses all understanding and guards our hearts and minds

through Jesus Christ alone.<sup>6</sup> This is the kind of peace that keeps us strong and stable when the world gets more violent. It is the peace that stays with us when we find more and more people abandoning God. It is a peace that keeps us going when evil men resort to horrendous acts of violence. This peace keeps us calm knowing that God will put a stop to all the evil that men do at the time of His choosing. In the world there will be trouble but the peace that God

gives helps us to realise that Jesus Christ has overcome the world.<sup>7</sup> Therefore we remain at peace and receive peace despite the increase in troubles both in the world and in our personal lives.

## Our focus in life

The Eternal God also tells us to be thankful when we receive this peace through Jesus Christ.<sup>8</sup> That is because it is a unique gift received through accepting Christ as our Saviour. Therefore, if we still feel troubled perhaps it's time to examine our lives to identify where exactly is our focus in life. The first question that we can ask ourselves is, "Are we God-centred or self-centred?" Well, an honest answer would be that we often have the opinion that we are able to handle our own situations. Sometimes we prefer to follow our way rather than what God says. A little dishonesty is advantageous some would say. What's wrong with a little extra-marital fling as long as the spouse doesn't know? A little drinking never harmed anyone. And so the list goes on. Soon these 'little' things get out of hand and guess what, the peace that we thought we had disappears. In its place are anguish, worry, irritation, anger and fear. Try putting your mind on Christ instead. Shine a little like Christ. Reach out and comfort someone like Christ did. Walk as He did and above all start a personal relationship with Him and experience the peace that Christ said that He would give.

Let's now take a little time to reach out to Jesus Christ. Talk to Him in the privacy of your room. Tell Him all that bothers you. Ask Him to come into your life as your personal Saviour and Lord. Read the four gospels recorded in the Bible. You will begin to experience a peace that you have never known before, for Christ has also promised never to leave us or forsake us.<sup>9</sup> Will you take up this challenge and give the peace of God a chance to work in your lives? ☐

<sup>1</sup> Psalm 29:11

<sup>2</sup> Galatians 5:22

<sup>3</sup> John 14:26-27

<sup>4</sup> John 14:27

<sup>5</sup> Isaiah 26:3

<sup>6</sup> Philippians 4:6-7

<sup>7</sup> John 16:33

<sup>8</sup> Colossians 3:15

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 28:20



# Poor in

It is 26 or 27 AD and times in the Middle East are tough. John the Baptist is in prison and will soon be executed, but something wonderful is happening in the province of Galilee. Jesus, God in the flesh, is beginning His earthly ministry. As He walks throughout the province He preaches the good news of the kingdom, healing every disease and sickness among the people.<sup>1</sup> Good news of this

“He appeared and the soul felt its worth.”

After this startling introduction and display of the magnificent transformational power of the Kingdom of God, Jesus begins to tell this large audience about it. Jesus, the Master Teacher, begins teaching in an orderly fashion, first things first.

He tells the people that their lives are now “blessed”. Prior

by  
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peacemakers and the persecuted—are now blessed. For many years I had a hard time understanding how those conditions could be considered blessings. Author Dallas Willard, in his book *Divine Conspiracy* helped me to see that these people were blessed because Jesus had come into their lives. Jesus, not their condition, is their blessing.

Consider for a moment the



magnitude is hard to hide. Large crowds of people begin to follow Him, and they bring to Jesus those suffering from mental, emotional or physical conditions such as severe pain, demon possession, seizures, or paralysis. Jesus does something no one else has ever done—He heals them. The great reversal of the condition of man begins! As the majestic Christmas hymn says,

to His healing touch their lives were cursed, severely troubled by disease, ignorance, superstition, and oppression from many sources. They lived their lives in a hopeless state, without any expectations of improvement.

He tells them that they—the poor in spirit, the mournful, the meek, the seekers of righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the

phrase “poor in spirit”. If one had a choice between a “spirited” horse or one who was “poor” in spirit, we’d take the spirited horse any day! Being “poor in spirit” is not a desirable trait.

It’s the same with people who are “poor in spirit”. No one asks for their opinion or values their comments. No one invites them to a celebration or any other



# spirit?

important social function. They don't receive any rewards, awards, or recognition. Being poor in spirit is not a marvellous, blessed state; it is a miserable anonymous existence. Being given a way out of this condition would be a real blessing indeed.

People with chronic illnesses or disabilities throughout time have been largely ignored, unappreciated and considered a drain on the resources of the community or family. No one asks for their opinion or desires their company. As a result, their spirit is not nurtured, but rather left in an impoverished or poor condition.

Jesus came to change that. He told the poor in spirit that they were now blessed. Did he intend them to remain poor in spirit? No. He intended to enrich their spirit with the Holy Spirit, and began by teaching them. The book of Matthew, as well as the other gospels, is full of the stories Jesus told that are intended to get people to think. When Jesus was asked a question He hardly ever answered it directly. His usual method was to turn the question back and ask His audience, "What do you think, or what do the scriptures say?" He was enriching their spirits by having them think and express their ideas! Can you believe it? God actually wants to know what you think! So tell Him, even if it is not very nice or pretty. King David expressed some not so nice or pretty thoughts in prayer and God valued them so much so that He saw to it that the book of Psalms was written and made part of the Bible.

What greater blessing can there be than to have the one and only true God of the universe pay attention to you, to value you, to

bless you?

These verses are well known by the name "the Beatitudes", giving the impression that being poor in spirit is a beautiful attitude, something good to attempt to achieve. Some confuse the matter even further by saying that poor in spirit means humble. A humble attitude is a good thing, but it is not the same as being poor in spirit. Pride and conceit are absent in the truly humble, but not necessarily

be filled and shown mercy, they will see God, they will be called sons of God, and again, theirs is the kingdom of heaven.) He uses a couple of delightful metaphors to describe their real identity.

He says that they (and we) are the salt of the earth and the light of the world.<sup>2</sup> Not "will be", but "are". This may have brought them to a crisis of belief. Who were they going to believe? Were they going to believe what their eyes saw in the mirror,

what society said about them, or were they going to accept the new identity Jesus gave them? It must have seemed too good to be true. What about you? Do you think this is too good to be true?

Are these teachings hard to believe? Probably. They certainly were for the original audience. Matthew wrote: "When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at His teaching, because He taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law."<sup>3</sup>

They may not have believed or understood it at the time, but Jesus had begun to transform them and they were to be just what He said—the salt and light of this world. Their lights may have been very dim and their salt barely

perceptible, but what Jesus had started in them would not be lost.

Likewise, when He begins to transform us our lights may seem quite dim and there may be only a trace of salt perceptible within us, but "being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."<sup>4</sup>

The Kingdom of God is indeed good news. Unbelievably good news! Jesus wants us to take it personally and forever. □

*"What greater blessing  
can there be than to  
have the one and only  
true God of the universe  
pay attention to you, to  
value you, to bless you?"*

so in the poor in spirit. Jesus was humble but definitely not poor in spirit! I do not think Matthew wrote these verses to tell us that being poor in spirit is an attitude to seek after, but rather that the poor in spirit are blessed because Jesus is now active in their lives. Perhaps it would be better to refer to these verses as "the Blessed of Jesus" rather than "the Beatitudes".

After telling these people who are considered useless by their society that they are "blessed" and promising to bless them in many ways (theirs is the kingdom of heaven, they will be comforted, they will inherit the earth, they will

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 4: 23–25

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 5:13–14

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 7: 28–29

<sup>4</sup> Philippians 1:6

# Purpose in prophe

**H**ave you ever asked questions like: What is the purpose of life? What is the meaning of life? Is there more to life than what we see? If you have, you are like countless other people who search for answers to these intriguing questions.

## **The wonders within**

Consider how intricately the human body and mind have been designed. All the different 'sub-systems' like our respiratory, nervous, and digestive systems seem to fall perfectly in place and work as one 'super-system', which we refer to as a human being. It appears that each part and system knows exactly what to do. We can see different genders in the design of human beings. Remarkably, we are able to speak in different languages and communicate across cultures. The thinking, reasoning and decision-making processes are nothing short of 'breath-taking'. Just consider how human beings have been able to harness all the resources to make, for example, the pyramids of Egypt, the Great Wall of China, and then there are our inroads to outer space. Even within the human body, medical specialists are able to explore and operate the 'deep' recesses with state-of-the-art technology.

## **The wonders without**

It is simply amazing how our planet is unique in its life-support systems. Rotating on its own axis, it is 'careful' not to get too close to the sun, or to the moon. We have all the resources on earth to support human life and activity. These resources seem to work in balance to support plant, animal and human life. We may be a speck in the universe, yet in the known universe, planet earth is the only one that is vibrant with life as we know it.

## **God reveals Himself**

The wonders we see within or without us did not occur by accident. The Bible reveals that a Creator God designed and put in place everything

we see, and some things that we cannot see. This includes the air we cannot see, but breathe in. Also, the law of gravity is very real, even if we cannot see it. We may not understand the purpose of life by merely looking within ourselves, or our environment. Yet these wonders are tools that God is using to reveal Himself to us.<sup>1</sup> We can stand in awe and reverence before God when we think about His personal interest in designing us, making us so wonderfully complex.<sup>2</sup>

Some may question the simplicity of assigning the complexities of the human body and the universe to a Creator God. Simplicity, however, is the nature of God's message.<sup>3</sup> The evidence God presents in the visible and invisible creation is designed to help us build faith. We need faith to believe in the invisible God and in the purpose He has set for us.<sup>4</sup> This purpose cannot be discovered from within ourselves, or from studying the universe.

## **A tool called 'Prophecy'**

God has not left us without any help. He reveals His purpose through the pages of the Bible, and one of the tools He uses is called 'prophecy'. Bible prophecy refers to predictions or forecasts of events that are yet to occur. God shows that He is the ultimate source of power because He alone can bring to pass what He foretells.<sup>5</sup> There is nothing that can stop His purpose. The Bible reveals that it is God's pleasure for us to live forever with Him. He worked out a plan to make it possible for us to know and believe that His divine purpose for us will not fail.

Prophecy, as revealed in the Bible or the Word of God, centres on the One person who can give meaning and purpose to our lives. John 5: 39–40 (NLT) reveals plainly: "You search the Scriptures because you believe they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to me! Yet you refuse to

**by  
Ben David**

come to me so that I can give you this eternal life."

God created us to live forever with Him. He came in the person of Jesus Christ<sup>6</sup> to fulfil that purpose. He made known to His audience that "all the teachings of the Scriptures looked forward to this present time (the time when Christ walked the earth)".<sup>7</sup>

Let's look at some of the developments prophesied in Scripture concerning the Source of eternal life.

## **The birth of Jesus**

In writing to the Jews of his day Saint Matthew records what took place: "Now this is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant by the Holy Spirit. ...an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream... the angel said: 'Do not be afraid to go ahead with your marriage to Mary. For the child within her has been conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name Him Jesus for He will save His people from their sins.' All of this happened to fulfil the Lord's message through His prophet: 'Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and He will be called Emmanuel (meaning God is with us)'.<sup>8</sup>

Nothing short of a miracle was Jesus' birth. It is humanly impossible for a virgin alone to sire a child, a son no less. God had been 'born' to live among humankind. Years later, there were some who would deride Jesus that they "unlike Him" were not born out of wedlock.<sup>9</sup>

Mary's ancestry is recorded by Saint Luke<sup>10</sup> showing her relationship to King David while Matthew reports the place of Jesus' birth as Bethlehem, thus fulfilling Micah's prophecy.<sup>11</sup>

Jesus' first coming was prophesied in the Old Testament scriptures with specific details to help identify without doubt who

# cy, purpose in life



He was, and what He was supposed to do. Jesus saves us from sin. The prophecies evidently identify His miraculous birth, the place of His birth and His ancestry. Only by God's power could Jesus be born. But it also took God's sovereignty to ensure that prophecies written by different people at different times and in different places would be fulfilled. To add to the body of evidence, God also inspired Isaiah to identify who the Messiah would be: the Mighty God, a descendant of David.<sup>12</sup> Nothing less.

It is therefore essential to recognise what God was doing then, and the consequences it has today for each one of us. The birth of Jesus was a carefully planned miracle. The story of our salvation and our purpose in life begins with Jesus.

## **The life and work of Jesus**

Early in His ministry Jesus quoted Isaiah to authenticate His wide-ranging ministry: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for He has appointed me to preach the Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, and the downtrodden will be freed from their oppressors, and that the time of the Lord's favour has come."<sup>13</sup> Jesus claimed: "This Scripture has come true today before your eyes!"<sup>14</sup>

Jesus proclaimed Himself as the one to bring into reality the Good News. During His life and ministry, He announced the good news that the Kingdom of God and salvation was within reach. Jesus sets the stage where His life, work and death would become the bridge for the salvation of the whole world. Eventually He gives His life as a ransom.

But before that He restores sight to the blind, heals the sick, raises the dead and gives freedom from sin to those who obey Him.<sup>15</sup> His work mirrors the prophecy of Isaiah concerning what our Saviour would do.

## **The death and resurrection of Jesus**

Jesus predicts His death and



resurrection three times before it takes place.<sup>16</sup> His disciples do not grasp the significance of these prophecies. The death of Jesus is to bear the sins of the world.<sup>17</sup> This paves the way for Jesus to save humankind from eternal death. Sin has cut us off from God. Jesus sacrifices His life for our sins to be forgiven. His death opens the avenue for us to be adopted by God as His children.

A 'greater' miracle was performed. Jesus was brought back to life. He took on a special 'body' that showed the scars of His crucifixion, and He was also able to go through walls. The resurrection of Jesus was proof of His victory over death. It set the stage for anyone who believed and obeyed Jesus to be gifted with eternal life.<sup>18</sup>

In John 11:25 Jesus tells us: "I am the Resurrection and the Life. Those who believe in Me, even though they die like everyone else, will live again. They are given eternal life for believing in me and will never perish." Disciples of all ages and in all places have chosen to place their hope and future in the words of Christ, believing that one day they will stand before God in the resurrection of God's people.

The resurrection of Jesus and His current work as our Lord and High Priest forms a foundation of the Christian faith. It is central to the validation of prophecy.<sup>19</sup>

### Jesus' second coming

There is no greater conviction in the hearts and minds of Jesus' disciples that He would return. There are no 'more' comforting words of His love to be with us for eternity than what He said during His last hours on earth. One reason Jesus tells us plainly of His return is: 'so that where I am, you may also be.'<sup>20</sup> Our Creator God wants us to enjoy eternal life in His presence. Our purpose in life is therefore to allow Him to do His work and His will in us so that we would be aligned to fulfilling our destiny.

### The gift of the Holy Spirit

Jesus promised that He would not leave us alone after His ascension into heaven. He said that He would send the Holy Spirit to live within us and lead us. The Holy Spirit will teach us according to God's Word, and serve to remind us of our Saviour and His teachings.<sup>21</sup> The Holy Spirit indeed came on the

Day of Pentecost<sup>22</sup> as prophesied, virtually starting the church of Christ, which is also called the Body of Christ. As members of His Body, believers are empowered to carry on the work begun by Jesus. Through the Spirit, we become witnesses to what Jesus has done, and is doing for us, and we bring this testimony to any place on earth where people live.<sup>23</sup>

The Holy Spirit is given to us in good faith as a guarantee that God will give us everything He promised. The Holy Spirit identifies Jesus' followers as God's own people.<sup>24</sup> In fact, a person becomes a Christian only when he or she has the Spirit of Christ living in him or her.<sup>25</sup> The receiving of God's Spirit in our human mind and body begins a journey that traverses from here to eternity.

### From here to eternity

Jesus looked ahead to the time when He would return to earth. He prophesied about a time when he would judge or evaluate His people. His prophecy is interesting because it shows us how we can fulfil our purpose in life. He gives us practical examples of how we can and should care for others; like being hospitable, providing food, drink and clothes, caring for the sick and visiting those in prison. But it goes deeper.

How we treat our neighbour is of great interest to Jesus, because He pictures Himself at the receiving end of that treatment.<sup>26</sup> We shall be judged by how we treat others. Again, there simply is no escape—the plain truth is that Jesus is at the centre of everything, including the purpose in prophecy, and our purpose in life. We find meaning in life only when Jesus is at the centre of our thoughts and actions.

As we begin our Christian odyssey, we need to turn away from sin, and turn to God in faith. With God's help we need to prepare our hearts to receive the Holy Spirit. Through repentance and baptism, we can embark on a journey where we dedicate our lives to fulfilling God's purpose for us.<sup>27</sup> Following Jesus' example, our purpose lies in doing God's will, and completing the work He has given us as members of His Body.<sup>28</sup>

### By our lives we show Jesus' return!

Just as prophecy centres on Christ,

the lives of His followers would be Christ-centric. This requires faith, something close to Jesus' heart. Jesus was very much concerned about peoples' faith during His ministry, and also in the run-up to His Second Coming.<sup>29</sup> Our faith is evidenced by our works, and our works matter to Jesus.

As God's masterpiece in Christ Jesus, we were created to do good works.<sup>30</sup> When we live by faith and exercise God's love towards others, we show *by our lives* that God's prophecy concerning Jesus' return is a reality.<sup>31</sup> There is no prophecy more crucial than Christ's Second Coming. There is no purpose in life greater than doing God's will.<sup>32</sup>

Prophecy is a faith-building tool. The disciples believed Jesus and the Scriptures that prophesied about Christ after He was resurrected.<sup>33</sup> Events were foretold before their time so that after the prophecies have been fulfilled, we can whole-heartedly believe what God has said have truly come to pass. The Holy Spirit reminds us at appropriate times that God has fulfilled His promises. There is no reason then to doubt God. Our faith in His Word will bear fruit. The promises yet to be fulfilled will one day become fact.

Bible prophecy is a tool to point us to God and His plan for our salvation. The Bible says simply "...the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord." The gift may be free, but God had to pay a price, as Romans 6:23 declares "for the wages of sin is death". God paid a heavy price for each one of us to escape eternal death.

The Bible discloses that God created us for His divine purposes. Motivated by the Spirit of Christ, we do *good works* to others, whether they are believers or not. This reflects God's love working in us. As we praise and give thanks to God for who He is, and continue in our faithful obedience, we fulfil the obligations we have towards Him.

God reveals Himself in many different ways, visible and invisible. Prophecies concerning Christ have not failed. Jesus is coming soon. No prophecy is more significant. As we wait for its fulfilment, doing God's will alone gives our lives meaning. There is no purpose in life greater than His calling. □

<sup>1</sup> Romans 1:20

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 139:13–16

<sup>3</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:3

<sup>4</sup> Hebrews 11:3,6,40

<sup>5</sup> Isaiah 46:9–10

<sup>6</sup> Colossians 1:15–17

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 11:13

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 1:18–25; Isaiah 7:14

<sup>9</sup> John 8:38–41

<sup>10</sup> Luke 3:23–32

<sup>11</sup> Matthew 2:1; Micah 5:2

<sup>12</sup> Isaiah 9:6–7

<sup>13</sup> Luke 4:18–19; Isaiah 61:1–2

<sup>14</sup> Luke 4:21

<sup>15</sup> Matthew 11:4–6

<sup>16</sup> Mark 8:31; 9:31–32; 10:33–34

<sup>17</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:3–4

<sup>18</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:57

<sup>19</sup> Acts 2:22–33

<sup>20</sup> John 14:3

<sup>21</sup> John 14:15–17,25–26; 15:26

<sup>22</sup> Acts 2:1–4

<sup>23</sup> Acts 1:8

<sup>24</sup> Ephesians 1:13–14

<sup>25</sup> Romans 8:9

<sup>26</sup> Matthew 25:31–46

<sup>27</sup> Acts 2:38

<sup>28</sup> John 4:34

<sup>29</sup> Luke 7:6–10; 18:8

<sup>30</sup> Ephesians 2:10

<sup>31</sup> 2 Peter 3:9,11,14

<sup>32</sup> 1 John 2:17

<sup>33</sup> John 2:18–22; 12:16

### Lesson from a tree's life...

There was a man who had four sons. He wanted his sons to learn not to judge things too quickly. So he sent them each on a quest, in turn, to go and look at a pear tree that was a great distance away.

The first son went in the winter, the second in the spring, the third in the summer, and the youngest son in the fall.

When they had all gone and come back, he called them together to describe what they had seen.

The first son said that the tree was ugly, bent, and twisted.

The second son said no; it was covered with green buds and full of promise.

The third son disagreed; he said it was laden with blossoms that smelled so sweet and looked so beautiful, it was the most graceful thing he had ever seen.

The last son disagreed with all of them; he said it was ripe and drooping with fruit, full of life and fulfilment.

The man then explained to his sons that they were all correct, because they had each seen but only one season in the tree's life.

He told them that you cannot judge a tree, or a person, by only one season; and that the essence of who they are and the pleasure, joy, and love that come from life can only be measured at the end, when all the seasons are up.

If you give up when it's winter, you will miss the promise of your spring, the beauty of your summer and the fulfilment of your fall.

Don't let the pain of one season destroy the joy of all the rest.

Don't judge life by one difficult season.

Persevere through the difficult patches and better times are sure to come some time or later...

### Anonymous sayings

Be careful how you think; your life is shaped by your thought.

Don't wait for some distant day to come, it may be too late before you've even begun.

Not everyone will agree with all you decide, be true to yourself first and foremost.

The only important thing in life is what you do with the time you spend here on earth. Don't be afraid to follow your desires, they are not silly nor selfish.

Take the time and do what makes you feel alive.

Leave your fears and regrets in the past, for this is where they belong. Don't cloud today with things that can't be undone.

You have no more control over yesterday or tomorrow, than you do the raging of your passions. Do not quiet these dreams nor quench your desires, for if you do, your journey is ended.

You have only today to begin anew and follow your dreams, for in the end all we have are our memories.

When the twilight comes to us, let there be no excuses, no explanations, no regrets.

### *There is Always a Good Side*

*Everything depends on the way you look at things.*

*View every problem you encounter as an opportunity. There is always a good side to every situation.*

*The optimist sees an opportunity in every misfortune.*

*The pessimist sees misfortune in every opportunity.*

*The optimist sees the doughnut, the pessimist sees the hole.*

*You can develop success from every failure.*

*Discouragement and failure are two stepping stones to success.*

*No other elements can do so much for you if you're willing to study them and make them work for you.*

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# Unlike anything you hav

Just recently I had the opportunity to share the gospel—the message of salvation—with a friend of mine who is of a different faith (religion). After hearing the gospel, he started comparing it with some of the other faiths. He told me that they too have good teachings, miracles and even prophecies. He was very honest in what he said and I fully agreed with him.

So what is so special about the gospel—the Christian faith—that the other faiths lack? It is a good question that needs an honest answer.

## **Gospel vs. religion**

Religion represents Man's best effort to define what morality is, explain what or who God is, explain the meaning and purpose of life, and tell people how to live 'right' so that they might receive God's blessings. It tells you to follow a set of rules, rituals and traditions. It promises blessings if you do them and curses if you don't. In short, it promises success or failure depending on how well you perform your religious obligations.

The gospel, on the other hand, represents God's love for us. It declares God's love for us even though we all had disobeyed Him and earned the death penalty. It tells us that God is ready to forgive our sin if we would repent and accept Christ's sacrifice for our sin. Christ came to pay our death penalty and reverse our destiny—from eternal death to eternal life. God is offering us eternal life *as a free gift—something we don't deserve*. He gives it only because of His love, kindness and mercy towards us, not because of any good deeds that we had done. He is inviting *everyone* to become His children and live with Him forever. He is offering us a wonderful life—a life filled with love, joy, peace, contentment, friendship and fun. He is offering us the Tree of Life—eternal life with pleasures for evermore. This, in a nutshell, is the gospel.

God is love and the gospel is about love. The gospel is about

God's plan of salvation for Man. It is about loving God with all our being and about loving our fellow man as ourselves.<sup>1</sup> Its source is God. Religion, on the other hand, represents Man's best effort to discover God and define a formula for 'successful' living. It is about following some rules, rituals and traditions. Its source is Man.

The gospel is radically different—it's unlike anything you have seen, heard or believed. It is pointless to compare God's gospel with Man's religion. You will fail to grasp the significance of the gospel if you start comparing it with religion. Jesus told a parable—a story—to explain why this would happen.

## **New wine and new cloth**

Some disciples of John the Baptist and Pharisees asked Jesus why His disciples were not fasting as they did. Jesus told them a parable. He said: "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, he pours new wine into new wineskins."<sup>2</sup>

Jesus explained that new wine should not be poured into an old wineskin because it will ferment, expand, break or tear the wineskin. Similarly, He explained that new cloth should not be stitched with old cloth because the new cloth will shrink and tear the old cloth. He told them that it would be futile—even destructive—to compare the gospel (new wine/cloth) with man-made religion (old wineskin/cloth). In effect, He told them that whichever way they look at it, the result would be the same—the gospel would break or end the established religious order.

On another occasion, some Pharisees and scribes (religion leaders) also accused Jesus'



by  
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disciples for not adhering to the traditions of the elders such as washing their hands and pitchers in a special way.<sup>3</sup> Jesus rebuked their hypocrisy by telling them that they were more interested in rules and regulations rather than changing their hearts or caring for people, which requires love.

Some people think that Jesus came to improve, enhance and perpetuate the religious order. On the contrary, He came to abolish it. The gospel may anger some, shock others, yet it is the best news anyone can hear. Why? Because it will abolish all human misery and suffering and set people free so that they can really enjoy the abundant life God has for them. Yes, the gospel is unlike anything that you have seen, heard or believed. It is the best news ever!

## **God's idea vs. Man's idea**

Although God created us in His image, we are nevertheless mortal and limited. While God has endowed us with brilliant minds to understand the physical world, we are not equipped to understand spiritual things—the things of God—except by divine revelation. That's why God sent His son Jesus to reveal to us who He is, who we are, the meaning and purpose of life, and how we should relate to Him and to one another. The Bible is God's revelation to Man. It holds the key to understanding God's purpose for Man.

God is Almighty, All-wise, All-knowing and All-good. It is God's idea that we be born into His family, become His children and live with Him for all eternity. It is His idea that we inherit all that He has and become co-heirs with Jesus. It is His idea that we live an abundant life—a life filled with love, joy, peace, contentment, friendship and fun.

Man couldn't have figured out God's purpose for us even in a billion years. But God reveals to all those who would believe in Him. God inspired prophet Isaiah



# e seen, heard or believed

to write: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”<sup>4</sup>

you seek me with all your heart.”<sup>5</sup>

## **Need Holy Spirit**

On our own, we simply cannot understand spiritual things. God’s thoughts are much more profound than ours. We need divine help,

*prepared for those who love Him—but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God ...no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who*



God also inspired prophet Jeremiah to write: “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when

the help of the Holy Spirit (the third Person in the Godhead) to understand spiritual things. St. Paul wrote, “...we speak of God’s secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began... *No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has*

*is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness*

to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned".<sup>6</sup>

### Mystery revealed

Although the gospel is a mystery, the Holy Spirit can help us understand. St. Paul was inspired to write: "...the mystery made known to me by revelation... you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus... to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to His eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. In Him and through faith in Him we may approach God with freedom and confidence."<sup>7</sup>

St. Paul also wrote, "...the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him."<sup>8</sup>

Again, St. Paul wrote: "However, as it is written: *'No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him'*—but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit."<sup>9</sup>

### Love, not religion

God is not asking us to follow a set of man-made rules and rituals. There is a story in the Old Testament where Ahab, king of Israel, led his nation into pagan worship. He appointed 450 false prophets and led the nation to worship the pagan god Baal. God was very angry, so He put a curse on the land—there was a severe drought for 3 years. He sent prophet Elijah to confront the king and his false prophets. Elijah asked them to decide who they want to worship—the Lord or Baal. To determine who

the Lord is, Elijah and the false prophets each agreed to make a bull offering. The prophets offered their bull and prayed to Baal to burn up the offering with fire. They did this from morning till noon. They performed all sort of rituals and even cut their bodies so that Baal might notice their request, but there was no answer. Then Elijah's turn came to make the offering. The Lord answered Elijah's prayer and burned up the bull instantly with fire. God showed Israel that He was the Lord and not Baal. Elijah quickly rounded up and executed the false prophets. Evil was removed and God blessed the land with rain.<sup>10</sup>

This story is about worship. Israel had a religion that worshipped the false god Baal, but it failed them. God sent Elijah to turn their hearts to the Lord. He advised them to seek the Lord, not just follow any god or religious order.

The Book of Daniel also tells a story where King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon made a huge golden image and ordered his subjects to bow and worship the image at a preset time. Anyone who failed to obey his edict would be thrown into a furnace of fire. The king did this on the advice of his counsellors who were jealous of Daniel and his three friends. When the appointed time arrived, everyone worshipped the image except Daniel and his three friends. They didn't obey the king's order. The king was furious and ordered Daniel's three friends to be thrown into fire. But God sent an angel and delivered them.<sup>11</sup>

There is also another story in the same book where King Darius, on the advice of his jealous counsellors, ordered everyone in his nation to worship the king or else be thrown into a lion's den. Daniel disobeyed the king's order and so he was thrown into the lion's den. Again, God sent an angel and delivered Daniel.<sup>12</sup>

Daniel and his three friends set the example for us. They chose to obey God rather than blindly follow some man-made religion. Like them, we too must be bold to obey and worship the true God.

God sent His son Jesus to rescue us from sin and death. He has already gained victory for us. He is offering eternal life to all those who would believe and accept Jesus as their personal Saviour.

God loves us immensely and He is asking us to love Him and to love one another. He is asking us to migrate from following some rules and rituals to loving our God and our fellowman.

### Truth sets us free

God is love and He asks us to imitate Him. This, Jesus said, is the greatest commandment.<sup>13</sup> Religion brings bondage; it doesn't change lives or care for people. Love, on the other hand, changes lives and cares for people. It sets us free. Jesus said, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."<sup>14</sup>

St. Paul told the church at Corinth not to become enslaved to man-made rules, rituals and traditions. He wrote: "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom."<sup>15</sup>

On another occasion, Paul advised the church at Galatia not to go into religious bondage. Some zealots were insisting that converts follow certain rules and traditions (especially the practice of circumcision) set by their elders. Paul rebuked them for putting this burden on them. He told them that Jesus came to set them free, not enslave them. He wrote: "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery ... You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace ... For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love."<sup>16</sup>

### Go for it

The almighty, all-knowing, immortal and infinite God has a wonderful plan for you. The gospel reveals what that plan is. It is the good news that God loves you, has forgiven all your sins for Christ's sake, is reconciling you to God, is inviting you to become His child, is offering you an eternally happy and exciting life, and is eagerly waiting for your response. It is the new life in Christ and it is absolutely free. It is unlike anything that you have heard, seen or believed. Go for it and you will never regret it! ☐

<sup>1</sup> Luke 10:27

<sup>2</sup> Mark 2:21–22

<sup>3</sup> Mark 7:1–15;  
Matthew 15:  
1–20

<sup>4</sup> Isaiah 55:8–9

<sup>5</sup> Jeremiah 29:  
11–13

<sup>6</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:  
7–14

<sup>7</sup> Ephesians 3:  
3–12

<sup>8</sup> Romans 16:  
25–26

<sup>9</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:  
9–10

<sup>10</sup> 1 Kings 18:  
20–40

<sup>11</sup> Daniel 3

<sup>12</sup> Daniel 6

<sup>13</sup> Luke 10:27

<sup>14</sup> John 8:32

<sup>15</sup> 2 Corinthians  
3:17

<sup>16</sup> Galatians 5:1–6

# Thomas—a man of faith

Usually the Apostle Thomas is referred to as “Doubting Thomas”, as if his doubts about who Jesus was made him a real knucklehead. Let’s give him a break! After all, his doubts were real and possibly like some doubts that we may have ourselves. Like us, Thomas wanted to be absolutely sure before making a serious commitment to the one who claimed to be the Son of God.

## How’s your faith?

Perhaps you have some doubts about all this Christian stuff. Is it all a big hoax, a mindless faith based on wishful thinking, or is it logical, supported by tangible evidence? Is the Bible folklore, superstition and myth, or is scripture inspired by an all-powerful and loving God? Were our ancestors carefully designed and created, or did they slither out of the ocean? Is Christianity incompatible with science, or does science support faith? Does God tell us how we should live, or is it okay to follow our own ideas of morality? Is death final, or will we survive the grave? Is Jesus really the Saviour, or was He just a good person?

Do you have any of these questions in your mind? If so, it is okay, but we can find the answers and, once we do, it opens the door to a rich understanding of why we are here and what lies in our future. Scripture says to prove (test) all things.<sup>1</sup> Finding and testing requires some digging and wrestling with concepts that may be new to us, but it is worth the effort. Nothing is more important than getting to know what life is all about.

## Thomas had doubts

Thomas had been with Jesus for over three years but, after Jesus died, Thomas still had doubts about who He really was. Do you remember the story? Jesus had been crucified. The Apostles were fearful and shocked by His unexpected death and were in



by  
**Paul Hailey**

hiding. After a few days Jesus appeared to them, showing them His pierced hands and body as proof that He was really the one who had been crucified. Thomas was not with them at this time. When the others told Thomas what had happened, he replied, “Unless I see the nail marks in His hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe it.”<sup>2</sup> A week later Jesus appeared again, and invited Thomas to look at the scars on His hands and to put his hand into His side. Thomas did so, and cried out “My Lord and my God!”<sup>3</sup> Suddenly his doubts were gone, replaced with total confidence and trust. The Person he touched was indeed the same One who had died on the cross. His doubts gave way to worship and a life of dedicated service.

## A life-changing experience

Thomas was changed when he realised that Jesus truly was the Son of God. Tradition and historical evidence indicate that he effectively spread the gospel in several countries, including India where he died.

In our case, realising who He is changes us, giving us absolute confidence that Jesus is who He says He is—our Lord and Saviour who knows us, loves us, and guides us into everlasting life.

## Take your doubts to God

If you have doubts, you too can take them to God. You too can find the answers to those big questions of life, and you will be able to say with confidence as Thomas did, “My Lord and my God!”

Our natural human tendency is to shy away from seeking the things of God.<sup>4</sup> But God does reveal Himself to us in many different ways. Some people see His handiwork in the incredible intricacy and interdependency in the natural world. Others see undeniable evidence in fulfilled Bible prophecies and in the many

archeological finds that support scripture. Still others are led to God through answered prayers, miracles of healing or protection, seeing dramatic changes in other people, or seeing the application of Biblical principles work for the good.

People who are seeking God can learn much about God by looking into the above-mentioned topics. Personally, I have studied and experienced all of these things, and my faith has been strengthened. But my journey of faith in God really began when I got on my knees and simply asked God if He were real. He responded clearly in an unforgettable way.

Do you want God to be real in your life? Thomas set a pattern for us in how to get rid of those nagging doubts. First, Thomas was wise enough and honest enough to admit his doubts. He didn’t pretend to believe, but wanted to know for sure. Jesus responded by giving him undeniable proof that He was indeed the Saviour, with power over life and death. Jesus met Thomas at his point of weakness, and gave him the proof he needed.

The real rock-solid personal understanding of God comes from Him. Scripture tells us that the things of God are spiritually discerned, and the gift of spiritual discernment must come from Him.<sup>5</sup> Do you have doubts like Thomas did? Present your doubts and questions directly to God as Thomas did, and the answers will come to you. Seek and you will find.<sup>6</sup>

May God bless you and give you a fruitful and joyful spiritual journey! □

<sup>1</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:21

<sup>2</sup> John 20:24–25

<sup>3</sup> John 20:28

<sup>4</sup> Romans 8:7

<sup>5</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:14

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 7:7



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