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Megiddo Message

*How Great
Thou Art*



How Is Your Early Defense System?

My voice You shall hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning I will direct it to You, and I will look up. —Psalm 5:3

In today's nuclear and biological age, our nation's department of defense maintains highly sophisticated and costly early defense systems for survival. No sane person would consider abandoning the constant vigil that is needed to safeguard us against enemy attack.

But have we considered our vulnerability as Christians?

Yes, true believers are vulnerable. Every day they are engaged in spiritual warfare, and need a constant, conscious, working alert system. None can afford to enter any day complacently. They must be wide awake, alert, and on guard at all times, not just to prevent attacks—they will come—but to prevent falling to the enemy during the onslaught.

Perhaps we as Christians can take a lesson from the animal kingdom. In an article for the San Francisco Chronicle, Herb Cane noted the defense system of two natural enemies, the lion and the gazelle. I quote his comment in part:

"Every morning in Africa, a gazelle wakes up. It knows it must run faster than the fastest lion or it will be killed. Every morning a lion wakes up. It knows it must outrun the slowest gazelle or it will starve to death. It doesn't matter whether you're a lion or a gazelle; when the sun comes up, you'd better be running."

Aren't we a lot like the gazelle? Every morning when we awake, we must be alert for the enemy's attack, and keep running for our spiritual lives.

British pastor Charles Spurgeon wrote, "If you are not seeking the Lord, the devil is seeking you." Of course Spurgeon was thinking of that cloven hoofed monster he imagined as having horns and a pitchfork in hand. But the devil we must beware is no imaginary monster. He looks back at us the first thing every morning as we comb our hair and brush our teeth. And there are many other temptations we must be ready to withstand—the website we should not visit, an item in the magazine rack; the impatient clerk. If we wait until we are attacked to think about our defenses, we will be defeated. We must be prepared in advance. That was the apostle Peter's strategy. *"Stay alert! Discipline yourselves, be self-controlled. Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour: resist him, steadfast in the faith"* (1 Pet. 5:8, 9 various translations). If this approach was good for the heat of the day, it should work just as well right now.

David knew he had enemies; he knew he needed God's love and protection every moment. That is why he wrote: *"In the morning, O Lord, You will hear my voice; In the morning I will order my prayer to You and eagerly watch"* (Ps. 5:3 NASB95).

Let's not greet any new day without being aware of our urgent need to be prepared. How do we prepare? By being aware of our weaknesses and attentive to God's commandments, seeking His help. Preparedness is the best defense. Being anything less than fully prepared is being unprepared. To lose the battle is to lose eternal life! ♦

WE BELIEVE...

- ★ **in God, the Creator** and sustainer of the earth, the world, the universes, and all life, in whom we *"live, and move, and have our being."*
- ★ **in the Bible** as our only source of true knowledge about God and His purposes and plans for His creation and for the salvation of humankind.
- ★ **in Jesus Christ**, the Son of God and our Perfect Example, who was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin; who ministered among His brethren, was crucified, resurrected, and taken to heaven and seated at the right hand of the Father, crowned with immortal glory, and who shall shortly return to be King of the whole earth.
- ★ **in the Holy Spirit**, the openly manifest power of God, which God bestowed at various times and in various ways to reveal His knowledge to humankind, to support His spokesmen, to confirm His utterances, and to demonstrate His supreme power and authority.
- ★ **in life as the gift of God**, and in our sacred responsibility to use it for God and His coming Kingdom.
- ★ **in humankind** as providing the raw material from which shall be selected and developed a superior, God-honoring people upon whom God will bestow the blessings of immortal life in His soon-coming Kingdom.
- ★ **in ourselves** as capable, with the help of God, of applying to our own lives the precepts and principles taught in the Word of God, in this way perfecting that high quality of moral character which God has promised to recompense with life eternal in His heavenly Kingdom on earth.
- ★ **in the promise of God**, that Jesus Christ will soon return to rid the earth of all sin and suffering and inaugurate an eternal and worldwide Kingdom of peace and righteousness, until God's will is done here as it is now done in heaven.

MEGIDDO MEANS...

"a place of troops" (*Gesenius' Hebrew Lexicon*); "a place of God" (*Young's Analytical Concordance*). Megiddo was and is a town in Palestine, strategically located, and the scene of frequent warfare. In the spiritual parallel, it is a place where soldiers engaged in spiritual warfare gather to renew their strength and courage (2 Cor. 10:4-5).

*Start each day
with your armor on
and your marching
orders in hand.*

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Near Kananaskis,
Alberta, Canada. Photo
by Margaret Tremblay

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Megiddo Message

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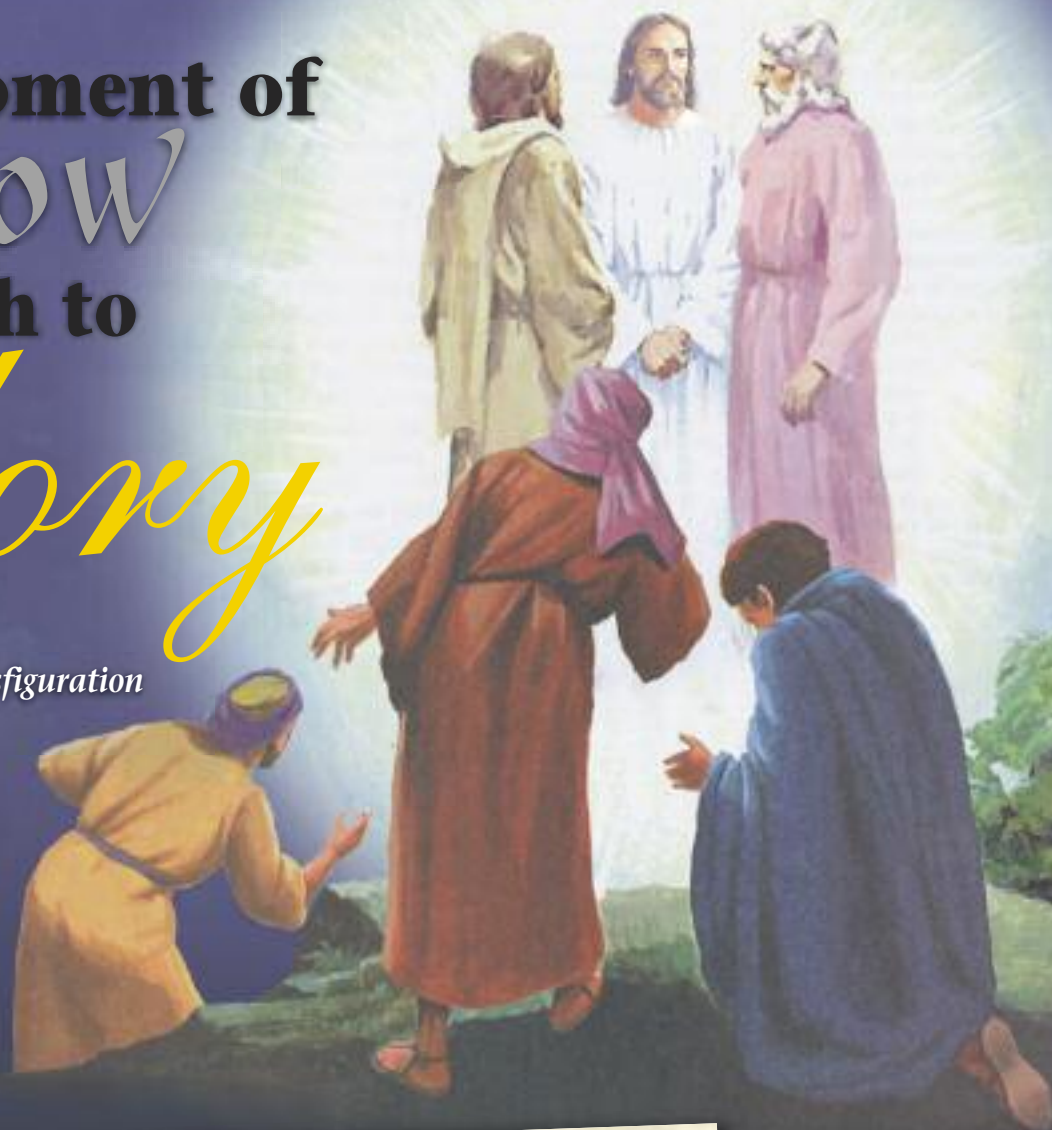
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The following lexicons are abbreviated as: BDAG—Arndt, W., Gingrich, F. W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (1996). A

Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature; DBL—Swanson, J. (1997). Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains; EDNT—Balz, H. R., & Schneider, G. (1990-). Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament; GES—Gesenius, W., & Tregelles, S. P. (2003). Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures; HAL—Koechler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M., & Stamm, J. J. (1999). The Hebrew and Aramaic lexicon of the Old Testament; LSJ—Liddell, H. G., Scott, R., Jones, H. S., & McKenzie, R. (1996). A Greek-English lexicon; LN—Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: Based on semantic domains; SHG—Strong, J. (1997). The new Strong's dictionary of Hebrew and Greek words. THAYER—A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (1889).

A Moment of Sorrow on the Path to Glory

Insights into Jesus' Transfiguration



Jesus' Transfiguration as told by Matthew

(See also Mark 9:2–13; Luke 9:28–36; 2 Pet. 1:17–18.)

Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid. But Jesus came and touched them and said, "Arise, and do not be afraid." When they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.

Now as they came down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead."

—Matthew 17:1–9

Think about it...

Did Jesus experience a moment of *glory* on the path of *sorrow*, or a moment of *sorrow* on the path to *glory*?

In other words, was the glory of the Transfiguration a single bright moment in a sad and steady march toward death on Calvary **OR** was His death on Calvary a momentary interruption in a life that was approved by His Father, blest with numerous revelations of glory—and unsurpassed and everlasting glory to come?

Let the Bible provide the answer. Consider these important events in Jesus' life:

- ◆ At His **baptism**, Jesus heard a voice from heaven saying, *"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"* (Matt. 3:17)
- ◆ At the **Transfiguration**, Jesus again heard *"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!"* (Matt. 17:5)
- ◆ After the **resurrection of Lazarus**, Jesus said, *"Father, glorify Your name,"* and a voice *"came from heaven, saying, 'I have both glorified it and will glorify it again.'"* (John 12:27–28).
- ◆ In His **final recorded prayer** before His crucifixion, Jesus said He had glorified His Father on the earth, and asked to be glorified in His Father's presence (John 17:4–5).

Transfigure: to give a new and typically exalted or spiritual appearance; to transform outwardly and usually for the better.
—Merriam Webster dictionary

An article by 19th century theologian A. B. Bruce called, "A Moment of Glory on the Path of Sorrow" describes Jesus' Transfiguration as the "moment of glory" on His way to crucifixion, "the path of sorrow." In his view, and that of the majority of Christendom, Jesus' main mission was to die. "Come watch now," he invited, "as the Christ, so misunderstood and lonely on earth, enters this glorious, heavenly pause in His steadfast journey toward Jerusalem and death."

Much as we also regard Jesus' life with reverence, must we think for a moment that His life was a "steadfast journey toward Jerusalem and death"? Was Jesus' whole career a preparation to die? Must we look upon the Transfiguration as an interruption in a life filled with loneliness and gloom, "a brief refreshment for his weary, saddened, solitary soul"?

Far from being a march toward death, Jesus' earthly career was a steadfast, glorious journey toward LIFE. He was living to LIVE! Why should He be sullen and downcast? Even on the eve before His crucifixion, when alone with His disciples, He spoke not of fear and death but of peace, joy, and life. *"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you.... Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.... I am the way, the truth and the life.... If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full"* (John 14:1, 6, 27; 15:10–11). One with lesser inner strength would have been frightened—almost anyone would have been tense and apprehensive. But Jesus had fixed His mind beyond the crucifixion. He was on the way to glory, and even the severest earthly trial was but a moment of suffering on the way. His mind was fixed on the *glory*. He naturally feared the suffering that lay ahead; but what was the very worst that sinful men could do to Him compared to the endless ages of happiness and joy that lay ahead? In just a little while, relatively speaking, He would be speeding across oceans of space in the delightful company of angels, on the way to His Father's throne. Can we imagine the thrill in His heart as He thought of His angel charioteers telling Him highlights of events here and there in the universe as they passed by one galaxy and another?

A Vision

Were Moses and Elijah really present, talking with Jesus? No, Jesus Himself called the transfiguration a vision: *"Tell the vision to no one"* (Matt. 17:9). Think of it as an audio-visual experience.

Many people have claimed that the Transfiguration was an actual experience, that Moses and Elijah were visibly appearing to the disciples, their "souls" being alive in heaven (they believe that the dead are conscious). But Jesus' own words remove any idea of this, for He says clearly that it was a vision: *"Tell the vision to no one."* It was not a live conversation between Jesus, Moses and Elijah.

Then try to picture the joy when Jesus would arrive at that sublime pinnacle in the heavens, His Father's throne. Can't we imagine that even as He walked the dusty Judean roads He could hear in His mind the distant heavenly choirs as they

rehearsed for the occasion? Angels had come to announce His lowly birth (Luke 2:8-12) —would they not much more celebrate His high moment of achievement! In just a little while He would be looking on the face of His Father and enjoying the welcome prepared for Him. What would it be like, to stand approved in His Father's presence, and be crowned with immortality? Jesus had the assurance that His life work was finished and accepted (John 17:4-5). Think of the honor of being seated at the right hand of His Majesty, a position of honor He would enjoy for some twenty centuries as He received instruction for His future mission as King. Then there would be the journey to earth in the company of glorious angels (Matt. 16:27). But it would be different than when He was taken away. This time He would be "on His own," so to speak, an immortal being in His own right. This time He would not be *carried*—the myriads of angels accompanying Him would be *His* angels. And when the time came for Him to ascend the throne of His Father David, He would reign forever and ever (Zech. 14:9; Luke 1:31-33).



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Mount Hermon

On What Mountain?

The tradition that connects the Transfiguration with Mount Tabor is beyond question false. On Mount Tabor's summit were an armed fortress and a great castle making it an unlikely site for the Transfiguration.

Mount Hermon fourteen miles from Caesarea Philippi is the most likely site of the Transfiguration of Jesus. Mount Hermon is 9,400 feet high, 11,000 feet above the level of the Jordan valley, so high that it can actually be seen from the Dead Sea more than one hundred miles away.

Because of Mount Hermon's great height, it is likely the Transfiguration took place somewhere on the slopes of this beautiful and stately mountain and not on its very summit. It seems this amazing vision took place some time in the late evening, or at night. Luke tells us that the disciples were weighted down with sleep (Luke 9:32). He also says it was the next day that Jesus and the three disciples came down from the mountain (Luke 9:37).

Quotation from *The Gospel of Matthew: Volume 2*. 1976 (W. Barclay, Ed.). The Daily Study Bible (157). Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster John Knox Press.

In view of all this glory, the sorrow was but for a moment.

Understanding the Transfiguration

The Bible account of the Transfiguration leaves us awed in the presence of the Divine. Even Peter "*did not know what to say*" (Mark 9:6). What would be our response? Words cannot adequately describe that vision in which the transfigured body of Jesus shone with celestial brightness, and the likenesses of Moses and Elijah were seen with Him, and a voice was heard pronouncing Him to be God's well beloved Son.

Think about the events that led up to it. Jesus and His disciples had been in the coast of Caesarea Philippi, where Jesus had asked them the intriguing question: "*Who do men say that I, the Son of Man am?*" A simple question, they replied with the usual round of ideas they had heard: "*Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets*" (Matt. 16:14). This, apparently, did not matter. The thrust of Jesus' point was in His next question: "*But who do you say that I am?*" To this question Peter responded with a powerful personal testimony to His own faith: "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*"

Jesus commended Peter's conviction, and took the opportunity to teach another powerful lesson. "*Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter [petros, a stone], and on this rock [petra, the mighty rock of which you are a stone] I will build My church, and the gates of Hades [powers of death] shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven*" (Matt. 16:17-19).

What a commission! And what a responsibility upon Peter and each of his successors who aspire to be part of the Church eternal! Built on the solid rock of Divine wisdom, this structure *shall stand*. And, said Jesus, the same high standard of holiness

must be maintained in the true church as is maintained in “heaven,” i.e., in the finished Kingdom of God.

With these challenging words still ringing in their ears, Jesus told His disciples about a few foreboding events in the very near future. *“From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day”* (Matt. 16:21). Jesus was prophesying. Did they realize it? Were they hearing right? Could it be possible? Yes, the immediate future for Jesus was not kingship but suffering, cruelty, injustice, and punishment He did not deserve. Jesus would die.

For the apostle Peter, all this seemed totally beyond the realm of possibility. Apparently Peter missed completely the fact that Jesus said also that He would be *“raised the third day.”* Shocked by the thought of such cruel suffering, so contrary to his expectations for Jesus, Peter responded, *“Lord, this shall not happen to You.”* Jesus took the opportunity to teach Peter—and us—a lesson: that every one of us must be ready to submit to the will of God, whatever is in that will. Peter had no right to protest, and Jesus rebuked him sharply: *“Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.”* It was as if He said, Peter, you are holding to your own thoughts of what should be. I must submit to the will of My Father. If giving My all means giving up My life, I will do it.

Then Jesus added another nutshell sermon, in which He further defined the lofty standard to which each disciple of His must attain. *“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”* (Matt. 16:24–26).

The Master was speaking from the depths of His own wholesouled dedication, His own personal struggles and approaching trial. For Jesus, too, was tempted; He, too, had to suffer, that He might *“learn obedience”* (Heb. 5:8).

The lesson is for all Christians in all ages and stages of life. The law of cross-bearing is binding upon **all** would-be children of the Kingdom, **all** who would live godly in Christ Jesus. *“If any man will come after me”—any*, none excluded. It is as if above the door to the school of Christ this legend were inscribed: “Let no one enter here who is unwilling to take up his cross.”

Does this seem too exacting a view of the Christian life? It is the teaching of our Lord Himself. *“For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.”* In this startling paradox is the deepest of meaning. It is as if our Lord had said, Whosoever makes it his first business to preserve his natural life and worldly well-being, shall lose the higher life; and whosoever will relinquish his goals in this life for My sake shall attain to real, even **eternal** life.

Something must be given up; the question is **what**, the lower or the higher? If we choose the lower, we lose the higher. If we choose the higher, we must sacrifice the lower.

Is the price too great? No, for *“what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”* If the greatest value in all the world is life everlasting—and we know that it is—then what price can be too dear to pay for it? How much more costly to hold to the “whole world”—or,

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PHOTO COURTESY OF “BIBLEPLACES.COM”

Mount Hermon in the distance.



Conversation on the Mountain

What were Jesus, Moses and Elijah talking about as they appeared in the vision on the mountain? Luke tells us: *"Behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem"* (Luke 9:30–31).

From this statement the above-mentioned author drew his conclusion that Jesus was indeed on the way to death, that His approaching demise was on His mind as the central purpose of His career; that the Transfiguration was a foreshadowing of that event, to explain to the disciples His all-important mission of coming to die for the sins of the world.

The Bible invites us to *"Come now, and let us reason together"* (Isa. 1:18). Picture Jesus transfigured, shining with the dazzling brightness of the immortal glory He will have when He comes in His Kingdom. Is it reasonable that Moses and Elijah in the vision, seeing Jesus in this indescribable glory, would be talking with Jesus about the horrible suffering, crucifixion and death that Jesus would soon face? Is there any other possible way to understand this passage in Luke's Gospel?

The word translated decease is *exodus*, a combination of *ex* plus *hodos*, and is literally "the completion of a progress (the route, act or distance); figuratively, a mode or means:—journey." It may also mean "an exit, i.e., (figuratively) death: decease, departing;... the close of one's career, one's final fate." Still another definition is "a going out, a marching out, as a military expedition, a solemn procession, a bridal procession to the bridegroom's house; an end, closed." (Definitions from *Thayer's Greek English Lexicon*, *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, and *Liddell and Scott's Greek English Lexicon*.) The word is used only three times in the New Testament, in Luke 9:31, 2 Pet. 1:15 where Peter speaks of his own death, and Heb. 11:22: *"By faith Joseph... made mention of the departure of the children of Israel."*

The word *"exodus"* is used to describe the closing of one's career, which normally is one's death. But what was the closing of Christ's career? For Him, death was **not** the end. For Him, death was only a brief interlude, only a moment of sorrow on the path to glory. Far from being a defeat, death for Jesus was only a brief interruption. A few hours, and He would be alive again!

In the context of the Transfiguration, with Jesus appearing in glory and Moses and Elijah representing the mortals who will be part of the glorious reality, was it not fitting that they should discuss what Jesus had only days before told His disciples: that He would suffer, and be crucified, and the third day rise again, after which He would be taken to the Father's right hand, until the Day of His return in glory? The closing of the mortal phase of His career would soon be an entering into the eternal phase, of glory and honor which would go on forever!

Jesus did not live to die. The writer of Hebrews described Jesus as living in the *"power of an endless life"* (Heb. 7:16). His life of service was no mere mortal span. Of Him it was said, *"You are a priest forever"* (Heb. 7:17). By His own testimony He was born to be a King (John 18:36–37). His career was not limited to the normal mortal span.

Always when Jesus foretold His crucifixion and death, He spoke also of His resurrection. He saw the suffering in perspective. What was the hour of trial compared with a future filled with glory—the glory of the resurrection, the glory of the ascension, the glory of being welcomed into His Father's presence, the glory of being exalted at His Father's right hand, the glory of His second coming with myriads of shining angels, and the glory of His coronation as King of the whole earth. What a path of glory!

more likely, only a tiny portion of it—and lose one's eternal life in exchange!

Jesus' appeal comes home to each of us. For *we*, too, must experience the pain of giving up what is near and dear to us. We, too, must suffer loss. But if there is something to lose, there is something incomparably greater to be gained. *"For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works"* (Matt. 16:27).

Immediately Jesus follows with a short range prophecy. *"Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom"* (v. 28). Who were the *"some standing here"*? And how would they see the *"Son of Man coming in His kingdom"*?

Only a few days, and all was clear. The *"some standing here"* were Peter, James and John. The *"coming"* was that of the *"Son of Man,"* whom they would see transfigured, appearing as He will be seen when He comes in the glory of His Kingdom.

Matthew's account reads: *"Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light"* (Matt. 17:1-2). They had never seen anything like it. It was a spectacle beyond description. Mark adds this comment: *"His clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten"* (Mark 9:3). Luke records that the Transfiguration followed a time of prayer, that Jesus took *"Peter, John, and James and went up on the mountain to pray. As He prayed, the appearance of His face was altered, and His robe became white and glistening"* (Luke 9:28-29). What a spectacular accompaniment to prayer!

Then two more grand personages appeared in this sacred drama. *"And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him"* (Matt. 17:3).

What was the meaning of Jesus being transfigured before them? It was a vision of His return in glory—His Father's glory—the dazzling light representing the glory of myriads of attending angels (Matt. 16:27). These three privileged disciples were being given this magnificent preview of Jesus' second coming, though at the time they did not comprehend it.

Why were Moses and Elijah in the vision? Whom might they represent, in relation to Jesus' Second Advent? Though we are not directly told, it seems fitting to take Moses as a representative of the saints who will be sleeping in death at the time of Christ's coming, who will be resurrected. Elijah, having been translated never to see death, could represent the believers who will be living when Christ returns. Both groups will be present, both will see Jesus arrive in all His splendor and glory. It has also been suggested that Moses may be representing the Law and Elijah the prophets, the mission of Jesus having been foreshadowed in the Law and foretold by the Hebrew prophets.

Asleep or Awake?

What did the disciples learn from Jesus' Transfiguration? In Luke's account, we read of Peter, James and John that their eyes were *"heavy with sleep; and when they were fully awake, they saw His glory and the two men who stood with Him"* (Luke 9:32). We do not know whether the sleeping of the disciples was part of the experience of the vision or whether it was indeed natural sleep. Only Luke mentions it. But whichever it was, they seemed not to have missed the experience, for we read that *"when they were fully awake, they saw His glory and the two men who stood with Him."* The Bible records visions given both to those who were asleep or awake. However this might have been, Peter wished to perpetuate the experience. *"Master,"* he said, *"it is good for us to be here; and let us make*

"While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!'"



three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah" (Luke 9:33). Mark suggests that Peter made this statement because he did not know what to say—but can we blame him? Can't we imagine that the spectacle of Jesus in glory would leave anyone speechless!

Then came another spectacular moment, for *"While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!"* (Matt. 17:5). What confirmation for Jesus, that the Father was indeed pleased with Him. And what an assurance to the disciples that Jesus was absolutely and indeed the God-appointed Messiah and Son of God!

The disciples hearing the heavenly voice *"fell on their faces and were greatly afraid."* What mortal has not been afraid in the awesome presence of Divine splendor! It was a moment they did not forget. Peter said years later, that *"the voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with Him in the holy Mount"* (2 Pet. 1:18). Jesus allayed their fears with a touch *"and said, 'Arise, and do not be afraid.'"* How they needed that touch!

A Vision

Suddenly it was all over. *"As they came down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, Tell the vision to no one"* (Matt. 17:9).

Many people have assumed that the Transfiguration was an actual event, and that Moses and Elijah (or their "souls") actually came from heaven to talk with Jesus (they believe that the dead are conscious). But Jesus says clearly that it was a vision: *"Tell the vision to no one."* Think of it as an audio-visual experience, not a live conversation among Jesus, Moses and Elijah.

Another Forerunner: Elijah the Prophet

The next matter to engage them in conversation was about Elijah whom they had seen in the vision. One of the disciples asked Jesus, *"Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?"* (v. 10). The scene with Moses and Elijah raised a question in their minds. If this is the way Jesus would come and appear in His glory, why the need for a messenger? Why the teaching about Elijah the prophet?

What was Jesus' reply? *"Jesus answered and said unto them, 'Elijah is coming first and will restore all things'"* (v. 11). There would be a special work for Elijah to do. In these words Jesus positively confirmed their previously held belief, that Elijah would precede His second advent, which they had just seen in vision.

Then Jesus made a statement that has caused confusion. Jesus went on to say, *"But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands"* (v. 12). Who is this "Elijah" Jesus was mentioning, this forerunner who had *"come already,"* to whom the wicked Jews had *"done... whatever they wished"*? It was none

other than John the Baptist, who had already served as the forerunner of Christ's first coming and who had recently been beheaded.

Why did Jesus call John the Baptist *"Elijah"*? Because John the Baptist had come *"in the spirit and power of Elijah"* (Luke 1:17). John the Baptist had been the *"Elijah"* of that time, and *"they"* (the hateful Jews and Herod) had *"done to him whatever they wished"*—and Jesus prophesied of Himself that soon He too would have to suffer a cruel death at their hands.

"Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist" (v. 13). They understood that Jesus was speaking of John the Baptist, who had already been executed. And Jesus' plain statement still stands, that the prophet Elijah is yet to come, before Christ's glorious second advent to *"restore all things"* (Matt. 17:11).

Glory Ahead!

Jesus, far from living all His life in the shadow of the cross, lived in the hope of His glorious coming Kingship. There were moments of trial, but how insignificant they were compared with the glory ahead. The night of His betrayal, He prayed to His Father that He might be glorified in His presence, a glory far outweighing any shame or suffering on earth. *"I have glorified You on the earth,"* He could say, *"I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself"* (John 17:4-5)—what glory could compare with that!

Jesus' whole career was a pathway to glory, the glory of being exalted at His Father's right hand (Acts 2:33); the glory of returning to earth in the *"glory of His Father"* with myriads of holy angels (Matt. 16:27; Mark 8:38), the glory of being exalted as King of the whole earth (Zech. 14:9), and finally, the glory of receiving *"blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power and might"* as the one who will bring to pass all the great promises of God to worthy mortals and make *"all things new"* (Rev. 7:12; 21:3-5).

How brief was the moment of sorrow on the path to eternal glory!

What is the lesson that comes to us from the Transfiguration, from Jesus and His matchless example left on record for us? For all of us it is a lesson in how to take the trials and tests of life, these moments of sorrow on the path to glory, to see them for what they are: opportunities to develop the character that God will reward with blessing and eternal glory; the *"light afflictions"* which *"work for us ... a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory"* (2 Cor. 4:17).

This life is our schoolroom, a training for the higher call, the call to glory and eternal destiny. This is the lesson Christ would have us learn. This is what the apostle Paul said: *"If we share His sufferings, we shall certainly share His glory"* (Rom. 8:17 Phillips paraphrase)—glory in full measure, far beyond anything eye has seen or ear has heard or the heart of man can imagine (1 Cor. 2:9). ♦

The glory ahead gave Jesus the determination
and courage to do always those things that
pleased His heavenly Father.

No Night There

*I see a land where never cometh sorrow,
Where sickness, pain, and trouble are no more;
By faith I see the City of Tomorrow
Securely resting on that golden shore.
So staunch and firm indeed are its foundations—
Upon the solid Rock of Truth they stand—
They will survive the crumbling of the nations,
For they were laid by God's directing hand.*

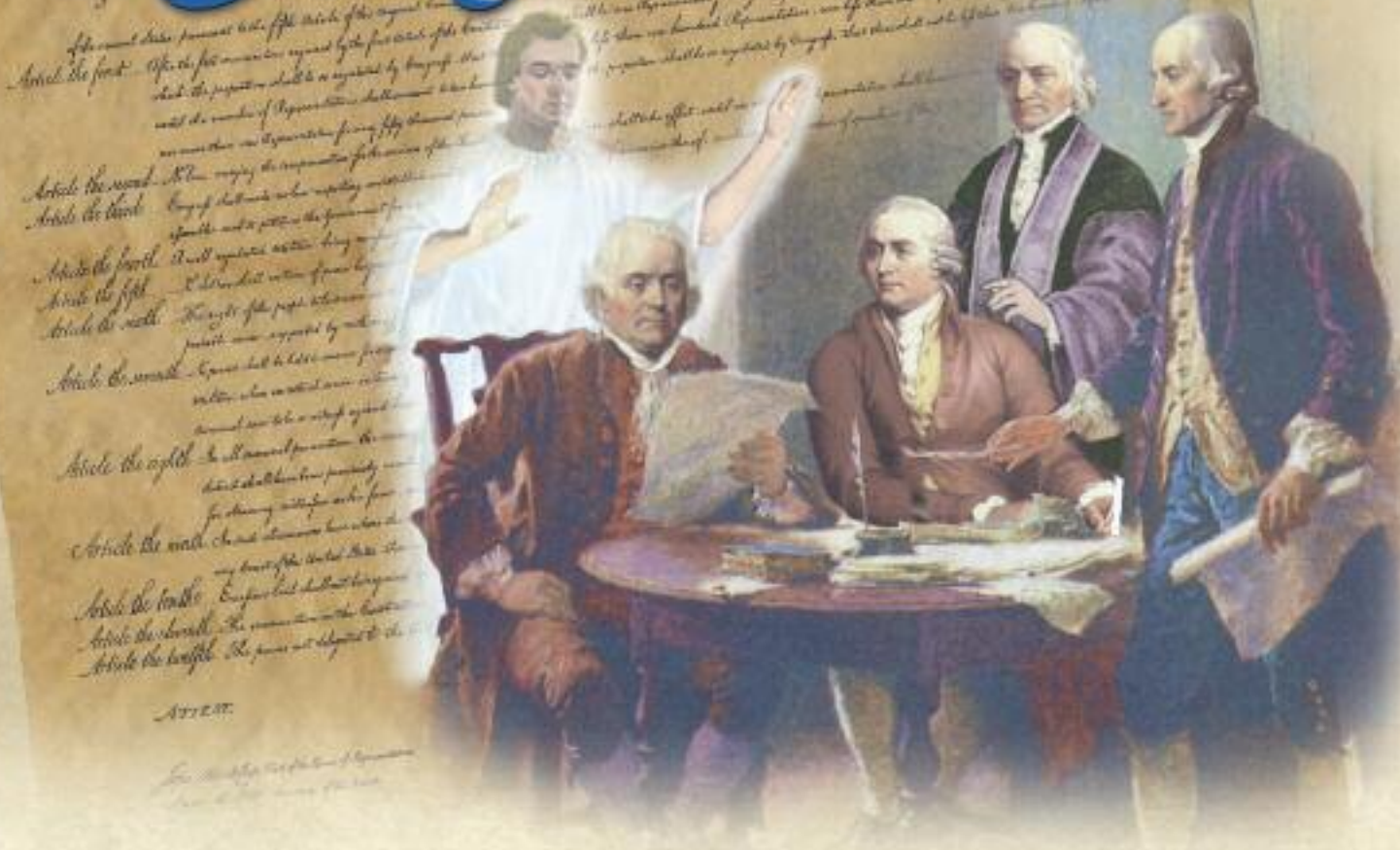
*Its glory streams from every open portal
(O wondrous City of the future day!)
As there a multitude of saints, immortal,
With joy the mandates of their King obey.
They radiate the glory of their Saviour,
Whose pattern they once followed with delight,
And now they share the loving smile and favor
Of Him who rules the land without a night.*

*The gates of that fair land swing open ever,
Not shut by day, and night is never known
In that abode beside the crystal river
Where God is love, and every grief has flown.
No one there needs the sun, in all its splendor,
To light the way, nor do they need the moon;
Light streameth from the throne of their Defender—
God giveth light at morning, night, and noon.*

*I long to tread its streets, and share the glories
Awaiting all who enter that fair land,
When earth, becoming one of heaven's stories,
Resounds with greetings of a faithful band.
To have my age made clearer than the morning,
With strength renewed, this would be my delight;
All clothed with light, my every move adorning,
And live forever where there is no night.*

Liot L. Snyder

While Angels Watch



It is no secret that the preferential place of Christianity in our culture is under fire. Christian values are not suitable in our pluralistic society. Recent U.S. elections have showed a nation strongly and sometimes bitterly divided. Underneath is a subtle but steady transition toward humanism as one by one the old traditions are rejected. Educators have even rewritten our history to claim that the founders of our nation were anti-God and anti-religion.

Basic to the post-modern thinking is the idea that each person is his or her own ultimate authority. Every "I" can say what is right or wrong for "me." The All-wise, Almighty God who created humanity in a universe governed by immutable laws is set aside or rejected altogether. Witness the removing of Bible reading and prayer from public

schools, and the media's defaming and ridiculing of those who believe seriously in God. The cornerstone of humanism is the belief that the universe and human beings themselves are simply the result of blind, mindless evolution. "The universe is self-existing and not created," reads the Humanist Manifesto. Human reasoning replaces the belief that the Bible is the Word of God, given for the guidance of His Creation.

What effect does this change in the current culture have on the plan of God? None at all. We only fool ourselves if we think that human hands can foil the Divine purpose. His plan is going forward on schedule. "My covenant will I not break, nor alter the word that has gone out of My lips" is the divine promise (Ps. 89:34). His decree is as sure to be fulfilled

as that spring follows winter (Isa. 61:11), or day follows night (Jer. 33:25). Whatever men may think or do, God plan will not fail. He still holds the controls. No one can override His decrees. His angels are watching, superintending to bring about His will.

One who reads world history in the light of Scripture cannot overlook the presence of the Divine hand at many a critical junction. Where would we be today if a severe Russian winter had not stopped the progress of Napoleon?

Where would we be today had Columbus not succeeded in getting funds to make his voyage that discovered the Americas?

Where would we be today had Martin Luther not had the courage to post his ninety five theses on the door of the church in Wittenberg?

Where would we be if the Founding Fathers of our Nation had not been willing to risk their lives in the cause of freedom and the American Revolution?

Behind all was the unseen Divine hand. Angels were watching, guiding, superintending to bring about God's will.

The hand of God and His care for His people runs like a golden thread through all human history, even down to our own day and time. In fact, to one familiar with the Divine plan outlined in Scripture, history becomes His tool in fulfilling His purposes. And the deeper one looks, the more evident it becomes that this is not the result of any human imagination. Only an Omniscient Jehovah could keep events moving steadily toward His purposes.

Ever Guiding

Look at the history of the Israelite nation, a people with whom God chose to work. When seventy persons belonging to the family of Jacob entered Egypt as famine-refugees, it was more than coincidence that they found a friendly dynasty on the throne. Progenitors of the chosen people, they soon were slaves of a dynasty that was not friendly. But the hand of God was still on them. In due time they, under the leadership of Moses and Joshua, were led to the land of Israel and freedom. The Divine Hand then arranged for and guided the establishing of a theocracy that should have been the ideal government for developing a people who would reverence and honor God. But not so. Again and again the nation and its leaders fell to copying the idolatrous ways of their neighbors, only to be humbled by invaders who were instruments in the hand of God to punish an apostate people.

When Jesus' apostles had preached His message throughout the Roman world and established churches to carry on its teaching, very soon the gospel they had preached began to be corrupted as it was assimilated by people who did not respect its Divine authorship. New converts soon became teachers who blended the teaching of Jesus and His apostles with what they had learned in the local schools and universities. The result was a "new" gospel totally foreign to what

Jesus had taught, and, in time, a total turning away from the teachings of Jesus and His apostles to the more palatable, more popular fables of men. Finally the light of true religion was extinguished.

How could it be relighted when an all-powerful Roman church would not allow any beliefs outside its own teaching? Any effort to change a tenet of the church would have been snuffed out instantly. But step by step the authority of the church weakened, opening the way for independent thought, increasing education, travel and trade, and—most important—the translating of the Bible into the languages of the people. Also significant was the discovery of America, the opening of a new land, and the setting up of a democratic government beyond the eye of dominating church officials.

If the plan of God was to go forward, if there was to be a rediscovery of true religion in the last days before the return of Jesus, there had to be a nation which permitted absolute religious freedom.

America was the place because America, as a result of the overruling Divine hand, had a freedom unknown to 18th century Europe. The discovery of America and American Revolution were as much a part of the purpose of God as any previous chapter of history.

Freedom of Religion: How Far?

The following act is an historical fiction featuring the hand of God working in the affairs of men for the furthering of His designs and for the benefit of His people.

The date is May, 1789.
The place is New York

City, where the Second Congress is in session. It was

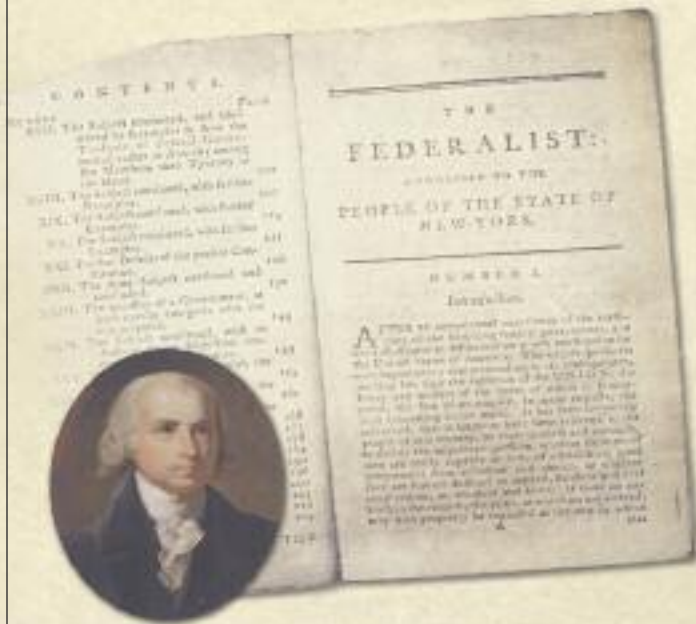
this Congress that gave us the Bill of Rights, as the first ten amendments to the Constitution are often called.

The Constitution as originally adopted was very specific and detailed as to the structure and functions of the new government, but said little about the rights of the individual. This omission was likely intentional, the authors being aware that more issues could not be successfully addressed at one time. The first challenge was to create a document that would be accepted by the people. The omission was noted and felt immediately, and two years later the Constitution was amended to establish and protect these rights.

It is a critical time for the young republic. The road ahead looks uncertain and untried.

Nations have risen, run their course, and fallen with no Divine interference. But this nation had a unique assignment: to be the cradle of the nascent truth of God's Word.





At such times the Eternal's hand is guiding, unrecognized by human instruments but no less definite in its work.

The scene opens on a Congressional committee meeting, where representatives James Madison (VA), Peter Sylvester (NY), and Jonathan Trumbull (CT) are hard at work, drafting possible amendments to the Constitution at a night meeting in Mr. Madison's apartment.

Madison: Gentlemen, we have no time to lose. The House should have at least the first four Amendments for consideration tomorrow morning. Article Three is the most controversial; dealing as it does with freedom of speech and religion. We may expect some warm debate, for the idea is strange and new to so many. But I have confidence that it will be adopted.

Trumbull: I think we can depend on Mr. Hamilton to question it. He is of the aristocratic party, and aristocracy and establishment always seem to go together. Mr. Burr will probably oppose, for no particular reason, but I hope we can muster enough votes to override him.

Sylvester: *(looking at watch)* It is almost time for the Bishop's appointment, is it not? I wonder just what brings him here at this hour.

Trumbull: I think I could make a pretty good guess. We shall see if I am right *(returning to document)*. Now, let's see, where were we? Oh, yes...now, Mr. Madison, what stand do you think Maryland will take regarding Number Three?

Madison: When Roman Catholics are a minority they are firm advocates of tolerance. When they become a majority, it is another story. Fortunately they represent a minority, so I think Maryland will go along.

(Enter Servant)

Servant: The most Reverend Bishop Newman, Sir.

Madison: Show him in at once. *(enter Bishop)*

Bishop: *(after greetings)* I believe I am on time, am I not? Night travel is not pleasant in the streets of New York, what with the lack of pavement and poor lighting. If I had not had my servant along with a lantern, I might have drowned in some of the mud holes.

Madison: Well, Reverend Sir, we hope that someday it will be better. After all, this is in Mr. Sylvester's jurisdiction *(pauses inquiringly)*.

Bishop: Gentlemen, I will state my business at once, as I know you are very busy men. So am I. It is my understanding that certain amendments to the Constitution are under consideration at this session.

Sylvester: This is true—or, rather, they are being prepared for consideration by Congress.

Bishop: *(earnestly)* When the Constitution was adopted two years ago, I, together with my fellow-clergymen, was keenly disappointed that no provision was made for an established religion supported by the State and recognized as the official church of the United States. To me this is a great and very serious deficiency, and I think I speak the unanimous opinion of the Anglican clergy when I say that I feel very strongly that things will never be right until this is corrected. If a representation of prominent churchmen had been invited to the Constitutional Convention, this would never have been overlooked. It is intolerable and inconceivable that the United States of America should be a stronghold of disestablishmentarianism. That is a powerful word, Gentlemen, but a very dangerous one. Therefore, knowing that amendments are planned, this seemed the opportune time for me to urge upon you this sacred duty.

Madison: Well, my dear Bishop, by a strange coincidence we were discussing this very point when you arrived. Now just what reasons can you give us for taking such a stand? As representatives of the people we can do nothing, you know, without good reason.

Bishop: Reasons, my good sirs? Some things are so obvious that they require no reason. But if you insist, it is a universal and time-honored custom. It is the only decent and proper thing to do. It has always been done, and by the most highly civilized nations of Europe. Are we, a newborn country, wiser than they?

Trumbull: I certainly hope so. The fact that a thing has always been done is no reason at all. Have you never heard of such a thing as progress? As for these highly civilized nations of Europe, it was to get away from their abuses and oppressions that our forefathers left their comfortable homes and came to this wilderness.

Silvester: This is a new thing we are doing in America, a new sort of Government. You might call it a government of the people, for the people, and by the people; not for the benefit of any special class or creed. We have broken with the past; let us bury it decently and proceed to make ourselves a better future.

Bishop: Apparently you do not agree with me. I am unable to understand why. After all, I speak as an expert in religious matters, which have not been your special study. I have always considered that a nation without an established religion can never obtain the blessings of Heaven or be assured of Divine protection. I believe the history of the world will bear me out.

Madison: That is your opinion, Sir, but I question your ability to prove it. To me, history reveals that established churches can degenerate into mere tools of the State, or they can become dangerously powerful in their own right. Almost invariably they become intolerant and resort to persecution of one kind or another. The conduct of established churches has often been such that they deserved the wrath of God, rather than His blessings. This is a strong statement, and I make it as a member of your own denomination. I am mentioning no names or places or dates, although I could do so.

Bishop: But our Mother Country, with her official church, has prospered greatly. Where better can we look for a pattern?

Silvester: The recent war proves that she can be in the wrong. The link between church and state placed the established Church in the position of making active war against us. And even with such help, the Mother Country was defeated, and at the hands of a little colonial people who are, fortunately or unfortunately, without a State church. You'll have to do better, my lord Bishop, if you are to prove your point. You need better reasons.

Bishop: (*pacing floor in agitation*) But, gentlemen of Congress, can you not see where all this will lead us? With nothing recognized as official, with no national standard, as you might say, the way is opened to every sort of superstition, to every crazy notion, and the end will be utter confusion. The end will be religious anarchy, and the spread of atheism. An irreligious government can never have the support of its own people or the respect of the world. President Washington has said privately that our new nation cannot endure without the influence of religion. Certainly he must have had in mind something definite and familiar.

Madison: Such as...?

Bishop: (*defiantly*) Such as an established church. Remember, my friends, our serious weakness. The United States is in no condition, politically or financially, to survive

any more disorder than we have now. We are surrounded by jealous enemies. They are strong. We are weak. Our government needs all the support it can get; above all, it needs the help and guiding hand of a strong and experienced Church.

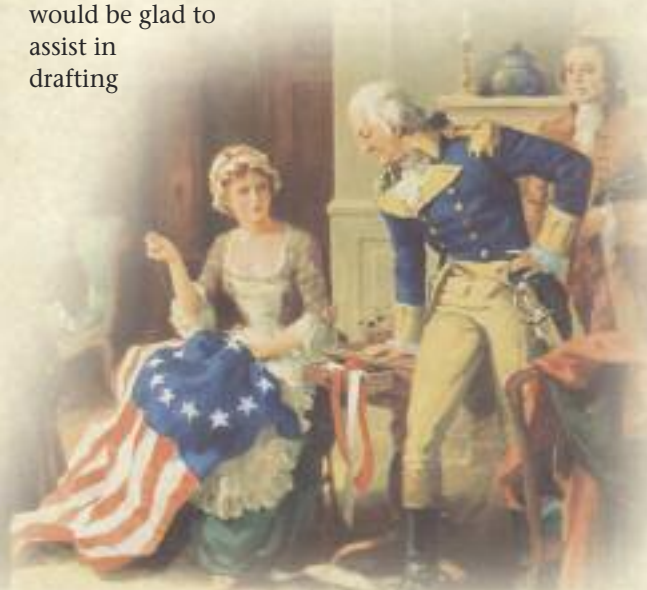
Trumbull: Well gentlemen, I am inclined to think that perhaps Bishop Newman has a point. Above all things we want order: in fact, we cannot afford to have disorder in our present condition of weakness; and religious disorder might prove as bad as any other kind. What do you think about it?

Silvester: (*thoughtfully*) Maybe you're right, Mr. Trumbull. There might be a compromise of some kind made, so as to give full freedom but retain the benefits of a well-known religion in official circles. What is your opinion, Mr. Madison?

(*The Angel enters in background*)

Madison: (*slowly, after serious thought*) Well, of course, the government ought to be an example to the people...I hadn't really thought of it in that light before. I had hoped we might get along without it, but if there is no other way to do it, an established church might be the lesser of two evils. (*He picks up the document and reaches for pen. THE ANGEL though unseen by the men, stands nearby*).

Bishop: (*eagerly, following up his advantage*) Of course, I have not read the amendment as you have prepared it, but I would be glad to assist in drafting



one which would, I am certain, be acceptable to the majority and be for the welfare of our nation.

Madison: (*laying down pen*) No...I'm sorry, Bishop Newman, but this will require more study. Now let me ask you a pointed question. If Congress should approve the establishment of religion, which church would you suggest as the favored instrument?

Bishop: *(beaming)* Why, our own, to be sure.

Silvester: Why?

Bishop: Why? Why not?

Silvester: WHY SO?

Bishop: As I said before, some things are so obvious as to be axiomatic. Our Church is the oldest, of course...

Madison: Not older than that of the Maryland Catholics.



Trumbull: Nor of the German and Swedish Lutherans of Pennsylvania and Delaware.

Silvester: Nor the Calvinism of my Dutch Ancestors.

Bishop: Of course, of course, but they really do not count—Papists and Europeans. After all, ours is an Anglo-Saxon culture and tradition, as in the mother country, and our church is best fitted to carry on that tradition.

(Silvester bristles, but is restrained by Trumbull)

Madison: My understanding, as we told you before, is that we have broken with tradition. In the name of justice, why not establish the Puritans of Massachusetts? Surely no sect has done more for our Republic. Or the Quakers—they have many excellent qualities.

Bishop: But President Washington is a member of our communion, and his opinion should have weight.

Trumbull: Would you be willing to interview the President and find just what his opinions are on this subject? Then we would have it direct.

Bishop: *(backing up)* Why, I hardly think it would be advisable just now. They say he has quite a temper, and I am afraid he might resent it, inasmuch as I am not a member of Congress or of this committee. Perhaps it would be better if one of you would do it.

Madison: Well Bishop Newman, what other reasons have you to offer?

Bishop: *(heatedly)* It all boils down to just this, gentlemen: we are right, and they are wrong. We must not establish error or give it official sanction. Tolerate other churches if you must, but at least do not place them on the same plane as the one true Church.

Silvester: *(warmly)* This sounds sir, like the voice of Rome! This is the very spirit of intolerance which led to the Reformation and the founding of our Western world.

Bishop: *(angrily)* Mr. Silvester, I resent your comparison. The dignity of my church will not permit me to accept this insult.

Silvester: Nor will my sense of duty to my country and the principles of freedom upon which it is founded permit me to accept your protest!

Madison: Gentlemen, gentlemen, this is not the time or the place for personalities. Let us all be calm, for the issue is serious. Let me say this, Most Reverend Bishop: it is my conviction that freedom for all, tolerance for all, and special privileges for none is the only fair policy. Who of us can say that all truth dwells with him or his particular church? It may be that from this fusion of many faiths and creeds will some day emerge a new and better religion. Let us not blindly worship the past or the status quo, but seek for truth wherever it may be found. If this calls for change, let us not be afraid of change.

Trumbull: It is my opinion, after considering the matter, that if a church cannot hold its own without the support and favoritism of the State, it deserves to fail.

Bishop: This is very dangerous heresy, but your blood be upon your own heads. Now here is something, gentlemen, which perhaps you have not considered. *(very impressively, almost dramatically)* If you will think seriously of it, it will strike fear into your hearts. In Europe today are millions of Papists. Their countries are poor and overcrowded. Some day they will be clamoring at our gates. Their hordes of immigrants will be our future citizens. Their first allegiance is to the Pope, and an established church is the normal and natural thing to them. In a few years, by their votes they could deliver this whole country up to Rome—and they will do it, too. And then where will our hard-won liberties be? *(very dramatically)* Think that over, Gentlemen, and act accordingly before it is too late.

Trumbull: *(startled)* Bishop! Don't frighten us like that. That is really something to think about *(OTHERS NOD GRAVELY)*.

Bishop: *(following up)* Now I don't want the Inquisition in America, any more than you do, and the only way to stop it is to have an organization strong enough to

keep it out—a Church which serves as the good right arm of the State. Now here is my suggestion. You seem to be unalterably opposed to the establishment of the Anglican Church—for what possible reason I cannot conceive. If you insist upon democratic procedures, let a general election be called, in which the people may state their preferences directly. The church receiving a majority or plurality of votes will become the official church of the United States. All the rest would receive toleration but no State support. Then we would at least have order and a familiar condition with which to live. I am confident that there are enough good Anglo-Saxons in the country to—

(Angel moves forward and stands by delegates)

Silvester: Just a moment Bishop. You are not playing this thing fair. You are giving the people only a choice between churches. Why not let them decide whether or not they want an established church at all?

Bishop: *(in some confusion)* Why, I hardly think that would be wise. The people are not ready for such momentous decisions. Their heads are still a bit turned by political independence.

Madison: *(decisively)* As chairman of this committee, Bishop Newman, this is our answer: With all due respect to your position, your suggestions are unacceptable. This is not a matter to be decided either by Rome or Canterbury. The people are speaking and will speak. As representatives of the people of the United States, we draft these amendments, which I prefer to call the Bill of Rights. Then the people, through their representatives in the various state legislatures, must ratify them if they are to be adopted. So you see there is to be no compulsion. If the people really desire an established religion, they will simply reject this amendment, which I will now read to you in the form in which it goes before Congress tomorrow morning.

“Article Three: Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”

It is my deep conviction that our highest welfare and safety lie in the absolute and permanent separation of Church and State. It may be a new and untried idea, but I believe God will prosper our efforts to build a better world on this basis. If we are successful, I believe it will have its effect for good in the Mother Country, and even in the whole world. To follow your suggestion would be to go backward.

Bishop: *(angrily)* Perhaps you think so. But at the next election we shall see. Some of you will be up for re-election, and you will find, sir, that our people also vote!

Madison: *(with self-control and courtesy, but with a cold decision)* You will pardon me, Bishop, but our time is valuable, and the hour is late. May we consider the interview closed? *(calling) James! (enter Servant)* James, please have Bishop Newman's lantern-bearer prepare to escort him home. *(exit Servant)* I bid you good-night, most reverend Bishop *(bows him out.)*

Trumbull: I was quite correct in my surmise, it seems. I thought it would be something like this.

Silvester: More and more I am convinced that we are working under the guidance of Almighty God, who is keeping us clear of these pitfalls.

Madison; Amen. But we have lost too much time. Now to get back to work. Read us your draft of Article Four, Mr. Trumbull.

(Curtain closes as Trumbull prepares to read. Angel stands with arms extended over the group.) ♦

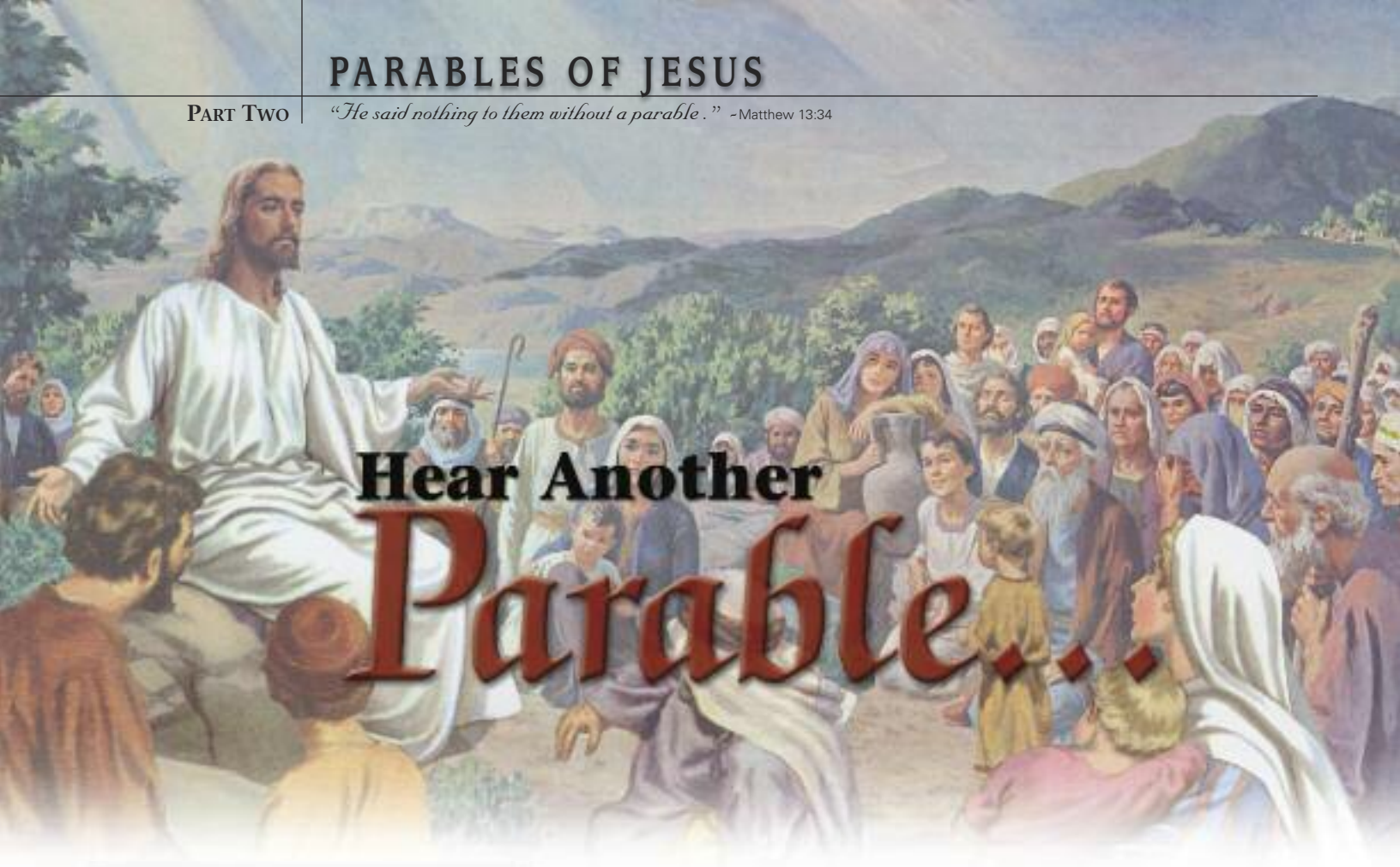
THE MINUTES COUNT

A conductor on a trolley line had seven minutes to spare between trips. The half-acre loop where his run ended was covered with a dense underbrush and thicket. He decided to put his seven minutes to work. At the end of each trip he cleaned out some brush and weeds. Eventually he turned the loop that had been an eyesore into a garden.

Do we fill our “spare” minutes with something worthwhile?

We make our future by the best use of the present.





Hear Another Parable...



THE PARABLE OF the Hidden Treasure

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. — Matthew 13:44

Following Jesus costs more than anything else—except not following Him.

How Much Is It Worth?

You may have studied Economics in school, but did you ever sign up for *Kingdom Economics*?

In these parables Jesus is giving a lesson in Kingdom Economics. He is introducing us to an economy that is very different from the economics of this world. In a free economy such as we have in the United States, the price of a commodity is determined mainly by supply and demand, unless the government intervenes. If the demand is greater than the supply, the price goes up. If there is a late frost, for example, and apples are very scarce, even if the quality of the apples is secondary, the price will be high because the demand will be greater than the supply. If the spring weather is ideal and everyone has apples to sell in the fall, the price on the market may be very low, even if the apples are picture-perfect.

The economics of the Kingdom are different. Here the supply is always abundant. God is not short on resources. But the demand for His product is very, very, very low. Still the price is high. Why? Because His price is not based on supply and demand. His price is based on quality and real value. This value is not influenced by how many people want it; the value is fixed by God Himself according to His standard of values.

The Hidden Treasure

Let us look at Jesus' parable in Matthew 13:44. What would you do if you were digging in the ground and suddenly uncovered a box of real treasure, as the man did in Jesus' parable?

"The Kingdom of Heaven is like...." What is it like? It is *"like a treasure hidden in a field."* The man in Jesus' parable is digging in a field, perhaps preparing to build a fence, or put in the foundation for a building, or plant a crop—

when he strikes something hard. What is it? Perhaps a rock? A root? No, he keeps digging and finds, to his surprise, that it is a box. This is no accident of nature. This box was placed by human hands. What could be inside the box?

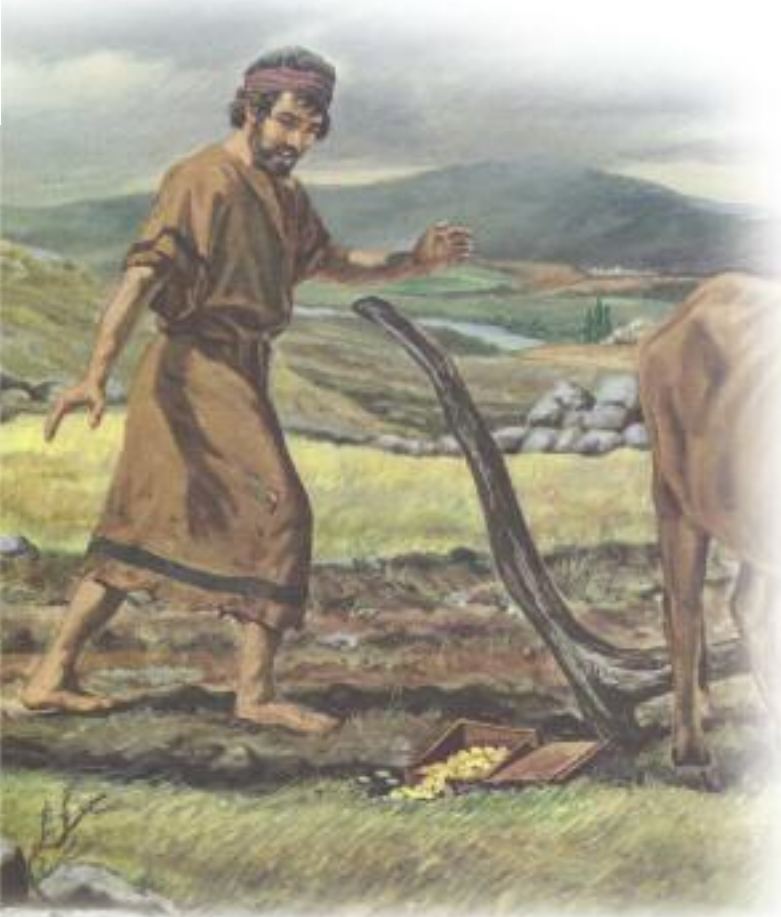
Carefully he unearths the box, cleans it off and opens it. Can you imagine the look on his face when he lifts the lid and finds—it is a box of solid gold coin. His eyes pop! He never dreamed of being wealthy. And now... !!

But it does not belong to him. He doesn't own the field.

His mind is racing as he carefully digs a deeper hole to hide the treasure. What can he do? Should he tell the owner of the field? No! Instantly he makes the decision: He must *buy that field*. The Bible text reads that *"he for joy...."* acts upon his decision.

He does not wonder what he should do. He does not even go home and discuss it with his family. He does not call his friends together and say, "I have found this treasure, now what would you advise me to do about it?" He says simply to himself, "I am going to have that field, whatever it costs!"

Could there be a better parallel to describe the priceless value of the knowledge of how to gain admittance to the Kingdom of God? Could there be a better illustration of the value of God's offer of eternal life?



What is the price of the field? And how much is the man willing to pay for it? What does Jesus say? The man *"for joy ... goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."* Nothing indicates that the man in this parable is wealthy. His stake in this world may be small, but he is willing to let it all go, if only he can have enough to buy this field.

What is Jesus' lesson? How much is the Kingdom worth? It is worth more than everything else in this world combined!

How does one pay the price? One must sell all he has invested in this world to own this one priceless treasure.

Is Jesus saying that we cannot have a house, or a car, or any of this world's goods, that we must literally sell them all if we want the heavenly treasure?

This is not Jesus' point. When studying Scripture, we must be careful to relate literal to literal, and spiritual to spiritual (1 Cor. 2:13). In other words, we cannot buy spiritual treasure with U.S. dollars or gold bullion. Jesus said *"The Kingdom of Heaven is like...."* not *"the Kingdom of Heaven" is....* The Kingdom cannot be bought with literal wealth, or a literal box of treasure. Jesus is teaching the value of the knowledge which, if applied, will give one admittance to the Kingdom.

What must we be willing to give up to live in the Kingdom? We must be prepared to sacrifice every competing goal or interest, anything that would detract or distract from that one great goal, anything that would keep us from living according to the standard God has set. The apostle John said, *"Do not love the world, or the things in the world"* (1 John 2:15–17). Why? Because the pleasures, the pastimes, the entertainments, the goals of this world will absorb our time and interest and leave us with no heart or affection for the higher, spiritual values. That is why Jesus said, *"...unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven"* (Matt. 5:20).

Our interest in the Kingdom must be first, and everything else must be secondary.

The Pearl of Great Price

Then Jesus presents a second parable, slightly different from the first, but parallel in meaning.

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it" (Matt. 13:45–46).

Here is a merchant seeking beautiful pearls. He deals in treasure, items of real worth. As a pearl merchant, he is always looking for that perfect pearl, that jewel of highest value.

Suddenly he comes upon the most beautiful pearl he has ever, ever, ever laid eyes on. But—the price. It also has the highest price. But he has to acquire that pearl—somehow. Day and night that pearl is shining in his mind's eye. He can't forget it for a moment. He has seen many pearls in his life, but never one like this.



THE PARABLE OF **The Pearl of Great Price**

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it." —Matt. 13:45–46

So what does he do? He acts on it. He has a good stock of pearls on hand, but they are all inferior to the one he has just seen. Some are good, but none compare in value with this one priceless pearl.

He makes his decision: the good must give way to the best. He must sell every lesser pearl to acquire that one great pearl.

Here again is the lesson of Kingdom economics. Jesus is saying, the very best of this world is nothing beside what I have to offer you.

What Is the Treasure?

The Bible defines the treasure as the knowledge, wisdom or Word of God. The apostle Paul says, writing to the Corinthians, "*we have this treasure,*" this knowledge of God, "*in earthen vessels,*" simple clay pots, our mortal bodies (2 Cor. 4:7). God gives us this knowledge in His Word. In Proverbs 8 it is personified as a woman who is appealing to us to take what she has to offer, because "*all the things you can desire*" are not to be compared to her value. "*Length of days is in her right hand,*" and "*in her left hand riches and honor*" (Prov. 3:16). Even more, "*She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her*" (Prov. 3:18).

Here is the treasure that can purchase "*the far more exceed-*

ing and eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. 4:17). No wonder it is the most precious pearl ever seen.

The apostle Peter speaks of this same sparkling jewel as the knowledge of God. He writes, "*According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue*" (2 Peter 1:3). He says that everything we have that pertains to future life does not come from this world or its philosophies but only by God's divine power. In the next verse he calls them "*exceeding great and precious promises.*" Here is the pearl, the sparkling jewel, the real value that is priceless. Through these promises we may actually partake of the Divine nature, and escape the corruption of this world, its mortality, its limited life span, and all the suffering that comes with it.

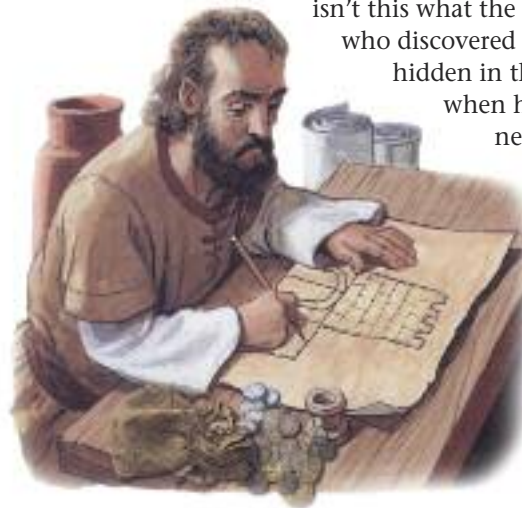
Why would anyone want this pearl? Because it is the only way to obtain those "*great and precious promises.*"

But as with every purchase, there is another factor to consider: the cost. How much are those great and precious promises worth? Jesus does not give any idea that He will be paying the price for everyone, even though this is probably the most common assumption in Christianity. In both parables, the one making the purchase uses his own assets to pay for it. How much is the pearl merchant willing to pay for that most precious jewel? What is the man who discovers the hidden treasure willing to give up in order to own the field where it is buried?

Count the Cost

At this point we need to look at another of Jesus' parables: the parable of Counting the Cost. "*Which of you,*" said Jesus, "*intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it*" (Luke 14:28). What does the prudent builder do? Before he begins, he takes his pencil and does his best to project his costs. Then he looks at his assets to see if he has enough capital to meet the costs and complete the building.

Isn't this what the pearl merchant does in Jesus' parable of the Pearl of Great Price? And isn't this what the man does who discovered the treasure hidden in the field when he realizes he needs to own





THE PARABLE OF **Counting the Cost**

Which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it—lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’

“Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.” —Luke 14:28–33

the field to recover the treasure? Each compares what he has with the price of the item he wants to buy. Each counts the cost. Does he have enough to make the purchase? The decision of both is positive: Yes! Both have enough if they use everything they have. Then comes the next critical question: Is it worth it? Again the answer is positive: Yes! Both are convinced that the value of the purchase outweighs the cost. Both are willing to give all they have in resources to make the purchase. Whatever it costs, they want it!

What, then, does it mean “to count the cost”? It means 1) to compare one’s available resources with the price of the item to be purchased; and 2) to determine if one is willing to pay the price. In other words, is it worth it?

Each purchaser in Jesus’ parables knew there was a sacrifice to be made. Jesus is saying, Be realistic. I am offering eternal life. How much do you want it? How much are you willing to sacrifice for it?

The man who discovered the hidden treasure counted the cost. When he heard the price of the land, did he stop short and say “No way!”? Did he complain because it was going to take everything he owned to buy the field? No. He counted the cost and said, in essence, It’s a bargain! I expected it to cost, but I know that hidden treasure has tremendous value, far more than I am giving up to buy the field. It is worth every penny that the owner is asking. He is even anxious to make the purchase. The parable says that he “for joy over it” sold all he had to be able to buy that field. He was saying by his actions, “At that price it’s a bargain! It’s the opportunity of a lifetime!”

What about the pearl merchant? Did he hesitate when he learned the high cost of that special pearl? Not for a

moment. To him, that pearl was worth immeasurably more than “all that he had.” In fact, the cost was insignificant compared to the value he was acquiring. Whatever the cost, he wanted it!

The apostle Paul had this same conviction about the worth of the Kingdom when he wrote, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18). He knew that whatever he was suffering, whatever he was giving up, whatever the price he was paying, the gain would far outweigh any loss.

Do we think, like so much of the religious world, that the Kingdom should be free, that the price tag should be marked “Paid in Full” because Jesus paid the price for us? Does Jesus say anything like that? Does He ever say, “I am paying the price for you, it is yours if you just believe?” Not once did He say anything like this. On the contrary He said, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me” (Luke 9:23). And, “whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:33). Jesus also quoted the law which contained this all-inclusive principle: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30).

The cost for everyone is the same: one’s all, with nothing held back (Rom. 13:14). The price may seem high, but God has designed a price that each of us can meet because, though He asks all we have, He never asks anything we do not have. This is His fair justice. Paying the price means giving up what we can easily give: our own ways and thoughts, everything that is contrary to His laws, everything He forbids. It means exchanging our ways for His higher, better ways (Isa. 55:8–9).

High Cost, Highest Value

Does the price seem high? Set the value of what God is offering beside anything you may have here, and you can only exclaim, “So much for so little”! That was the mindset of the pearl merchant in Jesus’ parable, also of the man digging in the field who discovered the treasure. Let it be ours also. Let us say to ourselves, Whatever the cost, I want that pearl, I want that eternal treasure! There is nothing in all the world that can even begin to compare with eternal life in Christ’s coming Kingdom when this earth is glorified and made over new. Can you even imagine living in a world where there will be nothing to hurt or destroy (Isa. 11:9), where there will be no disease, no sickness, no war, and no death? (Rev. 21:3–4).

Take Jesus’ advice and count the cost. Set the value of the little that you have to give beside the eternal benefits Christ is offering, and you will be convinced that here is value far beyond anything you could ask or imagine. It is worth it! For indeed, “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.” (1 Cor. 2:9). ♦



IS LYING THAT BAD?

"I was reading a story in the Bible in the book of Acts, where a couple lies about how much they sold their property (field, or house) for, when they are making their contribution to the disciples. Peter knows they have lied about it, and confronts the husband, Ananias, and he continues to lie, then dies right there. Peter says that God punished him for his sin. And then the wife comes in, and the same happens to her.

"What I don't get is, why would God kill somebody for lying? It just does not make sense to me. Maybe I am missing something, but if this is true, I don't know if I want to worship a God who treats people in this way."

A better understanding of the setting of the event you question may be helpful. It was a critical time in the history of the Early Church. Jesus had only very recently ascended to heaven, leaving His apostles commissioned to preach His message throughout the Roman world. The new Church was headquartered in Jerusalem, where much of the activity during Jesus' ministry had centered, where He had taught in the temple, where He had been crucified and been resurrected, and taken to heaven. Peter, John and the other apostles were preaching in Jerusalem, and confirming their Divine authority by performing miracles of healing. As a result, thousands of people were joining the Church. People have always wanted a cure for their ills.

The Church in Jerusalem had also set up a support system without precedent: they had all things *"in common."* This meant that any who had goods or property could sell them and bring the proceeds to the apostles for distribution. Such a system, being built around the needs of each individual, demanded a high standard of integrity (see Acts 4:34-35). The contributions being voluntary, the system could have been easily abused and totally unsuccessful if dishonesty and deception were allowed. Given the circumstances in the Church at that time, there are a number of reasons why God acted as He did when Ananias and Sapphira both lied against Him:

1) There were many new believers in the Church, newly committed to the faith, who had pledged to live according to the law of God, which forbids lying;

2) Dishonesty and deception, if allowed,

would be ruinous to the mission of the Church, especially when they had set up a plan of distribution according to each individual's need.

3) Ananias and Sapphira were setting a bad example by giving an amount and claiming it to be all the proceeds of the sale of their property;

4) Ananias and Sapphira knew that Peter had the Holy Spirit power from God, and that they were in reality lying not to Peter but to God.

5) The Book of Acts records that as a result of their death, *"great fear came upon all those who heard those things"* (Acts 5:5,11).

We today tend to judge God by our understanding and cultural views, as though we are entitled to judge whether a particular action of God is just or fair. We forget that He is our Creator, and provides the resources that sustain our life and that of the entire planet, to say nothing of the vast creation beyond us. He is sovereign over every part of His creation. Who are we to judge Him right or wrong?

God has given us the Bible, His written Word, to inform us about Himself and His dealings with His human creation. He gave Moses a set of civil laws for the governing of the nation of Israel. He gave also a higher, *"royal"* law for any who would want to ultimately live in His eternal Kingdom on earth. Under all of these laws, lying is forbidden. One of the original Ten Commandments was, *"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor"* (Ex.20:16). *"Bearing false witness"* is lying. Joshua commanded the people to *"serve [God] in sincerity and truth"* (Josh. 24:14).

Many times God showed His hatred of lying, deceit, and any kind of falsehood. *"He who works deceit shall not dwell within my house; he who tells lies shall not continue in my presence"* (Ps.101:7). *"Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord"* (Prov. 12:22). Among the seven abominations God hates are *"a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren"* (Prov. 6:19). The apostle Paul was very plain: *"Do not lie to one another"* (Col. 3:9). The Book of Revelations clearly shows God's attitude towards lying. In describing those allowed in the Holy City, He says, *"There shall by no means enter into it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie"* (Rev. 21:27). Those to be removed from His finished creation described in the book of Revelation are *"the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable,...and all*

liars" (Rev. 21:8). Again, those "outside" are "sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie" (Rev. 22:15).

Why do people not die now because they tell a lie? There are two reasons, one being they have not all promised to live by God's laws, which Ananias and Sapphira, being part of the Church, had promised to do. When God gave the law to the nation of Israel, the people listened while the law was read in their hearing, and responded, "All that the Lord has said we will do and be obedient" (Ex. 24:7). God would be unfair if He punished them for a law they did not know about or agree to obey.

Another reason why God is not taking action against evil today is "Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Ecc. 8:11). It is not judgment day yet.

Some people will say that Ananias and Sapphira should not have been punished for lying because the devil made them do it. Didn't Peter say to Ananias, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself?" (Acts 5:3). Satan was indeed responsible, but what or who is Satan? Satan is only a personification of the evil in our own hearts. When Peter was opposing Jesus and God's will for Him, Jesus said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan" (Matt. 16:23). Satan is the Hebrew word for "adversary," "opponent," also "accuser" (LSJ). Jesus was precise about the source of all evil when He said, "For from within, out of the heart of men proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders...." and every evil (Mark 7:21-23). When addressing Ananias, Peter placed the responsibility for the sin squarely on Ananias himself. "Why have you conceived this thing in your heart?.... while it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold was it not in your own control?" (Acts 5:4). And when Sapphira came in, not knowing what had happened to her husband, Peter gave her the opportunity to tell the facts, but she only reaffirmed what her husband had said. Then Peter said plainly, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the spirit of the Lord?" (Acts 5:9). She was party to the lie.

There is another angle to the sin of Ananias and Sapphira. They were likely looking for the same praise that had been given to Barnabas, who had just sold his property and "brought the proceeds and laid it at the apostles' feet" (Acts 4:34-37). By coveting praise they did not deserve, they were making their offering to God hypocritical. God hates hypocrisy. In fact, He says that those who covet the praise of men are not even considered believers (John 5:44).

This incident is not the only one in Scripture where God executed an immediate judgment as an example to others. Think about the thousands of Israelites who died in the wilderness en route to Canaan because of their transgressions. Hebrews reports that the corpses "of those who sinned... fell in the wilderness" (Heb. 3:17; see also Num. 14:22-33). The apostle Paul records that "all these things happened to them as examples, and they are written for our admoni-

tion, upon whom the ends of the ages have come" (1 Cor. 10:11).

God wants us to know that His laws are serious, and that our actions will have consequences if we do not do what we have promised to do. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10).

Just because God winks at sin now (Acts 17:30) does not mean He is approving it, or that He has become tolerant of sin, or has redefined it as the present culture has done. His laws do not change, and when He sends Jesus Christ (Acts 3: 19-21), His long silence will be broken and He will openly show His power against evil and those who oppose Him. In order to have a world filled with righteousness and peace (Isa. 32:17-18), He will have to remove the rebellious and the wicked. "The nation and kingdom which shall not serve [God] shall perish, and those nations shall be utterly ruined" (Isa. 60:12). This is the only way He can achieve the universal peace which He has promised (Ps. 72:7-8; Isa. 60:17-18).

You mentioned that you do not know whether you want to worship a God who treats people so harshly. At the present time there is no compulsion. Any who do not choose to worship a God who treats people this way do not have to. But nothing we do will alter His definitions of right and wrong or change His plan. If we want His eternal blessing and the endless life He is offering, we must come to His terms. His appeal is, "I have set before you life and death...choose life" (Deut. 30:19). If God approved of lying, deceit, and falsehood, how could He be a God of truth? How could He be just or fair toward those who are true and upright, if violating His law does not have any consequences?

The God of Heaven is not to be trifled with. He has mercy and blessing for the humble and contrite, but He resists the proud and arrogant and "such as turn aside to lies" (Ps. 40:4; 1 Peter 5:5; James 4:6). He is a God of truth, and He wants His people to be people of truth.

FUTILE REBELLION

Please explain this verse, "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way." What does it mean? (Psalm 2:12)

A number of prophetic passages in Scripture describe the resistance of the nations to Divine authority at Jesus' second coming. Among them is the second Psalm, from which you quote.

The Psalm opens with a picture of the time when Christ has returned and has been established as King of the whole earth (Zech. 14:9), and the rulers of earth's nations are rebelling against His authority. The Psalm describes that rebellion. We read, "Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing?" (Ps. 2:1).

The word translated “nations” (“heathen” in KJV) is used of a large group of people united by “various cultural, physical, geographical ties” (DBL). Gesenius’ Hebrew Lexicon comments that “the word is general, and used of the nations at large,...specially of the (other) besides Israel,... often with the added notion of foes and barbarians,... [used] of profane persons, strangers to the true religion, i.e. Gentiles” (GES).

Those who do not know God or His plan for the earth imagine vainly that they can successfully resist the new authority when it arrives. That is why the Psalm goes on to prophesy that “*The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying, ‘Let us break Their bonds in pieces and cast away their cords from us’*” (Ps. 2:2–3). The political leaders of the world will join forces to resist the new Ruler and His associates, those who have newly been made His kings and priests (Rev. 5:9–10).

But their resistance is futile and destined to fail. By resisting, they harm only themselves. Their attitude is well described by Jesus’ own prophesy in His parable of the Laborers, by the laborers who say, “*We will not have this man to reign over us*” (Luke 19:14).

What is God’s reaction to their resistance? “*He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall hold them in derision*” (Ps. 2:4). Or, as phrased in some of the newer versions, “*The Lord scoffs at them,*” or “*laughs them to scorn*” (NAS, NEB).

Then He openly “*rebukes them in anger, He threatens them in His wrath*” (Ps. 2:5 NEB). In other words, He pronounces judgment upon the resisters, those who are willing to fight to preserve their former (wicked) way of life.

The new rulers are prepared for this resistance: Divine authority has been fully vested in Jesus Christ. Speaking prophetically of Him, God says, “*‘Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion’ ...[saying], ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession’*” (Ps. 2:6–8).

How will the new government enforce its laws? There will be no resistance it cannot overcome. In the words of the

Prophet, “*You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter’s vessel*” (Ps. 2:9).

Facing inevitable destruction, the nations are given a solemn warning. Never before have they encountered an unconquerable foe. If they were wise, they would realize they have only two options: submit and serve, or resist and perish. “*Now therefore, be wise, O kings; be instructed, you judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little*” (Ps. 2:10–12). The passage is clearer as translated in the New Living Translation: “*Now then, you kings, act wisely! Be warned, you rulers of the earth! Serve the Lord with reverent fear, and rejoice with trembling. Submit to God’s royal son, or he will become angry, and you will be destroyed in the midst of all your activities—for his anger flares up in an instant*” (Ps. 2:10–12, NLT). No other options will be open. It will be literally “*obey and live*” or “*disobey and die.*” All will be compelled to do homage to earth’s rightful King. All will be compelled “*to give unto Him the glory due to His name*” (Ps. 29:2). Those who refuse to obey will literally “*perish.*” They will be cut off from among the living. “*For the nation and kingdom which will not serve you shall perish, and those nations shall be utterly ruined*” (Isa. 60:12).

None need perish, if only they would listen to and heed the warnings; if only they would submit instead of resisting; if only they would “*do homage*” to the new King instead of fighting against Him. But the reality will be as always: the majority will want their own way, even though the end of it be death (Prov. 14:12).

What about God’s anger? God does not become angry as we think of anger. He is not moved by any human passion. His wrath or anger is a term expressing His hatred of evil and wrong and His strong action against it, either to control or remove it. His anger is the penalty of His law which is intended to curb and curtail evil. This is why He executes on them “*the judgments written*” (Ps. 149:5–9).

But always there is a blessing for the humble, the penitent, the obedient, as the last verse of Psalm 2 indicates: “*Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him.*” ♦

ANSWERS FOR PAGE 25

ANGELS VISITS

1. Gabriel (Luke 1:26–31)
2. Abraham (Gen. 18:2–6; 19:1)
3. During the last plague in Egypt (Ex. 11:5 & Ex. 12:29)
4. To rescue Lot and his family from the doomed city of Sodom (Gen. 19:1–22)
5. After the temptation (Matt. 4:1–11)
6. Peter (Acts 12:7–11; 5:15–20)
7. Gideon (Judges 6)
8. Balaam (Num. 22:22–28; 2 Pet. 2:15–16)
9. King Hezekiah (2 Kings 19:14–15, 34–35)
10. Herod (Acts 12:21–23)
11. Gabriel (Daniel 8:15–26; 9:21–27)
12. Samson’s parents—Manoah and his wife (Judges 13:16–18)
13. Elijah (1 Kings 19:5–9)
14. Gethsemane (Matt. 26:36; Luke 22:43)
15. On board ship during a storm (Acts 27:23–24)
16. At Jesus’ resurrection (Matt. 28:2–6)

ENCOUNTERS WITH ANGELS

1. Balaam (Numbers 22:26–27)
2. King David (1 Chronicles 21:16)
3. Hagar (Genesis 16:7–8)
4. Elijah (1 Kings 19:2–5)
5. Abraham (Genesis 22:11–12)
6. A pillar of fire and a pillar of cloud (Ex. 14:19–20)
7. Moses (Exodus 3:1–2)
8. Manoah (Judges 13:8–16)
9. Philip (Acts 8:26)
10. Cornelius (Acts 10:2–3)
11. To give him instructions on conquering Jericho (Joshua 5:13–15)
12. Zacharias (Luke 1:5–22)
13. Jacob (Gen. 28:10–17)



ANGEL VISITS

1. What was the name of the angel who announced to Mary the glad tidings that she would be the mother of Jesus?
2. Who saw three angels at his tent door, and entertained them?
3. On what occasion did the angel of death visit many homes in Egypt?
4. What was the mission of two angels sent to Sodom?
5. On what occasion did angels come and minister to Jesus?
6. Who was released from prison at least two times by an angel?
7. What great leader of Israel was afraid to take up the task of delivering his people from the Midianites, until the angel who appeared to him and gave him a sign—fire came out of the rock and consumed his offering?
8. Who was hindered three times by an angel because he was bent on temporal gain?
9. What king of Judah prayed earnestly for help when the Assyrian army threatened their city and God answered by sending an angel one night that killed 185,000 men?
10. What ungodly ruler in New Testament times was struck down by an angel?
11. What angel helped Daniel understand the vision of the future he had seen?
12. Who asked an angel his name so that if *"your words come to pass we may honor you?"*
13. What prophet was fed two meals by an angel?
14. Where was Jesus when an angel came and strengthened him?
15. Where was Paul when an angel assured him that he would stand trial before Caesar?
16. On what occasion did an angel move a stone and then sit on it?

ANSWERS ON PAGE 24

ENCOUNTERS WITH ANGELS

1. The angel stood in his pathway.
2. He saw an angel between heaven and earth holding a drawn sword in his hand.
3. An angel found her by a spring of water in the wilderness.
4. The angel touched this man as he slept under a juniper tree.
5. The angel called to a man who was about to kill his son.
6. Two guides that the angel of the Lord provided for the Israelites in the wilderness.
7. The angel called to him from a blazing bush.
8. The angel appeared at the man's request, but refused the feast that was offered.
9. The angel told the man to go toward the south on the way from Jerusalem to Gaza.
10. *"A devout man, and one that feared God"* had a vision in which an angel appeared to him.
11. Joshua encountered an angel who was captain of the host of the Lord. What was the angel's purpose in appearing to Joshua?
12. He lost his speech because he didn't believe the message of the angel.
13. He saw angels of God descending and ascending in a night vision, giving him assurance of Divine guidance.





YOUTH IN CHRIST

"Remember your Creator in the days of your youth." -Ecclesiastes 12:1

Read: 2 Cor. 4:16-18

Memorize:

"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."
—John 20:29

How ABOUT You?

Have you ever felt especially close to God after an inspiring service, but among your family and friends He seemed far away? It's important to know God is real whether you "feel" it or not. Don't rely on feelings. Rely on God's Word and fill your mind with His promises, for they are real.

Why Believe?

I wish this feeling would never end, Julie thought as she sat in church with her family. As everyone sang God's praises in this special worship service, she felt closer to God than ever before. But she knew this feeling would end. She'd felt like this before, but after church when she was at home or at school with friends, the feeling of closeness would be gone.

Julie's thoughts ran on, "If I don't feel close to God when I'm home, maybe this feeling of God's presence is just in my head. Maybe He isn't real at all." Julie tried to forget these ideas, but she couldn't.

When the family arrived home, Mom went to preparing dinner immediately. "My cousin Pauline called me last evening, and she's coming for dinner," Mom explained as she scurried about.

"I didn't know you had a cousin named Pauline," said Julie as she began to help.

"When we were young, we spent a lot of time together," said Mother, "but in recent years, we've pretty much lost touch. I think you'll enjoy her."

Mother was right. That evening, Julie found Cousin Pauline delightful. She entertained them all during dinner with stories about Mom's childhood. "I'm glad I got to know you," Julie told her. "And just think — a few hours ago, I didn't know you existed."

Cousin Pauline laughed. "Well...I've existed all along," she said with a wink.

That evening after Cousin Pauline had gone, Julie curled up on the love seat to read, but she couldn't concentrate. The words "I've existed all along," had stuck with Julie. Cousin Pauline's existence wasn't dependent on Julie knowing about her. It is the same with God. I'm just like doubting Thomas, Julie told herself. Thomas wouldn't believe Jesus was resurrected until he saw Him.

Mom came in and sat down next to Julie. "Something bothering you?" she asked gently.

Julie told her Mom what she was thinking. "I sometimes doubt God is real and I wonder about His existence," Julie paused, "I see now that how I feel doesn't change whether He exists or not."

"Doubting God and His plan for His children is an old problem, Honey. If not careful the things all around us do seem more real than God and His promises. But the more we study our Bible and learn what God tells us, the stronger our faith will be in God and in the reality of His everlasting plan."

"Faith comes by hearing...the word of God." ♦

**BUILD YOUR FAITH ON THE WORD OF GOD—
NOT YOUR FEELINGS.**

The above story is adapted from *KEYS FOR KIDS* 1999

Who's Watching You?

CHARACTERS:

Michael Singer Youth, 12 years old
Mrs. Singer Mother

SETTING:

Mother is reading in the living room. Michael rushes in waving a note in his hand.

Michael: Look, Mother! Look what I found in our mailbox!

Mother: Why, it's too early for the mailman.
What is it, Michael?

Michael: It's a letter to me— Mikel Singer. I must see who it's from. *(tears open the letter)*. Why, it's from Jimmie Parker.

Mother: Well! That's nice. What does he say?

Michael: There's a picture, too. The letter says:

Dear Mikel. I made this just for you cause I like you. Its me and you goin fisken. Steve and Bill said all big boys are mean. I told them no cause your not. You fixed my bike and showed me your fisken pool. Im goin to pla a trombon like you when I get bigger. I watch you every sunday mornen in church. I dont have a big brother but if I did I want one just like you. Jimmie

(obviously pleased) Why, I never dreamed Jimmie has been watching me!

Mother: (smiling) Michael, you never know who may be watching you!

Michael: Mother, you have no idea how strange this makes me feel. I've been friendly to Jimmie just because he lives next door and because he is alone so much.

Mother: That little fellow has just paid you a compliment, Michael. But with that compliment comes big responsibility. Now that you know that little Jimmie likes you and is watching you, you want to be sure you are doing only the things that you want to see him do.

Michael: You're right, Mom. And here's the picture he drew (holds up picture and laughs)—Look, Mom. This must be



Jimmie with the big fish and the big smile. And this must be me holding the fishing rod. It's big enough to catch a— (pauses). Mother, do you suppose Jimmie is trying to tell me something?

Mother: (laughing) It certainly looks like it.

Michael: (musing) You know, Mom, Jimmie is alone so much...his father is away a lot and his mother is so busy with the other two younger ones. (brightens up) I have an idea! Do you suppose we could take Jimmie with us on our next camping trip? Maybe to the Twin Lakes?

Mother: That might be a good idea, Michael, but we want to talk with your father first.

Michael: (excited) I can show Jimmie lots of fun things...like how to fish. But we'll first need to find worms to put on our hooks. He can learn how to row a boat, or find his way in the woods, and maybe Dad can tell us some of those good Bible stories like he did last year. He can tell us about Paul and the shipwreck, or Daniel and his three friends. Dad really makes them come alive!

Mother: I'm sure Jimmie would like that. The rest of us would like it, too!

Michael: Let's talk to Dad tonight. (pause) I can't get over it. Jimmie has been watching me all this time, and I never even knew it. I wonder what he has seen me do? If I had only known, I would have been more careful what I did. I don't want to disappoint him like Larry disappointed me!

Mother: Larry?

Michael: Yes, I thought Larry had it all. He was friendly, and smart, and big, and strong. I wanted to be just like him—until he let me down. I found out he was more interested in being popular than in being fair. I don't want Jimmie to find out I'm not what he thinks I am.

Mother: That's up to you, Michael. (placing her hand on his shoulder) But I'm pleased you feel that way.

Michael: (with determination) If a fellow is going to follow me, I'm going to give him a good example to follow. The very best. All the way through.

Mother: That's a wonderful resolve, Son! And if you follow Christ and Paul, you can do no better. Dad and I will help you all we can. Come to think of it, we all want to be very careful...we are being watched.

Michael: (at first shocked) Really? (has an idea and is relieved) You mean the angels?

Mother: Well, yes, (smiling) the angels are watching. But I was thinking of our friends, your brother and sisters, or anybody else. We never know whom we are influencing. None of us lives just to ourselves, you know.

Michael: (looking out window) Jimmy's outside now with his wagon. Mom, I think I'll go out and give him a ride. Is it all right?

Mother: Sure—that's a good idea. He'd like that. What about some cookies?

Michael: Perfect! Thanks, Mom. (grabs a handful) I'll give him the ride of his life! ♦



by Patricia Fleming

AWESOME DESIGNS

"Stand still and consider the wondrous works of God." ~ Job 37:14

THE FASCINATING SEAHORSE

Seahorses have captured man's fascination from time immemorial. This unusual, often bizarre, little fish inhabits the waters of almost every warm sea throughout the world. More than 50 species of seahorses, varying in size, color and habitat preference, they share the traits that make a seahorse a seahorse. Can we believe this amazing little animal's design was a result of chancy evolution? No, the seahorse is another confirmation of an Almighty Creator.



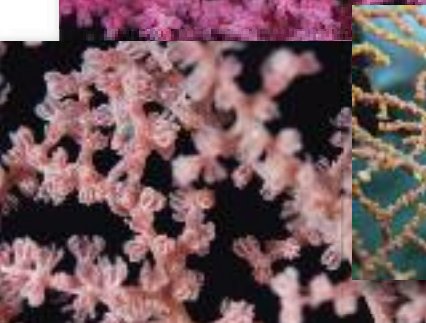
Masters at Camouflage



An Australian species trails seaweed-like filaments.



Spot the Seahorse



- ◆ Seahorses are found in sheltered areas along the coasts of temperal and tropical waters around the globe. They vary in size from about 0.6" to 14", most are 4" to 6" in length.
- ◆ Their bodies are covered with bony plates arranged in interlocking rings and covered by a thin layer of skin. Their skin color and texture varies by species. In most cases the coloration ranges from browns to tans, pinks and yellows. Some species are masters at camouflage.
- ◆ Seahorses are fish without scales, breathing by means of gills on the sides of their heads. They also have swim bladders to control buoyancy.
- ◆ They are the only fish with a defined neck that can turn its head. Their eyes can move independently, like those of a chameleon. They may look for prey with one eye while watching out for danger with the other.
- ◆ Seahorses swim uprightly. Their rapidly fluttering dorsal fin to propel them slowly through the water. Two transparent fins at the sides of its head are used to steer.
- ◆ The seahorse use its long snout like a straw to suck up plankton, tiny crustaceans and shrimp as they float by. Because they have no stomach and their food passes rapidly through their systems, they must eat almost constantly to stay alive.
- ◆ Seahorses are unique in that males are equipped with a kangaroo-style pouch from which their young are born. To our knowledge there is no other animal capable of this. The female transfers up to 1500 eggs to the male's brood pouch where the eggs develop and hatch. Once they are born, the father's job is over. The young will fend for themselves.
- ◆ In some species the newborn seahorses are no bigger than a comma. Each baby is an almost exact replica of its parents. Some are so transparent that you can see its tiny heart beating; pigmentation appears later.



POWER IN THE WORD

I read that "The Word of God is never an idle thing in a Christian's life, like some bowl of soggy Rice Krispies that has lost its snap, crackle, and pop."

The Word of God in Holy Scripture is good spiritual nourishment. It has good taste, which Psalm 19:10 calls sweeter than honey. The prophet Jeremiah ingested the Word and wrote, *"Your words were my joy and my heart's delight"* (Jeremiah 15:16). The Word is appetizing and zestful.

What is more, God's Word is energetic and imparts energy. Hebrew 4:12 reads, *"For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword."* The law of God is certainly like the sword as it penetrates to the sinful, spiritually sick heart like a surgeon's knife. God's purpose in using this knife is to remove sin so healing may follow.

Truly the Gospel *"is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth"* (Romans 1:16).

Every Thursday morning as I prepare to go to school to give a helping hand to the teachers, I think what I need to take with me: peace, encouragement, faith, patience, memory verses, humility, willingness, knowledge, some anger repellent, and a non-jealous snack bar. I have never had to use any of these last few, but it is good to be

prepared. I also take plenty of the fruits of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. I take a good supply of these so I can have some to give away.

We are in the library at school, where we cut out and separate the pictures and make them into sizes needed to teach a group of children. They give us three tables to the back because during the course of the morning, there are classes of 20 or more going in and out every little while to pick out a book they want to read. The librarian sits down and reads to the smaller children and they get excited and quite noisy at times. Then the room suddenly goes dark. The room surely quiets down in a hurry when that happens, and of course the lights go back on in less than a minute. To a child that is long enough. When they line up to leave the room, we ladies get a good-bye, and a lot of hand waving. We wave back, and now that they know who we are, we get a "Hello" or a wave when they go by in a car, or see us walking. We do not know all of them, but they know us by name.

I like to think about David's prayer for purity, a pure heart, a steadfast spirit of faithfulness, a willing spirit of service: *"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me"* (Ps.

51:10). Paul adds a few things also saying: *"think on these things"* (Phil. 4:8). He mentions things that are true, just, honest, pure, lovely, and of good report. These include encouragement, assurance, forgiveness, love, things that we can give and can use. We have much to remember.

B.C., Iowa

PROMISES, PROMISES

There are many promises in the Bible for each who overcomes: No more pain, sickness, and no more death!

Now we are glad for a night in which to renew our strength. But someday it will get dark for the last time. Immortal beings will be there, and their radiance will mean the end of night: it will be light all the time. Immortal beings radiate light (Rev. 21:23; Isa. 60:19).

A prophet of God centuries ago spoke of the wise shining forever like stars (Dan. 12:3). Just think, the angels shine! What a change from the mortal state!

The earth will indeed be filled with light. And it will be light that will never dim, but increase in glory through Eternity.

We can be there, if we overcome!

M.M., Nebraska

CONSTANT REMINDERS

There are so many sad things occurring in the world today. But this is nothing new. There has always been suffering. For those of us who know the plan God has for the earth, these things are just reminders of the brevity of life and spurs to give us the impetus we need to keep working to be worthy of all the future blessings of the Kingdom of God.

Our sights must be set on things above not on things of this earth. Every bit of worldly knowledge or every scrap of worldly goods we could accumulate in this life will be nothing when our probation day is over. Only what we have stored up in heaven will endure.

I have a little plaque that says, *"Lord, help me not to be so busy making a living that I forget to make a life."* It is so easy to forget that the reason for our existence is to prepare for Life, the life that will never end. If that is what we are concentrating on, whatever is happening in the world around us will not really affect us except to renew our determination to be worthy of every blessing promised the faithful.

P.F., Texas



Some newborn seahorses are no larger than a comma.

Mr. Moms

Notice the young—As soon as these miniatures of their parents are born, they are on their own. Clutching a reed with their tiny tails, they feed on what floats by.

I leave it with you whether this fascinating creature could be a product of chance or of design. I choose design, that the God of *"the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and everything on it, the seas and all that is in them"* (Neh. 9:6) is its designer. We bow in humble adoration before Him! ♦

Life is like a band. We need not all play the same part,
 but we must all play in harmony.

*Ye call me Master and obey me not,
 Ye call me Light and see me not,
 Ye call me Way and walk me not,
 Ye call me Life and desire me not,
 Ye call me Wise and follow me not,
 Ye call me fair and love me not,
 Ye call me Rich and ask me not,
 Ye call me Eternal and seek me not,
 Ye call me Gracious and trust me not,
 Ye call me Noble and serve me not,
 Ye call me Mighty and honor me not,
 Ye call me Just and fear me not;
 If I condemn you, blame me not.*

We need stormy weather from time to time to remind us that we are
 not really in charge of anything.

There's no better time than doing it right now.

Whatever chore you may have to do, think of doing it as for God,
 and it will be easier.

*My great concern should be not whether God
 is on my side but whether I am on God's side.*

You won't have a better tomorrow if you are thinking all the time
 about yesterday.

It's less painful to do it now than to wait until it gets worse.

The great dividing line between success and failure can be expressed in five words: I did not take time.

*When you have been wronged,
a poor memory is your best response.*

To forgive heals the wound, to forget heals the scar.

The Gospel According To You

*You are writing a gospel,
A chapter a day,
By deeds that you do
By words that you say.*

*Men read what you write,
Whether faithless or true;
Say, what is the gospel
According to you?*

*May each sun find something accomplished
by way of moral growth.*

We may not be able to leave others a heritage
of wealth or fame, but we can leave a shining example
of godly character.

*You will never "find" time for everything.
If you want time for anything, you must make it.*

Please God in all you do, and be pleased with all God does.

*Conscience is a safe guide only when God
is the guide of the conscience.*



*A smile adds a great deal
to your "face" value.*

My master was a worker,
With daily work to do,
And if I would be like Him
I must be a worker, too.

Happiness is an inside job.

A thing worth doing is worth doing well.

*Before you speak, listen.
Before you write, think.
Before you spend, earn.
Before you invest, investigate.
Before you criticize,
weigh the evidence.
Before you pray, forgive.
Before you quit, try harder.*

Great in Little Things

*Lord, make me strong enough to bear
My little round of anxious care.
I need Your help, for it I pray:
That I may follow wisdom's way.*

*Although I may not walk with kings,
Let me be big in little things;
Grace me with modesty, and teach
Me kindness of thought and speech;*

*Let me not be quick to chide
Another walking by my side,
But help me overlook a slight
To keep my book all clean and white.*

*When petty disappointments rise,
Help me be patient, gentle, wise;
I do not seek what this world brings—
Help me be big in little things;*

*Too big to hate, too big to sneer
Too big to seek for honor here;
But rather, I'd be truthful, kind,
Gentle of speech, of Christ-like mind;*

*So when He comes as King of kings,
He'll find me great in little things!*

—Author unknown

*God is not unjust
to forget your work and
labor of love...*

—Hebrews 6:10

