

2006 NEWSPAPER DEVOTIONAL ARTICLES by Rev. Mike Jones

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January 3, 2006 HONORARY HONORS

I recently attended the winter graduation ceremony at Clemson University where my niece received her Master's Degree. Many people were rewarded for their various educational achievements and the thousands of family and friends in attendance were justifiably proud. One man, however, fit more into my area of academic achievement; his degree was an honorary degree. He had not earned his degree by attending classes and writing theme papers, he was simply honored with an honorary honor because of his ties to the university and his achievements in life.

Due to my family's financial ability, I never had the opportunity to attend an institute of higher learning. Like many people in this world, the only degree I ever received was from the "school of life learning"; and sometimes when I look at my failures I wonder if the teacher did not grade on the curve in order to give me a degree from there!

Thankfully, I can declare today that I do have an "honorary degree to Heaven". It was not based on my educational abilities or my vocational achievements but on my acceptance of God's wonderful gift of salvation that has been provided by the sacrifice of His precious son, Jesus Christ. This is an "honorary" degree that is an honor indeed. A million years from now people will not know or care about the honorary degree that was given to this man at Clemson University but they will still be rejoicing in the fact that someone like me was honored by the God of the universe with eternal abundant life.

I do not know what kind of honor you are seeking this year but I can assure you that no greater honor can be given to you than having your name listed in the Lamb's book of life. It is an honorary honor that will have the angels talking (Luke 15:10).

January 4, 2006 NEW YEAR GOALS

People have many goals for the upcoming year- Lose weight, gain wealth, take more control of their life, give more attention to projects they want to start or complete, hug happiness, release bitterness, eat less, exercise more, drop bad habits, pick up new friends...

The good news is that many of the goals you desire for your life are also the goals God desires for your life. God want you to be health, happy, and prosperous in your life. He wants to help you put away the bad and take up the good. God is anxious for you to do the things you need to do and to forsake the bad habits that hinder your life and your relationships. God is on your side in doing the right things this year!

God wants to give you the wisdom to know the right things to do and then give you the ability to do those right things on a consistent basis. It is all a matter of trusting God's promises and following God's plan for your life. That is why the first step toward attaining your goals this year is a sincere and complete dedication to God. When you and God join forces you will find this coming year will be the most exiting and wonderful year you could imagine.

January 10, 2006 FINISH WELL

Someone has stated that one third of the leaders in the Bible did not finish well. I can think of a few right off of the top of my head- Moses was a tremendous leader but he disobeyed God by striking the rock at the end of his ministry and was not allowed to enter the promised land. David was a man after God's own heart but he committed adultery at the end of his ministry and family tragedies and national tragedies followed him the rest of his life. Solomon led Israel to great wealth with his great wisdom but toward the end of his ministry his wives' gods stole his heart and his sons ended up splitting the nation. Need I list more?

Multitudes of people think that Christianity is simply "making a profession of faith" when they are ten and then trying to live the best you can after that. They know nothing of "denying themselves, taking up their cross, and following Christ". Because of this fallacy in their faith many will not finish well. They are good people but they have not been taught to stay on guard during trials and temptations and it is very possible the testimony they pass on to others will be a tragedy instead of a triumph.

It does not have to be that way. Determine, with God's help, that you will run well and that you will finish well as a Christian. Guard your mind, hedge your heart, and set your eyes on eternity. Satan is a real enemy that must be fought all the days of your life but, praise be to God, Christ has promised that He would never leave or forsake us. Just don't take your eyes off the goal and stumble within sight of the finish line.

January 11, 2006 TWO FOR ONE

Recently I stopped at a burger place to get a bacon, egg, and cheese biscuit. The clerk told me it would be \$2.16 for two biscuits. I told her I only wanted one biscuit so she told me the price for one biscuit was \$2.69 plus tax. My brain started to overheat so I asked her why one biscuit would cost so much more than two biscuits would cost. She simply said it was a sale they were promoting. My brain is still not able to understand why two biscuits could be on sale but one biscuit could not be on sale!

I'm glad God is a lot smarter than this burger place when it comes to two for one. Forty four years ago when I became a Christian I found the great joy of God's two for one. I came to Him as a sinner in need of salvation so I trusted in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ as a payment for my sins. Wonder of wonders, when I trusted Christ to forgive my sins I was born again and the Holy Spirit came to dwell in my heart. I thought I was getting one need met, pardon for my sins, but in reality I was getting a second need met also, power to live for God through the ministry of the Holy Spirit at work in my life. What a tremendous two for one!

God wants to pardon and empower you today. And the best thing about God's offer is that His two for one is free for the asking.

January 17, 2006 PIE FLAGS

I thought it was a really good idea. Whenever we had a death in the community the local Mennonite group would usually bring some food to the home of the deceased. They were famous for their home made pies but they made so many different varieties until it was difficult to tell one from the other. To help people distinguish them they would attach a little flag with the name of the pie on it to a toothpick and put it in the middle of the pie. It made everything go a lot quicker at the dessert table when people could tell at a glance what type of pie they were about to get.

This "Pie Flag" principle needs to be translated into the church world. Some "Church Pies" may look like cherry pies to the untrained eye but in reality they are sour grapes! Many times that delicious looking chocolate pie is actually a mud pie waiting to be thrown at some unsuspecting person. And almost every church has had what looked like a delicious strawberry pie that actually dripped gossip and discontent on everyone who got close to it.

If your family and friends at church were to put a label on you what would it say? Would it describe you as a "pie" that everyone would want to taste or would it embarrass you beyond words? More importantly than that, what label would God put on you if He labeled your "pie"?

January 18, 2006 FRUITFUL FAITHFULNESS

A Scientific study has revealed that if your parents do not have any children then neither will you! It is interesting to note that when God created Adam He did not tell him to build a church and establish a religion and set up rules for men to follow. Instead, He simply told him to be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth; and to have dominion over the animals in the water, the sky, and the land (Gen 1:28).

It is also enlightening to see that when God got so tired of man's corrupt living until He decided to destroy all men from the face of the earth except Noah and his family that His command to them as they began a brave new world after the flood was for them to "be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth" (Gen 9:1). Again, God's emphasis is upon man being fruitful and faithful.

I wonder what it will feel like when we stand before God and brag about our facilities and our finances and God shakes His head and says, "Buildings and money have all passed away. What I am interested in is your fruit. Where is your Fruit?"

January 24, 2006 WHAT KIND OF RELIGION?

One of the questions of interest to me as I travel the world is, "What kind of religion do you have?" Everyone has a religion; even if it is the religion of non religion, so I always find a point of contact with the person. One thing that has become evident to me about religion is that no matter what label you put on the book (Christian, Muslim, Hindu, etc) it normally breaks down into one of several categories.

Some people have Personal Religion, a private guidance within their inner being that determines their moral values and guides their conscience. They do not know how to define this "godward" part of them and they seldom talk of it but it is the "power" that points their inward compass in the direction they feel they need to go. Sadly, this "moral compass" within them changes with the constantly changing standards of society.

Some people have Preacher Religion, someone outside of the person defines the standards and guidelines that the person lives by in order to be "righteous". Normally, the "preachers" whom these people emulate and look to for guidance follow another person's example (Some great religious person). But it is always man following man to get to God.

Finally, some people have Proper Religion, they have met the conditions set down for a relationship with the God of the universe and now they walk each day in His light. They are not perfect people yet because they were "born again" and now they must grow into the new person God wants them to become but their daily walk with God impacts every area of their life and gives them a peace and joy that transcends all circumstances they encounter in this world.

What about you? What kind of Religion do you have?

January 25, 2006 HEART CLEANERS

My brother recently had work done on an electrical problem with his heart. Before the heart work the doctors wanted to check for blockages. When the doctor came out to talk with the family he said they had found a fifty percent blockage in one artery but it was nothing to worry about. When my sister-in-law asked if there was anything that could be done to shrink the blockage the doctor said three things would help- "Eat like a rabbit, run like a horse, and think like a monk".

Many times Christians find themselves with a little bit of a heart problem and they wonder what they can do to help their situation. This doctor's advice is worth considering.

"Eat like a rabbit" means to eat the proper food. That is advice every Christian should follow as they daily take in the word of God instead of the garbage of the world.

"Run like a horse" means to daily exercise. Exercise for a Christian is witnessing, working, and walking for God on a regular basis.

"Think like a monk" means to live at peace in your mind. Daily entering into God's presence by prayer and constantly trusting in God's love in any circumstance brings the peace of God to the child of God.

If you are having spiritual "heart problems" then take this doctors advice. You will be amazed at the difference it will make when you eat the right spiritual food, exercise for God, and enter into God's presence in prayer each day.

January 31, 2006 RIGHTEOUSNESS REQUIREMENTS

One of the most important questions anyone can ever ask is, "What must I do to have a right relationship with God?" The Bible gives us five requirements for righteousness.

1) God Must Will it- (John 6:44) "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him:" God must want you to come to Him. It would do no good to knock on God's door if He was never going to answer the door.

2) Jesus Must Provide it- There is no other sacrifice that God will accept as payment for your Sin debt except the Shed Blood of Jesus Christ- (Acts 4:12) "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."

3) The Holy Spirt must Bring it- It is the Holy Spirit that Convicts us, Converts us, and Enables us to live as New Creatures in Christ. Without this work of the Holy Spirit in our life we would be powerless to come to God or to live as we should for God.

4) Christians must Tell it- (Rom 10:14) "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" Christians are to be Witnesses of what God has done for them and what He will do for others who will trust in Christ.

5) Sinners must Respond to it- God invites, He does not force. He offers the gift of salvation to "whosoever will" but men must receive the gift that is offered or face God unprepared.

God's requirements for righteousness are plain. Have you met them?

February 1, 2006 PILLOW PILLARS

(Gen 28:17-18) And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it.

Jacob has just left home on a journey that would gain him a wife and change his life. At the beginning of this journey he stopped to spend the night and put his blanket on a stone to use for a pillow. During the night he had a vision about Heaven and received a Blessing from God. To commemorate this event he took the stone he had used for a pillow and set it up as a pillar so he could use it at a place to mark his commitment and dedication to God.

Many Christians today are asleep in the pews instead of active in the work of God. They need a fresh vision of Heaven and a spiritual Blessing from God. That would turn their pillows of ease into pillars of dedication; and maybe bring the Revival this country so desperately needs.

When you go to Church this week are you looking for a place to rest your head or a chance to dedicate your heart to becoming active in the Work God? Turn your pillow into a pillar and find out how wonderful the Christian life can really be.

February 7, 2006 GETTING ALONG WITH GOD

A pastor jokingly said recently , “I would love being a Pastor if it weren’t for the people!” All of the other Pastors present knew he was not being negative, he was just frustrated because he could not seem to help and guide his church as he desired. I think some Christians feel this way about serving God. They would love being a Christian if it were not for God.

Don’t think me sacrilegious for saying something like this. Many Christians love the fact that their sins are forgiven and that they are headed for Heaven one day. Their frustration comes from the fact that they cannot seem to get their relationship with God to work on a day to day basis (Note how many people continually go to the altar to confess sinful behavior or cry for help in living the Christian life). Let me give you two simple guidelines that will make “getting along with God” much easier; which will make your life much more joyful.

First of all learn to Submit to God. In the Greek this means for you to “get into proper rank” with God. You will get along well with God when you find where you fit in His plan and then get busy doing what He has put in your heart.

Secondly, determine to Draw near to God. Many times in the Bible this is called “walking with God” and it simply means you daily invite God to be part of every area of your life- from the bedroom to the boardroom. God desires to fellowship with you. Invite Him into your life and experience the joy of an abundant life.

Try these principles and you will find that God not only wants to be your Heavenly Father but also your Faithful Friend; one who is easy to get along with.

February 8, 2006 PREACHER PREACHING

I was recently at a conference where two preachers preached on preaching to preachers! Not only were the messages well thought out and well preached but it was also obvious that the Spirit of the Lord had led these young preachers in selecting this particular subject. Both of these preachers were new to the area so they had been asked to speak at the minister’s conference but they had not been assigned a topic. Everyone knew that something special was taking place when both of them announced that the Spirit of the Lord had led them to preach on preaching.

Normally preachers, especially very young preachers, do not preach on preaching to a congregation containing mainly older and more experienced preachers. It would be like a green rookie just called up from the minors lecturing a veteran pitching staff on the fundamentals of pitching. That made the fact that the Holy Spirit would lead both of these young men to preach on preaching something special.

We live in a day of skepticism. TV portrays preachers as money hungry tyrants or sex crazed hypocrites and many people have lost confidence in the spiritual leadership of men of God. It is good for God to remind us sometimes with special occurrences like these young preachers being led to preach on preaching that He still leads men of God to the message of God that the people of God need to hear. That is what changes Sunday morning from a lecture into a sermon; and that is why you need to be in a Bible preaching Church each week.

February 14, 2006 LOVE'S COMMITMENT

My wife and I recently celebrated our 36th wedding anniversary. The thing that amazes me is the number of times I talk with young married couples and tell them how long I have been married and they look at me in utter astonishment and say something like, "I just don't think I could spend that long with the same person!". Whatever happened to "til death do us part"?

In the same way that God expects marriage to be a firm commitment He also requires His disciples to "forsake all and follow Him". God is not a "live together God" that you experiment with for awhile to see if you really want to serve Him. He demands that a person commit to serving Him completely or not at all.

I do not always understand my wife and I don't always understand God but I am committed to both because of their love for me and my love for them. I expect to die living with the wonderful wife God has given me and I expect to live forever with the wonderful God to whom I have committed my heart and my soul. Love brought my wife and I together; love brought God and I together, and my commitment to this love is without end.

How sad it must be for those people who commit to their marriage or to their relationship with God with "their fingers crossed"; ready to abandon ship at the first sign that things are not going the way they desire. They will never know the real joy of life because they are not willing to jump in with both feet and commit themselves unreservedly to all that love has to offer.

February 15, 2006 TITHING REWARDED

I really did not recognize what was happening until I wrote out my second tithe check of the year. When I had prayed at the beginning of the year for ways to more effectively serve the Lord I felt really burdened to increase my monthly tithe check. Things were a little tight for my wife and I financially but the Lord strongly impressed on my heart that this was something I needed to do so I changed my automatic check transaction in my banking program so I would increase my regular giving to the Lord.

When I met with the board that oversees my office on the second of February they decided, totally unexpected to me, to increase my salary. Because the first of February was a Wednesday Night I had not taken time after Prayer Meeting to write my first of the month checks. It was the night of the second of February when I finally got time to write my checks and realized that the Lord had already put the exact additional tithing amount in place a month before I knew I would need to increase my tithe- Glory!

I personally believe that if I would not have been willing to listen to God and trust Him by faith with the increase in my tithe then I would not have received a raise. I listened to God and sowed by faith. God answered that with a financial reward. He is such a wonderful God.

February 21, 2006 PRODIGAL PERPLEXED

It still astonishes me how much of a hero preachers make out of the Prodigal Son. He disliked living with his father so much until he left home. He was so selfish until he demanded his inheritance before his father died. He was so sinful until he wasted his entire inheritance in riotous partying without a thought for anything but immediate pleasure. He was such a backslider until he worked for the most anti-religious organization he could find (A Jewish boy working on a hog farm!). And he was such a sorry worker until he could not make enough to even keep himself fed! It is hard for me to make a hero out of this boy.

The older brother, who is the bad guy in this story, hardly has the credentials for being a villain. He is a hard working son who cares for his father and for the family farm after the prodigal son departs for his sinful life. Most people would count it an honor to be his neighbor.

The heart of the story, however, is the heart of these brothers. The Prodigal Son finally got his heart right and came humbly back to the father while the older brother's heart is revealed as being away from the father even though they lived in the same house.

Men look on outward appearances but God looks on the heart (I Sam 16:7). Remember that when you think you have everyone fooled with your older brother veneer that in reality hides a prodigal heart.

February 22, 2006 NUGGETS FROM PASTORS

I have one of the best jobs in all the world. I get to go to many different churches and many church conferences where I hear a large number of preachers deliver sermons and give advice. Every so often a little "nugget" will sparkle in the sermon and I will write it down to think about at a later date. Here are some recent nuggets.

"Instead of leaving, make something happen where you are"- spoken by a veteran missionary who was talking about how discouraged some people become because things are not like they expect when they arrive on a foreign field to share the gospel.

"I did not come to use this church for a stepping stone to a bigger church; I came to make this church a bigger church."- spoken by a Pastor who had been used of God to build a big church that was situated well out in the country, away from big city crowds.

While exhorting preachers to examine their relationship with the Lord a Conference Speaker listed two things that show the "sharp edge of love has dulled"- You no longer want to be close to the one you love and you no longer seek to communicate with the one you love. Those are two good check list items for your marriage and for your relationship with the Lord.

Surprise your Pastor this week. Share with him something from his sermon that really spoke to your heart!

February 28, 2006 GRANDMOTHER'S DEATH

It is sometimes strange how related things come about at the same time. A Pastor called me on Friday to see if I could fill in for him on Sunday while he attended the funeral of his grandmother. Coincidentally, I was already scheduled to attend a memorial for a Pastor's wife's grandmother on that same Sunday afternoon.

Grandmothers are special people. A common theme when people talk about grandmothers is that they seem to be fantastic cooks who always had time to do special things for, and with, grandchildren. Grandmother's house was a place of wonder and her lap was a place of security. I often tell people that I doubt a lot of things in this world but one thing I never doubted was my grandmother's love.

This coincidental Sunday brought awareness again that even Grandmothers die. And no matter how good their tea cakes are (and my grandmother made the best tea cakes in the world!) or how much they are loved by their children and grandchildren, they still must face death like everyone else.

Oddly, the word "grandmother" is used only one time in the Bible; when Paul talked to young preacher Timothy about the faith of his grandmother, Lois (2 Tim 1:5). Maybe that is because the only thing that really matters about Grandmother is her faith in Christ. Grandmother may be a wonderful person but she, like all of us, must come to God by the way of the cross through faith in Jesus Christ. And how sad it would be to know that Grandmother was not in Heaven because someone failed to tell her about Jesus; or because she failed to response to God's loving call.

March 1, 2006 TRASHED OUT

It happened twice in the same night. We came home from Prayer Meeting and I noticed an old Styrofoam cup in my van so I brought it into the house to throw it away. When I threw it into the trash can in the kitchen it bounced off the garbage already in the trash can and fell onto the floor where I had to bend down, pick it up, and then make room for it among the other trash.

When I went to my desk to empty my pockets I found some trash from some breath mints I always try to carry with me when I go to Church. I threw this trash into the trash can beside my desk where it promptly bounded off the top of the trash in the can and fell onto the floor. Another case of having to pick it up off the floor and physically put it into the trash can.

When something happens several times in my life then I assume God is trying to tell me something important. He could have been telling me that I needed to empty my trash cans (Which was true but not something I thought God lost a lot of sleep over). I think what God was really trying to show me was that when garbage accumulates then it begins to spread outside of its normal area where it becomes a bigger problem that requires more personal involvement. And if I wait until it overflows to get involved then I have waited too long.

March 7, 2006 WHEN GOD'S SENDS THE WORST

Wherefore I will bring the worst of the heathen, and they shall possess their houses: I will also make the pomp of the strong to cease; and their holy places shall be defiled. (Ezekiel 7:24)

A popular greeting card declares that you should sent their card if you want to send the very best. What do you do when you hear God declare that He will send the very worst! This is the only place in the Bible that the word "worst" is used and it is used by God to describe who He will send against His people in order to punish them for their sinful living and their unrepentant heart.

People sometimes ask me why their sexual preference or their sinful life style is any of my concern. After all, it is their life and they should be able to live it any way they chose. Surprisingly, this is often the same crowd that is adamant about not wanting to breathe second hand cigarette smoke or who lobby tirelessly about polluting the atmosphere because of the harm that will come to them because of what others do.

I tell these people that when God loves men enough to send the very worst of the heathen against them in order to punish them for their sinful living that it will not only be them who suffer but also their friends and neighbors. One thing we have learned in recent days is that terrorist controlled planes and remote controlled bombs have a non-discrimination policy.

I lift up my voice and cry out against sin because I care about where men spend eternity but I also call on men to repent because I want the best of God's blessings and not the worst of the heathen to be sent to me from God.

March 8, 2006 UNPREPARED HEART

And he did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the LORD. (2 Chron. 12:14).

Rehoboam was selected as king and he had every opportunity to make a mark for God and for good. Instead, he lived wrong and did wrong and became a king to forget instead of a king to honor. According to scripture, all of this came about because he "prepared not his heart to seek the Lord". My question then must be, "How do you go about preparing your heart to seek the Lord so you will not fall into the same sorry situation that ruined Rehoboam?"

You would think that "seeking the Lord" would be simply a matter of saying, "Hey, Lord. I need you. Where are you?" but preparation was needed. What sort of preparation must a person make in order to seek the Lord? The scriptures declare that we are to seek the Lord humbly and with all our heart. In order to do this a person must be willing to look at himself realistically (which will make him humble) and then be willing to give God the time and effort needed so that the "seeking" will be whole hearted instead of half hearted and lukewarm.

One of the reasons people can leave a church service and go directly into sinful behavior is because they prepared for church but they did not prepare their heart to seek the Lord. They were much more concerned with the clothes they wore than they were with the God they were approaching and, as Rehoboam can testify, that can have bad consequences.

March 14, 2006

CHURCH'S PURPOSE

When I stood in the pulpit of Grace Free Will Baptist Church as their Pastor I realized something very important. If you would have drawn a circle with a ten mile radius using my pulpit as the center you would have included 124 churches in that circle. That caused me to ask two questions- What purpose did these churches have to exist in these communities and What reason did Grace Church have to exist in the midst of all of these Churches?

Basically, a church has a three fold purpose for existing. First they exist in order to Prepare people to meet God. Everyone will have to stand before God and be judged one day. The primary purpose of the Church is to proclaim the Gospel so that men may hear the good news of God's gift of salvation and be prepared when they stand before the ultimate judge, God.

Secondly, the Church exists in order to Promote the worship of God. Men can worship anywhere but God calls men into the "body of Christ" when they become children of God and God expects them to worship Him as a body of believers who use their various talents and abilities to glorify and praise God.

Finally, the Church exists in order to Provide a method of showing God's love and character to the World. God is a Spirit so He cannot be seen by human eyes. God has chosen to use the Church to manifest His character in such a way until men see God through His people at worship and at work. That is why Satan tries so hard to divide and destroy churches.

Every building that bears the name "Church" is not established by God. Those who were are unique gifts from God to allow you and your family the privilege of meeting with God on a regular basis. Be sure and take advantage of that opportunity this week.

March 15, 2006

RELIGION'S ROAD

Did you know that except for the Grace of God your church could have been a heathen temple where the worship of the "goddess Diana" was taught and your daughter would have been urged to become a temple prostitute in the name of religion! In the early days of Christianity the Apostle Paul wanted to carry the Gospel into Asia instead of Europe but God closed the door to Asia and opened the door to Europe (Acts 16:6-9). The rest, as they say, is history.

Europe, and eventually the American colonies they established, had Christian principles instilled into their culture and Christian practices ingrained into their laws because Paul heard the "Macedonian call" and brought the Gospel to Greece. If he would have been allowed to go into Iraq and Iran as he desired world history would have been vastly different.

Forty- Four years ago a man stood in a pulpit in a Free Will Baptist Church in Shinbone Alley, S C and preached the gospel with such anointing until a fourteen year old boy who knew little about God or religion felt compelled to repent of his sins and accept God's offer of forgiveness through Jesus Christ. That night changed my life, my family, and my community.

Thank God for what happened in my life because God led Paul to "come over and help us". May Christians today hear the voice of God, and heed the call of lost men, with the same passion and purpose that led Paul to change history and "turn the world upside for Jesus".

March 21, 2006 EARS THAT HEAR

One of the most intriguing stories in the Bible is the conversion of the Christian killing zealot Saul into the mighty apostle Paul. Having consented unto the death of Deacon Stephen, Saul wants to hunt the remaining Christians down and destroy them from the face of the earth. On the road to Damascus he is blinded by a light so bright until it overwhelms the midday sun.

This is where the Bible disclosed a surprising thing- "And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me." (Acts 22:9). Earlier, Paul had testified that these men heard a voice but here he discloses that they "heard not" the voice; meaning they did not understand what the voice was saying. A sermon was preached to Paul with such power until it changed his life completely but the men around him only hear a "noise".

Been there; done that. I have often marveled at the number of people who will be in a Church service but only a very few will "hear" the voice of God speaking to them in the message. Jesus said, "If any man have ears to hear, let him hear. (Mark 7:16) and it is obvious that many people have ears that do not hear. They hear the "noise" of the sermon but they do not hear the voice of God calling them to change their life and follow Him.

Attending Church is much more than showing up and warming a pew. It should be a time when your ears are open to hear the voice of God so your heart will be tuned to do the will of God. What did you hear in Church last week- the "noise" of a sermon or the voice of God?

March 22, 2006 HEARING WHAT IS SAID

I recently celebrated my 44th spiritual birthday. I was born again into the family of God on Monday, March 19, 1962. It has been a wonderful forty-four years and the good part about having eternal abundant life is that it never ends! When this body ceases to function that will simply mean that I will be free from the flesh and at home with God- Glory!

Sometimes people ask me about my Christian life and want to know the most difficult part of living for God. They assume I will say something about the persecution I have encountered, or my daily struggle with fleshly passions, or the disappointments I must deal with because Christian Pastors and people fail to live like they should. All of these are problems but none of them is the main problem I have faced in my walk with the Lord.

My most difficult problem as a Christian is consistently hearing what God has to say. God generally speaks in a "still small voice" and it is often easy to miss His voice if you are not listening very carefully. Riding down the road it is sometimes easy to miss God saying, "Turn down that road. I have someone I need you to talk to or pray with ." Over and over I miss being a blessing and getting blessed because my ears don't hear the gentle voice of God.

The Christian life is the most exciting life imaginable. I want to live it the very best that is possible. Pray with me that God would help me to hear His voice and follow His path every moment of every day.

March 28, 2006

MARK THESE MEN

Romans 16:17-18 Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.

One of the Biblical teachings that is seldom applied today is the principle of isolating those who teach and preach wrong doctrine. We live in a world that thinks everyone has a right to their own opinion so we should just live and let live. Paul, and other Bible teachers, realized that wrong doctrine is one of the most dangerous enemies of the soul so they treated teachers of wrong doctrine like we would treat someone with a highly infectious disease; they put them into isolation.

The logical question from this is “how do you recognize those with this ‘doctrine disease’ so you can separate yourself from them?” Here are a couple of guidelines that will help you.

They will normally have an isolated interpretation of scripture- 2Pe 1:20 “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.” If your Bible teacher looks at scripture in a totally different way than everyone else looks at scripture then you should raise a red flag.

You will also note a “Superior Spiritual Attitude” in these men of dangerous doctrine. It is normal to have different stages of spiritual growth among individuals in a group but a consistent “Holier than Thou attitude” is dangerous. Normally, this kind of person gives constant “Pharisaical Pronouncements” to others in order to get everyone to live exactly like they think they should live.

The Bible admonition is very clear- “Mark these men and avoid them”.

March 29, 2006

FOLLOW ME

Phil 3:17 “Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample”.

Isn't this a great example of Christian conduct in action? When Jesus began His ministry He called on men to “Follow me”. Now the apostle Paul uses the same admonition to point the Church toward the proper path for their daily lives. Many times as I travel in foreign countries I will use this same admonition to stir the interest of the people with whom I come in contact. Generally, when I ask them to “Follow me” they ask four simple questions.

First, “Where are you going?” A logical question to ask someone when they ask you to follow them. Generally, my answer is “Heaven” and they smile and say, “That is where I want to go also.”

That leads to the second question, “Who do you represent?” Of course, in my case the answer is “Jesus Christ”

Which brings us to question number three, “Why should I follow you?”. This is when things get interesting. Now I have to be able to clearly explain why my way is better than the way they are presently going. I can tell you right now that cliques and simplistic answers will not satisfy in these cases.

Hopefully, this will lead to the ultimate question, “How can I get on the road you are traveling?”. That is when “follow me” turns from an interesting question into a life changing experience. An experience I hope you have experienced.

April 4, 2006 THE LORD'S REQUESTS

What sort of request does God make of God? When Jesus (the Son of God) talked about praying to God the Father He told us two things we should request from God. If they were important enough for Jesus to emphasize as prayer requests from God then I think they are important for us to put on our prayer list.

First of all Jesus told us to request that God's will would be done on earth as it is in Heaven. This is an obvious request that is seldom made but should be a constant part of our conversation with God. When you consider what a difference it would make if the will of God was the guiding principle in the way Christians act and the world functions you can see why this is a request that Jesus told us we should make of God on a regular basis.

Another request that Jesus told us to pray for is for God to provide Laborers for the Harvest. It does not take a person long to realize that the harvest is not the problem; it is the few who are laboring to gather the harvest that is the real reason for concern. Jesus did not tell us to pray for dinner guest at meal functions; you can pretty much generate a crowd when you provide a free home cooked meal! Nor did He tell us to pray for spectators at a singing convention; it is easy to quickly fill the house to hear good singers. Jesus said we needed to request God to send laborers who would do the work that is necessary to keep the harvest from perishing in the field.

Do you pray like Jesus, for God's will to be done and for laborers to work in God's field? Do you let these requests guide the way you live each day?

April 5, 2006 EVANGELISM INGREDIENTS

Sometimes I wonder why it is so hard for Christians to tell other people about the greatest gift that it is possible to give to anyone; the gift of eternal, abundant life through faith in Jesus Christ. What a horrible situation when we allow people to live in the misery and defeat that comes from a sin controlled life and then face God unprepared simply because we are unwilling to share the good news from God. Surely this is something we should seek to remedy immediately.

Maybe the reason we fail in this all important task is because we do not allow the four ingredients of evangelism to develop in our life. The first ingredient is Passion, if you do not have a strong desire to share the gospel with others then fear and timidity will cause you to be silent when you need to speak and the sinner will feel like the Psalmist, "Refuge failed me. No man cared for my soul." (Psalm 142:4).

Added to the ingredient of Passion must be an active Prayer Life, a committed Partnership with the Holy Spirit who will actually do the conversion work in the sinner's heart, and a dedication to Preparation by memorizing and studying the word of God you will be sharing with those who are unsaved. When these ingredients are present in a person's life you can almost guarantee that the opportunity will arise so you can share the gospel with someone.

Untold multitudes are dying untold because those who could tell them the good news of the gospel are so busy enjoying living for God until they fail to talk about God- and that is a tragedy beyond words.

April 11, 2006 UNEXPECTED VISITOR

My wife looks three times better than I look so it takes her three times longer to get ready each morning! That means I get up and get ready 2 hours before we need to leave, leaving her an hour and a half to get ready. Since we stay in motels a lot that normally means I go to the lobby and get some coffee which I drink while I do my devotions or work on my laptop computer while she is getting ready.

Recently, I had returned with my coffee and was working on a sermon on my laptop when I heard a commotion at the door. When I rolled away from the desk so I could look at the door I noticed it closing. I asked my wife what had happened and she said some strange man had come barging through the door, took one look around and said, "Oh no! I am in the wrong room" and had beaten a hasty retreat. For some reason the latch had not caught and this man had failed to look at the room number until he barged into our room. Needless to say, my wife was embarrassed and upset.

One of the great things about Easter is that we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ and His return to Heaven. One of the most sobering thoughts connected with Easter is that this same Jesus will return one day to claim His people without any warning until his sudden appearing. He will catch us doing what we normally do; I wonder if we will be embarrassed that He caught us in an awkward situation or rejoicing because we are hard at work for Him.

April 12, 2006 JESUS WAS RESURRECTED

"Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead:" (Romans 1:3-4)

It is hard to get out of life alive. Except for the Christians who will be raptured when the Lord returns, everyone has an appointment with death. It may be near or it may be several miles down the road but death is on a collision course with you. You can ignore it or work to escape it but death is no respecter of persons and one day you will look it in the eye and feel its horrible hand as it lies coldly on your shoulder.

Part of the good news from God this Easter season is that His son, Jesus Christ, died on the cross to pay your sin debt. That is great news but without hope for the future then dealing with my past wrong doing is of little benefit to me. The rest of the story is that Jesus was "declared to be the Son of God with power...by the resurrection from the dead". We are not asked to pin our eternal hopes on some man made doctrine; Jesus actually came back from the "great beyond" and declared himself the victor over death, hell, and the grave- Glory!

We serve a risen Savior. Let us rejoice in His resurrection and celebrate the fact that He calls whosoever will to join His family and enjoy His fellowship forever.

April 18, 2006 END TIME SIGNS

When Jesus was about to return to Heaven after his resurrection and appearances on earth the disciples asked him a question they thought was very relevant, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6) [Translation- "When will the end time begin when you fulfil all the promises you made to the nation of Israel through the years?"]. Jesus gave them a short concise answer, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power." (Acts 1:7) [Translation- "That is none of your business. You just do the job I have given you to do"- see vs 8].

It is obvious that there is no sign that must be fulfilled before the Lord's return but it is also clear that when certain things take place you are to "look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh." Lu 21:28. With that in mind, let me share several "end time signs" that are causing many Christians to keep a watchful eye on the sky and listen carefully for the last trumpet's sounds.

Jesus said the end time period would be like the days of Noah (Selfish absorption and busy times that disregarded God's word and God's warnings) and the days of Lot (Lustful pleasure would prevail and society's standards would crumble) [Luke 17:26-28]. Paul also points out that there would "come a falling away first, and that man of sin [would] be revealed, the son of perdition;" (II Thess 2:3). The only "son of perdition" mentioned by Jesus is Judas (John 17:12) and it is amazing that now Judas is being hailed as a hero instead of a betrayer!

No man knows the day or the hour when Jesus will appear. Those of us who know the Bible, however, know we sure had better "keep our bags packed".

April 19, 2006 SON OF PERDITION

There are many people in the Bible who are said to be indwelt by "devils" (demons). There is only one, however, who was said to be possessed by Satan; Judas-"And when he had dipped the sop, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. And after the sop Satan entered into him." (John 13:26-27)

It is also significant that the phrase "son of perdition" that Jesus used to describe Judas was also the phrase used by Paul to describe the Antichrist- (John 17:12)"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; that the scripture might be fulfilled." (2 Thess 2:3-4) "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshiped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God." Judas was a thief who stole from the work of God (John 12:6) and it is evident that either he, or someone who has the same spirit, will one day seek to steal God's honor by demanding that men worship him and take his mark in order to buy or sell.

It is sad that Judas walked with the Lord and saw all his miracles and then turned into the "son of perdition". Is it not even sadder that so many today will end up in perdition because they insist on walking there way instead of God's way?

April 25, 2006 PASTOR EARS

I recently read about an executive who had a plaque on their desk that read, "What people really need is a good listening to". That is mighty good advice for anyone who deals with people and their problems on a regular basis; like parents, pastors, and promotional directors (me).

We have 121 churches that belong to the South Carolina State Association of Free Will Baptists. This same organization has 213 ordained ministers; yet, it is becoming increasingly difficult to secure 121 Pastors from 213 ministers! Health/age problems, church problems, and financial problems all contribute to this situation but there is one factor that seems to stand out in an odd way- Many men want to be preachers but they do not want to listen to what other people have to say! To them, a Pastor is not someone who cares for wandering or wounded sheep but someone who has the opportunity to tell other people how they ought to live each week; and to do so with immunity because they say what they say from behind a pulpit.

Sometimes I think we need two lists for our ministers. One list for those men who simply desire to speak and another list for those who are willing to work with, and listen to, the people to whom they have been called to minister. I am not talking about listening in the sense that a minister listens to his people and then tries to preach sermons that will "tickle their ears". Nor am I talking about listening to the will of the people over the word of God when leadership decisions must be made. I am talking about being willing to listen to the hurts, the heartaches, and the unspoken needs that are hidden behind many conversations. This listening is where the real "soul" of people is found; and this is what most Pastors need to know if they are to be effective in helping their flock to know and show God in their daily life.

April 26, 2006 GARDEN PASTOR

My neighbor decided to raise a garden this year. He chose the field beside my house to accomplish this task. He has put in a lot of hard work so far and, unless something happens, someone is going to harvest a mighty big crop in the next few months.

When I came in from work just as night was falling last night this man was plowing this garden. This morning when I got ready to go back to work just after daylight this man was hoeing this garden. I thought to myself as I waved to him on the way by, if I were a pastor and I worked as hard as this man worked trying to grow some vegetables then I feel pretty confident I would see a harvest of souls one day.

This man Planned his garden (He decided he wanted to have a garden, he decided where he wanted the garden to be, and he decided what he wanted to grow in the garden). This man Prepared his garden (He knew the ground had to be tilled and the seed had to be planted). This man Protected his garden (He has already started pulling the weeds that always grow when you plant something and he is preparing the needed equipment to keep the birds and varmints from enjoying his crop before he can pick it). This man plans to Pick his garden (He is not doing all this hard work just to brag to his neighbors that he has a garden. He expects fruit from his labor).

Many Pastors would do well to follow the example of this gardener. It involves a lot of hard work but the rewards are worth all the efforts.

May 2, 2006 WHAT WILL FOLLOW YOU HOME?

A young city boy was visiting in the country. He came running into the house exclaiming, "Mommy, mommy. A little black and white dog followed me home. Can I keep him?" When the mother went out to see the dog that had followed the boy home she found it was a skunk!

The Bible lists at least three things that can "follow us home to Heaven". When you get to the pearly gates and look behind you, will you enjoy what follows you or will it be a skunk?

I. WORKS- *And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.* (Revelation 14:13). The Apostle Paul said one day our works would be tested by fire with the wood, hay, and stubble works being burned while the Gold, Silver, and Precious stones works would remain (I Corinth 3:12-15).

II. WORDS- *But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.* (Matthew 12:36-37)

III. WEALTH- *Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:* (Matthew 6:19-20)

Thankfully, there is also a fourth "follow behind" fruit we can see in Heaven. It is the people to whom we have WITNESSED who have accepted Christ. And what a joy beyond description to walk down streets of gold and see people who are there because we told them about Christ.

May 3, 2006 TREASURE IN HEAVEN

It is true that "you cannot take it with you" but it is also true that "you can send it on ahead of you!" God graciously and generously allows mere men the privilege of depositing "treasure" into the Bank of Heaven via the good deeds and God centered actions they do upon earth- "Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me." (Mark 10:21). "Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth" (Lu 12:33)

One of the few people in the Bible that God called a "Fool" was the rich man who was blessed by God to such a degree until he could not store all the fruits God had given him so he decided to hoard his income in "bigger barns" instead of using his resources as a steward of God. That night God called his soul into account and he had to face God as a pauper instead of having great treasures in Heaven (Luke 12:16-21).

Why is laying up treasure in Heaven so important? Heaven will be a wonderful place even if you are broke! The answer is in a simple statement made by Jesus- "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt 6:21). If you have little interest in Heaven while on earth then it may not be Heaven you are going to when you leave earth.

May 9, 2006 BOOK END BROTHERS

When they came to Christ James and John were known as “the sons of Thunder” and they are the only recorded case of someone asking Jesus for permission to perform an act of violence against someone- *And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?* (Luke 9:54). Yet, John is eventually known as the “apostle of Love” because of the prominence of love in the Bible books he wrote. Oh, the transforming power of Christ.

I call James and John the “book end brothers” because James was the first disciple to die (exempting Judas) and John was the last disciple to die. They were close confidants of the Lord and often went with Him for special miracles and special events as Christ developed them into leaders.

John is involved in an amazing incident that shows God's sense of humor. The mother of James and John came to Jesus and asked Jesus to take care of her sons when He came into His kingdom. On the cross, Jesus instructed John to take care of His mother. I can almost see God laughing and saying, “Their mother wanted Jesus to take care of her sons but I am letting one of her sons take care of Jesus' mother!”

Mother's plans for her children and God's plans for her children may not always mesh. Blessed is the Mother who trusts God enough to give her Children to God and then allows God to transform them and use them in the best way for the kingdom of God.

May 10, 2006 A WOMAN'S WORDS

As we approach Mother's Day, I thought it would be good to allow a woman to give her input about what a wife expects from her husband. I looked for a “veteran wife” (more than 15 years of marriage) and a committed Christian. Here are the top three items she listed.

1) Share Responsibilities: When both husband and wife work; household duties should be shared. Most men consider household work as all woman's work. *[Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up. (Ecc 4:9-10)]*

2) Compliment your wife: Men should be more observant of the clothes their wife wears, the way she carries herself, the way she fixes her hair, etc. *[A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver. (Proverbs 25:11)]*

3) Look at your wife as a person; not as a toy to provide you pleasure: Consider your wife's feelings, her opinions, her emotions; and her wants and needs. It is easier for her to make you happy when she is happy! *[So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: (Ephesians 5:28-29)]*

May 16, 2006 WATERLESS WATER PUMP

He must have been three or four years old and he was having a ball. My wife's favorite restaurant (the one that ends with "barrel") had an old hand water pump installed on a stand at the front of the eating area and this young boy was pumping it for all he was worth. He would pump and pump and pump and then hold his hand under the spout waiting for some water to appear; which, of course, never happened since the pump was bolted to a board.

This was a persistent kid, however, and he must have spent ten minutes pumping that water pump for all he was worth trying to get some water to appear from a pump that was not connected to a water supply. My first thought was "I hope that kid does not plan to be a preacher when he grows up"

The people of the world today are thirsty beyond description and it seems more and more as if those who are supposed to share the water of life with them are busy pumping from a pump bolted to a board. They have energy and enthusiasm and they really mean well but they will work themselves to death without getting any water if the pump is not connected to a water supply.

Pleasures of the flesh are like saltwater, the more you drink the more thirsty you become. Religions of the world are like empty desert sands, you keep traveling and traveling and never come to real refreshment. Only Jesus is the water of life that satisfies the thirsty soul. To try to get living water from any other source is like playing with a pump bolted to a board.

May 17, 2006 PRIME THE PUMP

This illustration is difficult for many in today's generation to understand but it contains an important enough principle to be repeated. A desert traveler who had traveled two days without water came to an abandoned shack. In the shade of a rock was a water pump. Beside the water pump was a sign- "Lift the flat rock and remove the can of water. DO NOT DRINK THE WATER. Use the water to prime the pump and you will have all the cool fresh water you desire. Refill the can and replace it for the next person in need".

In a day when everyone gets their water by simply turning on a faucet it is hard to get people to understand the need of "priming the pump" but to those of us who grew up using a hand pump as our water source it is a reminder of an important truth- You must learn to put off satisfying the desire of the flesh immediately in order to eventually have what you need.

We live in a generation that wants everything and they want it NOW. Sadly, this attitude has infiltrated the church. People want instant satisfaction, instant sanctification, and instant success in the Christian life. Most are not willing to "prime the pump" with prayer, meditation, and study of God's word so they end up quenching their thirst for a moment and then become more thirsty each day. They hop from church to church seeking to satisfy their thirst; never realizing that if they would just prime the pump the waters would flow abundantly, even in the desert.

May 23, 2006 UNKNOWN BENEFITS

Nostalgia uncovered the secret. One day a man was walking by the church where he had accepted Christ and decided to go in for old time's sake. When he entered he stopped at the office to let the current Pastor know what he was doing. The Pastor decided to walk with this man and he politely listened as this man told about the fond memories he had of the Church. The Pastor's ears perked up, however, when the man pointed to a place beside the pulpit and said, "That is where I was baptized".

The Pastor said, "You mean there used to be a baptismal pool located beside the pulpit." The man replied that he was sure it was still there. After finding the rough outline of the cover that the man said covered the baptismal pool, the Pastor decided to take a step of faith and cut the carpet along that outline. What to his wondering eyes should appear but the top of an in floor baptismal pool. Soon the lid was lifted and a dusty, but still useable, baptismal pool was revealed to a very grateful Pastor.

The original congregation had sold the church to this Pastor and his congregation. The new congregation's first step was to replace the old carpet with new carpet. In the process the carpet had been installed over the Baptismal pool and the present congregation did not know the pool existed. For years they had lamented the fact that they had to go to another Church for their baptismal services when they had their own Baptismal pool literally at their feet!

I wonder how many times you and I walk over tools to do God's work and just don't realize what He had provided for us?

May 24, 2006 HOT WATER

We found it because my wife had her hands full and could not turn off the water. For several years my wife's main complaint about cleaning the office where I work was that she did not have any hot water. One day she had to leave the water running while she carried a pan into another room and when she returned hot water was coming out of the faucet!

We had searched all over the building when I first came to work but we had found no hot water heater and only cold water came from the hot water faucet so we assumed we would simply have to "rough it". After hot water "miraculously" began to come from the faucet, we traced things down and found a hot water heater in a building beside our main building. It had been there the entire time but we did not realize it because the hot water took so long to travel the long distance from the heater to the faucet.

God told the prophet Isaiah that He would give His people "the hidden riches of secret places" (Isa 45:3). Many times these "hidden riches" are already available; it is just a matter of learning how to tap into them. Often, like it happened in this case, patience is required before we can benefit from the blessing.

Don't suffer with cold hands and constant complaints when God has all the "hot water" we need just waiting for us. Turn on God's faucet and then wait for Him to provide "hidden riches" for you.

May 30, 2006 TEA POT TEMPEST

Several people have asked me what I thought about a recent book and movie that denied the deity of Christ and threw mud at the character of Christianity. Here are several truths I try to keep before them.

"You do not stop your car because of a barking dog!". Three years from now this movie and book will be but a ripple on the pond of eternity but Jesus Christ will still be the rock of ages and the only begotten Son of God. A famous atheist once proudly proclaimed that he would put an end to Christianity in five years. That was many years ago. Now his home is a Bible Museum and the printing press he used to print his slanderous literature against God is now being used to produce Bibles- and the Church rolls on.

"Repeating a lie a thousand times does not make it become the truth". Satan has lied about the character of God since we first met him in the Garden of Eden. His latest lies only mean he is getting more and more desperate as the end draws near- "Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son." (1 John 2:22)

"Allowing a weather vane to direct your path will run you around in circles". If God was so sorry until He allowed men to believe the wrong thing about His Son for 2000 years before finally revealing the truth to a man trying to write a novel to make himself rich then I have serious doubts about following that God anyway! I believe God provided; and preserved, the Bible and I plan to faithfully follow its teachings. And I believe that when I face God He will be happy that I trusted Jesus Christ as my Savior and believed on Him as God's Son.

May 31, 2006 BOGGED BULLDOZER

Forlornly it sat in the middle of a field. Mounds of dirt lay all around the field waiting to be leveled but this bulldozer could not help. In the process of work this bulldozer had come upon a wet boggy place from all the recent rains and whoever was driving it had bogged it down until the metal tracks on the bulldozer were below ground level and the driver's feet were level with the ground. Now the "big bad bulldozer" that could handle anything was waiting on someone to come along and rescue it from a very bad predicament.

Can you relate to this bulldozer? Have you gotten yourself into a situation where you just "spin your wheels" and never make any progress? Have you hit a place in life where you do not seem to have enough strength to do what needs to be done so instead of bulldozing through the everyday demands of life you get bogged down all the time? Maybe it has come to the place for you to realize that sometimes even a bulldozer needs help.

Jesus is listening today for "bogged down bulldozers" to call out to Him. When they do they will end up singing like the psalmist, "He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings." (Psalms 40:2)

June 6, 2006 THE MARK OF THE BEAST

It is really hard to print an article dated on 6-6-06 without talking about the Mark of the Beast. Society is speeding at a dazzling speed down the slippery slope of apostasy where anti-Christianity is becoming increasingly popular and where the majority of people are only concerned with pleasure, peace (don't brother me), and profit. All of which is leading up to Anti-Christ coming in and establishing a kingdom where everything is provided to people who are willing to allow Anti-Christ to take complete charge of things while they just "eat, drink, and be merry".

Surprisingly, most people think the "mark of the beast" is the number 666. According to the Bible the number 666 is the "number of the beast" and only one of the three "marks" that a person could obtain in order to do business in the kingdom of Anti-Christ- the mark (symbol) of the beast, the name of the beast, or the number of the beast (666). "And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name." (Rev13:17)

The reason you need to be reminded about the "mark of the Beast" as well as the "number of the Beast" is because when wrath is pronounced it is the "mark" and not the "number" which is mentioned- "If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name." (Revelation 14:9-11)

June 7, 2006 VERSES

There are 31,101 verses in the Bible. The Old Testament contains 23,144 verses and the New Testament contains 7,957. The shortest verse in the Bible is John 11:35- "Jesus Wept". (The shortest verse in the Old Testament is I Chron 1:25 "Eber, Peleg, Reu."). The longest verse in the Bible is Esther 8:9 (90 words).

Ezra 7:21 contains every letter in the alphabet except "J". Daniel 4:37 contains every letter of the alphabet except "Q". These words only occur one time in the Bible: Eternity (Is 57:15), Reverend (Ps 111:9), Grandmother (I Tim 1:5), Gnat (Matt 23:24), and Easter (Acts 12:4) [Christmas is not in the Bible]

Although every verse (and every word) of the Bible is important, there is one verse that contains a truth so vital until the teaching of this verse has dominated my life and work for the past 45 years- "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." (John 3:36).

It is difficult to make it any more simple or plain than that. Those who believe (cling to, rely on, trust in) Jesus Christ have everlasting life. Those who trust in anything else, or nothing at all, abide under the wrath of God. I would say that truth is important enough for me to spend a life time sharing it with others.

June 13, 2006 WHEN MEN FAIL

There are some things a Minister can do that disqualifies him from service as a Minister. God will forgive his sin and he can still serve the Lord in various capacities but his days as an ordained minister are over. God still loves him and other Ministers still love him but that does not change the fact that a “bridge has been burned”.

Needing storage room in my file cabinets, I recently purged the files of fallen ministers. It was a sad day, and several tears fell during the process, but I knew that nothing would change the situation of these men so I cleaned out their files in order to use that room for current needs.

We read in James 1:14 that “every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed”. Every man must realize that temptation comes from “his own lust” and something that is a worm to one man may be bait to another. As a certain man said one time, “Every man has to know his own limitations!”

Playing with matches generally means that someone gets burned. And the problem with a fire is that the warmth it provides at first turns into agony and anguish when something whips that comfortable campfire out of control and a man watches in permanent pain as things he has spent a life time building suddenly lies in smoldering ashes at his feet.

God has provided everything a man needs to live a productive and abundant life. Don't let the dark shadows of some forbidden fruit build a fire in you that causes you to disobey God and end up living with weeds and wearisome work outside of God's garden.

June 14, 2006 DON'T BUILD THAT CHURCH!

I was cleaning out old files recently and noticed a sad situation. We keep a folder on each church that becomes a member of the South Carolina State Association of Free Will Baptists. I told my wife to pull the files of the churches that were no longer active so we could get some needed storage room. It shocked me when she piled a huge stack of inactive church files on my desk.

During the last thirty years over 30 churches ceased to function (some of which lasted only one or two years). They began with great celebration and anticipation but most of them faded from a dream into the nightmare of reality and their doors closed and the building reverted to being used for another purpose.

Where was God during all of this? Maybe that is the question that should have been asked at the beginning; instead of the end, of these projects. King David had a desire to build a church so he consulted his local mission board and was told it was a great idea. But when God's counsel was finally sought God said, “Don't build that Church now. I have other plans.”

The men who started these churches were good men who had a great burden to do something for God but they did what seemed good in their sight instead of getting clear direction from God. The need was there but building a church was not part of God's plan at that time. And if you leave God's plan out of any plan then even a right thing goes wrong. Remember that in all areas of your life.

June 20, 2006 BALD HEADED BRIDES

June is the “marriage month” as many young people decide to graduate from High School or College and immediately jump into the bliss of matrimony. When I see these beautiful brides as they walk down the aisle with their radiant smile I can not help but remember some brides in the Bible who entered their married life with bald heads and sad hearts.

God commanded the children of Israel that when they defeated an enemy and “seest among the captives a beautiful woman, and hast a desire unto her, that thou wouldest have her to thy wife; Then thou shalt bring her home to thine house; and she shall shave her head, and pare her nails; And she shall put the raiment of her captivity from off her, and shall remain in thine house, and bewail her father and her mother a full month: and after that thou shalt go in unto her, and be her husband, and she shall be thy wife.” (Deut 21:11-13)

Several factors were at work here- 1) The month long wait meant marriage was not based on a sudden lust stirred by beauty or battle. 2) While the shaving of the head and the cutting of the nails had an obvious impact of decreasing the spread of disease from this people to the people of God, it also showed the Bride “at her worst” and helped the man to realize he was marrying a wife and not just satisfying his sexual pleasure. 3) The period of mourning by the Bride for her parents allowed her to come to grips with this change in her life and prepare her for a new way of life.

When you come to think of it, the principles applied to “bald headed brides” make good principles for engaged couples to observe today; although I don’t think shaving a bride’s head is as needful today as it was back then!! Just remember that God thinks the union between a man and a woman is very important and it should be entered into carefully and prayerfully.

June 21, 2006 MILESTONE MARRIAGES

There are several “milestone marriages” in scriptures. The man with the most wives was King Solomon. He had 700 wives and 300 concubines (1 Kings 11:3- Although it describes the “wives” as princesses with the implication that there was only one wife that was the queen. These other wives were normally the daughters of other kings and were given as part of treaty agreements between nations with the thought that having a part of your family in the king’s house would help prevent war and seal commerce agreements). When I get to Heaven I want to find out how many bathrooms he had to have with this many women in his house trying to get ready at the same time!

Another “milestone marriage” was the man who had 88 children. “Rehoboam loved Maachah the daughter of Absalom above all his wives and his concubines: (for he took eighteen wives, and threescore concubines; and begat twenty and eight sons, and threescore daughters.) [2Ch 11:21]. Rehoboam was the son of Solomon and while it appears that Solomon took 1000 wives and concubines for social obligations it appears that his son, Rehoboam, took his 78 wives and concubines to satisfy his desires more than to establish his kingdom (and his kingdom soon crumbled).

I have been married to my lovely wife for 36 years. In spite of the fact that we have zero children and the only kingdom we are part of is the Kingdom of God we still have a “milestone marriage” because it was ordained by God and He is the guide and God in both of our lives. I pray your marriage will be built on that same foundation.

June 27, 2006 HANDS

Do you know the name of the baby who had a scarlet thread tied around his hand before he was born?- Zarah: "And it came to pass, when she {Tamar} travailed, that the one put out his hand: and the midwife took and bound upon his hand a scarlet thread, saying, This came out first. And it came to pass, as he drew back his hand, that, behold, his brother came out: and she said, How hast thou broken forth? this breach be upon thee: therefore his name was called Pharez. And afterward came out his brother, that had the scarlet thread upon his hand: and his name was called Zarah. (Genesis 38:28-30). A "first born" who was born second!

Do you know the man who controlled a battle by holding out his hands- Moses: "And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed: and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed." (Exodus 17:11). Eventually his hands became tired so Aaron and Hur held up his hands so Israel would win the victory. Whose hands can you help hold up so God's enemies will be defeated?

Do you know the man who had 12 fingers and 12 toes- The son of the giant, Goliath: "And there was yet a battle in Gath, where was a man of great stature, that had on every hand six fingers, and on every foot six toes, four and twenty in number; and he also was born to the giant." (2 Samuel 21:20). In this section of scripture four sons of Goliath are listed as being killed by David or his men. Sometimes problems span generations but eventually they must be dealt with.

One final question. As you face life's problems and death's soon coming, are you resting in the safe hand of God- John 10:29?

June 28, 2006 THE METHUSELAH BRIDGE

Most people know the name of the oldest man in the Bible- Methuselah. He lived to be 969 years old. Do you know what happened the year he died? It was the year of the flood. I wonder, did he die in the flood or before the flood? Did he help Noah with the ark? Noah was a preacher of righteousness (2 Peter 2:5), did Methuselah attend any of Noah's preaching services?

According to the generational records in Genesis chapter five, there were 1,056 years from the time of Adam until the birth of Noah. Adam was only 687 years old when Methuselah was born and he would live another 243 years (He was 930 when he died). Methuselah was only 369 years old when Noah was born and he would live another 600 years.

All of this simply shows that Methuselah had the opportunity to spend a lot of time talking with Adam in his early life as well as having time to talk with Noah in his later life. This would mean that Methuselah got the story of Creation "straight from the horse's mouth" (Adam) and Noah got it just one person away from when it happened. Isn't it wonderful the way God preserves His word?

I do not know why God allowed Methuselah to live until Noah's work on the ark was finished (Noah may have simply needed Methuselah's encouragement as he made a stand for right in a generation that totally ignored God's warning of coming judgement). I am just glad God uses "old people" like Methuselah to bridge the generation gap by passing on the everlasting truths of God's word.

July 4, 2006 HOPE FOR A LOST NATION

I am really glad God asked Ezekiel and not me. God put Ezekiel in the middle of a graveyard representing the nation of Israel and then asked this question, "Can these bones live?". If I would have been Ezekiel and the graveyard would have been America then I will honestly have to say I would have told God that I saw very little, if any, hope for America surviving it's downward spiral into destruction. Ezekiel was more diplomatic. He said, "Lord, you know whether or not these dry bones can live!"

At first Americans began to abandon God's claim on their life as "eat, drink, and be merry" became the order of the day. Soon sex had to be involved in everything we would sell, or sing, or count as social. Before long vulgar language and perverse acts were considered normal as actions and words had to become increasingly trashy in order to retain their "shock" value. The unbelievably bad became so normal until no one paid it any attention any more.

Then things went down a notch. Not satisfied to simply abandon godly principles, Society took a decidedly anti-God stance. Now everyone who does wrong is considered right and those who stand for right are reviled and persecuted. "Comedy" shows can no longer exist on television unless they are willing to make fun of Christ and those who bear His name. If I were Ezekiel I believe I would have to say, "God, this is a pretty tough case; even for you!"

Thank God for another graveyard and an empty tomb. If it were not for that graveyard at the foot of a cross then I would abandon all hope but, thank God, because Jesus lives I can face the future with the knowledge that even dry bones can be brought to life by God's power.

July 5, 2006 SUN STORIES

I remember picking butter beans on hot July days when I was so hot and miserable until I knew there was no butter bean in the world worth the "cost" I was paying. I remember working in tobacco fields in the hot July sun when I would become so hot and tired until I seriously wondered if I could continue working until the end of the row. I know about the sun in July.

The Bible has several stories concerning the Sun also. Do you know the one about when the Sun stood still in order to allow God's people to get a complete victory? (Joshua 10:12-14). There has never been a day like it before or after when the Lord used His extraordinary power to hold the Sun in place in order to help His people. Wow! The way God manifest His love for His people is awesome.

Another Sun story involves the Sun traveling in reverse (Isaiah 38:4-8). King Hezekiah was sick unto death and he prayed for God to give him more time. God decided to honor his request and add 15 more years to his life. He signified this by moving the Sun backward 10 degrees on the sundial. Not only can God make the Sun stand still; He can make it go backwards in order to show His people how much He cares!

Most of the time Life is lived by the normal rules of Life. Sometimes God does something extraordinary and even the Sun has to obey His will. I sure am glad He is my God and I am His child.

July 11, 2006 MEDICINE MOVE

I normally make a pot of coffee while I go out to the mail box and get the morning paper since I drink at least one cup of coffee at home and take one cup in the car with me to drink on the way to work. Since I am becoming more and more forgetful as I get older I have learned to put my medicine beside the coffee pot so I will remember to take it each morning.

Recently, as I got ready to push the button to start the coffee brewing the Lord spoke to me and told me to move my medicine to another place. Seemed sort of strange to me but I put the medicine on top of the creamer container thinking that placing it there would be a sure fire way to remind me to take it when I returned from the mail box.

When I got back with the paper there was coffee everywhere. The filter had become clogged and coffee and coffee grounds had flowed out of the top of the coffee maker and run all over the counter, down the side of cabinets, and onto the floor. It took me nearly a half hour to clean up the mess. As I was cleaning up I realized that if the Lord would not have told me to move my medicine then it would have been ruined in all that coffee mess.

After I thanked the Lord for preserving my medicine I asked Him a question, "Why didn't you just tell me to check the coffee filter so I could have avoided this mess as well as preserve my medicine." I can still hear God chuckling as He replied, "Just trying to build your character, Mike. Just trying to build your character." Don't you just love God's playful side!

July 12, 2006 PROVISION PEOPLE

My wife and I try to use our financial resources wisely and live a frugal life style so we can keep a good reputation in the business community and invest as much as possible in the work of the Lord- *Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.* (Matthew 6:19-21)

Every so often an "unplanned expense" will suddenly appear and things will get real tight for us. When that happens I simply remind the Lord that I am His servant, that we have invested our resources in His work, and He has given His word that if I will seek His kingdom first then He will take care of us.

Recently a medical expense unexpected appeared on our horizon. The very day it happened a person came by the office and said God had told them to give my wife and I a financial gift-Glory! This person had no way of knowing about this expense since my wife and I had just learned about it. It is such a wonderful privilege to serve such a great God who always has a "provision person" available to show forth His glory.

July 18, 2006 CHAPTER AND VERSE

One of the great “inventions” to help in the understanding of the Bible was the insertion of Chapters and Verses into the text. This was not necessary before the Bible became available to normal people since they simply came to church and listened as the Priests read scripture and gave their explanation of that scripture. The advent of the printing press and the translation of the Bible into English gloriously made it possible for the Bible to become available to everyone. This made it essential to have a reference point in order for the people to find the place where the Minister was reading.

Depending on which “authority” you consult, the person responsibly for dividing the Bible into chapters was Cardinal Hugo de Sancto Caro or Archbishop Stephen Langton sometime around 1230AD. The Greek New Testament was divided into verses by Robert Estienene (Because of persecution he received from adding verse numbers he also used the name Robert Stephens) in 1551. The verse divisions were first used in an English New Testament in 1557 in a translation by William Whittingham. The first Bible in English to use both chapters and verses was the Geneva Bible of 1560 and almost all versions since that time have used the same chapter and verse divisions as their standard.

Isn't it wonderful that I can give a scripture reference to you today and you can very quickly find exactly what I want you to see? God's Word is the most important book ever published. We need to become as familiar with it as possible because Jesus said, “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.” (Matthew 24:35). A million years from now you will still be glad you know where John 3:16 is located!!

July 19, 2006 POWER TO THE PEOPLE

It is difficult for many people to grasp but the Bible has only been available to common people for the last 500 - 600 years. Before that time it was laboriously copied by hand in Hebrew and Greek (which meant that only the priest who studied Hebrew and Greek could read what was written). People would go to church and listen to a sermon (Many times in Latin which was “Greek” to the average person!) and have no idea if the priest was actually reading what the Bible was proclaiming. The Bible was out of the reach, and out of the heart, of the average person.

The Priests thought that allowing “common people” to read the Bible would weaken the authority of the Church so they persecuted and killed the first people who published the Bible in English. But the blood of these Martyrs only fertilized the soil of saints and soon hidden copies of the Bible were being shared from person to person; and the rest, as they say, is history.

I hope you will take your Bible to Church this week and follow along as your Pastor reads his text and then uses Scripture to explain Scripture. And I hope you will realize how blessed you are to have the opportunity to read the Word of God for yourself. Multitudes of people have died in order for you to have that great privilege.

July 25, 2006 WALKING WITH GOD

Walking with God is a life transforming experience that moves you from where you are to where God wants you to be. It is not just joining a church and being "good". In fact, it will not take you long to recognize that sitting in a pew is not the same thing as walking with God. The first thing you realize about walking with God is that it requires you to get on the same road God is on; you cannot stay where you are and go with God at the same time! If you have not trusted Christ to forgive your sins and make you a new creature then God calls you to leave your sinful, selfish ways and begin the great adventure of walking in the paths of righteousness with Him. Walking with God moves you from "wandering in the wilderness" into the path of abundant life filled with purpose and promise.

The second think you discover is that you must walk in the same direction that God is going- "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3). If you get on the right road but go in the wrong direction then things will get pretty difficult as you clash with fellow Christians and get further from God all the time!

Finally, walking with God means you end up where God is going!! The journey is not always easy but when you get to the end of the road you will be glad you traveled the road you traveled.

Your life is a journey that is taking you somewhere with someone. Don't you think it is just smart to find out who you are walking with and where the road you are on is taking you?

July 26, 2006 IF YOU

If you died today what difference would it make in your community concerning the knowledge of the Kingdom of God?

If you were as interested in getting the Good News about Jesus to your community as the drug dealers are in getting their product to those same people what changes would take place in your community?

If you talked as much good about your church and its impact on your life as you talk bad about the Pastor and the other members of the Church would it change your community's perception of the value of your Church?

If you had to live on ten times the amount you put into the offering plate each week would your bills be paid and your needs be met?

If you were the only Christian in your community and God decided to destroy everyone in your community unless he could find 10 people whom you had led to live righteously (Remember this happened to Lot in Sodom) would the fire fall or would mercy be extended?

If you do not make a difference for Christ then who will make a difference? If you really believe there is a Heaven to gain and a Hell to shun and that the only door to Heaven is faith in Jesus then can you continue to live concerned only with your own health and wealth while the world around you lives in misery and dies lost

August 1, 2006 PASTORAL QUESTIONS

One area of my job description is to help Churches when they seek a Pastor. The good news is that many of our churches are keeping a Pastor for longer and longer time periods. The bad news is that because it is so long between pastoral changes then those people who are appointed to seek a Pastor have forgotten much of the process. Here are five questions that should be asked of every candidate by the pulpit committee.

1) What is your Personal Testimony? Tell me about when, where, and how you came to know Jesus Christ as your personal savior. I want to know that you know what you believe and that you are able to clearly explain that to my family and friends.

2) What is your Performance History? What you have done in the past will tell me a lot about what I can expect in the future.

3) What is your Preaching Style? Are you able to communicate with content? Will your preaching style fit the personality of our church.

4) What are your Pay Requirements? Are your financial obligations more than we as a church can feel comfortable supplying? Are there insurance issues or other financial issues that the church needs to be aware of as we consider you for a Pastor?

5) What are your People Skills? Will we love you as a Preacher but feel uncomfortable with you as a Pastor? Will my family and friends feel comfortable talking to you about their greatest failures and their deepest needs? Will you be a person as well as a Pastor?

If you get the right answers to these five questions then you will be well on your way to determining if the pastoral candidate is the man of God you need at your church.

August 2, 2006 CANDIDATE CONCERNS

If I were a member of a church seeking a Pastor and I had the opportunity to have a conversation with a Pastoral candidate I would talk about three areas that concern me.

1) Are your eyes open? Do you have a vision about where you want this church to go and what you want to accomplish during your time here? Are you going to stumble around in the dark or will you show us the light? Are your eyes open to where we are going?

2) Is your heart hot? I did not ask if you were hot headed; we have had enough of that, I asked if you had a heart that is burning with a passion for God and people. Are you looking for a position to fill or is this a ministry that God has lead you to accept and develop?

3) Is your sword bloody? In ancient days the king would line his soldiers up after a battle and examine their swords. If a sword had no blood on it then the king knew the soldier had been faking the fight and he was not actively engaged in the battle. I want to know that my Pastor is a good Christian as well as a good speaker. I don't want a thermometer Preacher who simply tells me the problems, I want a thermostat Preacher who helps change things.

Three areas of concern but they tell me a great deal about someone who will be my spiritual guide and church leader.

August 8, 2006 MISSING INGREDIENT

There are more churches in America today than ever before. America is increasingly becoming a secular society with declining moral standards where right and wrong is based on situational ethics instead of Biblically Principles. What is wrong with this picture?

A simplistic answer does not solve a complex problem but I think one reason for the change that has taken place in society can be traced back to what is coming from the pulpits across America. Thousands of sermons are being preached but most of these sermons are missing 2 necessary ingredients.

1) Sin is missing from most sermons. The vast majority of sermons are about self improvement or how much God loves people. Sin is seldom mentioned or, at best, only mentioned in a general way. The great revival speaker of days gone by, Charles Finney, often preached a sermon entitled, "How to preach so as to have no converts". His main point was that preaching about sin but never naming any sins led no one to turn from their wicked ways and seek God.

2) Repentance is seldom preached. Multitudes are being told that if they will only "believe" then they will be right with God instantly and forever. James declares that Faith that does not lead to changes in your life is "devil faith" (James 2:17-20). John the Baptist preached that men were to "bring forth fruit that showed repentance (Matt 3:8) and Paul said that his preaching had always been "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." (Acts 20:21). God wants us to turn away from sin as we turn toward Him.

The only way we will see change in America is when Preachers begin to preach against sin and then point men to a Savior who is able to save those who are willing to turn from sin by trusting in the payment for their sin debt by Jesus Christ. May that kind of Revival begin today.

August 9, 2006 THE NEXT VERSE

Despite the tremendous benefit that comes from having the Bible divided into chapters and verses, sometimes the verse divisions cause application problems. People will sometimes pick a verse out of context and end up saying the Bible says something that the Bible does not say.

One of the most common misquoted verses is First Corinthians 2:9 "But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." I hear this verse used almost every week to declare that it is impossible for us to know the wonderful things God has in store for us in Heaven. The problem, however, is the NEXT verse- "But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit." (1 Cor 2:10).

My heart beats for missions and I long to see people work for God. The scripture most often used to recruit these people is Isaiah 6:8 where Isaiah has a great vision of God's call: "I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me.". Almost all speakers stop here and tell people that if they will volunteer for God's service like Isaiah then they will go forward in victory. The problem, however, is the NEXT verse which tells Isaiah to go to a people who will not listen!- "And (God) said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not." (Isaiah 6:9).

Read the Bible regularly but read all of it so you will make sure you read the Next Verse.

August 15, 2006 SNARE IS BROKEN

Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped. (Psalms 124:7)

People ask me why I smile all the time and I tell them, "Freedom is worth celebrating!". I once was a slave to Satan who used me and abused me. He promised me pleasure but he gave me pain. He lured me by talking about freedom from restrictions but his real goal was to make me a slave to sin, self, and Satan. Thanks be unto God who sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to earth in order to set the captives free and turn us from slaves into sons of God! No wonder I sing, "The snare is broken and I am escaped".

When I became a follower of Jesus Christ it broke the snare of Satan's Power in my life. I am no longer a slave to wrong actions and thoughts because "greater is he that is in me, than he that is in the world." (1 John 4:4). Old habits are hard to break and it is sometimes easy to listen to Satan when he tells me to lash out at someone or lust after someone but then I think about the harm this would do to me as well as to them and I refuse to walk into the snare Satan has set to try to recapture me.

Because the snare is broken, I am also free from Satan's Punishment. Satan is on a sinking ship and he is trying to get as many people as possible to go down with him. When I was set free to fly like a bird with God it meant I could soar to heaven instead of sink into the lake of fire- Glory!

When you see me smile it is because "My soul has escaped out of the snare of Satan" and he whom the Son sets free is free indeed.

August 16, 2006 SIN'S SONG

For over 30 years I have listened to Preachers tell their congregations that music and movies impact their character and their conduct. And for 30 years I have heard people in the world say that Preachers are just trying to scare people and limit their enjoyment. Now the "gods of this world", scientists, have come to the same conclusion that men of God have expounded for decades and they are beginning to warn people that the music they listen to and the movies they view can end up influencing them in a very negative way.

The latest scientific research has found that if you continually listen to music with sexually expletive lyrics then you are much more prone to engage in sexual activity at a younger age and with greater disregard for normal social standards. In other words, you tend to become what you continually put into your mind (A fact that advertisers have known and exploited for years).

If you listen to sin's song it will produce sinful thoughts in your mind and sinful actions in your life. No wonder the psalmist prayed - "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer" (Psalms 19:14).

Listen to what you listen to. Look at what you look at. Think clearly about what you will become if you continue to allow the things that are influencing your life to continue to influence your life. Don't let sin's song lure you into a death trap.

August 22, 2006 UZZIAH DIED

It was a sorry end to a wonderful life. Uzziah was made king over Judah at the age of sixteen and he reigned for fifty-two years. He sought to follow and obey the Lord in his early reign and “as long as he sought the Lord, God made him to prosper” (2Chron 26:5). He was a great military leader who won many battles and led in the invention of advanced military hardware. He loved to farm and accomplished great things in the agricultural arena. His fame, his prestige, and his fortune increased until he was one of the great leaders of his time.

Then, tragically, he decided to enter the temple and offer the evening incense. The high priest withstood him and told him that this was a priestly duty and not a kingly task. Uzziah became enraged and decided he was king and he could do anything he wanted to do. At that moment leprosy broke out on him and he had to flee the temple. The rest of his life was spent as an outcast as he suffered and died as a leper. A sorry end to a good man.

Why do I tell this tragic tale. It was in the year that Uzziah died that Isaiah the prophet saw his ministry transforming vision of a Holy God who loved the entire world. Uzziah was a close friend of Isaiah. It was Isaiah’s mourning over the tragic end of his friend’s life that lead him to look beyond man and see the holiness and awesome power of God.

I do not know what it will take for you to see the wondrous glory of God. I certainly hope it is not something as tragic as “Uzziah’s death” but whatever it takes you must lift your eyes beyond men’s fame or failures and see that God is on His throne and the world needs to hear about Him.

August 23, 2006 SPIRIT DEPARTED

It is almost impossible to describe in words the high and the low that takes place back to back in these verses- “Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward. But the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul,” (First Samuel 16:13-14). One leader received the anointing of the Spirit of the Lord at almost the same time it departed from another!

I can think of nothing that could be worst than the Spirit departing from my life. To have to face daily decisions without the Spirit’s direction and leadership is something that is impossible for my mind to comprehend. It would be like trying to live without air to breathe.

Two great leaders in the Bible suffered the horrible tragedy of the Spirit departing from their life and ministry- Saul (in the introductory scripture) and Samson when Delilah cut his hair. In both cases it occurred because these men of God disobeyed a clear instruction by God. And in both cases they had edged ever closer to sin’s swamp until one day they found themselves making a fatal choice that had dramatic results.

I do not know all I want to know about the Spirit departing from these leaders but their example shows me that obeying God is always the right thing to do and their punishment is enough to cause me to “fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.” (Heb 4:1).

August 29, 2006 TEEN JESUS

So little is known about a time we wish we knew so much about. Chapters are written about the birth of Jesus and books are written about his adult life but extremely little is shared about the teen years of Jesus. Once we get past the incident of Jesus in the temple at the age of twelve the Bible simply says that Jesus was subject to his parents and he "increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man." (Luke 2:52)

Multitudes of preachers have pointed out that these principles cover the four major areas of growth in a person's life- Jesus grew Mentally, Physically, Spiritually, and Socially. In practical terms this means parents need to send their children to school (Mentally), put them to work (Physically), carry them to church (Spiritually), and train them to get along with others (Socially). If any of these four areas are neglected then it will have a life long impact on the teen's ability to function as a whole person.

Since these four principles are all God decided to share with us about the teen years of Jesus then we must assume that everything a parent needs to instill into a teen is found in these verses. Teenage years are extremely difficult because they cover the transitional stage of a person's life as they journey from the innocence of youth into the responsibility of adulthood. If parents can provide ways for their teens to grow consistently in each of these areas (Mentally, Physically, Spiritually, and Socially) then they will probably be very pleased with the person who emerges from that teen cocoon and spreads their wings to fly as an adult. God has given us the formula for successfully raising teens. Now let's put the principles to work.

August 30, 2006 SCHOOL SECRETS

Young people are beginning a new school year. They have a tremendous advantage over previous generations with the technology and teachers available to them but more and more of them are leaving school with minimal educational skills and horrible social manners. Here are three principles that, if followed, will make a difference for students this year.

1) Study Hard- *A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels:* (Proverbs 1:5). It sounds simplistic but things will go much better in school if students will put forth the effort to study. The Teacher can put the information out there but the student must bring it into their own thought process before it will do any good.

2) Stay True- *Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.* (1 Timothy 4:12). Students will face many social temptations and tremendous peer pressure during this educational year. If they will stay true to Godly principles then they will avoid the traps that seek to capture them and destroy their life.

3) Savor Life- *Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.* (Ecclesiastes 11:9). School is a special time in your life. Fellowship with your friends. Cheer for your team. Learn to enjoy everything God has given you (But always remember rule #2). Make this the best school year you have ever experienced.

September 5, 2006 GOD'S WORD WORKS

"So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." (Isaiah 55:11)

Sometimes preachers do weird things in order to get a crowd. They will eat goldfish, preach from the roof of the church, or organize a "holy hoe-down" and, most times, when the dust has settled they still have their "faithful few" and the circus crowd has gone to the next place that promises them the "onions of Egypt" instead of the "bread of life".

On the other hand, dreary dull services are not a sign of Godly approval. A church needs to have excitement and energy and enthusiasm but it needs it to be generated by the Spirit of God instead of being manufactured by the schemes of men.

I recently had to replace the heating and cooling unit at my home. The men who installed it put the new unit into our home and set up the condenser unit outside. They hooked up all the wires and pipes and turned it on; and hot air blew out of my vents on a hot August day. Had I paid all this money for new machinery that did not work? One final step remained. Once the men put the Freon into the system deliciously cool air started flowing from my vents.

Remember that this Sunday. All the machinery in the world, no matter how new or fancy, will spew hot air unless it has the "power" flowing through it. And the power comes from obedience to, and the proclaiming of, the word of God.

September 6, 2006 SOWING AND GROWING

A Growing Church is a Sowing Church and a Sowing Church is a Growing Church! It is easy for churches to get so busy shaping the soil until they fail to sow the seed of the Gospel. When that happens church members tend to complain about how the garden rows are shaped instead of rejoicing in the fruit that is being harvested. And I can tell you from experience that rejoicing members are a lot easier to work with than complaining members!

Isaiah the prophet said we were to "sow beside all waters" (Isaiah 32:20) and Jesus said the sower's seed went everywhere- in the pathways, in the rocky places, and on the good ground (Mark chapter 4). Some sow with testimonies, some sow with tracts, and some sow with the use of their talents but everyone should look back on their day and see "seed" scattered all along their path.

Sometimes sowing involves weeping and sometimes sowing seed makes us weary but God had promised a harvest- Psalm 126:5 - "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy." Galatians 6:9- "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."

Have your church services become dull and boring? Are church members fighting like cats and dogs instead of worshiping together like brothers and sisters? Maybe the problem is not the minister or the music. Maybe if everyone sows some seed of the word of God this week then next Sunday's service will turn from the same old routine into a harvest hallelujah time that will bless everyone who attends.

September 12, 2006

THINGS GOD COULD NOT FIND

When I say there are some things God could not find I am not saying God is becoming a senile old man. Even though God is called the “ancient of days” (Dan 7:9) it is because of the length of his “life” and not the aging of His “body”. In fact, God declares “I am the Lord, I change not” (Mal 3:6). So I am not saying God is getting absent minded; I am saying that God wanted some things and when He sought them they were not found.

First, God could not find Saints to volunteer for a needed position- *And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none.* (Ezekiel 22:30). More and more Christians are volunteering for God's work less and less; and moral anarchy is beginning to sweep the land.

Second, God could not find Sinners when they hid from Him- When God came down for his evening walk with Adam after Adam sinned Adam hid in the bushes and God had to call out, “Adam, where are you?” Multitudes of people today are hiding from God in the “bushes” of a busy or pleasure driven life and they fail to respond to a God who is lovingly seeking them.

Finally, God could not find Fruit that was not produced- *He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none.* (Luke 13:6) (Almost all commentators agree that this “certain man” represents God). This tree had everything it needed to produce fruit but it used all its resources to provide for itself and never produced fruit for others; and, eventually, God said it had no reason to exist and told His servants to cut it down.

If God is looking for you today, can He find you?

September 13, 2006

THE MISSING ONE

Maybe he was sick. Or maybe he had to work. Or maybe he was just plain sorry and slept late! But, whatever the reason, the church I was visiting recently would have had perfect attendance in Sunday School if just one more person would have come. I called this person “the missing one” and pointed out some very important information about him.

First of all, this “missing one” should be the object of our compassion. Jesus told about a man who had 100 sheep but when one turned up missing he left the 99 in the fold and went seeking “the missing one”. Many times we are so happy with the fact that almost everyone is in their place until we never seek “the missing one” and they wander in the wilderness to be devoured by the wolves.

“The missing one” should also be the object of our concern (I get upset when I cannot find my keys. Don't you think I should be concerned when I cannot find my “brother”). When one part of the “body” of Christ is missing it has an impact on every other part of the body. Someone else has to work harder or something in the church goes lacking because of “the missing one”. Rather than scorn them or reject them we should seek to get them back into their place so the body can function as it should.

When services convene at your church this week make sure you are not “the missing one”. And especially make sure that when the roll is called up yonder that you are not “the missing one”!

September 19, 2006

WORST IS YET TO COME

“For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.” (Matthew 24:21)

This is one of those statements you wish God would not have made! Instead of things getting better and better Jesus told His disciples that a time of trouble was coming that would be so bad until nothing that has happened up until that time will be as bad. Wow! It is horrible to even contemplate a time worst than the floods, famine, and fighting we have experienced just in my life time but this will be worst than any disaster now or in previous centuries.

Two factors contribute to this being the worst time of trouble the world has ever known. First is because of the Area that will be involved. This will not be a local catastrophe that the rest of the world will hear about. This time of trouble will involve all of the world at the same time! Millions and millions of people will suffer and die all over the world in a very short time.

The other factor that makes this time of trouble so bad is the Author of this tribulation. Usually, troubles come because of the stormy happenings of nature or the sinful nature of man or the hateful nature of Satan. This Tribulation will come directly from God and it will be so intense until men will cry for the rocks and mountains to fall on them and hide them from the wrath of God.

The good news about this bad news is that Jesus has promised to come and get His People before this tribulation begins. You can hang around and take a chance on going through this terrible tribulation if you want to but I have my “ticket punched and my bag packed” and I plan to walk golden streets during this time of grief.

September 20, 2006

STORMS

When I came to work this morning the sun was shining and it was a beautiful fall day. Just as I began to write this article I heard a rattling on my windows and looked up to see a wall of rain so thick until it was difficult to see the cars passing on the highway in front of my office. I had been busy doing needful and necessary things and the weather had occupied little of my mind. It was very much a surprise to realize that the beautiful conditions of the morning had turned into a storm by mid-afternoon.

As I watched the rain for a few moments and then turned back to my work I suddenly realized how thankful I was that I was safe and secure in the midst of such a vicious storm. My heart was not fearful and my head was not wet as I gazed out upon the wind and rain.

God's wrath will soon be poured out upon a world that has rejected His Son and persecuted His people. It will happen suddenly and it will be intense. People will be “marrying and giving in marriage” and going about their daily duties when suddenly the storm of God's wrath will come upon them. It will start out as just another day but when this storm burst upon the earth nothing will ever be the same again.

How can I be so calm and confident in the face of this coming storm- “And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.” (1 John 2:28)

September 26, 2006

THE TRUE GOD

Paul wrote to the Thessalonians that they had “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (1:9). I can think of nothing worst than going through life worshiping and serving a false god. Can you imagine coming to death’s door and finding that everything you had built your hopes on during your life was all a lie and you now had to face eternity without help or hope! Surely we need to know who the True God is and how we recognize Him?

One way to recognize the True God is to recognize the “idols” you need to turn from. In some countries they have built an Atheist or Apathetic “god idol”. They believe that God does not exist or, if He does exist, then He does not really care so they build their lives around pleasure and prosperity. God is little in their thoughts and even less in their lives.

In some countries they worship “Another God” idol. A majority of the population professes to be “Christians” but a large part of these also worship Spiritualism and the Occult. To these people God is good but you need to “dance with the devil” to enjoy life and be protected.

In other countries they know an “Ancestor God” idol. The traditions and teachings of the ancients form the base of their worship. Religion is a link to the past instead of a hope for the future. God is old and out of date and of little use to them in today’s world.

How, then, do you recognize the True God? Three characteristics identify the True God. 1) He Loves everyone and not just a select few. 2) He has a sacrificial Love. 3) He makes it easy for everyone to come to Him and to meet His requirements. Guess what? I know a verse that describes a God just like that- “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16)

September 27, 2006

REMEMBER GOD

It seems in our day as if many people are trying to wipe “God” out of the social conscience. Because of some twisted logic by a very vocal minority people are being asked to disregard God and kick Him out of the public arena. I say unto you today that it is not time to forget God; it is time to remember God and all of His benefits toward humankind.

Remember God for Defense- Ps 20:7 “Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God.” Politicians and Armies will do all they can; and fail. Only the divine protection of God will preserve America.

Remember God in Disappointment- Ps 42:6 “O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites,.” Life is filled with disease, disappoints, and despair. TV talks shows will confuse you and human logic will only lead you deeper into despair. The comfort and counsel of God’s Spirit is what you need.

Remember God Daily- Ec 12:1 “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them;” A day not lived for and with God is a wasted day.

Remember God’s Mercy is the only Hope at Death- Ps 25:7 “Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions: according to thy mercy remember thou me for thy goodness’ sake, O LORD.” Forgetting God and facing Him unprepared is fatal.

October 3, 2006 PICK ON THE PREACHER

October is Pastor Appreciation Month in many churches. Special events and (I hope) special offerings will be planned for the Pastor to show how much he is loved and appreciated. I love Preachers and think they are some of the most important men on the earth. Sometimes you need to "let them know they are human" a little, however, so here are a few "Preacher Pointers"

- Learn to politely tell a Preacher how he is doing. When a Preacher is preaching and people say, "Amen" that means they agree with what he is preaching. When people say, "Bless him, Lord" that is a polite way of saying, "You sure are struggling to preach and we sure are struggling to listen to you!"

- Want to see if the Preacher is having any heart problems? Stand up during testimony time and tell the Preacher you want to help the Church so you are volunteering for any job he wants you to do (Please have a doctor or nurse in the congregation before attempting this!).
- Want to spend some time with the Preacher? Sit in a different seat in church each service for a month. The Pastor will visit you every week wanting to know why you missed church!
- Want to see the Preacher start stuttering? Tell him this Sunday that you enjoyed his sermon much more than you enjoyed it when Preacher "so and so" preached it on television!! And then hug his neck, slip a hundred dollar bill into his hand, and tell him to find time to go out for a really good meal with his family.

October 4, 2006 REFLECTIONS

I am always writing down statements or snippets as I travel to different Conferences and Church Services. Here are a few "various" things I snagged in recent months.

- I had rather be dead with God than live for Satan. (Think it through. That has some depth to it).
- Children should be Raised in God's Plan, Reported to God in Prayer, Renewed by God's Pardon, and Released for God's Purpose.
- In Youth the absence of pleasure is pain. In old age the absence of pain is pleasure! (I don't know what the "spiritual" lesson is in this but it sure is true!).
- Many churches are defeated by Careless Christians, Cannibal Christians ("if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another". Galatians 5:15), Condemning Christians (Gossips), Cheap Christians, Compromising Christians, and "Claim to Be" Christians.
- Don't be an "Easter Egg" Christian; ornamented on the outside and hard boiled on the inside.
- The Prodigal Son returned home to find Forgiveness, Food, and the Father but his sinful life cost him time, his inheritance, and his brother's respect. Time spent with Satan is never worth the price you have to pay.
- A man who says there is no God is a fool (Ps 14:1), a man who lives as if there is no God is foolish, but a man who ignores God until death has committed life's greatest mistake.

October 10, 2006 THE PEOPLE PHOTO

Recently my wife and I had the privilege of spending a few days with a mission family in Spain. This fine family took time from their very busy schedule to show the lovely Princess Paula and I some of the amazing sights in the area of Spain where they are establishing a church.

We saw an Aqueduct that was bringing water to a town during the time Christ walked on the earth. We also visited the Royal Palace and stood in the room where Queen Isabel gave the orders to Christopher Columbus (whose real name, by the way, was Cristobal Colon) to find a new route to India which eventually turned into discovering a place called America.

The greatest thing we saw on this trip, however, was the love and concern of these missionaries. Between showing us the sights and doing the large amount of work missionaries must do on a regular basis, these missionaries still found time to console a mother whose longed for child was "born" still born as well as check on numerous people who were sick or were about to have surgery.

I have hundreds of photos from this trip but the picture I will cherish the most was not taken with a camera. It is a "photo" of the heart of missionaries who minister with love and compassion in a different culture to people who speak a different language.

I imagine, if you were to ask the people in your community what they are looking for in a church it would not be stained glass and fancy architecture. I believe, instead, that they would describe a picture of people with truthful convictions and loving compassion. That is the kind of photo that people really want you to show.

October 11, 2006 SWEET SMELL

The fragrance of fresh baked bread permeated the atmosphere as we walked down the street of Alpedrete, Spain. Alpedrete is a fast growing suburb of Madrid, Spain where Missionaries Tim and Kristi Johnson are establishing the first evangelistic church in the 500 year history of the town. In this beginning stage they have rented a store front building located on a street in the middle of the town and you pass by a bakery store as you walk to church.

Right now few people in Alpedrete really understand the purpose of what goes on in this new store front church two doors down from the sweet swelling bakery shop but the actions and attitudes of the missionaries and the few people who have already begun attending this fledgling work will soon cause "noses" all over town to realize that something good is in the air. Hopefully, it will not be long before these people will want to investigate the sweet smell of love and concern flowing forth from these dedicated Christians and this baby church will grow into a bustling congregation with a great influence in this town for the cause of Christ.

Many of you who read this attend a church that has existed in your community for many years. I wonder what sort of smell fills the community from the actions and attitudes of the minister and members of your Church?

October 17, 2006 POWER PRAYING

My wife and I recently flew nearly 9000 miles in a 7 day period in order to visit with some missionaries. I have flown on and off for over 40 years and have been amazed at how God has blessed during my flights. To the best of my knowledge, I have never had any luggage lost; in spite of the fact that numerous times my flights have had to be re-routed because of different situations. I love flying and still think looking down at the earth from 15,000 feet is one of the neatest things I can imagine.

On our recent 9000 mile flight everything went well until we were about to make our final landing at the Florence Airport. A very bad thunderstorm hit the Florence area just as we were about to land and the airplane suddenly dropped drastically. Just as the pilot regained control it dropped again and it was all the pilot could do to get us back in the air so we could circle around for another landing attempt. I tell people I still have the bruise marks on my arm from where my wife grabbed me and held on for dear life during this exciting end to our journey.

When we finally got on the ground and gathered inside the terminal to await our luggage one of the men on the plane looked at another man and said, "I sure did some power praying there for awhile!". Knocking on death's door will do that to you!

I am no braver than the average man but I try to do my "power praying" before the plane hits the air pocket. That way you can just enjoy the ride and know that if you don't arrive in Florence you will arrive in Heaven; and I will tell you the truth, Heaven is a whole lot more appealing to me right now than Florence.

October 18, 2006 WHERE WILL YOU AWAKEN?

The Lord has blessed us to find a wonderful bank to handle the business of the South Carolina Free Will Baptist State Office and our Christian Book Store. Almost anytime I need something I can call someone at the bank and they will handle it for me so that I do not have to take the time and energy to go to the bank. We especially like the fact that a courier comes by my office each day to pick up my deposit so I save nearly an hour each day that I would otherwise have to spend fighting traffic and waiting in line.

One of the couriers recently told me about something that happened at his church that made him really think. He said that during Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting one of the members gave a good testimony about God's blessings in his life and everyone rejoiced. The next day this courier received a phone call saying that this person had "went to sleep on earth and woke up in Heaven" and was now testifying before the Lord Himself.

The person who died was only 52 years old and thought he was in good health but some time during the night his clock ran out and he found his schedule had suddenly changed. Can you imagine how exciting it must have been to open his eyes and find he was looking at golden streets, marvelous mansions, and the heavenly hosts?

One day, you too will wake up in a different world. Will it be all you have ever dreamed about or will it be worse than your worst nightmare?

October 24, 2006 HEALTH CARE HURT

Mother was having some health problems so I was with her at the Doctor's office. After the Doctor met with mother and gave his diagnosis we were told to go to the check out receptionist to settle up and to arrange for another appointment.

As we approached the desk the receptionist was on the phone and I could not help but overhear her say, "Thank you for calling and letting me know about dad's sickness. I will check on him as soon as I get off work". When she looked up it was obvious she was in distress. She was there to help us but it was easily apparent that she needed our help at the present moment more than we needed her help.

Doctors and nurses are not only a vital need for our health care, they are also people. When is the last time you prayed for your doctor's personal well being instead of just praying about his professional skills? Remember also, that the frustrated, over worked nurse who sees more sickness in a day than anyone ought to see in a life time is also a person who may have a sick child at home or a dying mother in a nursing home.

The Holy Spirit helps our infirmities so He is able to help us pray for those who help our infirmities- "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." (Romans 8:26) Thank God that he cares about health care givers even more than health care givers care about us.

October 25, 2006 CLERK CARE

A group of ministers and I were on our way to visit with a missionary. We had been traveling for awhile when one of the ministers said he was thirsty. Another said he wanted some ice cream so we looked for an exit that met these requirements. Before long the golden arches were seen in the distance so we took that exit.

When we pulled into the restaurant parking lot I noticed a service station next door. The Lord strongly impressed my heart to go into that station while the others went into the fast food restaurant. I went into the service station, got a fruit juice drink, and went to the check out counter to pay for it. When I asked the clerk how she was feeling she said she was really sick and felt very bad so I asked her if I could have prayer with her. We had a glorious time of prayer and parted with her feeling much better and with me rejoicing in seeing God's guiding hand yet once again.

Life will present you with many choices this week. If you listen to the "still small voice" of God as well as the grumbling of your stomach you just might find a chance to share God's love with someone who desperately needs a touch from God at that moment.

Listen, is that God talking? "And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left." (Isaiah 30:21)

October 31, 2006 HYPOCRITE HOLIDAY

A hypocrite is someone who “wears a mask” in order to keep people from seeing who they really are. Halloween is about people dressing up in costumes, putting on a mask, and demanding that someone give them something or suffer the consequences (Which would get you jail time on any other day!). I know you will tell me to “lighten up” and realize that it is all about the kids having a good time. Then why are all the movies on TV right now about adults finding the most horrible gore displaying ways possible to kill other adults? And why do the candy and costume companies count on this day to make or break their year?

Enough about the bad things that happen at Halloween. If you care you are already concerned about what happens on this day and if you don't care you probably are not reading this column! My main concern is that we realize the right thing to show today; and every day.

1) Your Good works- “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16) [Surprisingly, this does not include your giving of Alms (Matt 6:1-4) or your praying of prayers (Matt 6:5-7)]. You can spend your time today “howling at the hypocrites” or you can do something good for God.

2) Your Faith- “I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.” (Romans 1:8). If people see the right thing to believe then maybe they will not want to hide behind a mask and demand something sweet. Instead, they will realize that God gives them the “good stuff” freely and with love.

Don't let the hypocrites hold you down. Shine for Jesus; the world needs your light.

November 1, 2006 KNOWING THE WILL OF GOD

People often ask me how they can know the will of God for their life. Often this is a “trick” question because the individual is actually asking, “Can I do this thing I want to do and tell everyone that it is alright with God.” If they are really serious about discovering God's will for their life I give them a threefold test they can use to determine if what they want to do is actually the will of God.

1) Is it consistent with the Word of God? God will not violate His Word. He will never ask anyone to do something that is contrary to what He has declared in His Word. For example, God would never ask you to join an organization that teaches salvation by works when His Word plainly declares Salvation is by Grace thru Faith.

2) Is it consistent with my Walk with God? God would not ask me to be a singer (I am tone deaf). God is not limited by our limitations but He is aware that we are human and He calls different people to do different things within the framework of how He created us.

3) Is it consistent with the Ways of God? God promises to provide for His people but He will not ask me to open a liquor store even if I promise to pay Him double tithes each week. God is a Holy God who will welcome me home from the hog pen but He will never direct me to abandon the father's house and live in the hog pen.

Is it God's will? Apply this threefold test and see how clear things become.

November 7, 2006 STIRRING A STAGNATE CHURCH

Some churches are growing and prospering but some churches are Stagnate Churches where a few people struggle each week to continue to function. These churches are in the maintenance mode (They are just maintaining the building and the budget each week while the same people sing the same songs as they listen to the same sermons on the same subjects) and if something is not done they may eventually “die”.

I am aware that sometimes churches reach the end of their road- To the best of my knowledge, none of the churches mentioned in the first chapters of the book of Revelation are functioning today. But I still think there is hope for smaller churches who are struggling to survive. Here is some advice that I think will breathe new life into a church.

1) Repent of Luke warm living. That is the advice God gave over and over to the churches in Revelation. Had they repented of their lukewarm living and returned to God's plan then I believe they would still be a lighthouse for God even today.

2) Renew your vision for the Lord. Find the work God wants you to do and get busy doing it. If you are satisfied to just “show up” at church it will not be long before no one else will show up to watch you show up!

3) Find ways to get outside the Church walls. 95% of dying churches have little involvement outside the church walls. They are “dead sea churches” with resources coming in but little going out except that which evaporates toward heaven. A church that turns in on itself will end up biting and devouring itself. Lift up your eyes and look on the fields; and then start doing something about what you see.

A dying world needs a living church telling about a loving Lord. Does that describe your church?

November 8, 2006 MISPLACED CHECK

Sometimes God is insistent. I came into the office recently and God told me to look through a box on the floor full of old papers. I gently reminded the Lord that I had several reports due that day and I did not feel I had time to sort through those papers at that time. But God was insistent so I figured I might as well look through that box of papers and be done with it.

Almost as soon as I started looking through the papers I found a church check that was three months old (and would have gotten a lot older had I not looked in that box that day!). A church had sent their conference dues to the Free Will Baptist State Office instead of to the local Conference Treasurer. When I received the check I figured the easiest thing to do was to take the check with me to the Conference and give it to the treasurer. Somehow that check had gotten mixed in with the other papers from that conference that I had not had time to file yet and was sitting in a box instead of being deposited in a bank.

The Church thought it had paid its dues but the Conference Treasurer had never received the check; and neither one realized it was all my fault! I immediately sent the check to the Treasurer and a letter of explanation to the Church and thanked the Lord for once more providing the leadership I needed; even if I was hard headed at first!

When God gently nudges you today be ready to obey. It may be a misplaced soul instead of a misplaced check He is trying to get you to see.

November 14, 2006

BROKEN HEART MACHINE

He should not have been there but everyone was very glad he was. The preacher had recently failed a stress test and was scheduled for a heart catheterization just days before he was to be the main speaker for Home Coming at the Children's Home. If he would have had the catheterization then the doctors would probably have kept him in the hospital but the machine needed for the catheterization was broken so it had to be postponed and he was able to deliver a message that stirred the hearts of the entire congregation at the Home Coming Service. A broken heart machine enabled the hearts of many people to be stirred to give and do more for needy children. Isn't that amazing!

Throughout the Bible there are examples of men of God who faced situations and circumstances that looked like something really bad had come their way. And time after time God would take the bad situation and twist it around in such a way until the bad would be turned into good. It is just one of those extra benefits that come standard to those who belong to God's family and walk in God's will (See Rom 8:28).

When bad things happen to bad people it usually ends up making a bad situation even worst. When bad things happen to children of God it generally starts a chain of events that culminate with people looking up to Heaven and saying, "Did you see what God did this time!". Now ask me again why I am so excited about being a Christian!

November 15, 2006

STRAWBERRY SHORTCAKE

She makes an absolutely wonderful strawberry short cake. It is beautiful to look at, wonderful to taste, and simply melts in your mouth. Once she started bringing them to socials at the church everyone looked forward to her strawberry shortcake for dessert and they were disappointed if it was not available. Her husband recently spoke at the men's fellowship of the church and said people did not really care if he came or not as long as his wife sent her strawberry shortcake! All the other men agreed and said that sounded about right to them!

What do you "bring to the table" when you attend Church? What special gift has God given you that allows you to do just what is needed in your Church? Your gift may not be cooking, it may be singing, or painting, or writing, or working with youth, or keeping people aware of mission needs, or a thousand other things. The main thing for you to be aware of is that every single Christian is given a gift by the Holy Spirit and as that gift functions in the local church it makes everything else in the Church work better.

Remember the ancient story of how a blacksmith did not have enough nails so the horseshoe came off the messenger's horse which meant a division of troops did not move to the correct location and the battle was lost. Sometimes a "strawberry shortcake" is just like that nail; it is not earth shaking but it may be battle winning. So be in church this week and do your part; however small it may seem to you.

November 21, 2006 FOUR JOYS

In three of the most famous parables spoken by Jesus he talks about a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost son. During these parables He shows four joys that come to those who find things that are lost. I pray these four joys will be in your life this week.

1) There is Joy for the Person finding the Lost. Finding something that was lost puts a smile on your face, a song on your lips, and a spring in your step. Even gray skies turn blue when something that was lost is found.

2) There is Joy for Friends and Family when something is found. "One can endure sorrow alone, but it takes two to be glad".--Elbert Hubbard. When the man found the lost sheep "he calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost." (Luke 15:6). I tell people all the time that a lost person coming to accept Christ as Savior will turn even the most boring sermon into a blessing!

3) There is joy for the Person who is Found - As a young boy I once became separated from my family deep in the forest. I called and called and looked with despair as the shadows grew longer and the night fast approached. I can still remember the intense joy that came into my heart when I finally heard a distant call and realized I was about to be reunited with my family.

4) There is Joy in Heaven when someone is found- (Luke 15:7) "I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance." (Luke 15:10) "Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

May you know these four joys this week as you seek the lost and bring them to Christ.

November 22, 2006 BELLIES, BOWS, BENEVOLENT

Many people will take time this Thanksgiving season to Thank the Lord for their health, their wealth, and their family. Glory! We certainly should thank God regularly for each of these things. Today, however, I want to express thanks for some other things that many times get neglected. I call them the overlooked bellies, bows, and benevolent.

I am not Santa Claus but I have a big belly. Part of the reason is because I attend a special event at churches almost every week and Free Will Baptist ladies cook very good and very much! I have traveled over much of this world and I can tell you today that you should give generous thanks to God for the bounty of food we will enjoy in the next few days. Many bellies in this world are big from starvation instead of from over eating.

I was raised with brothers and no sisters. Thank the Lord for the people who are willing to give of their time, skill, and energy to decorate churches and homes in order for them to look so festive this time of year. Most people take it for granted but I sure do appreciate it.

I remember when Christmas was mainly an apple, an orange, and some candy donated by good hearted people in the community. Multitudes of kids now get more than they can use but there are still people who remember those less fortunate and their acts of benevolence make a life long joyful memory for some family. I am thankful for their loving concern for others.

Thank God for the "big" things this year but don't forget the other blessings that often get overlooked.

November 28, 2006

THE LORD'S LIMITS

God's limits are not meant to limit you. God knows that only within these limitations can we really enjoy the joy of the abundant life. Many people avoid the church and God like they would some dreaded disease because they fear that somehow yielding themselves to God will impose fun killing rules on them and they will never be able to really enjoy life again. The opposite, of course, is true.

God wants men to enjoy the abundant life filled with happiness, joy, and freedom. Like the parent who has enough love for their child to limit the child's access to a hot stove, however, God imposes limits on mankind in order to prevent hurt and pain. God has seen that mankind is never more of a slave than when he uses his "freedom" to surrender to the captivity of drugs, drink, or lust so He establishes limitations that are meant to keep us away from the things that harm us and guide us toward the things that bring good into our life.

The fact that you are not supposed to murder other men, or to steal from them, or lie about them is a good limitation to live with. Not wasting your time, energy, and money on the worship of a stone statue does not limit your life; it frees you to worship correctly instead of being bound by superstition and slavery.

I'm glad the waitress "limits" the hot coffee she pours into my cup to the confines of the cup. It sure would be a hot and messy situation otherwise! Remember that when you wonder about the limitations God puts into your life.

November 29, 2006

EVE'S ERRORS

Do you know what Adam and Eve did when they left paradise? They raised a little Cain!

What excuse did Adam give to his children as to why he no longer lived in Paradise?

"Your mother ate us out of house and home."

Eve had everything a woman could want. She never had to worry about what to wear or if her shoes matched! (Remember they lived naked and not ashamed before sin). She did not have to wonder if her husband was looking at another woman or if she was being compared to her mother in law. But she made some mistakes and they changed her world; and the world you and I live in today.

Eve's first error was listening to the lies of the Devil. Satan promised her she that if she listened to him she would be like God but she ended up hiding from God in the bushes instead of walking with God in the twilight.

Eve's next error came when she disregarded the divine directives. God said she could have everything but this and she wanted nothing but that! And, as people have learned through the years, breaking God's rules always ends up breaking you.

Eve, the mother of all living, (Gen 3:20) ended up being the mother of all dying as she introduced her husband to sin and the wages of sin which is death. What a difference it would have made has she ignored the lies of the devil and believed the words of the Lord.

December 5, 2006 HELD UP

A minister traveling on a train in Europe was the sole occupant of a compartment, save for a young man reading a newspaper. The youth was also a Christian, but his faith was so weak, and his temptations so strong, until he told the minister he did not think he would be able to stand life a week longer. The minister took from his pocket a Bible and a pencil and said, "See, I will make this pencil stand up on its point on the cover of this Bible, in spite of the rocking of the train." The young man, thinking that this was some magical trick, watched the proceeding with interest, saying, "I'm afraid that it will not be very easy to do that, sir."

"But," said the minister, "I am doing it." "Oh, but you are holding it up," retorted his fellow passenger. "Why, of course. Did you ever hear of a pencil standing up on its point without being held up?" "I see," was the young man's comment. "I see you mean to teach me that I cannot stand unless Christ holds me. Thanks for reminding me of that."

As we approach this Christmas season it's so easy to think only of the little babe in the manger. However, this little babe grew up to live and die for our sins. Knowing we would need help in the new life He offered He also promised us that God would provide someone to help and guide us by living within us. Christ came to save us. The Holy Spirit came to "hold us up". Now that is something to really rejoice in this Christmas.

December 6, 2006 IS THE LANTERN LIT?

Before the days of railroad crossbars the railroads employed watchmen at major roads to wave a warning lantern when the train approached. At one of these crossings a man was killed in an accident and his relatives sued the railroad, claiming negligence on the part of the watchman. During the ensuing trial the watchman was questioned by the Prosecutor. "Were you on duty at the crossing? Did you have a lantern? Did you wave your lantern in warning?" Each time the man would reply, "Yes sir, I did."

The jury found the railroad not guilty and an officer of the railroad came by to thank the watchman for his testimony. The officer asked, "Tell me, Mr Smith, were you nervous during the questioning at the trial?" The watchman replied, "Yes sir, I feared every moment he would ask, 'Was the lantern lit?'"

We are approaching the Christmas season. Crowds will throng the malls seeking that perfect Christmas gift for someone special at a reduced price. Families and friends will travel for miles to meet and eat and catch up on the latest family news.

Mixed in among all of these shoppers and family reunions will be a number of people who profess faith in Jesus Christ. They will face many obstacles and many opportunities concerning their faith in the coming month. My question to them is very simple, "Is your lantern lit?"

December 12, 2006

UNUSUAL ANSWER

I called a Pastor recently and a liquor store answered. A new Pastor had accepted a position at one of the Churches in our state and I was calling to wish him well and see if there was anything I could do to help him get settled. What I did not know was that because the Church had been without a Pastor for several months they had given up the phone in the parsonage and the number had been reassigned to a liquor store.

Like me, Joseph must have felt like he had gotten a wrong number when he prayed to God about his future wife, Mary. He had found the most beautiful young lady in Bethlehem to be his wife and he was so glad to be able to finally settle down and live a quite peaceful life. Then the bombshell of her pregnancy shattered his peace and troubled his plans.

I can see him now as he prayed to the Lord for leadership, "Lord, I know you do not want me to marry this woman who has become pregnant but I need to seek your guidance so I can tell her that the Lord would not let me marry her." Imagine his surprise when an angel appeared in his dream to tell him it was God's will for him to marry Mary. Sometimes God is so unpredictable!

You probably have Christmas plans that you feel sure God will bless. It is possible that God will work in an unexpected way and you will find a far different situation than you expected. Don't panic. Just realize that part of the wonder of Christmas is learning that the box we want to put God in is never big enough and the answer God gives may not be the one we anticipated.

December 13, 2006

DOING RIGHT

Joseph must have felt like the walls were closing in on him as he walked the path God had given him. He found his wife was pregnant before they were married. Then the government called for a tax that cost him his job and his home and caused him to move his soon expecting wife to a strange town far from family and friends. And when he arrived at the place of God's leadership he found no place to stay and a baby arriving without help. I can imagine him standing beside that cow trough looking down at that red squirming bundle of flesh and wondering again if this could really be the god-child that God had promised.

Joseph found, as men have always found, that God never guides His people wrong. God always has a plan and when His leadership guides a person into a difficult situation it just becomes another way for God to show His greatness. Can you envision Joseph's face when the shepherds appeared with their tales of angelic visits and knelt down to worship the babe in the manger.

Keeping Christ in Christmas may not be easy and it surely will not be popular. It may involve sacrifices and situations you had not anticipated. But you will notice a world of difference this Christmas when God's path for you leads to His presence instead just presents.

December 19, 2006

THE SHEPHERD SHIFT

They had the job no one else wanted. While family and friends were home snug and warm in bed these Bethlehem Shepherds had to stay in the fields at night watching temple sheep that were destined to die. The “respectable people” in Bethlehem had day jobs that paid better and allowed for a normal life. These Shepherds worked the night shift, struggled to keep stubborn sheep from wandering off, and smelled like wet wool all the time.

It is Christmas. Everyone knows the “rest of the story”. It was during the “shepherd shift” that angels appeared and announced to these lowly Shepherds the good news about the birth of God’s Son. It was these lowly Shepherds who were the first humans to worship Jesus when He arrived on earth. And it was these Shepherds who were the first “Christian” evangelist as they went all over Bethlehem telling about the angels and the finding of the babe wrapped in swaddling cloths who was the Son of God come to earth.

You may feel as unworthy and as rejected as these Shepherds this Christmas season. The good news is that God still calls “shepherds” to worship and tell about His Son-“For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence.” (1 Corinthians 1:26-29). God’s gift is for everyone. Accept it today and you will have a MERRY CHRISTMAS.

December 20, 2006

ANGEL SERMON

On a cool crisp night, as Shepherds watched the flocks outside of Bethlehem, an angel appeared and delivered one of the most important sermons ever heard by humans. In this sermon are the four elements that every good sermon should contain.

A good sermon will first of all Ease the fears of the People. The first statement by the angel was, “Fear not”. People come to church discouraged, depressed, and defeated. The first thing they should hear is that God loves them and wants to help them.

The second ingredient in a good sermon is that it Proclaims the Good News and Great Joy that God is anxious for everyone to hear- “Behold, I bring your good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people.”

Thirdly, a good sermon Announces Jesus- “For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.” Jesus is the only begotten Son of God, He is the only acceptable sacrifice for sin, and He is the only one who can bring peace on earth and good will among men.

Finally, a good sermon Shows people how to find Jesus- “And this shall be a sign unto you, you shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.” Jesus is the reason for the season. A sermon that does not lead men to Christ is like a empty Christmas present- pretty but pointless.

May the Good News about Jesus bring Great Joy to your heart this Christmas.

December 26, 2006

THE REAL YOU

One of the great preachers of by-gone years, Rev. A.W. Tozer, listed seven things that reveal what a person is really like on the inside. 1) What they trust in. 2) What they think about the most. 3) How they use their money. 4) What they do with their leisure time. 5) Who they choose as their companions. 6) What they talk about. 7) What they laugh at.

The great apostle Paul asked this question, "For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him?..." (1 Corinthians 2:11). Almost everyone has a "public face" that the world thinks is the real person but it is the person that emerges "behind closed doors" that shows the real character- and the real Christianity - of a person. None of us are perfect and we ought to be able to relax when we are in a private place but if your relaxation is some sort of sinful behavior then there is something wrong with your relationship with a pure and holy God.

If you look at the seven things listed by Rev. Tozer and they reveal a flaw in your character then you need to come to God today and ask Him to forgive you of your sinful behavior, fill you with His Holy Spirit, and guide you in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. You will find that life is a lot more fun when you can just be you no matter where you are.

December 27, 2006

FLOWER PRAYER

A Pastor's wife recently told me about an experience that showed her that prayer in school is still an option. She was helping a florist deliver some flowers and one order was for a teacher in a local high school. When she started in the door of the school a young girl held the door open for her. As she passed by and started to thank this girl for her kindness she noticed that there were tears coming from the girl's eyes. She immediately stopped and asked if there was anything she could do.

The teen age girl broke down and began weeping, saying that the boyfriend of her best friend had just been killed. This Pastor's wife immediately forgot about her flower delivery and asked the teen girl if she could have prayer with her. There, at the front door of the school, they bowed together and asked the God of all comfort to bring comfort to this girl and to the bereaved family. After the prayer there was a hug and both people went about their business but this "God moment" had made a difference in a life that day.

A new year is fast approaching. It will be busy with many activities. From time to time God will allow you an opportunity to make a difference in the life of someone you meet. Do not become so busy with life until you forget the real reason for living.