

GOOD NEWS

Unlimited



November 2004

The Kingdom on Trial

CHRIST ALONE • GRACE ALONE • FAITH ALONE • SCRIPTURE ALONE

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EDITORIAL . . .

When he was teaching his disciples about prayer, Jesus suggested that this request be included among their petitions, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one” (Matthew 6:13). His language explicitly recalls his own experience of temptation (chapter 4), and acknowledges the moral drama of human existence.

Christ’s battle with Satan in the desert declared the nature of his whole mission, destined to reach its crucial moment in the garden of Gethsemane on the night of his betrayal. There, the same inducements presented at the beginning of his public life, were placed once more before him in all their reasonableness and desirability. He prayed, “My father, if it is possible, let this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will” (Matthew 26:39). Then having decided for God’s will no matter what, he paused to offer this word to his weary comrades, “Watch and pray so you will not fall into temptation” (Matthew 26:41).

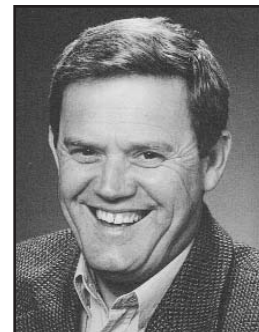
Consider the following comment on this event by Dr. Fosdick.

Gethsemane pictures the problem of everyday life. To face for conscience sake the doing of duty likely to cost us dear, to confront a handicap that cripples life or a tragedy that desolates it, saying, “If it be possible, let this cup pass . . . nevertheless”—at that place a man proves how much of a man he is, and in these days none of us escapes the test.

In the way we meet this kind of situation lies the test of our faith in God. It is not difficult to have faith in God on our Palm Sundays, when everything seems to be coming our way, when the crowd shouts approval, and

life strews palm branches in our path. Almost anyone can believe in God then. But when life passes from Palm Sunday to Gethsemane, with dangerous duty looming, with a possible cross ahead and with the heart crying, Let this cup pass!—then the test comes, whether our faith in God is fitted not simply for fair weather, but for foul.

There are two kinds of faith in God. One says if—if all goes well, if life is hopeful, prosperous and happy, then I will believe in God. The other says though—though the forces of evil triumph, though everything goes wrong and Gethsemane comes and the cross looms, nevertheless, I will believe in God.



Ron Allen

The Bible is full of this contrast. On the one side is Jacob saying, “If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and raiment to put on . . . then shall the Lord be my God.” That is fair weather faith, bargaining with God to trust him if all goes well. But listen to this other kind of faith, beginning not with ‘if’ but with ‘though’: “Though he slay me yet will I trust in him.”

God grant that we may be spared—Jesus prayed that. But if not—at that point our discipleship to Jesus meets its test.



*“Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one”
(Matthew 6:13).*

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THE KINGDOM ON TRIAL - 1

The Good News of Christ's Temptations

by Ron Allen

A Salutary Tale

"Don't let it be forgot, that once there was a spot; for one brief shining moment, that was known as Camelot." So runs the medieval legend of King Arthur; according to which Arthur established a celebrated kingdom, and a court which drew from all over Europe the most gallant warriors—seating them at his famous Round Table. Among these men of valor was the knight Lancelot; unmatched in strength, skill and courage in battle. King Arthur loved and trusted him implicitly.

Under Arthur's rule, Camelot is an Edenic place. The knights adhere to a code of honor called chivalry, and this helps maintain paradise. But alas, trouble is lurking. Arthur has appointed Lancelot as Guinevere's (the king's wife) protector. They develop a fatal fondness for each other, and Mordred the evil plotter, senses an opportunity to wreck everything.

He encourages the king to prove that chivalry is working by absenting himself from Camelot, and charging Lancelot with the care of Guinevere. But while Arthur is gone the Queen and her protector yield to temptation, and their secret is discovered. Camelot is plunged into chaos, bloodshed and misery.

Camelot's tragedy echoes the Genesis story of human dignity and loss. As friend and loyal servant of the king, Lancelot is a privileged being; chivalry is a noble concept—but only because it can be put to the test. Lancelot's freedom at court, is for him, a test of his relationship to his sponsor, the king.

The Privilege of Temptation


Matthew 4:1-11 informs us that Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted. (Mark and Luke simply report the fact of Jesus' temptation). Why does God permit temptation? Why is temptation taken up into God's grand purpose? Because humans have freedom and privilege in relation to God, and only self-conscious, free beings can be tested. Hamsters and shell-fish are not on trial. They only have their instincts. It is humanity's glory, and its doom, to be open to audit. Existence for men and women is much more than a mere scientific fact. It is an opportunity—for improvement or ruin. Self-consciousness is a talent to be buried or expanded by wise use. To know God and to serve him, is a franchise both elegant and perilous.

Every stage or circumstance in life is a chance for us to make something of ourselves. I am thirteen years old and eager for fun. I plead with my mother to allow me to accompany school friends on a Saturday night outing in the city. She relents. But on Monday she finds out about things

I did on that outing. "I'm disappointed," she says. I realize that I have failed a little test.

My dad hands me the car keys for the first time; I take my first job; I marry a wife; I become a father; someone in the family is sick; I receive a promotion; I am laid off; a loved one dies. Every advance, every set-back, each new experience is an occasion for me to become more of a man, or less of one. Existence measures me.

No Place to Hide

We can gain the whole world, or lose our own soul. That is our liberty. But one thing is certain: no one can run away from this cosmic scrutiny. There is no place where we can hide—where we will not be tested. Our freedom is sublime, but we are not free to escape from it. The Son of God was tested—in the desert. 

We also make another great mistake about temptations in thinking that all time spent in combating them is lost. Hours pass and we seem to have made no progress, because we seem to have been beset with so many temptations. But it often happens that we have been serving God far more truly during these hours than in our times of comparative freedom from temptation. We read: *"blessed is the man that endureth temptation,"* and I am sure this means the continuance of it as well as its frequent recurrence.

-Hannah Whitall Smith, *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life*. pp. 88 & 89

THE KINGDOM ON TRIAL - 2

The Good News of Christ's Temptations

by Ron Allen

One of Us

As Jesus is led by the Spirit into the desert to be tested, he replays Israel's history. The episode takes place right after his baptism. Jesus passes through the waters and sets foot in the desert just as Israel went through the Red Sea and entered the wilderness. Then Jesus fasts for forty days and nights. The very number recalls Israel's forty-year odyssey, and Moses' forty-day fast on Mount Sinai after the rebellion of the golden calf. The number forty suggests other ordeals: the testing of Noah and his family in the ark when it rained for forty days and nights; Moses again, when he spent forty years in Sinai as God prepared him to lead his people from slavery; Elijah, who fled into the desert for forty days and nights.

The point of these allusions to events in the history of God's people is to say that Jesus' experience was utterly the human experience. "He is able to sympathize with us, because he was tempted (tested) in every way, just as we are" (Hebrews 4:15). The dignity and freedom that set the conditions for human life, and which confer upon it the nature of a test, were absolutely known by Jesus. As he treads his way into the solitary wild, he is us. He is humanity.

The First Temptation

Satan approaches Jesus when he is hungry, and therefore vulnerable. "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread" (Matthew 4:3). Humanity is in possession of the grand

My own temptations tend to involve common vices such as lust and greed. As I reflect on Jesus' temptations, though, I realize they centered on his reason for coming to earth, his "style" of working. Satan was, in effect, dangling before Jesus a speeded-up way of accomplishing his mission. He could win over the crowds by creating food on demand and then taking control of the kingdoms of this world, all the while protecting himself from danger. "Why move thy feet so slow to what is best?" Satan jeered in Milton's version.

-Philip Yancey. *The Jesus I Never Knew*, p. 74

yet terrible freedom to set God aside at any time. This test appeals to Jesus' hunger, but its cunning lies in the fact that it is not an invitation to atheism. Rather, it accepts the reality of God, but frames him with a question (recall the garden of Eden: "Did God really say...?" (Genesis 3:1). A man is hungry—an unusually good man; a man who has just come from a baptism in which the divine voice had been heard to say: "This is my Son whom I love, with him I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). If that voice meant anything at all, would not God answer his much loved Son if he called on him to help make bread out of stones? It is insinuated that a God worthy of the name would surely not hesitate to provide for his Son—that is, if Jesus really is the Son of God!


The reader will recognize that they have often been in circumstances not unlike Christ's. The reader recalls situations in which it seemed utterly reasonable that God should come out of hiding and make himself useful.

I stood by a grave. A young woman had killed herself with a shotgun. Her boyfriend stood near heaving with grief and rage; audibly berating God. "Surely God could have done something to prevent this!"

A group of grain farmers gather at the old country church. For nine months the sky has refused to give anything but sunshine. The soil is barren and cracked. There are no crops and no fodder. Surely now would be a good time for God to step in and end the anxiety. Yes, one would think that God would act more in keeping with his divinity.

Such is the temptation presented to Jesus. To be a human being is to be ever at the point of choosing—not atheism, but of freeing ourselves from God by setting out the conditions which he will need to meet in order to be our God. Oh yes! We know how God should behave. We do not necessarily want to get rid of God until we have tried our hand at being the god of God. Why shouldn't God permit a bread miracle when our stomachs are growling?

Jesus Replies

"Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). The importance of Jesus' rebuff to Satan lies not so much in what he says about bread, but what he says about God's word. Humans find their 'truth' when they live by God's word, God's will, and not by trying to get God to live at their behest, their will or their wisdom. 

THE KINGDOM ON TRIAL - 3

The Good News of Christ's Temptations

by Ron Allen

Second Temptation

In the second test, Satan dares Jesus to jump from a tall building claiming the promise of God's protection (Psalm 91:11). This temptation is similar in type to the first, but now the pressure has been turned up. Initially, Satan presented the attraction of getting God to submit to human wisdom, but this test offers the allure of a powerful God who will put his power at human disposal.

All Things Religious Are Not All Good

Just because something looks and sounds religious does not mean it is a good thing. Satan disguises his temptation in a pious dress. He wraps it in words of Scripture. By this we are informed that Scripture can be misused and made to conceal evil. Jesus replies by himself referring to Scripture; thereby exposing Satan's fraudulent intention in his use of the Bible: "Do not put the Lord your God to the test" (Deuteronomy 6:16).

The quotation comes from Israel's desert experience, when the people demanded that Moses make water instantly appear. "Is the Lord among us or not" they said. So Moses struck the rock and water flowed.


Wanting to Examine God

The latent truth in wanting God to act with power for human convenience is the desire to be rid of the testing nature of our

existence in God's universe. By putting God to the test by setting powerful tasks for him to perform, we hope to become God's examiner.

From my earliest years I have imagined and dreamed that at moments of extreme risk I could access supernormal powers—like flying, or being able to emit fire-fighter-strength jets of water from my hands to blast enemies away. I believe I am not the only person who ever had these kinds of thoughts, and of course adults carry them on into their religious life; cherishing the darling hope that God is a god of power who will do their bidding.

Resembling Satan's own method, it is not uncommon for people to mask their ambition to test God by demanding powerful deeds from him by covering it with saintly talk. One might say, "I know that God will stop the grubs eating my crops. He sees my faith; he knows I have claimed his promise: 'prove me now herewith' (Malachi 3:10). After all, I don't believe in a weak God. I believe in a God who can do things. You watch!"

Such is the nature of this 'religious' temptation. "Since I belong to God, he won't test me. I'll test him." And whenever men and women put God to the test, they rarely ask him to perform some minor feat. It's usually something more akin to what we have come to expect from figures like Superman and Spiderman. 

BRINGER OF THE KINGDOM

In acting as the bringer of the kingdom of God, Jesus placed himself in total opposition to the kingdom of Satan. He was the one who claimed to have the kingdoms of the world at his disposal, and men and women were said by Jesus to be under his sway (Luke 13:16). The task of Jesus was to dethrone the "prince of this world" (John 12:31).

In a vivid parable Jesus told how it is impossible to plunder a strong man's house without first rendering the owner powerless (Matthew 12:29). The context shows that

he was thinking of his own work of overcoming Satan and setting his captives free.... He claimed to be the stronger One who had power to bind Satan and release his prisoners.

The whole of the ministry of Jesus was a campaign against Satanic power. It began with Satan's attack upon Jesus personally. It concluded with the death and exaltation of Jesus.

-I. Howard Marshall. *The Work of Christ*, pp. 31 & 32.

THE KINGDOM ON TRIAL - 4

The Good News of Christ's Temptations

by Ron Allen

An Ascending Scale of Temptation

The third and final test in the first gospel is temptation number two in Luke's account. Mathew begins with Jesus in the desert, then moves him to the high place of the temple, and finally to the top of a high mountain. He intends to emphasize the related nature of each trial together with their increasing intensity.

The Old Testament depicts Moses surveying the promised land from the top of Mount Pisgah (Deuteronomy 3:27). There are echoes of that here as Satan gives Jesus a mountaintop panorama of the kingdoms of this world.

There Is A Way That Seems Right

Satan knows that Jesus has been sent by God to inherit the kingdom. Without disputing that, he sets before Jesus a way into his inheritance which is other than God's way. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me" (Matthew 4:9). Placed before Jesus now, is the option of realizing God's promise to humanity by following a route that does not involve his obedience unto death; his sacrificial service; his putting God before all else. A crown is proffered which does not first require a crown of thorns.

Satan is trying to have Jesus renounce his mission in favor of life on the sunny side of the street. He is suggesting the "way that seems right to a man..." (Proverbs 14:12).

A Persuasive Argument

Satan's implicit argument is suggestive and powerful. Why should Jesus have to weep over Jerusalem? Why sweat and bleed for the indifferent and thankless? Why set foot on a path that is so sure to end in suffering? Isn't all suffering bad? Why suffer if you can avoid it?

To obtain the kingdom, Jesus is asked to jettison the principles of his kingdom which he expounds in Matthew 5.

Blessed are the poor...


Blessed are those who mourn...

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst...

Blessed are those who are persecuted...

Blessed are you when people insult you...

Against such a world view Satan is saying, "No need to be pushed around; no need to endure; no need to feel hungry, uncomfortable, or unwanted. I'll show you an easier way; a smart way; a quick way; a way to beat all others."

Such is the rational and respectable course presented by the tempter to Jesus. It is a course that is often admired. It is held aloft by pragmatists and politically astute public figures. It is long on appeal; long on prestige. It even enjoys an esteemed sanctity among the religious. It has its credentials: plenty of hollow morality, bells and smells; religion without sacrifice; without the love that never gives up; religion that is worse than useless, costing nothing and losing everything. 

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THE KINGDOM ON TRIAL - 5

The Good News of Christ's Temptations

by Ron Allen

A Life In Miniature

Jesus' wilderness ordeal is a prophecy and a summary of his whole life. Matthew concludes his account of the three temptations with the words, "then the devil left him" (Matthew 4:11), but that does not mean his trials were over. They had just begun. The theme of testing runs throughout Matthew. In chapter sixteen, Jesus begins to teach his disciples what it will mean for him to be the Son of God. He predicts his rejection and death at the hands of the nation's leaders. The elements of Jesus' desert testing are present when Peter begins to remonstrate with Jesus: "Never, Lord... this shall never happen to you." (Matthew 16:22). In reply, Jesus uses the very words he spoke to Satan in repudiating his enticements. "Get away from me Satan" (Matthew 16:23; 4:10).

Peter is not singled out personally in this rebuke, because Christ is rejecting the entire world of evil which does not understand and does not accept the way of God; the way of the cross. "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men" (Matthew 16:23).

The Unacceptableness of the Cross

The rebel universe does not want to witness love in action; does not want love to be borne to such lengths as Jesus is willing to take it. Satan is terrified by the prospect of love so amazing and so divine as to reach and include the rejected and dispossessed; lepers and moral failures of the worst kind. Not even Jesus' friends wanted him to go this far.

Men and women do not naturally want God to be the god that he is. They would prefer him to confine himself to being the god of power; the god who can make water flow in a dry place, and stop those who choose to jump off a cliff from hurting themselves. This, they prefer to a God who is *oppressed and afflicted, and led like a lamb to the slaughter*.

How can anyone believe in a God who will do nothing to prevent himself from being crucified? How can anyone believe in a God who permits himself to be spat upon and ridiculed? Isn't it simply a fact that we all grow tired of a God who refuses to return evil for evil? We grow impatient with the God who *opens not his mouth*; with his quietness and his refusal to take the kingdom using our methods.

Do we not easily identify with John the Baptist; languishing

in a dungeon waiting for Jesus to strike, and vexed out of our minds because we hear reports of him being meek and lowly, and spreading compassion even among his enemies? "Is God among us or not?" Make water flow; make bread now; do something powerful!

Can we not see ourselves in the crowds who glimpsed possibilities in Jesus, and tried to force him into a political kingship, but he slipped away from them? Aren't we like the Pharisees, irritated by Jesus' quiet dignity who said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly" (John 10:24). In other words, 'tell us forcefully, overwhelmingly, powerfully. That we can understand.'

Isn't it a fact that Satan's insinuations and suggestions to

Christ are utterly reasonable to us and devastatingly true? Would we not have had sympathy with those who stood near the cross while Jesus hung on it and called out, "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." Why does the Son of God cause us so much anxiety by his refusal to act according to 'common sense?' A god worthy of us would not choose the long road, the hard road or the unpopular

road. How could a respectable God be so humiliated and apparently so useless?

A Lesson from Kyril the Pope

In *The Shoes of the Fisherman*, Morris West describes Kyril the newly enthroned Pope, determined to maintain the common touch, rising early in the morning to walk the streets of Rome. He stops in a coffee shop to order coffee and a newspaper. Attired in the garb of an ordinary priest, Kyril is unknown and unrecognized.

About to leave, Kyril is embarrassed to discover he has left his wallet at home. When he tries to explain this to the man behind the counter, he is met with suspicion and derision. "Forgot your money! A likely story. That's always the way with you priests; malingerers all of you. Next you will ask us to believe that you are the Pope." Eventually Kyril has to tell them he is the Pope, but predictably, he is met with skepticism. He doesn't look like a Pope to them.

Continued on next page

Overcoming Through Trust in God

by Desmond Ford

Things are seldom what they seem. Like Christ, we must view everything in this world in the light of invisible realities. Isaiah Watts wrote: “Where reason fails with all her powers, there faith prevails and love adores.” Trust in the absolute overruling providence of God is the only sufficient weapon in life’s battle.

The kaleidoscope of faith enables the believer to view all circumstances as servants of God for his ultimate good. While he does not believe that God initiates evil, he knows that nothing can touch him except by divine permission and for his benefit. Joseph, reviewing the evil plots of his brethren against him, could say, “Ye meant it for evil, but God meant it for good. God did send me before you to save your lives by a great deliverance” (Genesis 45:57). Similarly, the persecuted Christ in Gethsemane rebuked his disciples who were trying to extricate him from peril by saying, “The cup which my father has given me; shall I not drink it?” (John 18:11). Observe that Jesus refused to recognize second causes. He does not say, “The cup that Judas has given me.” Complaining about life’s buffetings is similar to the behavior of a dog which turns to bite the stick in his master’s hand.

Had Simon of Cyrene arrived on the scene five minutes earlier or later, he would have missed the privilege of carrying Christ’s cross—a privilege which brought to him the gift of eternal life. Had he traveled a different route around the city that day he would have missed the greatest blessing of his life.

Within the purview of a loving providence we must include mistakes and even sins. Christ had not been responsible for either, but his sufferings were the result of both. Yet this disturbed not his peace. Provided we are “willing in all things to live honestly,” God’s mercy overrules our failures.

Confidence in a sovereign Providence which overrules all things enables one to say with Paul, “We look not at the things which are seen but at the things which are unseen.” Like Moses

we endure as seeing him who is invisible.

This conviction that all things are God’s servants brings a confidence that nothing can shake. So it has been with Christians in all ages. They have known that while the medicinal draught may be nauseous, it is a loving hand that administers it. We are to remember the words of Jesus, “What I do, thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter” (John 13:7).


Said Spurgeon:

As long as a man can look to God nothing is lost. FAITH—faith’s motto is INVICTA—she ever rides forth on a white horse conquering and to conquer.

Faith is the child of the Omnipotent, and shares in his omnipotence; it is born of the Eternal, and it possesses his immortality. You may crush and grind it, but every fragment lives; you may cast it into the fire, but it cannot be burned...

Faith has an eye that was made to drink in the sunlight, and so long as there is a sun, there will be eyes of faith to rejoice in him. If we have faith, there is that in us which overcomes the world, baffles Satan, conquers sin, rules life, abolishes death, all things are possible to faith.

You cannot banish faith—her home is everywhere. Get a firm confidence in God and you need not enquire what is going to happen—all must be well with you. Winding or straight, uphill or down dale, or through the fire or through the sea, if you believe, your road is the King’s highway. If faith does not fail, nothing fails. Faith arms a man from head to foot with armor through which neither sword, nor spear, nor poisoned arrow can ever pierce. ‘No weapon can prosper against you.’ ‘He will cover you with his feathers....’

—Desmond Ford. *A Kaleidoscope of Diamonds*, Volume 2. pp. 129-131. 


Continued from previous page

Christ too, was penniless and ridiculous; an unlikely Savior if ever there was one. But his defenselessness, weakness and shame were the very badges of his divine calling, and the hallmarks of the kingdom he came to win.

In Matthew, a harassed and helpless Son of God shows that God himself is no stranger to our ordeal; that God is battered, assailed and stressed by all the torments and exasperations that mark our existence. Yet that is only part of what Matthew would have us know—and it is the lesser part.

The greater part is that though Christ is our brother in temptation, he is king in that he never yielded to it. That he

was tempted makes him one of us. That he was victorious in temptation sets him apart from us. Where we are weak, he was strong. He saved others; himself, he could not save. Jesus is Lord of the maelstrom of temptation in which we are daily enveloped.

His victory is good news for us. Christ’s hard-won kingship means that we are not alone. It means that though we have been undone many times by evil, we will never be defeated. As Israel profited from David’s victory over Goliath, so we have our champion—Jesus. His victory is big enough for everyone. The kingdom is his, and he will be with us even to the end of the age. 

JOHN BUNYAN - *On Temptation*

*John Bunyan wrote his autobiography while in prison. It is a story of his early life of rebellion against God, his conversion and his battles with guilt. It is said that John Bunyan suffered almost every temptation with which the devil has tortured any man. The title of his autobiography is **Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners**. It was first published in 1666. The following is an excerpt. -Editor*

Temptation Never Goes Away

After the Lord had so graciously delivered me from such terrible temptations and had given me such consolation and such blessed evidence that he loved me, the Tempter came upon me again, this time with even more terrible temptation than before.

This time the temptation was to part with Christ in exchange for the things of this life. This temptation lay strongly upon me for an entire year, and followed me so continually that I was not rid of it a single day.

I was sure that those who were once really in Christ could never lose him forever. Yet it was a constant grievance to me to think that I would even have one thought within me against Christ. I had almost no other thoughts about him except blasphemies, and neither my hating these thoughts nor my resisting them helped keep them away. No matter what I thought or did they were still there. When I ate my food, when I stooped to pick up a pin, when I chopped a stick of wood or looked at this or that, the temptation would come: Sell Christ for this, or sell Christ for that; sell him, sell him.

A Fierce Trial

Sometimes these words would run through my mind a hundred times together: Sell him, sell him. And for whole hours at a time I have been forced to stand guard, leaning and forcing my spirit against it for fear that before I was aware of what was happening, some wicked thought might arise in my heart that would consent to this temptation. Sometimes the tempter would make me believe that I had consented to it, and then I would be as though tortured upon a rack for whole days together.

This temptation scared me very much because, as I have said, I was afraid that I might be overcome by it. And I fought so hard against it with my mind that my body too, would go into motion, by way of pushing or thrusting with my hands or elbows. As fast as the destroyer said "Sell him," I would answer, "I will not, I will not, I will not; no, not for millions and millions and millions of worlds." I said this because I was

afraid I would set too low a value on him, and I was so confused and upset that I scarcely knew where I was or how to be quiet again.

Much Prayer Needed

During this time I could not eat food peacefully, but as soon as I sat down at the table I had to go away and pray. I had to leave my food immediately, but it was the Devil who was tempting me to do it by his counterfeit holiness. I would say to him, "I am eating now, let me finish first." "No," he would say. "You must do it now or you will displease God, or despise Christ." I imagined that these must be impulses from God, and that if I did not follow them I would be denying God.

To be brief, one morning as I lay on my bed I was, as at many other times, fiercely assaulted with this temptation to sell Christ. The wicked suggestion ran through my mind as fast as a man could speak: "Sell him, sell him, sell him, sell him." As usual, my mind answered: "No, not for thousands, thousands, thousands." Twenty times together I repeated it, but at last after a great struggle I felt this thought pass through my heart: "Let him go if he will," and my heart agreed.

Through the Valley of the Shadow

And suddenly, Satan had won the battle and down I fell, as a bird that is shot from the top of a tree, into mighty guilt and despair. Getting out of my bed, I went out into the field with as heavy a heart as a mortal man could ever have. There, for about two hours, I was like a man bereft of life.

This is the Scripture that seized my soul: "*Profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected*" (Hebrews 12:16,17). Now I was bound over to the judgment to come. There was nothing for all the years ahead but damnation.

Victory through Jesus

Months went by and the sound of that verse concerning Esau went continually through my mind. But about ten or eleven o'clock one morning as I was walking along under a hedge, full of sorrow and guilt, and thinking of this sad thing that had happened to me, suddenly this sentence came rushing in upon me: "The blood of Jesus Christ remits all guilt." Suddenly I stopped and made a stand in my spirit and this wonderful verse took hold upon me: "*The blood of Jesus Christ his Son, cleanseth us from all sin*" (1 John 1:7).

Peace came stealing into my soul and I thought I could see the tempter stealing away as though ashamed of what he had done. At the same time, I began to see that my sin, when compared to the blood of Christ, was no more than a clod or a stone in this vast wide field where I stood.



Passion Week & The End of the World (2)

by Desmond Ford

Seeds of Global Events

Events in Palestine during Passion Week prefigure similar events globally at the end of the world. The triumphant preaching of the gospel (Christ's entrance into the city on what we now call Palm Sunday), the prediction of coming judgment (Luke 19:41-44), the polarization of the populace including the combining of disparate religious groups, the union of religion with the government, the decision to kill Christ and his followers such as Lazarus, a time of trouble in Gethsemane followed by a greater agony on Calvary, and then triumphant resurrection—including a multitude of the dead who ascended with Christ as the first fruits of the great resurrection day.

Many other elements can be found mirroring what is yet to be on a global scale. Judas, the professed follower of Christ who betrays him, prefigures the final manifestation of Antichrist who will also come in religious garb. Barabbas and his company of political insurgents point to the terrorist element which will characterize the last times.

The miraculous withholding of military opposition against the triumphant Christ, even in his cleansing of the temple points to the work of the restraining Holy Spirit in the last days. He will withhold political intervention against those participating in the final proclamation of the gospel (see II Thessalonians 2 with its references to the restraining power on the eve of Antichrist's final manifestation).

The Cleansing of the Temple

Next in the Passion Week history comes a memorable scene full of significance for us today.

Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the benches of those selling doves. "It is written," he said to them. "My house will be called a house of prayer. You are making it into a den of robbers." (Matthew 21:12-13).

The cleansing of the temple continues the hand-to-hand struggle with the religious leaders of the day which characterized the whole of Passion Week. It is not with the heathen but with professed followers of God that Christ has most trouble. And so it has ever been in all ages.

Visible Transience and Permanent Excellence

Many reject religion because of its inevitable linkage with hypocrisy. But such forget that only something very much alive can sustain parasites. There are no counterfeit thirteen-dollar notes—only the genuine are counterfeited.

And so it is in religion. Good religion is the best thing in the world as surely as bad religion is the worst. But the latter is more common, and Christ's action of cleansing points to the constant need for church reform.

Mankind has the capacity to look downwards, sideways and upwards. We can condescend to the things beneath us and try to keep up with our brethren and sisters alongside us. But only looking up can energize us to strive for what is highest and best. Nothing beneath us, or by our side, can fill the heart; only the One who is above. Everything visible is transient, only the permanent is excellent, and such is to be found in God alone. But the treasure is vulnerable.


Challenge to the Church

Because of the preciousness of genuine religion, it is the chief object of satanic attack. Similarly, heaven's best efforts are aimed at countering such attacks. All this is symbolized by the cleansing of the temple. Observe that Christ quoted Scripture on this occasion to tell people living in all coming centuries that the church must continually be challenged to return to the truths of Holy Writ.

At the outset of every spiritual movement there is a creative minority with a vision. When the idea takes root the movement comes into being rapidly, then comes the dangers. The original ideas may become commonplace, and quantity becomes a major goal. When that happens, standards are lowered. Politicians and financiers take over. The vision is replaced by a creed, sometimes by an absolutist organization. The message goes on paper; faith is defined by clever formulas. The fire dies out. The vision fades away, and reformation becomes imperative. -Daniel Walther.

Religion Can be Dangerous

Christ was upset by the exclusiveness of the temple. They had the court of the Gentiles, the court of the women, the court of the men. People were kept out. He was upset by the secularisation, the profiteering, the pride and the worldliness. These are the things that threaten the church in all ages. George Bernard Shaw, in the play *St. Joan* has the worldly-wise ecclesiastical leader tap Joan of Arc on the head and say, "My dear, religion can be dangerous."

And that is true. Religion can be very dangerous. If you mean it wholeheartedly you're in for trouble. But if you profess it, and you don't mean it wholeheartedly, you're in for trouble eternally. Religion is dangerous! And Christ in his love and mercy is always in the work of changing, reforming and cleansing, as he did the temple. 



DO YOU KNOW JESUS?

by Les Wells

My Need to Share

There are times when the Word of God burns like a fire in my soul and I have to share what I'm feeling, and how the Word of God changed my life forever. All over the world, men, women and children are suffering. Some may wonder what life and life's struggles are all about. I spent most of my young life wondering the same thing and asked, "Why me?"

A Rebel and Abandoned

When I was five years old my father, with whom I was very close, abandoned my mother and I. I was heartbroken and asked myself, "What did I do?" Later on in my youth I became very rebellious, and consequently spent twenty years of my life incarcerated. I was caught up in things of this world like drugs and alcohol.

My wife and I have three children. After my first daughter Danielle was born, I was incarcerated. I was in prison again when my second child was born; a son named Chase. The first time I held my infant son was when my wife, Christine, brought him to me in prison. After the birth of my third child Amanda, my wife returned home from the hospital to find that I had accidentally set our house on fire. As the firemen extinguished the roaring flames billowing from our house, Christine saw me handcuffed and put into the back of a police car for the last time. When placed in jail, I pounded my fists on the cellblock walls until they bled. I was a broken vessel.

A Wife's Prayers Answered

One day when I was in prison I stumbled across a Bible. I thought back to my childhood and my memories of sitting in church. I remember thinking that these Christians had a peace about them. I wanted that peace, but I didn't know where it came from or how to get it. When I found that Bible in prison and started reading it, I couldn't get enough. My heart was like a sponge. The more I read, the more I wanted; the more I wanted, the more change I began to see—God working in my life.

My wife believed in the power of prayer, and with that assurance she never gave up on the man God had placed in her life. With her faith, my wife 'burned a candle on her knees' in prayer. I believe that prayer was answered, and that it is the reason my family is still together to this day. We celebrated eleven years of marriage on July 2, 2004.

What God Did for Us


Once, I heard Billy Graham give an illustration on television about a man who was watching a huge storm outside his window. The trees were bent over from the wind, the clouds were black, there was thunder and lightning, and the hail was coming down hard. Then all of a sudden he noticed a flock of

birds caught in the storm. The birds were being blown all over. The man looking out his window wondered what to do. So he ran out to the barn and opened the doors to his hayloft, and then ran back into the house and watched, hoping they would enter—but they didn't. They continued to be tossed around by the storm. He grabbed a loaf of bread and ran back out to the barn to spread the bread all over the hayloft floor. Then he turned a little light on and ran back into the house, soaking wet. Again, he watched out the window, and pleaded, "Just fly into the barn. You will be safe there. Just fly in." Then he started thinking, "If only I could become a... bird." He realized that is exactly what God did for us. He became a man, and came to show us the way out of this world. He loved us so much that *"he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life"* (John 3:16).

Where to Look

This is exactly what I believe we need to focus on. If we confess with our mouth, believe in our heart that Jesus Christ is Lord, and ask him into our heart to be our personal Lord and Savior, there is not a power in the universe that can harm us. We are his, and he will protect us. No matter how much you are hurting, if you surrender your life to Jesus, he will comfort you. We need to focus on the mark straight ahead. That mark is Jesus Christ. (Bull's eye!) We may never know exactly what happens during spiritual warfare this side of heaven, but the implication is certain: what we see is only a small part of what is actually going on. John 3:17 goes on to say, *"God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through him."*

There are so many people caught in the storm of life. They're caught in a spiritual battle that is waging for their soul, and they don't know the way out. Some individuals lose family members to diseases like AIDS, cancer and other infirmities. Many parents in 'Third-World' countries helplessly watch their children die from starvation. In every town, every nation and every country, there are those who are hurting both physically and spiritually. If you're reading this now and you're suffering (or perhaps you know someone else who is suffering), I pray that you'll be able to see God's work in my life and in the life of my family. I pray that it will encourage you to believe that Jesus loves you and will carry you through the storms of life.

"...with God all things are possible" (Mark 10:27). 

Les Wells is a full-time counsellor teaching spiritual warfare at Hope, Help & Healing, a faith-based recovery program in Auburn, California. He teaches a weekly 12-step Bible study class, and on Thursday nights he leads a group of men and women out onto the streets of Auburn, carrying a large cross and prays for any or all that will openly permit themselves to be prayed for. Les wants to be "100% for Jesus, available 24-7, in your face!" -Editor

TO and FRO with the Editor

Question

Can you explain to me Matthew chapter 22 with special attention to verses 11-14? It says that God invites “many” (perhaps all) to be part of his kingdom, but “few” are chosen. I have read that this means the acceptance of God’s invitation must be accompanied by ‘appropriate’ conduct; that ‘proper’ behavior is evidence of being chosen. What is proper behavior, and where do I find that in Scripture?

M.B.

Answer:

The answer to your question is indicated by the stories that lead up to the parable of the wedding banquet. It is preceded by three other parables, directed by Jesus toward the Jewish establishment. Their refusal to accept him was hardening to hostile unbelief. They were on a course destined to end in tragedy. The parables are:

The parable of the workers (20:1-16).

The parable of the two sons (21:28-32).

The parable of the tenants (21:23-45).

In each of these stories Jesus presents certain characters who represent individuals and/or people, who learn of Israel’s God long after Israel did, and who contrary to Israel, embraced the privilege. The children of Abraham are pictured as enjoying prior knowledge of God, but by reason of careless pride, self-sufficiency and complacency, they squander their advantage by rejecting Christ and their place is taken by others. So, “*the last will be first (20:16); the tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of heaven ahead of you (21:31); the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit (21:43)*.” Jesus’ statement, “*Many are called but few are chosen,*” is equivalent in meaning to the three preceding.

The gospel is of such surpassing worth, that it is worth sustaining the loss of all else besides. This is the ‘proper’ response, referred to by commentators. Jesus offered no precise formula in this regard. The wholehearted reception of the blessings that come in Christ are for each person to respond to personally, as the Spirit moves.

Question

I know a person who was divorced from her husband because he was unfaithful to her. Her former husband has remarried. Does she have Biblical grounds to remarry?

C.D.

Answer:

I believe this woman is free to remarry in accordance with Christian and Biblical principles. Those whom Jesus spoke against in Matthew 5 and Matthew 19 were men who had managed to turn Mosaic Law concerning divorce into an opportunity for lust and selfish ambition. Claiming Moses as their backer, many divorced their wives for the slightest reasons and promptly married again. Jesus rightly observed that the spirit motivating this behavior was adulterous and he condemned it. Victims of this behavior are not condemned.

Question:

Did the sacrifices of ancient Israel atone for all types of sin—intentional and non-intentional? What Old Testament references are there to prove this?

S.K.

Answer:

According to the relevant chapters in Leviticus, about kinds of sacrifices (chapters 4 and 5), there is repeated emphasis on the unintentional nature of sins for which atonement is made. In Numbers 15:22-31 there is similar instruction, but with this added information: that no sacrifice be made for the person who sins defiantly.

An illustration of the way this may have been applied is in Exodus 21:14, where a person committing premeditated homicide is forbidden to seek refuge at the altar.

Question

Can it be denied that there is no demonstrable proof for Christianity?

J.N.

Answer:

No. But consider this: There is no ‘demonstrable’ proof for anything in the real world that matters. For example, how would you go about proving your own existence; that your imagination is real; that your love of your spouse is real? The data of the universe is capable of yielding more than one conclusion, but it must be acknowledged that the evidence for God and Christ is just as real, and just as valid, as the evidence for any of the other three things I have mentioned.

LIVES SPARED BY LITTLE THINGS

A company invited remaining members of other companies decimated by the September 11 attack on the Twin Towers to share their office space. The following stories were shared about why each one was still alive. Each story was about something little that had changed the course of history for them that day.

- The head of one company came in late that day because his son had started kindergarten.
- Another fellow was alive because it was his turn to bring donuts.
- One was late through being stuck on the New Jersey Turnpike due to an auto accident.
- One missed his bus.
- One spilled food on her clothes and took time to change.
- Someone's car wouldn't start.
- One went back to answer the telephone.
- One had a child that dawdled.
- One couldn't get a taxi.
- One man put on a new pair of shoes that morning. He developed a blister on his foot and stopped at a drugstore to buy a Band-aid.

Let's try not to allow the little things of life to annoy us. When we are stuck in traffic, miss an elevator or turn back to answer the telephone, let's think that this is exactly where God wants us to be at this moment.

Next time our morning seems to be going wrong; the children are slow getting dressed; we can't find our car-keys; we hit every red traffic light, let's not get mad or frustrated. God is watching over us.

-Medford Christian Journal.

NEWS BITS . . .

Suicide to Surge

A suicide takes place somewhere in the world every forty seconds, or nearly one million a year. World Health Organization figures suggest that suicide accounts for 1.5 percent of the total cost of disease to the world, and that figure is likely to rise in coming decades. The good news of Jesus Christ is pertinent; bringing meaning and hope.

White Activist Christian Dies

CAPE TOWN. Beyers Naude could have led South Africa's Dutch Reformed Church and the once-powerful Afrikaner secret organization—the Broederbond, but he turned his back on them and chose instead a lonely path of opposition against Apartheid. The 89-year-old anti-apartheid activist who died at a retirement home in Johannesburg was described by former president Nelson Mandela as “a true son of Africa.” In a statement, Mandela said Naude was “a brave man” who stood up to apartheid “when it was an unpopular thing for white people to do so.” -ENI.

Theology Needs to be De-westernized

A World Council of Churches leader has said that European theology needs to adapt to the global shift of Christianity to the Southern Hemisphere. The General secretary of the WCC told a gathering of Roman Catholic theologians that it is “high time to leave behind the destructive pride of the dominant global culture. That has its origins in the colonizing drive to conquer and subdue the world.” -ENI.

New Book by Desmond Tutu

A new book by Archbishop Desmond Tutu (South African man of God, and Nobel Peace prize winner) shows that despite all the problems in Africa, there is much hope for the continent and the world. In the book, *God Has A Dream* (2004), Tutu celebrates God's love for each individual, the African continent and humanity at large.

The book is a testament to the power of faith and hope in a world plagued by terrorism, religious fundamentalism, conflict and chaos. . . . With inimitable elegance, Archbishop Tutu eloquently teaches us how to transform our pain, outrage and sorrow into hope and confidence. He says it is through suffering that we can learn life's lesson if we allow pain to ennoble us, not embitter us. . . .

Tutu declares that he is not an optimist. “Optimism relies on appearances and very quickly turns into pessimism when the appearances change,” he says. “I see myself as a realist, and the vision of hope I want to give you in this book is based on reality.”

Tutu's lesson is that you don't need to do anything or to be anything to qualify for God's love. “Dear child of God, in our world it is often hard to remember that God loves you just as you are,” writes Tutu. “God loves you not because you are good. God just loves you. Period.”

Freedom of Worship in China

Officially-recognized churches in China are growing fast, but the world's most populous nation continues to face accusations that religious groups face persecution there.

Heavenly Beer Garden

Each week in summer, Pastor Josef Kalkusch orders 100 litres of beer, 30 cakes, and inordinate amounts of coffee. That is because each Sunday morning during July and August, after the Sunday service of course, he opens the “heavenly beer garden” beneath a 130-year-old oak tree in the Sachsenhagen churchyard. He thinks it is the only church-run beer garden in northern Germany. -ENI.

Movie Evangelism?

Bishop T.D. Jake's Dallas-based Potter's House church has a congregation of more than 25,000. He has national shows on Trinity Broadcasting Network and Black Entertainment Television. He has written 27 books, including the best-selling *Woman, Thou Art Loosed*.

Seeking to take a page from the phenomenal success of Mel Gibson's movie *The Passion of the Christ*, Jakes is hoping for equally big things from a new movie based on his book, *Woman, Thou Art Loosed*. He believes the movie theater may be the next frontier for evangelism.

Jesus and His Church

Not long ago, Pastor Jo was the senior Pastor at one of the largest churches in Minnesota. His alcoholism ended that and nearly took his life. In recovery he asked to be assigned to a little dying church in downtown St. Paul. Four years ago it had fewer than a dozen members, all elderly. Today the church is growing with more than two hundred people at Sunday services, and the church rooms are filled nightly with an assortment of meetings to help people get and stay sober, beat their compulsion to gamble, or address a sexual addiction.

It's pretty easy to tell when walking into this church that you're in for something out of the ordinary. Just outside the doors to the modern brick-walled sanctuary is the smokers deck, and it is dense with cigarette smoke. Inside, down front, middle-aged men with ponytails and sandals play guitars. In the pews you may find a judge sitting next to a former prostitute, or a psychologist giving a hug to a former gang member. As diverse as they are, these church-goers do share one thing in common: addiction. And the pastor, Jo Camp, is one of them and says so every Sunday at the start of each worship service. -MPR.

Gospel on the Radio

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