

PRAYING ABOUT A PROBLEM THAT WON'T GO AWAY

By Danny Boggs

Psalm 59 may represent the first recorded prayer of David since Saul had determined to become "David's enemy continually." (1 Samuel 18:29.) David offered up a cry for help, honest feelings about Saul and his cronies, and expressions of deep trust in God. The immediate results were relief - for the time being - and a change in his attitude and emotions. His problem was big, but God was bigger.

Still, Saul pursued him. David told Jonathan, "But truly as the Lord lives and your soul lives, there is but a step between me and death." (1 Samuel 20:3.) Jonathan was not convinced that his father was so bloodthirsty against David, until he saw a spear flying at him from his father's hand just as it had at David. (1 Samuel 20:33.) With the threat so clear, David headed for protection up a path he could never have imagined only a short time ago - to Gath, the Philistine hometown of Goliath.

The superscription at Psalm 56 makes us think of this low point in David's life. Three times in this prayer David says that his trouble was "all day long." (vv. 1,2,5.) Misguided people made his life miserable. Yet

his soul answers, "When I am afraid, I put my trust in You. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me?" (v. 3-4.) He knows God cares: "You have kept count of my tossing; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book . . . This I know, that God is for me. (v. 8-9.) Surely things will get better.

But it doesn't happen fast enough for David. Temporarily blinded to God's help, David resorted to acting like he had lost his mind when he fell into the hands of the Philistine king. (1 Samuel 21:10-15.) The king had no use for a madman. David wiggled his way out of Gath and escaped to the cave of Adullam. (1 Samuel 22:1.)

It may be from the dark cave that David walked back into the light with the words of Psalm 34. Four hundred down-and-out men had crowded around him. (1 Samuel 22:2.) Should they act like David did in Gath to escape their problems, or was there a better way? "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him and saved him out of all his troubles." (Psalm 34:6.) These words and more in this Psalm may be all at the same time a confession that

he did wrong by his deception in Gath, a commitment to keep things in God's hands from then on, and coaching for the disenfranchised men lining up behind him. "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him . . . What man is there who desires life and loves many days, that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit. Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it. The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous and his ears toward their cry." (Psalm 34:8, 12-15.)

Saul's unceasing animosity toward David led to more problems that would keep piling up on him for 13 years. David often felt he would crumble under their weight. But David kept praying, and God kept holding him together.

Problems don't always just go away. Problems may persist even when we pray about them persistently. *We* don't always know what God is doing, but *He* does. "The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit." (Psalm 34:18.) Keep praying!

— Neosho, MO

COVERING UP OR DIGGING DEEP?

By Luke Bowers

Every time I start doing major work on one of the walls of my house, I get nervous. What might look like a perfectly good wall on the outside will often reveal serious problems on the inside. I have removed wallpaper only to find improperly installed sheet-rock or covered up holes. Behind the sheet rock I have found poorly placed studs, bad wiring, lack of insulation, and even tools - sealed up and forgotten. The outward finishing might make things look pretty for a time, but eventually the underlying problems will show through.

Many of us live our lives this way. On the surface we try to put up really pretty wallpaper, but underneath we are unfinished and messed up.

For a while this might work, but over time it becomes hard to put on a smile and present a pretty front for all to see. The pretty exterior can only hold up for so long before the problems underneath begin to show.

Trying to live your life this way is exhausting and will only end in heartache and pain.

Each and every one of us has messed up our lives in some way. We have all sinned and fallen short of God's glory. (Romans 3:23.)

Fortunately, we don't have to go around just pretending that everything is OK. We can actually fix our problems and move on. You see, there is this really good repair man. He is a carpenter, a shepherd, and great physician; but, most importantly, He is our Savior. His name is Jesus Christ and He is the only one capable of putting our lives back together.

So, next time you realize you've made a mess of things, don't try to hide it. Instead call the only one you know who can fix it - and turn your life over to Him.

— Abilene, TX

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees,

hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness." (Matthew 23:25-28.)

"If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory." (Colossians 3:1-4.)

Old Paths

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"ask for the old paths" (Jer. 6:16)

I WILL NOT BE ENSLAVED

By Cecil May Jr.

In his first Corinthian epistle, Paul responds to questions the church asked. (7:1.) Context indicates that Paul quotes sentences from their letters and responds, usually with something like, "Yes, but." ESV and other translations indicate when Paul is quoting by putting quotation marks around such sentences. For example: "All things are lawful for me," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be enslaved by anything. (6:12.)

While Christ teaches that all foods are clean and, therefore, lawful (Luke 11:41; Acts 10:10-15), Paul notes that in addition to being lawful, things to be engaged in need to be "helpful" and "not enslaving."

One who continually practices sin, whatever the sin, becomes enslaved by it. (Romans 6:16.) The modern phrase is "addiction." We are familiar with drug and alcohol addiction. There is also sex addiction, power addiction, even money addiction. News stories abound of multi-billionaires, with more money than they could ever use, committing crimes to get more, getting caught and going to jail. No amount is ever enough!

Last winter during a bitter cold spell, I was sitting in a warm restaurant enjoying a hot meal and a steaming cup of coffee. Through a nearby window, close enough to touch him if the class had not been between us, was a tall young man in a short-sleeve shirt. He was probably in his forties. He was shivering. He was smoking a cigarette, taking puffs between shivers. How addictive! How enslaving nicotine must be to compel an otherwise sensible, healthy young person to leave the inside warmth and stand freezing to inhale some cigarette smoke! "I will not be enslaved to anything."

Smart phones, texting, Facebook, Instagram, the internet: all can be effective tools for accomplishing good ends. Like others, I find myself saying, "I don't know how we got along without them." However, they too can be addictive, enslaving. A mother told me she sat across the table from her teenage son as he sat with earbuds, texting. She tried to talk to him, but he was oblivious. She finally took out her phone and texted him! If social media interferes with family time, if you cannot talk intelligibly with friends for tweeting or texting, if you cannot bear to be separated from your phone for even a few minutes, you might ask yourself, "Am I addicted?" We should say with Paul, "I will not be enslaved by anything."

During football season I follow my favorite college teams and a few adopted pro teams. However, for some, it seems sports is their religion and their team is their god. Their conversation year around is about their team and the teams their team will play. They spend thousands of dollars a weekend to go to games. Their joy or deep grief is wrapped up in whether their team wins or loses. Are we teaching our children that Bible study and worship assemblies are more important than ball practice or ball games? Compare the time, interest, money and intensity of involvement in sports with the time, interest, money and conversation about Christ, worship and help for the needy! Remember, "'All things are lawful,' but I will not be enslaved by anything."

— Montgomery, AL

SIN CARRIES A HIGH PRICE

By Danny Tunnell

The recent "Me Too Movement" was started to help demonstrate the widespread prevalence of sexual assault, violence, and harassment, especially in the workplace. Some prominent men have selfishly abused women. Many of them have resigned or been fired from their positions. How does the Bible address this issue on how men should treat women?

We think of Joseph serving Potiphar in Egypt. Potiphar's wife continually tried to entice Joseph to have an affair. Joseph's response was resolute. "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9.)

Paul gave Timothy a very simple and straightforward guideline, one every Christian man would do well to follow today. "Treat older women as you would your mother, and treat younger women with all purity as you would your own sister." (1 Timothy 5:2.) How do you treat your mother? How do you relate to your sister? You care for them, you respect them, and you treat them with all purity.

Men, why not use a little common sense? If you must meet alone with a woman (outside of dating) then meet in an office with the door open. Vice President Mike Pence has been harshly ridiculed for his wisdom, when it became known that he does not dine alone with women other than his wife; what some have called the "Billy Graham rule."

The Bible contains many accounts of sexual immorality. King David took another man's wife and had her husband killed. Although David later repented, he had used his power and authority to have her. David's daughter, Tamar, was raped by her half-brother. (2 Samuel 13.) Jacob's daughter, Dinah, was assaulted by a local prince. (Genesis 34.) An unnamed woman was gang-raped and left for dead in the town of Gibeath. (Judges 19.)

God has not changed. He still judges the sexually impure and adulterous. (Hebrews 13:4.) Those who remain sexually immoral have no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. (Ephesians 5:5.) The sexually immoral person sins against his own body. (1 Corinthians 6:18.)

Paul wrote, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap. Those that sow to the flesh reap corruption, but those who sow to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." (Galatians 6:7,8.) The Bible says, "Be sure your sin will find you out." Even though some may be able to repent, as did King David, sin still carries a very high price.

— Miami, OK

O, THE SHAME OF THE CROSS!

By Joshua Ortiz

“Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Hebrews 12:2.)

Jesus is the author (founder) and finisher (perfecter) of our faith. “The joy that was set before Him” was God’s redemptive plan for mankind. The plan to open heaven’s door for people was Christ’s joy. But in order for that joy to become a reality, He had to suffer and endure the cross.

The word “despising” is the participle that connects to the verb “endure.” This means at the same time He endured the cross, He despised the shame.

The crucifixion process was reserved only for the lowest criminals. How shameful was it to die on the Roman cross? The cross was considered so shameful that Rome did not allow its own citizens to bear it. Although there were possible isolated incidents, it was not allowed. People who were crucified were either slaves or foreigners. To the Romans, the Jews were a lower class of people. Thus, in the eyes of the Romans, Jesus fell in the class of those who qualified for crucifixion.

The Jews considered Jesus even lower than themselves, so when they rejected Jesus and scoffed at Him, they seized the opportunity to demand that the Romans crucify Him.

Throughout this shameful and underserving process, Jesus had done, and did, nothing wrong.

Why did Jesus willingly suffer the shameful crucifixion process?

He did it for us.

Are you living for Jesus, the one who endured the shame?

— Miami, OK

“For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:6-8.)

Editorial . . .

WORKING HARD AT AVOIDING WORK

By Dalton Key

For far too many slothful souls, laziness has become no less than an art form. In the words of Kin Hubbard, “Some folks can keep so busy doing nothing that they seem indispensable.”

It’s true. Dodging work and responsibility in general can become a tiresome, life-long occupation requiring more thought and effort than would have been required by just rolling up the sleeves and doing something constructive in the first place. Keeping busy at doing nothing can be exhausting!

Jesus described this kind of man in His parable of the talents. The servant entrusted with one talent took the time, the planning and the effort to dig a hole and bury his talent rather than do anything to increase its value. He is labeled as “wicked and slothful.” (Matthew 25:26.) He could have invested the talent. At the very least, he could have put it to work earning interest. Instead, he went to work digging a hole.

I wonder if the one-talent man ever complained to others of his lord’s unfairness, of his lack of equal opportunity, or about what he may have considered as questionable, foolhardy methods carried out by his fellow servants? I wonder if he ever came to realize that he failed because of his own laziness; that if he had worked half as hard working as he worked to get out of working he might have actually accomplished something?

If this man was like so many others like him, I doubt he ever got the point.

Most lazy people will blame the world, the weather, society, their friends, their circumstances, and sometimes even their God before laying the blame where it belongs - squarely in the lap of their own laziness!

And too often the problem shows up at church. What of business meetings which find us doing nothing but discussing business of past business meetings during which we never got around to the Lord’s business? What of our time and hard work expended in analyzing charts, graphs and statistics; poring over polls, surveys, and questionnaires, efforts which often actually keep us from going out and doing what we know should be done? We’ve hidden behind bureaucracies, budgets and buildings long enough, blaming our lack of growth on everything from poverty to lack of persecution, from the devil to demographics, while the real problem rests with us and our own slothfulness. Too many of us have come to see things as did the lazy slug who observed, “I love work; it fascinates me; I can sit and look at it for hours.”

“Be not weary in well doing.” (2 Thessalonians 3:13.)



Redeemed! How I Love To Proclaim It!

By Joe Slater

“In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.” (Colossians 1:14.)

Ever since Eden, sinful humans have needed redemption. To redeem something is to buy it back; in many cases, it is the equivalent of a ransom. We enslave ourselves to sin; once we have done so, how can we ever be free again? We have nothing with which to redeem ourselves. All the good works we could pile up in a thousand lifetimes couldn’t pay the first penny of interest on our sin debt. The price is too high! “The wages of sin is death.” (Romans 6:23.)

Fortunately for us, our loving God doesn’t want us to suffer the penalty for our sin. While we cannot redeem ourselves, He paid the price Himself, giving His precious Son to die on our behalf and in our place. The blood

Jesus shed on the cross purchased our redemption. He freed us from the slavery of sin!

Redemption from sin includes forgiveness, also known as remission. To forgive means to “send away.” First, our sins are sent away – we no longer have to bear them. Under the Mosaic Law, on the Day of Atonement, the High Priest put his hands on a goat’s head, confessed Israel’s sins, and sent the goat away. We commonly call it the “scapegoat” (one who takes the blame for another’s wrongdoing). Jesus literally did for us what the scapegoat symbolically did for Israel.

But second, we ourselves are “sent away,” not in the sense of being banished, but being released. God no longer holds our sins against us. (see Hebrews 8:12, 10:17.)

We are forgiven!

Only “in Christ” is redemption found. Are you “in Christ?” (Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:27.)

— Justin, TX

“Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.” (1 Peter 1:18-21.)

FROM WHENCE DID WE COME?

By Milton Smith

One of mankind’s most sought-after quests is the desire to truly discover where he came from. For many years now, the public school systems in this country have been offering less-than-inspiring answers to this question. With the kind of answers that are now being given, it leaves one to wonder if most young people honestly question if man has any real worth at all.

Beginning in the twentieth century, it became fashionable to teach that the original “father” of mankind was some sort of “barely living” organism that somehow came into existence from some primordial pool of dirty water. Beginning in the dim and distant past, this prehistoric “soup” began with the formation of inanimate chemicals that all arose from hydrogen gases. Once this process got started, organic evolution took over.

I guess this means that man ultimately came from hydrogen gas. Not much adventure and romance involved in this rather fanciful suggestion.

The Bible has proven itself to be accurate over and over again in areas such as archeology, science, history, etc. So why do so many want to abandon this amazing book at its very first verse which states that it was “God” who created the heavens and the earth? The inspired record also tells us that this same God created the first man (Genesis 1:26) and the first woman (Genesis 2:21-23.) But not only this, God made them in His own image. (Genesis 1:27.) He did this by placing an eternal soul (spirit) within them. Many centuries later it would be none other than the Son of God Himself who verified the inspired record of Genesis. In Matthew 19:4, Jesus asked, “Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning made them male and female . . .?”

Does man want the answer to the age-old question “where did we come from?” The answer has always been available to us, and it is found in the first book of the Bible. When scientists begin to say “in the beginning God,” they will begin to find those elusive

answers that keep evading them.

— Tulsa, OK

“For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother’s womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well.” (Psalm 139:13,14.)

Old Paths

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