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For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

Luke 2:11-14

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VISITING THE ELDERLY

by Daniel Kleyn

I have a question for you, young people. So I want each of you to take the time to ask yourself this question and to consider the importance of it. It is essential that you do so, for one's answer to this question demonstrates whether or not he is living as a true Christian should.

The question is this: "**Do you visit the elderly?**"

That this question is important is not simply because I might think so. No! Rather, God's Word points out why it is that you and I must consider this question. In James 1:27a we read: "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction." Scripture here tells us that when one visits the "fatherless" and the "widows" he is showing that he is a true Christian. The fatherless and the widows are those who are lonely. And this is so often true of the elderly too, for they likewise live a lonesome and quiet life. Each of you is called therefore, as a child of God, to visit those who are lonely: the fatherless, the widows, and the elderly.

But let us be more specific with our question. Ask yourself the following: "When was the last time that I visited an elderly saint?" Or even: "When was the last time I visited my own grandparents?"

There are a number of reason why we should be actively involved in visiting the elderly.

As already mentioned, we should do so because it is our calling to do so. God commands us to do so. You and I must love our neighbors as ourselves, and this does not mean simply to **say** that we love them, but to **show** that we love them. By visiting the elderly we show that we think about them, that we love them, and that we are concerned for their physical and spiritual welfare.

This means that you and I must visit the elderly for **their** benefit. Elderly saints live a lonely life. Loneliness is part of the "affliction" they experience. This is especially true of orphans and widows, but it is true also of elderly saints. And so they need our visits. They need to know that you and I, as fellow believers, love them and care for them. And not only do they need our visits, but they enjoy them.

Just take the time to imagine, young person, what it would be like if you yourself were unable to go outdoors each day. I am sure you would find it extremely difficult. Maybe some of you have even experienced that feeling when you have been in hospital or sick in bed for a time. After sitting or lying there for many long and lonely hours, you really look forward to and appreciate a visitor. And so do the elderly. So, for their benefit, take the time to visit them. Do this especially for those who are unable even to attend church on Sunday.

However, we do not visit the elderly just for their benefit. It is certainly true that we must endeavor to make our visits beneficial for them. But if that were the only reason why we visited them then very soon we would be filled with pride and think to ourselves that we are doing a great work and service to these people. This must never be our attitude. To keep us from becoming proud we must realize that our visits to the lonely and elderly are also for **our own** benefit. But how is this so?

I am sure you have all been told at one time or another: "You can learn so much from old people." I often wondered what that really meant, and sometimes I even doubted that it was true. And I am

sure that many of you did or do. In sinful pride we think that we know so much more than our grandparents or than other elderly saints. We think that because we have had more education than they did we are better equipped to face the world and life. So we wonder, therefore, how the elderly could possibly teach us anything.

But our doubting the truth of that statement is a serious error. I have learned from experience that I was so wrong. I will tell you how.

For the last three or four years of their lives my grandparents lived next door to us. Because we took care of them, we saw them every day. It was through that daily contact with them that I realized how much I could learn from these dear elderly saints. They had been through life, they had fought life's battles, they had experienced all sorts of hardships and troubles and had learned how to face them in the strength of the Lord. All of these experiences had strengthened their faith and their trust in God. Because of these experiences they were filled with wisdom, and even without setting out to teach me something, the stories of their lives taught me so much. It was not the case that "Opa" and "Opoe" (Dutch for "Grandpa" and "Grandma") *preached* to me every time we visited. Not at all. They would simply tell stories about their experiences in life and my brothers and I would listen and learn.

There is an important lesson here for you, young people. If only you would take more time to listen to the experiences of elderly saints then you yourselves would be better able and equipped to face the difficult circumstances in life. Perhaps you would even learn how to avoid certain pitfalls.

So do you visit the elderly?

Perhaps your response to this question is: "Who me, you expect me to visit the elderly? I wouldn't know what to say. I couldn't communicate with them. Isn't it better to leave that to others who are themselves older and who are better able to talk with elderly people? I'd probably be more of a hindrance or nuisance to elderly people if I visited them, than a help."

The fact is that usually you do not have to say much at all. Just your being there means a whole lot to the elderly, for you show that you have a Christian love and concern for them. You are there because you care for them. They sense that, and if you show an interest in them they will enjoy relating their experiences to you. And even if they are failing physically, you must still respect them, and you will soon learn to do so on account of their wisdom. Give them a listening ear, and do not be in a hurry to leave. **Listen** and **learn**!

There are also valuable spiritual benefits which come from visiting the elderly.

When you visit with the elderly you will come to realize that our life on earth is indeed short. Elderly saints will make you see this, for they themselves are looking forward to their eternal and heavenly home and you can sense that the things of this world are not as important to them as they are to you. Sometimes they are not important at all. And so you are confronted with the reality that our life here on this earth is just a pilgrimage. We do not seek an earthly life, we seek a heavenly, spiritual and eternal life with God. What a great benefit to be reminded of this, for we are so inclined to forget that fact. So easily we get caught up in this world and love it and act as if the chief purpose and goal of life is this earthly life. We need to be snapped out of such dangerous thinking.

The wisdom that the elderly will impart to you also concerns our own history as churches. These saints have lived through the bitter struggles that we as Protestant Reformed Churches have faced. They realize, therefore, the importance of the truth for which we stand, something which many of us, to our shame, do not. And therefore I say again: "Listen and learn!"

So visit the elderly. Take the time to talk to them at church. Visit your grandparents regularly. Visit other elderly saints. For "pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction."

And do not say to yourself: "I do that at Christmas time, so that is enough." No! It is commendable that you do it at this time of year, but it is just as important, and perhaps even more important, that you do it year around, for the elderly are lonely year around.

Do this, young people, and by God's grace your visits will be a blessing, not only to the elderly and lonely whom you visit, but also to yourself.

Voyage of the Phoenix

by Tom Bergman

This is the first article in a series on missions and witnessing. Some of the articles will focus on the church-bodily function of mission work, while others will center on the individual calling to be a witness of God's Name through our everyday lives. This particular one will address the matter of witnessing through the manner in which we plan ahead. How do you plan your life? How do you schedule your day? The Word of God has much to tell about Christian planning. You will see that the Christian way to go about this has only the praise of God's name as its goal. Spiced with a shipwreck tale from the annals of church history, this article may give you a lot to think about—reason to pray.

Let us turn first to the Word of God. In Matthew 6, the Lord Jesus Christ himself teaches us,

> Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?

Every day, we make plans. It could be the simple decision of what to have for breakfast or as important as choosing a college. Christ speaks to us here. See how God cares for the needs of the birds and flowers? We should mind our priorities. When we witness the splendid beauty of the lilies, we should be cautious about how much emphasis we place on our plans, for ourselves. Not to say, of course, that we may not make any plans. We have to decide what to wear in the morning. We still need to pursue a life's calling. But, it is how we do this that is so crucial. It is the attitude we embrace when we make plans that Christ is teaching. Read more!...

> Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?...For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.

Our top priority is to seek the kingdom of God. All day-planning and life-planning must be done in His service—to His Name's honor and glory. It is His will, not ours. Since childhood, we are taught to pray, "Thy will be done..." His holy will, His plan is beyond our control. Therefore, it is good to say, "I hope to be married in May, the Lord willing. I hope to begin college in September, the Lord willing. I hope to arrive at 10:30, the Lord willing." You cannot make your own plans apart from God, and order them to happen. We never know what the Lord has in store for us, do we? So we plan ahead, as we rightfully ought, but with the significant reminder: the Lord willing.

To demonstrate the relationship between our plans and God's will for us, let me tell you a story. It is the gripping tale of the voyage of the Phoenix. (Note: Many of the details come from *Great Lakes Shipwrecks & Survivors* (1960) by William Ratigan.) Inside is a lesson about God's plan for us. In addition, an interesting twist from our church history is woven into the picture. It will hit surprisingly close to home.

The Voyage of the Phoenix

The reform movement in the state church in the Netherlands had led to several splits in the church. Some of the faithful members had saved up for a move to the religious freedom of the United States. Although it was an enormous task, some

did make the trip across the Atlantic, and settled in various parts of the country including Michigan, Iowa, Illinois, and Wisconsin.

On November 11, 1847 a second wave of these Dutch immigrants was set to sail from Buffalo. The Atlantic crossing had been long and treacherous, but they were all safe. Some had spent their life savings for this chance. It was a righteous cause, wasn't it? Seeking a place to worship God as they ought—it was just and good. They planned to settle new towns, soon to be named Holland, Zeeland, Vriesland, etc. And no doubt they prayed about this venture. But, God knows our needs even better than we do. All creation follows His plan, and we can never know what lies ahead. The same was true for the 300 Dutchmen who boarded the Phoenix that chilly November morning.

Familiar with the Buffalo-Chicago "horseshoe" run, the Phoenix steamed out of Buffalo and headed for Cleveland. Over to Detroit, through the St. Clair River, and into Lake Huron, the Phoenix carried a group of people eager to build up the Church in the wilderness on Lake Michigan's shore. At least they anticipated doing so.

Crossing the deep waters of Lake Huron, the steamship passed through the Straits of Mackinac into Lake Michigan for the final leg of the journey.

By November 21, stormy weather had blown the Phoenix off course. And it was before dawn that morning that the ship ran into trouble. Five miles off the Wisconsin shoreline, within sight of Sheboygan, a crewman discovered a fire below deck. Starting above one of the boilers, the fire quickly spread. Captain G. Sweet sounded the alarm to lower the lifeboats. A desperate life-and-death struggle followed. In a matter of minutes, the fire was licking at all corners of the ship. The same people who were planning to settle in what is now the Grand Rapids area were suddenly faced with grim options. All told, the lifeboats and rescue efforts saved a mere 46 passengers. The fiery Phoenix engulfed those who clung to the ropes, while the icy November waters claimed the rest. Then, the charred remains of the Phoenix descended to the watery grave at the bottom of Lake Michigan. So ended the voyage of the Phoenix.

Why did God allow that? Why not let the early Church in America be built up with this boatload of Dutch faithful? It is not for us to know. We can rest assured, however, that the Lord does know what is best for us (Romans 8:28). It is His plan that leads to Christ's second coming and our final resurrection. The chilling example of the Phoenix makes it so much more relevant. Each time we consider planning our lives ahead, we must keep in mind that God governs all. It is His will for us that ends up as top priority in our planning.

More importantly, when we make plans like this, we witness! People are always going to notice how you go about your life. Is it life "on your own terms"? Eat, drink, and be merry? I could tell you that just over a month ago, someone said to me, "You know, I might as well just try to be happy, because tomorrow I might not be here." Is this a Christian view that seeks first God's kingdom? No. Christ tells us in the Sermon on the Mount to "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). We are called to witness to the Name of God in our lives. We are called to witness for Christ even in the way we make our plans. Others around will notice how we go about...

...planning a career.

...seeking a Christian dating relationship.

...budgeting our income.

...praying for God's guidance in life.

...asking God to keep us safely throughout the day, if it be His will.

It is an opportunity to witness. It is true of us, but more specifically, and more personally, it is true of you. Witness that Christ dwells in you! You cannot help but show that in your life. Show your heart. Show by the way you make your plans that you are really just repeating, Thy will be done, Father.

That is what Christ Jesus himself teaches us. Make sure you let that "word of Christ dwell in you richly" (Colossians 3:16). "If ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (3:1,2). Seek His will, not your own. Let others see by your actions that you seek His kingdom rather than your own. This is the heart of witnessing!

In a sense, we are all onboard the Phoenix right now, not knowing the future. Therefore, pray. Pray as those Dutch immigrants surely prayed about their plans. We cannot be good witnesses without prayer. "Do all in the name of the Lord, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him... knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ" (Colossians 3:17,24). "Serve the Lord Christ!!!" The Lord willing, witness that Christ dwells in you—in prayerful planning.

Tom Bergman is a member of Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church. He is studying at Grand Valley State University to be a school teacher.

Christmas Morning

by Dominie M. E. Voila

This story appears in the charming Dutch book, Peper en Zout *("Pepper and Salt"), under the pseudonym, Ds. M. E. Voila (French for "so there"). It is a series of anecdotes taken from the experience of a pastor in the Netherlands, most of them humorous, all of them very pointed. The translation is by Rev. John H. Piersma, then pastor of First Christian Reformed Church, Pella, Iowa.*

A shrill, merciless telephone woke me during the night which bridges Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. Drunk with sleep I staggered to the desk in my study, picked up the phone and muttered an indifferent greeting. A woman's voice responded.

"Am I speaking with the pastor?" Yes, yes, and you...?" "This is the home of Mr. Karmon. I'm his private nurse. Would it be possible for you to come right over? Mr. Karmon has made special request for you. I know that it is a very inconvenient time, but I'm to ask you anyway." My thinking became clearer. Karmon, of course, since he was very ill. Earlier in the week I had called on him. "Certainly, nurse, I'll come immediately."

> I stood up and walked to the window and pushing the curtain aside I saw in the earliest gray light of the morning how the naked arms of the trees were lifted imploringly towards heaven...

While dressing, my thoughts were occupied with Mr. Karmon. He was an unusual person. He had been a widower for many years. An elderly, gray-haired housekeeper took care of him and his home. Karmon was very shy and reserved. Earlier in life he had been a successful manufacturer, but just prior to the War he had turned that business over to younger men. The larger part of his house had by order of the government housing authority been surrendered for use by others, but he had built a private entrance to the remainder in which he had now lived for several years almost like a hermit. During the last while he had shown increasing signs of failing health.

A lonesome life, and I now surmised that it would be a lonesome death as well.

Strange, but I knew so little about him. How long had he been a widower? Now that I was thinking about it I realized that I had never heard anyone speak of his wife, and apparently there had been no children.

I knew that he was a man of sound judgment and that he possessed abilities which would entitle him to a place of prominence in life, perhaps also in the life of the church. But there were objections; he never partook of Holy Communion. During the annual home visitation the elders would discuss this with him, but in vain. A particular reason was never volunteered, and although he accepted the admonition with his customary courtesy, his refusal was firm. After a while it was no longer discussed and his name was seldom mentioned.

He and I had also discussed this matter privately, but with the same result. For that matter, whenever conversation turned in the direction of his personal, inner life he would come with great difficulty, and he would stare vacantly out of the window at things far removed from his room.

For the rest Karmon was an exemplary person, a faithful churchgoer, honest and generous. Dur-

ing the last weeks I had visited him occasionally, but they weren't easy visits. His quiet, almost secretive manner was more pronounced than usual.

It was a few degrees below freezing and the tires of my bicycle crunched softly on the asphalt pavement of the canal-lined street as I rode through the silent star-lit night passing house after house with windows staring from corpse-like eyes over the water. With a strange weird effect the bells of the clock in the carillon of the old tower suddenly exploded downward, their peals ricochetting recklessly against gable and tree. I counted the number: the night was almost past, the night of Christmas. In a few hours I would be standing in my pulpit and the congregation would be singing with joy because of the birth of the Christ-child. But in the house to which I was going there was another gathering—the gathering of the shadows of death.

My thoughts returned to Karmon and in my memory arose the case of the orphanage. We needed money and I visited Karmon to solicit a donation from him. He would have to have some time to think it over, he said, but the very next day he called to say that he would pledge a gift of a thousand guilders. There was one express stipulation, however, and that was that his name should not be mentioned The money had been a real lifesaver for the orphanage. And no one but myself had ever so much as guessed the identity of the donor.

Everything about him was, no, mysterious was not the right word, but nevertheless very unusual: his behavior, his seclusion, his church life. And even his outward appearance, which was marked by heavy black eyebrows and a head of thick gray hair.

And now he had to die. It amazed me that he had asked for me. Was he afraid of death? I didn't know why, but I couldn't easily believe that. Karmon looked to me like one cut out of different wood, although...but shortly I would know.

There stood the high silhouette of his house. A weak beam of light shone between the curtains of an upper window. As softly as possible I range the doorbell. I heard the muffled creaking of footsteps on the staircase. The nurse opened the door very quietly.

"How is he?" I asked. 'Quite well for the moment. The doctor says that he could linger for several days, but that it might also be all over within a few hours. You know, of course, that he is suffering from a terminal malignancy?"

I nodded as we climbed the staircase. In front of the door leading to the sickroom stood a Mrs. de Laat, Mr. Karmon's sister-in-law and from conversation with her I understood that she had already been staying in the Karmon home for a few days in order to assist with the housekeeping and the nursing.

Whisperingly she told me that it had taken some doing to get Karmon to approve of her taking her little daughter with her, even though she could not get away from home without her. She shrugged her shoulders and I couldn't resist the impression that she bore little affection for her sick relative to whose side she had come solely out of a sense of duty. "He has always had a dislike for children, you know," she offered.

I thought for a moment about the orphanage, but I simply nodded and followed the nurse into the large room, where, back of a screen, stood a bed. It was immediately noticeable that Karmon had failed rapidly, even in the few days since I had last visited him. In the soft light of the lamp above his bed it looked as if the lines in his face had been carved with a knife and when he had turned his head upon the pillow his eyes made the slow rotating movement which one sees oftener in those who no longer have a will to resist death's encroachment. His arms lay straight and motionless upon the sheets, the hands powerless. Nevertheless he was an impressive figure, and again I was struck with the contrast between the thickly-planted gray hair and the black eyebrows.

A "Book Challenge

Can you find sixteen books of the Bible?

I once made a remark about the hidden books of the Bible. It was a Lulu. Kept people looking so hard for facts, and for others, it was a revelation. Some were in a jam, especially since the names of the books were not capitalized.

But the truth finally struck home to numbers of readers. To others, it was a real job. We wanted it to be a most fascinating few moments for you. Yes, there will be some really easy ones for you to spot. Others may require judges to help them. I will quickly admit, it usually takes a minister to find one of them, and there will be lamentations when it is found. A little lady says she brews a cup of tea, so she can concentrate better. See how well you can compete.

Relax, now, for there really are sixteeen names of books in the Bible in this story. (A minister found 15 books in 20 minutes, but it took him 3 weeks to find the 16th one!!!).

With a weak but audible voice he asked his nurse to excuse us since he wished to speak with me alone. After the door closed with a soft sigh behind her he waited for a few seconds. Then he raised his eyes and looked at me as one who had reached a very hard decision. I began the conversation:

"You asked if I would come; can I help you?" With the same rather thin but yet plain voice he answered, "Yes, and it is indeed very difficult for you, so late at night, and with such a very busy day tomorrow." I assured him that this was unimportant now that I knew that it was his desire to see me.

"I would not have called for you," he continued, "if I did not have to reckon with the possibility that it might soon be too late. I will not make it much longer, dominie, and before that moment I want to tell you something. First of all, about the orphanage: I have specified a certain amount in my will, but you know, upon the condition that there is as little publicity as possible."

I tried to thank him, but it is very difficult under such circumstances to find the right word. It's just as if one is personally signing the death-sentence of the dying. But with a slight movement of his hands he checked further talk on my part and said:

"There is something else. You have not known me fully well, not on the inside. I know that you were dissatisfied with me: the Lord's Supper and perhaps other things, and I am appreciative of the fact that you did not harshly condemn me. Because there was a reason..." He paused, during which I gave him no encouragement to continue, something which he apparently did not expect either.

And then he told his history. There was not much rising or falling in his voice and yet the telling of his story from the very beginning brought with it so much tension that I could not help but listen very intently, strangely fascinated.

"I am," he began, "I am now sixty-three years old, actually still young for dying, and yet it is already so long ago. I was married and my wife passed away when our little girl was three years of age. dominie," he looked at me, 'you are married and no doubt you love your wife very much. I did, too, and when she died and they carried her away to be buried it was as if they buried my own heart. I was shattered and numb. I lived in emptiness and it was cold, day after day it was cold. Now you must know this too: in my younger years I was very ill-tempered. I was completely careless; when I was about eighteen years old I no longer went to church. My father was already dead and my mother could not control me. I went to the university for a year, but let's forget about that. I was hot-headed and rude and sometimes dangerous. Until I met my wife..."

He stopped speaking. So involved was I in his story that I knew exactly where his thoughts were. An expression moved across his face which made him look much younger.

He went on: "It is even now a mystery to me that she could possibly get to love me, but she did, and she made of me a different—I don't dare to say a better—but I do say a different man. She was of a gentle character and completely trusting. She trusted me too. She taught me to go back to the church and to believe in the Gospel that I had wanted to forget. I prayed and I gave thanks to God and still do it, even though it is...but that comes later."

It was a heavy silence in that spacious sickroom...as if the shadows behind had joined to listen to the telling of these things out of the dark past. I asked if he would like something to drink. He nodded and when I put a glass of fruit juice to his lips he very carefully swallowed a mouthful and licked his lips—it was evident that all this was costing him a great deal if effort.

His voice was somewhat hoarse after drinking, but he went on:

"We had a child, a daughter. Her name was Marijke after my wife, and she resembled her a great deal. I have already told you that my wife died when Marijke was three. I was inconsolably desperate for she was the only one that I ever really loved, and love, dominie, is a fearful thing. My old nature came back to the surface. I stood in my room all by myself and cursed God out loud, calling him a brute and a murderer. And then that other thing happened...."

Again he waited. I could sense that this man was battling furiously within himself in order to get across the threshold of silence, that he might reveal the secret that he had so anxiously guarded...and hated. He swallowed a few times and stared straight ahead into the darkness.

"Our child was dear and happy, always happy, and it was just that which I could no longer endure. That was a sickness, but it was also an evil. I can hardly believe it now, and yet I"—his voice dropped to a whisper—"and yet I struck her just because she laughed." Brokenly he continued; "I struck her with the back of my hank flush in her face. I was wearing a ring with a small diamond mounting and her cheek bled. I saw that, but I did

not take her into my arms and I did not kiss her and I did not say that I was sorry. I simply walked away. She developed blood poisoning and was dead after two days. No one ever suspected it, you are the first one that I have told. I stood at her bedside and she smiled at me once more."—His voice broke and died away; I saw his lips moving soundlessly:

"Marijke, Marijke..."

We were both silent. I was it all before me: that little girl with her quick smile and happy eyes and that huge masculine hand which had struck so ruthlessly. Oh yes, it was an awful thing to do; and yet, it was not done intentionally and could one continue to lay this to the account of a man who had mourned so bitterly because of the death of his beloved wife? I wanted to say this to him but I couldn't. What good would it do if I would present the arguments which he himself knew so well? He was not asking for a lawyer, he had long ago pronounced himself guilty. I looked down upon him as he lay there, his eyes closed and deeply sunken under a pale forehead. The tension of the silence became unbearable. Something had to be said.

"Karmon,'—neither could I speak with full voice—"Karmon, you have surely prayed to God for forgiveness?"

There was no answer. He lay very quiet and with a sudden shock the thought rose within me that he might have already died, until I saw the almost imperceptible rise and fall of his breathing. More urgently I repeated my question: "Karmon, Karmon..."

It was then that he opened his eyes, eyes so full of terror that to look at them was more than shocking. It was as if I were looking with his eyes through two windows into a desolation so deep that no comfort could possibly find place. I couldn't think of anything to say but,

"You know, of course, that there is grace with God? Even the"—I stumbled over that hard word—"even the murderer with Jesus at the Cross received forgiveness."

Fixedly he kept his eyes on me,

"Yes," he murmured, "murderer, that is the right word. But did this murderer of Golgotha murder his own child? A dear innocent child?" It seemed as if he wanted to torture himself with these last words, and he repeated them, "an innocent child? The murderer, dominie, he was saved, but not Herod who killed the children of Bethlehem."

Relentlessly he kept his gaze fixed upon me. A strange pressure paralyzed my tongue.

"You think that I am afraid of death?" His mouth twisted as if in sharp pain and his words sounded rough, "Dominie, I don't dare to meet my wife and child up there!"

It seemed as if everything stiffened all about us. Now I understood. Now I understood the despair of this man and also that behind this despair lay the eager longing of a human heart for final peace.

I stood up and walked to the window and pushing the curtain aside I saw in the earliest gray light of the morning how the naked arms of the trees were lifted imploringly towards heaven and in my imagination I thought I heard the whispering of the dying man: "Marijke, Marijke...."

I turned myself about, returned to the bed, back to the beseeching eyes which though voiceless pressed me for an answer. Then I told him of Jesus Christ, God's Son, Who came to seek and to save that which was lost. He knew that, of course, for he heard and read it many, many times. And yet I had no other message for him than the simple Gospel.

I spoke of a love of God which is so great that it made a light to rise in Christ which drives away all shadows of guilt and remorse, yes, which drives away even the shadows which doubt the reality of His endless mercy.

What else could I say to him? To him who lies broken on the battlefield and burning with thirst one gives a sip of pure water and nothing more.

Then I prayed with him, and when I had finished he looked up at me. It was as if an angel had touched his eyes and cleaned them of all anxiety, of all fear.

"The curtains," he whispered.

I pushed them aside. Morning light stood before the windows. Karmon looked at the dawn and drank of the rising sun.

Then a clatter could be heard somewhere in the house and the sound of the opening of a door. A clear young voice cried in the hall: "Is it Christmas now, Mother?"

A woman's voice answered with something which I could not understand. The child, however, was not to be denied:

"Yes, Mother, but even if Uncle can't get better, it is still Christmas, isn't it?"

I softly left the sickroom, returned home, and then went on to church to bring the glad tidings of Him Who had made it possible for one to find Christmas even near and on the deathbed.

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Watching Daily At My Gates

by Skip Hunter

December 1

Numbers 14:40-45 The people of Israel stood at the door of Canaan. Because of a lack of faith they refused to enter. When informed that because of their sins they would perish in the wilderness, they wept and decided to go against God's Word and tried to enter Canaan on their own. We read that God sent enemies unto them who smote them. Do we abide by the words of verse 41? Do we realize that failure to obey the commandments of Jehovah can only bring ruin to our lives. If we obey, God is pleased to prosper us both spiritually and temporally. That is the testimony of Scripture. Sing or read Psalter 111.

December 2

Numbers 16:1-11 Do we obey those in the Church whom God has put in authority over us? Do we obey them in all of our thoughts, words, and deeds? Korah, Dathan, and Abiram were not satisfied with the leaders God had given them. In their pride they tried to usurp positions in the Church that were not theirs. We read that God punished them and their followers. The earth opened and swallowed some of them. God's fire destroyed others. Let us reverence the leaders God has sent us and remember that they are chosen by Him. Sing or read Psalter 214, especially stanzas 1, 5, and 7.

December 3

Numbers 16:41-50 Over and over God showed His power to the children of Israel. Over and over they disobeyed and were punished for their disobedience. Here we see that again. They had just been witnesses to the earth swallowing up Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, but yet they murmured against Moses and Aaron. What about us? Are we any different? In both the Old and New Testaments we have God's clear warning against all manners of sin. Do we always obey? Or are we found walking in ways clearly against the law of God. We must pray through the atonement wrought for us on the cross for forgiveness of these sins. Sing or read Psalter 83.

December 4

Numbers 20:7-13 Once again God tried the Israelites. He brought them to a place where apparently there was no water. When Moses disobeyed the command to speak to the rock but rather struck the rock in anger, God pronounced that Moses would not enter into the promised land. Moses, of whom God had said that there never was a man like him, would die before he could enter into Canaan. We see two points of emphasis here. First of all we see that all of God's people must obey God's law perfectly. There are no exceptions. Secondly we see that even Moses was only a type of Christ. The fulfillment had to come yet. For us the fulfillment has come. Do we show our thankfulness by our obedience to God? Sing or read Psalter 207.

December 5

Numbers 22:1-8 Israel got closer and closer to the promised land. It seemed the closer they got the harder the devil worked to keep them out. In this chapter and two after it we have the account of how Balak king of Moab hired the false prophet Balaam to curse Israel. We, too, are coming closer to the promised land that we seek. Satan will work harder and harder to keep us from crossing the Jordan and entering into heaven. He will send "Balaams" to persuade us to turn from the Word of Jehovah. Stand fast people of God and look to the day when we shall enter the land that truly flows with milk and honey. Sing or read Psalter 33.

December 6

Numbers 24:15-19 Even though Satan and Balak sought to have Israel cursed, it was God's purpose that Balaam would speak the wonderful prophecy in the reading for today. Balaam was commanded by God to speak about Christ to these heathen people. Balaam had to speak about Him who would crush the head of Satan. Satan did not want to hear this prophecy then, nor when Christ came to this earth, and neither does he want to be reminded of it now. What about us? In this time of the year as we begin to think about Christmas, are we thinking about the Christ Who will smite all of the wicked? Sing or read Psalter 4.

December 7

Numbers 31:1-16 Before Balaam left Balak, he gave him some evil advice concerning the children of Israel. He told the king of Moabthe way to get their God angry at them was to cause them to break God's law by marrying heathen men and women and following in the abominations of the heathen. Balak followed the advice, and God sent a plague to destroy those of His people who married the wicked and worshipped their gods. This Word of God is applicable to us today. If we marry among the world and follow the world's gods, we will be afflicted by God in this life. Marriage is a beautiful ordinance of God and can only be properly carried out by two believers. Sing or read Psalter 360.

December 8

Deuteronomy 4:5-10 Before Moses was taken from the people of Israel, he delivered to them a farewell speech. In that speech he retold the story of their deliverance from Egypt and their journey through the wilderness. He reminded them of the punishments sent by God upon them when they fell into sin. He also reminded them of the promise that would be the reward of those who remained faithful unto the end. These words are for us also. We, too, must hear the Word of the Lord and teach that Word and that Word only to our children. This is so because we are the people chosen by the eternal and faithful God. Sing or read Psalter 166 especially stanzas 1, 3, and 4.

December 9

Deuteronomy 26:1-11 Do we take the first of all that we have and bring it before the Lord? Do we contribute to the Kingdom causes faithfully so that it is evident that we are thankful for our salvation? We like Israel were destined to a life in hell except that our Lord God saved us with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. As we bring our gifts on Sunday let us do it with cheerfulness not grudgingly, for we know that "God loves a cheerful giver." Sing or read Psalter 78.

December 10

Deuteronomy 31:1-6 As Moses comes to the end of his farewell remarks to the nation of Israel he tells them that he will not lead them over the Jordan into Canaan. But then he gives them the good news. He tells them that the Lord will lead them, and He will give to them Joshua to lead them in conquering the land. We have our Joshua as well. Joshua is the Hebrew equivalent of Jesus. The names mean Jehovah Salvation. Jesus is our hope and confidence. He will lead us safely through this vale of tears into the joyous world which is heaven. Let us "be strong and of a good courage," and "fear not," for God will not fail us or forsake us. Sing or read Psalter 81.

December 11

Deuteronomy 21:18-23 What kind of Christ are you celebrating this Christmas? Are you just celebrating the birth of the baby found in a manger because there was no room in the inn? If you are, you are sadly in error! Our Christ was condemned to die. He was condemned to die the death that signified that He was accursed of God. Why? Not for His own sin because He knew not sin. He died for us rebellious sons and daughters of the most high God. This is the Christ we must celebrate in this season of the year. Sing or read Psalter 47 especially stanzas 1, 8, and 9.

December 12

Psalm 2 Our Christ reigns upon His throne in the heavens! What a glorious thought that is! What a comforting thought that is, as well. It is glorious because He had all the glory that belongs to the Father, and He sheds that glory unto His Church. It is comforting because nothing in this life will harm us. We have a Christ Who laughs at the wicked's efforts because they will never prevail over His powerful council. Celebrate the Christ Who laughs at those who, even in this season of the year, try to make His work ineffective. Put you trust in Him who will bless us with all the happiness ever needed. Sing or read Psalter 4.

December 13

Psalm 45:1-7 Do you love righteousness? Do you walk in ways that show that you love righteousness? Our Christ loved righteousness. He walked in ways that showed that He loved it all the time. We read that He was anointed with the oil of gladness above all those around Him. The world tries to make this season of the year a season of joy and gladness. But we can see that it is impossible because of their inherent sin and wickedness. What about us? Do we try to do the same thing? There can be no joy where sin rules the roost. Let us enjoy this Christmas by putting off the old man and living the life characterized by true righteousness. Sing or read Psalter 124 especially stanzas 1, 4, and 7.

December 14

Psalm 72:1-12 In this Psalm we have a prayer that David prayed for his son Solomon. Not only do we see that Solomon's kingship was glorious, we also see that he typified our Savior. The beginning verses of this Psalm speak to us about the extent of Christ's kingdom. We see that He is a merciful King especially to those of His subjects that are poor and oppressed. We must realize that as we sing "Glory to the newborn king," we must sing of a King Who will embody these attributes. The fulfillment of such a kingdom will not be on this earth but in heaven. Sing or read Psalter 302.

December 15

Psalm 72:13-20 Do we believe that God is the only One Who doeth wondrous things? Is that our constant confession in this life? That is the truth found in verse 19. That should help us see the true meaning of Christmas. We must confess that God doeth great wonders; we must also confess that the birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ is the greatest wonder of them all. The wonder does not stop in the manger; it is not stopped by the grave; it is the accomplishment of our salvation by all of the work of Christ. Let us make that our confession and hope during this Christmas season. Sing or read Psalter 362.

December 16

Isaiah 28:16-22 Where do you find Christmas? As you hear carols being played in the malls and stores, is Christmas there? As you see signs and billboards proclaiming that this is the Christmas season, do you find Christmas there? Even as your homes and schools, though they be Christian in nature and purpose, evidence that this is the season of our Savior's birth; do you find Christmas there? Verse seven tells us that we must find Christmas in the Church. Zion is always symbolic of the Church of God. You cannot celebrate Christmas without hearing the preaching that Christ is the cornerstone. You can omit all the materialism of the world's Christmas and still not find Christmas if you do not embrace the preaching about Christ with your whole heart. Sing or read Psalter 320.

December 17

Isaiah 32:1-8 We stand in an evil day. Even as we celebrate Christmas, we are oppressed by the evil around us. Now, that is how it should be. If we truly walk an antithetical walk pleasing to God and Christ, we should be hated by the world around us. These are hard words and very hard to put into practice. But yet we have the comfort of the verses we read. God through His Son will strengthen our weaknesses and deliver us from our oppressors. Thanks be to God for such a gift. Sing or read Psalter 281.

December 18

Isaiah 42:1-7 Do you believe in the creation as recorded in Genesis 1? That may seem a strange question to ask during our celebration of Christmas. But yet it is an important question and a necessary one. The same God that sent His Son to this world to die for sinners created the heavens and earth by the Word, which is Christ. To believe the one truth and not the other is impossible. Either you believe in a God Who created the world as set forth in Genesis and saved His people or you believe in nothing. Salvation is the re-creation of souls lost by the fall. To believe in salvation you must believe in creation. Sing or read Psalter 285.

December 19

Isaiah 49:5-12 How many of you are Christians of Jewish descent? Not many I dare say. That truth is found in our reading for today. God had ordained that Christ is to be a light to the Gentiles. What a comfort for us who mainly are those Gentiles! That truth should be ours this Christmas. That truth also should be the basis for our "going into all the world and preaching the gospel." We have been given a great gift; let us show our gratitude during this season of the year by proclaiming the gospel to all nations in whatever way God has made it possible for us. Sing or read Psalter 50.

December 20

Isaiah 62 Are you ready for Christmas? Are you ready for your new name? We spend much time preparing ourselves to celebrate Christmas. What is the balance between our earthly preparations and our spiritual ones? Our celebration of this glorious day can only be rewarding when it is done in accordance to the ordination of God. We find this in verses 10 and 11 of today's reading. Are we ready for our salvation as we will experience at the end of time? Christ came to this world for the beginning of our salvation. He will come again and "receive us unto Himself." Are we ready? Sing or read Psalter 420 especially stanzas 1 and 2.

December 21

Matthew 1:18-25 Joseph had to be instructed concerning the virgin birth of Christ. He was a simple carpenter waiting to be married to his espoused Mary. He was also a proper man not wishing to cause extreme embarrassment to Mary when she was "found with child." After receiving a message by an angel he believed and did as the angel told him. Is this our faith? Do we believe in the Christ of the virgin birth? Young people, do you believe in Jesus or do you make a mockery of His Name with your actions and speech? Celebrating Christmas must be with the heart and with our actions. Sing or read Psalter 43 especially stanzas 1-4.

December 22

Luke 1:39-45 Young women, do you have the faith found in Mary by her cousin Elisabeth? We read in verse 45 that she believed, and through her belief she would see all that Gabriel had told her. We, too, must have that same faith. We must believe that Christ has come to this world, has died for us, and has ordained for each of us a station and calling in this life. In I Timothy 2:15 we read of a woman's salvation being in childbearing which includes child rearing. Now of course this verse does not speak of a salvation by works, but rather it outlines the way of gratitude for salvation for young women. Like Mary all young women must be grateful for their salvation and work toward the day that God makes them mothers in Israel. Sing or read Psalter 360.

December 23

Luke 1:46-55 Mary rejoiced at Elisabeth's salutation and responded with the song of Mary often called "The Magnificat." In these words we see the Christmas story laid out for us in a very simple way. She first confesses the greatness of her God, and then she praises the mercy that He has shown to His people. She also speaks of the everlasting covenant established with Abraham for all of His people. Let these words be ours during this season of the year. We need God's mercy no less than Israel of old. Let us take the song of Mary both on our lips and in our hearts. Sing or read Psalter 94 especially stanzas 1-5.

December 24

Luke 1:67-79 With the naming of John, Zacharias' lips were loosed and he praised God according to verse 64 of this chapter. A few verses later we have the words of praise which he spoke in his song. He realizes that his son, however precious to him in his old age, is only a forerunner for the Christ Who would come later. He suppresses his personal happiness and praises God for the salvation of His people. Can we do that today and tomorrow? As we rejoice in Christmas, can we rejoice in Christ the dayspring from on high? Sing or read Psalter 58.

December 25

Luke 2:1-20 Today is Sunday! What a glorious thought this is! Are you happy about it? Do you realize we celebrate Sunday because of the resurrection of Christ from the dead? I realize that it is also Christmas. In order for us to give Christmas its full meaning; we must always look ahead to Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. Christ's work was only begun with His incarnation. Christmas was only a small beginning. As we celebrate this day, let us be glad that we can use this day of rest to celebrate the birth of the Lord. Let us also remember that on this day as well we must "Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy." Sing or read Psalter 45 especially stanzas 1-3.

December 26

Revelation 21:1-8 In a few days we will commemorate the end of another year. We will also be that much closer to the return of our Lord on the clouds of heaven. John in the last two chapters of Scripture shows to us the glory that will be ours at God's appointed time. We will not inhabit this earth or live lives like those on this earth. Does that disappoint you, people of God? Are we so wrapped up in this life that we forget about the life to come? If we are, we better reread verse 4. Even the best things of this life are but sorrow, vanity, and vexation of spirit. Eagerly await the new Jerusalem with its fountain of living water. Sing or read Psalter 53.

December 27

Revelation 21:9-17 John was given a foresight into the new Jerusalem. He tries to give to us a sense of its beauty. This new Jerusalem is the complete Church triumphant as we see first of all in verse 9 where it is called the bride of the Lamb. We see that it is complete in verses 16-17 where it is speaks of the city which lies in the shape of a cube where all three dimensions are equal. Here we will join with all those who have gone before us and sing the songs of Zion in a way that we never could before. Sing or read Psalter 33.

December 28

Revelation 21:18-27 In this part of the description of the new Jerusalem, John tells us that the light of it will be the Lamb of God. In this life we have need of the sun to give to us physical life. In the life to come this will no longer be necessary. The sun is a picture of the Sun of God Who will light the new heavens and the new earth with His glory. There will be no night there as our rest has been accomplished by the Lamb of God. We also will no longer be tormented by the wicked as the only ones there will be the saints whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. What a comforting place heaven will be! Sing or read Psalter 318 especially stanzas 1, 2, and 4.

December 29

Revelation 22:1-7 "Behold, I come quickly" is the testimony of Christ. Are we watching? Are we waiting? Are we ready? Are we keeping the sayings of this book? We have many responsibilities as children of God in this area. Everyone from the youngest to the eldest saint on the earth must be watching and waiting. This is not a time of inaction, but rather a time in which we study the Word of God faithfully and diligently. Children, you must learn the Bible stories and learn them well. Young people, you must dig deeper into the truths of Scripture and find out what they are saying to you. Adults, you must continue to grow day by day in the Word of our God. Anything less will cause us not to be ready when He comes quickly. Sing or read Psalter 333.

December 30

Revelation 22:8-15 Are we living the testimony of verse 12? Do we daily realize that our reward will be according to our works? Are we constantly reminded that we must give account for all that we do? If we do, we must realize that our works must glorify God as much as is possible in this sinful life. We must realize that we cannot do things for our benefit alone. This is the Word of the Alpha and Omega. This is the Word of Him out of Whose mouth goes a sharp two-edged sword. Let us watch our ways and bring forth fruits of repentance as we walk a walk of sanctification. Sing or read Psalter 162.

December 31

Revelation 22:16-21 The last day of another year is upon us. We have been examining the truths found in the last two chapters of the Bible. In these chapters we are given a glimpse of the glory that will be ours and exhorted to watch for the day of His coming. It is good that we do this at the end of the year because the end of the year in a small way can signify the end of the world. We need to remember in all of our pondering that Christ's grace must be with us. We also have the comfort that it will be. We have no reason to doubt any uncertainties of 1995; we have the grace of Christ to keep us from all harm. Let that be our comfort as we look back over 1994 and look ahead to 1995 and the day of Christ's coming. Sing or read Psalter 200.

School Life in Northern Ireland

by Jessica Hanko

School life begins at the age of four or five when one would enter a primary school. The first seven years of education are done in grades P1 to P7 (preparatory one to preparatory seven). At the age of ten or eleven, one would take his eleven plus (11+) test. This is an aptitude test to determine whether one will attend a high school or a grammar school for his secondary education. Those with the highest level of achievement will go to a grammar school while the rest will go to a high school. Although the same scholastic materials are used in both types of school, the academic standard is much higher in a grammar school. A high school prepares a person to go into various trades while a grammar school prepares a person to go on to college.

The beginning of secondary education (forms 1-3) lays down the foundation for the work that follows. After the third year of secondary school, one would start his G.C.S.E.'s (General Certificate of Secondary Education)—a two-year course consisting of seven to ten subjects of your choice. The only requirements are mathematics, English, and one foreign language. A variety of courses are offered including most languages, computer courses, English (along with literature, drama, or media), lower or higher level math, science (which is divided into biology, chemistry, and physics), physical education, music, art, technology, religious education, home economics, economics, history, and geography.

After completing one's G.C.S.E.'s, the choice of how to further one's education is up to the individual. The next stage is A-levels (advanced levels)—a two year course specializing in two to four subjects. An even wider range of subjects is then available.

The school day is about the same length of that in America. The school year spans ten months, from the beginning of September until the end of June. The school year is divided into two terms, two before Christmas and two after. There is a two or three day midterm break and a week at the end of each term. Two weeks are taken off at Christmas and Easter. Day holidays and exceptional closures are also taken.

All schools require a uniform of certain colors. A typical girl's uniform consists of a collared, button-up shirt, a tie, a jumper, a knee length skirt, bunched knee-high socks, and a certain style of shoes. A boy would wear the same style of shirt and tie, a blazer, pants, shoes, and socks.

Public transport is used by a majority of students. The schools issue free bus passes to the students outside a two mile radius. Every morning, those of us who get the bus have to walk a mile. The same trip has to be made each evening.

Most schools provide a number of sports activities including football (soccer), hockey, cricket, tennis, table-tennis, athletics, badminton, and netball—a girlish way of playing basketball. Everyone is required to participate in P.E. (physical education) and games (outdoor sports). Extracurricular activities include choir, orchestra, public-speaking, quiz teams, chess teams, debating, and Christian Union.

On the whole, school life in Northern Ireland is not much different from that of America. More studying is required of the students here, the reason being that N. Ireland has a higher standard of education. Also, more emphasis is placed on math, languages, and science. After a year, we have gotten used to the changes and we all have settled down well in our new environment.

Jessica Hanko is the daughter of Rev. Ronald Hanko, a missionary in Northern Ireland for the Prot. Ref. Churches.

Lessons from a Grandmother

by Rev. James Slopsema

While in Seminary I made regular trips to my grandmother's house to learn Dutch. Together we would sit on the sofa. I would read out loud from a Dutch Bible and translate. She would help me through the rough spots. This is a good way to learn a language. Too bad I didn't go there more often.

During one of these visits my grandmother quoted from the Heidelberg Catechism. This prompted a few questions on my part. I discovered that as a teenager she was required to memorize the Heidelberg Catechism for one of her catechism classes. And now some 60 years later she still knew the Heidelberg Catechism word for word. To test her memory I found a copy of the Catechism and asked her to recite Q&A 55. She did. What about Q&A 26? She recited that too. Without any help or prompting. She didn't even ask what the first word was.

Amazing!

But is it so amazing? My grandmother was not a woman of superior mental abilities. She was an aged saint with the normal abilities of someone in their middle 70's. The fact that she knew the Heidelberg Catechism so well after so many years was not a testimony to any superior abilities but to the fact that she had memorized it so thoroughly as a girl. What is thoroughly memorized as a young person is never forgotten, especially if it is used again and again in adulthood.

It was a good thing that my grandmother knew the Heidelberg Catechism so well in her old age. A few years after this my grandmother had a debilitating stroke. She lost the ability to read and communicate. She was confined to a nursing home, unable to attend church. By this time my family and I lived out west and were able to visit her only once a year. Although she couldn't say our names or communicate, her face would light up in recognition when we came into the room. Obviously her memory had not been destroyed. What a source of comfort and encouragement the Heidelberg Catechism, which she had committed to memory, must have been to her during those final years. It's a good thing to memorize sections of the Scriptures and the Catechism in our youth.

Now let's test ourselves.

How many of us can still recite what we memorized last year in catechism? How many can recite what they memorized last week? How many of us can recite at the end of the class what we recited at the beginning of class? (I always wonder about this, when I see some nervously pouring over their catechism books just before class.) And how many of us fail miserably in our recitation for catechism because we simply haven't taken the time to memorize the material?

From what I have seen over the years as a pastor I think very few catechism students today are as diligent as my grandmother and, I believe, many others in her day were in memorizing their catechism lessons.

Let's not be content to do as little as possible for catechism! Let's prepare for each catechism class by mastering the material we are supposed to learn.

This doesn't require hours and hours of our time each week. It requires that we study our material a little every day, instead of waiting until the last day or minute. It has been proven scientifically that what is memorized in short periods over several days is memorized in less time and is retained longer than what is memorized in one sitting.

How important is all this?

First, youth is the time God has given us to memorize and learn. Learning and memorization become more difficult as we grow older. Those who squander this opportunity of youth never have another opportunity like it.

Second, what we learn from the Scriptures in our youth stays with us to guide us into God's ways for the rest of our life. This is the thrust of Proverbs 22:6, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." The training a child receives guides him the rest of his life. So too does the catechism he learns.

Finally, some of us may reach a point in life when the only source of comfort and encouragement we have is what we have committed to memory in our youth. This can happen in time of persecution. It can also happen in old age.

Rev. Slopsema is the minister of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan.

Letter to the editor:

Having often proclaimed the gospel concept of faith, as well as issuing the call to faith many times in the preaching, I was taken aback—to say the least; when I read the article "What Must You Do to Be Saved?" (September issue). In his concluding two paragraphs the author, Nathan Brummel, has led us right into the murky waters of Arminianism, a place where we most certainly do not want to be. He has done so by presenting the salvation of the Philippian jailer as dependent upon his own work.

I quote: *"And here is the answer to the question that we have been investigating. The answer to the question 'What must you do to be saved?' is 'You must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.'* Brother Brummel then points to the necessity of Christ's satisfaction, saying, *"And this is what the Lord Jesus did. When He suffered on the cross on the hill of Golgotha He took upon Himself the sins of the world, and suffered at the hand of God so that all those who believe on Him might be restored into a loving relationship with God."*

I would like to ask Nathan: How do you define the "world?" That is an important question, because Arminius would certainly have agreed with the words which you wrote. The followers of Arminius teach that Jesus died for the world (defined as all men, head for head), so that all those who believe on Him might be restored into a loving relationship with God. Salvation, therefore, is left to every man. Christ died for him, but *he must believe* in order to make effective that death of Christ. This is contrary to what Scripture teaches concerning the effective and definite atonement of Christ, which accomplished its purpose in the salvation of all those for whom Christ died.

The concluding sentence of the article, *"If you hear His words and keep His commandments then you will be saved,"* is again a statement which could be accepted by any follower of Jacob Harmsen, alias, Jacobus Arminius. It is exactly against this erroneous conception of man's activity *preceding* his salvation that our spiritual fathers at Dordt set forth the truth of Scriptures embodied in our *Canons of Dordt.*

I ask the brother to think through his proposition. If the natural man is *dead* in trespasses and sins, as the Apostle Paul (Ephesians 2:1) and all Scripture teaches us, then immediately the idea of "If you...then you will be saved," falls by the wayside as an impossibility. A dead man has not the ears to hear spiritual things (I Cor. 2:14), nor is he able to walk in the way of God's commandments. Obviously then, salvation is impossible, if man must first do something, in order then to be saved. I say, we do not want such a conception of things—not only because it contradicts biblical teachings, but also because it leaves us without a gospel to be preached for the salvation of sinners. I, for one, long for the salvation of such men and women as the Philippian jailer. I trust that brother Brummel does as well. Let us, therefore, hold on to the one gospel of salvation, the truth of which is found embodied in our Reformed Confessions. Then we have something to preach.

I trust that Nathan, upon reflection, will be able to see the errors in his exposition. I would suggest that he rethink his interpretation of Acts 16:30, 31. Perhaps a study of our Heidelberg Catechism, Q & A 20 and Canons of Dordt III/IV, Article 14, would be one place to start. I would also be happy to try to help him see the meaning of the text, if need be. But a letter to the editor is not the place for Bible exposition.

Pastor Steven R. Key
Randolph Prot. Ref. Church
Randolph, Wisconsin

Response:

The article referred to was in the October 1994 special evangelistic and outreach issue of the *Beacon Lights.* I discussed a basic question that unbelievers will need answered which is "What must I do to be Saved?" To answer the question I referred to the Philippian jailor and the question that he addressed to the Apostle Paul.

Pastor Key pointed out that I wrote that Jesus "took upon Himself the sins of the world." He wonders what I mean by this. I mean the same thing as John the Baptist when he says, seeing Jesus come to him: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world," John 1:29. I take John to mean that Christ will take away the sins of the whole world of the elect.

The second issue which Pastor Key discusses is my statement "If you hear His words and keep His commandments then you will be saved." He writes that "If the natural man is dead in trespasses and sins, as the Apostle Paul (Ephesians 2:1) and all Scripture teaches us, then immediately the idea of 'If you...then you will be saved,' falls by the wayside as an impossibility." He writes that "Obviously then, salvation is impossible, if man must first do something, in order to be saved."

Pastor Key writes that my statement is Arminian. I disagree. I think that it is Biblical and

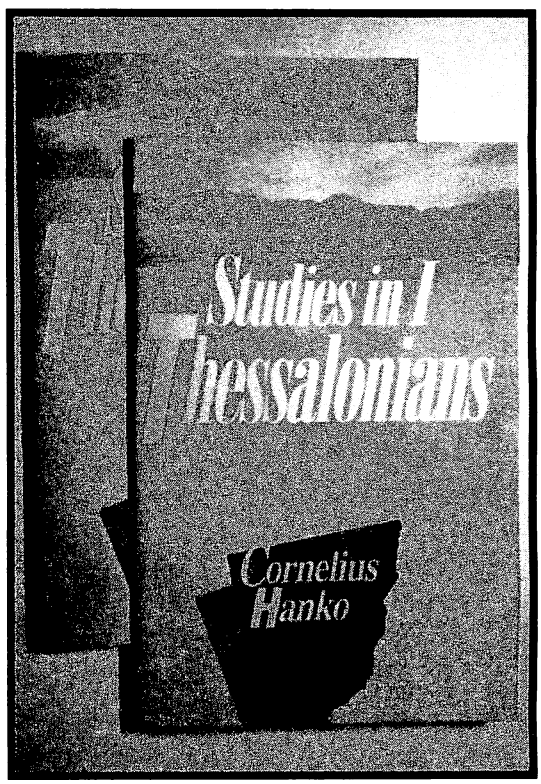
Calvinistic. First the Lord Jesus Christ makes "if...then" statements like this. For example, in John 8:51 "Verily, verily, I say unto you, if a man keep my saying, he shall never see death." Here we have an "if...then" statement. Jesus is saying if any man keeps my words, then he will not see death, i.e. will not go to hell, but rather to heaven. Pastor Key's objection would be the same here. He would have to respond that Jesus is teaching that there is a work that the totally depraved person must do first in order to be saved, and that would be, to keep Jesus' commandments.

But the answer is that "if...then" statements like this are Scriptural. But Pastor Key is correct in his analysis that any sort of "if...then" statement that involves a presupposition that the work is dependent on man is wrong. But just because some Arminians have this wrong presupposition in their thought when they use "if...then" statements, this should not and need not bind Calvinists in their positive presentation of the gospel in Biblical "if...then" clauses.

The Apostle Paul writes in Romans 10:9: "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." Therefore it is wrong to think that "if...then" statements are intrinsically Arminian as Pastor Key seems to claim. For if this were the case then we would interpret the Biblical writers in this way when they use "if...then" statements. Rather, Biblical "if...then" statements are intrinsically Calvinistic because the Bible used them and the Bible is teaching Calvinism. Therefore, in bringing the message of the gospel to strangers or friends for the first time it is legitimate to use Scriptural language in your presentation.

Nathan Brummel

The Beacon Lights staff wishes to thank Becky Kalsbeek for her help with the production of the magazine. Becky has provided many creative ideas and spent much time on the Beacon Lights and she will be missed.



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Martha: The Harried Hostess

by Carol Brands

The average person is unable to handle wealth. "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven."

There are, however by God's grace, those who have wealth and handle it wisely. There was an Abraham, who used all of his vast wealth to serve God in humble faith. There was the woman in Shunem who housed the prophet Elisha and was rewarded with a son. There have been throughout history various others, also, who used their wealth to support the work of the kingdom of God.

One such woman was Martha. Martha appears to have been the wealthiest woman in the small town of Bethany, not far from the bustling city of Jerusalem. Her home was a prominent one of which she was the owner. Perhaps her husband was dead; we do not know the circumstances in which she received the home. But head of the home she was—head of a large home, head of a family consisting of her younger sister Mary and her younger brother Lazarus. She had wealth and control of her wealth and she used it well.

The Gospel evidence suggests that once Jesus left His own parents' home at Nazareth, this home in Bethany is one of the few places where He was able to rest in peace. Near Capernaum, He was often found at the home of the apostle Peter, whose wife and mother ministered to His needs. And here near Jerusalem, Martha and her siblings took in Jesus, and, undoubtedly, also His disciples when they were present. Here He was able to rest. Here He was able to teach in the courtyard and at meals. Jesus loved being here with this devout family.

Martha and her sister Mary were the ones who made this possible. There is no doubt that Martha was a paragon of efficiency. She kept a well-ordered home where it was possible to have guests and to serve meals to one or to several. Her sister Mary assisted her in her work. There was love between the sisters and brother, a closely knit family. And there was a desire to be of service wherever service was needed. The family viewed their wealth not as something desirable for personal pride but as a tool for service.

When Jesus loves, He does not love because of wealth. He does not love rich people more and poor people less; all of Scripture refutes this idea. Rather, when He loved this family in Bethany, it was due to the great faith which this family possessed, not due to their wealth. He loved them because they belonged to Him, were among the elect for whom He would die. He loved them because they believed in Him—not fully understanding, but believing as much as they did understand. They responded to His teaching and acknowledged Him as God, as Messiah, as "He who should come." And, believing, they threw everything they had into supporting and aiding Him and His ministry. They were truly godly leaders, true disciples of Jesus. He was at one in fellowship with them; He loved them!

All of this was made possible by Martha, the godly owner and leader of the home. Her faith and love made the framework in which her sister and brother were able to exercise their faith and love without hindrance. Mary and Lazarus responded without resentment to her authority, working as an harmonious family, serving God in blessed unity.

Is this how I view my possessions? Like this family, do I practice true hospitality? Do I use all that I have to serve God and His kingdom?

In this context, Jesus near the end of His life visited again this family. As was His custom, He sat in the courtyard while supper was being prepared. Doubtless, as a good hostess, Martha had first spent some time also listening to His words, visiting with Him. And most likely she also heard Him speak things she would rather not hear: words of His impending trouble at Jerusalem, His suffering and death. Jesus would have tried to prepare His friends, just as He was trying to prepare His disciples, for His death. Mary heard...and couldn't tear herself away. If Jesus' life were soon to end, she wanted to hear every word she could while He was still here! She wanted to be with Him, hearing Him, worshipping Him every minute that breath lasted.

Martha, too, heard...but couldn't stand the dark atmosphere and got up to dispel the atmosphere with her usual hospitality. A good hostess must insure pleasantness, right? So, let's get rid of this negativism by a good meal and some light sociability! Quickly, she began putting together the best meal she could muster, with several delicious food courses and flowers on the table and her best silverware, all the best, the best...for her Master...

Do I really listen when God is speaking? Or do I, like Martha, push away unpleasant topics—such as my sin—by crowding them out with daily trivia? Do I also make myself too busy to listen?

To accomplish all this, Martha needed help! She whispered to Mary to come and help, but Mary didn't even hear her; she could only hear Jesus. She attempted for awhile to do it all alone but it was too much; she wanted to do so much, and everything must be perfect! No, just a simple hot dish wasn't enough, or even one meat and one vegetable; for her Lord, it must be two or three meats, three or four vegetables, a bowl of fruits artfully arranged, and anything else she could think of...yes, surely a few pastries for dessert...and...

The more she attempted, the more she became flustered. The more flustered she became, the more irritated she became at her sister, just sitting there and doing nothing! What was the matter with Mary? Usually Mary also would help, but now she just *sat there*! And Jesus...He must know that she needed Mary's help, didn't He? Why couldn't He tell her to help? Was He blind, not to see how much work she had, that she needed help?

Finally Martha could stand it no longer. Disregarding the usual courtesies of a hostess, she disrupted the instruction Jesus was giving and spoke to Him. Plaintively, suggesting that He was an insensitive guest, she cried out, "Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her therefore that she help me!"

How frequently I see this happening! When my children are given work to do, how quickly they look at the brother or sister and say, "But *him*...what about *him*?"

Notice that her anxiety over much serving had caused Martha to make three errors of judgment:

1. ***She failed to love her sister.*** Usually she was a compassionate sister and usually Mary was a good helper, but this time Mary's need to hear Jesus was greater than her call to work...and Martha failed to sympathize with that need and to give Mary what she needed.

2. ***She failed to honor Jesus as she ought to have.*** She dishonored Him as Guest but, above all, she dishonored His motives. She felt He was honoring Mary who was being lazy rather than herself in her work of compassion for Him. He did not care about the work she did for Him!

3. ***She failed to meet her own spiritual needs.*** She, too, like Mary, needed to sit at Jesus' feet and absorb His words, preparing her soul for His passion and death. But she was too absorbed with the present material needs to accept this need.

It is easy for me, also, to fall into this snare, isn't it? I, too, can begin my work in a right way, wanting to do it for God's sake, but then by and by find the work itself becoming the important thing, rather than God and listening to God. I, too, can begin to feel sorry for myself because my work makes me so busy...instead of seeking ways to cut down on my work and spend more time listening to God.

I love the way Jesus responds to Martha. He gives her His undivided attention! He is not just an irritated male, impatient at her interruption. He is not a male chauvinist who considers a woman's work unimportant, belittling her service. Neither does He, however, excuse her error and preoccupation. Her error needs correction! So, gently, gently, He calls her name, twice. The gentle reproach in His voice reaches her: "Martha! Martha! Thou art (full of cares) and troubled about many things"—her spotless house, a huge meal—"but one thing is *needful* and Mary hath chosen that good part!"

Knowing our own pride, our own irritation with having our faults pointed out, especially when we have felt someone else was in the wrong, it is remarkable that we do not find Martha angry with Jesus' rebuke. Jesus had called her name and His calling her was effective: she heard! She responded!

We do not know just how she responded but she definitely was won over to see that He was right, that Mary was right, and that she, too, must pause to listen, putting first things first.

Like Martha, we need our sins pointed out, too. Sometimes God points them out through Christians who speak to us about them...maybe even our spouses or children. Sometimes He points them out through the stress of our lives which overwhelms us until we pray about this. Sometimes He uses our own Bible study in the quiet of the night. Most often He uses the week after week preaching of His Word through His ambassadors in church. Through these means He calls *our* names, too—just as gently, just as lovingly, and just as forcefully: "My child! My child!" We hear Him speaking to each of us personally about our own sins.

Am I listening? Each Sunday, am I listening? In Bible societies, am I straining to hear Him speak to me? Am I the Martha needing rebuke...or the Martha who hears the rebuke, learns the lesson and joins Mary at the Saviour's feet?

Carol Brands is the mother of 8 children and is a member of Edgerton Protestant Reformed Church in Edgerton, Minnesota.

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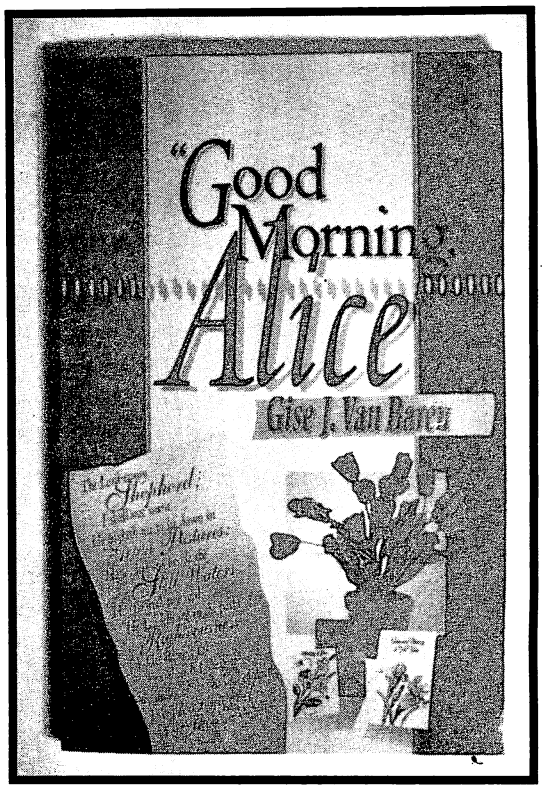

"GOOD MORNING, ALICE"

In this book, a series of cards written to Alice by an anonymous friend is set into the framework of the story of Alice's struggle with Lou Gehrig's disease. Alice's story is written in an interesting and personal way, by her brother, Rev. G.J. VanBaren.

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The Christian in the Chinese Culture

Written by Rev. Poh Boon Sing
Good News Enterprise

Reviewed by
Crysta Brummel

In order to familiarize myself more with the Chinese culture while we are staying in Singapore, I recently read the book, *The Christian in the Chinese Culture,* by Rev. Poh Boon Sing. I would recommend this book especially to our young people who are interested in the challenges that our fellow believers experience here in Singapore. I say our young people, because many of the members in the churches here are young people (though this book would be good for young and old alike to read). Could you also face such trials? Could you be faithful to Matthew 10:37, 38: "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me....He that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me?" Would you be willing to forsake father and mother for the sake of the Gospel, as many of these Christians have had to do?

Rev. Poh himself is a converted Christian; thus he has experienced life both as an unbeliever and as a child of God. Rev. Poh has also spent some time in prison, for wanting to share this glorious Gospel to the Muslims in Malaysia.

This book introduces the reader to the three main "religions" in the Chinese culture: Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. It also states three factors that bind the Chinese, making it difficult to convert a Chinese to Christianity: Pietism (strong sense of loyalty to family); Maxims (short sayings which are "rules" of conduct); and Materialism (we all know about this!)

Rev. Poh goes on to tell about certain events in the Chinese culture which make being a Christian difficult. One such is the relationship between the believer and his parents. Children are expected to live with their parents after marriage, in order to show their gratitude, by caring for them. (Ironically, Chinese do not express love in the way we do, by words. The Chinese show their love by money and gifts.) As Rev. Poh points out, living with our parents after marriage is against God's command in Genesis 2:24, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife." He also deals with the hardships new Christians experience when their parents are not converted, and oppose their children for being Christians. (Many will allow their children to attend church, but refuse them baptism, thinking baptism is the sign that they are a Christian.)

An interesting chapter is devoted to the many Chinese festivals, both religious and nonreligious. (The Chinese seem to have a festival for every month!) He gives advice to the Christian concerning which of these they can and cannot participate in.

Rev. Poh concludes this short book with a warning against two mistakes which are easy for a Christian to fall into: first, to have an over-negative attitude toward the Chinese culture; and secondly, to make part of the mystical Chinese culture a part of his Christian life (this deals with the charismatic movement).

This is an excellent book to familiarize ourselves with the Christians in Singapore, though, when reading it, the reader should keep in mind that the author is a Reformed Baptist minister.

Anyone wishing to purchase a copy can write the publisher at:

Good News Enterprise
106, Jalan BS 5/3
Taman Bukit Serdang, 43300
Seri Kembangan, Malaysia

(Cost is M$8 plus postage/handling, which is about US$4.)

Crysta Brummel is married to Allen, a 4th year student at the Protestant Reformed Seminary. They are currently in Singapore for 6 months while Allen does his internship.

"LITTLE LIGHTS"

. . . LET IT SHINE!

by Connie Meyer

The Gift

The presents were wrapped in festive and colorful paper, but there was one package that was more beautiful than all the rest. It was wrapped in shiny gold foil, and its ribbons reflected the light in every color of the rainbow. It was so beautiful, that it made the other gifts look plain and ugly next to it.

Day after day the children wondered what could be so special inside that package. Mother was good at giving us no hints at all, and Father was even better at it. The children could tell that their parents were enjoying the secret, so they gave up any hope of guessing what it might be.

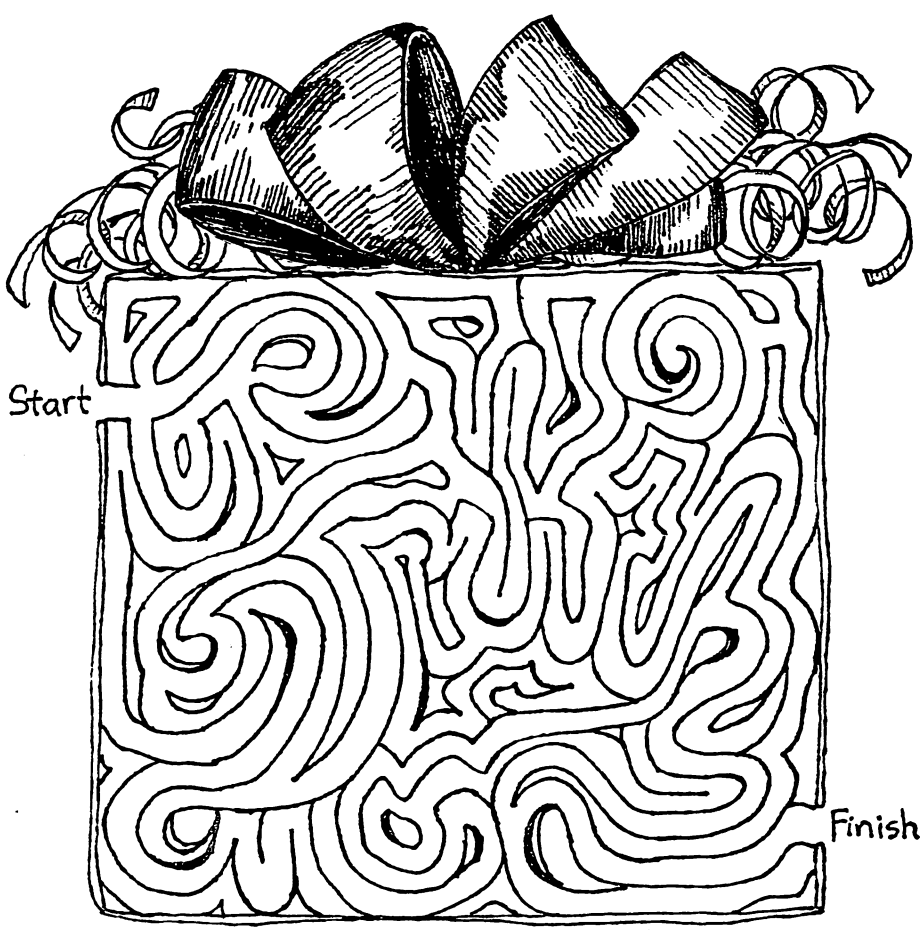
Finally the special day arrived. After eating a meal of their most favorite foods, the family gathered together to exchange gifts. Everyone sat in a circle, and from the youngest to the oldest, each one received the thoughtful gifts that the others gave them. Each time it was someone's turn to give a gift, all eyes would glance at the golden gift, wondering if now the contents would be revealed. But each time they were disappointed.

Finally all of the gifts had been given and opened, all except the special one. Mother and Father exchanged glances and smiled. Yes, now it was time. They set the package down in the middle of the circle, and instructed the children carefully to open it together. In their excitement it was hard to be careful, but the children managed to do it. At last they could see inside the box!

A little wooden sign with fancy gold letters met their puzzled gaze. Father took it out and hung it over the door. It said, "Buy the truth and sell it not." Proverbs 23:23a.

"I hope you're not too disappointed it's not a toy," Father explained. "But we asked ourselves what would be the best gift we could ever exchange with our children, and Scripture gave us the answer. "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth." It's the truth of Christmas, the truth that Jesus Christ came in the flesh. It's loving that truth. We hope you all will "buy the truth and sell it not."

Connie Meyer is the mother of 5 children and attends Hope Protestnat Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan.



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Wishing You a Blessed Christmas

The Beacon Lights staff wishes you a Blessed Christmas. Our hope is that you will spend this time in joyous communion of the saints, always remembering and celebrating the true meaning of Christmas—the birth of our Savior. As we enter a new year, the staff asks for your continued support through prayers, suggestions, and financial contributions. It would not be possible for us to put out this magazine without the help of our readers, typsetter, printer, and mailers. For their help we thank God, since without His help nothing is possible. To God be the Glory!