

UPON THE ROCK

Jan/Feb, 2007



Vol. 10 Issue 1

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Upon The Rock Lectureship
February 24-25, 2007
West Side Church of Christ

Upon the Rock is published bimonthly for the purpose of setting forth sound biblical material concerning first-principles and evangelism. We strive to print articles that are informative for Christians and non-Christians

.Mark Reynolds, Editor
Larry G. Reynolds, Co-Editor
Jim Witty, Printer
mreyn8391@comcast.net

God Is (Psalm 19:1)

By A.J. Cox

Introduction

There is on some level within virtually every human soul a yearning to know from whence he came. To state the issue another way, “What is the origin of the universe?” For people of faith, this question has been resolved with certainty. “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which do appear” (Hebrews 11:3). This belief in a Creator is not merely a privilege or a convenience, it is a necessity. Again, the Hebrews writer states, “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Hebrews 11:6). If the Creator requires such a conviction, one would imagine that there would be irrefutable evidence to support this belief, and indeed there is.

Nature's Testimony

The Psalmist wrote, “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world” (Psalm 19:1-4). There is a sense in which nature speaks to mankind. Day and night men of every nation and language hear her testify of God's glory. Of course if nature testifies to God's marvelous wisdom and craftsmanship it testifies to His existence! (Job 38:4-7; Psalm 102:25). The more we learn about our highly ordered and intricate universe the more difficult it becomes to claim that it is not the product of an intelligent designer. As one renowned former atheist

WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?

Hear - (Romans 10:17; Matthew 7:24-27).

Believe - (Hebrews 11:6; Mark 16:15-16).

Repent - (Acts 2:38; 17:30; Luke 13:3).

Confess - (Matthew 10:32,33; Acts 8:36).

Be baptized - (Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:27).

Live faithfully unto death - (Rev. 2:10).

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Charles Blair preaches for the Garfield Heights Church of Christ, 2842 Shelby St., Indianapolis, IN. 46203.

2007 Upon the Rock Lectureship
February 24,25, 2007
Theme: Our God Is Alive

February 24, 2007

9:00 am: God Is (Psalm 19:1) - A.J. Cox
9:50 am: God Shall Supply All Your Need - Cliff Goodwin
10:40 am: God So Loved the World - Mark Reynolds
11:30 am: God's Word Shall Not Return Void - Brandon Britton
12:10 - 1:10 Lunch Is Provided
1:10: God's Bears Our Burdens - Billy Bland

February 25, 2007

9:30 am: Made in God's Image - Jim Bullington
10:30 am: Nothing Separates Us from the Love of God - Billy Bland
1:30 pm: God Shall Wipe Away All Tears - Charles Blair

West Side Church of Christ
6600 W. Kilgore Ave.
Yorktown, IN. 47396
(765) 759-5984

put it, biologists' investigation of DNA "has shown, by the almost unbelievable complexity of the arrangements which are needed to produce (life), that intelligence must have been involved." Further he states that, "It has become inordinately difficult even to begin to think about constructing a naturalistic theory of the evolution of that first reproducing organism" (Antony G. N. Flew).

Paul also spoke of nature's testimony when he wrote, "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse" (Romans 1:20). Two of God's invisible qualities that are manifested in the creation are His eternal power and His divine nature, or His Godhood. It appears that what Paul means is that an examination of the universe would lead us to the conclusion that the Creator is infinitely more powerful than we are, and that He possesses an altogether different nature from ours. So convincing is nature's testimony that those who refuse to acknowledge God will be "without excuse."

The Origin of the Universe

The laws that govern nature are a powerful testimony to the existence of God. To illustrate, consider how some of these laws impact the question regarding the origin of the universe. Creationists and evolutionists alike are in general agreement that there are only three possibilities (causes) that could account for the existence of the universe (the effect). (1) It is eternal. (2) It created itself out of nothing. (3) It was created by something else (God).

Concerning the first possibility, there is universal agreement that matter/energy is not eternal. Creationists obviously believe this, and evolutionists all but admit that the universe is not eternal when they speak of its age. That the universe is not eternal is certain from what

is known as the Second Law of Thermodynamics. This law, also known as the "Law of Increasing Entropy," states that isolated systems always move in the direction of greater disorder or randomness. Since the universe is generally regarded as a closed or isolated system it must also be acknowledged that the universe is constantly moving towards greater disorder and randomness. Another way to state the matter is that there is an ever-increasing amount of entropy (disorder or unusable energy) in the universe. There is less usable energy in the universe today than there was yesterday, and there will be even less tomorrow. This essentially means that the universe is running down. Just as the winding down of a clock implies that the clock was at some point wound up, the ever-increasing amount of unavailable energy in the universe implies that it had a beginning.

If the universe is not eternal is it possible that the universe created itself? So says the evolutionist. Such statements as, the universe was "created spontaneously from nothing" are not uncommon in the writings of evolutionists. There is, however, no empirical evidence to support this theory. The First Law of Thermodynamics, also known as the "Law of the Conservation of Energy (and/or Mass)," states that matter/energy can neither be created nor destroyed. While the amount of unavailable or unusable energy is constantly increasing (the Second Law), the amount of matter/energy in the universe remains constant. If matter/energy cannot be created by any natural means the universe could not have created itself. This is to say nothing of the incredible notion of something creating itself!

The universe is not eternal, and the universe clearly did not create itself. How, then, are we to account for its existence? Evolutionist's objections notwithstanding, the only other possibility is that the universe was created by something else; which is to say that it is the product of an intelligent designer. If there was ever a time when

upon this earth. Those who mourned would be comforted (Matthew 5:4). The mourning here is the mourning for sin. Those who would see what sin had done to their lives would weep because of its effect. Without God no man can find answers to life. Hence, the promise by Jesus was that those who were sorry for sin would find relief, that is, they would be comforted.

How would God wipe away all those tears being shed for guilt of sin? Paul instructs us that the goodness of God leads men to repent (Romans 2:4). How would one learn about the goodness of God? There is only one way. He must learn of the goodness of God through the written Word of God. When an individual learns the truth and obeys it, his soul is purified by that obedience (1 Peter 1:22,23). A soul so burdened by sin turns to God in obedience and finds the seasons of refreshing that come from God because of that obedience (Acts 3:19).

A jailer in Philippi, an ardent Jew bent on destroying the church, half Jews of Samaria and a sorcerer to name a few. Each came to accept the truth about Jesus. They turned away from sin, confessed faith in Jesus and were baptized in water to wash away their sins. Those in Acts 2 were pricked in their hearts by truth (Acts 2:37). By verse forty-one, they gladly received the word and were baptized for the remission of their sins (Acts 2:38-41). They came up from the waters of baptism, new creatures in Christ Jesus. God had wiped away their tears and they were comforted by the truth they had received.

Our God is alive! He cares for all humanity. Through His Son, Jesus the Christ, access to God is granted to all who will accept the truth. One day all tears will be wiped away, all suffering and pain will have ceased and the ceaseless ages of eternity will begin to roll on as we pass from earth to heaven and receive the promise from God of eternity with Him. Even so come, Lord Jesus (Revelation 2:20).

written revelation given to us by God through His Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:12,13).

The picture of God that is revealed in the written Word is about a God Who loves His creatures. A love so sublime that it can be defined by those words, "God so loved the world..." (John 3:16). Because God sent His only begotten Son to die for us, He proved to the world, the depth of His love for us. His Son, Jesus the Christ became our High Priest Who can be touched by the feelings of our infirmities (Hebrews 4:15). It likewise shows a God Who promises that He will never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5,6).

We strive then as Christians to show to the world that the God of heaven cares for them (1 Peter 5:7). The birds of the air and the flowers of the field are seen by God (Matthew 6:26-29). How much more then is man, the crowning touch of God's creation of things on this earth. If the death of a sparrow is noted by God, how much more the suffering of those whom He has created in His own image (Genesis 1:26,27). Because God is alive and not a figment of man's imagination we find this command from God. We as the children of God are not to worry about life, but instead, make our requests to God for those things we need with thanksgiving (Philippians 4:6).

Our God does not take trips, nor sleeps or is busy doing something else like the gods which man creates (1 Kings 18:27). He gives assurances that we can overcome temptations by finding the way of escape that God provides for those who are His (1 Corinthians 10:13). The Word of grace provided by God is able to build us up and give us an inheritance which God, Who cannot lie, promised to those who are His (Acts 20:32, Titus 1:2).

Jesus spoke about the things that would be true of God's people in the new heaven and the new earth, that is, the church of our Lord

nothing existed nothing would exist today, because from nothing comes nothing. If, however, something exists today something has always existed, and that something is God.

Conclusion

Truly nature is the handiwork of God (Psalm 19:1; 102:25). The creation testifies to the existence of a Creator! After millennia of scientific investigation and advancement no one has been more profound or succinct in stating the matter than the Hebrews writer who declared, "For every house is builded by some man; but he that built all things is God" (Hebrews 3:4). The fool may say in his heart, "There is no God" (Psalm 14:1). And the wicked may refuse to have God in their knowledge (Romans 1:28). But the evidence in support of God's existence is overwhelming and clear (Romans 1:20). As time progresses, every new discovery and revelation that science may yield will only serve to confirm what the psalmist said in the long ago, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14).

A.J. Cox preaches for the Cloverdale Church of Christ PO Box 428, Cloverdale, IN. 46120-0428.

God Shall Supply All Your Need (Philippians 4:19).

By Cliff Goodwin

Different people have different ideas about God. Among those who mentally assent to the existence of God, there are some perceptions that do not place Him in a very favorable light. Some view God as a hasty, vindictive Being—One ready in an instant to send a thunderbolt down on any unsuspecting sinner. While it is true that vengeance belongs to God (Deut. 32:35; Rom. 12:19; Heb. 10:30), and that His vengeance will one day come on the unbelieving and disobedient (2 The. 1:6-9); one needs to understand that vengeance is not God's preference. God would rather *extend* mercy than *exact* vengeance (cf. Jonah 4:2; 2 Pet. 3:9).

In fact, God is by His very nature a *giving* God. He is kind, gentle and very gracious (Exo. 34:6; Psa. 145:8-9; cf. Isa. 30:18-19). In short, God is love (1 John 4:8). He is ultimately concerned with man's welfare, both now and eternally. It is out of such love and concern that God showers the world with innumerable blessings. He is the Giver of every good and every perfect gift (Jas. 1:17). Herein lies a concept for all to ponder. Everything in life—*everything*—that is truly good and perfect, has come down from the Creator of the universe! Some of His blessings are as fundamental as the sunshine and the rain (Matt. 5:45), while others are the sublime spiritual blessings vouchsafed only in His Son (Eph. 1:3).

It is this view of God that man must foster, and such appreciation for God that man must cultivate. The world is filled with countless souls who daily enjoy God's temporal, material blessings, yet they never seek Him from Whom all blessings flow! These are like the proverbial hog feasting on acorns, yet never so much as looking up at the majestic oak. God must be acknowledged for all the blessings He has

God Shall Wipe Away All Tears

Charles Blair

Through all the years the conflict rages in the heart of man as to where he turns to find the answers to life. The Scriptures speak about the wisdom of this world and the wisdom which comes from God (James 3:14-17). At one time the Greeks were in pursuit of wisdom, that is trying to find the answers to life itself (1 Corinthians 1:24). In our nation today there is the growing influence of humanism which is just another way of saying, that man has the answers to life within himself. Again, God speaks to the truth that man cannot direct himself (Jeremiah 10:23). There must be something outside of man which provides the answers to life and how to live it.

The history of man is filled with cases of idol worship. Jeremiah shows the foolishness of man in this regard. He goes out into the forest and cuts down a tree. He brings it into his house and decorates it with silver and gold. He then fastens it with hammer and nails so that it does not move. He then worships the very thing which he made with his own hands (Jeremiah 10:3,4). What is this tree all about? It is about man searching for something to believe in which will direct his life. The tree which is cut is without breath nor can it give him directions for life.

As the New Testament comes to a close the apostle John gives this warning. He warns Christians to flee from idolatry (1 John 5:21). Man must find answers outside of himself. The answers to life can never be found in false gods created by the mind of man. Because of the physical universe around us, all men should come to know that there is a God (Romans 1:20). When we turn to the Scriptures we find out Who that God is. We discover His nature and the demands He makes on our souls. One cannot know about God without the

same rationale behind God's statement to Noah when He said, "Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man" (Genesis 9:6). Each person in this world is a unique and somewhat fragile creation of Almighty God, and as such, each person deserves to be treated with the love and dignity that such an origin demands.

James addressed this very point when he wrote of the dangers of the tongue, warning "But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God" (James 3:8-9). Implicit in his warning was the fact that we should not speak well of God and in the next breath disrespect God creation. Words are a common way in which we injure others and this so often without so much as a second thought. According to James' inspired reasoning, even injuring another by our words is an affront to God in as much as every person bears the Creator's image in some way!

Perhaps we would not murder another human being and that out of respect for God's Divine order. However, do we really respect God's order when we willfully hurt another human being in some other way? Do we respect God's order when we have the ability and the opportunity to help another human being but refuse to do so out of selfish or other ungodly motives? Do we respect God's Divine order when we have the gospel at our fingertips and blithely ignore the spiritual plight of our neighbor? The fact that each and every human being bears the image of his Creator obligates each of us to act in a spiritually responsible way toward one another. Perhaps that is why Jesus' parable of the judgment in Matthew 25 sees men banned from God's blessings because they failed to show mercy and compassion toward others. Think on these things; fulfill your purpose!

Jim Bullington may be reached at 4080 Churchill Downs, Gainesville, GA. 30507.

already given and is *still giving*. This acknowledgement, then, should prompt man to seek after his Great Benefactor. Paul and Barnabas told the people of Lystra, "Nevertheless [God] left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness," (Acts 14:17). Later Paul would tell the Athenians, "That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring," (Acts 17:27-28). God is already infinitely good to all mankind; those who seek His will spiritually will find that He supplies **all** their needs—both physical and spiritual.

The Philippian Christians of the first century found the above assurance to be true. Paul had brought the gospel into Philippi, a chief city of Macedonia, as recorded in Acts 16. Among the first converts were Lydia and her household, as well as the Philippian jailor and his household. By the end of the chapter, there were "brethren" residing in the Macedonian metropolis (cf. Acts 16:12-15, 25-34, 40). From Paul's later epistle to the Philippian church, one finds that they had been very zealous in the cause of Christ—even from the time of their conversions. Paul commended them for their "fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now" (Php. 1:5; cf. 4:15). Such a statement indicates the faithfulness and steadfastness of their support—both *moral* and *financial*. In writing his epistle to them, Paul assured the Philippians that God would be there for them, just as they had faithfully been there for him (Php. 4:7, 9, 19).

Philippians 4:19 is a great statement of assurance, "But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Jesus Christ." As is always the case in Bible study, it is helpful to consider this verse in light of its context. As was noted above, the Philippians had been

faithful supporters of the apostle Paul in his labors for Christ. After all, this is the responsibility of the church (cf. 1 Cor. 9:1-11; Gal. 6:6; 3 John 5-8). Obviously, the Philippian congregation had been exemplary in this good work, for Paul singled them out as the only congregation that had “partnered” (from McCord’s translation, CG) with him in “giving and receiving” (Php. 4:15). This wording seems to indicate that Philippi had been a type of “sponsoring congregation” for the apostle Paul, receiving funds from other churches and giving them to him. Evidence supporting this view is found in Second Corinthians 11:8, where Paul told the Corinthians, “I robbed other churches, taking wages of *them*, to do you service.” Upon leaving Macedonia Paul went briefly to Athens and then to Corinth, where he took wages of other churches—not from the Corinthians themselves. From these facts one sees a plurality of churches involved in the *giving* aspect; yet Paul said only one had been involved in the *giving* and *receiving* aspects, namely Philippi. Therefore it seems most plausible that Philippi had filled the role of a “sponsoring congregation” in Paul’s work (using modern terminology).

It needs to be noted, however, that Philippi had not merely collected monies from other churches and passed them on to Paul. They also gave sacrificially themselves. After leaving Philippi, Paul went to Thessalonica, another Macedonian city. While preaching and teaching there he was not chargeable to any man; both he and his co-workers labored night and day in order to support themselves (1 The. 2:9). However, one learns from Philippians 4:16 that Paul’s income was supplemented by contributions from the Philippians, “For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity.” A few years later, at the time of his writing the Philippian epistle, Paul indicates that they had recently supported him even as a prisoner. “But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity... But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of

Being made in God’s image sets us apart from all other created beings. Humans clearly are a distinct class of beings and occupy a place of great distinction in the realm of the creatures upon this earth. In fact, the text quoted from Genesis 1 specifies that man was to “...have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” Although God made every creature, His focus was clearly upon one, namely man! God gave specific instruction to man regarding his relationship with his Creator but never did He give such instruction to any other creature. Differing from all other living beings, God “...breathed into his [man’s] nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.”

Being made in God’s image adds the dimension of moral accountability to our existence. Dogs are dogs, cats are cats, fish are fish and man is man. Of all the creatures, man is the only one whom God holds morally accountable for his actions. Man’s present and future quality of life is directly linked to his willingness to hear His Creator’s voice. But with man, just hearing and obeying is not enough; we must submit our wills and become willingly obedient to His commands.

Being made in God’s image demands that we treat one another with the respect due the crowning glory of Creator God’s handiwork. Imagine maliciously destroying a prized painting produced by a gifted artist; what type of reaction do you think that would elicit from the artist? Imagine intentionally defacing the brilliant luster that a furniture maker had achieved on a showpiece by hours of hand buffing; what reaction would you expect from the artisan? Now, transfer that feeling and multiply it exponentially and you get some comparison of how Creator God is affected when we destroy or hurt another human being, the apple of His eye. That was apparently the

Secondly, we were made in the image of God as opposed to the image of anyone or anything else. Who is God? What is God? These are the tough questions with which we must wrestle if we are to even begin to know what it means to be made in His image. In attempting to understand God, there are good and valid reasons why we usually begin such a discussion by expressing what God is not rather than what God is. God is not of this universe. God is not man. God is not nature. God is not natural (as defined by the laws of the physical universe). God is not what we want Him to be nor is He defined by our imaginations. God is... God is... Well, God is God! He is like no other and is not defined, confined, nor refined by the rules of the world in which we humans live.

God is supernatural. His being and His existence are totally outside the realm of human experience. For that reason, He can only be described in relative terms. To illustrate this point, imagine that a time warp transported you back into the presence of Alexander the Great. Further, imagine that the only physical possessions that you had were the clothes on your back and a cell phone in your pocket. Alexander and his friends are amused by you, by your looks, and by your strange clothing. However, they are not amused by the ringing cell phone in your pocket. Your task – explain to men who have no knowledge of electricity, radio, telephones, or other modern conveniences – explain to them the concept of the cell phone. Metaphors and analogies would abound in such an effort. You would use things with which they were familiar in order to attempt to explain the things with which they were unfamiliar. So it is with God in revealing Himself to us. He used the natural (that with which we are familiar) to explain the supernatural (that in which we have no experiential knowledge)!

Epaphroditus the things *which were sent* from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God,” (Php. 4:10, 18). It is on the heels of this last verse that Paul then wrote, “But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus,” (Php. 4:19).

What then is to be learned from the statement comprising verse nineteen? At least two observations must be made. One, everything will ultimately be alright so long as one puts God and His kingdom first (cf. Matt. 6:33). Yes, it is true that in life there will be setbacks, adversities and even tragedies; but all things will *work together* for good concerning them who love God and put Him first (Rom. 8:28). If such is not the case in this life, it will certainly be the case in eternity (cf. 2 The. 1:6-9). The Philippians obviously trusted in this principle. The evidence suggests that the Philippians were likely poverty-stricken (cf. 2 Cor. 8:1-4), and yet they generously supported the preaching of the gospel. Paul assured them that God would supply all their need (cf. Psa. 37:25-26). Two, one can never “out-give” God. As the omniscient, omnipotent Being, God is able to bless man in countless ways. Once again, **every** good and perfect gift is from God—whether it is physical, medical, domestic, financial, or spiritual. The Philippians had doubtlessly sacrificed greatly in their support of the gospel, but God was more than able to supply all their need in every way. In fact, the God who did not withhold His own Son will freely give all things needed for man’s welfare (cf. Rom. 8:32).

Cliff Goodwin preaches for the Ironaton Church of Christ, PO Box 964, Talladega, AL. 35160-0964.

God So Loved the World (John 3:16)

By Mark Reynolds

John 3:16 has been called by some, “The golden text of the Bible.” Standing alone, it is a beautiful, comforting and powerful verse. But when kept in its context is even more than that; it is soul-saving. John 3:16 is at the center of a conversation between our Lord and a man named Nicodemus. This conversation can be divided into three movements: (1) Nicodemus and Jesus face to face (3:2-3); (2) Nicodemus and Jesus mind to mind (3:4-8); and (3) Nicodemus and Jesus heart to heart (9-21).

Face to Face

“There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him” (John 3:1-2). This ruler of the Jews came to Jesus calling Him, “Rabbi,” a respectful title given to teachers of his day. He understands that Jesus has come from God, because of the signs that Jesus had shown. He had not asked for anything, but had simply made a statement waiting for a reply. No doubt Nicodemus, being a great ruler of the Jews, knew the Old Law inside out. He also knew that there had been no message from God from the close of the Old Testament until John the Baptizer came preparing the way for Jesus. Now, here is the One for Whom John had laid the ground work, authenticated by signs demonstrating He was from God. Nicodemus came to hear the latest word from God, and he knew he could get that word from Jesus.

What did he get that day he met Jesus face-to-face? So much more than he expected: “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). What a jolt this had to be to Nicodemus,

Made in the Image of God

By Jim Bullington

“Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” (Genesis 1.26-27).

The fact that man was created in God’s image is directly affirmed in at least a half a dozen places in the Holy Scriptures. In order for us (mankind) to know that we were created in God’s image, He would have to tell us and that due to the fact that we know nothing about God other than that which He chooses to reveal of Himself. We could imagine what our Creator was like but we could not know without His revelation. So, if we are to understand the facts and implications of being made in God’s image, that understanding must come from His word. Conjecture and speculation will gain us nothing in this quest so it is to His word that we turn.

First, we were made. We did not make ourselves and we are not the product of blind chance or random happenings. There is **intent behind** our being and there is **intent for** our being. The fact that we were created is the healthy beginning point of a worldview and a self-view that elevates us above the mere animal kingdom and conjectures about cosmic accidents resulting in our existence! The truth is not altered by what we wish it to be, but why someone would want to believe that he/she is a mere accident brought into existence by the random gods of chance is beyond this scribe’s ability to grasp. The Bible affirms the fact that our origin is the direct result of the actions of Almighty God.

Jesus Has Promised Rest To The Weary

Jesus invites us to come to Him for rest. He stated; “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Mat.11:28-30). What a blessing to know that we can have pardon and relief from the burden of sin. What a blessing to know that the soul which is heavy laden can have rest in Christ.

To have this rest, however, one must come unto Christ. Jesus invites us, but He doesn’t force us. We must “come unto” Him. Jesus sends out His call through the Gospel (Mark 16:15). We hear His invitation (Rom 10:17), believe in Him (John 8:24), repent of our sins (Luke 13:3), confess our faith in Him as the Son of God (Acts 8:37) and are immersed in water for the remission (forgiveness) of our sins (Acts 2:38).

As God’s child, we then have the privilege to call Him our Father, go to Him in prayer and walk in fellowship with Him (I John 1:8-10). Having obtained rest for our souls, we are also promised eternal rest in the world to come – “There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God” (Heb. 4:9).

Is your soul weary? Are you “heavy laden?” Will you not come to Christ who has promised you rest? You will be glad you did.

Billy Bland is an instructor and the Dean of Students at the Memphis School of Preaching, 3950 Forest Hill Irene Rd. Memphis, TN. 38125.

the Jewish leader. They had been building on tradition for 4,000 years, and now the latest word from God is that those who hope to see Him must begin anew. This honest seeker is told he must not lead his people to bigger and better things in the Jewish religion, but must go all the way back, even further than infancy, to be born again.

Mind to Mind

The reaction of Nicodemus is certainly understandable in light of his lack of understanding regarding the ultimate plan of God. “How can a man be born when he is old?” (3:4a). It does not appear he was contradicting Jesus, but was certainly excited at the most, and curious at the least. What a marvelous thing it would be if what Jesus said could actually happen; if a man could begin all over again. After asking how it could be, Nicodemus illustrates his question to Jesus, “...Can a man enter a second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?” Can this body of mine be turned back into embryonic form in my mother’s womb? And if that cannot be, then how is the more difficult thing to be done, that of remaking my personality, spirit, mind, and body?

Jesus answered, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (3:5). How can one be born of the Spirit? Paul answered this for the Corinthians: “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:13). When one “drinks” from the Scripture, one “drinks” from the Holy Spirit, as He is the one that does the teaching. This new birth proceeds out of two things: Out of the water of baptism, and out of the Word (teaching) of the Holy Spirit.

Nicodemus was confusing physical with spiritual when he asked his

famous question, "...can he enter the second time into his mother's womb and be born?" (3:4b). Jesus corrected his thinking when He said, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (3:7). Nicodemus was thinking fleshly and Jesus was thinking spiritually. Jesus uses His own illustration so He and Nicodemus could meet mind to mind. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit" (3:8). You see the effects of the wind, but not the wind itself; the same is true of one who is born again. You will see the effects of the new birth; the evidence will be seen in the way they live their lives. How deep and profound to this leader of the Jews, whose religion had become all physical devoid of the spiritual. Jesus let him know that through the new birth lives are changed from the inside out, beginning with the heart of a man.

Heart to Heart

Nicodemus begins this last movement of his time with Jesus with another question: "How can these things be?" (3:9b). Whereas his first question (3:4) indicated, "How is it even possible that these things might be true?" it seems this question is asking, "What is the process of being born again?" Jesus' answer is seen in three movements: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life" (3:14,15). Inherit in this first movement is obedience. Just as the Israelites in the wilderness had to believe in the healing power that came through the serpent of brass, and had to obey Moses' command to seek it and look upon it to be saved: One must seek the lifted up Savior and come to Him through the commands He gave. How is this salvation even possible? Let us look further at the second movement. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in

What Are We To Do With Our Burdens?

While we cannot avoid all burdens, we can get relief from them. Peter wrote; "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you" (1Pet. 5:7). The Psalmist encouraged his readers; "cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved" (Psa. 55:22). It is encouraging to know that the One who created and sustains the world, has said for us to cast our burdens upon Him! Why? Because He cares for us (1 Pet. 5:7). He is our heavenly Father! An earthly father cares for his children. How much more does God, our heavenly Father care for His children (cf Mat. 7:7-11). When Jesus sent out His disciples to preach His Gospel, He knew they would face opposition and even death. He exhorted; "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows (Mat. 10:29-31). God knows us intimately. Even the very hairs of our head are numbered. We are of much more value than many sparrows and yet not even of the sparrows falls to the ground without the Father's knowledge. If He takes notice of the sparrow, how much more does He look after His children!

In addition to casting our burdens upon the Lord, we are to bear one another's burdens. Paul wrote; "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). Many people, including this writer, have been comforted by those who helped in bearing their burdens.

But there are some burdens that we are to bear ourselves. Again Paul wrote; "For every man shall bear his own burden" (Gal. 6:5). These burdens in this context have to do with our personal responsibilities in life that we ourselves must bear. No one can bear these for us.

even murdered because of the choices of others. The ones who were injured or murdered did not wish this upon themselves, but others made bad (and/or sinful) choices that brought about much heartache to many.

We have some burdens in life because we live in a world where burdens exist. The apostle Paul stated; “For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life” (2 Cor. 5:4). There are burdens that come our way because we are in this “tabernacle” or body. Sickness and hardships come into our lives because we live in a world where sickness and hardships exist. When they come into our lives, that doesn’t necessarily mean that we have sinned and that God is punishing us or is angry with us. Jesus refuted such faulty thinking. Luke records; “There were present at that season some that told him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:1-5).

Then there is the burden of sin in the lives of all accountable people. God’s word informs us that “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23)! It also tells us that “all have sinned” (Rom. 3:23). Consequently, sin is a universal burden. A person may choose to ignore his sin problem, but it doesn’t go away by ignoring it. If one doesn’t seek remedy for his burden of sin in this life, he will suffer eternal consequences.

him should not perish, but have everlasting life (3:16). This is what makes the new birth possible.

Further, “For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved” (3:17). He has sent the light. “How is this possible?,” asked Nicodemus. “How can a man begin anew?” Jesus said, Life through My death; love from the heart of God through His gift; light through My mission in the world. That is how. Because God so loved, He gave; and life comes through that gift; and now the light is shining.

No doubt Jesus met Nicodemus heart to heart that day. Nicodemus came to Jesus a religious man; one who does things in the name of God. But Nicodemus left Jesus that day understanding what it meant to be spiritual; the motives that lie beneath the actions. Nicodemus learned a lesson that all must learn if they want to enter into the kingdom of heaven: It is not enough just to be religious, one must be spiritual; he must do the things God commands him with the right motives. Nicodemus learned that spirituality is the attitude one has toward the One who died for you (John 3:14-17). He allows his spirit, changed from the teachings of the Holy Spirit, to control his body in the flesh. Dear reader, are you spiritual or only religious? Would you like to start all over? You can!

Works Used:

“The Gospel According to John,” G. Campbell Morgan.

Class notes from the Memphis School of Preaching, taught by Keith A. Mosher, Sr.

Mark Reynolds preaches for the Towne Acres Church of Christ, 2411 E. Riggin Rd., Muncie, IN. 47303.

God's Word Shall Not Return Void (Isaiah 55:11)

By Brandon Britton

Introduction

In my experience, we Christians have a tendency to underestimate the value and power of the Word of God, or perhaps to overestimate our own abilities. Have you ever sought to convert someone to Christ, only to have them reject the Gospel? Did you replay the study(ies) in your mind and ask yourself "What did I do wrong?" Have you ever preached a sermon, or listened to one, and wondered "Why didn't anyone respond during the invitation?" I have asked myself both questions. Although these questions are asked sincerely and out of a heart seeking to save the lost, the question is flawed. Yours will be a long and frustrating life as a Christian if you are relying upon or expecting your abilities to be the deciding factor in whether or not people obey the Gospel. Simply put, the power is in the message, not the messenger. "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12).

Do you remember the lesson from the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13)? The sower spread the seed, but only one-fourth of his efforts produced fruit. Three-fourths of his efforts "failed." Did he not do enough? Could he have worked harder? The problem was not with the sower or the seed, but the soil. Jesus explained that the soil represented the heart of man (Matthew 13:19). Some hearts are so hardened that they refuse to allow the seed (which is the word of God, Luke 8:11) to penetrate. Other hearts are shallow, and although they receive the word, there is no depth (commitment) and when difficulties arise they fade quickly. Others receive the word, but they never remove the cares of the world and their faith is quickly

Casting Our Burdens Upon the Lord

By Billy Bland

One of life's unbiased realities is - **we all have burdens**. While some burdens are comparative light others are very heavy and weight us down. What are we to do with life's burdens? Are we to wring our hands in utter despair and hopelessness? Do we act as though we have no burdens? While the two aforementioned options can be taken, both are extremes. We should not take the ostrich approach to life, hiding our heads in sand and closing our eyes to burdens' realities. They are real. However, neither should we wring our hands in despair and think there is no hope. Some have gone so far into hopelessness to commit suicide. People in great despair considered "ending it all," (we also realize that people may have been on certain medications that distorted their thinking and took their lives, when under normal circumstances they would not have done so). We must remember, as a marquee I once read, "Suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem." To this I would add, even if the problem is not temporary in this life, there is a permanent solution that doesn't involve suicide.

Why Are There Burdens?

There are some burdens we bring on ourselves. If one smokes cigarettes, he should not be surprised if one day he develops breathing problems and even cancer of the lungs. Smoking cigarettes is known to produce such ill effects. We bear burdens, at times, due to choices we have made.

There are burdens brought into our lives by the choices of others. Other people sometimes make wrong choices and we have to suffer due to their choices. We all know that isn't fair, but life is not always fair! Perhaps we have all known people who were injured and/or

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3:16,17). Although a person can benefit from studying with a knowledgeable Bible teacher, the Bible is such that a person can read, understand and obey it on their own (Ephesians 3:4).

Not only does the Bible not rely upon man's ability, it does not need anything in addition to it to reach the lost. Though well intentioned, man sometimes worries too much about external factors in influencing the hearer to respond to the Gospel. Sermon hand outs, fancy power point presentations, dynamic speakers and interesting visual aids and illustrations are fine to use, but we would be foolish to think these man made aids are necessary to reach the lost. In the first century the only tool that the Christian had at his disposal was the Word of God, and they enjoyed tremendous success in reaching the lost. "But the word of God grew and multiplied" (Acts 12:24). We must never lose sight of the fact that "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17).

Brandon Britton preaches for the East Hill Church of Christ, PO Box 329, Pulaski, TN. 38478.

overtaken by other interests. Some hearts are sincere and receptive and when they learn the Gospel they obey it and continue faithfully in it. The same seed was sown in every heart, by the same sower, but the results were drastically different. As much as this parable teaches us about the hearts of men, it teaches us about our role as sowers of His seed. Our job is to plant the seed, water the seed and trust in God to give the increase (1 Corinthians 3:6). All of this factors into the meaning of the message from God that is recorded by the prophet Isaiah in chapter fifty-five, verses eight through eleven. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: 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 55:8-11). There are several principles that this passage impresses upon our minds.

The Word of God Is Superior

My favorite subject in high school was English Literature. To this day I enjoy reading "the classics" and the works of brilliant authors from long ago. I have read many of these books many times, but there is only one book I read everyday, seek to commit to memory and use as a guide for my life. That book is the Bible and the difference is that it is superior to all other great writings combined. Isaiah wrote God's words, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8,9). Though man is created in His image (Genesis 1:26), the nature of God in every way infinitely transcends

that of man. Both the thoughts and the acts of God surpass man's understanding. Although there may be an occasional symposium or class devoted to the study and discussion of great literary classics, millions do not gather together on a weekly basis to discuss, study, hear and pattern their lives after these books, but they do the Bible. I have yet to sit beside one who is hospitalized or dying and have them ask me to read to them from Shakespeare or Hemmingway, but I have frequently been asked to read the Bible to them. The reason is because the Bible is the Word of God, not man and is superior in every way to the greatest accomplishments of humans. "For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you" (1 Peter 1:24,25).

The Word of God Is Sustaining

A casual reading of Psalm 119 is all that is necessary to impress upon our minds the importance of the Word of God in sustaining the Christian on a daily basis. "My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken thou me according to thy word" (Psalms 119:25). "My soul melteth for heaviness: strengthen thou me according unto thy word" (Psalms 119:28). "This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me" (Psalms 119:50). "My soul fainteth for thy salvation: but I hope in thy word" (Psalms 119:81). "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psalms 119:105). "Uphold me according unto thy word, that I may live: and let me not be ashamed of my hope" (Psalms 119:116). There are so many more that could be cited, but surely these are enough to convince us of the sustaining power of His word.

Isaiah compares His word to the water that comes from and returns to heaven, hydrating and sustaining the earth in the process. "For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not

thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater" (Isaiah 55:10). Isaiah's message is that God sends the moisture from heaven and it accomplishes many things before it returns to heaven. It waters the earth so that it can bring forth vegetation, The vegetation it produces has multiple uses: it produces seed so that the process can be repeated continuously and it produces fruit that can be eaten. The picture is one of complete care and the meeting of every need. "According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue" (2 Peter 1:3). It provides the spiritual food we need to be strengthened, energized, sustained. (As a side note, this verse, Isaiah 55:10, is further evidence for the inspiration of the Bible because Isaiah knew something of the rain cycle nearly twenty-five hundred years before science "discovered" it).

The Word of God Is Sufficient

I am sometimes amazed at the impact a sermon can have on different groups of people. In an audience of a few hundred people, the same sermon can produce faith in unbelievers and cause them to come to Jesus for salvation, stir others who are believers to repentance, comfort those who are grieving, relieve those who are suffering and strengthen those who are faithful. Of course I should not be surprised because Isaiah explained that the Word of God is sufficient to meet all needs of all people. "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). Like the moisture that comes from heaven and meets many needs before returning above, the Scriptures have a broad range of applications for many different people. The idea is that it is sufficient to meet the needs of man, without depending upon flawed and fallible man to "make it work."