

E-Herald of the Coming Kingdom

"The time has come, and the Kingdom of God is near.
Change the way you think and act, and believe the Good News."
Mark 1:15 GW

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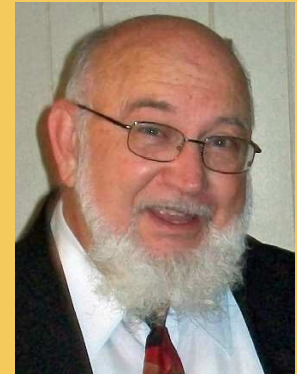
Some Golden Daybreak

*DEDICATED TO SPREADING THE GOOD NEWS OF GOD'S COMING
KINGDOM TO BE ESTABLISHED WHEN JESUS RETURNS*



EDITOR'S NOTE

Co-Editors: Kent Ross - Wally Winner



Celebrating Easter

This is season when we celebrate the Resurrection of Christ from the dead. Some do not want to recognize it saying as a holiday it is of pagan origins. While a technical case may be made on that point, Christians around the world recognize it as a day to remember and to celebrate the immense consequence of God's majestic power in raising His Only-Begotten Son from the dead.

Satan was shown to be powerless when God acted. The seal of Imperial Rome was no deterrent when the angels from God rolled the stone away. Jesus, Himself, had already given us a preview of His Father's power over the grave, when Jesus raised Lazarus. But that was only a preview of what His Father would do.

For when God acted and sent His angels to raise Jesus from the dead, it was the first resurrection to immortality . . . Paul says the first-fruits of them that sleep. The entirety of 1st Corinthians speaks to its important. For if Christ is not raised, then we all are still in sin, and of all, most miserable.

BUT NOW IS CHRIST RISEN FROM THE DEAD! HALLELJUAH!

He was the first, and remains the only one to have achieved the immortality that alone resided in God, His Father. But God's Plan is also for us, as it was and is for those great saints of the Old Testament . . . David, Moses, Abraham (see Hebrews 11), none of whom have as yet received their reward, God having something better planned so that "they" without us should not receive it . . . it being the Resurrection Christ received, from mortality to immortality, from corruption to incorruption.

David is not in heaven, but yet in the grave. Moses is not in heaven, but yet in the grave, Abraham is not in heaven, but in the grave . . . so is my own Dad and Mom, so are all those Christians down through the centuries that have died.

They all await the trumpet call and the voice of the archangel as Jesus, Himself is sent back to this earth to begin the process of redeeming the earth and implementing the Kingdom of God right here on planet earth.

The earth will be renewed, and so will all of God's people who will be raised to everlasting life and will join their brother, Jesus, and then rule until God, Himself, comes to be with His Family.

That's the reason we celebrate the fact that nearly 2000 years ago, God showed Satan, and showed us, that He is the Ruler of the Universe, and we have His promise for us!

Concern for Future

We always want Jesus to return soon. Well, most of us do.

After a sermon I preached on the soon Return, a godly Christian woman, walking out after the service, said to me, "Pastor, I don't want Him to come yet."

As I was prepared to ask her why, she went on, “. . . because my children aren’t ready for it. They’re not ready.”

I appreciated her concern. We all have that concern over those we love, those perhaps we’ve raised, or married, who show little interest in the things of the Lord.

Nevertheless, His coming seems closer, much closer as the middle east remains a cauldron of unrest, with the Arab world intent on destroying Israel.

They do not understand that Israel remains God’s “people of the covenant.” That will never change. While we, as Christians have been adopted in, Israel remains His and at the last when all looks dire and Israel seems lost . . . the Lord will go forth to battle, and woe to those who ignorantly stand against them, for it is a stand against Him.

Reaching Out With the Message

How vital it is that people come to know the Lord as their own personal Savior before these final things begin to actually occur.

None of us know the day not the hour. If the angels don’t know and evidently even Jesus did not know, How egotistical for any to think they can figure it out. It is also egotistical to think we can determine when it cannot be.

All we can know is that it is going to occur, and when it does, it will be too late to try and make a last-minute decision for Him. Behold, now is the day of salvation for those you love.

Encourage them know to know Him and to make Him Lord of their lives.



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STRENGTH AND WEAKNESS

By Jonathan Wincapaw



2 Corinthians 12:9 - But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

This past weekend I had the opportunity to speak at the Bible College Invitational. With the theme for the weekend being "Identity Theft", I had prayed for and spent time planning a message that would be beneficial to our college students as well as potential future students. The passage above is what stuck out at me.

In today's society it has become normal to cover our weaknesses and pretend to be strong all the time. We are looked down upon for our weaknesses, so we keep them to ourselves. Unlike Paul in this passage, I struggle with sharing my weaknesses. I opened up with the students and shared my greatest weakness. Writing this, I share my next greatest weakness with you. (Putting my thoughts into writing.)

Like most people, I struggle with boasting about my strengths. I would much rather talk about the things that I am good at compared with discussing my weaknesses. I am good at most things; I am competitive and I strive to be the best. Now, these can be good things. However, they are not good if we lean on our own strengths, are too competitive and ignore the cost of being the best.

I find myself in a conundrum. Even when I claim to be getting better, am I not boasting in my strength of being good at overcoming weakness? And yet Paul, in this passage, challenges us to let our weaknesses be front and center, so that the power of Christ may be upon us for others to see.

So the challenge is this: Can we admit that we are weak? Can we get past the myth that you must be a super human being to be effective in ministry, or even a Christian? The real problem becomes thinking we are stronger than we are. Paul had a weakness and he boasted in it. He allowed others to see his weakness so they knew Christ was at work in him.

2 Corinthians 12⁵ For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness,"^[a] made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ. ⁷ But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

A couple of chapters later he goes on about weakness. It is not our strengths that we boast about. Instead, it is Christ. He is the light that comes out of our darkness. We are the weak and fragile clay pots holding the power of God. Isaiah 64 states that we are the clay that was molded by the Father. Why clay? Why something that breaks so easily? It is not our strength that God has ever looked for.

1 Corinthians 10:12 So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!



*“All God’s giants
have been weak men who
did great things for
God because they
reckoned on His being
with them.”*

Hudson Taylor

When we think we are strong, we find ourselves in the position to fail. This is the same reason Jesus told the Pharisees in Mark 2 that he came for the sick. How often do we go to the doctor when we are healthy? We typically only go if we know that we have a problem. If we think we are strong, we think we do not need help. Jesus came not for those that had it all figured out, but those that knew they needed help. If I know that I am weak, I will seek help. (Someone will be proofreading this and it is humbling that I need to ask for help.)

I am reminded of a quote from Hudson Taylor. He said, “All God’s giants have been weak men who did great things for God because they reckoned on His being with them.” This got me thinking about some of the Biblical heroes in whom we find strengths.

Gideon – an angel approached him and called him a valiant warrior, and he had to take a moment to check and see if there was someone behind him. Who, me? I am the weakest of the weak.

David – called the man after God’s own heart, yet he dealt with adultery, lying, stealing, murder...

Peter – the leader of the first church couldn’t go a day without disowning Christ, even though he claimed he would die first.

Noah – the man God chose to start over with. He struggled with the bottle and maybe loneliness and depression.

I could go on with others and put my name and yours right along with all of these. We are a weak people that like to think we are strong. But the reality is that our greatest strength is not as strong as God’s weakness. Our greatest wisdom doesn’t even compare God’s foolishness. (1 Cor. 1:25 roughly)

Although it may sound depressing to be called weak, there is a positive note. This is the way God intended it to be. We were made to depend on God. We are programmed to be incomplete without God. He wants to use us because of our weaknesses, not in spite of them.

1 Corinthians 1:27 “But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong..”

God knows that we are weak. Do we? Can we put our “so called” strengths aside, put away the fake self-confidence, stop pretending to be invincible and be the weak people that God created? Like Paul, we are to boast in our weakness so the power of Christ may be shown in us! Will we let Christ take our identity and let his be shown in us?

ABOUT THE LAWRENCEVILLE YOUTH

Being born and raised in the Lawrenceville Church of God of Abrahamic Faith, I came to know the Lord as my Savior in my early teens (13 yrs. Old). During this time, I have gained some experience in working with youth. I am no expert, but I do have 16 years experience being the Sr. High Youth Leader. Prior to that, I taught Jr. Church for several years. I actually started teaching a Wed. Night Class for toddlers when I was 13 years old. If anyone was to ask me to give them some advice about teaching youth (and some have), I do have a few things I wanted to share:

1. Pray – Pray – Pray - As the Bible says, Pray without ceasing.
I pray for guidance, direction, and that God would use me as an instrument for His purpose. I pray that He would open windows of opportunity where He wants the kids to serve. I pray for ideas that would draw their attention. I pray for the group, that it would grow spiritually, and grow in number. To me, numbers are lost souls, so I like to see growth. I pray for the kids, sometimes by name, that they would grow spiritually and reach out to others and I pray for their problems. I pray for lots of things.
2. Stay in the Word. Read your Bible daily. This is how I stay in tune with God.
3. Put Him First in everything you do.
4. Figure out your purpose and goal as a youth leader.
Mine is to:
 - a) To seek and save the lost (grow in number)
 - b) Help them to grow spiritually
 - c) Get them to bond with each other. I think it is vitally important for their Christian survival for them to have Christian friends. I stressed this and arranged this with my own kids as well as the kids in the youth group. There is so much trouble out there that they can get into. This is so important that they connect with each other. I do not try to be their best friend. You hear this so often, that as a youth leader you have to be in close relation to the kids, I disagree. I think as a leader it is your job to be the adult and not one of them. Nevertheless, I feel that it is my job to make them respect each other and develop friendships with each other. This will keep them coming, not that you are their best friend. I do not think they want a 50-year-old (Ugh!) woman to be their best friend. It gets more difficult to connect, the older you get, but I do not think it is necessary. I do have to keep up on their music and interests, but I do not think I have to be one of them.
5. I plan 1 Service Project a month. I think it is important to teach them to serve as Jesus did. This is my favorite part of being a youth leader, because I love to do mission work. I think it is important to get them to like it, and even enjoy it. This is especially important in the culture that we live in, where everything is “me, me, me”. It is good for kids to learn not to be so selfish and to give of themselves. We buy Bibles (paper back NIV New Testaments from International Bible Society for 87 Cents) and have the kids pass them out at every opportunity. We pray over them before passing them out. We pass them out at Craft Shows, Soup Kitchens, Food Pantries, For Trick or Treat, Safe House in Atlanta, Panama City Florida Rescue Mission, etc.
6. I plan 1 fun activity a month. This is to keep them coming. It also helps them to bond. This serves as an outreach. It's easier for them to invite their friends to go bowling, rather than a bible study. This introduces the new kid to other Christians, so eventually they will feel comfortable and want to come to the bible study.

7. We have a youth meeting/Bible Study 1 night / week, except during the summer. You need to find a night that most of the kids are available. Ours is Sunday Night.

a) I mainly teach Jesus. I try to present the gospel every week. This might be the only time that some kids ever hear about him.

b) I try to teach something with some meat. Last year I taught a series on Courage. Blue Fish TV has very good resources. It comes with a video that you show and then a Bible Lesson that goes with it. I have used almost all of the Blue Fish series.

I like them because the videos are excellent, the kids can relate to them, and the Bible Lessons are always good. They are very easy to teach.

I have taught Contagious Christianity. That was a video series with workbooks. I really like the Youth Specialty material called Creative Bible Lessons on John, The Life of Christ, Revelation, etc. There are several to choose from. They are all good, but I would start with John.

c) I never teach doctrine. If it comes up, I tell them how we believe, but it is never the topic of my class. I feel that is for Sunday school. We have some kids that attend other churches, but come to our youth group. My main purpose is to teach the Gospel.

d) Use the Bible a lot. Let God's Word speak to them. That way, the class is never a failure. Believe me, I have left the class several times thinking that they did not hear anything I said. However, God tells us in His word that His Word will never go void. So if you always use His word, He will accomplish something. Make sure they have a Bible of their own. If not, give them one. In addition, I keep a box of those 87-cent Bibles in the classroom for the Bible Study. It is good for everyone to have the same version and you can refer to a page # so the new kids are not struggling to find it. It is very good for them to see the words in the Bible for themselves.

e) We have music each week, by the Youth Music Leader. This can be on CD or live, depending on the talent of the Music Leader.

f) We have prayer requests each week. The kids write them down and hang them on a clothesline in the room. Each week the Prayer Leader takes them down and gives them to one of the youth who volunteer to pray for them. We pray for the request until it is answered. Then we take them off of the line. It is a good idea to have the secretary record each prayer request and its answer so that you can review what God has done.

g) We take up offering each week. We encourage them to give. The treasurer counts the money. Our offering goes to 2 sponsored children. One is through Compassion and the other one is through World Vision. We also buy 5 Bibles per month through American Bible Society that are sent to foreign countries.

We have pop available for them to buy for 50 cents. We keep microwave popcorn there for anyone who wants it for free. We always serve a snack of some type after the meeting is over. Walking tacos, mac & cheese, hamburgers, hot dogs, grilled cheese, pizza, etc. Sometimes the most often question we get before youth is, "What are we eating tonight". This usually comes from one of the boys. Food definitely gets their attention. After we eat, we will play a game. They LOVE Dodge Ball. Our new church facility allows us to do this.

8. We take a break from weekly meetings in the Summer. The break is mainly for me, LOL.

We still do a lot of youth activities in the summer: swimming parties, Mission Trip, Kings Island Christian Concert Weekend, FUEL, SUMMIT, Putt Putt, Movies, go for ice cream, etc. I think it is good for them to play together. It helps them bond before school starts so that they will want to hang around each other. I start in August, trying to do something every Sunday Night to get them used to coming back. Then in September, we start up again with the weekly Bible Study.

9. Create positions/jobs for them to do. This helps them feel that they are a part of the group. It also helps them grow into what they feel their gift is. We have the Normal positions: President, VP, Secretary, Treasurer. They have to be a Church Of God member to hold one of these positions. Then, we elect a Music Leader, Prayer Leader, Devotion Leader, Photographer, Attendance person, Birthday Recognizer, etc. Anyone that comes regularly can do one of these jobs. This has worked well. I would encourage any youth leader to do this. It gives them ownership and also can be a learning experience for them. It also makes your job easier.
- 10) Feed them as much as possible. Kids love to eat. Americans eat 100 acres of Pizza everyday. So we try to do our part.
11. One thing I do to ensure good attendance is I call or text each of them before every Meeting, Bible Study, or activity. There are so many things pulling on them and wanting their attention. I want to be the last thing pulling on them so that they will come. This helps stay in touch and it also helps you to get to know their parents. I have met so many people through this youth ministry.
12. We started something on Wednesday nights that we have been doing for about 2 years. We take the youth and go and visit our shut-ins. Some of them are in Nursing Homes. Some still live at home alone. We sing to them and sometimes serve them communion if they want it. We usually have 15-20 kids that do this. One of our youth even started playing the guitar so that he can help lead the music. It is a real blessing, not only to the person we have visited, but also to each of us that go.

I do have help from other parents, which is much appreciated, but my right hand man is my husband, Gary. He keeps discipline in the group and is great with the kids. He helps with the planning and organizing and helps me teach.

I do have a message for the parents of youth. As I mentioned earlier, these kids are being pulled from all directions to do anything else except church. It is important as parents to involve your kids in a positive, Godly environment as much as possible therefore your church youth group is a great place to be. There is a disturbing epidemic going on in our country with parents allowing kids to make their own choices when it comes to church. We have heard many reasons as to why they did not attend youth, but the ones that involve the parent giving the child the option to come or not are difficult to understand. Gary and I never gave our kids an option when it came to church or youth as long as they were living in our house. We made the decision for them, this leaves less stress on them and you are always making the right decision, because you are exposing them to a Godly environment. As parents, we only have our kids for a little while, so it is our responsibility to expose them to God and the Gospel as much as possible. They will always have time for Sports, school activity and friends, so why not teach them to make time for God while you have them under your control.

One more advice to parents is to never use "Youth" as a disciplinary tool against your kids. Some kids love youth so much that some parents will use that against them to do homework, clean their rooms etc. If you teach them to make God the center of their lives, you will be raising a child after God's own heart.

I would like to finish by saying "Make Youth Priority in Your Church". They are our future pastors, worship leaders, Sunday School teachers, Youth leaders, Deacons, Elders, Doctors, Nurses and yes, maybe even a Politicians. Most importantly, they will be future parents. Those of you, who were blessed to be raised in a Christian / Godly home, understand the importance of our future parents to raise their kids in a Godly home.

In His Service,
Jill Hedges, Sr. Youth Leader
Lawrenceville Church of God

Lawrenceville Church of God Youth



30 Hour Famine



Mission Trip



Beach Prayer



Baptism





Christmas Party



Dodge Ball



Visiting

Leading Worship



Habitat for Humanity



Snow Tubing

RESPONSES COME INCREMENTALLY

By Dale H. Swartz

Dateline: Oregon, Illinois 1971 - When I graduate from Oregon Bible College I'm going to pastor a church full time and my church will be like the churches seen in the Book of Acts. I am going to turn the world upside down just as the Apostles did. I can't wait to preach my first sermon like Peter did. When he preached in Acts 2 over three thousand people answered his alter call and then Acts 4:4 another five thousand men were baptized. Yes sir, the world is going to change when I get into pastoral ministry. Dateline: Litchfield, Minnesota 2012 - Boy things have not turned out as I planned. I've been preaching the gospel faithfully for over forty years, I've pastored churches in four states and one Canadian province, and during that time according to my records, I have baptize 99 people, but I have conducted 100 funerals; which gives me a net loss of 1 over the 40 years. Have been a success or a failure? Well, to be honest those numbers can't be compared that way as the number of conversions versus the number of deaths has no direct correlation with each other; but I hope you get the picture.

Did any other pastor believed, as I did, that you would take the world by storm only to have your hopes and dream collapse? I can't help but believe that I'm not alone. The story is told of a newly baptized believer who came up out of the water all enthused, excited and ready to share his new found faith with everyone he met. Amidst all the excitement, one well-seasoned Christian exclaimed, "he'll get over it!"

In the Book of Acts we see large numbers of people being converted all at one time, but today it's a lot different. We deal with people pretty much one on one. There have been those times when several people accepted Christ at the same time and all the saints in the congregation rejoice with great exuberance. Most churches experience the birth of new Christians in groups of ones and twos; and often times it comes at the end of many hours of teaching, counseling, prayer, and loving kindness.

In my current pastorate, I have served my congregation for almost thirteen years. There have been good times and bad times; there have been births and deaths; there have been conversions and yet others have fallen away. These last individuals are probably the ones for which my heart aches the most; but I have to remember that God created each of us with free will. I have come a long way in my spiritual growth. I have learned that the birth of new people to Christ is going to take place when I step back and let God, through the Holy Spirit, do the work.

Another lesson every pastor knows is that it take time to get to know people in order to earn the right to share the gospel message. From the first day in Litchfield, I have worked a secular job. I first worked at the local McDonald's restaurant. After fast food, I began driving a local transit bus throughout the county and five years ago, I added to that a part time job assisting at the local funeral home. Through all of those outlets have met a great number of people; many of whom I know by face rather than

by name. The "Voice of Tomorrow" radio program on Sunday mornings has yielded throngs of positive comments regarding the scriptures and now, after almost five years on radio, there are new people attending the church on a regular basis.

I find it interesting that even though the book of Acts tells about thrones of people accepting Christ at one time, there are also many stories of people being converted one on one or in small groups. Philip baptized the Eunuch (Act 8), Paul baptized the Philippian jailer and his family, and Peter baptized the family of Cornelius just to name a few. The importance of these conversions is no less important to God than the multiple births in Acts 2:41 and Acts 4:4. The number, or quantity, of people being saved at one time is not as important to God as is the opportunity being made available to every person. Each person is a soul for whom the Lord Jesus died. Referring to God longsuffering nature, Peter said "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

Let me share with you some of the techniques that I have used recently that I see as being successful. First of all, when I discuss doctrine with people knowing that we have differences, these are people with whom I have come to know and trust, and I have earned the right to be able to discuss sensitive and personal issues of faith with them. These talks are always held one on one, not in a group setting. When discussing the Biblical truths that are unique to the Church of God, Abrahamic Faith, I will often say: "I know you believe the Bible to teach thus and so (whatever the doctrine is that we're discussing). Even though I'm a pastor, I am struggling to understand that point of view. Would you explain it to me?" Or on other occasions I will say: "Ok, I will agree with you that the Bible says this or that." (I temporarily accept my friend's doctrinal position on subject at hand.) "If that is true, please explain this verse from the Bible as it seems to say something completely different from what you are saying. I really want to know"! By talking about doctrine in this way I am not be judgmental of my friend's position and I am not saying his position is wrong. I understand that he truly believes in his position and there is true Biblical support for his position. Therefore I simply ask him for clarity on his doctrinal position so that I might understand it as he does. Most of the time when he cannot answer me, he has said, "what do you think?" Now he has given me permission to share my Biblical point of view on the subject.

The current results are that I have had eight new people attending regularly for since just before Christmas and they are beginning to see for themselves that what I am teaching makes a lot more sense and they are seeing the flaws in what they had been taught for years. One person who is now attending our church regularly is a person with whom I have been sharing scripture with for 10 years.

Yes, at the beginning of my ministry I wanted to turn the world upside down. I had to learn that my ways were not necessarily God's ways. I also had to learn that Jesus said: "I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18) and therefore Dale had to get out of the way. Through everything I cling to Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 15:58 where he says: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord."

WHAT DOES ALL THIS MEAN????

(Part 3)

By David Hixon



Last time we stopped in Luke 21. If you remember Luke 21 parallels Matthew 24. Jesus was telling the disciples AND us the things that would take place at the end of the age.

Remember what Jesus said, we must always keep this in the front of our minds when we see these things taking place. Luke 21:28-” But when these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

Let’s go now to Verse 29-31 – “Then He told them a parable: “Behold the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they put forth leaves, you see it and know for yourselves that summer is now near. So you also, when you see these things happening,” and He just spoke about the Middle East and Jerusalem, “when you see these things happening, recognize that the kingdom of God is near.”

So, you and I, certainly we’re not going to set dates and say we know it’s going to come in five years or ten or fifteen or twenty. We can’t do that and we

shouldn’t do that; but, my, if we’re watching what’s going on in the world and even in the Church, all of these are signs of the time of the end, knowing the Kingdom of God is near.

What does Christ say, in verse 34 , again, what are His warnings and admonitions to us:

Verses 34-35 – “Be on guard,” Who is He talking to? The disciples AND US TOO! “Be on Guard,” check yourself. You can’t do it for anybody else, but you can take heed to yourself. Don’t let your heart “weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life,” you know, get side-tracked. Stay focused, so that day doesn’t “come on you suddenly like a trap; for it will come upon all those who dwell on the face of all the earth.”

Most people don’t understand and are going to be so busy just involved in life and in their goals and in their desires in life and what’s most important to them. They’re not focusing on God and what really matters and what really is important, not as they should; and they’re going to be caught off guard by all these events.

And so, what this well-known verse, verse 36—many wonderful verses in the Bible, this is certainly one of them, where Jesus told us that we don’t necessarily have to go through horrible things in the end time. You know, our main motivation to be at church is not to escape with our lives; but, you know, it’s not a bad thing if you do, right? It’s not wrong.

I like what Jesus said. He told His disciples in verse 36, “But keep on the alert at all times” “Watch,” that means be alert, be aware of what’s going on, “praying,” so there’s that thing of the oil, “praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place...”

Why did Jesus say that? Because it is possible, and because many will be protected and blessed and spared the horrors that are going to come to pass in this end-time age, “... that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

So that’s a very positive and encouraging verse from Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. But if He chooses someone to be a martyr, like the two witnesses, then that’s...He’ll pick people that He knows can handle that. The two witnesses, whoever they are, and when He raises them up, they’re going to know ahead of time how they’re going to die, because it’s written in scripture. They know. But He’ll choose people who say, “Bring it on.” So here’s a warning, as we watch world events. “Keep on alert at all times.”

I want to summarize these warnings from Jesus Christ with three points on things that we can be doing, so that we heed these warnings.

We’ve read these things before; we know they’re there; but let’s bring it down to three things that we should be doing. I’m sure many of you have been doing these for years, many of you. So my encouragement to you is, don’t let up. Let us help one another to keep going.

Here’s the first one of these three final points:

1. Let’s keep our heart in God’s church and in His work, no matter what.

Christ emphasized that over and over and over. But let’s maintain our zeal and enthusiasm for God and His church and His work.

Don’t let anyone in a bad attitude turn you off on God or God’s church, His people, those who are converted, those who love Him, no matter who they are, where they are, as part of God’s people, God’s church.

We’re part of the Church of God, the people of God. And so, it’s very important, God says in scripture, don’t let any human being, you know, people can get into wrong attitudes and can just become discouraged, negative, or, “I don’t want to be a part of any of these lousy churches...look at these ministers. They’re always causing problems!” Hey, look beyond us. Look beyond human beings. Look to God! He uses fallible, imperfect human beings, even in the ministry, right? Yes, He does. Look beyond. Look to God and say, “God, what big lessons are you wanting me to learn through all these trials in my life and in the church?”

One of the obvious ones is put your faith where it should be—in God! Trust in Him. Keep your nose in the Bible and you will not let anybody turn you off on being a part of God’s people and God’s work. And if they’re getting all disillusioned—and there are lots of people, I’m fully aware of that, who are out there, independent, and don’t want to be a part of anything. “No, I don’t want to be a part of any organized thing. Look what happened...blah, blah, blah.” I just feel sorry for them. I really do. I just hope they’ll grow up before it’s too late and become an active, dynamic part of the church and the work of God; they can’t let their anger, resentment, and bitterness cause them to not get in there and become a part of the church and the work of God.

They didn’t learn and they didn’t grow. They just dropped out. And that’s one of the things we cannot allow to happen. Keep your heart in God’s church and in His work, and don’t let any human being turn you off on God and the church and the work of God. Just keep learning.

The second lesson that we can learn,...there are many lessons to learn. These are just kind of a summary of three key critical and important ones that I think Christ emphasizes.

The second one I've got is:

2. Love and serve our brethren in the faith fervently.

Maintain that love for the brethren and a desire to serve one another and love one another and keep growing in that. Christ emphasized that as being so very important. If we don't learn to do it better and love one another, it's a big mistake. Notice 1 Peter, chapter 4, verse 8 . Peter learned it and God used him to write this.

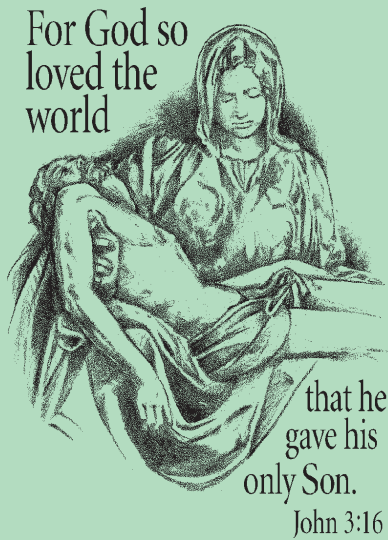
1 Peter 4:8- "Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins." We don't condone sin; we don't approve sin; sin is bad. It's wrong in all of our lives; but the love of God and the love for one another will help you to help somebody, no matter what their problem is, no matter what their addiction may be, no matter what they're struggling with, what sin in their life, you love them. You love them, and you give them help and support and encouragement. Pull one another out of the fire, you know, it says in Titus.

You know, God can use us if we have enough of the love of God. No matter what a person is struggling with, no matter what attitude he's in, you try to look through it. Even if they're angry and mad at you and attacking you, just don't do back to them the same thing. Forgive. Forgiveness is a big one. So, loving and serving our brethren in the faith, fervently, is very important, Christ emphasized.

And then, thirdly

3. Grow in God's love for people in this world around us.

Not just the brethren, but let us grow in God's love for people in this world around us and let us give our lives for them. Let us lay down our lives and be living sacrifices in God's church and in God's work, knowing what's coming. Our neighbors, our workmates, people that sometimes maybe we don't like too well or get along too well with, God says to love them and pray for them. You don't have to like them and like what they're doing, but God wants us to grow in love for people.



Let's close with John 3:16- "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."

A well-known scripture, but a powerful one. In this point...and I hope that we in can develop within the church things to help people who are struggling, that God is calling out of sin. I want us to keep growing and learning how to help people who have addictions of all kinds in their lives because as God calls people out of the world, they're going to have all kinds of problems, as you know. We do. And they're going to have needs.

We're going to need to have people who have that love, saying, "Look, we're all sinners, and God calls people out of sin and out of the world, and the church is a place of healing. The church is a place where you come to overcome sin and get support and help and encouragement and you learn God's way and you become motivated and you want to come out of sin, you want to get help with your problems and your addictions."

You seek it, you pray about it, and it's available within the church, where ministers and elders and leaders, brothers and sisters, we're not self-righteous, but we love God and His way and we want to love the people of this world.

All I know is we'd better be the way Jesus was and the way Paul was when he wrote the Corinthians, "Such were some of you, but now you are sanctified through Jesus Christ."

So God calls people, and I know people in the congregations of the churches of God who have...rarely will you find some who are struggling with certain things like that, unless they come into a group of people with leaders who understand where they're coming from and coming out of certain problems in their life, you would never know.

They would never share it with anybody because of the nature of it and the way people look at it. So my point is, when God calls people out of the world into His church, there can be all kinds of, we could say, secret sins and problems, of all kinds imaginable—anything and everything—and Jesus Christ said that part of the gospel message that God has called me to preach is to heal the broken hearted.

Our world is filled with a lot of broken-hearted, hurting people. Maybe people trapped by sinful addictions and sinful lifestyles who need to find a home in the church of God that has the truth of God, teaches the truth of God, but also has the love, mercy, and compassion and understanding that our doors are open to all of God's people, and anyone with any problem who wants support and help, love and encouragement, because that's the way God is.

God loves sinners. God LOVES sinners with His whole heart and soul and mind and being and gave His Son for sinners, every sinner, all of us, didn't He?

So let's grow. Jesus Christ emphasized this, to "follow My example." Let's grow in love for the people of this world around us and let us give our lives for them.

So we'll close with John 3:16-17- "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved."

So, let's keep watching world events, watch the Middle East especially. As Jesus said, keep your eyes on Jerusalem, and let us heed the warnings of Jesus Christ and let us help one another to draw closer to God, to become more zealous for God, to love one another and love the people of this world, and let us keep moving forward in the Church of God to do the work that God has called us to do.



The Funeral That Was Called Off

By Rex F. Cain

I believe I can say with confidence that you have never been to a funeral that was called off because the deceased got up out of his own casket! As far as I know, this has happened only one time in all of recorded human history ... and I suspect, it applies just as well to all of unrecorded human history!

Not that some have not risen from the dead – Jesus himself raised 3 to life and one of them was in the coffin on the way to the cemetery. But only one was raised to immortality never to die again ... and all of us here this morning know well who that was!

Have you ever asked yourself – what was the cause that gave birth to Christianity? If you ponder it, you come to an almost overwhelming conviction that whatever the cause, it must have been something incredible that would persuade so many Jews, especially so, when you consider the fantastic results that were achieved.

Christianity was a most unpopular religion – both among the Jews and Gentiles. Yet, many accepted it and with such vigor that the scriptures say, THEY TURNED THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN.

Why Jews fought Christianity so vigorously was because:

They had a superior attitude to the Gentiles and would not accept them unless they were ready to adopt Judaism.

A fanatic insistence on keeping the Sabbath (Sat.) as a day of rest.

A determination not to eat forbidden foods as prescribed by Moses.

And a deep hatred of human sacrifice.

From among this ultra-conservative people sprang the leaders of the new faith ... in spite of the new teachings that cut right across the dogmas of the Jewish faith.

The Christians claimed they still believed in only one God. Yet, most Jews regarded that as absurd since the Christians claimed Jesus was sitting at the right hand of God. To Jews, this was blasphemous.

Then there was the question of sacrifice. In the Jewish mind, only animals were sacrificed at the Temple. But Christians were claiming that Jesus – God’s Son! – was executed like a common criminal and became a human sacrifice for sins! “Disgusting!” said the Jews.

And another thing, former Jews (after becoming Christian) worshipped God – of all things – on the first day of the week, Sunday! This was anathema!

And finally, Christian Jews began eating just about anything they wanted in spite of what Moses had written before. All extremely difficult for orthodox Jews to tolerate.

Yet, despite all these objections to this “new kid on the block” (in a manner of speaking) ... to this new faith in the community, we read in Acts: AND THE WORD OF GOD INCREASED; AND



THE NUMBER OF THE DISCIPLES MULTIPLIED GREATLY IN JERUSALEM (right in the heart of Judaism), AND A GREAT MANY OF THE PRIEST WERE OBEDIENT TO THE FAITH. (Acts 6:7)

Thus, the obvious question: what caused this staggering result? What shook these fanatical Jews out of their deep-seated prejudices developed over thousands of years?

Fortunately, we have a Book that recorded those events of 2000 years ago and gives us the answer. At this point in the book, a man named Peter is speaking to thousands of Jews gathered for an annual festival in Jerusalem following some dramatic God-ordained miracles: a strong wind had just swept across the city and flames of fire danced in mid air over certain Christians. They were able to speak in foreign languages – the languages of those gathered there for the festival from many countries.

Acts 2:14 Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. 15 These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning! 16 No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

17 “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. (Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. (18 Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, (and they will prophesy. (19 I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. (20 The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. (21 And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’

22 “Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. 23 This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. 24 But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.

Acts 2:32 God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. 33 Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.

Acts 2:36 “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” 37 When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” 38 Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The answer to the question, “What caused this staggering result in Jerusalem - the heart of Judaism?” It was simply this: The funeral for Jesus had been called off! It didn’t take place. Death could not keep its grip on Him. He walked away from the cold dark tomb. There were many witnesses to this truth. Jesus was alive! He is still alive! He will return to earth and to

Jerusalem again! He will set up a Kingdom. He will establish a righteous one-world government. He will become KING OF KING AND LORD OF LORDS!

Peter didn't pull any punches in his sermon ... much of which we did not read. But he did make this telling point: He said, LET ALL ISRAEL (the Jews) BE ASSURED OF THIS, GOD HAS MADE THIS JESUS WHOM YOU CRUCIFIED (the Jews he's speaking to) BOTH LORD AND CHRIST (the master of our lives / the Messiah that was promised to Israel). (v. 36) We read the Jews WERE CUT TO THE HEART. They even begged, WHAT MUST WE DO TO BE SAVED? Peter responded simply, REPENT AND BE BAPTIZED FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS AND YOU WILL RECEIVE THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

Think of this – the very ones who consented to Jesus' execution – some perhaps who had a hands-on involvement, were told to repent, be baptized and they would be blessed. So, don't let anyone ever tell you that they are too bad to go to church. Better said, that they are too wicked to find salvation in Christ. Only one thing in this life is unforgivable by God and that is a constant refusal to acknowledge that God is God. To persistently declare by words and deeds that He does not exist and has not worked a plan for your redemption from sin.

Peter's sermon was pretty effective that day. 3000 were baptized! 3000 admitted they had, indeed, crucified the very Messiah whom they had longed for for centuries and when he arrived, they killed him. But they repented and evidently, were forgiven and will be in Christ's coming Kingdom here on earth.

Because that funeral was called off, it has changed the course of human history. We have never been the same since. And to think, Jesus is still alive as I speak ... as we gather here today. He could appear in this room. He could return this evening or tomorrow. We do believe it will be soon.

It is my earnest prayer that you are here this morning because you sincerely believe that Jesus did, in fact, rise from the dead.

It's surely obvious that the early disciples and the tens of thousands that followed over the years did not choose to die a martyr's death because they believed the Roman propaganda that the Roman guards had stolen Jesus' body from the tomb. If they had, why didn't they produce the body to prove it was all a hoax?

They certainly didn't die cruel deaths because they thought the early believers had taken his body and buried it out in the desert somewhere. Who would allow themselves to be horribly tortured for a dead hero whose words were never true from the start?

The only reason believers thru the centuries have chosen to suffer and die, if necessary, was obviously because they were convinced that Jesus' funeral was called off! That Jesus rose from the dead! That he was alive even as they were dying!

Peter, persuaded completely that he had seen Jesus alive after his crucifixion ... and that he witnessed on the Mount of Transfiguration Jesus' future kingdom and glorification ... and realizing his readers then and now (you and I) did not have his privilege, wrote this for the ages: **THOUGH YOU HAVE NOT SEEN HIM, YOU LOVE HIM; AND EVEN THOUGH YOU DO NOT SEE HIM NOW, YOU BELIEVE IN HIM AND ARE FILLED WITH AN INEXPRESSIBLE AND**

GLORIOUS JOY, FOR YOU ARE RECEIVING THE GOAL OF YOUR FAITH, THE SALVATION OF YOUR SOULS. (I Peter 1:8,9 NIV)

That's us. We've never seen Jesus alive (or dead!). But I'm convinced he's alive. I can't believe the first disciples, in the heat of the moment – in the days following Christ's death – would let themselves suffer so much for a man they believed was dead. No, they saw him alive and for that, they were even willing to die. And they did die ... and many over the centuries for their faith.

Because that funeral was called off, we have been called to God with an incredible hope! Our own resurrection and immortality! Can you imagine it? Paul wrote: **NO EYE HAS SEEN, NO EAR HAS HEARD, NO MIND HAS CONCEIVED WHAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM. (I Cor. 2:9niv)** I pray we're among this number.

About 50 years after Jesus' resurrection, Paul was writing these words. Obviously, he was still convinced Jesus was alive...

1 Cor. 15:20 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. 22 For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. 23 But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.

Simple and simply profound statements: *Christ has been raised ... all men are going to die because of Adam ... Christ has given us resurrection hope ... in Him all men shall live.* Christ was first to rise to immortality, we who believe and obey will be next ... **AT HIS COMING...THOSE WHO BELONG TO CHIRST**, as Paul puts it. Does that promise stir you at all? Paul writes to other brethren...

1 Thess. 4:14 We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. 15 According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. 18 Therefore encourage each other with these words.

If we believe Jesus rose, argues Paul, we can believe the dead in Christ will also live again...and will be forever with the Lord!

Finally, when John the Apostle was an old man, persecuted and finally exiled on the island of Patmos in the present day Aegean Sea just off the coast of present day Turkey, Jesus appears to John. He infuses John by God's Spirit to write the book of Revelation.



Jesus repeated himself three times in the last chapter obviously making a critical point to John and all who would read Revelation:

Rev. 22:7 "Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book."

Rev. 22:12 "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done."

Rev. 22:20 He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

What more can I say? The funeral was called off. Jesus is alive. He has promised over and over that he will return. There's no other religion or faith in all the world that has a resurrected living immortal Lord that can make these same promises for his followers!

Remember, even the Jews who took part in Christ's crucifixion were forgiven. Peter said all that it took was to **REPENT AND BE BAPTIZED**.

INVITATION

When Jesus spoke to John on the island (and to us), he said, **HERE I AM! I STAND AT THE DOOR** (he means, the door of our hearts) **AND KNOCK. IF ANYONE HEARS MY VOICE AND OPENS THE DOOR, I WILL GO IN AND EAT WITH HIM, AND HE WITH ME.** (Rev. 3:20)

In a word, Jesus is asking us to open our hearts, our lives to His indwelling. He wants to fellowship with us – **TO EAT** with us, he said. Are you enjoying this fellowship with Christ? Is He real to you or just another historical figure that is long dead? Have you heard him knocking at your heart to enter your daily life?

To believe he's dead is to be dead wrong, for He is alive.

If you've never opened your heart to the Living Jesus, the opportunity is yours even now. It's your choice – and I pray you will always make wise choices.





Keeping Christ the Center of Easter

By Merry Peterson

When asked to write this article for this publication I was a little hesitant. Many people view Easter very differently from each other. Some are of the assumption that it should be called Resurrection Sunday, others go with the culturally accepted name of Easter (inspite of its pagan origin in name.) As Christians the holiday is centered around the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a wonderful time of year and one of the greatest events in history that we celebrate. The challenge becomes in our world so full of commercialism and consumerism: how do we teach our children to treasure the real reason we celebrate this special Sunday in spring.

The object of this article is to give parents, caregivers, and Sunday School teachers some practical suggestions on Keeping Christ Center in our Easter celebrations. It is our duty to pass on to our children the importance of our Christian faith. A Bible passage that comes to mind when considering how best to ensure this happens is Romans 10:8-15. It says: "But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." For there is no difference between Jews and Gentile – the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?"(Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION. Copyright 1973,1978,1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.)

How will our children know of the story of God's beautiful plan of salvation if no one tells them or shares their faith or the gospel message with them? Imagine the joy of sharing the greatest event in history that is relevant to each individual's daily life and eternal life on planet earth. This is the challenge in our society; to keep Christ ever before us in view as adults and subsequently transmit that view to our children.

Keeping Christ ever before us should be our goal as Christian adults and the life that we model for our children. The best way to model this for our children is in our everyday actions and conversations. One of the best teaching tools that I have found is the conversations that happen while you are in the car with the kids, or at any other point in time when you are conversing with your children. Conversations may start off in many different ways, your opportunity as the model is to look for the teachable moments that happen by using the kid's conversations as a segue to a much deeper spiritual topic. For example: If the kids are





talking about cute baby lambs you can use that conversation to segue into a conversation about how Jesus is the lamb of God. This can be phrased as: 'you know there is a very special kind of lamb who had a special kind of job from God to do' then the explanation can go on from there. Another conversation that could happen is about cute baby chicks or butterflies or anything in creation that is new. This can segue into a conversation about how God makes us into a new creation through Christ and how that is accomplished. Another conversation that that could occur is when shopping for Easter clothing and children ask why they are putting on nice clothes in particular for that day. This is the opportunity you have as a parent to explain that you want to look your very best because God gave his very best and then go on to explain how God gave his best when he gave us his son. These are ways to relate the real spiritual meaning for the Easter celebration so that it takes on a deeper significance for children and ceases to be just about candy and bunnies and baby chicks.

The next suggestions are activities that you can do with your children. Prior to Good Friday you may wish to bake hot cross buns with your children. This is a yummy treat to make with your kids and they can put the crosses on the top with icing as a way to remember that Christ died on the cross (perfect time to discuss the topic while they are doing it). Many recipes are included in recipe books or can be found online. Another kitchen activity that can be used in Sunday school or at home is Resurrection empty tombs. This is an easy activity to use as you discuss the burial and resurrection story of Jesus. Take refrigerator biscuit dough like Pillsbury biscuit dough and have children make the sections into cave shapes. Next take a Peep brand marshmallow bird and stuff it into the hole in the cave. Meanwhile explain that Jesus was buried in a cave kind of grave. Next pinch the dough closed to 'seal off the tomb. Then you will bake the dough on baking sheets just as the directions on the package instruct. When the buns come out you have the children open up their 'graves' and inside they will find that it is empty – just like Jesus' tomb was empty after he was resurrected. It is also a yummy treat that they will enjoy eating.

Craft ideas that children enjoy are making lambs with a paper outline and fluffing them out by gluing cotton balls onto them. This is when you could use the conversation about how Jesus is the lamb of God. Another craft idea is making butterflies out of coffee filters that have been painted with watercolor paints and then pinched in at the middle with a chenille stem wrapped to make the body and the ends twisted at the top to make the butterfly's antennae. This is the opportunity you have to explain how butterflies go from being a caterpillar to becoming a beautiful butterfly. They become a new creation through transformation, just like through what Christ did for us on the cross by taking away our sins we become a new creation that is beautiful to God and others. We are transformed by the power of the cross from death to life. An additional craft that is fairly easy is to make is a flat paper rock outline out of construction paper. Then cut out a smaller paper rock out of the same paper. Have your child decorate the outside of the bigger rock with crayon or markers or stickers with flowers to make it a garden and have them glue a small cut out figure of Jesus on the large rock somewhere near the middle. Then take a paper fastener and put it through the smaller rock





and then through the bigger rock so that the smaller rock can pivot and open up the grave to reveal Jesus who is underneath. These craft activities take only a few supplies and yet can provide the opportunity to explain the Easter story and its importance with your youngsters.

Participation in a Good Friday service is a great opportunity for children to understand the importance of Christ's death. As a child I remember we had Good Friday off of school in Canada which left us free to attend our church's Good Friday service. This service centered around the night of prayer, betrayal, arrest, Death, and burial of Christ. It was a very somber service which as I remember helped to cement the brevity and ultimate importance of these events in the life of Christ and their significance to the believer today. The next important activity is to be sure to attend your church's Resurrection Sunday Celebration. The gathering of believers to celebrate with jubilation the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ is a very important part of raising children in the Christian faith. Jesus overcoming death and the grave is a fascinating subject for children and the fact that Jesus was raised to life eternal and makes it possible for us to be raised to eternal life someday is even more fascinating to them.

There are resources available for reading with your children and other media available that would appeal to more mature children. For reading with younger children there is a Berenstain Bears book called: *The Berenstain Bears and the Easter Story*, by Jan & Mike Berenstain, (Copyright 2012 by Berenstain Publishing Inc. available through Zonderkids, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49530) This story is exactly about what we are discussing in this article. Brother and Sister bear learn about the meaning of Easter, the book also provides a few questions that you can discuss with your kids from the story. They do a nice job of presenting the story, in a good, succinct way for children.

Another literary gem you can share with your young children is the following poem: *Easter is Really for Jesus* courtesy of Songs 4 Teachers copyright 2006 www.songs4teachers.com

Easter is not just for the Bunny, With goodies and treats that he brings.
Easter is when we must celebrate And alleluia is the song that we sing!
Easter is really for Jesus, Who died and then rose from the dead.
We must always remember the love Jesus showed And all of the things that He said.
So, remember this Easter when you go to Church, And this message you tell everyone.
That Easter is all about Jesus And the bunny and treats are just fun!

For those of you who have more mature children or those oh so sophisticated teens you could look on youtube with them and find music videos of 'Arise My Love' (Easter 2007 edition) , or Watch the Lamb by Ray Boltz (official video). Discussion of questions that arise from viewing these or emotions they experience from viewing these could follow. For much more mature teens you may even decide to watch Mel Gibson's





film : The Passion Of The Christ. Being a tenderhearted soul who could never even stand the milder versions of the crucifixion on other films it is amazing I went to see this at all. Several times I had to close my eyes for a second or two, and once or twice I thought I might vomit, but overall I was glad I put myself through it once. Although I personally have some mixed feelings about the film it does offer the express opportunity to discuss the events of Christ's crucifixion with your teens. Many teens are into horror films and for those who have not seen the film it definitely could be considered a horror film. It is particularly gory, and there is a very visible face to evil in the film. While watching it in the theater it was amazing to hear the questions and exclamations of the other viewers in the theater. It made me wish that I could somehow pause the movie and explain to the other viewers the whys and how comes of the situation that they were viewing. Like why they were whipping Jesus – there was an Old Testament prophecy about that. While the film was lacking in some areas and took a lot of creative license in other areas overall it really was a great discussion starter and made the viewer really stop to consider the events in Christ's life and why this all happened.

Lastly, an activity that appeals to those who enjoy hide and seek, and those ever popular egg hunts you may wish to purchase and use a set of resurrection eggs. Instead of purchasing a set I suggest the following: make your own with the following list. Keep the list with the color or kind of egg handy when you are explaining the contents of the egg so that the eggs can be opened in order of the story contents. You may choose to use the metallic eggs or speckled eggs to help distinguish the eggs from any others if you are mixing them in with other eggs that do have candy or treats inside. I tend to use them alone. These items are all readily available and you may not have to search any further than your own home for these items. Be sure to write down which color egg you have selected for each item. Egg 1: three dimes – this represents silver and how Jesus was betrayed for 30 pieces of silver. Egg 2: A rose thorn or small thorn from another source – this represents the crown of thorns that Jesus wore. Egg 3: two small nails – this represents the nails that were driven into Jesus' hands and feet. Egg 4: a small piece of muslin cloth – this represents how they wrapped Jesus' body in muslin cloth before burying him in the tomb. Egg 5: Spices such as cloves or small cinnamon sticks – to represent the spices that the women took to the grave to put on Jesus' body. Egg 6: a small stone - to represent the stone that sealed the tomb that was rolled away. Egg 7: Keys – explain that Jesus holds the keys to eternal life. Egg 8: Empty – because the grave is empty, Jesus is our risen Savior! Have kids open these special eggs in order as you explain the story. I have children guess what they think might be in the egg first without looking by shaking, listening, and smelling it to see if they can guess what is inside, then I let them open it. Once they open it they can share how they think it relates to the Resurrection story. Through these objects one is provided the opportunity to guide them through the story filling in any gaps in their understanding or teaching them the story if they do not know it.

It is my hope that these practical suggestions will help you and your children celebrate the joy of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ this year. Weather you call it Resurrection Sunday or Easter keep Christ at the center of your celebrations this year and share the glorious news of the gospel with everyone.



MONEY MATTERS TO GOD

By Dan Cain

Allow me to share our financial journey with you. I grew up in a pastor's home where we didn't have the latest and greatest but we had more than enough. My father, Rex, is a conservative man who for my entire life has had zero debt, including his house. I grew up watching him and Mom be frugal in their decision making, save up for things they wanted to buy, and always give generously. Because of this, I instinctively followed their example with money, giving tithes and offerings, and saving quite a bit over time as well. My parents were a tremendous example in this way and in many others. My wife, Rachel, also grew up in a home where some good money principles were taught but like me, she still had much to learn in this area.

Fast forward to college where David Krogh taught me personal finance. He taught me the power of compound interest (which really blew my mind!) as well as how much of a debilitating affect debt can have on people, physically and spiritually. I'd always been a wise spender but I'd never given that much attention to all these details of money before. It was then that I became very interested in doing money God's way and since that time I've had this growing passion inside of me to not only be debt free but to help others find that freedom as well.

Two weeks after Rachel and I got married we packed up everything we owned and moved out to Omaha to do my pastoral internship under the godly leadership of Scott and Christy Ross. Fears began to set in on how we were going to afford to live on an intern's salary as well as pay back Rachel's large pile of student loans (Dad had graciously covered my college expenses). We trusted in God to provide, and He did provide many opportunities for work: substitute teaching jobs for Rachel, free sampling gigs for both of us at SuperTarget on the weekends, as well as some mystery shopping and other odd jobs not only allowed us to cover all our living expenses but somehow even pay down her loan as well as save up for a down payment for a house! It was quite amazing how God was in all the details, even so far as having Scott and Christy host Financial Peace University while we were there (which will be discussed later in this article). It was my first time taking the class and Rachel's second time, as she had taken it with Seth Ross at North Hills while she was in college a few years back.

After the internship when we moved to Oregon, Illinois where I served under the leadership of Michael Hoffman, we really began putting to use what we had learned from my Dad, David, and Financial Peace. We mapped out a plan where we would live below our means and on less than my income and use Rachel's income and the rest of mine to finish off her student loans as well as pay off our new house in about three years. I'm a bit of a nerd, so I would get excited putting extra principal on the house each month, watching the debt go down and being that much closer to breaking the bondage of debt. It was a bold plan, one in which we limited ourselves from buying a lot of extra things even though we could afford them. However, the satisfaction and freedom that would come with having zero debt at the age of 26 was a tremendous motivation for us.

Even with Rachel continuing her education and getting a Master's degree, as well as having our first child, Maranatha, we still were able to pay off the house in exactly three years to the month from when we bought it. We screamed "WE'RE DEBT FREE!" live on the Dave Ramsey Show which was an empowering experience. With no debt whatsoever Rachel could pursue her ultimate dream job - being a stay at home mom.

We got to enjoy being completely debt free for about six months, until we moved to Troy, Ohio. We sold our old house in Oregon for a lot less than what we had paid for it, and we bought a new house in Troy that was more than our last one. Though finances are tight, we still are blessed with the flexibility for Rachel to continue

her full-time job as a stay-at-home mom. To us, that is priceless. Even with our modest single income salary, we're still hoping to pay off our new house in less than ten years and celebrate our debt freedom... again! I share our financial journey with you to try to offer hope that being debt free isn't just some mythical creature that you've heard about but doesn't really exist. For most people, even though culture may tell you otherwise, it is indeed possible to live without debt and is something for which I believe we as followers of Christ should actively strive - not so that we can indulge ourselves with big fancy things and store up vast amounts of unnecessary wealth, but so that we can honor God in this important area of our lives, take away unnecessary money conflict in relationships that matter to us most, be freed up to do the Kingdom business that God is calling us to do, and to not be slaves to anyone or anything else other than willing slaves of our Lord and Master, Jesus the Christ.

So why does money matter so much to God? Because he knows it matters so much to us. There are over 800 Scriptures about money in the Bible, and Jesus talks more about money than any other subject except for the Kingdom of God. God and Jesus know how much of an impact money and possessions have on the heart of fallen man and as you well know, Yahweh is a jealous God who wants to be first above everything else in our lives, including our money.

God and Jesus know too well that money is the #1 competitor for our hearts. Jesus himself said, "No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money" (Luke 16:13). Think about this: of all the countless sins, vices, and temptations Jesus could have picked, he plainly stated that we cannot serve both God and money. He's recognizes that money's overpowering grip can often tightly grasp our hearts, causing division in our mind between loving the God of the universe and of loving green pieces of paper. How tragic!

Paul states it this way, "For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the true faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows" (1 Timothy 6:10). When we place money in a position over God in our lives, all kinds of sin and evil comes about. A Christian who craves money over the One True God wanders from the true faith (this one's bad enough!) but also causes us to be metaphorically gashed all over our body with penetrating wounds. Ouch. We need to get this one right or it could ruin our eternal salvation, like the rich young ruler in Matthew 19, as well as cause us more grief, sorrow, and pain in this life in more ways than we had ever anticipated.

So let me ask - do you trust in money for your happiness? For your security? Do you worship money, love money, serve money, chase after money, spend a lot of your time and energy thinking of how you can get money? Or do you trust in God for real joy and true security? Do you worship Him, serve Him, love Him, chase after Him, and spend your time and energy thinking of how you can get more of Him? Do you love money and use God? Or do you love God and use money?

I want to drive home this point because I believe having our hearts right in this matter is a very crucial step with this issue. I can give you all the budgeting advice and motivation in the world but if your heart is still in the wrong place then we're not digging out the sin problem by the root. Having our heart in the right place includes being content in all circumstances (Philippians 4:11-13), trusting solely in God and not in money because it is so unreliable (1 Timothy 6:17), using our money to do good (1 Timothy 6:18-19), and having great generosity because of our abundant joy (2 Corinthians 8:2-3), among much else.

Also it's important to know that when Jesus talked about the rich and how hard it was for them to enter the Kingdom, he was talking about us - we're vastly rich in comparison with the rest of the world. I want us to become like Zacchaeus in Luke 19:8; once he gave his life to Jesus, money just became another tool that he used to show others who Jesus is. Is the way you spend your money showing others who Jesus is? As for the nuts and bolts side of this, there have been countless pages written on money management so I'll share with you just a few of the things I've found most helpful and then share my best resources for your further growth and motivation.

1) Create a budget (or a “cash flow plan” if you don’t like the “b” word!) in which every dollar is planned out on paper before the month begins. A budget is simply telling your money where to go instead of wondering where it went. In that budget, give, save, and spend - in that order. At least 10% off the top goes back to God as our tithe, our first fruits, honoring Him as our first priority. I would much rather live off of 90% blessed by God than 100% without His blessing. Additionally, save at least 10% of your income if at all possible - your future self will thank you. Build an emergency fund of at least \$1000 and work up to saving 3 to 6 months of expenses.

2) Get the “debt snowball” rolling. Take a piece of paper and list all of your debts in order, smallest to largest. The smallest balance is your first priority; pay the minimum on all your other bills, but attack the smallest debt with any extra money you come up with until it’s paid off. Then apply to the next debt the amount you were paying for the smallest debt, and continue this “snowball effect” until all your debts are paid!

3) Communicate, communicate, communicate. The #1 stated cause of divorce is money fights and money problems. There can’t be any money secrets between you and your spouse - come completely clean. Have lots of grace and mercy toward one another as you plan out your budget together so you both understand the issues that you’re facing, and can make decisions as a team. Finances can be a dividing factor in marriage, but they can also bring you together in a new and deeper way, as you trust God together in this crucial area.

4) Be “gazelle intense.” This is a term coined from Proverbs 6:4-5 and it means that when you’ve gone into debt, when you’re in over your head with money problems, you need to work as hard to get out of debt as a gazelle works to run from a cheetah! Credit card companies and banks are marketing geniuses and they know what they’re doing. The only way to beat debt is to run like a gazelle and refuse to get caught up in their deceptive games. The debt cheetah is on your tail trying to take you down - run like crazy and start getting out of debt now! Gazelle intensity could include getting serious about your budget, cutting up your credit cards, taking an extra job for a while, or selling a bunch of stuff, all with the goal of paying off your debts and staying out of debt.

5) Teach your kids. If you’re a parent, one of your main jobs is to teach your kids all about God - including what He says about handling money. When your kids leave home, they need to know how to handle the financial challenges and temptations they’ll face in the world. Some main things to teach them are how earning money works, how to save and pay cash, the importance of giving, and how to have fun spending on a plan. You will leave a legacy with your children in every way - the question is what kind of legacy will you be leaving?

6) Get help. You need to seek help in this important area of your life before it’s too late. Financial problems can be solved but it often means changes, some of which may not be that easy. A qualified financial planner can help you identify the problem areas and think through solutions that will work for your family. Also, especially if you’re single, getting the support from trusted friends in your life will be key. If you could have done it yourself you would have done it a long time ago. I want to leave you with the greatest resources I’ve found so far - daveramsey.com and Financial Peace University (FPU). Rachel and I have taken FPU multiple times through our local church, I led it twice in Oregon and will likely be taking our current church through it later this year. You can go to the website to find scores of great godly advice about money as well as find an FPU class in your area. If you haven’t taken the course, you need to. If your church hasn’t done the course, consider hosting it. Money is an urgent subject that affects much, much more than just our wallets.

In closing, during your fight to become debt free, you may be called “cheap” - I have. You may be misunderstood and thought of as “weird” - I have. But trust me, I’d much rather be weird than normal - normal with money is worry, tension, anxiety, stress, fear, fighting, living paycheck to paycheck, broke, and deep in debt. Normal isn’t working very well, is it? Your journey to debt freedom won’t be easy, and it may even be a little weird, but it will definitely be worth it.

What could we do for the Kingdom of God if every Christian on the planet was completely debt free? I’d love to find out!

What Does A Nuclear Iran Mean to the World?

By Wally Winner

“The Islamic Republic of Iran does not ask for the permission of any country for implementing its defensive strategies,” a top leader of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) said.

Brigadier General Hossein Salami, Lieutenant Commander of the IRGC, was responding to the U.S. position that any move by Tehran to block the Strait of Hormuz would not be tolerated.

“The US is not in a position to affect Iran’s decisions ... The Americans are not qualified to give us permission for carrying out our military strategy,” he said.



Brigadier General Hossein Salami

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, president of Iran since August 2005, continues his outrageous public record of belligerent words against Israel and the U.S. He has made headlines repeatedly calling for Israel to be wiped off the map, for being a Holocaust Denier and for taking a hard line stance on Iran’s nuclear program.

Not only does Ahmadinejad vigorously fight the international community for Iran’s right to possess nuclear technology, he has Russia and China’s support. Russia supplies the nuclear fuel for the reactor and both Russia and China have stated in 2006 that they will oppose sanctions against Iran in the UN Security Council.

Iran’s alleged nuclear bomb has always induced bitter war rhetoric in the past, but of late, the cacophony has evolved into a sharper indicator of an impending military tussle.

U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta dropped a bomb shell of his own on reporter David Ignatius when he revealed that he believes there is a strong likelihood that Israel will attack Iran in April, May or June 2012. Iran is getting closer to a functional nuclear bomb, a prospect that the West and especially Israel find frightening.

Israeli reports indicate Iran has the capability to develop nuclear missiles that could reach Israel and the U.S. Israel maintains that there is a limited time prior to Iran having a bomb before the window of opportunity to prevent it will be closed.

Though Iran claims its use of enriched uranium is for research purposes only, many now worry Iran has begun to weaponize uranium by enriching it to 90 percent, effectively gaining a nuclear weapon.

Experts expect that Iran will be able to continue to stall any serious UN or US sanctions against the development of her nuclear weapon program. Iran will continue until she has multiple deployable weapons

leading to a showdown with Israel. Israel has typically chosen to preemptively attack such threats, just like she did with Osirak or with Egypt in the Six Day War.

“The Israelis have reached a point where they believe the Iranians are on the verge of what the Israelis refer to as the ‘zone of immunity,’” said Robert Moog, associate professor in public and international affairs at North Carolina State University.

The zone of immunity refers to the point in which, if Israelis choose to strike rather than be struck, they will no longer be able to significantly delay the weaponization of Iran’s nuclear program.

On June 7, 1981, Israel launched a preemptive strike against Iraq’s nuclear reactor at Osirak, just prior to the reactor going hot (to avoid fallout as happened at Chernobyl). Israeli intelligence had confirmed Iraq’s intention of producing weapons-grade uranium. So they sent 14 jets flying below radar that were able to level the reactor in a mere minute and a half. The international response then was outrage.

However, when America fought Desert Storm against Iraq, there were finally expressions of appreciation to Israel for delaying Iraq’s nuclear bomb program as the Osirak attack succeeded in doing.

Just like Iraq was, Iran is one of the largest oil producers in OPEC²⁷ so it is obvious they do not need to pursue nuclear technology for energy.

In September 2006, Israel even leaked attack plans for Iran’s core nuclear facilities. In

September 2007, Israel bombed a facility in Syria which was a nuclear reactor built with help from North Korea.

In June 2008, Israel conducted war games involving 100 fighter jets refueling tankers and helicopters for pilot rescue going 900 miles over the Mediterranean and back. It was a mock operation against Iran to send a message and to prepare for a gloom eventuality.

Should Israel attack Iran, a larger regional war in the Middle East could erupt, drawing in the United States.

According to a March 30, 2011 UPI story, a classified war simulation was held to assess the ramifications of an attack on Iran by Israel, The war games were designed to predict possible outcomes of an Israel-Iran conflict.

The results of the exercise has raised fear among some American officials, including Gen. James N. Mattis, who commands all American forces in the Middle East, Persian Gulf and Southwest Asia.

After the war game ended, officials said Mattis told colleagues an Israeli first strike would likely have dire consequences across the region and for U.S. forces there.

We can easily imagine the aftermath of it. It could be very harmful for the world economy, just as there was a recession in America following the shocking 2001 World Trade Center “9-11” attack.

The fallout in the oil-producing region would disrupt oil production. Even if that is completely avoided, Iran has threatened to disrupt the oil flow if attacked. She plans to torpedo oil tankers going through the Strait of

Hormuz where one quarter of the world's oil supply passes. The result in either case would be a major energy crunch worldwide. The global economy could be hurt with temporarily higher energy prices.

Jerome Corsi claims that sleeper cell Hezbollah agents exist in America ready to strike targets on American soil, perhaps even with low yield nuclear weapons, in defense of Iran. This could seriously constrict the U.S. (and world) economy even worse than 9-11 did.

Ultimately, the war game showed military officials the unpredictable and uncontrollable nature of a strike by Israel, and a counterstrike by Iran.

Many of the moderate states have peace treaties with Israel. As far as the peace treaties are concerned, the Islamic notion of *hudna* says it is legitimate to enter into false treaties with infidels and then break them when in a position of strength. Therefore, it appears that the only thing keeping the Muslims at bay has been Israel's nuclear deterrent.

What then will convince them to disregard the risk of being incinerated and attack?

Suicide bombings will not trigger the prophesied war.

Ahmadinejad is a radical version of Islamic fundamentalism. He is a true religious zealot, living in a simple apartment and believing that the Mahdi is coming back in only a few years and so he operates "on the basis of the Expectation of the Return".

The Mahdi, or "12th Imam" (12th grandson of Mohammad), is the Shiite Muslim version of the second coming of the Messiah—apocalypse and all. Ahmadinejad believes that bringing an apocalypse with Israel will facilitate the return of his Messiah in a few years.

Of course, if he fervently believes that the Mahdi can come back soon, why would he be anything but tough, just as he is so famous for? This makes him exactly the type of "lunatic" classically imagined as pushing "the button".

Since its birth as a Jewish State in 1948, Israel has faced a multitude of threats from its neighbors.

Does the Bible say anything about Iran and a nuclear attack on Israel?

If not Iran, will somebody in the Muslim world use nuclear weapons on a thwarted attempt on Israel.

Currently, the Islamic nations listed in Psalm 83 do not quite seem militarily allied as the Psalm predicts. What has to happen next is that all the Islamic peoples mentioned in Psalm 83 and other prophecies unite to the singleness of mind and military purpose. Only the extreme states like Iran or Syria already openly express the stated goal of Psalms 83 to cut Israel off completely. Syria has its own problems right now and won't be able to focus on Israel for a while.

However, both Iran and Syria have voiced a bitter "eternal hatred" that the Bible predicted (Ezekiel 35:5; 25:15; Genesis 16:13-16; 17:18-21; 21:9). They also desire to erase the embarrassment of an Israeli state in their midst which they have failed to remove several times already.

When can we expect this war to happen? Our choices are few, and thankfully the process of elimination rules out all but one of them. Armageddon does not fit. The millennial or post-millennial periods do not work either. The former is 1000 years of peace and the latter has only one brief war right at the end (Rev 20).

That leaves the tribulation or pre-tribulation periods. What many do not realize is that Jesus said that the Great Tribulation will be similar to the Millennium with its one world government and peace and prosperity. Nations will be conqueror and controlled (Dan 11:44; Rev 9:13-21). After that, we have a picture of peace and prosperity: eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage—until the day that Jesus gathers his bride (Mt 24:38-41).

Scripture implies that the end times conditions are present in the 21st century. Israel has been brought back into the “promised land” and is a sovereign state. Jerusalem remains the center of prophecy and modern controversy. What will be the results of The Global March to Jerusalem? Certainly an Iranian nuclear attack on Israel would set the world on a course closely related to biblical descriptions of the events of the end times.



The Prophet Ezekiel describes a dictator called Gog (often associated with Russia) who will form a military coalition with Iran, Sudan, Libya, Middle Eastern, and Central Asian countries in “the last days” (Ezekiel 38:16). [See “*When Russia Stretches*”, October 2011 eHerald <http://www.eherald.org/october-2011.html>.] Could this be a reference to modern day events in the Middle East? While it is impossible to say for sure, the biblical prophecies refer to wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes, and famines. All of which are common news features today.

The passages generally associated with this event are: Zech 14:2-4 2I will gather all the nations to fight against Jerusalem. The city will be taken, the houses looted, and the women raped. Half the population will be taken into captivity, and the rest will be left among the ruins of the city. 3 Then the LORD will go out to fight against those nations, as he has fought in times past. 4 On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem. And the Mount of Olives will split apart, making a wide valley running from east to west. Half the mountain will move toward the north and half toward the south. (Living Bible Translation)

Current developments may seem to fit prophecy well only until something better comes along that fits even better. It may not be Iran who triggers the war. That in spite of how she obviously shares the same hatred for Israel that the Arabs do and how her president has spoken words very close to Psalm 83’s “let’s wipe them out as a nation so they are remembered no more”.

Those who believe the accuracy of the Bible differ on interpretation of specific biblical prophecies. Some biblical prophecies were literally fulfilled; some appear to be future to their day. Let us place our faith on the teaching that Jesus is coming again. It will occur in the midst of worldwide catastrophes. At such time he will come as the conqueror, “On his robe at his thigh was written this title: King of all kings and Lord of all lords.”

SOME GOLDEN DAYBREAK

C. A. Blackmore

*Some glorious morning sorrow will cease
Some glorious morning all will be peace
Heartaches all ended, school days all done
Heaven will open - Jesus will come.*

*Some golden daybreak Jesus will come
Some golden daybreak, battles all won
He'll shout the vict'ry, break thro' the blue
Some golden daybreak, for me, for you.*

*Sad hearts will gladden, all shall be bright
Goodbye forever to earth's dark night
Changed in a moment, like Him to be
Oh, glorious daybreak, Jesus I'll see.*

*Some golden daybreak Jesus will come
Some golden daybreak, battles all won
He'll shout the vict'ry, break thro' the blue
Some golden daybreak, for me, for you.*

*Oh, what a meeting, there in the skies
No tears nor crying shall dim our eyes
Loved ones united eternally
Oh, what a daybreak that morn will be.*

*Some golden daybreak Jesus will come
Some golden daybreak, battles all won
He'll shout the vict'ry, break thro' the blue
Some golden daybreak, for me, for you.*