

MILLIONS OF TEARS

By Danny Tunnell

It is good to learn what God's Word says about death. The Bible teaches that death is an enemy of mankind and God. (1 Corinthians 15:26.) The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about so much suffering and heartache, and has killed tens of thousands in the United States alone. Many of the dead were older, some were children, and others were in the prime of life. The wake of this plague has left behind incalculable loss and sorrow.

The Bible teaches that this enemy, death, will ultimately be destroyed forever. "The last enemy that will be destroyed is death." (1 Corinthians 15:26.) This enemy, death, has already been defeated. It was defeated when Jesus Christ died on the cross and rose from the dead. If Satan would have known that, he would have never crucified the Lord of Glory. (1 Corinthians 2:8.)

Death is feared by many because after death comes the Judgment. (Hebrews 9:27.) Those with a sense

of guilt fear the Judgment. They know they have offended God and they don't see any remedy. (Romans 3:23.)

The Bible teaches that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. (Hebrews 9:22.) That is the reason why Jesus died on the cross. "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin." (1 John 1:7.)

Jesus removed the sting of death (1 Corinthians 15:55) by taking away the fear of judgment, and He promised His followers a bright future beyond the grave. He said, "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you." (John 14:1,2) Paul stated, "There is therefore no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit." (Romans 8:1.)

It's okay for a Christian to cry over the unimaginable losses many in our country have sustained over

the past few months. There is nothing wrong with shedding tears over the passing of a loved one. "Jesus wept." (John 11:35.) But as Christians we should not sorrow like those who have no hope. (1 Thessalonians 4:13.)

The Revelation of Jesus Christ says, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord." (Revelation 14:13.) Those who have gone to be with the Lord are a lot happier than we are. They don't want to come back here! They are in a better place, living in a society where everyone is holy, where no one ever lies, cheats, hates, suffers, or dies; in a crime-free environment.

Without Christ during these trying times, we would be sorrowing like those who have no hope. But in Christ we know He is with us. Though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we have no need to fear any kind of evil. Our Shepherd is with us, His rod and His staff comfort us. (Psalm 23:4.)

—Miami, OK

A CALL FOR KINDNESS

By Joe Dale Wilson

Ephesians 4:32 begins with "and be kind to one another." The inspired Paul added to that in 1 Corinthians 13:4, "love . . . is kind." Paul listed "kindness" as one of the qualities a new Christian is to "put on."

Glen Campbell had a real catchy song several years ago that suggested, "try a little kindness, then you'll overlook the blindness, of narrow-minded people on the narrow-minded streets." Our world needs kindness. Kindness is the product of our love for others. Love and kindness make the world a better place to live. As Christians, we are in the world to change the world by our wholesome influence. We live with kindness radiating from our words and actions. We teach the gospel, which is God's expression of His loving kindness to mankind.

Hatred walks our streets, is

seen in e-mails and other sources of communications, bubbles out in our political arenas, and produces wars. Many follow a god of bitterness and vengeance. The world needs the loving kindness of God to be personified in Christians today.

In our day to day dealings we need kindness. People will do things that will disturb us. We can either jump on them with spurs on or reply with kindness. Which one will have the greater influence for Christ? We are here to win them to Christ, not to condemn them to the devil. Our words and actions must be seasoned with the wisdom of kindness.

Every day in the news we hear of people who are unkind to their fellow man. But every day there are those who go out of their way to show love and kindness to someone who is not in a position to help himself. Christians

should be the ones who are more prone to be kind; and in my experience, they are!

If your life has not been marked by kindness, try it - you'll like it!

—Vernon, TX

"Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing." (1 Peter 3:8,9.) "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you." (Ephesians 4:31,32.)

Old Paths

Vol. 44, No. 6 June 2020

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

HEARD ANY GOOD NEWS LATELY?

By Milton Smith

I rather imagine that you have either said - or had someone say to you - the old expression, "Heard any good news lately?" It is possible that the average person might hear this question (or one similar) several times a year. Many times we ask this question as a mere greeting to friends. Or maybe this question might be asked to "jump start" a conversation. Sometimes we may simply suggest it in an almost mocking manner, implying that "good" news is hard to come by these days.

Within the context of mere human life, good news can often be a rare thing. In some parts of the world living conditions are so abysmal that any news that might brighten a person's life is almost impossible to find.

Most of us are aware of the fact that the word "gospel" actually means "good news." The Christian needs to fully realize that we have a wonderful opportunity each day to present this unequaled good news to friends and family members alike.

If you know someone who is in a lost condition, chances are they are desperately seeking after some good news in their life. You can do this person an enormous favor that carries with it eternal blessings! When the opportunity presents itself, give them the best news they will ever hear!

Are we seriously to believe that it was nothing more than an accident - a mere happenstance - that God chose a word that literally means "good news" for the divine message that we are charged to deliver to the world?

The apostle Paul once persecuted Christians because they promoted this "good news." He was confronted one day by Jesus while traveling on the road to Damascus. Paul's mission on this trip was a simple one: If he found any Christians, whether they were men or women, he was going to arrest them and bring them, bound, back to Jerusalem. Many of them might likely be put to death. But Paul met Jesus on that historic trip and was baptized and became a Christian a few days later. After learning the truth about the glorious gospel of Christ, he would later write, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one who believes; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." (Romans 1:16.)

What a change!

Paul would spend the rest of his earthly life traveling the world to bring the gospel (good news) of Jesus Christ to those lost in sin. Today, you and I have the same privilege. Let's not waste such a blessed opportunity.

Heard any "good news" lately?

—Tulsa, OK

KING OF KINGS

By Joe Slater

"He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all." (John 3:31.)

John the Immerser deliberately made a play on the word "above" in this passage. The first "above" pertains to heaven being "above" the earth directionally. But the second "above" is a reference to rank. Jesus is "above" everyone else in rank. The Lord Himself said, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." (Matthew 28:18.)

Why does Jesus outrank all others? The place from which He came partially answers that question. John and all the prophets before him were earthly men; but Jesus had come from Heaven where He had been eternally co-existent with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

The point is not that John, Moses, Elijah, or the other prophets were wrong or evil. In fact, there was a time when God spoke through such men. But as Hebrews 1:2 says, God "has in these last days spoken to us by His Son." On the Mount of Transfiguration, when Moses and Elijah appeared alongside Jesus, God's voice commanded: "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!" (Mark 9:7.)

In ancient times, kings led their armies on the battle field. Loyal soldiers understood the importance of following their king. Even the captain of the army knew the king outranked him.

Jesus is our King of kings and Lord of lords. (Revelation 19:16.) As His loyal soldiers (2 Timothy 2:3), let us honor His supreme rank with our careful obedience!

—Justin, TX

"For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence." (Colossians 1:16-18.)

OF LOVE AND LIGHT

By Luke Bower

The other day, I overheard someone talking about how they love to buy things online. They even observed that as soon as the drone delivery system is perfected, they won't have to interact with the UPS person.

It seems more and more stores are moving in this direction. Have you noticed that our society is becoming increasingly isolated from each other? You no longer have to go to department stores; you just order what you want online. You don't have to talk to anyone when you go to the grocery store - with the self-checkout lanes you don't even have to talk to the cashier. From drive-through windows to internet shopping, it's all designed to make our lives easier; but it's also taking away our interaction with each other.

Unfortunately, many of us take this same attitude and apply it to the church. We slip in, talking to as few people as possible, find a pew that will allow a quick get-away, and as soon as the prayer is over we make our dash to the car.

I heard a quote which seems to capture the attitude of many: "To live above with those we know - now that will be grace and glory. To live below with those we know - now, that's a different story!"

Although this lifestyle might sound appealing to many of us, it is not how we are called to live as Christians. One of the greatest commands we are given is to love one another. How can we do that if we refuse to interact with one another? How can our good works be a light to the world if we refuse to let the world see them? One of our purposes for gathering together in worship is to encourage each other, but how can we do that without talking to, or interacting with, one another?

Even though it is not always convenient and may mean stepping out of our comfort zones, we need to slow down and share our lives with others. Talk to the cashier at the grocery store. Don't work on slipping out of church services so quickly.

Let's make every effort to love one another and let our lives be a light to those we meet.

— Abilene, TX

"By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:35.)

EDITORIALLY SPEAKING . . .

GALE-FORCE WINDS OF CHANGE

By Dalton Key

No doubt you've been feeling them - the gale-force winds of change blowing throughout the brotherhood. The voices demanding change are growing stronger, becoming evermore insistent and demanding. As a result, many once-faithful congregations have been affected and infected with the rot of apostasy.

The changes in question are by no means trivial. They are fundamental, going to the very core of who we are and what we, since New Testament times, have held dear. We find ourselves pressed to change our very understanding of biblical truth; to accept the idea that almost nothing we've ever considered distinctively true is actually true.

We have long taught the Lord's church as being unique and fundamentally different from denominational bodies. No, we're told, the church of Christ is just another denomination among many, just a small part of a larger, universal body of saved saints. We have always stressed the importance of New Testament authority in determining matters of salvation, worship, faith, and practice. No, we hear, this emphasis does nothing but distance us from our religious neighbors. Instrumental music in worship? Why not? Women taking a public, leading role in congregational worship and governance? Bring it on! Baptism as essential to salvation? What an archaic, small-minded notion! You name it; we're being pressured to rethink it.

These unrelenting demands for change appear to have one unchangeable formula: The bulk of everything taught, suggested, or implied by preachers and teachers once considered faithful or sound is now suspect and deserving of rejection and ridicule. Conversely, nearly anything taught, suggested, or implied by denominational or denominationally-inclined "experts" is considered tantamount to the gospel message itself!

And what about the gospel? What about the very words of New Testament Scripture? They are picked through, picked over, and picked apart until nothing is left but that which lends credence to the pre-determined agenda of the change agents. What Paul said about grace is accepted; what he said about doctrine and obedience is ignored. What John wrote about love is heralded; his words concerning divine truth and the dangers of false teaching is summarily squelched.

The intolerant and judgmental arrogance foaming from the lips and pens of these agents for change is nothing short of shocking. Finally, after nearly 2000 years, they have it all figured out. We've all been wrong all along! Job's sarcastic jab at his comfortless comforters comes to mind: "No doubt you are the people, and wisdom will die with you!" (Job 12:2.)

I realize I may be in the minority, but I choose not to change. I'd much rather hold to heaven's changeless truth than foolishly attempt to catch the tail of an ever-evolving message of religious populism.

Paul's words seem especially apt: "We should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head - Christ." (Ephesians 4:14,15.)



BAPTISM AND SALVATION

By Mark Lindley

The title of this article may seem startling to some. It may cause some to shake their heads in unbelief. The question is, does the Bible teach that "baptism saves us?"

I know that many preachers preach that baptism is the "first act of obedience" after one has been saved, but that "baptism has nothing to do with your salvation." However, according to the Bible, baptism comes "before" salvation. It is something that one does to be saved, not something one does because he is saved already.

It is clearly a contradiction to say that "baptism saves us," and to affirm that "baptism does not save us." Either both statements are false, or perhaps one of the statements is false and the other is true. But both cannot be true. The statements clearly contradict one another.

Suppose I could produce a verse from the Bible that teaches that "baptism saves us." Would you believe it? I would like to think that

those reading this article would trust the teachings of the Bible. Consider the following statement made by the Lord's apostle, Peter: "Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 3:20,21, KJV.) Did you notice those six words from verse 21? "Baptism doth also now save us!"

The analogy Peter gives is this: In Noah's day, eight souls were "saved by water," just as water baptism also now saves us. Answer the following question please: according to Peter, an inspired man of God, what does baptism "do?" It does something. What is it? It "saves" us! That means that baptism comes before one is saved

from sin. This fits perfectly with the rest of what the Bible teaches about baptism: baptism is "for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38); baptism is the point when one's sins are washed away (Acts 22:16), et al.

Please do not allow someone to prejudice your mind against this clear teaching of Scripture by "twisting" it. Also, be aware that some would charge that people who believe such teaching about baptism believe in "water salvation." That is just an attempt to prevent you from accepting what the Bible actually says about baptism.

I have been a member of the church of Christ for thirty-six years and have never heard anyone preach that the power to save is in water. The power is in the blood of Christ. (Ephesians 1:7.) But it is in baptism that a sinner receives the benefits of that blood and is saved. (Romans 6:3,4.) Please consider these matters with an open mind and an open Bible.

— Ripley, MS

THE CHURCH DOES NOT SAVE BUT THE SAVED ARE IN THE CHURCH

By Bobby Key

People are often heard to say, "Now, the church doesn't save anyone." This statement is true. The church is made up of people, and people can not save us.

However, though the church does not save a person, one must be in the church to be saved!

It is Christ who saves, but He is the Savior of the body, which is the church. (Ephesians 5:23.) He purchased the church with His own blood. It is in Christ that we have "redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." (Ephesians 1:7.)

When one reads the second chapter of Acts, he reads about three thousand people who heard the gospel for the first time. They learned that Christ was the Son of God, and that God demanded of them repentance and baptism "for the remission of sins." (Acts 2:38.) The text goes on to say, "Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added

to them." (vs. 41.) These same souls "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." (vs. 42.) The chapter ends with the words, "And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved." (vs. 47.)

Please notice that those who were being saved were added to the church. Surely this means one must be in the church to be saved.

Has Christ promised to save anyone outside His church? The answer is, "No." When we are saved we are added to His church. In fact, the very same things we do in order to be saved makes us a member of the church.

While it is true that the church does not save, it is also true that the saved are in the church! Are you? - Deceased

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He

might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes it and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church." (Ephesians 5:25-29.)

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829 S. Rockford Ave.,
Tulsa, OK. 74120

On a nonprofit basis.
Published monthly and
supported by Churches of Christ
and individuals.

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"Subscription Free;

Prayers Requested;

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