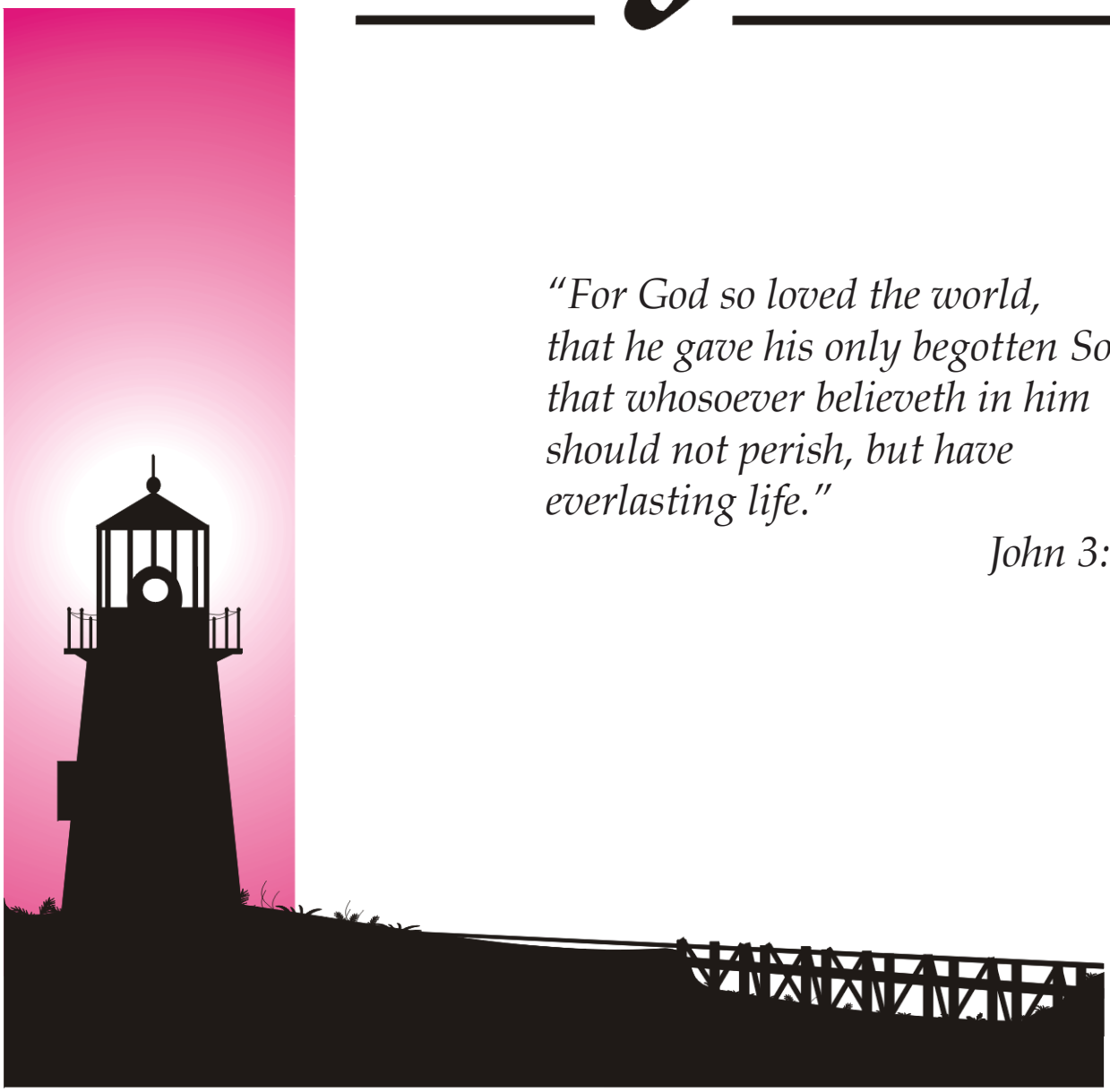
Beacon Lights

December
2007

Volume LXVI
Number 11



*"For God so loved the world,
that he gave his only begotten Son,
that whosoever believeth in him
should not perish, but have
everlasting life."*

John 3:16

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Beacon Lights is published monthly by the Federation of Protestant Reformed Young People's Societies. Subscription price is $10.00. Please send all correspondence, address changes, subscriptions, and article submissions to the business office.

Blackwater: A Calvinist Crusade?

by John Huizenga

What does John Calvin have to do with the fighting in Iraq? More than you'd think, according to Jeremy Scahill, the author of Blackwater: the Rise of the World's Most Powerful Mercenary Army. Some of the first that you may have heard about Blackwater was back in April, 2004 when four Americans were ambushed in Fallujah; their bodies dismembered, burned, and hanged on a bridge over the Euphrates amid cheers of "Allah is great." It turns out that these men were professional security bodyguards trained by Blackwater and hired by the United States government. In past months you may have noticed Blackwater in the news again; some of their men being charged with obnoxious behavior and murder. As I write, Blackwater has become a daily news item. Who are these guys, anyway? Jeremy Scahill alleges that Blackwater's heart, vision and drive is rooted in the Dutch Calvinism. It's owner, Erik Prince, is a son of Holland, Michigan where the seed of a Christian community was planted and flourished for a time.

Mr. Scahill explains it likes this: "Dating back to the community's founding, Holland had long been run by Christian patriarchs. In 1846, with a sea-weary clan of fifty-seven fellow Dutch refugees, Albertus Van Raalte came ashore in western Michigan. Prince's predecessor had fled his home country because he had 'undergone all manner of humiliation and persecution through his defiance of the religious restrictions imposed by the State church.' …After arriving in the United States aboard his vessel, the Southerner, Van Raalte led the clan to the shores of Lake Michigan, where he envisioned a community free to live and worship within the tenets of his brand of Dutch Reform, and without any outside influence. … Virtually the same description could be applied to Edgar Prince, and eventually to Erik, born nearly a century after Van Raalte's death" (2-3). The author continues, "Ed Prince was not an empire builder. He was a Kingdom builder. … For him, personal success took a back seat to spreading the Gospel and fighting for the moral restoration of our society" (8).

After his death, his son Erik continued to pursue his father's vision of moral restoration with billions of dollars in cash at his disposal. His father had established the Prince Corporation of Holland, and the very successful business was sold to Johnson Controls for $1.35 billion in cash. His sister had also married into the DeVos family, which founded the marketing firm Amway, linking the family with billions of dollars more. Erik gave generous financial support to right wing politics, religious organizations such as Focus on the Family and the Family Research Council, colleges, mission groups, etc., linking him with a host of powerful men. At some point, he converted to Roman Catholicism and supported conservative Catholic groups as well. His vision and money was a perfect match for men like Chuck Colson and Richard Neuhaus who articulated the vision of Catholics and evangelical Christians working together to christianize the world. In a speech at Calvin College in 2002, Chuck Colson praised Erik Prince and "talked extensively about the historical foundation and current necessity of a political and religious alliance of Catholics and evangelicals. Colson talked about his work, beginning in the mid-1980s, with famed conservative evangelical Protestant minister turned Catholic priest Richard Neuhaus and others to build a unified movement. That work ultimately led in 1994 to the controversial document "Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium." The ECT document articulated the vision that would animate Blackwater's corporate strategy and the politics practiced by Erik Prince—a

marriage of the historical authority of the Catholic Church with the grassroots appeal of the modern conservative U.S. evangelical movement, bolstered by the cooperation of largely secular and Jewish neoconservatives" (20). Finally, Erik Prince and the vision expressed in the ECT document would be linked to the United States government. Mr. Scahill continues: "the ECT was not merely a philosophical document. Rather, it envisioned an agenda that would almost identically mirror that of the Bush administration a few years later, when Neuhaus would serve as a close adviser to Bush, beginning with the 2000 campaign. … The manifesto was years in the making and would greatly assist the unifying of the conservative movement that made George W. Bush's rise to power possible" (20-22).

With a vision in place to Christianize the world, connections with men in high places, plenty of money, experience as a Navy SEAL, and business savvy, Erik Prince began to develop "Blackwater," a world class military training camp in a swamp in North Carolina. The U.S. military had been steadily downsizing, and plans to use private military personnel were in the works. When terrorists attacked the Twin Towers, Blackwater was ready to help with the response. As the war developed, Blackwater grew exponentially as it received millions of dollars in contracts from the U.S. government. Now Blackwater has become one of the world's most powerful mercenary armies, with enough power to overthrow the governments of the smallest countries in the world. It has plans to build two more training camps, one in Illinois, and one in California.

Jeremy Scahill is very alarmed that such power is in the hands of conservative Christians. He writes, "What is particularly disturbing about the "expanding role" of Blackwater specifically is the issue of the company's right-wing leadership, its proximity to a whole slew of conservative causes and politicians, its Christian fundamentalist agenda and secretive nature, and its deep and longstanding ties to the Republican Party, U.S. military, and intelligence agencies. Blackwater is quickly becoming one of the most powerful private armies in the world, and several of its top officials are extreme religious zealots, some of whom appear to believe they are engaged in an epic battle for the defense of Christendom. The deployment of forces under this kind of leadership in Arab or Muslim countries reinforces the worst fears of many in the Islamic world about a neo-Crusader agenda masquerading as a U.S. mission to "liberate" them from their oppressors" (374-375).

Scahill puts together a vast amount of research and provides a compelling story. When this information is viewed in light of the theological movement of the Federal Vision and the goal of a kingdom of God on this earth, I am inclined to agree that once again a distorted view of the kingdom of God could be producing a 21st century crusade. We watch the developments with godly discernment, and busy ourselves with the preaching of the gospel, raising our children in the fear of the Lord, and the gathering of God's people into the kingdom of heaven. John Calvin would have nothing to do with the compromise and unity of evangelicals with the Roman church to christianize the world. Neither do we. "For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come" (Hebrews 13:14). v

Forgiven Much

by Andy Tanis

"Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little" (Luke 7:47).

Beloved, in order to properly understand what this text is saying, we must consider what had just taken place prior to the time that Jesus made this

statement. Most of us can probably recall the circumstances that led to this truth proclaimed by our Lord. We will take a brief moment to recall why this statement is recorded in God's Word, and how it is applied to every believer today. In order to do this, we must first take a look at the setting.

First of all, the story begins with an invitation extended to Jesus by a Pharisee named Simon who desired to have Jesus come and eat at his house. Jesus willingly went to Simon's house, and ate at his table. While they were eating, a woman in the city came into the house with an alabaster box of very costly ointment. One thing mentioned about this woman is that she was a sinner. She approaches the place at the table where Jesus was, trembling in the deep awareness of her sin and misery. Weeping all the while, she washes Jesus' feet with her tears and dries his feet with her hair. Worshipping Him, she continues by kissing His feet. In spite of the stares from those gathered in the room, she continues to honor Jesus by anointing His feet with this costly ointment.

This she did in the presence of all who were there. Her love for the Lord was so great that none of this attention that she received by the others mattered. The Pharisee himself looks at the sight with disgust. In unbelief, he questions the knowledge and righteousness of Christ. "This man, if He were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth Him: for she is a sinner," he thought to himself. Surely a righteous man would want nothing to do with such a wretch, and would certainly be quick to rebuke her and send her away!

Jesus knew Simon's thoughts and proceeds in telling the parable of a creditor which had two debtors; one debtor owing 500 pence, and the other 50 pence. When they had nothing to pay, the creditor cancels their debt, and forgives them both. Jesus then asked Simon which debtor will love the creditor the most. We can rightfully say that Simon was using common sense when he told Jesus that the debtor who would love his creditor most would be the one who had the greatest debt cancelled. Jesus then explained that the situation with this woman was no different. Since her sins were many and her debt to the Lord was great; He gave her the assurance that she had been forgiven for all her sins. Hence, her love for her Lord could no longer be contained.

It would be wise to consider this event figuratively, and focus on the contrast between the characteristics displayed by those who are forgiven much and the characteristics displayed by those who are forgiven little.

Simon's attitude is clearly portrayed as an attitude of pride and self-righteousness. He displays himself to be one who is "forgiven little" by his lack of love and concern for this godly woman, and ultimately for Christ Himself. He represents those who look at the law merely from an external aspect, and will hold to their own "good works" to give them a free ticket to heaven. These people establish their own righteousness as if they are the standard for all to imitate. Matthew 23 goes into great detail explaining the kind of attitude that was characteristic of the Pharisees. In Matthew 23, Jesus confirms that, instead of receiving God's favor, these people receive God's judgment. Because Simon held this woman in contempt, refusing to acknowledge her to be forgiven, he testified by his lack of love that his sins were not forgiven.

The woman here represents the people of God in the deep consciousness of their unworthiness. Imagine with me, if you will, a child who has just been chastised by his father for doing something wrong. This child can't bear the thought of being under his father's wrath and anger. So with fear and trembling, he timidly approaches his father. With true sorrow in his heart, he pleads with his father to forgive him, and not to be angry. He says, "I'm sorry, Dad. I have sinned against you and I'm sorry. Please forgive me!" The woman, by her actions, displays a genuine sorrow for her sins, and in godly faith seeks Jesus, believing Him to be the source of her salvation, and there finding hope for deliverance.

One who is truly righteous must look away from himself to Jesus, the "author and finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2). The people of God will only be drawn to Christ and look to Him for forgiveness if the Holy Spirit first convicts them of their sin. They may not look at the law externally, but must go deeper to consider the impossibility of keeping the least of God's commandments. The Holy Spirit does this by giving them a deep awareness that they have provoked the Holy God, and stand exposed to His wrath. The believer must be humbled to truly say from the heart, "Surely, I am the *chief of sinners*! There is no one on earth that could possibly be less worthy of God's favor than me."

This broken, humbled sinner will see himself as naked in God's sight, and in his shame will approach God's throne of grace seeking to be the recipient of abounding mercy and love. He comes to Christ in holy fear, by faith believing that he will "in no wise be cast out" from communion with his Savior and Redeemer. He comes to Christ, believing not only that those sins are forgiven, but that he is still loved by God. He finds all of his own

righteousness to be filthy rags, and seeks salvation outside of himself. By faith, He looks to the cross of Christ and the work accomplished on that cross.

The church, the true Israel of God, consists of these people who have tasted and seen that the Lord is good. These are they which have heard the voice of their Redeemer saying, "Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more." The one who has been forgiven much will abound in the work of the Lord, seeking to bring hope to the believer who is under a heavy burden of sin. Paul exhorts the church at Ephesus to be "kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." (Ephesians 4:32).

The most striking feature to notice here is that those who are the recipients of an overwhelming amount of forgiveness will seek to show love throughout their lives. This love is shown in obedience to the command of Christ. Jesus says, "This is my commandment that ye love one another; that your joy may be full." Those who love will live thankful lives, and be full of happiness and joy. They will seek not their own welfare, but will seek to be used by God to bring hope in the life of another.

After Jesus teaches His disciples and us the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6, he says, "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (verses 14, 15). This passage brings out the necessity for us to truly forgive from the heart. Others will see our joy and respond by saying, "Truly, this love and joy is a clear testimony that this person has been with Jesus, and he has experienced the forgiveness of sins." v

Andy is a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan.

Story Time

The Christmas Story

By Sarah Mowery

"Don't you love Christmas?"

I glance up from my grocery list to look at the woman next to me. She smiles a wide smile. A jaunty Santa cap perches on her curly hair, and two little elves dangle from her ears.

"Don't you love Christmas?" she asks again, and then continues, "I just love Christmas—the carols, the cards, the decorations, the gifts, the food, the story...I just can't wait!" She pauses long enough to grab a box of Stove Top stuffing from the shelf and to wink at my children before sauntering down the aisle, humming "Jingle Bells" as she goes.

I push my shopping cart past the meat department, where turkeys and hams are on sale this week, and a row of tiny, blinking Christmas trees line the counter. Even here in the grocery store, carols ring out, and boxed Christmas cards and trinkets flank the ends of the aisles. I duck my head as under an arch of gaudy tinsel bells, and the words of the woman pass through my mind, "The carols, the cards, the decorations, the gifts, the food, the story…" The story. What story does she have in mind? I wonder to myself as I hand my daughter a package of butter to place in our cart. My one-year-old son points at a parade of Santas, Rudolphs, and Frostys that bob from the ceiling as we make our way past the frozen goods. One of those Christmas stories? Or the Christmas story?

A big "Countdown to Christmas" calendar greets us as we approach the cash register. One by one, I lift the groceries from my cart as a lady over the loud speaker sings about children waiting impatiently for Santa. The teller grins at my two little ones as she hands them each a candy cane. "So are you guys getting anxious for Christmas?" she asks them, and then she shakes her head at me. "The season starts so early nowadays; kids have to wait twice as long for the day to finally arrive!"

The courtesy worker loads the groceries into my trunk and I strap Leah and Will into their car seats. The sparkling lights of a Christmas tree in the window of a nearby store catch my eye. Not so long ago, when I was in college, I worked part-time at that small store, ringing up customers who came in to buy fresh flowers, home décor, or specialty coffees. Our store would start receiv-

ing ceramic snowmen and snowflake ornaments already in June, and the season's new Christmas trees made their debut in early October. Among all of those shimmering lights and glittery ribbons, the smell of peppermint-flavored lattes wafting through the air, I remember feeling as if I "just couldn't wait for Christmas."

I drive home, carry my two sleeping toddlers into the house, and tuck them into their beds for a nap. As I haul my groceries into the house and begin putting them away, my mind wanders again to the woman who said that she "just can't wait" for Christmas, and "the story" that she added onto the list of things that she loves about the season almost as an afterthought.

Are you waiting anxiously for Christmas? What does "Christmas" mean to you?

Long before Clement Clark Moore's eager children nestled all snug in their beds, or Dickens' Ebenezer Scrooge, or Dr. Seuss' Grinch, holy men of old penned the Christmas story. It's a story that begins before the beginning, in the eternal counsel of God. It's a story that was first spoken on earth to Adam and Eve, as they stood soon to be banished from the Garden of Eden. There God promised them the seed that would crush the head of the serpent. Throughout the rest of their earthly pilgrimage in a world now cursed because of their sin, Adam and Eve longed for the coming of that Savior, and they diligently taught their children the blessed "Mother Promise." And so, Abel looked for the fulfillment of the sacrifice that he made to God. Likewise Enoch and Noah, Abraham and Sarah, received God's promise of redemption and saw the realization of that promise afar off. They were persuaded of the certainty of the coming of the promised seed, and they lived embracing that hope. Isaac, too, dwelled in the land to which his father had been sent, that physical land that pictured the spiritual reality, for he also sought a heavenly country. The patriarch Jacob spoke to his children of the coming of Shiloh even on his deathbed. Moses by faith instructed God's people to keep the Passover and led them through the Red Sea and the wilderness back to the Promised Land, which they possessed under the leadership of Joshua, "Jehovah Salvation." Throughout the years of the judges, the kings, the prophets, and the captivity, true children of God longed for the fulfillment of that promise…for the birth of the Messiah, the Christ. They looked for the day when their King, the Son of David, would come to make them right with God. They were waiting…waiting for the day that we remember as "Christmas."

And that day came. You know the story, don't you? The Christmas story? Come to Bethlehem. See the young virgin who labors and brings forth Jesus, "Jehovah Salvation," her firstborn child, wraps him in rags, and lays him in a feed trough. This scene is not the one I saw displayed as I entered the grocery store earlier today, the one with the smiling, golden-haired woman, and the serene, chubby baby laying on shimmering yellow hay. Nor is it the one of which the lady crooned over the loudspeaker, the one in which the cattle are lowing, but the baby utters not a sound.

There was no room for this child. No room in the inn, no room in Bethlehem, no room in Israel, no room in your heart, no room in mine. As Isaiah foretold, if we were to have seen this humble baby lying there, he would not have looked beautiful to us. This child is humbly clothed, he lies in rough manger, and he cries like no other child has or will ever cry. Why? Look a little closer.

Neither you nor I would want to bring forth our child in a barn. We who are used to clean, comfortable hospital rooms would refuse to give birth lying in the filth and the stench of farm animals. And yet, who is this child born tonight? Who put this child there? You. And me. This Jesus is the Child that the Church brings forth. We put that tiny baby in that dirty manger, and he cried out on that night as he bore already then the ugly weight of our sin. Look one more time, and see, even more startlingly, that confined in the helpless body of this tiny infant…is God.

Christmas comes and goes every year, and yet, to the believer, the story never grows old. It's not a tale of Santa, Rudolph, or even a cozy nativity scene. It's the story of the dirty, rotten, shamefulness of our sin, and the Savior God who stooped down to earth and came as a baby to bear our curse for us.

But that's not the end of the Christmas story—there's more. We read in the gospels that the child Jesus grew and found favor with God and man. As a boy he had to learn the Old Testament Scriptures just like you and I did, only as he read the Old Testament prophecies, he read about himself, the longed-for fulfillment of those promises. As he entered adulthood, Jesus lost the favor of many men, for few were they who sought that heavenly country. And so, the man Jesus lived the life of a suffering stranger, until his persecution culminated in his being mocked, beaten, and crucified as all around ridiculed him. Who would do that to a man? Who could do that…to God? You. And me.

As I put the last of the groceries on the table and begin setting the table for supper, I glance out the window. The wind has picked up, and tiny, white flakes are swirling to the ground. There's still more to the story:

the angels sang, remember? And the shepherds, when they saw that crying babe in the crude trough, praised God! For that same longed-for Messiah who was killed as a fulfillment of all those lambs slaughtered in the Old Testament is the Star out of Jacob and the Scepter that rises out of Israel. He lives! And He is coming again, the One whose life and death have opened our way into the heavenly kingdom for which the Old Testament saints, too, so desperately longed. The hopes and fears of all the years were fulfilled in Bethlehem that night. For the little babe born and the man crucified is Christ by highest heaven adored, Christ our Everlasting Lord. Rejoice! Immanuel has come to thee, O Israel. And He comes again!

Are we waiting anxiously for Christmas? What does "Christmas" mean to us?

Is Christmas all about trimming our tree or agonizing over what gifts to buy for those on our lists? Like the lady in the grocery store, do we celebrate the carols, the cards, the decorations, the gifts, the food…or is a Christmas a season in which our love for our Lord is renewed? We have a different reason to celebrate, don't we? To the point that we spend more time with the merry distractions of the season than we spend in adoration of and fellowship with our Savior, they become tools that the Tempter successfully uses to draw us farther from him. A different reason to celebrate calls for a different type of celebration.

Supper is just on the table as my husband's car pulls into the driveway. My children, up from their naps, stand by the window, and they erupt with squeals of delight as Daddy makes his way inside. I stoop by them, noting the drifts that are sweeping 'round the house. I smile to myself as the inspired words of the prophet Isaiah come to my mind, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow."

That is the story of Christmas. What a beautiful story! What a glorious gospel!

Don't you love Christmas? v

Sarah is a member of Doon Protestant Reformed Church in Doon, Iowa.

Devotional

Watching Daily At My Gates

by Skip Hunter

December 9 Read I Peter 3:19-22

In an earlier passage we looked at being ready to give an answer. Here we have an example of Noah who preached for 120 years to people who did not want to hear. We must never give up in our witnessing. God will use our faithful witness for his glory and the benefit of the elect. This will be for our benefit as well as those to whom we witness. We also have the comfort of the fact of Christ's resurrection, ascension, and sitting at the right hand of God. With Jesus our advocate we have no reason to fear those who may try to harm us. Sing Psalter 273.

December 10 Read Psalm 8

Young people you spend many hours at school and home studying science. All of science is God's creation. As we study various parts of God's creation, we need to remember who we are and who God is. Because we are created beings ourselves, we must never pretend to be wiser than our creator. We have many responsibilities as head of creation; we must never misuse them. Finally verse 9 must be foremost in our minds. In all of creation we must seek to see the excellent name of God. Sing Psalter 15.

December 11 Read Psalm 16:1-11

This Psalm has been one of great comfort to God's people in every age. There are many verses from which we can gain comfort and instruction. In verse one the Psalmist prays that God will preserve him. He says that he trusts in the Lord and in that trust he can pray. Preservation of God means much. It means that he preserves us in all the trials in this life, and it means that he will preserve us until he brings us to heaven. Because of this we can trust him to do everything for us in a way that is

good for us. Now you pick a verse and think about it for a short time. Then don't forget to pray. Sing Psalter 29.

December 12 Read Psalm 19:1-6

Students and teachers alike profit from studying Psalm 19. First of all, we have guidance in what we study in creation. It does not have to be astronomy. God's handiwork is visible in chemistry, human anatomy, and other sciences as well. Because God is a God of order, we can find orderliness in all of creation. We also can see Christ in all of creation as well. As we learned yesterday, God preserves his people. In creation we have a picture of that preservation. Sing Psalter 37.

December 13 Read Colossians 1:1-10

Let's look at a New Testament passage today. Paul in his epistles was writing to real people. He was also by inspiration writing to the church of all ages. We can take personal instruction in each of his epistles. Verses 9-10 are what I wish to point out today. First of all young people, your parents and grandparents spend many hours in prayer for you. They especially try to pray for your spiritual life. They want you to do well and succeed in your lives, but they are more desirous that you "walk worthy of the Lord" in all that you do. This is akin to John rejoicing to hear that his children are "walking in the truth". Continue to learn about our God and Savior, and he will grant the desires of your heart.

December 14 Read Colossians 1:11-20

Two ideas come to mind in reading through this passage. First of all, we see who Christ is and for what purpose he was created. As I said a few days ago we can not help but in creation see who our creator is. Verse 16 tells us that by Christ, remember John 1, all things were created by him but also they were created for him. Secondly, verse twenty brings to us great comfort. Because of the cross we are reconciled to him. God's people are blessed because they can see all things in Christ. Sing Psalter 85.

December 15 Read Colossians 1:21-29

Reread verse 23 again. The word hope has popped up several times in my Bible wanderings the past week. Even as we saw in I Peter 3 the child of God must have the hope of salvation and the return of Christ. How do we have that hope? We have that hope by being grounded and settled in the faith. How are we grounded and settled? We are grounded and settled by the Holy Spirit in our hearts working in us to study the Word and to not leave the truths found in that Word. We have the truth of the mystery of God. Let us learn it and use it. And then we will never leave it. Sing Psalter 363.

December 16 Read Genesis 3:14-21

Verse 15 of this chapter is commonly called the Mother Promise. It is called this because to Eve was first given the hope of the Savior. As we begin preparations for our celebration of Christmas, we must ever be aware of what Christmas means. It does not mean trees, presents, colored lights, and all of those trappings. It does not even mean a baby in a manger, shepherds, wise men, and all of that. Christmas is the promise of the Savior. As Christ was announced to Adam and Eve, a sacrifice went with the announcement. Adam and Eve were cursed with hard work and pain, but they were also given the hope of the Savior who would redeem them from their sins. Is this our celebration of Christmas? Sing Psalter 50.

December 17 Read Genesis 49:1-12

Who is Jesus? Jesus is the gatherer of the nations. Jesus is Shiloh. He is the one who brings true peace to his people. People of God, are you despondent, out of sorts with your life? Go to Shiloh because Shiloh is the Prince of peace. He will gather you in his arms and hold you and give you peace. The tribe of Judah had this hope throughout their generations. Now the hope that is found in Christ is found in all manner of people. Let the nations rejoice and give thanks and praise the Prince of Peace who is Christ the Lord. Sing Psalter 355.

December 18 Read Numbers 24:12-19

Witness the testimony of Balaam the son of Beor. Even the unbeliever is forced to confess of the reality of the birth of Christ! As Balaam speaks this beautiful prophecy of Christ, it is not his desire. Today many speak of Christ, but they do not wish to speak of the reality of what Christ means for them. For the unbeliever the reality is destruction. The Star out of Jacob and the Scepter from Israel will smite those who do not confess him as their Savior. Christ will have dominion over land and sea. Is this what you see in Christmas, people of God? Do you see the king and not just a baby in the manager? Forget the shallow Christ of the Christmas carol and worship the king of heaven and earth. Sing Psalter 200.

December 19 Read Isaiah 7:10-16

The unbelieving Ahaz did not want to hear about the true Christ of Christmas. He did not want to hear of him who would save Israel from their sins. Therefore God himself gave the sign of the virgin birth. He gave to his son the name Immanuel-God with us. What can we say about us, people of God? Do we want to hear of our Savior this Christmas? Wouldn't we rather concentrate upon the things of Christmas rather than the Christ of Christmas? Look who this Son is. Confess this Son and

worship him. Let us see the signs of Christ, and let us not be like Ahaz and refuse to watch for Christ. Sing Psalter 331.

December 20 Read Isaiah 9:1-7

Tomorrow we will look at the familiar verses six and seven. Today let's look at verse two. It was a dark time for Israel as Isaiah spoke and penned the words of these prophecies. Foreign nations were ready to pounce upon them. Sin and evil worship was rampant throughout the land. Is it any different for us? Some of God's church face extreme persecution throughout the world. Sin and evil worship are rampant even in much of what calls itself church. Out of that darkness the light of Christ falls upon the true believer. Are we looking for that light? Are we walking in that light? Let us look for the light even as we go throughout this season. Sing Psalter 71.

December 21 Read Isaiah 9:1-7

Do we sometimes wonder about the reality of Christ's birth? If we do, then we doubt the zeal of Jehovah as is spoken in verse 7. A child has been born unto us. We have been given the Wonderful One, the comforting Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace. When we listen to the beautiful strains of the *Messiah* we must not just focus on the melody. We must focus on the meaning of the words. Many singers have sung of Christ. Of whom have they sung? Are they like Balaam? What about us? What do we hear? Of whom do we confess? Those who are contemplating confession of faith think about that truth. Let us consider these wonderful words as we go through this Christmas season. Sing Psalter 266.

December 22 Read Isaiah 53

Is the Christ of Isaiah fifty-three the Christ of whom we speak and sing during this Christmas season? Do we confess one despised by men and acquainted with grief? Is that what is portrayed by Christmas cards, posters, and celebrations? We probably should read this chapter once a day during the advent season. We should do this so that we have a proper understanding of our Christ. He does not stay in the manger. He does not continue to be the miracle worker adored by many. He becomes bruised and bloodied at the cross for the sins of his people. People of God, young people, He does this for us. This is the personal Christ whom we must confess and to whom we must cling. Read Isaiah fifty-three again and then, in tears, go to your Savior in prayer and confess the true Christ of Christmas. Sing Psalter 140.

December 23 Read Micah 5:1-7

Not only do we find the prophesied place of Christ's birth in this part of Scripture, we find our Savior. Look at the passage again. How many references do you find of Christ and his work other than verse two. Look at the wonderful words about the remnant. A remnant is not often something desired. Yet, we need to desire to be part of that remnant. That remnant will be blessed of God. That remnant will be fed of Christ and led to the holy hill of the Lord. Think about this people of God. Think about this as we draw closer to not only Christmas but to the day of the Lord when Christ will return upon the clouds of heaven and bring us unto himself. Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift! Sing Psalter 58.

December 24 Read Isaiah 60:1-9

What a glorious passage of Scripture this is! Here we find the true Christ of Christmas. He is the light of the world. All manner of men will be drawn unto him. We will be drawn unto him! We, the worst of sinners, have been brought to the brightest of lights. We will see the glorious One who reigns in heaven and earth. We must lift up our eyes to see him. We cannot let our eyes be blinded by the world's glory which is no glory. When we lift up our eyes we see Christ and, blessing of blessings!, our children see Christ. Let us show them that Christ of Christmas and let us glorify that name which is above every name. Sing Psalter 362.

December 25 Read Luke 2:1-20

What a beautiful Christmas story this is! There are no lights or tinsel. We just find salvation in the manger in Bethlehem. God is good to his people. Of that there is no doubt. He was good to those lowly shepherds watching their sheep. Not only did they get to hear the heavenly chorus sing "Glory to God." They had the privilege of worshiping Christ the King. What did they do when they saw the great salvation lying before them? They went out and spread the good news to others. Oh, the world was not interested in Jesus as we will find out tomorrow, but the church rejoiced in her Lord and King. Let us do that today as we celebrate Christmas correctly. Sing Psalter 125.

December 26 Read Jeremiah 31:10-17

Yesterday we saw the church's reaction to the birth of Christ. Today we see the world's reaction. The world wished to kill Christ many years ago. The world still wishes to kill Christ. We see this in its celebration of Christmas. In the commercialism of the day Christ is forgotten, and not only forgotten but also killed. The world will accept a child in a manger, but it wants to leave

him there. Satan knows who Christ is. Satan knew then and knows know that his head will be crushed. It was crushed at the cross, and it will be completely crushed at the return of Christ. Let us think about this truth at Christmas, and then let us rejoice in the newborn king. Sing Psalter 198.

December 27 Read Isaiah 40:1-11

Yesterday a bleak picture was painted about the world around us. But fear not, people of God, He has given to us utmost comfort. In times of distress and trouble we need to turn to his word. In this portion of Scripture we find that comfort. Israel was in distress because of Assyria and her own sin. In the midst of that distress Isaiah spoke these words of comfort to them. These words are for us the church of today. We know that this life is temporal, but we also know that there are good tidings at hand. Our Shepherd is coming again to gather our children and us unto him. That babe did not remain in the manager. That babe is our King! Thanks be to God for such an unspeakable gift. Sing Psalter 362.

December 28 Read Psalm 52:1-9

Look at verse eight again. No matter how bad it may seem around us, in God's house we grow. In various passages of Scripture we heard about our deserved judgment. But because of God's mercy we can be confident and assured that he will care for us. Some of you have experienced those who do not feel that assurance. It is hard for some of you to see such a person grieve because of that lack of assurance. This text shows that it is not up to us but it is rather in God's hand. Sing Psalter 145.

December 29 Read Psalm 103:1-7

This Psalm has many beautiful ideas in it. First of all we see the idea of blessing the Lord. We tend to think that God is to bless us. But the word bless means to speak well of. This is something that we must do always. We must not forget his benefits. They are many. They encompass both the spiritual and the physical. Even in sickness there is a physical benefit. It may be hard for us to understand this, but it is there. Notice the idea of youth and the eagle in verse five. Remember that the next time you see an eagle. Reread this Psalm and look for these ideas. Sing Psalter 277.

December 30 Read Psalm 103:8-12

One of my favorite verses is verse 12. When you think of the geography of "as far as the east is from the west," you get a little picture of God's love for us. We sing in Psalter 362 "Our sins mount up against us." Then you read this verse and understand what mercy really is. God is our Father; he is not like an earthly father whose anger is sinful. He is angry at our sins, but through Christ he looks at us in love. For this reason we should live lives of thankfulness toward him in all that we do. Sing Psalter 280.

December 31 Read Psalm 103:13-18

Two hundred seventy-eight is the Psalter number which goes with verse 13. Because of sin earthly fathers have trouble pitying their children. Pity here does not mean to feel sorry for them. It means to lovingly care for them. But God, who knows who we are, can pity us perfectly. It is most comforting to know that his mercy is forever and for us. We must strive to keep his covenant, not to gain that covenant but because we are part of the covenant. As we end another year tonight, these words must be our thoughts. If they are, we will have no problem ignoring the senseless partying of the world. We will remember that each day is the Lord's, and that he holds all things in his hands. Sing Psalter 278.

January 1 Read Psalm 19-22

This is a glorious end to a glorious Psalm. Verse 19 proclaims God's sovereignty. The final three verses tell us to speak well of Jehovah in all and by all that we do. We cannot stop blessing our God. You must do this in all of your studies. I must do this in all of my teaching. To do anything else is to deny God's sovereignty. As we begin this new year, we are reminded of God's sovereignty. It is God who brings each new day, new week, new month, and new year to pass. We look at this day as bringing us one day closer to Christ's return. The only resolution we need is to love God and to love our neighbor. When this is our resolve, we will be satisfied with each day. Sing Psalter 282.

January 2 Read Psalm 27:1-6

Reread verse one again. After reading that, what more do we need? There is nothing we can fear in this life. Oh, there are times that we are afraid of something around us. This may because of our own weaknesses or because of others, but when we remember that God is with us, we really do not need to be afraid. This was David's confession. Do any of us have cares more pressing than David? Many of God's people have often read this Psalm for comfort. Young people, make this one of your safety nets. Sing Psalter 71.

January 3 Read Psalm 27:7-10

Prayer is an important part of the life of the child of God. We must pray every day. We can pray because we know that he will answer us. God will not hide his face from us. He will care for us at all times. He is the God of our salvation. Of that we may be sure. We do not even

have to fear being forsaken even by those who love us in an earthly sense. Jehovah is with us. Make this your hope; make this your prayer. Sing Psalter 74.

January 4 Read Psalm 27:11-14

These are beautiful words that end this short Psalm. First of all we asked to be taught. This is not easy for us to do. We want to teach but not be taught. We must learn to wait on Jehovah our covenant God. We so often want to run ahead of him. We want things to happen our way and in our time. If we wait, we will be of good courage. This courage does not come from within us; this courage comes from him alone. He will give us the courage and strengthen our hearts to face what ever he brings on our path. Wait on the Lord. Sing Psalter 72. v

Memoir of Rev. C. Hanko

Rev. C. Hanko

Chapter 29

Trip to Europe—1987

Editor's Notes--In 1987, Rev. Hanko and Allie traveled with Rich and Elaine Bos and their two sons, Ed and Bob to Europe. No doubt a highlight of the trip was the time spent in The Netherlands, the land of their fathers.

On August 12, 1987 we packed the Olds at Rich and Elaine's house. We parked the car at the Detroit airport, carried in our luggage, were checked in, and then discovered that we would have a four-hour wait. Our plane had to come from Chicago. We were given a meal ticket so we went to a restaurant and idled away some time there. When we finally got under way we found that the plane was making a stop in Minneapolis. At sunset we arrived there; we were not allowed to leave the plane, and after a short wait, we were under way to The Netherlands. This delay meant that we lost a half-day in Netherlands. Instead of arriving at 7 o'clock in the morning, we arrive at 1 PM. But we made the most of it, rented a car and started out of Schipol airport north to Zaandam, where we visited Czar Peter's house. This was by no means a mansion, but rather a very small house of but a few small rooms, with the bed built into the wall. Czar Peter of Russia stayed there, while his ship was being built by the expert ship builders of the Netherlands.

From there we continued on to the Afsluit Dijk, the well known masterpiece of engineering that shuts out the ocean and serves to drain the Zuider Zee and make it a fresh water lake, called the Ijsel Meer. This was a rather rainy day, but we did get a few pictures.

We arrived in Harlingen, where we looked for a bed and breakfast for the night. It so happened that the fishermen's ships lay in harbor and all the bed and breakfasts were taken. We ended up in a hotel. We had supper in a small coffee shop. A cup of coffee cost us a florin and 75 cents. The hotel was an old building with a spiral staircase leading to the second floor. We stayed on the third floor, where Ed and Bob dozed off to sleep to the rhythm of Rich's and my snoring.

On Friday morning we went to Franeker, where we saw a planetarium built in a home. In the attic this man had all kinds of gears which controlled the models of various heavenly bodies displayed down below. It was amazing how he could build such a display. There was also a miniature planetarium in the museum. He told us that there is a similar miniature planetarium made by a Bos somewhere in Michigan.

A Reformed University was established in Franeker soon after the Reformation in the Netherlands. It had some outstanding professors, one of whom, Cocceius, still has his name engraved above the entrance. It is now an old people's home. A nearby café was once the meeting place for students and it is said to be the oldest café in the whole of Europe. A row of houses in front of the old university was once "professor row," for all the professors lived in them.

We then went on to Dokkum, where we saw a hand-operated draw bridge and a number of windmills. There we had lunch.

In the afternoon we went to Ulrum where Don Rietema was raised. But our interest was especially focused on the Reformed Church where Rev. De Cock was minister and where the Secession of 1834 originated. This church is now a Protestant Church in Netherlands, the name of a new denomination recently formed by a merger of the old State Church, the Reformed Church and a Lutheran denomination. It is totally apostate. This church had a pulpit built up on the wall over against a section enclosed for the consistory. It had hard wooden seats, and a small opening in the wall where it is thought the lepers could come and listen to the sermon. We took in the town and went to 't Sandt where my father was born and raised. We saw the Hervormde Kerk which he likely attended.

Then we went on to Spijk. Elaine had spent some time there in her visit to the Netherlands 33 years before. We had hoped to see the Ronddorp, where Elaine stayed with the Pastoors but this had burned down. We did see the large Hervormde Kerk surrounded by a moat and also the windmill where Rich's dad was born in Woldendorp, which was our next stop. We saw a truck there that had the name Bos on its side. Rich asked the driver whether he knew any of his dad's relation, but that man seemed to know nothing about them.

So we went on to the capital of Groningen, Stad Groningen. This is a rather large and old city. Here is where Rev. Herman Hoeksema spent his early days. Here we saw the famous Martinitoren and also the large Catholic Church.[1] We had supper there, but no one enjoyed the hamburger they fed us.

It was getting late, so we passed Ouddyk, where acquaintances lived whom I met in Lynden, and then on to Leeuwarden, where we spent the night at a rather old, but pleasant hotel, called De Paauw.

We drove back to Ouddijk to spend a few minutes with the former acquaintance and to drop off some literature. We did not find them home, so we hastened on our way, for we had a full schedule for the day. We did see cows out in the front yards of this town, but maybe that was not so strange.

Urk. This is the town on the Ijzel Meer in which the people still dress in clothing of the Middle Ages. What also makes the town interesting is that all the land in this area has been taken from what was formerly the sea. Besides, ships had their harbor here, so that on the shore of the lake there is a memorial bearing plaques with names of those of this area who suffered shipwreck in times past. Ed, Bob and Allie took a number of pictures and then we went on to Kampen. This city was on our itinerary because here is where the Schilder Theological School is located. It took us awhile to find it because of poor directions. In fact, we rode past it once without seeing it. But we finally found it, a red brick building set between others of similar design. But the name was clearly written above the doorway.

Now we went to Arnhem, well known from World War II and from the excellent book by Cornelius Ryan entitled, *A Bridge Too Far*. Here is where the Allies were driven back by the Germans as they fought to regain Holland for the Dutch. The American soldiers are still appreciated for their part in the battle.[2]

By afternoon we were in Utrecht, the former home of Pa and Ma Griffioen. With great effort we managed to see the famous dome of the Catholic Church. But it was with great effort because wherever we went the road was blocked by a parade that was being held in that city that day.

Now we made our way to Amsterdam, the well-known Kalver Straat, the royal palace, the square where the dope addicts hang out day and night. We ate supper that night on the second floor of the McDonald's on Kalver Straat. Then we took a ride on the canal to see the city from that vantage point. Ed took some pictures of the canal at night, and then we hastened to go to Leidensdorp where we had reservations at the Ibis Hotel, and where we would meet the rest of our party.

On Sunday morning we went out to look for a church. We found a church that had just finished its first service. As the people were coming out, I asked one woman whether there was a second service. She assured me that there was and said that we should hurry to participate. This church was a Hervormde-Gereformeerde Kerk

1 The Martinitoren is the highest church tower in the city of Groningen.

2 The Allies wanted to bring an early end to the war against Germany in September of 1944. Rather than advancing along the entire European front, which would take much longer and cause many more casualties, they planned to make a quick dash across German-occupied Netherlands, across the Rhine River, and into Germany itself. The plan, called Operation Market-Garden, made use of airborne forces and armored units in securing a series of bridges, the last of which was in Arnhem, across the main rivers of Holland. The plan was a colossal failure for the Allies, who suffered almost 18,000 casualties. Arnhem was not liberated until April of the following year, and by that time, many of the Dutch had suffered through the "hunger winter" in which thousands starved.

(a combination of the State Church and the Reformed Church). It was called "De Schepping Kerk" (the Creation Church) and had a large mural on the front wall of the auditorium representing the "Big Bang." Obviously this was a very modern church. There were women in the consistory, and after the sermon a communion service was held, in which children as well as adults went forward to receive the elements. At that stage we walked out.

We next headed to Sassenheim. Anyone who has not heard of Sassenheim has not known Rev. Gerrit Vos. That was his birthplace and he loved it. He was certain that of all of the Netherlands only in that area was the pure Dutch spoken. It is a neat little town. Elaine looked all around the two churches in the town, but could not find a name on either one, so we do not know which one Rev. Vos attended.

We went back to the Ibis Hotel to meet the rest of our tour group. We met them and had a short meeting with them and the guide Shabon. Until the tour group arrived we were treated like guests. When they arrived we became a part of the tour group. Immediately the meals and service were not as good.

Now we were about to leave the Netherlands, a country that had a strong appeal especially because it was for years the seat of Calvinism. Here the great Synod of Dordt was held. Here was the history of reformation in the 19th century that still affects our lives today. Besides all that, here we had our roots, since our forefathers came from this little country. v

Karen is a member of Protestant Reformed Church in South Holland, Illinois, and a granddaughter of Rev. C. Hanko.

Church History

The Upper Room

by J. P. de Klerk

The researchers (monks) believe that this is the place where Jesus and his disciples ate the Last Supper before Jesus was betrayed and captured. Centuries ago old drawings narrowed the spot in Jerusalem where it could have been.

The whole building is made of plastered bricks and has been restored several times, layer upon layer. The first picture of the house dates back to 1100.

The iron gate is only there to stop tourists who will scratch the walls. The heavy floor tiles were made of hewn natural stone. There is room for a long table with short legs, as have been found back under several ruins in Jerusalem, together with copper oil lamps which have been hanging from the ceiling.

These houses usually did not have many windows, as to keep the rooms cool during the summer months or warm when it was freezing at night.

At the left is the staircase. The area at the bottom of the stairs usually is used for animals and transport wagons. v

J. P. de Klerk was an author and writer from Ashhurst, New Zeeland.

Called to Minister

To know and believe in Jesus Christ
Is to have eternal life.
Our Lord grants all those of His own,
Grace, mercy, peace in strife.
But how shall we learn of Him,
Whom we have not heard?
Who is there to expound for us
God's holy written Word?

Our Father, true to provide
The needs of His elect,
Calls men to serve the Church of Christ,
To edify, lead, protect.
Men convicted in their hearts
That they must preach the gospel truth.
Men who love the sheep of God,
The old ones, and the youth.

And so, He's brought to your church, too,
One to stand in the Shepherd's place.
One well-equipped to guide his flock
Through the struggles they will face.
And yet, he's just a man,
A sinner, like you and me.
And so he has weakness and faults
That all will clearly see.

But his calling is a high one,
A weighty load, indeed.
And so our Father calls the church
To bear its brother's needs.
"How shall we begin to minister
To our pastor?" you might ask.
"What are things that we can do
To help fulfill his many tasks?"

First, respect this faithful servant.
Hold him in high esteem.
For he is sent of God Most High
To preach grace to the redeemed.
Encourage him; up-build him;
Listen as through him Christ doth speak.
Apply what you hear each Lord's Day
To your life throughout the week.

But do not depend on him alone
To cause your faith to grow.
Search daily through the Scripture,
Seek to Him more clearly know.
For when we are a people
Who live out of the Word of God.
When we reject the ways of sin
And the narrow path do trod,
Then we will be less quick to judge,
To note our pastor's sin:
We'll be too busy sorrowing
O'r what we find within.

And when he preaches something
That doesn't sit quite right,
Be ready then to see your sin,
And set your way aright.
And give of your goods cheerfully
To provide your pastor's earthly needs.
Treat with love the family
Of the man who sows the gospel seeds.

And pray for Him.
Remember him before the Father's throne.
'Though he may lead our earthly fight,
The battle's not his own.

When we walk this way,
And minister with love,
Then more and more we'll grow to know
Our Servant-King above.
And He will bless our church
As to each other's needs we tend.
We'll grow in grace toward one another
In a bond that knows no end.

Sarah Mowery

Understanding What God's Will Is

by Vicki Cnossen

Aforenote to the reader: As this series of articles is written especially *for* you, know that these writings are not directed toward *only* you. This is not meant to be an attack on young people, but rather, an encouragement. As young adults, middle-aged adults, and even aged adults, we all constantly strive to know and do the will of God. It is my prayer that God's name *alone* will be praised, and that he will use these weak means to build us up in the faith; and give us an increased desire to grow in our knowledge and love for him, our God and Savior.

Dear precious child of God. You live in a day in which you are increasingly bombarded with a gospel of selfishness. Everywhere you look, everywhere you go in this world, you are told that life is all about YOU. The music, the television, the advertisements. Do whatever makes YOU feel good. Say what gives YOU the praise. Wear what makes YOU look good. Seek a career in which YOU can build great wealth in order to achieve what YOU want. When you're on a date, do whatever makes YOU feel good.

But, dear precious child of God, I ask you this: Who are you? You are the sons and daughters of God. John 1:12: "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." You have been bought with a price, and you belong to Christ. I Corinthians 6:19-20: "What? Know we not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." As God's child, you have been given a spirit of power, love, and self-discipline. II Timothy 1:7: "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." You are to labor in your holy calling. II Timothy 1:9: "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began." You are risen with Christ, and therefore called to set your affection on things above. Colossians 3:1-2: "If ye then 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." You are commanded to do God's will. Matthew 7:21: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."; and Ephesians 6:6: "but as the servants of Christ; doing the will of God from the heart."

Exactly what is God's will? Scripture tells us that God's will consists of two aspects. His will of decree (Eph. 1:5: "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will."), and his will of command (Matt. 7:21: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."). God's will of decree includes everything that God has foreordained and that will ever come to pass. His will of command reveals everything that man ought to do and be. They are not the same, yet there is no conflict between them. Our focus of study in the following articles, Lord willing, will be on God's will of command.

Each day, you have very important, and seemingly not-so-important decisions to make. Decisions about how you will dress. The entertainment you will seek. How you will conduct yourself on a date. How you will use the gifts and talents God has given you. Yes, God's will of decree is his sovereign determination of all things that happens in your life. But that does not give you a free pass to say, "well, God has saved me; I will always be his, so I can live as I please." Quite the opposite. Romans 6:1-2: "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" You are responsible to God for your decisions. He has blessed you with his word to be your guide. Your decisions must be made according to God's written will. Psalm 119:105: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." And Psalm 40:8: "I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart." Many decisions you must make do not come down to two choices; that of right or wrong. For instance, when you are deciding

which pair of jeans to purchase, there is no detailed, written law in Scripture as to what is right or wrong for the child of God. But, you must use God's word to determine your decision. You must ask yourself, "Am I choosing this pair of jeans because it's what Hollywood tells me is what I should wear?" Or, is your purchase determined by your focus on what is pleasing and honoring to God? The desire in your life must be to serve *God*, and to do *his* will. Psalm 40:8 speaks of David's confession: "I delight to do thy will, O my God." As a child of God, your focus in all things must be doing the will of God. You must first consider what he wants and commands you to do and be.

This is the exact opposite of what you hear in the music, and see on the TV and magazines and billboard advertisements. The "rule" of today's world is self-fulfillment. The devil is very pleased with this rule that the world is feeding you constantly. He is *always* attacking you, working constantly to turn you away from God. I Peter 5:8: "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." He knows that the day of Christ's return is near, so he is using all his hosts to attack you. Dear child of God, take up the armor of God, the Gospel, the Word of Truth. Search the Scriptures to know what the will of God is for you. Trust in God alone to guide your decisions. Proverbs 3:5-6: "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." Don't look to Hollywood, or a worldly music star. Don't listen to the devil when he shouts to you "just do what you want, you're young, have fun now!" When he whispers in your ear, "if you don't follow the crowd everyone will laugh at you, you'll have no friends, no fun," shout back at him to get behind you. Tell him what he is: the liar.

Go to the source of truth. Go to your heavenly Father. Pray. Often. For everything. I Peter 5:7: "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you." Pray for each other. Pray with each other. And be assured that your parents, grandparents, friends, and fellow saints in the body of Christ diligently pray for you as well. Through constant prayer you will come to know God's will for you. Hebrews 4:16: "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." When you face a decision, be it large or small, seek him in prayer. Ask him to make his will know to you. How does he show you his will? Does he whisper in your ear the answer? Or perform a miracle? Or give you a vision? No. Only by God's grace (the pure preaching of the Word being the chiefest means of grace) and in the way of studying his Word he will guide you in all truth. I Peter 5:8a: "Be sober, be vigilant," and I Peter 5:10: "But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you." Seek the Scriptures. Alone. Together with your friends. Colossians 3:16: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the LORD."

Living as a child of God in this godless world is not easy. God doesn't promise ease and comfort and fun in this life. To the contrary, since we are pilgrims and strangers on this earth, he promises suffering. Philippians 1:29: " For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake." Also, Romans 8:17-18: "And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

But, dear child of God, do not be discouraged. He also promises you an eternal reward. Colossians 3:4: "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory." Also, Colossians 3:24: "Knowing that of the LORD ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance; for ye serve the LORD Christ." It is a reward far greater than any praise of man, far greater than any pleasure on this earth. It is the reward of eternal life with him; a life of perfection, with no suffering, no sorrow; a life of everlasting joy in perfect praise of our creator. As his child, he equips you to do his will while you are on your pilgrimage here below. He has given you the armor of salvation, righteousness, peace and faith. So may you live a life of thankfulness to him for his great gift of salvation. And may you strive to know and do his will. I Peter 5:11: "To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." v

Additional Sources of Reference:

Doctrine According to Godliness, Rev. Ronald Hanko, RFPA, 2004, p. 79

Standard Bearer, Rev. Garret Eriks, Volume 81, issue 3, and Volume 81, Issue 15, "Making Decisions According to God's Will"

Vicki is a member of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church in Byron Center, Michigan.

Church News

BAPTISMS

"For the promise is unto you and your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." Acts 2:39

The sacrament of Holy Baptism was administered to:

Alayna Joy, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Josh Lubbers—Byron Center, MI

Allyson Sue, daughter of Brittany Landheer—Byron Center, MI

Isaac James, son of Mr. & Mrs. Eric Westra—Calvary, IA

Levi Joel, son of Mr. & Mrs. Joel VanEgdom—Doon, IA

Luke William, son of Mr. & Mrs. Paul DeJong—Doon, IA

Nicole Lynn, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Chris VanGinkle—Doon, IA

Samantha Lynn, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Brian Koole—Faith, MI

Ethan Bradley, son of Mr. & Mrs. Philip Kleyn—First, MI

Andrew Robert, son of Mr. & Mrs. Nate Pastoor—Grandville, MI

Tyler Neal, son of Mr. & Mrs. Ryan Kooienga —Grandville, MI

Annica Faith, daughter of Mr & Mrs. Trent VanBemmel—Grandville, MI

Cowen Joseph, son of Mr. & Mrs. Joe VanOverloop—Grandville, MI

Laelle Brynn, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Corey Terpstra—Holland, MI

Ashlee Grace, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Doug Feenstra—Hudsonville, MI

Kade Peter, son of Mr. & Mrs. Derek Van Den Top—Hull, IA

Cameron Joel, son of Mr. & Mrs. Daniel Terpstra—Peace, IL

Jessica Jean, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Nathan Postmus—Redlands, CA

Taylor Wesley, son of Mr. & Mrs. Timothy den Hartog—Redlands, CA

Lauren Kate, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. John Flikkema—Southeast, MI

Madison Kate, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Joel Kooienga—Southeast, MI

Charles Edward, son of Mr. & Mrs. Brent Snippe—Southeast, MI

Alicia Joy, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Eric Lubbers—Southwest, MI

Jessica Ann, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Kyle Ten Broeke—Trinity, MI

Amber Joy, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Hib Kuiper—Trinity, MI

Grady Lee, son of Mr. & Mrs. Tim Machiele—Trinity, MI

Conner Steven, son of Mr. & Mrs. Brad VanSingel—Trinity, MI

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

"Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." Proverbs 22:6

Public confession of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ was made by:

Brittany VanBemmel—Doon, IA

Rachel VanBemmel—Doon, IA

Kenneth Van Den Top—Doon, IA

Kyle Van Den Top—Doon, IA

Richard Van Den Top—Doon, IA

Sherry VanEgdom—Doon, IA

Larissa DeJong—Holland, MI

Melissa Wassink—Holland, MI

Amanda Windemuller—Holland, MI

Andrea Engelsma—Hope, MI

Philip Wierenga—Immanuel, Lacombe, Alberta, CAN

Kurt DeJong—South Holland, IL

Brett Zandstra—South Holland, IL

Joel Boverhof—Southwest, MI

MARRIAGES

"For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death." Psalm 48:14

United in the bond of Holy Matrimony were:

Mr. John Heyboer and Miss Anna Corson—Faith, MI

Mr. David Kuiper and Miss Nicole Wagner—Faith, MI

Mr. Michael Pols and Miss Heather Peterson—Hope, MI

Mr. Brent Kregel and Miss Kara Kamps—Hope, MI

Music in the Woods (4)

The Reformed Dutch immigrants who began to come to West Michigan in 1847 were known for their piety and love for the songs of Zion. At home, at work, at church, they sang the Psalms in all their joys and sorrows, and trials and toil. They had been grievously persecuted in the Netherlands, and as such most landed on American soil in abject poverty. Yet they sang through it all with thanksgiving to God.

The Reformed Church in America was concerned about them. Rev. Isaac Wyckoff and others had helped them on their way to Michigan, but they wanted to help them more. They were all Reformed, were they not? So in 1850 the Dutch immigrants joined the large, established Reformed Church in America. Now the Reformed churches in the east could better help these new, struggling churches in the west.

And they did. But the union was not all that it seemed. In very little time reports of conditions in the east reached the ears of these immigrant Psalm singers in the west. Their brothers in the east may have been concerned about the poor health and poverty of these Dutchmen, but these Dutchmen were even more concerned about the spiritual health of these Reformed Americans. All was not well in the east. They did not cherish the doctrines of the sovereignty of God and depravity of man, election, and reprobation. They did not cherish singing the word of God in the Psalms.

They sang hymns in the east—just like the man-centered hymns the king in the Netherlands had tried to force all Reformed people to sing. It was one of the reasons these Dutch immigrants had separated from the State Reformed Church in the Netherlands in 1834—and had been sorely persecuted for doing so. Now they found themselves joined to a church that sounded more and more like the church they had left in the Netherlands.

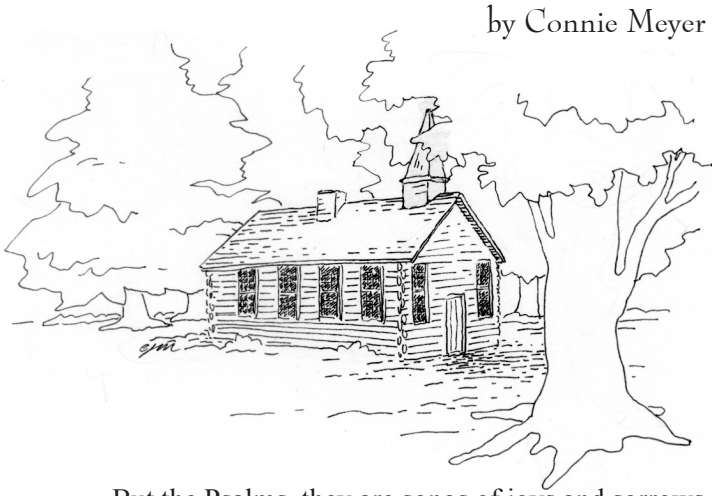
Rev. Wyckoff had told them they could leave at any time, but Rev. Van Raalte urged them to stay together. So did other ministers in the Dutch colony. They held to the same confessions, did they not? Then they ought to be one.

By the mid 1850s there were hundreds of Dutch people living in Holland and the surrounding settlements, even as far as Grand Rapids. They did not relish another church split such as they had experienced in '34. Accusations and angry quarrels were already taking place over the matter.

"LITTLE LIGHTS"

. . . let it shine !

by Connie Meyer



But the Psalms, they are songs of joys and sorrows, repentance and deliverance, and something else, too. They are battle cries of victory.

In April of 1857 Classis Holland met in the quaint, cedar log church of Zeeland, Michigan. Rev. Van Raalte and other ministers and elders were there, but others were noticeably not present. Four letters from four congregations were read, each explaining why they must leave the fellowship of the Reformed Church in America. Two ministers and about 150 families were now on their own. Those that stayed in Classis Holland were saddened and angry.

Such was the state of the church 150 years ago. It was a victory for the truth.

Find the following underlined words in the puzzle below:

"O sing unto the Lord a new song; for he hath done marvellous things: his right hand, and his holy arm, hath gotten him the victory" (Psalm 98:1).

S	U	O	L	L	E	V	R	A	M
N	O	H	U	E	T	I	G	S	D
W	E	N	D	N	H	C	W	G	H
S	I	N	G	O	T	T	E	N	O
G	A	V	R	D	G	O	A	I	L
H	A	T	H	G	I	R	D	H	Y
N	E	Y	L	H	M	Y	M	T	S

Connie is the mother of 5 children and a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

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at Covenant Hills Camp, Otisville, Michigan.

Speakers

Mr. Dan VanDyke
Rev. Clayton Spronk
Rev. Ronald Van Overloop

Hosted by

Byron Center PRC

"The fear of man bringeth a snare:
but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe."
Proverbs 29:25

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