

## “I REALLY WANT TO BE CENTERED”

By Charles Goodnight

Centered? Do what? Centered *in* what? Centered *on* what? What are we focused on? Where is our heart? Really? Our kids, when they were young, were diagnosed with ADHD. They had a difficult time focusing on anything. My, was that a challenge! Church, when we come together as a family to worship, what do we focus on?

What are our hearts and minds centered on?

The question applies to every day and every moment of our lives.

May our God help us to remember that Jesus Christ **MUST** be the center of our faith. The storms will come. The trials will face us. Clinging close to Jesus, we will be safe, protected, shielded from the storms of life. But even so, we will still be challenged, stretched, wrung out.

By staying focused on Jesus,

we will be anchored in Him, secure and unshaken. Race car drivers are trained to focus their attention on where they want to go (as opposed to where they don't want to go). The premise is simple: They are traveling so fast that if something catches their attention, and they look at it, they'll hit it! So they learn to tune out the peripheral and focus on the road ahead.

Friend, focusing on Jesus will always keep us moving in the right direction. With little or no attention to the peripheral, I press on ahead - my attention on Jesus. If not, I can't follow where He is going - I'm less in tune with Him.

May our heartbeat be in tune with His heartbeat.

Let's just keep it simple, and let's keep **CENTERED**. It's the greatest of challenges.

— Texas City, TX

“Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind . . .” (Philippians 4:12-15a.) “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.)

## “WILL YOU ALSO GO AWAY?”

By Cecil Burch

“From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. Then Jesus said to the twelve, ‘Do you also want to go away?’ But Simon Peter answered Him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.’” (John 6:66-68.)

Some of the saddest times in the life of Christ were when His disciples, even after he had performed miracles and fed and taught them, rejected Him. Their excuses for not believing in Him were many. Before they walked away on this occasion, the complaint was made, “This is a hard saying, who can understand it?” (John 6:60.)

Today, it is heart-breaking when we see those who, for whatever reason, leave the fellowship of the church and align themselves with unbelievers. They choose to follow their own opinions and feelings. Jesus described a group of people who were very religious

and very dedicated, but religiously wrong, by saying, “You make the commandments of God of no effect by your tradition. Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying, ‘These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’” (Matthew 15:6-9.)

Jesus made it very clear that He comes even before family. He said, “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate (love less) his father and his mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14:26.)

Some people who desire to be popular allow their lives to be controlled by the majority. Jesus said, “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because

narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.” (Matthew 7:13-14.)

Every child of God should consider Peter's wise response: “Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”

— Amarillo, TX

“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven, given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12.) “For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” (1 Corinthians 3:11.) “When Christ who is our life appears, then you will also appear with Him in glory.” (Colossians 3:4.)

# Old Paths

Vol. 42, No. 12 December, 2018

“ask for the old paths” (Jer. 6:16)

## “CAN ANY GOOD THING COME OUT OF NAZARETH?”

By Milton Smith

Many Christians are unaware of the fact that skeptics of the Bible have long asserted that the town of Nazareth never existed during the time when the New Testament claims Jesus spent his childhood there. Nazareth is not mentioned in the Old Testament, by the Apostle Paul, in the Jewish Talmud, nor by the first century Jewish historian, Josephus. Many critics have claimed that this absence of evidence points to the fact that Nazareth did not exist during the time of Christ.

Dr. James Strange of the University of South Florida (considered an expert in this area) describes Nazareth as being a very small, insignificant village that covered only about sixty acres. He estimates that its maximum first century population could not have exceeded more than about 500 people. He notes that when Jerusalem fell in 70 AD and priests were no longer needed in the temple because it had been destroyed, these priests were sent out to various other locations. Archaeologists have found a list in Aramaic describing the 24 courses of priests who relocated, and one of the priests was registered as having moved to Nazareth.

Dr. Strange adds that there have been archaeological digs that have uncovered first century tombs in the vicinity of Nazareth. These tombs would establish the very limits of this tiny village because by Jewish law, burials had to take place *outside* the town proper. Renowned archaeologist, Jack Finegan, has written, “From the tombs, it can be concluded that Nazareth was a mainly Jewish settlement in the Roman period.” Many respected archaeologists no longer doubt the first century existence of the village of Nazareth. Even the skeptical scholar, Ian Wilson, has written, “Such findings suggest that Nazareth may have existed in Jesus' time, but there is no doubt that it must have been a very small and insignificant place.”

Students of the Bible will quickly recall that when Nathanael told Philip that he had found the Messiah and that he was none other than “Jesus of Nazareth,” Nathanael sarcastically replied, “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:45,46.) He was obviously referring to its small, insignificant size.

Archaeology continues to confirm the reliability of the Bible - even when it must do so somewhat reluctantly.

— Tulsa, OK

## OUR KING IS COMING!

By Bobby Key

While our Lord was yet among men, He promised, “I will come again.” Though many centuries have come and gone, this promise still echoes through the ages, bringing comfort to the suffering saints. “So Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.” (Hebrews 9:28.) Over three hundred times in the New Testament our Lord makes the promise, “I will come again.”

Yes, our King is coming - not to be crowned and begin His reign, but rather, to end His reign and receive His own! Let us notice some of the characteristics of His coming.

1. **It will be majestic.** “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory.” (Matthew 25:31.)

2. **It will be sudden.** “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.” (Matthew 25:13.) “Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.” (Matthew 24:44.)

3. **It will be the end of preparation.** “And the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats.” (Matthew 25:32.) “And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” (Matthew 25:46.)

4. **It will be the beginning of supreme joy for some.** “Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’” (Matthew 25:34.)

5. **It will be the beginning of great sorrow for others.** “Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’” (Matthew 25:41.)

— Miami, OK

“And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.” (Hebrews 9:27,28.) “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.” (1 Thessalonians 4:16,17.)

**WE ARE NOT YET HOME!**

By Glen Walton

“And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for he had placed the children of Israel under solemn oath, saying, ‘God will surely visit you, and you shall carry my bones from here with you.’” (Exodus 13:19.)

Joseph had enjoyed a distinguished career in Egypt. Next to Pharaoh, he had held the highest position in that country. Yet those long years of faithful service never made him feel he really belonged to Egypt. Before he died, he adjured his people to take his mortal remains to the land God had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The Lord expects His people to be faithful in their earthly positions and responsibilities. By so doing they honor Christ and His church. They are to never become so attached to this world that they prefer it to the land of promise.

Our home is not here, but in heaven. Here we are pilgrims and sojourners on our way to a better place. (1 Peter 2:11.)

Peter thus wrote, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.” (1 Peter 1:3,4.)

— Amarillo, TX

“Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.’” (Revelation 21:1-4.)

## EDITORIAL . . .

(EDITOR’S NOTE: As another year comes to a close, I must express my heartfelt appreciation to all of you who continue to remember this little paper with your ongoing and generous support. Because of friends like you, this work continues! Thank you!)

**THE SIMPLE GOSPEL**

By Dalton Key

Just prior to his ascension, Christ commissioned His disciples to go into all the world and “preach the gospel.” (Mark 16:15,16.) From Mark’s account, together with accounts of the same commission in Matthew and Luke, we learn that “the gospel” includes faith, baptism, and remission of sins. (Matthew 28:19,20; Luke 24:46-48.)

Peter and the other apostles carried out their Lord’s commission for the first time on the day of Pentecost, as recorded in the second chapter of Acts. On this momentous occasion, the message preached was the gospel of Christ, a message which involved repentance, baptism, and remission of sins. (Acts 2:38.) On that day long ago, some 3000 souls were obedient to the gospel message, were thus saved from sin, and added by the Lord to His church. (Acts 2:31,47.)

Nearly twenty centuries have come and gone since that first gospel sermon, yet this same message, the gospel message, continues to be “the power of God unto salvation.” (Romans 1:16.) As the very word of God, this message is still, all these years later, “living and powerful.” (Hebrews 4:12.) It still works as heaven’s spiritual seed, begetting children into the family of God. (Luke 8:11; 1 Peter 1:23.)

Because Christ has commanded His gospel to be preached, and because God’s power to save is in the gospel, we have neither right nor reason to proclaim anything else - anything more or anything less - to a lost and dying world. Our theme must be as Paul’s was in the long ago: Jesus Christ and Him crucified. (1 Corinthians 2:1,2.) Offering opinions is not preaching Christ. Droning on about pet programs or projects is not preaching Christ. Promoting self is not preaching Christ. Lobbying for social reform is not preaching Christ.

Paul charged Timothy to “preach the word.” (2 Timothy 4:2.) Notice that he didn’t encourage the young man to “share a few thoughts.” He didn’t urge Timothy to “find some good jokes.” He charged firmly and plainly, “preach the word.”

We would do well to heed the wisdom of T. B. Larimore, masterful preacher of the gospel of years now past, who once said, “I would be afraid to be ashamed, and ashamed to be afraid, to preach on anything that is not part of the divine message that Jesus commissioned his apostles to preach to every creature in all the world.”

It’s just that simple.

**THE KEY TO BEING A GOOD PREACHER**

By Danny Tunnell

Many appropriate things have been written about preaching and preachers. God had only one unique Son, and He was a preacher. God saves lost souls through the foolishness of preaching. (1 Corinthians 1:21.) Preachers are to preach the Word! (2 Timothy 4:2.)

What is the key to being a good preacher? Genuine humility and dependence on God are essential. The preacher must resist the temptation to be prideful. Jesus’ disciples argued among themselves as to which one of them was the greatest. But God has always resisted the proud and given grace to the humble (1 Peter 5:5), and with God’s help we can do anything! A preacher can use all the grace he can get!

A preacher needs to be humble and it must be genuine. He needs to focus on Christ, as John the Baptist exclaimed, “He must increase, but I must decrease.” (John 3:30.) Or as Paul proclaimed, “God forbid that I should glory, save in

the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by Whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.” (Galatians 6:14.)

In a world where many people try to elevate themselves, a preacher must not take credit for the work of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, “When the Holy Spirit is come, He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.” (John 16:8.) Paul talked about planting, and Apollos watering; but God gives the increase. (1 Corinthians 3:6.)

A preacher must quote the Scriptures. Christ quoted Scripture many times. He realized that there is supernatural power in the divine, powerful, living word of God as it pierces the hearts of those who hear it.

It helps a preacher to be flexible in some areas, to not be too set in his ways. Jesus communicated truth to people in different ways: by parables, by miracles, by speaking to large crowds, and to

individuals. In times past, God has used visions and dreams, and even nature itself to declare His works.

A good preacher understands that some will never enter a church building, but they may read an article or a book, or listen to a radio program or watch television. The preacher knows he needs to meet people where they are many times.

Finally, a good preacher should have a sense of urgency. He is not complacent. He doesn’t excuse his inactivity by saying, “I’m just a patient fellow.” He is a fisher of men. A good fisherman moves from one spot to another on the river, lake, or pond to where the fish are biting. He doesn’t sit on the bank in one spot and drown worms all day! Jesus told His disciples, “Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are ripe already to harvest.” (John 4:35.)

— Miami, OK

**Clergy or Laity?**

By Joe Slater

Are you in the clergy? Or are you a lay person? If you are a Christian, you should answer both questions the same: “Yes!”

Our word “clergy” goes back through the English and French languages to a Latin word meaning priest. Laity, on the other hand, comes from the Greek word, laos (people). In the Old Testament, Israel distinguished between its priesthood and “the people” in general. Only certain Levites who were male descendants of Moses’ brother, Aaron were priests.

The New Testament, however, recognizes no such difference among Christians. In fact, Peter tells the Christians to whom he is writing that they are “built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 2:5.) To the same people he writes, “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people.” (1 Peter 2:9.)

Every Christian, then, serves God as a priest under the High Priesthood of

Jesus Christ. Thus the Hebrews writer exhorts: “Therefore by Him (i.e. by Jesus Christ) let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.” (Hebrews 13:15.)

Since there is no distinction in the Lord’s church between priests and non-priests, all Christians are also the laity (the common people). Our Lord has instructed that no one seek self-exaltation. “But you, do not be called ‘Rabbi’, for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren.” (Matthew 23:8.) The next two verses continue the same prohibition against religious titles such as Father and Teacher (Master). In principle, these are no different than Reverend, Doctor, Pastor, or any other title men might invent to elevate themselves above their brethren. All such titles are divisive and violate the teaching that Christ’s disciples are brethren.

Titles are not the only means of making such artificial distinctions. Robes, collars, and other special items of clothing are commonly used in

the religious world to make certain individuals stand apart from the common people. God’s word sanctions none of it.

What higher station could we desire than that of simply being faithful Christians? Let us be thankful and humbled to be priests of God under the High Priesthood of Christ. And let us seek not to exalt ourselves, but to exalt Him who is worthy of the highest praise of earth and heaven!

— Justin, TX

**Old Paths**829 S. Rockford Ave.,  
Tulsa, OK. 74120On a nonprofit basis.  
Published monthly and  
supported by Churches of Christ  
and individuals.

Dalton Key Editor

“Subscription Free;  
Prayers Requested;  
Contributions Appreciated.”