

GRACE COMMUNION INTERNATIONAL

CHRISTIAN Odyssey

April–May 2012

Growing Together in Life & Faith

The Empty Tomb—

what's in it for you?

Page 3

Anyone for Lemonade?

I couldn't believe it.

I must have looked at it a dozen times, as I put the issue together. So had our copy editors and proofreaders. Our designer didn't catch it. Neither did the printers—not that it is their job. They had sent us page proofs and we had signed off on them. But there it was—a glaring error in a headline, of all places.

92 Years and Still Going Stong!



None of us caught it until the web master uploaded the issue for the internet version. But it was too late. Like Oliver Cromwell's portrait, *Christian Odyssey* had been printed "warts and all." Unfortunately, these things happen. It wasn't the worst typographical error I have ever allowed to slip through in my editorial career. (The worst was probably "Crucifixion.")

Well, you know what they say: when life sends you lemons, make lemonade. I think we might be able to get two glasses of lemonade out of this sour note.

First, it serves as a reminder that it is difficult to publish a magazine without some misprints. Many people and processes are involved, and the various computer programs we use are quite capable of misunderstanding each other. Errors will creep in, although thankfully not often as glaring as in a headline. To produce a magazine-length publication or a book that is 100% error free is like—well, it's like trying to live a perfect, sin-free life. Fortunately, a pub-

lishing mistake is rarely fatal. However, the apostle Paul helpfully warns us that "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23).

Fortunately, the source of our salvation and eternal life is not subject to human error. We have a Savior who is not only the author, but also the finisher of our salvation. He will do the final "proof reading" of our lives, and because it depends on his righteousness and not ours, we can rest assured that we will be presented for eternal life "without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless" (Ephesians 5:27).

Perhaps we can squeeze out another parallel lesson from our editorial gaffe. Our headline should have read "Still Going **Strong**." That is a cliché, and nine out of ten people I showed the page to did not notice the "r" was missing. That's the trouble with clichés. You read them carelessly, assuming you know what they say.

It is the same with scriptures that become familiar to us. We tend to read over them, and in doing so, we can overlook some important details. Beginning on page 3, we have an article about the significance of the empty tomb of Jesus. We have included many of the scriptures that you'd expect to find in an article like this. I'd like to challenge you to look at them carefully. Don't just skim over them, assuming you know what they are telling us. Our hope is that you will see some exciting aspects of the resurrection of Jesus that are often missed.

There are other articles in this issue, which we hope will help you make this Easter season inspiring and encouraging. That is what we want *Christian Odyssey* to be—encouraging and inspiring. Even when we make mistakes. ;)

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CHRISTIAN Odyssey

April–May 2012. Vol. 9 No. 2.
Circulation—9,000

Christian Odyssey (ISSN 1937-500X) is published six times per year by **Grace Communion International**, PO Box 5005, Glendora, CA, 91740. Copyright © 2012 Grace Communion International. All rights reserved. *Christian Odyssey* is

also available on the Internet at www.christian-odyssey.org. For subscriber services in the U.S., phone 1-800-423-4444.

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Postmaster: Please send address changes and Form 3579 to Grace Communion International, PO Box 5005, Glendora, CA, 91740-0730.

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A photograph of an ancient stone tomb entrance. A large, smooth, light-colored stone is rolled away from the entrance, which is a dark, rectangular opening in a rough, weathered rock wall. The surrounding area is filled with other large, irregular stones and some sparse vegetation. The background shows a clear blue sky and some green trees.

The Empty Tomb—

What's in it for you?

By Joseph Tkach and John Halford

We don't know precisely when. We are not sure exactly where. But early one morning about one thousand, nine hundred and eighty years ago, something happened in Jerusalem that affects the life of every human being who has ever lived.

Jesus, a carpenter from Nazareth, had been arrested, condemned and crucified. As he died he entrusted himself to his eternal heavenly Father and his Holy Spirit. Then, for three days his battered corpse had lain in a tomb carved out of solid rock, sealed by a heavy stone rolled across the entrance.

Even so, Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, had placed a guard at the tomb. Jesus had prophesied that the grave would not hold him, and Pilate was afraid the followers of the dead

man would try to steal the body. However, that seemed unlikely. Those followers were demoralized and in hiding. They had seen the brutal end of their leader—flogged nearly to death, nailed to a cross and, after six hours of agony, stabbed in the side with a spear. They had taken the battered body down from the cross and hastily wrapped it in linen. It was only intended to be a temporary burial, as a sabbath was approaching. Some planned to come back after the sabbath to prepare Jesus' mortal remains for a proper burial. They had no illusions about what they would find in the tomb. Their beloved leader was dead—he was going nowhere.

The body of Jesus lay in the cold, dark tomb for three days. Then, sometime early in the morning of the third day, the shroud that held the mangled flesh stirred, and out of it

stepped something that had never existed before—a resurrected and glorified human being. Jesus had been resurrected by his heavenly Father and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Not just in a way that restored his human existence, as he had done for those he brought back from the dead, but who would later die again—Jesus had become a new kind of creation, never to die again. He folded the burial shroud, and walked out of the tomb to continue his work. And nothing would ever be the same again.

Don't fully understand

When he was with us on earth, Jesus was one of us, a flesh-and-blood human being, subject to hunger, thirst, weariness and the limited dimensions of a mortal existence. He also lived in communion with God's Holy Spirit, as one of us. Theologians call this "the incarnation." But he was also one with God as the eternal Word or Son of God. This is a concept that is difficult, and perhaps impossible to completely grasp, given the limitations of our human minds. How could Jesus be both God and human? The contemporary theologian J.I. Packer put it well: "Here are two mysteries for the price of one—the plurality of persons within the unity of God, and the union of Godhead and manhood in the person of Jesus... Nothing in fiction is so fantastic as is this truth of the Incarnation."¹ It is a concept that is contrary to everything we know about ordinary reality.

What science is uncovering shows that just because something seems to defy explanation, that does not mean it *isn't* true.

Well, perhaps not everything. Scientists working on the leading edge of physics have had to come to terms with phenomena that turn conventional logic on its head. At the quantum level, the rules that govern our everyday life break down, and rules that are so counterintuitive to logic as to seem preposterous take over. Light can act as both a wave and a particle. A particle can be in two places at the same time. Some subatomic quarks must spin twice before they have "gone around" once, while others need to make only half a revolution. And so on. The more we learn about the quantum world, the more unlikely it seems. But experiment after experiment demonstrate that quantum theory is right. But our ordinary experience gives us no clues that this would, or even could, be the case.

What science is uncovering shows that just because something seems to defy explanation, that does not mean it isn't true. Likewise, we accept that even though we may not fully grasp how Jesus was God in the flesh, that was the way it was. We have the tools to investigate the physical



world and are often surprised at its inner details. So why should it be a surprise that the spiritual world is also sometimes counterintuitive? We do not have tools to investigate divine and uncreated realities—we have to accept it the way God reveals it to us. In fact we were told about these things by Jesus himself and by those he commissioned to preach and write. The evidence we do have, from Scripture, from history and our own experience supports the belief that Jesus was both one in being with God and one with humanity.

So while it is intriguing, it is not essential for us to understand every detail about how this can be. Insisting on it may actually get in the way of fully appreciating what happened on that first Easter morning. When Jesus the man was resurrected, the two natures reached a new dimension of being together that resulted in a new kind of creation—a glorified human being, no longer subject to death and decay.

Many years—perhaps as many as 60—after this event, Jesus appeared to John, the last of his original disciples, who had seen him die. John was now an old man. Jesus told him, "I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades" (Revelation 1:18).

Hold it! Read that again. Let the impact of it percolate. Once we become familiar with a scripture, there is a danger when we read it quickly, thinking we know what it is saying, but end up glossing over important details. Most of us have grown up knowing that "Jesus died for us." It has become a cliché, and once that happens, it dilutes any power to shock. Once a verse or an idea becomes too familiar it is tempting to hurry through it, thinking, "Yes, I know that."

Revelation 1:18 is a verse that needs to be unpacked carefully. So look again at what Jesus is saying. He *was dead*. He *is now alive*. As if that were not enough, he says he will *stay alive forever*. And he also has a key that opens up the



When Jesus the man was resurrected, his two natures reached a new dimension that resulted in a new kind of creation—a glorified human being, no longer subject to death and decay.

way for others to also escape the grave. Even death isn't what it used to be after Jesus' resurrection.

Wow! At least, we should respond with a "wow." What this verse is saying is that Jesus has revolutionized what it means to be a human being. Not just for himself, but for everyone. That is the astonishing promise of another verse that has become a cliché: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that *whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life*" (John 3:16). Jesus, resurrected to eternal life, has opened up the way for us to also live forever.

But wait—there's more.

Look again at what Jesus prayed before he died: "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world" (John 17:24). Jesus, having shared our mortal existence for about 30 years, says he wants us to be with him in his immortal environment forever.

Paul, writing to the Romans, believed it: "Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that *we may also share in his glory*" (Romans 8:17-18).

Jesus was the first human to transcend mortal existence, but God never intended that he be the only one. We were, as Willie Nelson sings, "always on his mind." "Those God fore-knew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among *many brothers and sisters*" (Romans 8:29).

Although we cannot yet understand the full impact of this,

our eternal future is in safe hands. "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has *not yet been made known*. [So don't worry about it.] But we know that when Christ appears, *we shall be like him*, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). What is his can become ours, his kind of life. God's kind of life.

Through his life, death and resurrection, Jesus has shown us what it means to be a human being. He is the first to reach the full perfection that God had in mind for human beings from the beginning. But by no means is he the last. We can't get there by ourselves. "I am the way and the truth and the life," Jesus explained. "No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). But

he "by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body" (Philippians 3:21).

So when we read the scriptures carefully, an exciting preview of the future of the human race begins to unfold.

"What is mankind that you are mindful of them, a son of man that you care for him?" asks the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews. "You made them a little lower than the angels; you crowned them with glory and honor and put everything under their feet" (2:6-8).

This much he knew. He was quoting a Psalm that had been written a thousand years before. But, he continued "at present we do not see everything subject to them. *But we do see Jesus*, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God *he might taste death for everyone*" (verses 8-9).

When the women came back to finish preparing Jesus' body for burial, they found the stone rolled back and the tomb empty except for the neatly folded body shroud and head covering. But that empty space was filled with promise—for them and the other disciples. And for every human being.

Jesus' destiny is our destiny. His future is our future. Easter demonstrates God's willingness to irreversibly bind himself to all of us in an eternal relationship of love, lifting us up into the very life and communion of our Triune God.

Jesus came to save us for that. And he has. **co**
'J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1993), 53.

Expedient Indeed

By Kerry Gubb

“I tell you the truth: it is expedient for you that I go away ...”
(John 16:7 KJV).

Jesus said it, so it’s true—and the obedient disciple in me accepts it. But hasn’t always understood it. What is it about the Master’s departure that is expedient for his followers? Perhaps that’s why he reinforces the concept by assuring us that it’s true—because he knew we’d have difficulty with it at times. I sure have!

Surely this Christian walk would be much enhanced by having a walking, talking, flesh-and-blood Jesus around us for encouragement, teaching and exhortation. For us, “expedient for you” often does battle with “where are you, Lord?” In short, deep down, we’d really like to see, hear and touch him.

But the truth is, we *do* have his live, literal presence with us: his live, non-bodily presence—the one he calls “the Comforter”—the Holy Spirit—the one who not only walks alongside, living with us, but who also lives—literally—within us. Both with us and within us.

Our desire for Jesus’ literal presence has been granted—his way, which is better than our way by about as much as heaven is over earth (Isaiah 55:9). He has not left us bereft, like orphans. Despite his physical absence, he is nonetheless with us continuously, as he promised he would be, in the person of the *parakletos*, “the Comforter”—the non-bodily, yet *literal* presence of the Father and the Son who “come” to us and make their “home” with us (John 14:23).

So, what makes all this “expedient” for us? What’s going on that makes this the optimum arrangement?

Intercession! Our merciful and faithful High Priest, personally experienced in the full range of human feelings, intercedes—having reconciled us with God. The Captain of our Salvation completes his glorious work in partnership—as one—with the Comforter.

At the right hand of the Father, he mediates in an intercessory role known to many as “justification”—the means

by which we have been forgiven of our sins, our record clear, his own righteousness attributed to us.

What does it mean that Jesus “ever” (perpetual—at all times) intercedes for us? Many people unwittingly default to a mental image of the kind-hearted Son pleading each and every case before a stern-faced, reluctant Judge sitting with his arms folded and foot tapping impatiently, salivating at the chance to pass sentence. “Father, forgive him ...”, “Father, forgive her ...”, “Father, forgive ...”, in an endless litany of anxious appeal, our lives forever tenuously in the balance. This grossly distorts the reality of God.

The Christ who said “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32), is not busy trying to change the Father’s mind about us. He knows the Father’s heart, even if we don’t yet.

It was the Father who sent his Son into the world, not to condemn it, but to save it—precisely because he loved it so much (John 3:16-17). The Father isn’t reluctant, stern or cruel. He and the Son and the Spirit are eternally one, and that means they are eternally one in their love for and faithfulness to us (John 14:20).

Jesus’ intercession for us is not a torrent of impassioned pleas. It’s implicit in his very presence at the right hand of the Father: our humanity is redeemed and glorified *in him*. He is our perfect substitute and representative. His *being there* is the fullness and wholeness of his intercession for us and the Father’s acceptance of us on his behalf. The price of our salvation has already been paid, once for all time (Hebrews 9:26).

Our redeemed humanity now sits in the very presence of God in the person of Jesus Christ, who in his life, death, resurrection and ascension has included us in himself as the beloved children of the Father. And all this is because of God’s “great love for us,” because he is “rich in mercy,” and that’s how he felt about us even when we “were dead in transgressions” (Ephesians 2:4-7).

But there’s still a “meantime,” isn’t there? Forgiven, redeemed and included though we are, we still sin. So difficult, while still in the flesh, to live a life day-to-day, “down



Many people have a mental image of the kind-hearted Son pleading each case before a stern-faced, reluctant Judge impatient for the chance to pass sentence.

here,” that is completely in tune with what is already true of us “up there,” isn’t it?

A grim reality ...

Except for the presence of the *parakletos*: the “Comforter alongside,” the invisible presence of Jesus Christ here on earth, where we really need him!

Concurrent with Jesus’ intercession of “justification” in heaven, we have the Holy Spirit’s intercession of “rectification” here on earth: with us and within us (John 14:17). The work of the Comforter is directed toward the same result: the complete fulfilment of our salvation. You might say that the Comforter helps us live life in the light of Christ’s saving achievement.

What’s going on in the Father’s presence is a done deal. As Jesus completed his earthly work, he said: “It is finished” (John 19:30). That’s what he meant. What’s going on “down here” is a life of faith and hope, bridging the huge gap between what we still are in the flesh and the fullness

of the done deal in heaven. What’s already true in heaven is the source and reason for our resilience and endurance to fight the good fight, finish the race, keep the faith and receive the crown. And bringing all this together is *parakletos*, “the Spirit of him who raised Jesus Christ from the dead,” the one who lives in us and through whom the Father “will also give life” to our “mortal bodies” (Romans 8:11).

There’s an interesting contrast between the way the ancient Israelite high priests did their work of intercession for the people and the way the book of Hebrews describes Jesus’ finished work on our behalf. The ancient high priests did their work standing. “But,” Hebrews 10:11-12 tells us, “when this priest [Jesus] had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he *sat down* at the right hand of God.”

He sat down because his all-encompassing and eternal priestly work was done. “It is finished.” What remains now is the life of faith. And *parakletos* has it covered. He’s called “the Helper” in some Bible translations. But we need to understand something: The Holy Spirit is not the “tiger in our tank.” He doesn’t somehow supercharge our own

efforts to walk this walk. He’s not a tool we use. The fact is, he uses us. He guides us into truth (John 14:26), and one with the Father and the Son, works with our conscience and ethical values, leads our thinking, brings our minds, intellects and hearts into line with God. Through the Spirit, Jesus even redeems and heals our weak and limited prayers, offering them to the Father as his own on our behalf and in our stead (Romans 8:26).

So the Father’s answer to the Son’s prayers in the Spirit on our behalf is always “yes.” Not necessarily “yes” to exactly what we had in mind when we asked in weakness—but rather, “yes” to our prayers as they are redeemed and transformed by him through the Spirit.

And our part in all this?

Trust! Believe! Appreciate! Give thanks! In the love and grace of God be led and strengthened by the Comforter!

Just as Jesus said, it was expedient that he go away that we might never be alone.

Expedient indeed! **co**

Proud to be "Kayla's Daddy"

By Rick Shallenberger



During a recent trip to Africa, I had the privilege of following in my daughter's footsteps, often being introduced as "Kayla's Daddy."

It started the day after I arrived. I was standing in front of almost 400 primary students. When the Director of the school introduced me as Kayla's Daddy, the children cheered. I felt an immediate bond with them because they knew and loved my daughter. I looked at my daughter and my heart swelled with pride. It was the first of many "heart swellings" that would occur during my two-week visit to Africa.

Kayla and a friend, Carrie Smith, have spent the past five months teaching at a private school in Blantyre, Malawi. I was able to watch my daughter teach her class of 67 (yes, you read that correctly – 67) students and my heart swelled with pride at her professionalism and the way she handled the class, which was almost three times the size of a normal class in the US. My heart swelled with pride again at church when Kayla and two other women sang special music in Chichewa, the national language of Malawi. And again as I watched Kayla and her friend join the women's choir, singing and dancing for special music.

My heart continued to swell whenever I watched Kayla take small groups of children who were behind in their lessons, and give them personal attention. And again, as I watched the children swarm around my daughter, as she sang them songs and played games.

On more than one occasion I felt God prompting me, "This is how I often feel about my children. This is how I often feel about you." It was (and is) a very good feeling. I was watching my daughter do what she is gifted to do—teach and love children. I was reminded that God often feels the same Fatherly pride when he watches us use the gifts he gave us to share his love with others.

Kayla has desired to go to Africa since she was a young girl. She had read a few articles in *National Geographic* about the special needs of the children in several African countries and she determined then and there to go to Africa and make a difference. She put several pictures on her bedroom wall to keep her dream in her heart and mind. Through her teen years she decided her life goal was to make a positive difference in the lives of others, and she has been doing just that for a number of years through music, teaching, drama and using her God-given gifts to love others.

Kayla's first real opportunity to go to Africa came during her junior year of University. I was asked to put together a proposal to send two women to teach at Young Ambassadors Private Primary School (YAPPS). When I first mentioned it to Kayla, who was in the third year of her Elementary Education degree program, she jumped at the opportunity. She went with two other women, Carrie Smith from Pittsburgh, PA, and Alberta Gibbs from England.

It took only a couple days for Kayla to fall in love with

God gave me a glimpse of what he feels when he sees us, his children, use our talents and gifts to share his love.



Africa and with the children she was there to teach. The children would swarm Kayla and Carrie, playing with their soft hair, begging for their hugs and asking them to play games with them and teach them songs. Kayla spent much of her free time hanging out with the children and planning more and more ways to reach them. Kayla and Carrie were affectionately referred to as the two *azungas* (white people).

During that seven weeks, Kayla kept asking God “Why am I here? What can I do to make a difference?” and God kept responding through the children, through the members at the churches she visited, and through the school officials. Here’s a comment from her blog:

“Word has been spreading rapidly that Young Ambassadors has teachers from America and the UK.... Only one other primary school in Blantyre (which is the 2nd largest city in Malawi) has “azungas” (white people) teaching, so now Young Ambassadors’ reputation is 1 of the top 2 schools in the district! How amazing is that?! I finally understand why they told us that they need us here and why they think it’s a blessing that we’re here. We truly are making a difference!”

The two weeks I spent with my daughter made up one of the greatest highlights of my life. I was able to watch my child share her gifts and her love with the children, staff and church members in Malawi. Watching her filled me with love and pride. I know now that God was giving me just a glimpse of what he feels when he sees us, his children, use our talents and gifts to share his love and his life with others. **co**

I am with you always



When my husband Rick makes a trip overseas, it affects many people. Routines change when someone is not at home for 2-3 weeks. Schedule changes need to be made in our local congregation. Adjustments are needed at home too. Rick’s travels even affect our dog Tyson’s routine.

Because Rick’s grandmother went to stay with a caregiver while Rick was gone (to give me a much-needed break), our dog, Tyson, suddenly became a “home alone” dog from 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Monday through Friday.. To make things easier for him, I took him on an early morning walk in our neighborhood each morning before leaving for work.

Tyson’s favorite thing to do is to walk and smell all the trails left by the other dogs in the neighborhood. I am always amazed at how much he enjoys that experience because I usually just want to walk quickly and get home where it is warm! One morning I was talking to God and observing Tyson at the same time. I realized that Tyson is in his own little world on these walks. He is following trails I cannot see or smell, and, from my perspective, don’t even exist. I cannot follow the trails that he does. And yet, those scent trails are real to Tyson and all the other dogs in the neighborhood.

I told God how amazing it is that he created the ability in Tyson to follow those trails. Watching him sniff and walk, you would be hard pressed to deny the existence of those scent trails even though you can’t see them. I realized I can’t **see** those trails myself because those scent trails are in a different world or “dimension” than I live in.

As I was sharing this thought with God, another idea popped into my head, “Just like I am with you too even though you cannot see me.” It was a timely thought because I had been struggling to trust God to take care of some things in my life. I wanted him to resolve some issues in ways I could see and understand.

Jesus was reminding me that his being with me is as real as the scent trail my dog was following was real. Just because we can’t see those trails doesn’t mean they don’t exist. Just because we can’t see Jesus with us doesn’t mean he doesn’t exist.

Jesus is real; and his promises are sure. As I continued to walk, those promises came to mind. “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20); “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5); and “neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:39). This is reality. **co**



“There she is!”

By Joyce Catherwood

Every time I walked in the door, Dad would clap his hands, look pleased and say, “There she is!” He was always sitting in his not-so-gently worn, green upholstered recliner, surrounded by small tables piled high with Bibles and commentaries.

Lying across the arms of his chair was a tray-type contraption he had made to hold his open books. It had a nifty built-in pencil/pen holder. Sticking out of all his books and Bibles were little cards that Dad used as bookmarks. It seems every other page was “book marked” because every other page was important to him. Behind his chair was a heavy, rusty stand-up lamp that must have been at least 50 years old, with a long chain to turn it on and off.

If you can provide a listening forum for a senior citizen, do so. Don't let them spend their final years wondering “Was my life worthwhile?”

I don't remember exactly when he started greeting me with, “There she is!” It's funny the things one gets used to. Now that Dad is gone, I would give anything to receive that greeting just one more time. In his 90s, my dad was living alone, having lost his life partner of almost 70 years. His

little house was next door to mine. He had put in a walkway from my door to his. He would watch expectantly for me to come down it, which I did several times a day to check on him.

Almost every time I went over, he wanted me to sit down so he could tell me all about what he had been reading, or a “new truth” he had discovered from his research. Sometimes I would take the time to accommodate him. But most of my visits were for the purpose of making him a meal, cleaning his house, washing his clothes or feeding Maggie, the little stray dog he had adopted. I know he was happy to have some company, but what he really wanted was for someone to listen to him. He would talk to anyone, including strangers, and the first question he always asked is “Are you a Christian?” Then, no matter what the reply, he would immediately say, “Sit down, let's talk!”

My dad's education ended with the 6th grade, but that didn't stop him from learning. His mind was bursting with ideas. He was always inventing gadgets or modifying existing machines to make them more efficient. He could fix just about anything. His interests ranged from beekeeping and smoking meat to solar energy. Even into his early 90s, he would follow construction workers or repairmen who came onto his property, asking questions or giving advice ... actually mostly giving advice. As his physical strength ebbed away, he focused more and

more on studying his beloved Bible and his well-marked reference books. That suited him just fine, because that was his favorite thing anyway.

Dad never hesitated to make his opinion heard, although never on a grand scale. However, as the years went by, his stage grew smaller and smaller. Yet there was still so much he wanted to say. He needed to be reassured that what he said still mattered. I learned that the need to be validated does not diminish with age. If anything, it increases. In my dad's case, he became house-bound and rarely had visitors. So if I didn't provide a forum for his voice to be heard, then it was as though the spotlights had been turned off, the curtains closed and the



audience had left. And that happened much too often.

I was simply too caught up in all that "needed" to be done for him. Some elderly people have few friends and no family visitors and therefore no way for their voices to be heard. Already constrained by aging bodies, the added frustration of not being "heard" is discouraging and demeaning.

If I could do it over again, I would spend much more time just sitting and listening to Dad. Even if I didn't agree, I would still listen. Even if what he said didn't make any sense, I would still listen.

It is fascinating to consider how God used a

devout old man named Simeon to bless the infant Jesus when he was brought to the temple to be consecrated. Simeon had waited all his life for the redemption of Israel. He had been given a special revelation that he would not die before seeing the Messiah with his own eyes. When Jesus' parents entered the temple, Simeon took the baby Jesus in his arms, praised God and pronounced a blessing on him and his parents. Scripture says Mary and Joseph marveled at his words. What he said mattered. Simeon could now die in peace, honored and validated.

If it is within your power to provide a listening forum for a senior citizen, I hope you will do so. Don't let them spend their final years feeling useless and in the way, wondering "Does what I say matter to you? Was my life worthwhile?" **co**

The Right Place at the Right Time



At a meeting on how to attract more customers in our direct-selling business, one woman shared her strategy: to be in the right place at the right time. I thought, yes, but that is easier said than done. I've been in the right place a few times, like when I was walking along the beach in Australia and just happened to fall in with a group of people who had spotted some whales. A few days before I saw a kookaburra, which my Australian friends told me was a rare sight.

Wouldn't you love to always be in the right place at the right time? Sometimes it happens by chance, sometimes it's an answer to prayer, but it's not something we can plan or control.

When those coincidences do happen, some attribute them to an alignment of the stars; others just call it luck. Believers like to use the term *God-incidence* when they feel God was clearly involved. A God-incidence can be any situation where it seems God has brought either people or circumstances together for good. If we read Romans 8:28 correctly, this describes the whole of life.

This well known, but sometimes misunderstood verse doesn't necessarily mean everything that happens is managed or controlled by God. But it does mean we can look for a good result even from the most difficult or even tragic events in life.

When Jesus died on the cross, his followers wondered how any good could come of that horrible turn of events. Some of the disciples went back to fishing, resigned to the conclusion that this was the end of Jesus and all he came to do. For those three days between the crucifixion and the resurrection, all seemed lost. But as they discovered, and we now know, it wasn't the end. It was only the beginning.

God, of course, had always planned for good to come out of what looked like an impossible situation, and it was more than a coincidence or even a God-incidence. This was God's *plan* from the beginning. The whole of history up until then led to this fulcrum event, as part of God's grand plan of love and redemption.

Jesus was in the right place at the right time and because he was, we also are in the right place at the right time. We are right where he wants us to be. In and through him, we are safe in the circle of Father, Son and Spirit, loved and redeemed by the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. We don't have to wonder if our lives will have counted. No matter how hopeless the circumstances surrounding us, all will indeed work together for good in the end, because he loves us.

Just as the women and the disciples despaired during those three dark days, we sometimes wallow in despair for ourselves or for others whose lives seem to hold no hope. But God will wipe away every tear and give us the happy ending we all want—all because Jesus was in the right place at the right time. **co**

School in Thailand Continues to Expand

By John Halford

Iwould like to update you on the progress of the work of Chugait Garmolgomut, a 1986 graduate of Ambassador College, and his wife Amphorn (Fong) in the city of Chiang Mai, Thailand. I visited Thailand again in February and helped Chugait and Fong open up yet another school—a kindergarten extension of their flourishing Ambassador Bilingual School (ABS) for grades 1-6.

The school's idea grew from a challenge from the late Dr. Herman L. Hoeh, who loved Thailand and all things Thai. Chugait and Fong had been raised as Buddhists. Now Christians, they wanted to reach their people with the gospel. They asked Herman Hoeh what to do, and he suggested they start a school based on true values and right living. He gave them \$100 to get started.

They started a small school in their basement apartment, teaching in Thai and English. Many Thais want to learn English, as it is a significant key to a successful career. As more students came to them for education, they were able to expand. ABS is the flagship of a network of bilingual schools in Northern Thailand. Chugait and Fong leased an empty five-story office building on the outskirts of Chiang Mai. They renovated it inside and out and made it into a bright school for several hundred students in grades 1-6. I helped them formally open the ABS two years ago. At that time, they showed me an empty, semi-derelict warehouse that stood behind the main school. "That's where the kindergarten will be," explained Fong.

And that is where it now is! They have transformed the old warehouse into a sparkling kindergarten and renamed it the "Love Building"—a fitting name since we opened the kindergarten on February 14th. Chugait asked me to say a few words to the large group of parents who had come to the opening ceremony. I told them that in the Western World, February 14 is known as Valentine's Day, when people gave gifts to those they love. The school is also a gift of love, to the parents, the children and the future of Thailand.

The Thais are tolerant of all faiths, but the vast majority of the people remain staunchly Buddhist. Frankly, much missionary activity in Thailand goes nowhere as the Christian message is presented in a way that is out of context with Thai culture. However, traditional values are beginning to fray as Thailand continues to modernize. ABS teaches Christianity by example, and although making converts is not the



The author and Chugait Garmolgomut opening the new kindergarten at Ambassador Bilingual School in Thailand.



Chugait Garmolgomut with several of the school's children.

focus, Chugait and Fong have baptized dozens of people in the last few years. Today a church of about 70 meets in their home.

ABS now offers an education from kindergarten through middle school. I jokingly asked Fong, "So where are you going to build the high school?" Without hesitation, she pointed to an empty lot next door. "We'll put it there," she said, "if that is God's will."

It probably is. Psalm 127 reminds us "unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain." It seems that the Lord is building this "house" as the work is certainly

not in vain. It is a success story that is attracting the attention of educators and missionaries in Thailand.

How you can help:

There is a way you can be part of this success story. Chugait and Fong are not asking for financial assistance. However, the challenge of run-



Chugait and Fong Carmolgomut with a portrait of the late Dr. Herman Hoeh, who encouraged and inspired them to start the school.

ning a bilingual school in Thailand is the lack of high quality, affordable books in the English language. The Herman L. Hoeh Library, named after their friend and mentor, is in urgent need of books.

Many of us have books that our children and grandchildren have outgrown. If you send us those books, we can get them to Thailand. They do not need to be specifically Christian books, although they are welcome. Any book for grades K-6, ideally with colorful pictures on any subject of an educational nature, would be welcome. They do not need to be new, but they should not be too battered, torn or in any way defaced.

Do you have books that ABS could use? Then email me at john.halford@gci.org and let me know what you have. If you can get them to me, I know how to get them to Thailand. **co**

Living in the Present



Many people live in the past, constantly lamenting what might have been. Instead of accepting what cannot be changed and moving on, they prefer to be held captive by things they can do nothing about.

Others put their lives on hold waiting for the future. As soon as all their preconceived needs are met, they will get their priorities straight and live the good life.

While it's true we can learn from the past and look toward the future, we live today. God lives in the present. His name is "I am" not "I was" or "I will be" or "I might have been." God meets our needs daily (Matthew 6:11). Our walk with God is a day-by-day journey. By not living in the present, we can miss what God has in mind for us today.

From a spiritual perspective, we live in the present by being open to God's presence in our lives every day. We seek a closer relationship with him (Matthew 6:33). We do not let the past drag us down or the worries of the future hinder our daily walk with God.

This daily walk with God is vital, but how we walk with him is also important.

Let's use the analogy of taking a nature walk. Since I'm not drawn to nature as many are, I could wander aimlessly down a trail unaware of surroundings. When asked what I saw I might not even remember. Others notice the chirping bluebird, the laughing child, the leaves changing color, a fish jumping in a pond or a vibrant sunset and realize all those things have something to do with God. They are aware and alert to God's presence all around them. How I yearn for that!

Prayers of those living in the present become more than begging God to give them what they want. They want God's will revealed to

"Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, today is a gift of God, which is why we call it the present." —Bil Keane

them and his desires to be their desires. They pray throughout the day—some big prayers and many little prayers—of praise, thanks, and requests for immediate help to bring a thought or action back to where God would want it to be (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

Studying God's Word becomes more than just reading a few scriptures (Acts 17:11). They think about how those scriptures apply to their daily lives. They realize the Bible is a living book God uses to speak to them, so they ask God to help them understand it more fully. They want scripture written on their hearts so it comes to mind when needed in a given situation throughout a day.

Meditation becomes more than busy thought. They purpose themselves to think about God, his Word, biblical principles and how Christ would handle situations (Psalm 1:2, Joshua 1:8). They also learn to be still and know God (Psalm 46:10). They dwell on God's goodness, mercy, love and grace.

This is their walk with God, and they will do this every day, all day long. When they wake up tomorrow they'll do it again because God's mercies and love for us are brand new every day (Lamentations 3:22-23). There is something new to be learned about God each and every day, but we'll miss it if we aren't living in the present. **co**

Jesus Christ's Last Sermon

Jesus Christ spent his final hours of human life nailed to a cross. Despised and rejected by the world he came to save, history's only perfect person took upon himself the consequences of our sins. The Bible records that on that spring day, from a hill outside Jerusalem, Jesus spoke several times. No one Gospel writer records all his sayings. Matthew and Mark describe one. Luke and John each give us three. Together, these sayings constitute a powerful message from our Savior's heart during the hours of his greatest personal agony. They reveal Jesus' innermost feelings as he poured out his life for us.

1) "Father, forgive them"

Only Luke tells us that Jesus, shortly after he was crucified, prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34, NIV, 1984 edition quoted throughout).

Nearby were Roman soldiers gambling for his clothes, common people whipped to frenzy by the religious leaders and gawkers who came for the hideous spectacle. The Jewish elders mockingly said they would believe in him if he saved himself (Matthew 27:42-43). On his left and right were two criminals condemned to die with him.

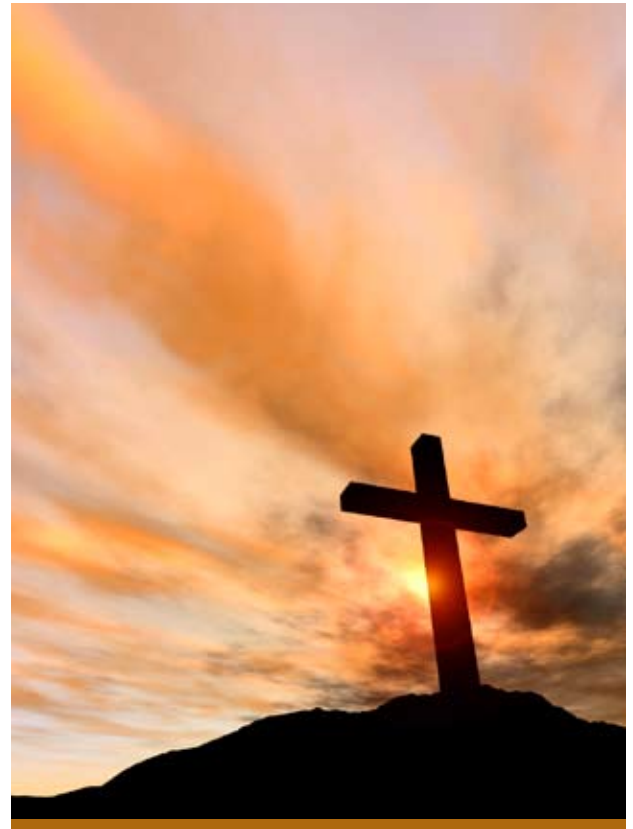
Not everyone at the foot of the cross was hostile to Jesus. Women who had followed him during his ministry and some of his disciples now came forward. His mother, Mary, was mourning the Son whom God had miraculously given her.

Innocent of any crime against God or humanity, Jesus had been betrayed, arrested, scourged and condemned. Now, from the cross, Jesus' thoughts reached above his pain and rejection. Instead of being consumed with his own pain and misery, Jesus asked forgiveness for those responsible for the evil done to him—by extension, all who ignorantly go the way of sin and death.

2) "You will be with me in paradise"

Jesus next spoke to encourage one of the criminals crucified with him. Both criminals, likely thieves or murderers, early on joined bystanders in reviling Jesus (Mark 15:32). Luke tells us, "One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: 'Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!'" (Luke 23:39). This man wanted only escape from his pain. The gulf between them remained because this faithless criminal had no desire to know his Savior and repent of his sins.

But a miraculous change occurred in the other criminal.



He came to believe. This man was just as guilty as the first. He admitted he deserved to die (verses 40-41). He, too, had mocked Jesus earlier, but now he rebuked the other criminal.

We are not told of any other conversation between this second criminal and Jesus. Perhaps only Jesus' example and prayer, which he overheard, moved him so deeply. He said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom" (verse 42). Jesus replied by offering him hope for the future: "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise" (verse 43).

All who surrender to Jesus receive not only strength to face the present, but also lasting hope for the future. There is a future beyond the grave. Eternal life in God's kingdom awaits those who will embrace Jesus as Lord and Savior.

3) "Woman, behold your son!"

Jesus honored and showed concern for his mother. When it seemed impossible for him to help anyone, he provided for Mary's care through his trusted friend John.

"When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, 'Dear

woman, here is your son,' and to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' From that time on, this disciple took her into his home" (John 19:26-27).

4) "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"

For the first time, Jesus' thoughts were on himself. He cried out, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"—which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34).

Many have puzzled over Jesus' seeming doubt. Was Jesus afraid? Had his Father deserted him in his greatest need? Jesus was quoting the first portion of Psalm 22:1, a prophecy of the Messiah's suffering and exaltation.

We sometimes forget that Jesus was fully human. Yes, he was God in the flesh, but he was also subject to all the feelings of mind and body that any of us feel. Jesus spoke these words after three hours of darkness had covered the land (Matthew 27:45). Jesus hung on the cross alone, where he took our place, to feel the pain and anguish that sin causes.

There, in the darkness and pain, bearing the burden of our sins, Jesus fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy: "Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:4-6).

Seven Sayings of Jesus on the Cross

Jesus shared in our humanity. He set an example for us, suffered for us and was victorious over sin and death in his work on the cross. His victory, both in his death and his resurrection, enables us to be reconciled to God and restored to fellowship with him.

While hanging on the cross, Jesus spoke of:

- Forgiveness (Luke 23:32-34)
- Hope (Luke 23:39-43)
- Care (John 19:25-27)
- Loneliness (Mark 15:33-34; Matthew 27:45-46)
- Suffering (John 19:28-29)
- Triumph (John 19:30)
- Reunion (Luke 23:44-46)

Soon Christ would savor the sweetness of eternal victory over sin and death. His final three statements came in rapid succession.

5) "I am thirsty"

Death drew near. The time of final sacrifice was close. Jesus had endured—and overcome—the heat, pain, rejection and loneliness. He could have suffered and died in silence. Instead, unexpectedly, he asked for help. "Knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, 'I am thirsty'" (John 19:28).

Jesus asked for a drink and received vinegar, fulfilling David's 1,000-year-old prophecy (Psalm 69:21). "Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink" (Matthew 27:48). The man who had hurried to answer Jesus' request said: "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to take him down" (Mark 15:36).

6) "It is finished"

Jesus had finished his work on earth. His sixth message was one of triumph: "When he had received the drink, Jesus said, 'It is finished.' With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit" (John 19:30).

Jesus' humility rings in his words. His was not a vain, I-showed-you attitude. He did not even say, "I did it." He claimed no credit. He asked no pity. To the end, Jesus' mind was on the work he came to do. He announced, for all to hear, "It is finished."

7) Jesus' final words

Matthew tells us, "And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit" (Matthew 27:50; see also Mark 15:37). Only Luke preserves Jesus' words: "Jesus called out with a loud voice, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.' When he had said this, he breathed his last" (Luke 23:46).

God is love, and Jesus' ministry showed what love is. He gave himself for us. He preached his last sermon most effectively, by both word and example. In his last seven statements, he affirmed God's greatness and glory.

God's work goes on

Jesus' example and words on the cross bore fruit even before his death, when the repentant robber acknowledged him as Lord and appealed for his mercy.

On that Passover so long ago, Jesus finished his own mission as a human on earth. But his work goes on now in his church. Christ's followers today preach his gospel of salvation. They show his love for fellow humans. And they look for his return as King of kings and Lord of lords.

This is the wonderful message of good news that Jesus Christ preached the day he died for all. ☪

H m m ...

We of the evangelical fold are much more easily persuaded to pray all night for God to do a miracle than to put on our work clothes and help a neighbor.

A.W. Tozer

I would rather live in a world where my life is surrounded by mystery than live in a world so small that my mind could comprehend it.

Harry Emerson Fosdick

History and experience tell us that moral progress comes not in comfortable and complacent times, but out of trial and confusion.

Gerald R. Ford

The local congregation is the primary place for dealing with the particulars and people we live with. As created and sustained by the Holy Spirit, it is insistently local and personal. Unfortunately, the more popular American church strategies in respect to congregation are not friendly to the local and the personal. The American way with its penchant for catchy slogans and stirring visions denigrates the local, and its programmatic ways of dealing with people erode the personal, replacing intimacies with functions. The North American church at present is conspicuous for replacing the Jesus way with the American Way. For Christians who are serious about following Jesus by understanding and pursuing the ways that Jesus is the Way, this deconstruction of the Christian congregation is particularly distressing and a looming distraction from the Way of Jesus.

Eugene Peterson

You have to do your own growing, no matter how tall your grandfather was.

Abraham Lincoln

A friend recently told me of being in a church where on a Sunday morning a young couple stood before the congregation and confessed to sexual intercourse, made evident by the ensuing pregnancy. What is significant about this episode is that we rarely demand this type of confes-



sion for other sins. Rarely does one hear of public confessions for racism, unethical practices in business, economic exploitation, or cheating on an exam or income tax. The church has at times made sex a stand-apart sin by its forms of discipline and tone of condemnation.

Dennis Hollinger,
The Meaning of Sex

Sometimes I think all the English speakers should be committed to an asylum for the verbally insane. In what language do

people recite at a play and play at a recital? Ship by truck and send cargo by ship? Park on driveways and drive on parkways? Have noses that run and feet that smell? How can a slim chance and a fat chance be the same, while a wise man and a wise guy are opposites? You have to marvel at the unique lunacy of a language in which your house can burn up as it burns down, in which you fill in a form by filling it out and in which an alarm goes off by going on.

Anonymous

How strange this fear of death is! We are never frightened at a sunset.

George MacDonald

(W)hile science is on a quest for knowing truth, it can't tell us the whole truth, because it doesn't ask all the questions. Religious faith, in its quest for truth, doesn't ask all the questions either, but it asks different questions. Science doesn't negate the validity of faith, nor does faith negate the validity of science. They seek truth from different points of view.

Dean Nelson and Karl Giberson,
Quantum Leap

"Where did I read that?"

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