

Christian's **Expositor** Journal

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CREMATION—NOW A HOT OPTION

Carl M. Johnson

My brother-in-law has a place south of Ada that includes one of the finest bass lakes in our part of the country. He has worked many hours dredging the lake in order to clean its floor and its shores. He also has built a gravel-bottomed cove for a private swimming area, stocked the lake with thousands of fish, built a boat dock and ramp, and a picnic area with concrete tables and seats inlaid with ceramic tile. It is the perfect place for a big fish fry, and he sees to it that the entire church is invited out for just such an occasion every several months. The picturesque lake setting is serenely beautiful, and the lake itself is a fisherman's paradise. He has invested so much of himself into his lake property that he told me recently he has decided when he dies, he is not going to be buried, but he wants to be cremated and have his ashes spread over the lake. His only concern is whether there is anything spiritually wrong with cremation.

The number of cremations in North America has increased dramatically in recent years. As of 1999, twenty-five percent of Americans and forty-two percent of Canadians were cremated after death, and it is expected that cremation will continue to gain in favor and become the normal method of disposing of bodies. According to Philip Jackman, cremation is expected to be the preferred method of disposing of bodies in Canada by the year 2015 ("Cremation Now a Hot Option," **Globe and Mail**, 1998-SEP-9).

While cremation is becoming a more popular death rite option in America, the concerns most people have about the practice are religious ones.

The Bible does not give specific instructions for the disposal of bodies after death. The Jews, however, in Bible times, “uniformly disposed of the corpse by entombment where possible, and failing that, by means of interment (1 Kgs. 11:15; Deut. 21:23)” (**Smith’s Dictionary of the Bible**, Vol. 1, pp. 331-332). **Unger’s Bible Dictionary** adds,

The Hebrews did not normally cremate, except in most unusual cases of emergency. Later Babylonians burned their dead and deposited their ashes in ornate funerary urns, as did Greeks and Romans. Hebrews in later time, indicated by the numerous ossuaries found in New Testament Palestine, also practiced cremation (p. 250).

In 1886 the Roman Catholic Church banned the practice of cremation for its priests and people because church leaders felt cremation would somehow interfere with the bodily resurrection. Consequently, there was a low rate of Catholics who opted for cremation until 1963 when the Catholic Church lifted its ban.

According to Stephen Prothero, associate professor of religion at Boston University and the author of **Purified by Fire: A History of Cremation in America**, the cremation rate also is low among blacks who profess Christianity. Blacks generally maintain a strong belief in bodily resurrection and have a strong tradition of visiting cemeteries, as do Latinos, who adhere to more conservative Catholic beliefs.

Prothero adds that Protestants typically have a more liberal view toward cremation, in part because of their emphasis on the immortality of the soul in the afterlife rather than resurrection of body and soul. Eastern Orthodox churches continue to prohibit cremation. Conservative evangelicals, especially in the “Bible Belt” where the rate of cremation is lowest, frown upon the practice.

Islam does not allow cremations. Orthodox and Conservative Judaism prohibit the practice except in extreme cases, such as plague, and mandate burial in a Jewish cemetery. Reform Judaism allows cremation, but encourages families to place the remains in an urn and bury it in a Jewish cemetery.

It becomes apparent that the main religious objection to cremation by those who profess Christianity is that it will interfere with the bodily resurrection somehow. If that assumption is true, those martyrs who were burned

at the stake for the sake of Christ, and innocent saints who have lost their lives in fiery car accidents and house fires are going to have a problem on Resurrection Day. The truth is, however, that God will have no problem raising bodies that have been cremated, buried, buried at sea, vaporized in atomic explosions or destroyed in any other way (Rev. 20:13). God's power is infinite and there is nothing we can do to obviate the resurrection (Jn. 5:28-29).

James W. Fraser objects to cremation, arguing that the practice is not "Christian." He contends that God punished Moab for burning the bones of the king of Edom until the bones turned into lime (Amos 2:1). He concludes, "If there is any verse in the Bible that positively emphasizes God's disapproval of the burning of human bodies, it is this. God plagued and punished Moab for this immoral and unpardoned sin" (**Cremation—Is it Christian?**, p. 13).

The king of Moab was filled with such hatred for the king of Edom, he dug up his dead body and made lime out of his bones to use as whitewash on their houses and walls (Amos 2:1, **CEV**). God punished the king because of his maniacal attempt to continue to cause pain to a dead man—a man completely out of the king's reach. It is a mistake, however, to conclude God punished him simply because he burned the king's remains because there is no prohibition in the Old Testament against burning the bones of the dead (cf. 2 Kgs. 23:4-6, 16).

According to 1 Samuel 31, after the death of King Saul the Philistines began to mutilate his body. Some of Saul's brave friends, however, retrieved his body and cremated it in order to keep the Philistines from desecrating it any further. God did not punish them for burning King Saul's body, nor is there any mention of their act being "immoral and unpardoned." On the contrary, the king's friends disposed of his body with reverence and mourning.

Therein lies the key as to how we should dispose of dead bodies today. We should dispose of them with reverence. Even though the spirit leaves the body at death, the body is the physical reminder of all the person meant to us. Furthermore, the body is destined for resurrection, transformation, and reunion with the spirit at Christ's return (1 Cor. 15:35-55). Therefore, the body should be treated with reverence, yet it becomes a very personal decision as to what procedure expresses the appropriate respect for the deceased. For some people the correct choice is cremation, for others the correct choice is burial.

At death the body returns to dust, whether it is buried or cremated (Gen. 3:19). Cremation, however, does speed up the process. Some people prefer

having their bodies disposed of quickly by heat rather than having them decay slowly in a grave. Cremation also allows people the freedom to place their remains in some private place of great personal significance, such as my brother-in-law plans to do. According to Doctor Kenneth Iverson, some other reasons why cremation is growing more popular in the United States are that cremation usually costs less than burial (lowest figures on Internet sites were between \$800 and \$1,000), requires less cemetery space, and modern cremation methods are quick, clean, and efficient.

There are some issues you need to consider, however, before you decide between cremation and burial. Families may encounter some discomfort and resistance from family members for a variety of personal reasons. Will your family be comfortable with cremation? Some family members are disturbed at the thought of death itself, not to mention cremation, which many perceive as a cold and uninvolved process. They may resist your wishes when the time comes. Address it with your family now if you want to be cremated. You can put their unease to rest and have peace of mind knowing your wishes will be carried out.

Direct cremation (having one's body cremated and disposed of immediately after death without any type of funeral or memorial service) is another option some people request to eliminate "all the bother of funeral services" for family members. Those who say—whether seriously or in jest—"Just cremate me and throw me out!" do not realize the burden this request places on family members. Direct disposal of cremated remains without funerals or memorial services of any kind can cause serious emotional problems for survivors. Funeral services are not provided for the deceased, they are there to help support and comfort the living. Take time to consider family and friends and their need to work through the grieving process before you make this decision.

Gary Stumpff, funeral home owner and former coroner, explains that sometimes survivors themselves make the mistake of choosing direct cremation for a deceased loved one. They choose direct cremation, not because they want to eliminate "all the bother of funeral services," but because they believe this procedure is a way for them to circumvent the grieving process. Stumpff says they are working from the false premise "out of sight, out of mind." In other words, if they do not have to see the body, and do not have to attend a funeral or memorial service, they feel like they can avoid grief. Stumpff con-

firms the warnings mentioned above, that this sort of practice has caused untold emotional problems for the grieving survivors. In many cases, months or years later, people require professional treatment for severe depression.

Scattering requests should be given careful consideration as well. Emptying the urn of all that remains of a loved one can be a traumatic experience. So, carefully consider the feelings of the family in deciding this matter. An executive of the Forum for Death Education tells of a lady who required emotional therapy as a result of scattering the cremated remains of a loved one. She needed a focal point for her grief, so he suggested she retain a niche at a local mausoleum and place some memento of the loved one inside.

Barbara Murry in **Publisher's Edge** (May 29, 2003), said her mother's running joke with a local mortician caused her to begin thinking about cremation versus burial. She says her mother is about forty pounds overweight, and teases the mortician by saying, "I don't know if you'll want to cremate me, Eldon. It'll start a grease fire and you may not be able to get it under control!" Murry says she has always wondered how she could be so horrified and amused at the same time by her mother's words. As she reflected upon those words, however, she concluded that she always hated the idea of her body buried under the ground. Even though her religious upbringing taught her that "I wasn't there," it still felt sad, lonely and cold. At that time she became more than willing to entertain another idea for what to do with her remains when she dies. She continued, "The only reason I can think of for burial, or 'getting planted' as some of my old Norwegian relatives jokingly called it, is for the people who love you to have a peaceful place to come be with their thoughts of you."

It is important, indeed, for loved ones to have a focal point where they can come with thoughts of the deceased person. Cremation, however, actually offers more options than does burial. You may select a niche in a columbarium (a vault with niches for urns containing ashes of the dead) with space for one, two or even an entire family. You may choose to bury the cremated remains in a single burial site, an urn garden or family plot. You may prefer scattering in a specially prepared garden within cemetery grounds, with or without a marker. As mentioned earlier, you may spread the remains in some private area of great personal significance. You may even select a personal type of memorial such as a tree, rose bush or other type of perennial plant in a special area. Whatever your decision, you will have created a lasting memo-

rial that will serve as a focal point not only for present-day survivors, but also for future generations.

Ironically, there is an ancient Chickasaw Indian burial ground on my brother-in-law's property, not far from the lake. He allows members of the Chickasaw tribe to come onto his property to visit and maintain the burial site, because it is "sacred ground" to them. If I survive my brother-in-law and we carry out his wishes to cremate his body and spread his remains over the lake, I can assure you the lake will take on a new "sacred ground" meaning for me. In addition to enjoying the fish and the serene beauty of the setting, I can envision fond memories of the one whose hard work made it all possible.

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COME HOME

Doug Edwards

A few years ago I saw a video entitled **A Trip To Bountiful**. The video presents the story of an older woman, in poor health, living with her son and daughter-in-law. The daughter-in-law is not pleased with the older woman and makes no effort to hide her feelings of disgust. Eventually, the older woman runs away and takes a bus back to her old home in Bountiful, Texas. There she reflects about happier times when she was younger and felt better. Of course, the loyal son discovers his mother is missing and comes to Bountiful to bring his aging mother back to his home. As she sadly gets into the car to leave her old home place, a soft song starts playing in the background. We hear these familiar words: “Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling, Come home, Come home.” I do not know who the recording artist is, but the song is beautiful, touching and emotional. I probably have never been accused of being overly emotional, but there is something about that song and the message that it delivers that brings tears to my eyes. The song is based on an invitation of Jesus for us to come home.

Perhaps the best known invitation of Jesus is found in Matthew 11:28-30 where Jesus says,

Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and My burden is light (NKJV unless otherwise specified).

This invitation naturally divides itself into three parts: (1) the problem, in this life we labor and are heavy laden; (2) the solution to the problem, three commands involving our coming to Jesus, taking His yoke and learning from Him; and (3) the promise, rest for our souls. Quite often, we use this invitation as filler material in our sermons. We may make a point and then quote this passage to sustain the point. However, the passage deserves a closer examination.

The Context

Before we can examine the different parts of this invitation we need to consider the context in which it occurs. It actually occurs in the middle of a section of Matthew's gospel that deals with different rejections of Jesus. An imprisoned John had sent two of his disciples to ask Jesus if He was the coming One or if they should look for another. Jesus referred to the mighty works that He was doing and told these two disciples to bring that message to John. Then Jesus turned to the crowd and asked them, "What did you go out to the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? A man in soft clothing?" (Mt. 11:7-8). The multitudes were rejecting John, and in so doing, they were rejecting Jesus. Jesus again pointed to their rejection by saying that John came neither eating nor drinking and they accused him of having a demon, but Jesus came socializing and they accused Him of being a winebibber and a glutton (Mt. 11:18-19). Then Jesus rebuked the cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida for rejecting His mighty works (Mt. 11:20-24). In Matthew 12, the apostle continues to give examples of the Pharisees rejecting the mission of Jesus. It is in the midst of all of these rejections that Jesus gives us the beautiful invitation inviting all who labor and are heavy laden to come to Him. He could have just as easily walked off in disgust, and said, "Why should I bother with these ungrateful people?" But He did not. He is the One, the only One, who can give rest for our souls.

The Burdened

Jesus said, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden." The Lord's invitation is thus open to all of us because we all carry burdens. Job described the common lot of man when he said, "Man, who is born of woman is of a few days and full of trouble" (Job 14:1). A casual watching

of the evening news will verify that Job's words are true. Many are burdened with poverty. The number of souls in third-world countries who face such great poverty that they go to bed hungry is uncountable. Some live in regions of social injustice where prejudice and racism are burdens. Many other people, even here in medically advanced United States, suffer with life-threatening, debilitating and chronic diseases of one kind or another. Others live in areas of such great danger as terrorism and war. For these poor, unfortunate folks, living is simply a day-to-day existence. Still others carry the burden of living in areas of natural disasters, floods, droughts, famines, and earthquakes.

The greatest burden, however, that we carry is that of sin. Some people are fortunate and do not live in third-world countries, do not face starvation, disease or other problems. But they do share in common with the rest of mankind the problem of sin. Paul reminds us that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). Sin is a burden from which there is no earthly escape. Sin destroys life. Daily, many die from alcohol and drug addiction, and abortion claims millions of lives every year. Sin, however, destroys spirituality. James warns us that lust produces sin, and sin left unchanged produces death (Jas. 1:14-15). Sin also destroys love. Without love, our homes and our relationship with God are destroyed. Sin destroys souls. Paul said, "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). We deserve death because of the sin in our life. Sin separates us from God (Isa. 59:1-2). It hurts God and breaks His heart, but even worse, it destroys man. Sin makes one feel dirty, sick, afraid, alone, hopeless, and helpless. Sin stains our souls, and no amount of good living can take that away. Listen to these sad words of the Psalmist describing his life away from God,

My heart is severely pained within me,
And the terrors of death have fallen upon me.
Fearfulness and trembling have come upon me.
So I said, "Oh that I had wings like a dove!
I would fly away and be at rest (Ps. 55:4-6)

"Come Unto Me"

Jesus gives the solution to the problems of life. It is found in the form of three short commands. First, Jesus says, "Come to Me" (Mt. 11:28). We need to stop and contemplate the implications of that statement "Come to Me." Christianity does not center around an institution, nor does it center around a set of rules. Christianity centers on a relationship with a person. Let us not get the cart before the horse. The importance of the church and the need for God's Word for guidance comes about because of our relationship with Jesus. Have you ever considered the sermons those inspired preachers of the first century delivered to the masses? On the day of Pentecost Peter preached the man Jesus to the Jews (Acts 2). That is true for the other inspired sermons (Acts 3, 8, 10, 13, 16). This is not to any way minimize the importance of the church or the value of God's Word. I am merely emphasizing that these items will not be very important to us unless we first have a relationship with Jesus.

Do you know Jesus? Notice that I did not ask if you know about Jesus. Lots of people know lots of facts about Jesus. There are many, even unbelievers, who can give you the facts about the Lord's birth, His miracles, teachings, and even the story of His death and resurrection. But Jesus is not a storybook person, neither is He merely a historical figure or just a set of facts. Jesus is a real person who wants to have a relationship with each of us. Peter certainly knew Jesus. He told Him that He was the son of the living God (Mt. 16:17). He would also say to Jesus, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (Jn. 6:68). You see, Peter recognized as a person, the Hope of the world.

Coming to Jesus requires effort on our part; we have to actively seek Him. When Jesus called Peter and Andrew to follow Him He said, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Mt. 4:19). The Bible then says in the next verse, "They immediately left their nets and followed Him." Following Jesus required effort on their parts. The same is true for you and me. Jesus challenges us with these words, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Lk. 9:23). Anyone who intends to come to Jesus must realize there are requirements that go with discipleship. There is the mistaken perception among some that Jesus makes no demands and expects little commitment. Paul tells us that we have to present our bodies as living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1), and Jesus says that we must forsake all in order to be His disciple (Lk. 14:26-33).

When we sincerely come to Jesus, the person, it can take away the problems that upset us. There are times when we struggle with feelings of inferiority. At other times we may be lukewarm. We may feel that we are serving the Lord and then come to the realization that we have left our first love. We also may struggle with feelings of discouragement and apathy. We may have lingering doubts about our Christianity that never seem to go away. Perhaps the reason that these problems continue to bother us is that we have not yet come to Jesus.

"Take My Yoke Upon You"

The second command that Jesus gives is "Take my yoke upon you" (Mt. 11:29). The people of Palestine were familiar with the concept of the yoke because their society was more agricultural than ours. Farming was important to their way of life, and a yoke was used to bind the oxen together so they could work together to pull the plow. A yoke was a wooden frame or bar with loops or bows at either end, fitted around the necks of a team of oxen for the purpose of harnessing them together. Usually an ox was brought to a carpenter and careful measurements were taken. The yoke was then roughed out and the ox brought back to make sure that it fit comfortably. The yoke was then carefully adjusted so that it would fit well and not harm the neck of the animal. The farmer wanted the yoke to fit well so that it would not chafe or irritate the necks of the animals even though they would work under heavy burdens. The yoke was tailor-made to fit the ox.

What is the metaphorical yoke we are to bear? It is simply a symbol of the submission that we must render to Jesus. We must make Him the King and Lord of our lives. We must surrender our will to His will and then faithfully obey His commands. Simply put, taking the Lord's yoke upon us means to submit to Jesus as Lord.

Jesus then says, "For my yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Mt. 11:30). How can His burden become lighter? It can happen because we bear His burden in love. Love lightens any and all labor. Any adversity can be made easier to endure if it is endured with love. It is not that the burden itself somehow magically becomes lighter, it is simply that we bear it in love. There is an old story about a young boy carrying his crippled little brother, on his back. An older gentleman saw them and said to the boy, "Son, that is sure a heavy burden for you to carry." The boy replied in a matter-of-fact way, "Why, he ain't

heavy, he's my brother." The load was heavy, but the boy did not mind because it was his brother. He bore him in love. John said concerning the commands of God, "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome" (1 Jn. 5:3).

Jesus also said that His yoke was easy. Literally, that means that it is well-fitting. Just as the ox's yoke was tailor-made to fit it, so our yoke is tailor-made for us. Jesus knows man, and His commands are designed to help us to go to heaven and to be happy here on earth (Jn. 2:24-25). The Lord's yoke is not one of pain or bondage. Many, unfortunately, view the way of Jesus as too restrictive or too confining. Some see the Lord's yoke as dull or boring. Many claim to be free from the shackles of God without realizing they are slaves to sin (Jn. 8:34; 2 Pet. 2:19). The voluntary submission to Jesus' will is the best design to keep us safe and happy. Jesus cares for us the way we care for our children. The truth of the matter is that we are all slaves to someone. Paul says that we are either slaves to sin or slaves to righteousness (Rom. 6:16-18). The burden that we bear as a Christian is lighter than the burden we bear in the world.

The yoke that the Lord places us under is not one that we bear alone. We have others help us in bearing this yoke. Fellow Christians help to bear this yoke. Paul says to the Galatians, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). He also says to the Romans, "We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not please ourselves" (Rom. 15:1). The Lord Jesus Christ also helps us to bear this yoke. He told the apostles, "[A]nd lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Mt. 28:20). Paul could confidently say, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phi. 4:13). Christ's yoke, then, is a symbol of a shared relationship of working together to do the Father's will. Man is not left alone to do all that God has for him to do.

"Learn From Me"

The third command that Jesus gives is "Learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart" (Mt. 11:29). In this command Jesus invites us to be His disciple. A disciple is more than just an occasional follower of some teacher. A disciple is one who carefully follows the teaching of someone else and who imitates his teacher. He hangs on every word that comes from his master, making the teacher's thoughts his thoughts.

The teachings of Jesus are more than just opinions, theories or good ideas. They are the words of God Himself and hence essential for our entrance into heaven. Jesus said, "The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life" (Jn. 6:63). The people who heard Him were astonished at His teaching because He taught them as one having authority (Mt. 7:28). Jesus possesses all authority (Mt. 28:18). He is the way, the truth, and the life, and no man can approach the Father except through Him (Jn. 14:6). As we watch Jesus we do not see Him schedule a class on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. at the local synagogue, with that being the totality of His teaching. The Lord's teachings go with Him as He goes out into the world, and so we see they are practical for our everyday existence. We follow the teachings of Jesus as we go out into the marketplaces, streets, homes, and hospitals. Consequently, we face the same oppositions He did, we are often misunderstood as He was, and we give ourselves up for others as He did. The teachings of Jesus cause us to leave our comfort zones and interact with our fellow man.

Jesus mentions two of His own characteristics that we need in order to be His disciple. First, we need to be gentle. Other translations render this word as "meek." The entire ministry of Jesus was characterized by His meekness in the face of hatred and opposition. Many people unfortunately stumble over this need for meekness, substituting the word "weak" in its place; however, meekness and weakness are not synonyms. Meekness simply means strength under control. It is the strength to do what is acceptable to God even when we face the evil of men and the insults and injuries that come from such evil. The Bible says that Moses was the meekest man on the earth (Num. 12:3), yet we certainly do not picture him as a weak man. Unquestionably, we need to learn from Jesus to be meek and gentle. Second, we need to be lowly in heart, which is an indication of humility. The greatest enemy of service to God is pride. Pride lifts us up and makes us self-sufficient, not needing God. Humility, on the other hand, draws us close to God. We recognize our insufficiencies and our need for God. James said, "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up" (Jas. 4:10). Jesus warned us that many who are first will be last and those who are last will be first (Mt. 19:30).

The Promise—Rest

We have seen thus far in this invitation that Jesus has described a problem and the solution to that problem. There is also, though, a promise that goes with the invitation—rest. Jesus said, “I will give you rest,” and “you will find rest for your souls” (Mt. 11:28, 30). We notice that Jesus did not say we will find rest from work or physical exhaustion, but rather, rest for our souls.

The Bible points out that the wicked do not enjoy this rest. David writes, “There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin” (Ps. 38:3). Isaiah adds, “There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked” (Isa. 57:21). The Apostle Paul also joins in, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death” (Rom. 7:24). For those who turn their backs on God there is no rest. They may try to find substitutes to produce this rest in their lives. Some will turn to alcohol or drugs, others will turn to greed and materialism, others to worldliness and the philosophies of this world. Still, others look for peace in the fulfillment of the flesh by seeking illicit sexual gratification. Man constantly looks for substitutes for God’s peace, but he always discovers that what he finds is only temporary.

The rest that Jesus promised occurs in two ways. First, there is a rest in this life. There is a freedom from sin. When one obeys the gospel and is baptized into Christ, he enjoys the forgiveness of his past sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16). He also learns that by walking in the light he can enjoy forgiveness of sins throughout his life (1 Jn. 1:7). How wonderful it is to know that you can be forgiven of all of your sins and be righteous in the eyes of God! We also have a living hope in this life (1 Pet. 1:3). It is not a blind hope or a false hope, but one based upon the resurrection of Jesus and the promises of God. This hope serves as an anchor of the soul (Heb. 6:19), keeping us from drifting in the storms of life. We also enjoy a peace that surpasses all understanding in this life (Phil. 4:7). This peace comes from a right standing with God (Rom. 5:1). Many will spend their entire lifetimes searching in vain for peace because they will not come to God.

There is also a rest in our future. If the only rest that we received was in this life, that would be good, but it would not be sufficient. Jesus wants the Christian to never lose sight of his heavenly rest. Paul describes this rest like this: “. . .and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels” (2 Thess. 1:7). The Hebrew

writer says, “There remains therefore a rest for the people of God” (Heb. 4:9). John adds, “Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, ‘Write: “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.”’ ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them’ ” (Rev. 14:13). Heaven is the home for the soul and there we will find rest from sickness, persecution, trials, tribulations, sorrows, sin, and death.

When we finally enter heaven we will joyfully discover that our struggles are all over. We have come home. We will then completely have rest for our souls—not our bodies, not our minds, but our souls. In this life we never find rest for our souls. The reason for this inability to rest in this life is that we are made for heaven. The Bible says that God “has put eternity in their hearts” (Eccl. 3:10). We may try to ignore it, we may try to crowd out this desire, but it always comes back. We were made to exist in heaven with God. We will be miserable in this life if we continue to rebel against this great truth. Jesus wants us to have this rest.

Come Home

If we were to summarize the Lord’s invitation it would simply be this: “Come home.” Home is one of the most beautiful words in the English language. Actually it is a beautiful word in any language. Home is a place of happiness, love, acceptance, joy, peace and association with loved ones. Jesus pleads with us to come home. The Spirit and the bride say “Come!” (Rev. 22:17). How can we reject this most wonderful invitation?

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CHRISTIAN'S EXPOSITOR SPECIAL ISSUES

The annual special issues of the CE have continued to be very popular with our readers. These issues are great for your congregation's tract racks, for teachers, for giving to friends and for family or personal study. Below are listed some of the older volumes that we still have in stock for sale.

THE LAST DAYS OF JESUS ON EARTH, SEPTEMBER 1990

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SPIRITUAL BEINGS, SEPTEMBER 1989

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THE CLARITY OF SCRIPTURE

Smith Bibens

For many people the Bible is a closed book—a puzzle wrapped in an enigma stuffed in a riddle. Such people do not even think it is possible to make sense of the Bible. Others assert, “You can prove anything by the Bible!” This cynical claim is just another way of saying that the Bible cannot be understood. Even many professed believers think the Bible cannot really be comprehended. When some misguided soul says, “It doesn’t matter if we disagree, just so long as we are sincere,” what they are really saying is one of two things: (1) we cannot figure out what the Bible means, or (2) it does not matter what the Bible teaches. Added to the foregoing, are the many who are taught by their religious leaders to distrust their ability to understand the Bible. When presented with Bible teaching on a matter, their response runs something like this: “Well, my preacher (priest, pastor) says...” or “Our church teaches...” These folks believe that interpreting the Bible is a task best left to trained theologians. Cultists teach the Bible cannot be understood without additional help from their leaders and/or their “inspired” books (Mormonism, Christian Science, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Catholics). Many passages, however, teach the clarity of Scripture. One passage is Deuteronomy 30:11-16.

For this commandment which I command you today is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, “Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?” Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, “Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?” But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it. See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and

multiply; and the LORD your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess (NKJV unless otherwise noted).

Moses is calling attention to their ability to obey the Word of God—it is clear enough that obedience is possible. He says it "...is not too mysterious for you." Moses addresses these words to Israel at a crucial juncture in their wilderness sojourn. For forty years Israel wandered in the wilderness as judgment for their unbelief (Num. 13 & 14). The generation that now stands before Moses on the verge of the Promised Land must not repeat the mistakes of the previous generation. They must obey God in everything.

Moses anticipates excuses people might give for disobedience and disbelief. The fundamental excuse is that the Word of God is too difficult to understand. If it is to be understood at all, it would take a special person to help one understand it. "Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?" There must be, according to this excuse, a special person to explain this Law. Again, it might be asked, "Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?" There must be a special person to go over and get the Law. Fundamentally, then, the excuse is: The word of God is too difficult for us; it takes a special person to understand it. This is exactly what many religious leaders want their followers to believe. They want people to be dependent upon them for their understanding, and ultimately, their obedience.

Are the Scriptures difficult to understand because God's speech is too lofty for common men to understand? There is a vast difference between God and man. God knows all things. Man, by comparison, knows nothing. God is spirit; we are creatures. How can common men possibly be expected to understand the Word of God? Moses reassures Israel and us—"[it] is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend into heaven for us?'" God, the Father of our spirits (Zech. 12:1), desires to communicate with His children, and He is able to. Will we listen?

Someone says, "The Scriptures were given to a people far off in a different country and with a different language and with different customs. How can I, living in the year 2004 in the United States, understand a message given to the Hebrews millennia ago? It takes a special person, one with a better understanding of the culture in which it was originally written, to understand." Moses replies, "Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us?'"

Moses, anticipating possible excuses for ignoring the Law of Moses, refutes similar denials of the clarity of Scripture in use today. Throughout the Christian dispensation, there have been those who have said about the Bible, “Scripture is too wonderful for the average Joe to understand. But I have figured it out! Listen to me! I can go into heaven and bring it to you. I can go across the sea and understand it for you.” Some say, “Don’t read the Word of God yourself. Just listen to the preacher or the priest. They understand better than you.” Some say, “You have to understand the numerical codes hidden in Scripture,” or “You have to understand the hidden meanings of words in the original language to truly understand Scripture. Listen to me. I’ve cracked the code.” And others say, “Because Scripture was written in a different culture, I have immersed myself in that culture and I have insights necessary to understand Scripture. We have to find a way to apply Scripture to our culture and as we do so, there will be changes. It takes a scholar to figure it out!”

The Word of God is *not* hidden. It is not far off. It is not in heaven. It is not beyond the sea. But it is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart. You can understand it. You can teach it with clarity and conviction to your children, your brethren, and your fellow man. This is the substance of the doctrine of the clarity of Scripture. Scripture can be understood. You can read it and know what it means, what it requires of you, and it is able to build you up in the faith and give you an inheritance among the redeemed.

When we say it is clear, we do not mean that we are able to comprehend it entirely. To comprehend it means that we understand it so completely that we need not go back to it again because we have exhausted it. Scripture is deep and profound. It will require a lifetime of study, and we will still not exhaust its wealth. The Bible may be compared to the earth—the farmer scratches its surface and makes a living, while the miner delves deep into the bowels of the earth and brings up precious minerals and gems. Thus it is with the Word of God. The simplest saint can find everlasting life in its pages, and the sober scholar will spend a lifetime challenged by its deep truths.

When we say that Scripture is clear we do not mean that everything will be understood immediately. Scripture bears that out in 2 Peter 3:15-16:

...and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some

things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.

There are some things hard to understand, but it is the *untaught* and *unstable* who wrest the meaning of the Word into something God does not intend. Peter does not say understanding is impossible. Given time, mental industry spent in diligent study, and growth in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, many dark and obscure parts can become as clear as light. Solomon counsels,

Yes, if you cry out for discernment,
And lift up your voice for understanding,
If you seek her as silver,
And search for her as for hidden treasures;
Then you will understand the fear of the LORD,
And find the knowledge of God.

Some things are difficult to understand at first because they require us to first understand other principles and truths. For example, calculus is an advanced field of mathematical knowledge that is mastered only after one learns arithmetic, algebra, geometry and so forth. The Bible intimates that one should develop a deeper understanding of God's Word with the passage of time given the requisite effort.

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil (Heb. 5:12-14).

The Psalms abound in statements affirming the clarity of Scripture. Because the Word of God is clear, the psalmist speaks of it as a lamp unto his feet and as a light unto his path (119:105). If Scripture lacks clarity it cannot serve as a guiding lamp upon a dangerous path, nor can it serve as a helpful light in the midst of spiritual darkness. Psalm 19:7-8 states, "The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of

the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.” In Psalm 94:12 we read, “Blessed is the man whom You instruct, O LORD, and teach out of Your law.” In the 118th Psalm, verses 104 and 130, we are told, “Through Your precepts I get understanding; Therefore I hate every false way... The entrance of Your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple.” Only because the Word of God possesses clarity can it make one wise, impart blessedness, move us to hate every false way, and give understanding to the simple.

Denying the clarity of Scripture denies the teaching of Jesus Christ. Jesus commanded, “Hear Me, everyone, and understand!” (Mk. 7:14). Jesus teaches that man must do the will of the heavenly Father to be saved.

Not everyone who says to Me, “Lord, Lord,” shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?” And then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!” (Mt. 7:20-21).

If God requires us to do His will, but His will is not clear enough for us to understand, then who can be saved? Yet Scripture affirms that God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4). Either Scripture is misleading us or we can indeed understand and obey God’s truth. The latter alternative is the correct one. Jesus further teaches, “Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man...” (Mt. 7:24). Many religious leaders teach that the ideals Jesus teaches are too lofty, or impossible to attain or understand. The truth is that we can and we must obey His doctrine. Jesus warns, “He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day” (Jn. 12:48).

In the Savior’s story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16, Abraham counters the rich man’s plea that Lazarus be sent from beyond the grave to enlighten his five living brothers, with the statement: “They have Moses and the prophets. Let them hear them” (v. 29). The Old Testament Scriptures clearly presented everything the brothers needed to know in order to prepare for a blessed eternity.

The Apostle Paul confirms the clarity of Scripture in his writings. Paul admonishes, “Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is” (Eph. 5:17). Is Paul talking nonsense? Of course not! Paul told the Ephesians they

could understand his knowledge in the mystery of Christ when they read his writing (Eph. 3:4). Paul reminds Timothy, "...from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15). In this reminder there is a definite assertion of the clarity of Scripture. The Scripture had come to Timothy as a child. The Scripture had been presented to him by his mother and grandmother, simple, common people; yet, by virtue of its own clarity, this Scripture had imparted full wisdom unto salvation. Paul further asserts that the inspired word is "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Does this sound like an ecclesiastical hierarchy and venerable church tradition are required to explain the Bible to the people? Of course not!

The Bereans carefully compared everything Paul preached to them with what they themselves found in their diligent searching of the Scriptures (Acts 17:11). Though many a cleric since then would rake a congregation over the coals for daring to question and examine his teaching in the light of Scripture, Paul did not, and no true minister of the gospel will!

Every admonition of Scripture to beware of false prophets (Mt. 7:15) and to mark those who depart from apostolic teachings (Rom. 16:17), every exhortation to hold fast the form of sound doctrine (2 Tim. 1:13), and to hold fast the faithful Word (Tit. 1:9) that by sound doctrine the gainsayers might be exhorted, presuppose that Scripture is clear. This clarity is also asserted in every earnest warning against adding anything to God's inspired Word or against subtracting anything from it (Deut. 4:2; Rev. 22:18-19; Mt. 5:19). How could anyone know whether he was adding or subtracting if Scripture were not clear? Jesus states (Jn. 8:31) that we are His disciples indeed as we continue in His Word. This again implies that He has given us a clear Word, so that it is possible to know whether we are continuing in it or not.

Consider Romans 3:23: "...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Because of clarity of the Scripture, even the unbeliever who reads this line, carefully marking the meaning of every word Paul uses and observing the whole context, can understand its import, even though he refuses to accept this truth and bow under its verdict. Likewise, the vast majority of Scripture can be plainly understood by anyone who has ears to hear. How is your hearing?

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JESUS WASHES HIS DISCIPLES' FEET AN EXPOSITION OF JOHN 13:1–17

James Crouch

Chapter 12 brings to a close the first section of John's gospel. In this first section, John focuses on Jesus' public ministry, especially His ministry in and around Jerusalem. Beginning with chapter 13, John redirects his focus to Jesus' final instructions to His chosen disciples (chapters 13–17). While the Synoptics introduce Jesus' death by focusing on the historical events occurring during the four days preceding the crucifixion (e.g., the second cleansing of the temple; the cursing of the fig tree; the confrontations with the scribes, Herodians, Sadducees and Pharisees; the series of eschatological parables; the prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem), John focuses squarely on Jesus' final instructions to His chosen disciples during the brief hours preceding the crucifixion.

At the appointed time, Jesus and His disciples enter the furnished upper room prepared by Peter and John for the Passover meal (Mt. 26:17–19; Mk. 14:12–16; Lk. 22:7–13). As we peer into the room through the eyes of John, we see Jesus picking up a towel, wrapping it around His waist as an apron, and filling a basin with water. What a compelling spectacle! Let us consider the text.

John's Preface (vv. 1–3)

It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. The evening

meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God (NIV unless noted otherwise).

John introduces Jesus' farewell addresses and specifically this stunning scene with a three-verse preface. In the first verse, he notes Jesus' motivation for serving this meal to His disciples, and His motivation for washing their feet—love. In the second verse, John notes that Judas had already made the decision to betray Jesus. In the third verse, John stresses Jesus' complete awareness of the short time that remained for Him on the earth and His understanding of His mission.

Jesus Prepares to Wash the Disciples' Feet (vv. 4–5)

So he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

Under normal circumstances, a house slave would wash the feet of those entering a house; one seldom washed the feet of peers. No doubt, the disciples gladly would have washed the feet of Jesus, their Master; but to wash the feet of a fellow disciple would be the equivalent of admitting inferiority. Such an admission at this time in Jesus' ministry, when expectations of the messianic kingdom were running high, would have been a devastating blow to the ego. Consider some of the recent conversations preceding this event.

About a week earlier, while Jesus and His disciples were on their way to Jerusalem for the Passover, Salome (the mother of James and John) called Jesus aside to make an interesting request.

Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him. "What is it you want?" he asked. She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom." "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?" "We can," they answered.

Jesus said to them, “You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father.” When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mt. 20:20–28).

Earlier, John and James had made this same request of Jesus (Mk. 10:35–45). On that occasion, the other disciples became aware of the request that had been made and had become angry with these two brothers who shared an evident favored relationship with Jesus.

Thus, there was ongoing tension among the disciples concerning who would receive positions of greatest prestige within the Messianic kingdom. The gospels record four separate occasions on which the disciples argued about who would be the greatest (Mt. 18:1–9; Mk. 9:33–37; Lk. 9:46–50; 22:24–30). Such discussions would have intensified after they witnessed Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

Further, Luke begins His account of the Passover meal with Jesus uttering these words.

When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. And he said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God” (Lk. 22:14–16, NIV).

The fact that Jesus clearly states that His kingdom would be established before the next Passover would have raised the expectations of the disciples.

After presenting his account of the Passover meal and the institution of the memorial supper, Luke adds that another dispute arose among the disciples concerning who would be greatest in Jesus’ kingdom (Lk. 22:24–30). However, suppose this dispute did not occur after the meal, but before the meal. Luke’s gospel does not always emphasize the exact chronology of

events as much as the facts of what happened;¹ thus, it is possible this final argument among the disciples took place before the Passover rather than afterwards. Indeed, this sequence of events would make more sense in light of the lesson of humility Jesus presents in our text (i.e., It makes more sense that Jesus washed the disciples' feet following a dispute among the disciples rather than that the disciples had such a dispute so soon after Jesus had presented His lesson on humility.). Plummer writes:

The dispute [recorded in Luke's gospel] may have arisen about their places at the table, or as to who should wash the others' feet. That S. Luke places the strife after the supper is not fatal to this view; he gives no note of time, and the strife is singularly out of place there, immediately after their Master's self-humiliation and in the midst of the last farewells. We may therefore believe, in spite of S. Luke's arrangement, that the strife preceded the supper (pp. 264–265).

As the meal is about to begin, Jesus says this will be the last Passover He eats with His disciples before the establishment of the kingdom. A heightened awareness of the kingdom's establishment gives rise to whispered discussions of who will be greatest in the kingdom. As the disciples argue among themselves, the time for the meal arrives. Perhaps the dispute continues as they vie for the best seats at this momentous meal. In light of this setting, who of the disciples is going to volunteer to wash feet? No one stoops to serve. They are content to eat with dirty feet, and they would have done so had Jesus not acted. Jesus arises from the table, lays aside His outer garment, ties a towel around His waist, fills a basin with water, and begins doing what the disciples could not bring themselves to do. The reason He does so is because they do not—they will not. Pride and ambition are blocking their paths.

Peter's Refusal (vv. 6–11)

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"

Jesus answered, "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you. For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.

Can you imagine the embarrassment washing over the disciples as Jesus begins to wash their feet? Can you imagine the shame filling each man's heart as Jesus takes each foot and lovingly washes off the dirt? It is too much for one of the men.

"Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Peter balks. The Greek word order and construction suggests the following emphasis: "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"² It was uncommon for one to wash the feet of his peers; but Jesus, the Master, was washing the feet of His servants. The other disciples are probably just as appalled and embarrassed, but Peter, characteristically, is the one who speaks. Jesus reassures Peter by explaining to him that everything will be clearer "after these things," probably meaning after His suffering and resurrection.

"...you shall never wash my feet." Jesus' promise of future understanding does not satisfy Peter. His mind revolts at the thought of his Lord washing his feet, so he engages his mouth: "You will never wash my feet!" Peter's first remark ("Are you going to wash my feet?") was one of respect and reverence for his master; but his second remark smacks of open rebellion and disobedience. Jesus responds accordingly.

Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." In essence, Jesus says, "Peter, you're taking a dangerous position. Am I your Master, or not? Are you one of my disciples, or not? If you refuse to submit to me, then you can have no part in me."

How could a simple matter of foot washing escalate to such a level? Consider the core of Peter's statement: (1) he would not permit his Lord to play the part of a servant, and (2) he apparently believed that in certain circumstances (e.g., this instance) he was free to exercise his will above his Lord's.

First, if it is not permitted for the Lord to humble Himself willingly in service to others, then it follows that the Son of God never could have left heaven to become human; He never could have been born in a manger or reared in Nazareth by a carpenter; He never could have lived to help others; and He cer-

tainly never could have allowed Himself to be spit upon, slapped, whipped, or crucified. By Peter taking the position, "I will not allow my Lord to play the role of a servant," Peter was rejecting the whole premise of Jesus' incarnation, ministry, and atoning sacrifice. By rejecting such a premise, Peter could not receive spiritual cleansing because salvation requires our willingness to accept Jesus as the expression of God's grace. Thus, Peter would have no part with Jesus.

Second, Peter's bold objection smacks of rebellion against his Lord. The implication of Peter's statement is clear: I will submit to you as long as it does not violate my conscience or in some way go against what seems appropriate to me. This sort of conditional submission does not please God and cannot result in spiritual cleanness. Jesus' requires His followers to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Him (Lk. 14:25–27). Salvation from sin, a gift from God, is conditioned upon a person's willing, complete, and unconditional submission to Jesus as Lord.

Thus, Peter's retort threatened to compromise the sum total of Jesus' ministry: He came to serve others, and He came to assume the position of Lord. We can then understand why Jesus responded, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" Although Peter was energetically impulsive, he was submissive—when ever confronted with his sin, he was quick to make the needed changes. This facet of his character is evident in this passage. No doubt, Peter is now unaware of the serious nature of his objection—his heart was right; his temperament and understanding were wrong. The very thought of being cut off from His Lord scares him, so he hastily retracts his objection saying, "Not just my feet, but my head and hands as well." As Carson notes, no special or figurative sense should be given to Peter's request for having his hands and head washed along with his feet (p. 464). If Jesus' washing his feet was somehow a requisite in order to be associated with Jesus, then Peter's exuberance leads him to think that additional washing will provide additional benefit.

Jesus answered, "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean." In essence, Jesus says, "No, washing the feet is enough to make you clean." Why? Because it was Peter's lack of submission that was threatening to undo him spiritually, not the dirt on his body. Cleanness, then, refers to a person's spiritual cleanness, a metaphor describing a freedom from sin and a right relationship with the Lord. Once Peter sub-

mitted to allowing Jesus to wash his feet, he was clean, having once again assumed a proper relationship with his Lord.

Jesus' argument is based on physical cleanliness. He argues that once a person has had a bath, he does not need to rebathe; he just needs to wash his feet. This statement must be understood in the context of first century culture: though otherwise clean, a person's feet would immediately become dirty from walking the dirt roads in bare or sandaled feet. Thus, feet were often in need of washing.

From a spiritual perspective, once a person has been cleansed by God (i.e., he has received the forgiveness of sins at baptism—Acts 2:38; 22:16), he does not need to be washed again. However, there is an ongoing need to submit to Jesus as Lord, here figured in Peter's submission to Jesus in washing his feet. Once a person ceases his submission to Jesus, he ceases to be clean because his relationship to Jesus is no longer as it should be. John expresses a similar thought in his first letter:

But if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1:7–9).

“And you are clean, though not every one of you. For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.” The disciples are all clean (i.e., have a proper relationship with Jesus as their Lord) except for Judas. Though Jesus is well aware of Judas' evil plans, He does not exclude him from the paschal meal nor does He refuse to wash His betrayer's feet.

Jesus' statement here further proves that the foot washing provided no inherent cleansing else Judas would have been made clean by it. Just as Peter's initial lack of submission had threatened to undo him spiritually, so Judas' lack of submission to Jesus (evidenced by his willing plan to betray Him) resulted in his being spiritually unclean.

Jesus' Explanation of His Actions (13:12–17)

“Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

Why did Jesus wash His disciples’ feet? Was He particularly health conscious? Did He think their dirty feet would contaminate the dinner? He explains.

“You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am.” Jesus’ point is that He occupies a position above His disciples. He is the spiritual instructor, they are the disciples (i.e., learners); He is the Lord, they are the subjects. Despite the fact that Jesus occupies a greater office, He did not allow His superiority to be an obstacle preventing Him from serving others.

Indeed, Jesus’ washing His disciples’ feet is symbolic of His sacrificial death. Just as the Lord humbled Himself to wash His disciples’ feet, so the Lord of creation humbled Himself to become a human and to die for the sins of the world. In both cases, the motivation is love (cf. 3:16 and 13:1) with the goal of serving the needs of others.

“...you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.” If the Lord of creation is willing to humble Himself in order to serve His subjects, surely the servants ought to be willing to serve one another. Jesus says, “You also ought to wash one another’s feet.”

The lesson, of course, is not about foot washing per se, but of humble service in general. We are to do as (**kathos**) Jesus did, even if we do not perform the exact act (unless foot washing is the need). We follow the Lord’s example by willingly serving the needs of others. This conclusion is evident in that foot washing is never commanded or illustrated elsewhere in the New Testament while humble service to one another is a central theme (Rom. 12:10; Eph. 4:2; 5:21; Phil. 2:1–11; 1 Pet. 5:5). If we ever refuse to serve other on the basis of superiority or because the task is too menial, we have failed to

understand the Lord's lesson. We should ever be ready, as it were, to pull out the basin and the towel.

“I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.” Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. Jesus presents the principle that should compel us to serve one another: the servant is not greater than his lord. Indeed, our goal as servants of Jesus Christ is to be like Him (Lk. 6:40; 1 Jn. 2:3–6).

Humility, like love, is not a bottled-up feeling, but is a character trait evidenced by action. In keeping with this fact, Jesus ends His instruction by saying, “Now that you know these things, you will be blessed *if you do them*” (8:31; 12:47–48; cf. Mt. 7:21–23, 24–27; Jas. 1:22–25). Humility will lead us to look for ways to help and serve others, and humility will never lead us to reject any act of service as too menial. Paul writes:

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus (Phil. 2:3–5, NIV).

Peter would later write, perhaps while reflecting on the scene of our text:

Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time (1 Pet. 5:5–6, NIV).

“happy”: In the KJV, the translation of verse 17, “happy are ye,” can convey an inappropriate message. The Greek word **makarios**, as used in this context, is defined by Bauer as, “pertaining to being especially favored, blessed, fortunate, happy, privileged...of humans privileged recipient of divine favor.”³ Kittel comments, “The special feature of the group *makarios*, *makarizein*, *makarismos* in the New Testament is that it refers overwhelmingly to the distinctive religious joy which accrues to man from his share in the salvation of the kingdom of God.”⁴

The English word “happy” means “fortunate, lucky” and describes the feeling one has when life’s circumstances are good. While the Greek word **makarios** is sometimes used to describe good fortune, it is most often used to describe one’s relationship to deity. It is used consistently in this way in the New Testament. When Jesus says, “Blessed are the poor,” He does not mean that such an individual is happy in the sense of being fortunate because of circumstances; rather, He describes a person who has true joy because he enjoys the favor of God. Such blessedness exists in spite of, not because of, outward circumstances.

Thus, in our text, Jesus is not declaring that those who serve will be happy in the sense we use the word today. Rather, He pronounces a blessing upon those who serve, a blessing deriving from a realization that such behavior pleases God.

Application

We are not greater than our Master—if Jesus served others from a position of humility, we should serve others from a position of humility. Humility is a frame of mind, but it is seen in behavior (Phil. 2:1–11). Humility does not mean verbally stating a humble state of mind or behaving in a mousy fashion. Nor does humility exclude confidence or recognition of one’s intelligence or ability. Humility has to do with how we view our own worth versus the worth of others. If, out of a feeling of superiority, we fail to serve others, we are not humble. There should be no task we are unwilling to perform for others if the need exists. *5703 Melstone Dr., Arlington, Texas 76016, jimcrouch@thechurch.com*

Endnotes

- 1 It is well documented that Luke’s account does not emphasize chronology, but facts. For example, the other writers agree that Jesus pointed out Judas as the betrayer before the memorial meal, but Luke places this after the memorial. Thus, it is possible Luke discusses the memorial supper first, giving it central focus, and then mentions the conversations that took place before the meal.
- 2 In Greek sentence structure, emphasized words are often placed at the beginning of sentences or clauses. The word order of the this sentence is, “Lord, you my [you] wash the feet?” The emphatic pronoun “you,” unnecessary since the Greek verb includes the pronoun (shown bracketed), is added for emphasis.
- 3 Bauer, p. 610.
- 4 Kittel, **Theological Dictionary of the New Testament**, volume 4, p. 367.

“THE LAMP OF THE BODY IS THE EYE”

Matt Trent

“Do you believe in miracles? Yes!” This is how announcer Al Michaels reacted to the U.S. Olympic hockey team victory in 1980. The impossible had happened. The unthinkable was a reality. During some of the hottest moments of the cold war, the U.S. won. Since that time, this victory has often been called a “miracle.” In fact, in early 2004, Walt Disney pictures released a film retelling this story. The title of the film is “Miracle.”

Our English word “miracle” comes from a Latin word that means, “wonder” or “surprise.” Surprise is common. We might be surprised by things ranging from a quick recovery from an illness to the signal light turning green at just the right time so that we do not have to stop. We could use the English word “miracle” to describe both. However, the student of New Testament miracles finds this troubling. These surprising events are not like the miracles we read of in the Bible. What exactly is a Bible miracle?

What Is A Miracle?

We can classify all of the different kinds of events that have happened on this earth into three categories: the normal, the paranormal, and the miraculous (Jividen, pp. 5-6). The “normal” events are events that have a clear cause and/or effect, that are explainable by natural law. Throughout history these events have formed a predictable, reliable standard that makes the “scientific method” possible.

The second kind of event is called “paranormal.” Paranormal means, “along side normal.” With paranormal events, we cannot easily explain the

cause or the effect, but we can be sure that no “natural law” was violated. For example, if you witness a magic trick, you might not be able to explain the cause of the event, but we know that no natural laws were violated. Another example of this is hypnosis. Hypnosis does not violate any laws of nature, but it is difficult to explain the causes and effects.

The third kind of event is a miracle. These are events where natural law is transcended. When we read of the miracles in the Bible, it is clear that the cause must have been more powerful than the laws of nature. The laws of the universe are transcended when a man walks on water, raises the dead and changes water into wine. Jack Cottrell says, “Thus a miracle is distinguished by its cause—a cause which is non-natural, supernatural and immediate” (Cottrell, p. 251).

In the New Testament, several different Greek words are used to describe the miracles. These words do not describe different types of miracles. Instead, these words are used to describe the various aspects of a miracle.

The first word is **semeion**. This word is most often translated “sign.” The purpose of a sign is to distinguish one thing from everything else. The “sign of circumcision” (Rom. 4:11) distinguished the children of promise from the rest of the population. The “signs of an apostle” (2 Cor. 12:12) showed that Paul had abilities that others did not.

Signs also lead you to a conclusion. The signs in the life of Christ were intended to lead the witnesses to the conclusion that He was the Messiah.

The second word, **teras**, is translated “wonder.” This word focuses on the viewer’s response to the miracle. It is interesting to note that this word never occurs alone to describe a miracle. It is usually coupled with **semeion**, so that we read of “signs and wonders.”

The third word, **dunamis**, emphasizes the power that is necessary in order to perform a miracle. In order to transcend the laws of this universe you need access to power that is stronger than this universe. As Nicodemus said to Jesus, “...no man can do these signs that You do unless God is with him” (Jn. 3:2).

A fourth word, **ergon**, is translated “work.” An example of this word being used to describe a supernatural event is found in John 5:36 where Jesus said, “But I have a greater witness than John’s; for the works which the Father has given Me to finish—the very works I do—bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent me.”

Miracles in the Life of Christ

The importance of miracles to the ministry of Jesus is clear to all who read the gospels. In each gospel the writer carefully records details of these amazing events. Often the writers record the same miracles and thus give complimentary details about a miraculous event. There has been some discussion about exactly how many miracles Jesus performed. **Halley's Bible Handbook** lists thirty-five (p. 469). They are classified under the following headings:

- seventeen bodily cures
- nine miracles over forces of nature
- six cures of demoniacs
- three rose from the dead

Jesus also did many miracles that we do not know about. Each of the gospel writers occasionally makes summary statements about the miraculous work of Christ (Mt. 4:29; 8:16; 9:35; 12:15; 14:14, 36; 15:30; 19:2; 21:14; Mk. 1:32, 39; 3:10; 6:55; Lk. 4:40; 5:15, 17; 6:17; 7:21; 9:11; Jn. 2:23; 6:2; 7:31; 12:37). For example, in Luke 6:17-19 it says,

And He came down with them and stood on a level place with a crowd of His disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem, and from the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, who came to hear Him and be healed of their diseases, as well as those who were tormented with unclean spirits. And they were healed. And the whole multitude sought to touch Him, for power went out from Him and healed them all.

Why do the gospels record so many miracles? Why did Jesus perform so many miracles? Miracles had a purpose. One purpose was to give evidence of God's approval. Consider these passages:

- If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him (Jn. 10:37-38).
- Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know (Acts 2:22).

- God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will? (Heb. 2:4).

Miracles were also intended to give evidence that would create faith. An honest witness of these miracles, seeing that God is giving Jesus power, would naturally believe. Consider what John testifies,

And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name (Jn. 20:30-31).

Another purpose of Jesus' miracles was to get people to listen to the message. We can see this in the way the gospel accounts are constructed. They each use the miracles to highlight teaching. For example, in Matthew 5-7 we read of the Sermon on the Mount. This sermon ends with a challenge to build on the rock of these teachings. In chapters 8-9, Matthew records ten miracles. These miracles show us that He Jesus is able! Build your life on the rock. Build your life on the teaching of the One with power to do all things.

When Jesus sent out His apostles, "they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs" (Mk. 16:20). The purpose of miracles in the lives of His followers was to highlight the teaching of Christ.

Why Did Many Reject Christ's Miracles?

When we read about the miracles performed by Jesus, it is difficult to understand why they rejected Him. How could they see the sick healed, the demon possessed freed, and the dead raised and yet not believe? In an effort to understand why this happened, consider Luke 11. This one event provides an informative look into this issue.

In Luke 11:14 we read of Jesus casting out a demon. The man possessed by the demon had been dumb. When the demon left the man, he was able to speak again and the multitude marveled. How incredible it must have been to witness the immediate healing of a man in such a condition. Yet not everyone was impressed. Two different groups found reasons to doubt.

The first group said that He had power from Satan. Jesus responded to this statement by saying, “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation and a house divided against a house falls” (v. 17). Unfortunately, in our times we have ample evidence in support of Jesus’ response. Millions of homes have been divided by divorce because a house divided will fall. These principles are true for Satan as well. If Satan’s subjects were not working with him, they would be working against him and thus destroy his work. In order to be successful they must be united.

The second reason their argument would not work for the doubters was that some of their own had also cast out demons (v. 19). How could they prove that their own did not cast out demons by the power of the devil?

Having destroyed their argument, Jesus highlights the truth His miracles were intended to support: “But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you” (v. 20).

The second group doubted Jesus’ miracle because they needed a sign. Their demands clearly indicates that they did not believe Jesus’ prior miraculous deeds were sufficient proof that He was the Messiah. Just consider these insufficient miracles recorded in Luke to this point.

- Escape from mob at Nazareth (4:28-30)
- Casts out demon at Capernaum (4:31-36)
- Healed Peter’s mother-in-law (4:38-39)
- Draught of fish (5:4-9)
- Healed a leper (5:12-14)
- Healed a paralytic (5:17-26)
- Healed man with withered hand (6:6-11)
- Healed centurion’s slave at Capernaum (7:1-10)
- Raised the son of the widow at Nain (7:11-17)
- Stills the storm (8:22-25)
- Casts demons into swine (8:26-39)
- Raised Jairus’ daughter (8:41-56)
- Healed woman with hemorrhage (8:43-48)
- Fed 5,000 (9:12-17)
- Casts demon from demoniac boy (9:38-43)
- Heals dumb demoniac boy (11:14-15)

Having seen this list, we understand the obvious boldness of their challenge. Which of these miracles left room for doubt? Which of these miracles was not immediately and completely accomplished? Yet these were not enough.

Jesus' answer to this specific challenge is to tell of a sign that is coming (vv. 29-32). The sign that was coming was the sign of Jonah. Matthew records Jesus' explanation of this sign: "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Mt. 12:40). The special sign for the evil generation was the resurrection. This sign continues to be the sign for the skeptic today. Whenever we meet the challenge of atheism today, we need to point to the resurrection, the sign Jesus identifies as the ultimate proof of His deity.

As Jesus foretells of the great resurrection, He also foretells judgment for those who reject Him. Jesus says that the Ninevites of Jonah's day put the Jews of Jesus' day to shame. The reason is that when they, the Ninevites, heard the great message from God, they changed. They did not ask Jonah for proof but rather repented.

Jesus also says that the queen of the South would rise up in judgment of this generation. First Kings 10:1-10 tells the story Jesus is referring to. The queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord, so she made a journey to meet him. The Bible says that she asked him the hardest questions she knew. Solomon answered all of her questions. She was so amazed that she said that the half had not yet been told about Solomon's greatness. Her conversation with Solomon led her to bless God and give Solomon gifts.

In both of these incidents, Gentiles had learned of the greatness of God and gladly accepted it. In the life of Christ, God's chosen people had seen God the Son live among them, and yet they rejected Him. His own rejected one greater than Solomon. His own rejected one greater than Jonah.

Having read these passages we wonder how they could have rejected Jesus. What was the real problem? The problem was not that Jesus' miracles were suspect or inefficient. The real problem was the heart of the witnesses. Consider Luke 11:33-36:

No one, when he has lit a lamp, puts it in a secret place or under a basket, but on a lampstand, that those who come in may see the light. The lamp of the body is the eye. Therefore, when your eye is good, your whole body also is full of light. But when your eye is bad, your body also is full of darkness. Therefore take heed that the light which is in you is not darkness. If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, the whole body will be full of light, as when the bright shining of a lamp gives you light."

This parable of Jesus presents many obstacles to the reader. According to Lenski these passages have also presented many obstacles to commentators. He writes, "This entire passage (v. 33-36) nonpluses the commentators, and their efforts at interpretation are labored and unconvincing" (Lenski, p. 650). Nevertheless this parable, like all of the other parables Jesus spoke, contains valuable truths for us. We must correctly understand this parable so that we can benefit from its truths.

No one, when he has lit a lamp, puts it in a secret place or under a basket, but on a lampstand, that those who come in may see the light (v. 33). This verse contains the philosophy of Jesus' ministry. He considered His work as the shining of a light into the world. Jesus' own words, "I am the light of the world," tell the whole story. He was the one who could illuminate every part of the world that was dark.

We should consider this statement especially as it relates to His miracles. Remember, miracles were designed by God to have an effect upon men. Jesus' performance of miracles was part of His shining the light of truth in this dark world.

Because He is the Light, Jesus has to shine. He could have hid His light in many ways. For one, He could have not done any miracles. Another way He could have hidden His light was to do special signs for those who would hide them in a dark heart. Jesus did not do special signs upon request. Jesus shined the light of His life for all to see.

The lamp of the body is the eye. Therefore, when your eye is good, your whole body also is full of light. But when your eye is bad, your body also is full of darkness (v. 34). We see the perfect harmony between light and the eye. Light's purpose is to shine; the eyes' purpose is to use that light for the body so that man's body is illuminated. If we cannot use our eyes, we have no other way of giving direction to our bodies.

The same holds true of our spiritual sight. The light of Jesus' life gives us the light we need to direct our spiritual life. Jesus' ministry meets our needs.

What eye do we use to see the light of Christ's life? It is our heart. Our heart operates for us spiritually as the avenue of light into our whole body.

The word "good" here means, "without fold, without duplicity, without ulterior motive hidden back in some fold" (Lanski, p. 652). The honest heart sees in Jesus One greater than Jonah. The honest heart sees in Jesus One greater than Solomon. The heart that is free from evil motives finds the truth it is looking for in the life of Christ.

To have a "bad" eye is to have an eye that is hostile to God and His will. This "bad" eye does not make the viewer blind, but it does make them him incapable of accurate perception. His condition causes "double vision." This evil heart sees in Jesus a simple carpenter from Galilee who is working with Satan. The evil heart sees in Jesus a blasphemer. The fact is, this evil heart does not really see Jesus at all.

The consequences of our spiritual sight are enormous. If we see with the honest eye, we will see in Jesus one who is greater than Solomon and will follow Him in everything we do. If we see with the dishonest eye, we will reject Jesus and will be on our own. It is difficult to navigate with double vision. The entire body will likely be harmed. So it is with our spiritual man. This tainted vision will misdirect us right into harm's way.

Therefore take heed that the light which is in you is not darkness (v. 35). How could light ever be darkness? In order to understand how to make light darkness, remember Jesus' words in verse 33. In that verse Jesus said that we never light a lamp and then hide it. While this is true physically, we need to be especially careful that it is true spiritually. We cannot ever put the light of Christ's life in the basement. We must always use the light of His life to illuminate our own lives.

If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, the whole body will be full of light, as when the bright shining of a lamp gives you light (v. 36). If we keep the light of Jesus on the lampstand, it will have the complete effect. This shows us the greatness of the light of His life. Who else could provide light for every area of our life with their example? Who else could chase darkness from every part of our lives? Only Jesus has this ability. Only His life has this power. We must use the light of His life for this purpose.

If we are fully illuminated by the life of Christ our entire being will be used to serve Him. As one commentator said, “The mouth does not confess Jesus while the hands disobey him; the head does not bow in worship before him while the feet walk in the counsel of the ungodly. No; the brilliance of the lamp illumines us altogether” (Lenski, p.655).

Do People Reject Jesus’ Miracles Today?

We can clearly apply this parable to our day in which men reject the light of Jesus in various ways. One very common method of rejecting the light of Jesus is by rejecting His miracles.

Within the last three hundred years, there has been a great amount of doubt raised about the miraculous element of the Bible. Men such as Spinoza, Hume, Strauss, and Funk have written books boldly asserting doubts about the miracles. This has been especially true in relation to the miracles in the life of Christ. A.B. Bruce correctly says,

it is the miraculous element in the Gospels that chiefly raises the question as to their historical trustworthiness. Eliminate that element and hardly a doubt would remain: the residuary words and deeds of Jesus would be welcomed as proof that in Judea there once lived a sage and philanthropist of unparalleled wisdom and goodness (Bruce, p. 99).

The voice of the skeptics is loud. They are covered in popular magazines like **Time** and **Newsweek**. They are interviewed on the History Channel, the Discovery Channel and even ABC. When you see the type of media attention this doubt receives in our day, you might wonder if anyone believes in miracles anymore. In September 2003 a **Fox News/Opinion Dynamics** poll showed that 82% of those questioned believed in the miracles of the Bible.

I found this poll reassuring on some levels, but I was left to wonder: would Jesus be pleased with this high percentage? This parable teaches us that Jesus wants for man to be fully enlightened by Him. Just believing in miracles is not enough. Sadly, many men and women who believe Jesus performed miracles still struggle with their eye today.

Men still struggle with their eye when they demand the Lord prove through signs that He is whom He claimed to be. We saw in Luke 11 how

incredible it was to demand a sign after Jesus had already performed so many. How much worse it is today? We have all of the New Testament miracles those skeptics had, plus we have the resurrection! The resurrection is *the* sign. Men have no right to challenge the Lord by calling Him to give them a special sign.

Men still struggle with their eyesight when they teach conflicting doctrines from the life of Christ. In the average American town, you are likely to find dozens of different denominations. Each of these denominations teaches a doctrine founded upon the life and teachings of Jesus. This parable teaches us that bad perception will cause confusion. The confusion of denominationalism is because of poor eyesight.

Men still struggle with their eyesight when they continue to hang on to sin after learning of the new life in Christ. Many passages in the New Testament teach us about the change that needs to take place in our lives. We are changed by what we have learned (Eph. 4:20-24). When we reject the teaching, we make the choice to allow darkness in our lives. Jesus said that a good eye would lead to a fully illuminated body. When we hang on to sin, we cannot have this because of our poor eyesight.

Do You Believe in Miracles?

Do you believe in Miracles? Yes! Most of us believe that miracles happened. Yet this parable makes it clear that if we really believe the miracles of Jesus' life, he will illuminate our entire being. Consider this summary;

If they but gazed on him with the proper motive, they would find their whole lives illumined, and glory waiting upon their work. He was anxious for this result—hence his warning. We learn, then, the necessity of singleness and simplicity of aim. In such a case we shall need no theories to account for Christ's power, but acknowledge its Divine and gracious character at once. Then shall our whole heart go forth in sympathy to him, and we shall be with him in co-operation and in success" (Spence & Exell, p. 329).

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ZAMBIA

P. Duane Permenter

What a delight it has been to study and train Zambians and Zimbabweans together with Bill Davis. It was a real blessing from heaven to join Bill in the study at Binga, Zimbabwe, with about twelve Tonga leaders from Zambia and twenty-seven church leaders from Zimbabwe. The study at Binga took place the week of December 8. We arrived in Binga on the preceding Saturday or Sunday. Bill had arranged for us to stay in the Binga Lodge and take our meals there while using the conference room. There were about forty of us, and it ended up costing several hundred U.S. dollars. Bill would not let me share in this expense at all for he said he planned it and would pay for it out of his money. Bill is an asset to the work in so many ways, and I am very thankful for him.

The study began with the importance of following the proper order in leadership just like the communion or anything else. We dealt with the qualifications of elders, evangelists, and deacons. We also talked about the work of an elder and that one elder cannot rule the church alone nor can his work or authority cover more than one congregation. We also taught on the work of an evangelist, the need for training the church and young, potential evangelists. We pressed the importance of an evangelist working himself out of a job and going to other parts of the country to establish new works. We addressed issues of the Holy Spirit and many other parts of the doctrine that are so much needed here in Zambia. We printed out materials beforehand that could be used to take notes on and to keep for future reference. Printed materials are very costly but I believe it is very important to provide such since one of

the great needs in Zambia and Southern Africa is printed material for the use of the brethren. Even though most of the things we discussed were basic things, much of what we said was very enlightening to the Africans. At the conclusion of the study many said we need more of these kinds of studies where we come together for several days of intensive training.

I was convinced already, but even now more than ever: the greatest work for an American evangelist over here is to train these brethren in the doctrine and do the best we can to work ourselves out of a job. I realize that I have only begun and that the work is so vast that there is much more to do. In fact, even though I have worked seven days a week, many hours a day, it will still take years to do what needs to be done. Please, pray that I have the wisdom and strength to do and be what this great work in Zambia needs. Much more has been accomplished in the last six months than I thought was even possible, and I am so grateful to the Lord for such a great work to share in. Thanks and appreciation I also send to Edmond for backing me and helping me in more ways than I know how to say. God has surely blessed our efforts. At present, there are nine new congregations, and adding in the number of existing congregations and congregations that have come out of digression, the total congregations in Zambia stands between 160 and 170.

Please write or call me if you have questions. I am gone most of the time so it is easier to reach me by e-mail. In some places I go I have learned how to access the Internet, so even when I am out I can often access email. I will certainly be able to do so after arriving home and will answer you as soon as possible. Thank you so much for all the response to Don Kelly's plea for money for Bibles and the drip irrigation systems. We have distributed many Bibles already and will continue to do that for many weeks. In the name of Jesus Christ I write these things and it is my prayer that God will bless you in every way. *P. Duane Permenter, P. O. Box 37073 Lusaka, 10101 Zambia, Africa, Telephone 260-01-215-290, duane@dnlpermenter.com*