

bethesda

NEWSLETTER

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Our Compassionate Lord

"Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed. Because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness" Lam 3: 22, 23(NIV)

These words were written we believe by Jeremiah in the middle of captivity in Babylon after the overthrow of Jerusalem in 586 BC and exile by Nebuchadnessar. This verse in the middle of the 5 chapters of laments provides the first glimpse of hope during this sad experience. It would be another 30 years before God caused the return from captivity and rebuilding of the Jerusalem and the temple, and the reinstatement of temple worship.

Three important words describe the character of God on Whom the Israelites could rely on and hope in.

The first is Love (Heb=chesed). It speaks of the covenantal love of God, initially with the Jews (Jer 31:31,33,34) and in Christ with all who believe in Him (1 Cor 11:25). The second is

Faithfulness (Heb=emuwnah). It means faithfulness and certainty and is related to 'chesed', Love. The third is Compassion. This means God knows and cares and acts to relieve the pain.

In Mark 8:1,2, we read, "During those days another large crowd gathered. Since they had nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples to Him and said, 'I have Compassion for these people; they have nothing to eat. If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance'". Then with several loaves and a few fishes he fed the 4,000.

I believe that God cares for the young widow who silently weeps in the night, the distraught father who stands by the bedside of his 10 year old son, bald after chemotherapy for blood cancer, and the 12 million starving people presently in southern Africa. However helpless we may feel, God is sovereign and we have a duty to be involved in its solution, even though it is little part.

God shows His compassion in the following ways.

On his creation

"As a father had compassion on his children, so that Lord has compassion on those who fear Him. For He knows how we are formed, He remembers that we are dust" (Ps 103:13,14).

As Provider

"Glorious and majestic are His deeds, and His righteousness endures forever. He has caused His wonders to be remembered; the Lord is gracious and compassionate" (Ps 111:3,4).

As Redeemer

"They refused to listen and failed to remember the miracles You performed among them. They became stiff necked and in rebellion appointed a leader in order to return to their slavery. But You are a forgiving God, gracious and slow to anger and abounding in love" Neh 9:17.



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Lawrence Chan (Editor) • Chang Chew Kient • Susan Chan • Judy Kan • Chong Kwok Yan • Samuel Wee • Wong Oi Kwan • Wong Tuck Keong

As Comforter

"For the Lord comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones" Is 49:13.

As Deliverer

"Therefore this is what the Sovereign Lord says, 'I will bring Jacob back from captivity and will have compassion on all the people of Israel, and I will be zealous for My holy name'" Ez 39:25.

As Sympathizer

"For we do not have a high priest Who is unable to sympathize with our weakness, but we have one who has been tempted in the same way, just as we are, yet without sin" Heb 4:15.

There is a challenge to us who belong to His family, "Therefore as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience" (Col 3:12).

We do have a sympathetic Savior whose compassions fail not; they are new every morning. He can thus save us completely (Heb 7:25). Everlasting praise be to Him.

//He loves, He saves,
He keeps, He
satisfies this longing
heart of mine;
He fills my life to
overflowing with His
joy and peace divine.
He guides, He guards,
He watches over me,
He slumbers not
nor sleeps;
For He is my glorious
Savior, and He loves,
He saves, He keeps //

Lawrence Chan ■

AssemblyNews

OUR NEWLY-RECEIVED SAINTS

6/4/2003 - *Law Gin Lieng from Bethesda (Bedok-Tampines) Church & Rebecca Ng Chee Ka (Bethesda Katong Church)*

18/5/2003 - *Kelvin Ng Tuck Kay from one of the churches in Singapore*

We welcomed them with joy into our fellowship. Let us encourage them in the Lord as members in His family. ■

OUR NEWLY-BAPTISED SAINTS

11/5/2003 - *Barbara Bai Mei, Louise Baptist, Vivian Ho, Sim Poey Yong, Edison Ngo, Aaron Toke, Jason Tan, Tommy Yeo.*

We delight in the Lord for the above who obeyed Him through the waters of baptism. We accepted them in the Lord on the Sunday following their baptism and acknowledged our responsibility and privilege to love them, look after them and learn from them as a family of the Lord's people. ■



Our newly baptised saints

BIRTH

3/4/03 - *God's gift of a baby boy, Alistair, 1st child, to Michael & Angeline Goh*

3/5/03 - *God's gift of a baby girl, 1st child, to Kam Yew Chuen & Sandy*

9/5/03 - *God's gift of a baby girl, 1st child, to Kasi & Sarabha*

29/5/03 - *God's gift of a baby boy, 2nd child, to Chan Wai Kiong & Ai Lin*

We praise the Lord for His gift of children to our Christian families. Pray for the Lord's strength and health to the mothers and babies. Pray that the Lord will enable them to bring up their children in His compassion and control. ■

BEREAVEMENT

26/3/2003 - *Home-calling of Johnny Tan Soon Kee*

21/4/2003 - *Tan Ah Beng & Siet Lim on the passing away of Ah Beng's mother.*

16/5/2003 - *Joyce Tay on the passing away of Joyce's mother-in-law*

26/5/2003 - *Wong Sau Fong on the home-calling of her father*

We thank the Lord for having comforted those who are in their bereavement. Pray for the Lord's mercies and ministry for the bereaved family members in their bereavement. ■



Easter Conference 2003 (18 April, 9 am)

Theme: The "Cross" Life

Speakers: Khoo Oon Soo & Lawrence Chan

Message 1: "The Challenges of the Cross Life"

Message 2: "Ministry of the Cross Life"

Chairman: Sum Siew Tak

The Bethesda Choir rendered the Easter Musical "Behold the Risen Saviour".

About 450 attended. Lunch was provided after the Service.

We are indebted to the Lord for using Khoo Oon Soo and Lawrence Chan in the ministry of God's Word to those who gathered at the 1-day Easter Conference. May the messages on the challenges and ministry of the cross life be realised and reflected by those who attended. We are thankful to the Lord for the ministry of songs through the Bethesda Choir. Pray that the Lord will continue to grant the choir members the joy of singing and serving Him. ■



More than 450 attended the Easter Conference



Sum Siew Tak

Khoo Oon Soo

Lawrence Chan

Easter Gospel Service (20 April, 6 pm)

Speaker: Victor Ng

Chairman: Lee Kam Wing

The Bethesda Choir rendered the Easter Musical "Behold the Risen Saviour".

About 200 attended.

We hear with joy the message of the Lord Jesus Christ's death, burial, resurrection and coming again in songs and sermon at this special gospel meeting. Pray that more will be added to God's kingdom through our weekly gospel effort. ■



Bethesda Choir



Johnny Tan

27th April 1925 to 26th March 2003

Our dear brother Johnny Tan Soon Kee went to be with Christ on 26th March '03 at the age of 78. Saved and baptized at Bethesda Bras Basah in 1956, he continued in fellowship in Bethesda Hall (Ang Mo Kio). He was a faithful brother, knowing the Lord's ways, humble and true in his life. In the 1960s he was actively serving the Lord in the Choir, Sunday School and tract distribution at Tiong Bahru. In the 1980s at his age of over 50 years, he was faithful in attending the Sunday School and even received the attendance award. From 1986 and through 1990s when the assembly moved to

Ang Mo Kio, he continued to maintain a quiet and consistent testimony for the Lord. One would see him exercising his priesthood regularly at our remembrance feast until early Jan '03. He was faithful in attending our CEP and RFG until 3 years ago.

In January 2003 he was taken ill and was diagnosed with advanced cancer of the stomach. He stayed at Tan Tock Seng Hospital for 56 days after an operation and was transferred to Assisi Hospice Home for the next 7 days. During the time in the hospital one could witness his faith and preparedness to meet the Lord Jesus Christ in heaven.

A short service before cremation was conducted on 27th March '03 at Mt Vernom Cremaetorium Hall 2 with 15 members in attendance.



Johnny Tan attended our CEP in the 1990s

Our late brother left behind a legacy for us; to live simply and in faithfulness to the Lord. With the little savings he had when he retired in 1981 and the small pension received monthly, the Lord saw him through. He even left three thousand dollars in his bank account. From his savings passbook, one can tell that our late brother was very thrifty in his spending. He did not take advantage of anyone nor asked for sympathy regarding his needs though being single and with no relatives. We thank the Lord for those who visited and prayed with him in hospital.

As a family of God's people, let's extend a hand of fellowship to our elderly saints, especially those who are weak and infirmed.

Wong Tuck Keong ■



Johnny Tan in the choir at Bethesda Hall (Bras Basah) in the 1960s

The Root of Man's Problems

Terrorism. War. Disease. Economic fallout. Murder. Suicide. Natural disasters. The daily newspaper and TV news seem to be full of reports about such events. It seems to me that God is trying to tell people something through them.

The well-known verse John 3:16 may give us an idea of what it possibly is. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have eternal life." God who created the universe of which the world is a part, and who therefore has the right to rule it, loves man but man does not love God and instead disobeys Him or rebels against Him. Worse still, he totally ignores Him, bringing upon himself God's fierce wrath. However, because of His love, He has made a way of escape from His righteous judgment through sacrificing His Son, Jesus Christ on the cross, so that whosoever believes in Him will not be damned to eternal punishment but is given eternal life.

Henceforth, after conversion, the sinner is to do the will of God by living a life that pleases Him; a life of faith in Christ, loving God and loving his neighbor as himself. When this earthly life is over, he has the eternal blessings of heaven awaiting him as promised by the Lord (John 14: 1-3; 1Cor 2:9).

This, in a nutshell, is the message all believers are commanded to give to the world by none other than their Lord Himself (Mark 16:15). This is the good news that the Apostle Paul says he was compelled to give and woeful he would be if he stopped preaching it (1 Cor 9:16). We too cannot stop preaching this wonderful tidings of salvation to all and sundry and hence year after year, we conduct a Gospel Rally to

urge people to repent of their sins and turn to Christ. Wherever we go, witnessing for Christ must be part of our personal lifestyle.

The fact is that people do not know what is going to happen to them in life. The Bible says clearly that this is because they are alienated from God because of a life of rebellion against God, whether they are aware about it or not, by choice as well as by lineage. They live their lives with scarcely a thought about their Creator and when their eyes close in death, there is the prospect of Judgment before Him awaiting them. When I think of those who take their own lives, I can see in their tragic end at once a picture of the lostness of men who have strayed far away from the Almighty in order to live as they please. There can only be one ultimate tragic end for all those who choose to go their own way rather than God's way and that is to be sent to everlasting punishment in Hell.

God has instilled in every one of us believers the love and compassion for our lost relatives and friends. He wants us to do whatever we can to bring them to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for He has given us the "ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor 5:19,20). Since God desires the salvation of all sinners and they need Christ to save them from eternal damnation of the Lake of Fire, let us do something for those who are still without Christ. For this Gospel Rally 2003, let us pray for, invite and bring them to listen to the blessed Good News that Christ came to save all sinners.

Patrick Wee
Gospel Rally Committee ■

Give Me Tears

*Give me tears in my eyes, loving Lord, I pray
Give me tears when I intercede
Give me tears when I kneel at your throne each day
Give me tears till I learn to plead*

*Nail-pierced Lord, break this cold stony heart of mine
Melt my heart with Your holy fire
Flood my soul with the passion of love Divine
May I hunger with Your desire*

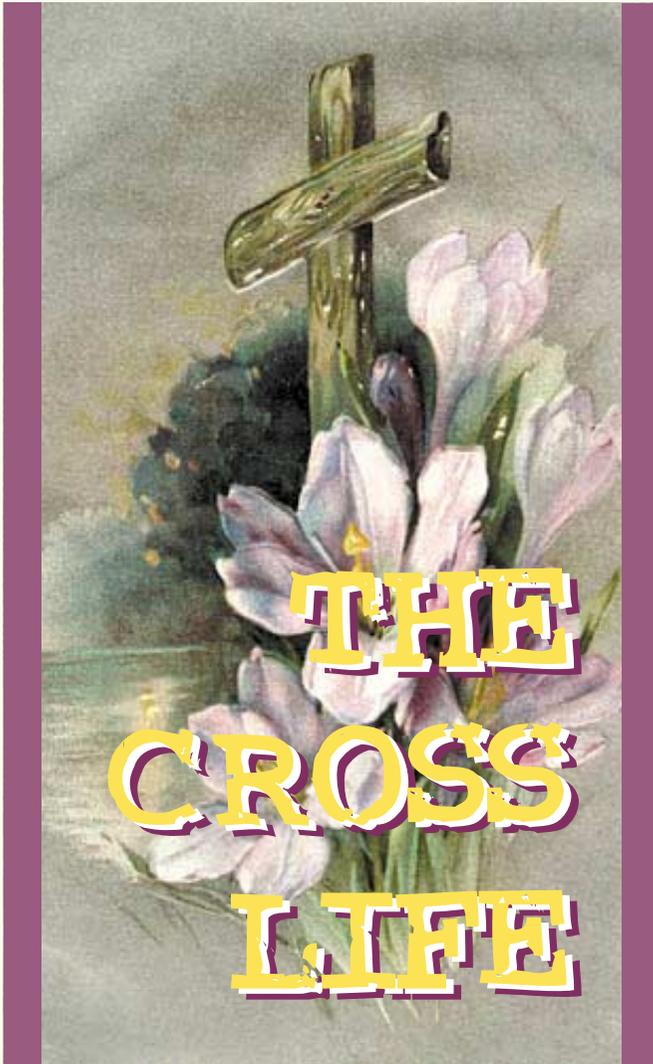
*Take the callousness all from my heart again
Till I hunger and thirst and yearn
Till the longing for souls of sin-ruined men
All consuming within me burn*

*Fill my heart with Your tears, there unveil Your cross
Till all else of this world has died
Till all else in this world I shall count but dross
Save the cross of the Crucified*

*May my heart be a crucified heart always,
That it bleed for the souls of men
May the burden for souls melt my soul each day
Till I share Your travail again*

*Give me tears when I preach of Your dying love
Give me tears when I plead with men
Give me tears as I look to Your throne above
Love of God, melt my heart again*

by Wesley Duewel ■



The cross is the world's best-known symbol. Coca Cola and Nike advertise around the globe but no design is better known than the Cross. Every advertiser wants to come up with some simple drawing, known world wide, needing no attending words. That is exactly what God has done using the cross as a representation of all the Lord Jesus did on a lonely hill outside Jerusalem.

Why is the cross so powerful? Because it is a message without words. A statement without sound. A meaning demanding no explanation. It is the simplest and sublimest method of announcement, yet the most complex means of communicating the most profound truths.

The cross is a message from the past of the suffering and death of the Lord Jesus. It has a message for the present reminding every believer of their need to reckon themselves dying with Christ and taking up their own cross. The cross is a message for the future proclaiming for time and eternity that the work of Christ was adequate. No further work of man or God is necessary for restoration of fellowship with God for all eternity. What a powerful symbol!

Are you wearing a cross? This symbol is spread ubiquitously in our lives. But few comprehend the

complex meaning of the cross. For most who see the cross or even wear it, the gold or silver is more important than its message.

CROSS LIFE! Putting these two words together seems a contradiction. Surely the word "CROSS" is more corresponding to death than life. And "LIFE" must not to be put in juxtaposition with "CROSS". If it were not for Christ we could not put these two words side by side. Paul reminds us "If Christ be not risen we are of all men most miserable." If Christ had not been raised from the dead the symbol of the cross would be no more powerful than thousands of symbols, which have been parlayed on the public without the slightest rippling effect. Each dissipates as soon as they are thrown into the sea of man's recognition. But the cross has endured time and the onslaughts of man to destroy it over the past 2000 years.

The simplest meaning of the cross is of course - death! No other meaning is so obvious. The profoundest meaning of the symbol is the substitutional and identifying nature of that death. Gal 2:20 offers the most succinct summary of its weighty implication. When Christ died I died with Him! This is one of the most unfathomable yet practical aspects of this well-known symbol.

The cross is the exact opposite message of the world, the flesh and the devil. The world offers the advice "Have all you can have" and man responds with greed and covetousness until he knows neither what he has nor why he has it. The flesh expresses its philosophy in the ads of Nike - "Just do it" This well-known ditty flows around the world like the tides of the sea. Man responds with enthusiastic drunkenness considering neither the cost nor the consequences of such self-satisfaction. The devil's advice is blared out in the simplistic words of the US Army "Be all you can be!" counseling men and women that they can be like god without Jesus Christ. Each of these messages is diametrically opposed to the message of the cross of sacrifice, loss, pain, suffering and death.

The Purpose of the Cross as a pictogram is to provide a symbolic summary of salvation and sonship to any who will believe the message of the Cross. Love cries out boldly and clearly to any who will come to the cross for salvation.

The Punishment by the cross is not so much seen in the symbol but the spiritual meaning written on the heavens as God darkened them above the cross. The Father drew a curtain across the sky declaring midnight at midday as Christ bore the punishment for our sins. No one could see the judgment poured out at the cross by God on His perfect Son.

Pardon by the cross is the initial announcement of God. The forgiveness of sins is the first offer of God inviting all men everywhere to repent and accept the cleansing power of the blood. This transaction makes every believer a son of God whom the Lord Himself can and will bring into glory with culminating pleasure.



The satisfaction of God is proclaimed loud and clear as the cross declares the "Finished Work of Christ." God, was angry with man for his sins, but demonstrated full propitiation. God demanded this price and was willing to pay the same. The price was paid in the person and suffering of His only Son. His provision was adequate and with Divine authority made universally available. The product of this glorious provision is nearness and access to God not only as Creator but also as Redeemer. God is satisfied and demonstrated that by the greatest event in the world's history - The resurrection of Jesus Christ. Not only is the cross empty but the grave is empty as well.

The Cross also proclaims with amazing boldness that man has been changed. Reconciliation by the cross is the effect of the work of Christ in mankind in general and specifically. God was not reconciled! It is man that needed to be thoroughly changed from a position where he could not be saved by any efforts or abilities of his own to making salvation available. This work of God on the cross provided the ingredient whereby any can enjoy fellowship with a previously offended God and also offer acceptable worship by the risen Christ.

The Preaching of the cross is the one remaining responsibility left to man. God has done all and provided all in the work of Christ on the cross. He has made that work available to all through the living Christ and restored to man the privilege to declare the unsearchable riches of Christ. This preaching is to those who are rejecting it a foolish message but to us who are believing: we are enjoying the breadth

// The Purpose of the Cross as a pictogram is to provide a symbolic summary of salvation and fellowship to any who will believe the message of the Cross. //

and length and depth and height of His Love. The divine power for a transformed life.

So the next time you see someone wearing a cross take the opportunity to "preach the message of the cross. "I notice you are wearing a cross?" "Why do you wear a cross?" "What does the cross mean to you?" These questions together with a few others will give you an open door to then say, "May I share with you what the cross means to me?" God will give you wonderful opportunities to explain why we can justifiably put the word CROSS and LIFE side by side. This is the true meaning of Cross Life. The cross is the means by which God has given us His life.

Fred Kosin ■

AFTER SARS — A testimony

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I have been back at work since my illness for more than a week now. Things are fine. I thank the Lord for providing me with full recovery and good health. This is a blessing indeed.

I recall being very tired in February and March, and very much wanting to have a break. I had plans for a medical trip in April. However, God had other plans and I fell sick with probable SARS. Surprising, because I do not know my source. A time for God to bless me, for then I realized that many people cared, and prayed.

Hospitalization was a time of waiting, and in some sense, uncertainty. I did not know how long my illness would last, for fever seemed unrelenting and unremitting. Every time I thought the fever had gone, it would return again, heralded by a sense of feeling cold. Though I usually felt better when the fever broke, invariably my clothes would be drenched in sweat and that was not particularly enjoyable. In those times I was occasionally grumpy, and difficult to talk to, as some of my family and close friends can attest to. Due to lack of appetite, I didn't even feel like looking at food. Dinner sometimes consisted of one small spoon of rice with a bit of meat, and I didn't want to eat anymore. (Well, later on, when my appetite returned after I recovered, it certainly came back with full force.) It was no wonder that perhaps I dehydrated myself a bit, and at one time my blood pressure was only 84/48! Well, I made myself drink more fluids, and soon after it returned to normal.

After discharge, I was given 2 weeks of medical leave. This time turned out to be a source of blessed rest, both physically and spiritually. I had periods of unrushed quiet time and prayer with God, time to rest and fully recuperate. God drew me close to Him in a way that I had not felt in a long time, and this was a wonderful and blessed feeling indeed. I was also able to catch up with many friends during this period as well as do other things which I had put off for a long time.

Now back at work, this sense of trusting in and relying upon Him is not something I wish to lose again, as I have lost before. I may never know why or how I got SARS. But the blessings that I have received, remind me to continually trust God in everything. I know that many who get SARS may not get full recovery like I have, or even survive. But God knows His plans for each one of us and His ways are certainly higher than our ways. We all need to trust God and lean upon Him for our daily strength. Though we are besieged, we are not fallen. May this time be a time when our understanding of the Lord increase and our reliance upon His strength, which is more than sufficient, grow. Let's continue to pray for and encourage each other in the Lord daily.

In His grace,
Ong Pei Yui ■



Serving with Sincerity

The Listening Servant (1 Samuel 3:10)

Samuel owed a great debt of love to his parents who were God-honouring people. Their delight was to frequent the Lord's house in Shiloh. Hannah in particular had a strong prayer-link with heaven, a fact that Eli the High Priest did not readily recognise, mainly because he had lost touch with God. Baby Samuel was surely conceived in an atmosphere of tears and supplication. As a child of prayer he became a man of God ready to lead Israel to a spiritual recovery. As with Timothy in his blessed inheritance of "faith" from grandmother Lois, and mother Eunice, so was Samuel blessed with a "prayer" inheritance from Hannah.

1) Listening to God's call (1 Sam 3:10)

Some have ears that are never tuned heavenward, while others perhaps hear the call but ignore it. As slackness and complacency towards sin increases so does spiritual deafness take over. Eli no longer heard God's voice even though he dwelt near the Sanctuary. His testimony and spirituality were in ruins.

a) A Personal Call

Samuel had been given a name that means "heard of God." This was Hannah's personal experience of prayer. No wonder she burst into praise to the Lord (1 Sam 2). Now Samuel must experience for himself the call of the Lord to a life of intimacy and devotion. The Lord Jesus called his disciples to be "WITH HIM" (Mk 3:13). He wanted them at His feet before He sent them out on their feet for service to Him.

b) A Persistent Call

God called Samuel 3 times and then on the fourth occasion He called his name twice. God wanted Samuel to listen and obey. Notice also the 7 double calls of Scripture:-

- 1 - Abraham (Gen 22:11); 2 - Jacob (Gen 42:6);
- 3 - Moses (Ex 3:4); 4 - Samuel (1 Sam 3:10);

- 5 - Martha (Lk 10:41); 6 - Simon (Lk 22:31);
- 7 - Saul (Acts 9:4).

God does not repeat names unless there are serious challenges to be met. I wonder how many believers have heard God call time after time but have refused to act. There are many gaps in the world where there are no workers or witnesses. The Lord lamented this fact in Ezekiel's day (Ezek. 22:30). Does He not grieve in our day that there remains a great unharvested field of souls?

2) Listening to God's word (1 Sam 3:21)

The revelation of God's word was very rare in these days (1 Sam 3:1). In fact, in the whole of the book of Judges there were only 2 prophets mentioned. One was Deborah (Jud. 4:4) and the other an unnamed messenger (Jud.6:8). Now God produced another great one.

a) In the right place

Samuel lay down in the temple (1 Sam 3:2 NIV) which housed the Ark of the Covenant, the symbol of God's holy presence. If we would hear God's word we need to draw nigh to Him in the Sanctuary so that He can draw nigh to us in intimacy. The temple was located at a place called Shiloh (1 Sam 3:21) which has been interpreted as the place of rest. It is also a title of the Lord, as the Messiah (Gen 49:10). Those closest to Him can be assured of ever hearing the Divine secrets.

b) In the right attitude

Eli might have been in and around the Tabernacle but his heart was not right with God. He heard nothing from the Lord's lips. His religion had become ritualistic and unrealistic. As he heard nothing from God he had nothing to pass on. When God's servants lose touch with heaven the flock of God starves. Not so Samuel. His heart and mind were open towards God, and he received the riches from the treasury of His word.

c) With the right result

The Lord revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of God and as a consequence the word of Samuel came to all Israel (1 Sam 4:1). What flowed in from God flowed out to the people. He became a fount of blessing to all.

3) Listening to God's Warnings

(1 Sam 3:11-18)

It is much easier to underline the precious promises in the Bible than to highlight the warnings and judgements. There is always a danger of resting complacently in the fact of eternal security but trying to avoid the eternal consequences of playing with sin. Fearing to yield to sin was the saving grace in Joseph's life. Fearing not to deal with sin was the downfall of Eli and family.

a) A shattering message

It was going to cause the ears of all the people to tingle. How upsetting to know that God's judgement was about



to fall on the Priesthood. Such was the iniquity in the camp that no atonement was possible. There are many warnings to God's people about sin and impurity. Often times the believers think they will remain unscathed. The Laodicean Church thought it was alright and never really expected God's punishment.

b) A solemn message

The tragedy of this judgment was that Eli knew there was sin in the camp and did nothing. How could he deal with his own family? He feared them more than he did God's wrath. It was much easier to cover up sin or ignore its presence than to have a purification campaign. Where there is hidden sin of which the Elders know, but fail to act against, there will surely be a day of reckoning. God is zealous for His own house and name. Samuel would have had great difficulty sleeping the rest of the night after hearing of those terrible judgments to come.

4) Listening to the correction of the Lord (1 Sam 16:7)

Samuel ought to have remembered that the Lord is not bound by tradition. Choosing the first born might be Jewish custom but it was not necessarily the Lord's way. God was selecting His own King for Israel and did not need any man to advise Him!

a) Human Choice

Jesse's sons were paraded before Samuel so that he might anoint God's chosen one. Eliab the eldest made a great impression on Samuel. He had the right appearance and stature. Human reasoning said "this is God's man," but God rejected Samuel's opinion. It is so easy to judge by first impressions. New Christians may come to our Assembly and we may suppose they would make good preachers, or leaders. They can be quickly promoted to a place of authority but we may live to regret our hastiness. Timothy was told not to lay hands suddenly on any man (1 Tim 5:22). Outward appearances and business abilities are not indications of true spirituality. Samuel had to think again!

b) Divine Choice

The Lord looked into the heart of all Jesse's sons and found the youngest one, David, was a man after God's own heart. There he found faith and trust and love and devotion. David's name means "beloved". And God loved him for what He saw in him, that inner beauty of heart and that potential to rise to faithful leadership of God's people. God's choice of Elders is always best. How we need to make His choice our choice.

// O give me Samuel's ear, the open ear O Lord,
 Alive and quick to hear each whisper
 of Thy word;
 Like him to answer at thy call,
 And to obey Thee first of all. //

Alfred Chote ■

Living The Abundant Life – 2

A Living Sacrifice

Although the killing of sin is foundational to our living the abundant life, it will be incorrect to suppose that our Christian life is solely an individual and personal matter. Our abundant life is, in essence, a community experience.

Paul's epistle to the church in Rome has 4 chapters devoted to this theme, Romans chapters 12 to 15.

The apostle began with an exhortation in Romans 12:1.

"I urge you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a holy and living sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship." (NASB)

The word "Sacrifice" is often used to describe an action that leads to "the forfeiture of something highly valued for the sake of something considered more valuable." But here in this verse it is used in the sense of a religious offering. In the Old Testament we are introduced to the practice of sacrificial offerings. God had demanded from the Israelites offerings as a form of worship.

Of the various Old Testament offerings there was one called the meal offering (or grain offering) in which there was no taking of life. That means there was no animal killed, no shed blood and no flesh burnt on the altar. This offering, I think, best pictures Romans 12:1 because the "sacrifice" in this verse is likewise not of blood.

Lev. 2:1 gives us a brief description of the meal offering.

"Now when anyone presents a grain offering as an offering to the LORD, his offering shall be of fine flour, and he shall pour oil on it and put frankincense on it."

The ingredients that go into making the meal offering provide lessons for us on how to live the Christian life. The main ingredient of the meal offering is fine flour. The grain is crushed and ground into a fine powder. This slow process of grinding speaks to us of the process of character building that comes through trials and tribulations in life. Romans 5:3,4 reads, "And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character and proven character, hope". We present ourselves as fine flour, matured through trials, unto the Lord.

On the fine flour was added oil, "He shall pour oil on it." Oil speaks of joy. For example in Psalm 45:7b we find



these words, "Therefore God, Thy God, has anointed Thee with the oil of joy above Thy fellows." We offer unto the Lord a disposition of life characterised by joy. Please note that this means that an unjoyful Christian is not giving to God His due.

On the fine flour was added frankincense. Frankincense is a substance that when burnt gives forth fragrance, a soothing aroma. This fragrance represents the beauty of the believer's life. In 2 Cor 2:15 we read, "For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing"

In addition, "Every grain offering of yours moreover, you shall season with salt" Lev 2:13. Salt typifies grace. Col 4:6 says, "Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt". This I confess is what I sorely need – to season my speech, to flavour my life with the salt of grace.

These then are the qualities of a meal offering acceptable to God. It is the Christ-like character of a believer. Needless to say the Lord Himself was the perfect meal offering. We merely follow in His steps.

Note that there are two prohibitions. Neither leaven nor honey was permitted in the offering. Leaven depicts deceitfulness. Honey depicts flattery. Our sacrifice to God must be free of such elements.

The portion Romans 12 to 15 contains valuable practical teachings on what it means to be a living sacrifice. Just as in the Old Testament, there were requirements when it comes to sacrifices to God. There are at least 4 of these requirements in these chapters. I like to term these "requirements" as "hard acts".

The first of these "hard acts" we find in Romans 12:3–21. This is the hard act of honest self-appraisal. Verse 3 reads, "For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself as he ought to think so as to have sound judgement, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith". The reality is none of us is very important. If we understand this we will be more at peace. God has graciously allotted to every believer a small gift so that each of us can fulfil a function in the Body of Christ. We are important only when we fit into the Body of Christ. The whole Body in submission to its Head is what counts.

The second hard act found in Romans 13:1–7, is "subjection to authority."

Verse 1 reads "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God."

All authority emanates from the throne of God. God has delegated authority as He willed. To flout authority is to go against God. Those who wield the sword, that is earthly governments, do so only because God had assigned them to act as an avenger in this world. It is a temporal and temporary duty. They may not even acknowledge God as the One who had empowered them. But it does not change the fact. As Christians we leave temporal justice into the hands of these men. We

do not take justice into our own hands.

The third hard act found in Romans 14:1–23 is the hard act of "accepting others who are different."

Verse 1 "Now accept the one who is weak in faith".

God has in His inexplicable and perfect ways allowed for believers to have different opinions on many issues. It would not have been difficult for God to anticipate these differences and give clear instructions on every one of these. Of course we would then have a much thicker Bible. But He did not. It seems to me that He has left it this way so that we have a test of brotherly love. If all believers are uniform in every way then there will be no test of love.

When we look at a brother in Christ who differs from us what comes first into our minds? Do we think, "He doesn't know the truth. He has not read his Bible correctly. Let me show him where he has gone wrong." Or do we think, "God has accepted him. He may be right and I may be wrong." Or simply, "He is a brother in Christ".

Attempting to answer this difficult question I would say:

First we have the word of God as our reference. Next we have the Holy Spirit as our teacher. Third we have prayer as our means to ask God for discernment. On any matter if the word of God declares it, then there is no room for discussion. But if the Word of God does not take a firm stand, neither should we. Without a doubt it is hard for any of us accept those who are different. Things would be so much simpler if everybody agrees.

The fourth hard act found in Romans 15:1-6 is the hard act of bearing the weakness of others.

Verse 1 - "Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not please ourselves."

We are not all equally strong. Some are stronger than others. The distribution of the load is therefore never equal. The stronger carries more weight. The faithful picks up the slack that others leave behind. We are expected to carry the burdens of others. We cannot do what pleases ourselves. We cannot say, "That's his business."

Brethren differ in vision, in spiritual maturity, in temperament and in so many other ways. The stronger ought to bear (and bear with) the weakness of the weaker. This is yet another hard act to perform in order to be an acceptable sacrifice before God.

To live the Abundant Life we have to individually deal with the sin in us. But that's not all. To live the Abundant Life we also have to live as a Living Sacrifice to God and in relation to fellow believers. May the Lord grant us wisdom and strength to bring to pass the promise that the Lord had made to us - that we might have life more abundantly.

Wong Kok Seng
Morning ministry 27 Oct 2002 ■



Promise Of Peace In Perilous Times

The world's predicament

We have never had it so bad. Not in 40 years have our lives and our livelihood been so threatened and endangered. The collapse of the Thai currency in 1997 triggered the Asian financial crisis. The resulting mass unemployment and economic depression affected the region badly. Fortunately, after about 2 years we were quite out of the woods and looked forward again to sunny skies.

The skies suddenly became dark with foreboding after September 11 2001. All at once our lives and that of the world's peoples were radically changed, perhaps never to be the same again. Terrorism became a sinister household word and the repercussions were felt worldwide. Air-travel, the tourist industry, global trade and investment indices were severely battered, and the subsequent fall-out caused many bankruptcies and desperate scramble for survival among innumerable corporations. While this was going on our lives were endangered constantly by the possibility of terrorist attacks. The climate of fear had begun to grip our lives.

When SARS first struck in November last year, it went largely unnoticed. By mid-March this year it had struck fear worldwide. It is a hitherto unknown entity, whose beginnings are shrouded in mystery, but whose finish is lethal. When economic recession bit in we could lie low, wait for recovery, and live to fight another day. However, with SARS, that 'another day' may come, but we may not be around to do any fighting. We can avoid the deadly Ebola and the Lassa viruses by not going to Africa, the Nipah virus by not handling infected pigs, the Aids virus by avoiding drug addiction and promiscuity, but there is no real way to avoid the SARS virus – suddenly your neighbour, colleague or friend can infect you. With the SARS episode the bright rising star of the Life Sciences – genomics – meets its first and most formidable test. With all its much publicized hype and halo, if it can lick the problem soon, it would well and truly have earned its spurs.

The Christian response

In the midst of all this anxiety and perplexity, Christians should nonetheless not be caught off-guard by these developments. The Lord Jesus had forewarned of such event over 2000 years ago (Matt 24:6,7 and Luke 21:9-11) when mention of 'wars, rumours of wars, earthquakes and pestilences' a harbinger of the End-times. Nonetheless as a corollary of being human, Christians can suffer job losses, can suffer from terrorist attacks, can succumb

to SARS. There are documented cases of Christians who have been killed as a result of terrorism, and who have died of SARS. What then? How are we to reconcile this fact with Psalm 91; just a wistful scriptural fantasy whose gossamers offer no support when sinking hands grasp in desperation?

The word of God cannot lie, nor can it hold forth false promises. We do not know why some Christians suffer, but for each Christian 'casualty' many others have been wondrously protected and kept. It would be extremely naïve to think that being a Christian renders one immune or invulnerable to the ravages of the human race. Perhaps it has to do with one's personal walk with God; perhaps it has to do with His permissive will for His sovereign glory (John 12:24). Nonetheless since it the Omnipotent God Who promised, let us never fail to believe, nor fail to cling tenaciously to His promises of deliverance by praying specifically for His protection for ourselves and ours. Above all else, the ultimate assurance is that nothing ever happens without His foreknowledge and permission (Matt 10:29-31), and that the Christian's eternal destiny is sure and secure. We can certainly take heart and comfort in Christ's words of assurance and promise in these perilous times: "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. . . Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 14:27 and 16:33).

When dark storm clouds gather on the sight
And mighty waves crash all around,
When howling gales tear through
the moonless night

And fear and terrors all around;

Behold, a beacon beckons from afar –
A haven safe from the Elements' rude shock;
Shelter for all who enter its door ajar,
That House founded on solid Rock.

Chong Kwok Yan ■



Coming Events *Mark it in your Diary*

Assembly Gospel Rally

18 to 20 July, 7. 30 pm nightly

Theme:

"Peace for the Heart"

Evangelist:

SV Ramalingam



Pray, Participate and Promote

Chairmen:

Samuel Wee, Tan Chee Wei,
Tan Ah Beng

Interpreters:

Ho Soo Kian (Mandarin),
Andrew Premsundar (Tamil)

Verbal Testimonies:

Alex Kwok, Loo Wee Boon,
Darren Chan

Written Testimonies:

Chua Yen Ching, Akiko Tan,
Joanne Chin

Organists:

Carol Wee, Sue Ann Chin

Special Items:

Male Singing Group &

Soloist:

Keyna Goh, Youth Group &
Bethesda Choir.

Pray for the Lord,s preservation of
those involved in: Ushering,
Counselling, Publicity, Children,s
Programme, inviting friends &
relatives to the rally. ■

Bethesda Hall (Ang Mo Kio) 2003 Speakers & Chairmen List

Morning Ministry Gospel Service				Tuesday Prayer Meeting		
2003	Speaker	Speaker	Chairman	2003	Galatians	Speaker
1st Jun	Lawrence Chan	Collin Leong	Ng Siew Kiang	3rd Jun	4:24-27	Tan Kian Huat
8th Jun	Peter Wee	Chang Chew Kient	Tan Chee Hwee	10th Jun	4:28-31	Sim Chear Wah
15th Jun	Tay Kim Swee	Andrew Sng	Mau Teck Hwee	17th Jun	5:1-6	Kurien Kurian
22nd Jun	Khoo Oon Soo	Sum Siew Tak	Jeremy Wee	24th Jun	5:7-12	Andrew Premsundar
29th Jun	Khoo Oon Soo	Chan Man Wong	Ho Kuang Cheng	1st Jul	5:13-15	Frankie Cha
6th Jul	Khoo Oon Soo	Tan Chee Wei	Collin Leong	8th Jul	5:16-18	Andrew Paul
13th Jul	G D James	G D James	Collin Leong	15th Jul	5:19-23	Jeffrey Jee
20th Jul	S V Ramalingam	S V Ramalingam	Tan Ah Beng	22nd Jul	5:24-26	Peter Wong
27th Jul	Tan Jing Poi	Chang Chew Kient	Tan Ah Beng	29th Jul	6:1-6	George Varughese
3rd Aug	Ho Kuang Cheng	Daniel Panneersalvam	Tan Ah Beng	5th Aug	6:7-10	Peter Chow
10th Aug	David Chua	Tan Chee Hwee	Loo Wee Boon	12th Aug	6:11-14	Alex Loh
17th Aug	Sum Siew Tak	David Tucker	Andrew Paul	19th Aug	6:15-18	William Koh
					Ephesians	
24th Aug	Tan Kian Huat	Patrick Wee	Andrew Paul	26th Aug	Overview	Samuel Wee
31st Aug	Tan Kian Huat	Victor Ng	Alex Kwok			