

From the Editor's Desk



"Earthen Vessels"

*"Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. ---- For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But **we have this treasure in earthen vessels**, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us" (2 Corinthians 4:1-7).*

*"Now we know that if the **earthly tent** we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands" (2 Corinthians 5:1)*

Even though this earthen vessel is fragile and can easily become cracked, chipped, or broken, still the Lord has chosen it to deposit His treasure!

"Since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart"



Johnson K. Samuel

Life is so very fragile, isn't it? We realize that truth so powerfully when a loved one is no longer with us, when he or she quietly, suddenly slips away. It hits us really hard as it dawns on us that life is so fragile and delicate. In this context, we cannot but exclaim how aptly the Bible describes our life and our physical body as an earthen (clay) vessel or an earthly tent - so temporary, so fragile, so delicate, so breakable, so transient!

We can trace the origin of this analogy of the earthen vessel (clay pot) to the creation of man. Let us go back to the Book of Beginnings: *"Then the Lord God formed a man from the **dust of the ground** and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being" (Gen. 2:7).* Thus we see that man is, indeed, like a clay pot made from the dust of the ground into which God breathed life. The name 'clay pot' takes our thoughts immediately to the potter who has given it its shape and who can still remold it if needed. Notice what Jeremiah saw in the potter's house: *"Then I went down to the potter's house and there he was making something at the wheel; and the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again into another vessel as it seemed good to the potter to make it" (Jer. 18:4).* The Great Potter can remake us into a useful vessel of His choice if we submit ourselves totally into His hands. We know how the Lord remolded the dreaded persecutor of the church, Saul, into *"a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel" (Acts 9:15).*

Even though this earthen vessel is fragile and can easily become cracked, chipped, or broken, still the Lord has chosen it to deposit His treasure! Apostle Paul exclaims: *"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us" (2 Cor. 4:7).* The abundant power of the Holy Spirit was poured into the apostles as also into His people at all times to be our Lord's witnesses and carry His

message of salvation. Paul says: *"Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. ---- For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ".* Thus our Lord has entrusted that responsibility to us, though fragile earthen pots as we are, to use our treasure of the power of the gospel through Holy Spirit and shine our light in this dark world. No angel in heaven has been given that job. For example, Peter was asked to go to Cornelius' home to preach the gospel. Philip had to travel to the desert to share the good news of salvation to the Ethiopian minister. This priceless treasure we hold in a common earthenware jar – to show that its splendid power belongs to God and not to us. Though we are handicapped on all sides, but we are never frustrated; we are puzzled, but never in despair. We are persecuted, but we never have to stand it alone; we may be knocked down but we are never knocked out!

Our earthen vessel has a glorious hope. *"Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands" (2 Cor. 5:1).* Even if this fragile, delicate and easily breakable clay pot or the earthly tent is broken, we have a heavenly body kept in store for us.

Paul describes that event very eloquently: *"The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. --- The first man was of the dust of the earth; the second man is of heaven. ---- And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man" (1 Cor. 15:42-49).*

That glorious event will happen at our Lord's second coming. Are you ready and waiting for His imminent return?

Fasting In Secret:

The Highest Expression Of An Empowered Faith

"When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you" (Matthew 6:16-18)

Political - social context of the Gospel:

Matthew's Gospel is set mainly in the Roman province of Judea. The people of Judea were mostly Jewish and had been conquered and occupied by the mighty Roman Empire. Politically, the empire began with Augustus, but Titus was the Roman Emperor from 79 to 81. Matthew's Gospel belongs to the period after 70 Common Era. Syrian Antioch is the most possible location for the composition and audience of the Gospel. If Matthew is seen as the Gospel of the Church of Alexandria, having been written somewhere about A.D. 80-85, it constitutes a document of the highest importance for evaluating the reaction of an essentially Jewish Christian community.

Prima facie evidences show that Apostle Matthew wrote this gospel. With a faith affirmation that Jesus Christ is son of David, son of Abraham for their Jewish links, he brings in contrasts with Jewish and Roman religious and political ideas. Ethical teachings of Jesus recorded remarkably in this gospel more than elsewhere in the N.T., the author responds to the contextual criticisms that Christianity was a new SECT and did not deserve the respect accorded either to "paganism" or to Judaism. He argues Christianity is a natural successor to Judaism but the Pharisees did not agree, so they had little tolerance for Christian ideas and theology. Christians were called heretics and blasphemers. While studying the Gospel of Matthew, we must keep in mind the Syrian Antioch location for its composition, Roman province of Judea for its setting and the faith affirmation - Jesus as the son of Abraham.

Exposition:of the passage:

The first two chapters talk about the birth of

messiah, three and fourth talk about Galilean ministry, chs 5 to 7 speak about the ethics of the kingdom of God in different illustrations. Gospel of Matthew is remarkable for presenting in a special way the ethical teachings of Jesus. Our passage for today, Matt. 6:16-18 is written in the immediate context of Jesus' GREAT TEACHING on prayer popularly known as Lord's prayer. Chapter 6 beginning verses tell us: do not pray in empty words as non-Christians do, do not stand and pray in synagogues and public places as hypocrites, but you pray in a closed room.

Disciples were interested in the opposite form of prayer.

The succeeding passage, Matt. 6:19-21 talks about theology of wealth. Jesus says: Accumulating wealth is a dangerous thing - making property for own sake, only for selfish preservation - asking disciples to keep a detached attitude to wealth. In between these two theological and ethical affirmations on prayer and wealth, Matthew narrates about FASTING.

Therefore the act of prayer, the act of fasting and attitude to wealth are sequentially connected and related to each other in the ethical thought in the Gospel.

Reflection on the passage:

Turning to the text - the focus is on fasting: What is fast? Is it a ritual to be observed without breaking? For example: "Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi will observe a strict religious fast during his maiden trip to the United States, press release said, irrespective of his age, 64 years-and of protocol in the Obama White House. Modi will restrict himself to a "liquid diet" throughout the Navratri festival, when India's majority Hindu worship mother goddess Durga in all her manifestations. He will only consume lemonade with some honey and a cup of tea every day". A



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While studying the Gospel of Matthew, we must keep in mind the Syrian Antioch location for its composition, Roman province of Judea for its setting and the faith affirmation - Jesus as the son of Abraham.

Jesus fasted only one time for 40 days in the wilderness. We don't have any evidence whether Jesus fasted every Monday and Thursday or any special days of the Jewish religion.

Fasting provides self-control and discipline to deny the natural desires of the flesh. During fasting, the believer's focus is removed from the physical things of the world and intensely concentrated on God. Put differently, fasting directs our hunger toward God.

Fasting is a powerful tool which if used wisely and with proper intention, will result in deliverance and healing. Secret fasting will open up our hearts and ears to hear God's voice and bring clarity to spiritual journey.

senior official in Modi's office in New Delhi told: "He has been fasting for the last four decades and does not want to change this pattern even while he is travelling".

Matt. 6:16-18 portrays fasting in contrast to such a fast. The passage does not at all help to locate or identify what type of fast is superior over any other type of fast. Hence no recommendation can be made for any one type of fast over another or how long should one person fast or how often one should fast!

Jesus fasted only one time for 40 days in the wilderness. We don't have any evidence whether Jesus fasted every Monday and Thursday, or any special days of the Jewish religion. We go beyond Jesus! Today we have lost the sanctity of fasting in some places; hypocrisy is attached in the intention of fasting. Some people fast for the annihilation of his/her enemy. Some others do it for personal achievements. Some persons behave badly even after their fasting prayers. There is no character formation, but only exhibition of arrogant, adamant and exclusively possessive behavior. Some are doing it for banner popularity, some are not fasting they only criticize fasting and some are living only for programs not for people. For Jesus, people are important than programs.

However, there are several types of fasts seen in the Bible. Some are 'partial' as seen in Daniel 10:2,3 and some others are 'total' as seen in our Lord's 40-day fast in the wilderness, and a few others are 'absolute' (no food or water) for 3 days as in the case of Esther 4:16. There is a 'voluntary' model of fast in Daniel 9:3 and an "involuntary" kind because of personal grief or no desire for anything (Daniel 6:18) or no food available (2 Cor. 6:5). However, there was a growing belief in the value of fasting in the early church.

Turning to pentecostals:

Is it a mandate for combating fleshly thoughts? Does one need to take fasting regularly every Friday in our churches? Though I am 30 years old in the Pentecostal 'set up' as member and holding both roles of teaching and preaching, still I don't know why Fridays are regularly separated only for fasting prayer - not for bible study, not for ladies meeting or anything similar. Do you know its logic?

Therefore I like to raise the question: what is truth for today from the biblical teaching about

fasting in the light of the present day fasting celebrations?

It helps immensely to understand the importance of the secret practice of fast. In other words the essence and achievement of fast depends on the fast

itself, means attitude behind the act of fast. Pharisees made a routine of fasting twice in a week on Mondays and Thursdays. (Karl Barth and James Hastings agree about the days specified).

Great American Theologian Jonathan Edwards wrote: Fasting provides self-control and discipline to deny the natural desires of the flesh. During fasting, the believer's focus is removed from the physical things of the world and intensely concentrated on God. Put differently, fasting directs our hunger toward God. It clears the mind and body of earthly attentions and draws us close to God. So, as we gain spiritual clarity for our thoughts while fasting, it allows us to 'hear God' more clearly. Fasting also demonstrates a profound need for God's help and guidance through complete dependence upon Him.

One thing more I would mention concerning fasting and prayer, wherein I think there has been neglect by ministers. Although they recommend and much insist on our duty of secret prayer, so little is said about secret fasting. It is a duty recommended by our Savior to His followers just in like manner as secret prayer as may be seen by comparing Matt. 6:5,6 with Matt. 6:16-18. Though I don't suppose that secret fasting is to be practiced in a stated manner and as a steady course just like secret prayer, yet it seems to me it is a duty that all professing Christians should practice and frequently practice. There are many occasions of both spiritual and temporal nature that do properly require it and there are many particular mercies that we desire for ourselves or friends that it would be proper, in this manner, to seek of God. (Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival)

Andrew Murray states in his book on prayer that Christ gives the cure for little faith in Matt. 17:19, 20, 21: "But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting". Murray concludes that faith depends entirely upon the state of the spiritual life. And he draws two lessons: "One, that faith needs a life of prayer in which to grow and to keep strong. The other, that prayer needs fasting for its full and perfect development. Prayer is the one hand with which we grasp the invisible; fasting, the other hand with which we let loose and cast away the visible".

Conclusion

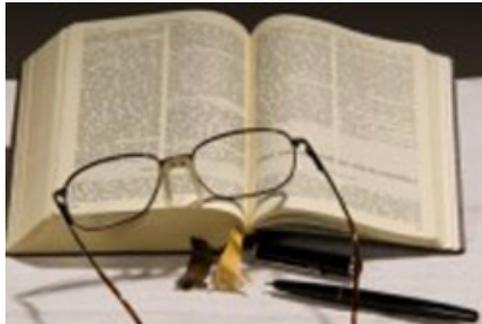
What should be the motivation behind fasting? Is it for popularity? Or is it merely a ritual? Do we have selfish motives behind it? As with all the spiritual disciplines, it is not the mere performance that God desires, but the proper motive of the heart. Remember that fasting is related to strengthening one's spiritual life. *It is a powerful tool which if used wisely and with proper intention, will result in deliverance and healing. Secret fasting will open up our hearts and ears to hear God's voice and bring clarity to spiritual journey.* ■

God's Book for Mankind:

- Part 10 -

Canon of the Bible

We learned earlier that God did not give the 66 books of the Bible to mankind at one time, through one writer and one place. From the time of writing the book of Genesis by Moses in the wilderness until the time of writing the book of Revelation by John in the Isle of Patmos there is a period of about 1500 years and about 40 writers. Canonically has to do with the recognition of these books as part of the Holy Scriptures.



Origin and meaning of the word CANON:

It comes from the Hebrew word Qaneh and from the Greek word Kanon meaning "reed". In the ancient world certain reeds were used as measuring sticks or measuring rods (See 1Kings 14:15; Job 40:21). This term came to signify rules or standard in the Greek culture of that time (See Gal. 6:15-16).

The early church used this word in reference to the creed of the church. By the middle of the fourth century this word "canon" began to be used to mean the officially recognized list of the books that belong to the Holy Bible.

Oral Communication:

Jehovah, God of the Bible is the greatest of all communicators. He created by His word. He spoke and there it was. All through the Scriptures of the Old Testament we see the phrase, "The word of the Lord", so God was the first oral communicator. Then Moses commanded the children of Israel to talk and teach their generations the words of the Lord.

Written Communication:

The Lord himself wrote the Ten Commandments and it was kept in the Ark of the Covenant. God commanded Moses and others to write and they wrote what God wanted them to write.

Necessity of Canon:

Just like there are false prophets today there were false prophets and false apostles even during the Old Testament and New Testament times. Many have claimed from time to time that God had spoken to them and that their writings were from God. So it was necessary to distinguish

between what is from God and what is not from God.

Canonization:

God who spoke, revealed, inspired and preserved His word also determined the canon of the holy scriptures. The moment the word of the Lord was written it was part of the canon. Then God, by His Holy Spirit, instructed and illuminated His people to discover,

collect and recognize that which He intended to be in the canon. This is called the canonization. Dr. Charles C. Ryrie wrote as follows in his "Basic Theology", published by Moody Press: "Some decisions and choices had to be made and God guided groups of people to make correct choices (not without guidelines) and to collect the various writings into the canons of the Old and New Testaments".

The Old Testament Canon:

The writing of famous Jewish historian Josephus (Contra Apion 1.7-8 and 37-42) gives some hints about the Old Testament Canon. People of God by the direction of the Holy Spirit used some guidelines in recognizing the inspired books of the Bible. The test that was used to recognize and accept the books of the Old Testament according to the writings of Josephus may be summarized as follows.

1. It is written by a prophet of God or someone recognized as divine authority.
2. It does not contradict other scriptures.
3. Old Testament people of God (Jewish people) accepted it as authoritative.
4. It is evident that its origin is by the inspiration of God.

An Old Testament scholar Dr. Ronald K. Harrison wrote in his book, "Introduction to the Old Testament" as follows: "In all its essentials the canon was most probably complete by about 300 B.C. and while discussion concerning certain component parts was continued well into the Christian era, the substance of the canon as it existed a century and a half after the time of Ezra and Nehemiah remained unaffected..."

There was a house where the Jewish Rabbis

Bible Study



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Glorifying God



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"When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? ---- Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" (Psalm 8:3-9)

Glorifying God for His Glory in Nature

The Westminster Shorter Catechism declares: "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever". That is to say that human beings exist to praise God and thus live a life that enjoys God for ever. The question that follows from this naturally is how to glorify God in such a way that we can enjoy him forever? This also means that believers ought to be always on the look out for stimuli to praise God every moment of their lives.

Glorifying God is not by repetition of some mantras that has some self-hypnotic effects or the like. It is not getting into a trance or ecstatic experience that comes from psychedelic lights or sounds. Glorifying God is not subjective, but objective in its nature where the worshiper gazes the glory of God realizing how the Creator is distinct from the creation. Real praise of God happens when we see the glory of God and pours forth our hearts before Him.

The psalmists are good examples for worshipers of God. They acknowledged God in their lives, in creation, in history and in everything. Psalmist who penned Psalm 8 might have composed it at night or for singing for a celebration at night because there is no mention of sun but

the night sky (stars, moon) are mentioned. The singer and the chorus would scan the clear night-sky of Palestine and shout in adoration, "*how majestic is your name in all the earth!*"

While the Psalmist had drawn his inspiration to praise from a cosmic scene the poet of Psalm 104 has a much smaller frame of nature: The cultivated land from which humans and animals get their food from. He would praise God saying: "*Praise the LORD, O my soul. O LORD my God, you are very great; you are clothed with splendor and majesty*" (Psalm 104:1). His inspiration comes from the planet earth and the space where the plants and trees grow and fish, birds and animals thrive - because it is a great God who provides for them.

In the history of Christian church, there are numerous examples where the believers used nature as a resource for worship. Saint Francis of Assisi is the outstanding example. He could see God in the nature and had cultivated a habit of connecting with God's creation. Another example that comes to my mind is the author of the great hymn, "How Great Thou art!" translated in to almost every modern language.

In 1885 Swedish pastor Carl Gustav Boberg was walking back home after an evening service from his church when he was inspired by the sight

"Canon of the Bible" Continuation from previous page

gathered to study and discuss Scriptures in a place called Jamnia about 25 miles east of Jerusalem and about 15 miles south of the modern city of Tel Aviv. Rabbis met there during the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D.70, according to historians. These Rabbis recognized and accepted the 39 books of the Old Testament of the Bible we have today which was completed by about 300 B.C. as mentioned above..These 39 books were divided only into 24 books because the books of Samuel, Kings, Chronicles were each one book, Ezra and Nehemiah one book, and the 12 books of the minor Prophets was combined into one book. This is called the Masoretic (Hebrew Text). The Old Testament was divided into three as Jesus mentioned in Luke 24 as the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms.

The New Testament Canon:

There were some tests by which the New Testament canonical books were recognized and

accepted as was the case with the Old Testament.

1. It must be written by an apostle or a close associate
2. Its teachings should be consistent with the doctrines found in other New Testament books.
3. It should teach high moral and spiritual value that is in line with the work of the Holy Spirit.
4. It should be accepted and recognized by the majority of local churches of that time.

The Council of Laodicea in A. D. 363 accepted the 27 books of the New Testament to be read in churches. The Council of Hippo in A. D. 393 and the Council of Carthage in A. D. 397 affirmed the 27 books.

God who inspired the Scriptures determined which books belonged to the Holy Bible and guided and directed to gather and recognize the books He wanted as the Holy Scriptures.

All praise, glory, power, authority, and majesty belongs to Him forever and ever, Amen. ■

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of lightning and winds making waves in the fields and the rain that followed. The pastor himself said later about the inspiration for the song. "It was that time of year when everything seemed to be in its richest coloring; the birds were singing in trees and everywhere. It was very warm; a thunderstorm appeared on the horizon and soon thunder and lightning. We had to hurry to shelter. But the storm was soon over and the clear sky appeared". Inspired by the nature scene he wrote "How Great Thou Art!"

Nature is the stimulus and the reason for glorifying God provided we are willing to see the majesty of God the Creator in it. Just like a painting declares the creativity of the painter and all praise for the painting is in fact praise for the painter, we praise God when we see His glory in nature around us.

However, humans have marred and disfigured the nature. We have leveled the hills and filled the meadows to erect concrete jungles that hide the view of sunrise and sunset. We have lights in our streets that are so bright and lights up the evening sky so that the stars are scarcely visible. We have built factories that emit fumes in to the sky that shrivel the trees and make birds flee from our trees and fish to die in our rivers. We have messed up God's nature. Even then, when we look around at what remains, His glory still elicit praise from our hearts. We can look at beautiful landscape photos freely available to praise Him. There are TV channels that showcase the beauty of God's creation that make us bow down in praise of God the Creator. A walk in the country side is certainly an unavoidable option. However, it is important that we don't just look through nature around us but see the glory and majesty of our God in it and pour forth our adoration of Him.

Likewise true and meaningful worship takes place when we open our eyes to see God's glory displayed around us and is sensitive to His acts in our lives and history, acknowledging God in our lives, in creation, in history and in everything.

Glorifying God in Our Lives

A second realm which impels us to praise God is what He has done in our lives. Put it another way, praise of God happens when we acknowledge what God has done in our lives. If that acknowledgment doesn't happen we will be singing praises to ourselves or to anything other than God.

The Psalmists pour out praises to God because they maintained hearts of thankfulness to God. For example, the psalmist who penned Psalm 116 says, "How can I repay the LORD for all his goodness to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD" (Psalms 116:12-13). In the Bible, the cups are described in terms of what they are made of or

what they contain. For example, a silver cup is one made of silver while a wine-cup is that contains wine. In this verse the cup of salvation is a cup that is filled with God's acts of salvation or acts of deliverance. The Psalmist will lift up a cup that is filled with God's acts of deliverance that he has received in the past. That is his way of "repaying the Lord" for all that good things He has done for him. John Piper is credited with the alliteration "an attitude of gratitude". This is what exactly we are talking about. Lifting up the cup of "salvation" is to maintain a heart of gratitude.

However, many times we are not able to lift up a "cup of salvation" because we are not able to ascribe to God what He has done in our lives. God doesn't get credit for what happens in our lives because we have trusted in our own strength and kept God away from our lives. This is a dangerous independence from God which impoverishes our spiritual lives. This is the tragedy of the modern secular mind which exalts human effort to such a level that there is no room for God in our consciousness.

Our culture think about God only when something goes wrong. When calamities strike, then we tend to ask where is God and why God allows such things. Until then we don't normally talk about or mention God. God doesn't normally feature in modern conversations.

However, it is important for us to lean on the strength and wisdom of an almighty God. This is what the wise sage of the Book of Proverb admonishes: "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil" (Prov. 3:5-7).

This passage teaches us some very important truths. First of all, it is to disown our autonomy on our lives. "Lean not on your own understanding" means to understand the limits of human reason and ability. Eugen Peterson (in The Message) paraphrases this verse as, "Trust God from the bottom of your heart; don't try to figure out everything on your own".

Some people approach God as the last resort. They have tried everything and failed. These are the people who don't like to bother God with things they can do themselves. The other group is those who totally ignore God in their lives. However, both these are wrong. The right approach would be to depend on God for everything and recognize that we can do nothing without Him. This absolute dependence on God leads us to ascribe God glory in our lives. That is to give up our autonomy on our lives and give God the control.

Lives that recognize God in their lives and admit their absolute dependence on Him would have plenty to praise Him daily. Such lives can lead lives that "glorify God and enjoy Him forever".

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Our FAITH without WORKS is USELESS and INEFFECTIVE!



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"What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead." (James 2:14-17)

In the above passage, James tackles the important relationship between faith and works in the life of a Christian believer. Is faith alone sufficient in the life of a child of God? Or, should our faith be accompanied by our works, which is 'faith in action'? Genuine faith will naturally produce good works; the two complement each other. Works are actions which follow the "royal law" of love (vv. 8, 15, 16). What James was implying is that our faith in Jesus Christ will demonstrate itself in our sincere love for others, which was what our Lord Jesus Christ had commanded His disciples in John 13:34, 35: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

So, the obvious answer to the question posed by James "Can faith save us?" is that our faith without works cannot save us. Faith that yields no deeds is not saving faith. The New Testament teaches that we get justified when we have true faith in Christ, but thereafter, our faith should be accompanied by our works, which is evident to the world by the fruit we bear. On this subject, this was what our Lord Jesus Christ had categorically stated as well: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven" (Matt. 7:21).

Thus, James does not set faith against works, but rather discusses two kinds of faith: a dead faith and a saving faith. Saving faith is not simply an empty claim (vv. 14-17), but which produces an obedient life (vv. 21-26). James insists that a faith that does not result in good works cannot save, and gives three arguments in support of this truth:

1. Faith without works is no better than words without deeds (vv. 15-17).
2. Faith can be neither seen nor verified unless it shows itself in works (v. 18).
3. Even the demons have an intellectual belief in God, but it does not

lead to their salvation (v. 19).

This teaching of James reflects neither a negative nor a positive response to the teachings of Apostle Paul in his Roman epistle. James does not contradict Paul, and both affirm that true saving faith results in a changed life as evidenced by works. For Paul, justification is by faith (Rom. 4:5). For James, justification is by a faith that works - by a genuine faith that manifests itself in post-conversion works. Thus faith by itself if it does not have works, is dead! A faith without works is not real faith at all.

In order to prove his point, James introduces two people: one has neither adequate daily food nor clothing, but the other has both but is not willing to share them. When the latter says a benediction to the former without actually helping him, it is of no use at all. Similarly, when Christian believers say empty platitudes without actually helping those in physical need, what does it profit? How many words can fill a hungry stomach? What James is emphasizing is that we are not saved by a faith of words only but by that kind of faith which results in a life of good works. In other words, works are not the root of salvation but the fruit. Calvin has thus remarked: "We are saved by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone".

Thus, true faith and good works go hand in hand, and they are two parts of God's work in us. Faith brings a person to salvation, and works bring that person to fruitfulness. Faith is the cause, works are the effect. What matters is not faith and works, it is not faith or works; rather it is faith that works! Our good works will affirm that our faith is real, and proves that truthfulness of our words. Thus, true saving faith is seen in activity, and it is something that motivates our life so that we think of others and serve them. That is exactly what Apostle Paul means when he writes that we "have been saved through faith" for "good works"!

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." (Eph. 2:8-10) ■

True faith and good works go hand in hand, and they are two parts of God's work in us. Faith brings a person to salvation, and works bring that person to fruitfulness.

The Danger of Anxiety!

Tension and anxiety are the by-products of this modern life style. Today we have grown much ahead in materialistic gains and economic status. Facilities have increased. We are surrounded by modern amenities. Owing to urbanization, villages are transformed into very busy small towns. The villagers used to have spare time after their farming, sowing and harvesting. There was enough time for communicating and harmless entertainments.

Today things have changed. We live in a busy world. Both husbands and wives have become earners. Children are left with schooling, studies, tuition, coaching class, smart classes which include computer courses, personality development, body building etc. -- 24 hours a day are not enough. Communication of ideas has increased tremendously.

Though a lot of information is passed through the TV, Radio, Satellites and Websites, the truth is that families do not have time for communication. We tend to forget – “A family that prays together stays together”. Many homes are on the verge of explosion. The reason is there is no time for family members to come together and discuss their feelings. Each member is tensed and worried.

This is not the scenario what our Lord expects us to have. When a crisis occurs, parents and children come together at the feet of our good Lord. There should be heartfelt communication in the family itself. Mental tension at offices, schools and elsewhere should be discussed at home. ‘Do not fret’, ‘Fear not’ – such



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golden words are forgotten by us. As parents, we lost our spirituality. How can we ask our children to be spiritual? Let our children see what we do and how we face a problem with the guidance of Holy Spirit. Spirituality cannot be taught but should be poured out to our generation.

If we are worried about our eating and drinking, we are of little faith and we behave like unbelievers. "But seek

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first His Kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own” (Matt. 6:13).

There is a story which has ‘Death’ as its main character. One fine morning ‘Death’ was walking toward a city. On the way a man met ‘Death’.

The man asked “Death”: “Where are you going”?

Replied ‘Death’: “I am going to the nearby city. I will take away 100 people

from there”.

The man said, “How terrible and sad”!

At that ‘Death’ retorted that he didn’t feel so as he had to do his duty.

The man in this story hurried to the city and informed whoever he could meet, the plan of ‘Death’. He asked those people in the city to take utmost care and to be alert.

Towards the evening the man met “Death” again and asked: “You said you are going to take away only 100 people, but I understand that 1000 people are dead. Why is it so”?

Pat came the reply: “I kept my word. I took away only 100. The other 900 died of anxiety and worry and despair”.

Though the story is humorous, it focuses our attention to one obvious truth that tension and worry lead one to death finally. Mental tension and depression bring sickness and diseases. As we live in a very tough and competitive world, we may face tragic results and failures. Many are unable to overcome such loss and crisis with presence of mind.

As children of God, let us thank our Lord for He cares for us. Our God wants us to believe Him and praise Him in any situation. Today if there is smooth movement, tomorrow there may be hurdles in our path, our loving God doesn’t desire to see a tensed look from us. Situation change. But our Lord is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. Let us leave our burdens to Christ. He will take the burden of poverty, strained relation between husband and wife, etc. He will make us happy and peaceful.

Just believe.

Fellowship with God

"God is faithful by whom ye were called unto the fellowship ['koinonia'] of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord." (1 Cor. 1:9).

I would like to introduce you to the Greek word, 'koinonia', to help explain how God intends to share Himself with us. It is the Greek word for 'fellowship'. It denotes a deeper form of association shared between two people. Let us consider a few verses where we find the Greek word 'koinonia'.

"God is faithful by whom ye were called unto the fellowship ['koinonia'] of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor. 1:9).

Notice that we are called to have fellowship with Jesus. In fact, it is when we allow Jesus to share Himself with us that we are truly Christians. Christianity is not merely a set of beliefs but a vital connection with Jesus Christ.

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion ['koinonia'] of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen." (2 Cor. 13:14).

The Scriptures are clear; we are to have 'koinonia' or 'fellowship' with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In other words, God wants to share Himself with us, that we may receive from Him the fruits of His spirit - His patience to demonstrate to others, His love to show for our enemies, His temperance to exercise in all things, and His kindness towards those that are forsaken; all these are areas we can develop through 'koinonia' with our Heavenly Father.

God is not asking us to redeem ourselves from our fallen nature, but to allow Him to transform us into a new creature, one that He intends us to be. We are to receive the life of Christ



Shibu Thankachan
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through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit's work to impart to us the life of Christ, so that it is no longer we who live but Christ that lives within us.

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20).

When each one of us allows God to share Himself with us, then we are able to have true Christian fellowship

God is not asking us to redeem ourselves from our fallen nature, but to allow Him to transform us into a new creature, one that He intends us to be. We are to receive the life of Christ through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

with one another. What makes a church family the body of Christ is when each one of us is in fellowship with Jesus. We become one body, working together with various gifts and talents all being directed by the Holy Spirit.

In terms of God and our relationship with Him it involves our participation in the life of the Trinity, granted by the

Father, through the Son, made alive by the Spirit. It is fellowship with God that is marked by truth and holiness. This is John's point when he says: *"This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5).* John mentions this upfront because fellowship with God and glorifying God is not merely an emotionally arousing activity such as energetic music and doing good works but rather it is enjoying and reflecting His character. It is a life that is lived in union with the incarnate, crucified, risen and ascended Lord whose Spirit is within us. It's a matter of walking in the truth and in holiness. This is the heart of glorifying God. Without this John adds, *"If we say that we have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness we lie and do not practice the truth" (1 John 1:6).*

In all we do, let us live a life that marks fellowship with God and glorifies Him by confessing sin, yielding to God in loving obedience, sacrificially loving others, longing for and finding more joy in things eternal than the things of this world. This can be done by drawing nearer to God, walking in faith and remaining in His truth. As

the body of Christ we should walk in the light as He himself is in the light. These are the tests of fellowship with God and a life lived for His glory.

Fellowship with God is one of the richest privileges for human beings and I pray it is how you test your own life and how you measure a life that truly glorifies God!

Children's

CORNER



Jesus is coming to take us to be with Him!



Navin was excited because his father was coming from Dubai. He was going to get a number of things if he studied well and got good marks in his exams. That was the only thing his father had told him to do. He was overjoyed when he saw his father. He could barely wait to see all that his father promised to get him. His father loved him so much that he had brought for him so many gifts.

More than all the the gifts, it was his father's presence that gave him the greatest pleasure. The family enjoyed the vacation in many outings and parties with friends and relatives. But soon the vacation was over and his father had to go back to work in Dubai. He was sad since he had to wait one whole year to see his father again.

Dear children, just as Navin enjoyed the time with his father, we too have a blessed future of great joy with our Lord.

That life of joy will be for ever. Lord Jesus said: *"Behold I am coming soon and my reward is with me, and I will give every one according to what he has done --- Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life ---"* (Rev. 22:12-14). Our Lord Jesus is coming soon to take us to be with Him for ever. But He will take only those who have lived pure before Him. And He will reward every one according to their deeds. Therefore we should be cleansed in the blood of Jesus and live our life obedient to His Word. Because Jesus said: *"Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord', will*

enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Mat. 7:21). We should be born-again, that is, receive the Lord Jesus as our Lord and master of our life, by repenting of our sins and confessing our sins before God. And then we have to be baptized and walk in obedience to the commandments of God mentioned in His Word, the Bible. If we do not obey God's Word and do not live right before God, then we will be lost in hell. *"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Rom. 6:23). *"Do not be deceived --- A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction. The one who sows to please the Spirit from that Spirit will reap eternal life"* (Gal. 6:7-8). Let us live to please God by obeying His Word and enjoy eternal life with Jesus. ■



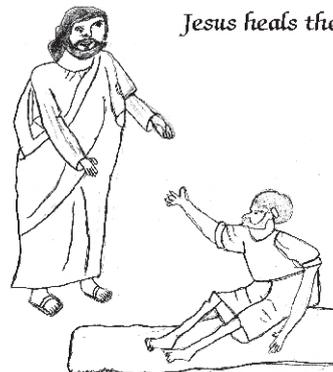
Shiny Aunty

Jesus the Great Healer



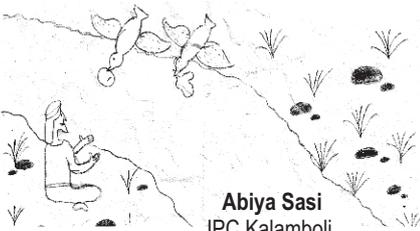
Bincy David
IPC Kalamboli,
Navi Mumbai.

Jesus heals the paralytic



Joshua Joseph George Vashi.

The ravens brought him bread and meat in morning and evening (1 Kings 17:6)



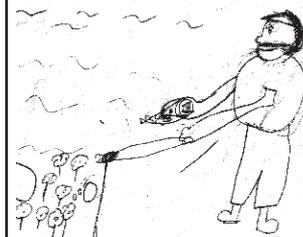
Abiya Sasi
IPC Kalamboli,
Navi Mumbai.

Jesus at Gethsamane



Riju V. Samuel
IPC Kalamboli,
Navi Mumbai.

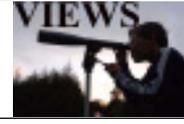
Peter gets a coin for the temple tax from fish mouth (Matthew 17:24-27)



Ahiya Sasi
IPC Kalamboli,
Navi Mumbai.



&
JKS



The 'Big Bang' never happened!

Scientists were banking on the Big Bang Theory to explain how the universe began. Everything in existence is thought to have occupied a single infinitely dense point and this point began to expand in a "Big Bang", 13.8 billion years ago as estimated by Einstein's Theory of General Relativity. Some scientists see it as problematic because the theory can explain only what happened immediately after the Big Bang - not at or before the event. In a recent paper published in the Journal of Physics Letters B, Ahmed Farag Ali at Benha University in Egypt and Saurya Das at the University of Lethbridge in Canada, have proposed a new model in which the universe has no beginning and no end. Thus there was no Big Bang after all from an infinitely dense single point!! The model gives the universe a finite size and an infinite age.

New theories about the beginning of the universe will keep coming and going. Scientists can continue to exercise their God-given privilege of a spirit of enquiry. That is how human knowledge expands. Let scientists continue their research and quest into the unknown. Eventually, man will, certainly, accept the role of the super intelligent Creator in the creation of the Universe!

Do church bells violate human rights?

For hundreds of years, the church bells of Linz in Austria were allowed to chime at night every quarter of an hour. Austrian architect Wolfgang Lassy says he hasn't been able to get a good night's rest for years, with the Mariendom cathedral in Linz waking him up every 15 minutes. He has now sued the Church and has also sent a letter to Pope Francis expressing his deep discontent. Lassy's lawyer says: "Lassy has been unable to sleep at night for years because the church bells chimed exactly 222 times every night with a volume of 75 decibels". Local church representatives would not simply stop the bells without a judicial order or an



order from the Pope. Lassy lives only about 250 feet away from the cathedral. In the letter to the Pope, the lawyer writes: "The chiming of the bells has no religious background, but it causes massive sleeping disorders for the neighbors of the church, with significant repercussions for their health, such as states of exhaustion. The European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg has declared a night's rest a human right. We therefore beseech you, Holy Father, to intervene and ensure that human right of the people of Linz to a healthy and refreshing night's sleep is respected and that the bells no longer chime at night".

Both parties propose to meet and discuss a possible solution through nonjudicial means. The lawyer wants a chiming ban from 10 p.m. until 6 a.m. We think it is a fair solution. There is nothing sacred about ringing the church bell!

Icelanders building a temple to Thor!

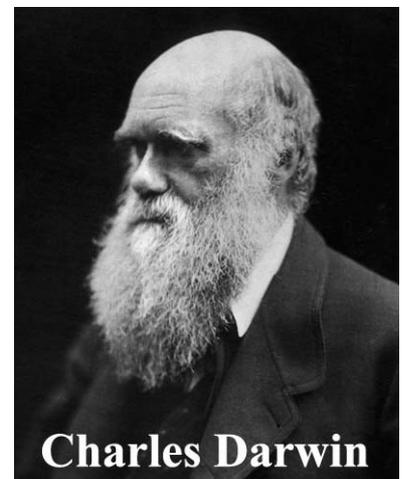
A movement that promotes Thor, Odin, and other Norse gods will start construction on a temple that will stand on a hill overlooking Reykjavik, the capital of Iceland. Hilmar Hilmarsson is the high priest of the group. The temple will host weddings and funerals, among other

rituals. While 94.8 percent of Icelanders are registered with a religion, only 31 percent believe a Supreme Being exists; 51 percent believe in their own personal version of god or a life force. Two percent attend church on any given week. More than half the babies in Iceland are born to unwed mothers.

Behavior follows beliefs. When we jettison a biblical worldview, we replace it with a non-biblical one. Chesterton, a scholar, noted that "the first effect of not believing in God is to believe in anything!!"

Feb. 12: International Darwin Day!

Atheists celebrate Darwin's birthday, February 12, as International Darwin Day. Not to be left behind, giving a tremendous boost to atheists, some 500 churches in the U.S. will celebrate "Evolution Sunday" on Feb. 15 to recognize Charles Darwin's birthday! In response, other churches will celebrate "Creation Sunday" instead. Tony Breeden is the founder and organizer for Creation Sunday. He says: "If I can't trust the plain meaning of the Bible in Genesis because of the all-natural presuppositions of science, why should I trust it when it speaks of a Virgin birth, water turning into wine, the resurrection of Christ, or any other supernatural claim in the Bible? It's a slippery slope and it undermines the foundational basis of the



Gospel itself". On the question of conflict between evolution and Bible, Breeden has no doubts in his thinking. He declares: "As the Holy Spirit began to guide me into all truth, I began to realize that millions of years of molecules-to-man evolution actually undermines the faith".

It is sad that even some Christian churches do not believe in the truth of the Word of God. No doubt, these are signs of the end times. Jesus Christ, Himself wondered: "However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth"? (Luke 18:8).

Libyan Bishop ready for martyrdom!

21 Egyptian Christians were kidnapped in Libya and beheaded by militants. But the Italian Bishop Giovanni Martinelli of Tripoli has refused to leave Libya and has said that he is ready for martyrdom. Almost all of his countrymen have been repatriated by the Italian government. He says that he has received many threats on his life in the streets and in his church. He says his decision to stay is "the culmination of my testimony". He adds: "Being able to give testimony is a precious thing. I thank the Lord that he allows me to do so, even

with martyrdom. I'm not moving from here. And I'm not afraid". The bishop has lived in Libya since 1971 and regards it as his home. When he arrived in the country there were 150,000 Christians there, a number that has dwindled to only 300.

Let us pray for all those who are being persecuted for being Christians. Let us be thankful to God for the freedom we are enjoying and make the best use of that freedom to tell others about Christ.

A Christian Iraqi child's reaction!

A young Iraqi Christian girl, Myriam, is among those who have lost everything at the hands of militants. She is now living with her family in a half-built mall in Northern Iraq. When a reporter from an Arabic language TV network asked her how she'd retaliate against the terrorists, she replied: "I won't do anything to them, I will only ask God to forgive them". She added: "We used to have a house. We do not have anything now. But thank God, God provides for us". Other children also shared their perspectives about what it's like to live in the mall with many other refugees who have been left with few possessions. "Jesus will be with us, no matter where we go," said another child

named Flourine.

How wonderful it is to know our Lord. He gives joy in all circumstances!

Ice Church in Romania!

A unique ice church is constructed every year by the Hotel of Ice within its premises in Romania's Fagaras Mountains. The church, which is located more than 2,000 meters high in the mountains, has become a popular tourist attraction even among those of different religious orientations. It features an ice altar and a large crucifix also made out of ice. Every year, the church is constructed out of "sanctified ice" from the waters of the Balea Lake. Priests from different Christian denominations are called to give their blessings to the water before it is frozen to make the blocks of ice for the church. Once the structure has been completed, the priests are again called to perform an inaugural Mass to commemorate the building of the new ice church. According to the hotel, the church has celebrated baptisms and weddings as well as religious services for different Christian denominations.

The 'Ice church' has turned out to be a great attraction for "religious tourism" and a source of income for the hotel. ■

Quotable quotes

Aiden Wilson Tozer (1897-1963) was born on a small farm in Western Pennsylvania. He left behind many books that continue to give Christians encouragement and guidance. His writings are as fresh today as when he was alive. We give below some quotes from his writings:



A.W. Tozer

- ** "The faith of Christ offers no buttons to push for quick service. The new order must wait the Lord's own time, and that is too much for the man in a hurry. He just gives up and becomes interested in something else"
- ** "It is either all of Christ or none of Christ! I believe we need to preach again a whole Christ to the world - a Christ who does not need our apologies, a Christ who will not be divided, a Christ who will either be Lord of all or will not be Lord at all!"
- ** "We are not diplomats but prophets, and our message is not a compromise but an ultimatum"
- ** "There is scarcely anything so dull and meaningless as Bible doctrine taught for its own sake. Truth divorced from life is not truth in its biblical sense, but something else and something less"
- ** "True faith rests upon the character of God and asks no further proof than the moral perfections of the One who cannot lie. It is enough that God has said it"
- ** "You can see God from anywhere if your mind is set to love and obey Him"
- ** "If God gives you a watch, are you honoring Him more by asking Him what time it is or by simply consulting the watch?"