

Christian MONTHLY

DEDICATED TO THE PROCLAMATION
OF THE WORD OF GOD



Psalms 119:105
Thy word is a lamp unto my feet,
and a light unto my path.

January 2018

The Work of God

Carl Kulla
May 1949 CM

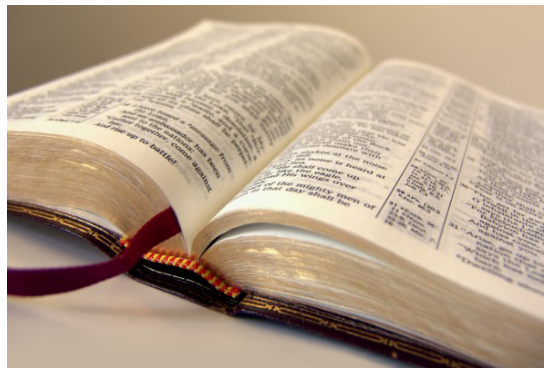
For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.

Ephesians 2:8-9

OUR SALVATION IS ALONE in the redemption of Christ. He is the author of eternal life. His is the atonement, and the work and fulfillment of salvation belong only to him. *For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.* (Galatians 3:26) The gift of God is full and free, without money and without price, *Not of works, lest any man should boast.* To this salvation which is wrought in Christ, none can add unto it, and nothing can be taken away from it. For the salvation of God has been settled, established, and sealed in heaven with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

The work of salvation is so completely God's in Christ, that from the first awakening call, unto the receiving of grace, and a crown of life, God is the author, the sustainer, and the finisher of the work of grace within man. Christ speaks of this in *John 6:44: No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.* God has called and chosen, elected and predestinated unto salvation those who are saved. *According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will ... In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.* (Ephesians 1:4-5, 11-12) *And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.* (Acts 13:48) *For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn*

among many brethren. (Romans 8:29) *Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.* (2 Timothy 1:9) God calls through His Word in the "foolishness of preaching," and chooses through Christ in the forgiveness of sins. Of itself the will and mind of man is bound, being the servant of sin, *Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.* (Romans 8:7) The will of God comes with a new mind and life in Christ, which new life is God's work. *For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.* (Philippians 2:13) As Jesus also makes known in the parable of the vine and the branches, saying, ... *without me ye can do nothing.* (John 15:5)



If the work therefore be of God, then it cannot be of man. We cannot draw men to Christ and salvation by the human agents of fanfare and new things. For God calls and draws. It is His work. As God calls by His grace, so likewise, whether we be young or old, we are kept in faith alone by the grace of God; and not by man's dreams and labors. This is the promise of Christ, *While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; (John 17:12) who also prays, I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.* (John 17:15) Paul testifies to this same end, *Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.* (Philippians 1:6)

To deny that the grace of God is sufficient unto all our needs (*My grace is sufficient for thee: 2 Corinthians 12:9*) is to make the will of man free, to destroy the doctrine of salvation by faith alone, and to bring ourselves into the bondage of work's righteousness and self-righteousness. May God preserve us from the wrath to come, and grant to one and all blessings in heavenly places in Christ.

In God's peace!

Christ, the Light—Our Life, Our Joy

Alvin Holmgren
January 2008 CM

AT OUR NEW YEAR'S SERVICES we often sing: "Oh God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come. Be Thou our guide while life shall last, and our eternal home." (Isaac Watts)
What better prayer can be offered at the first service of the New Year? It gives expression to our need of God and of His presence in our daily lives. Each day is God's gift to us, and it is His will that we would use them wisely. The best way for us to do so is to use each day in the light of eternity. We know that we are daily drawing closer to the fulfillment of our years here, and the dawning of God's eternal Sabbath rest. (Hebrews 4:9) St. Paul expresses this thought by saying: *Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.* (Romans 13:11)

When considering these things, Moses prayed: *Teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.* (Psalm 90:12) I believe that this prayer can be understood in the light of the word of Scripture that states we should give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard let at any time we should drift away from them, and as a consequence not reach that Sabbath rest. (Hebrews 2:1 and 4:1)

God guides us by His Spirit and His Word. His Spirit calls us to faith and obedience. It reveals Christ and His merits to us; it comforts us in our trials and is the source of our joy. We dwell in Christ through faith and He in us by His Holy Spirit. *Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.* (Psalm 119:105)

Shortly before His death, Jesus said to the people, *Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light.* (John 12:35-36)

The wise men that came to worship Jesus were among the first to rejoice in this light. *In him was life; and the life was the light of men.* (John 1:4) Following the word of Scripture, the wise men departed from Jerusalem in order that they might continue their search for Him who had been born King of the Jews. *The star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.* (Matthew 2:9-10)

"...they rejoiced with exceeding great joy."

What was the source of their joy? Was it their human reason and carnal thinking? No. It was the light of Christ—that Light which is able to light every man that comes into the world. (John 1:9) They did not find the new king in Jerusalem in the circumstances that they no doubt had envisioned. Instead the star in which they rejoiced led them to Bethlehem, to a lowly house which must have presented a far less royal appearance than the homes of their own servants. And yet they were not offended, but they *fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.* (Matthew 2:11)

What does this lesson teach us? For an answer, let us read the words of Martin Luther who wrote: "Reason and nature never proceed any farther than they can see and feel. The light of nature and the light of grace cannot be friends. Nature wants us to feel and be certain before she believes, grace believes before she perceives. For this reason nature does not go further than her own light. Grace joyfully steps out into the darkness, follows the mere word of Scripture, no matter how it appears. Whether nature holds it true or false, she clings to the Word. This is the kernel of the gospel, in which the nature and character of faith is explained as an assurance of things not seen. It clings to the Word of God and follows the things that are not seen, as alone conveyed in the Word of God. St. Paul's words apply here: *The foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.* (1 Corinthians 1:25) *Jesus said, Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.* (Matthew 11:6)

The wise men found their joy in the gladness of the star—the Scriptures that led them to Christ. Our joy must also be in Him. *Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation.* (Isaiah 12:3) *Jesus said, The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.* (John 4:14) ~



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Corrie Karlsen, ALC Calendar Committee

I Am the Bread of Life

Pastor Dennis Hannu
Wolf Lake, Minnesota

BREAD OR FOOD CONSUMES A LARGE PART of our life, whether we are actually eating or working to provide food for ourselves. According to a USDA report, Americans age 15 and older on an average day spend 2.5 hours a day eating and drinking with about 11 percent of the population spending 4.5 hours a day.

Obviously eating and drinking is necessary for us to sustain life here on this earth. It is no surprise then, that after Jesus feeds the 5,000 in the sixth chapter of John with only 5 barley loaves and 2 small fish, the people are ready to make Him king by force if necessary. The natural bread of this world can consume us to such a degree that we lose sight of what is evident and plain or real. Although it is necessary to eat natural food and drink here on earth, what Jesus brings is far better. The natural food of this life sustains for a short time, but the food that Jesus gives is a food that gives life eternally. The people on that day were attracted to Him because He had fed them with the loaves and fish. Their Messiah was standing in plain sight and all they were concerned with was the filling of their bellies. Jesus tells them in *John 6:26-27: Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled. Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.*

Immediately the question is raised: What can we do to gain this type of food? What can we do to perform the works of God? The people that day who were with Jesus wondered about this, and possibly we find ourselves with this dilemma as well. We are to work by the sweat of our brow in order to gain our natural food, so it only makes sense that if this is the way we provide for ourselves naturally then there must be something for us to perform in order to gain this food which lasts for eternal life. Jesus answers this question in *John 6:29: This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.* In other words there is no work to perform for the fallen race of Adam; the performer of the work stood before the people that day. They went on to demand some sort of a sign that would provide proof for them that He was from God. *John 6:30-31: They said therefore unto him, What sign showest thou then, that we may see, and believe thee? what dost thou work? Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat.* Their thoughts were still on natural bread so when Jesus says that the bread of God is He which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world, their immediate response is, "Give us this bread always." Jesus then says to them in *John 6:35: I*

am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. They want a sign and they want this bread. Jesus is the sign and He is the bread. Everything that they want and need stands before them. Jesus says as much in John 6:47-51: Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life. I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.

Jesus through the evangelist John sets before us what is the plain and simple truth. Natural food will only support life for a short period of time; whereas the Son of God, who is the bread of life, gives a life that endures forever. *John 6:53-58: Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live forever.*

The people gathered around Jesus on that day were interested in natural food and, in particular, that He would continue to provide them with it. He tells them that actually what they need is to be a partaker of Him. Jesus provides a sustenance that goes beyond the natural life to eternal life. He says several times in this chapter that He is the bread of life. The bread of life Himself gives life to the fallen race of Adam. He restores the race through His finished work, His death, His resurrection, and His ascension. All along Jesus was talking to the people

on that day of Himself and what He provides in His Incarnation and they were so caught up in their concern for the natural food that they were unable to see. Natural food does indeed consume a large amount of our time here on this earth but in our pursuit of it let us never lose sight of the One who says "I am the bread of life," for it is He who gives us real life. God be praised that He sustains us for all eternity with this "bread of life!"

God's peace.



Gifts for a King

Gwen Wilson
Ridgefield, Washington

Dear Children,

Hello to you all. I pray this is a good day for you. If you are reading this, God has already blessed you, because you are given another day to serve Him with your being.

We will continue with the Christmas story, which is so beautiful I never tire of telling or hearing it. I hope you children and all who read it never tire of it either.

The wise men have seen a special star in the east and have started on their journey which is going to take several months, almost two years. Let's look into their account. (Matthew 2:1-23)

FAR AWAY EASTWARD from where Jesus was born were some wise men who, I think we can assume, studied the stars. These men knew the Old Testament prophecy of a child to be born, the Messiah, and believed He (the one who would come to rule Israel) was going to come. *But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. (Micah 5:2)*

At the time of Jesus' birth these men were given a sign of this Messiah so long awaited for, and the sign was a star. This was no ordinary star, but some say a light from God, and He made it move as He willed. Remember the shepherds were given a sign too? The angel announced the birth and told the shepherds the sign to look for: a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes.

After the wise men saw the new star they began their search for this new king that was born. I believe that God not only gave them the star as a sign, but also revealed by His spirit in their hearts the meaning of the star.

Can you just imagine the excitement in the wise men, as they were actually going to see the promised child? These wise men had about 1000 miles or 1500 km to travel and would be going on camels. Some say that they may have traveled as much as they could in the company of other travelers, as it could have been very dangerous to go that far in a small group. There were often thieves hiding along the roads in different areas. It makes sense to me that they would travel with others for there is safety in numbers.

It took the wise men a few or several months to reach Jerusalem (depending on how far they made it each day), with the star as their guide. Upon arriving, they went first to King Herod's palace saying, *Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. (Matthew 2:2-3)*

Herod surely did not want anyone else to be called king and immediately planned in his heart to somehow get rid of

this "king." He gathered all the chief priests and scribes together and asked them where this baby was to be born. They told him, In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet. (Matthew 2:5) These chief priests and scribes also knew the Old Testament prophecies, so they were able to answer Herod.

Herod had the wise men come to him alone and asked them when they had first seen the star. He wanted to figure out how old this baby may be at this time (close to 2 years).

Herod sent the wise men to Bethlehem and said, *Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also. When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. (Matthew 2:8-10)* My heart rejoices with the wise men as they came out of Herod's palace and there in the sky is the "star." After all those long miles and days of travel, they only had to go a little farther and then are even at the very door where the baby is.

When they go into the house they see Jesus with Mary, His mother. They fall down and worship Him and give Him gifts of, gold, frankincense, and myrrh. What a special moment that must have been! I like to ponder and imagine this whole event. So beautiful! God be praised.

I love how God protected His Son and warned the wise men in a dream not to go back to Herod and had them go home a different way. Oh, what full hearts the wise men must have had returning home. They would bring the good news of Jesus' birth to their people. They had made the long journey with great anticipation, and then the return trip was probably filled with great anticipation of sharing the good news they carried.

After the visit from the wise men, God warned Joseph in a dream to take the young child and His mother and flee into Egypt, as Herod was seeking to destroy Him. Joseph immediately fled with his family while it was still night.

Herod was very angry that the wise men did not return to tell him where the baby was. He sent soldiers to kill all the babies 2 years old and younger, in Bethlehem and in all that area. It was a very sad thing, but Herod did not realize that God was protecting His Son. Herod had no desire to have anyone take his place as king and certainly no room in his heart for Jesus who came to save him from himself.

Joseph and Mary eventually moved to Nazareth, as it was spoken by the prophets, that He shall be called a Nazarene.

We can be so thankful to God for sending His Son to us and we can rejoice once again in the celebration of His birth this Christmas season.

Let us all continue this New Year with the joy of Christ the babe in our hearts, and earnestly await His return. He IS coming back to take those who love and believe in Him to heaven for all eternity.

God's peace.



Adoración de los Reyes Magos by El Greco, 1568
Courtesy of Wikipedia

The Privilege of Those Who Believe

Pastor Joel Baker
Plymouth, Minnesota

These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was. I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word. Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee. For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me. I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them. And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are.

John 17:1-11

In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)

John 7:37-39

WE HAVE LOOKED AT THESE SECTIONS of John's Gospel recently. Both sections reinforce for us the special privileges that belong to those who believe and the special relationship between Jesus, the Father in heaven, and the Holy Spirit.

One who believes in Jesus, though undeserving of God's love and grace, recognizes, through the work of God, that he or she is being called by Him to Himself. The person is convicted of their sin, truly repents of sin and their own sinful nature, understands their need for God's redemption, and cries out for His intervention.

God also calls people through the Sacrament of Baptism, bestowing His Spirit upon the one being baptized with water and the Word. That person may remain in their baptismal covenant for all of their life, confirming that relationship at confirmation and/or testimony before others.

Jesus knows who those people are who have been called to come to God and who have responded to that call. He tells us in John 17 that all those whom the Father has called and who have responded to that call also believe in Him since the Father has sent Him. Jesus also says that He has done the work of the Father here on earth by taking care of those who belong to God, protecting them from the world, and promising them the indwelling of the Helper who will come when Jesus' remaining work is finished—His crucifixion, burial, resurrection, and ascension. Those actions bring about

our true forgiveness of our sins, crucified our own sin nature as we spiritually die with Christ, are resurrected with Him spiritually first and physically when He returns, and we receive power from on high with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Jesus takes care of us, preserves us, and sanctifies us. The Father sent Him, He sends us, and the Holy Spirit is also sent to accompany us throughout our life.

In John 7, Jesus tells us what to look forward to when He sends the Spirit. He says of those filled with the Holy Spirit: "From his innermost being (his belly) will flow rivers of bubbling up, gushing water, bringing refreshment and well-being (salubrity), satisfying the needs and desires of the soul." This is being filled with the Spirit—bursting with spiritual "water"—possibly wisdom, discernment, encouragement, and/or other gifts of the Spirit for the purpose of bringing refreshment and well-being to others to whom God leads us, and satisfying in the process our own needs and desires of our souls.



What a promise our Lord has given us and what a Helper He has sent us! Do you believe in Jesus as your Lord and Savior? What a gracious gift you have received. Is the Holy Spirit active in your life? What a blessing to have Him. But even if we believe in Jesus we can quench the Holy Spirit from being as active in our lives as He could be or as you desire Him to be through continual sinful behavior, through pushing Him away through denial of conviction of sin, or rejection of God's Word altogether day after day. I do pray that if you had a spiritual exam today that the Great Physician, the Shepherd of the Sheep, would find you in good spiritual health, both belonging to Him and actively bubbling up with spiritual water strengthening yourself and others. ~

Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water... Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

John 4:10, 13-14

Confession of Faith

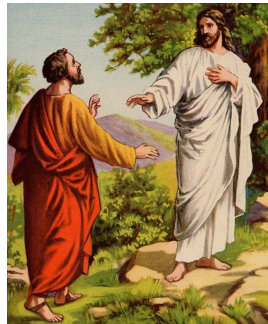
Hermann Sasse

And Jesus went out, and his disciples, into the towns of Caesarea Philippi: and by the way he asked his disciples, saying unto them, Whom do men say that I am? And they answered, John the Baptist: but some say, Elias; and others, One of the prophets. And he saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Peter answereth and saith unto him, Thou art the Christ.

Mark 8:27-29

[JESUS CHRIST] CLAIMED TO BE THE FULFILLMENT of what the Old Testament had prophesied concerning the Messiah, the Servant of God, the Son of Man. One can accept or reject that claim just as did the witnesses of His earthly life. One can regard it as blasphemy as the High Priest did when Jesus made His "good confession before many witnesses" (compare Matthew 26:63-64). One can regard Him as possessed of the devil (Mark 3:22) as the scribes did, or, with modern scribes, as a psychiatric case. One can accept in simple childlike faith His claim as His disciples did. Whatever attitude men may take, they have to answer the question who He was. This belongs to the mystery of His person. Wherever a man is confronted with Jesus he cannot avoid answering the question, "Who is He?" Buddha or Mohammed do not ask this question. Jesus does it. Even His bitterest enemies have to answer it.

Thou art the Christ. This was the answer which Simon Peter gave to the question of his Lord. It was the first confession made by Simon, the spokesman of the Twelve, on their behalf, on behalf of the future church. A personal beatitude is spoken to the first confessor: *Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.* (Matthew 16:17) This answer is not the result of human thinking. It is given by God.



Thus the confession of faith is the answer to the question which Jesus puts to man, either directly, or as a question implicitly contained in the Gospel. All creeds and confessions of Christendom are meant to be essentially a repetition and continuation of the confession that Jesus is the Christ.

Martin Luther, The Large Catechism:

I BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST, HIS ONLY SON, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

Here we learn to know the Second Person of the Godhead, so that we see what we have from God over and above the temporal goods aforementioned; namely, how He has completely poured forth Himself and withheld nothing from us that He has not given us. Now, this article is very rich and broad; but in order to expound it also briefly and in a childlike way we shall take up one word and sum up in that

the entire article, namely (as we have said), that we may here learn how we have been redeemed; and we shall base this on these words: In Jesus Christ, our Lord.

If now you are asked, What do you believe in the Second Article of Jesus Christ? answer briefly: I believe that Jesus Christ, true Son of God, has become my Lord. But what is it to become Lord? It is this, that He has redeemed me from sin, from the devil, from death, and all evil. For before I had no Lord nor King, but was captive under the power of the devil, condemned to death, enmeshed in sin and blindness.

For when we had been created by God the Father, and had received from Him all manner of good, the devil came and led us into disobedience, sin, death, and all evil, so that we fell under His wrath and displeasure and were doomed to eternal damnation, as we had merited and deserved. There was no counsel, help, or comfort until this only and eternal Son of God in His unfathomable goodness had compassion upon our misery and wretchedness, and came from heaven to help us. Those tyrants and jailers, then, are all expelled now, and in their place has come Jesus Christ, Lord of life, righteousness, every blessing, and salvation, and has delivered us poor lost men from the jaws of hell, has won us, made us free, and brought us again into the favor and grace of the Father, and has taken us as His own property under His shelter and protection, that He may govern us by His righteousness, wisdom, power, life, and blessedness.

Let this, then, be the sum of this article that the little word Lord signifies simply as much as Redeemer, i.e., He who has brought us from Satan to God, from death to life, from sin to righteousness, and who preserves us in the same. But all the points which follow in order in this article serve no other end than to explain and express this redemption, how and whereby it was accomplished, that is, how much it cost Him, and what He spent and risked that He might win us and bring us under His dominion, namely, that He became man, conceived and born without [any stain of] sin, of the Holy Ghost and of the Virgin Mary, that He might overcome sin; moreover, that He suffered, died and was buried, that He might make satisfaction for me and pay what I owe, not with silver nor gold, but with His own precious blood. And all this, in order to become my Lord; for He did none of these for Himself, nor had He any need of it. And after that He rose again from the dead, swallowed up and devoured death, and finally ascended into heaven and assumed the government at the Father's right hand, so that the devil and all powers must be subject to Him and lie at His feet, until finally, at the last day, He will completely part and separate us from the wicked world, the devil, death, sin, etc.

But to explain all these single points separately belongs not to brief sermons for children, but rather to the ampler sermons that extend throughout the entire year, especially at those times which are appointed for the purpose of treating at length of each article-of the birth, sufferings, resurrection, ascension of Christ, etc.

Ay, the entire Gospel which we preach is based on this, that we properly understand this article as that upon which our salvation and all our happiness rest, and which is so rich and comprehensive that we never can learn it fully. ~

Life Is a Real Vapor

Lois Matson
Yacolt, Washington

WATCHING THE STEAM RISE FROM a cup of hot cocoa on a cold winter afternoon makes me ponder this Scripture: *Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.* (James 4:13-15)

James says our lives are like a vapor, the little mist that rises from a cup of cocoa and disappears. This doesn't seem possible in our minds, because we're so REAL, so substantial, and the steam is just a wisp and gone. We have REAL things happening in our lives: growing up, making friends, holding jobs, getting married, having children and grandchildren. Life is REAL, not a wispy bit of steam. Is James wrong?



No, the Scripture is true. Our lives really are fleeting and insubstantial. The Bible compares us to grass or flowers that grow, flourish and die (Psalm 103:15-16). Our days are like shadows (Psalm 102:11). We exist for a moment and then we're gone. Compared to eternity, the life of a hundred-year-old person is short, like a dream that passes when the morning comes.

If we're so insubstantial and wispy, what's the point?

Our lives may be insubstantial, and we may only live here for a short time, but we're not **insignificant**.

We are not insignificant **to one another**. We love—and are loved by—our parents, our spouses and children, our family and friends. There is a great hole in our lives when someone we love passes away, when their little vapor

disappears. God gives these loving relationships, and we ought to cherish them.

We are not insignificant **to God**. He made humans in His own image. He made each one of us exactly as He wanted us to be. God cares deeply for us, so deeply that He didn't abandon us to die in our sin but sent His only Son to save us. God is our Father, and He wants a fatherly relationship with us. He wants us to trust Him as dear children trust their father. He wants us to hear Him in His Word, pray to Him in every situation, and worship Him with prayer, praise and thanksgiving.

The Prophet Isaiah wrote that God rejoices over Jerusalem. *Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God... as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee.* (Isaiah 62:3, 5) Every believer is a citizen of the new Jerusalem. If we are Christ's, we are offspring of Abraham.

The Apostle Paul compares the love of Christ for the Church—that's us!—as that of a husband for his wife (Ephesians 5:25), and Christ's love isn't insignificant. No bridegroom thinks that his bride is insignificant! A groom adores his bride, as Christ adores us.

The Apostle Peter says this about those who believe: *But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.* (1 Peter 2:9) We ought to be humble servants of the One who has called us out of the darkness of sin into His marvelous light. He has chosen us and set us apart, a people of His own. The God of the universe delights over us and loves us dearly. We ought to proclaim His praises through our short, vaporous lives.

The God who loves us also calls us to love one another, to bear one another's burdens, to encourage, to build up, and to help our neighbor. St Paul writes to the Galatians: *Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.* (Galatians 6:2-3)

We don't know what tomorrow brings. We don't know whether we will live or die. We ought to live each day, then, in humble thanksgiving, saying with the apostle James, *If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.* Let us not rejoice in our arrogance, deceiving ourselves, but let us serve one another in humility.

Though our lives here are as fleeting as a shadow and wispy as steam, they are significant and REAL. ~

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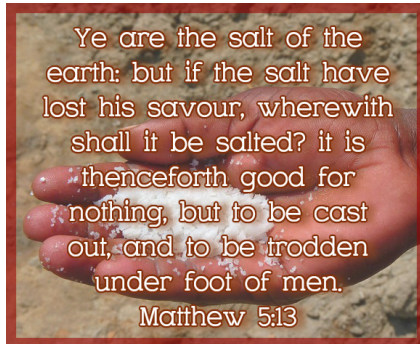
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The Call of Jesus

Dietrich Bonhoeffer



Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

Matthew 5:13-16

“Ye are the salt.” Jesus does not say, “You must be the salt.” It is not for the disciples to decide whether they will be the salt of the earth, for they are so whether they like it or not; they have been made salt by the call they have received. Again, it is: “Ye are the salt,” not “Ye have the salt.” By identifying the salt with the apostolic proclamation

the Reformers robbed the saying of all its sting. No, the word speaks of their whole existence in so far as it is grounded anew in the call of Christ. The call of Christ makes those who respond to it the salt of the earth in their total existence.

The call of Jesus makes the disciple community not only the salt but also the light of the world; their activity is visible, as well as imperceptible. “Ye are the light. Once again it is not: “You are to be the light;” they are already the light because Christ has called them. They are a light which is seen of men, they cannot be otherwise, and if they were it would be a sign that they had not been called. How impossible, how utterly absurd it would be for the disciples—these disciples, such men as these!—to try and become the light of the world! No, they are already the light, and the call has made them so. Nor does Jesus say, “You have the light.” The light is not an instrument which has been put into their hands, such as their preaching. It is the disciples themselves. The same Jesus who, speaking of Himself, said, “I am the light,” says to His followers, “You are the light in your whole existence, provided you remain faithful to your calling. And since you are that light, you can no longer remain hidden, even if you want to.” It is the property of light to shine. A city set on a hill cannot be hid; it can be seen for miles away, whether it is a fortified burgh, a stronghold, or a tottering ruin. This city set on the hill is the disciple community. ~

The Name of Jesus

THE NAME OF JESUS is the dearest and richest name; it contains a wealth of power. It brings peace and joy to redeemed souls. Before this name the angels of heaven bend their knees in humble worship. Before this name hell shakes in its unsaved fear. Before this name all knees shall once bow, of things in heaven and on earth and under the earth.

Through this name God was able to reach fallen mankind and lead them back to the Father’s house, reconcile them to Himself, and give them eternal joy. Through this name everything was regenerated which in the beginning was destroyed by Satan in his well-planned scheme for the destruction of man.

Oh, this powerful name! With its full salvation we can rise to everlasting life! In this name the tones of the life-giving Word enter one’s heart—the forgiveness of sins in Jesus’ blood. The power of the Holy Spirit and God’s love stream into one’s soul through the name of Jesus. I also came back to the Father’s house and have received love toward brothers and sisters through the power of this name. Oh, this precious name will carry me over the river of death in faith in His redeeming blood! Blessed name! How can I praise and honor Thee!

P. Ystad; March 1960 CM

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:5-11