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EDITORIAL

What Does the Bible Teach?

"Make it as sure as you know how"

These words, as we read from Matthew 27:65, were spoken by a Roman governor to the chief priests of the Jews and the Pharisees to allay their fear about Jesus' body being stolen from the tomb in which it was kept after His death, because they were extremely apprehensive that Jesus' disciples would come and steal the body and would declare that He had risen. They had said to Pilate, "Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, 'after three days I will rise.' Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away, and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead.' So the last deception will be worse than the first. Pilate said to them, 'you have a guard: go your way, **make it as secure as you know how**'. So they went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting the guard." (Matthew 27:62-66). This shows how wisely people go about doing worldly and physical things. We want to be sure about everything we do, physically speaking. Whatever we purchase for our day to day necessities; groceries, food items, medicines, automobiles or any machine or gadget, we always want to make sure, and in most cases doubly sure, that those things are good in quality. We do not want to compromise our safety and security, our health and wellness. We want to make it as sure as we know how.

But what about our soul, our spiritual life? Are we prepared

to go and live with God in heaven? The question is not, if we have the desire to go to live with God in heaven. But the question is: Are we ready? Have we made the required preparation? Have we made it certain that we have done what God has commanded man must do to be saved from sin? (Acts 2:38; 22:16). Are we walking and living daily as God would want us to walk and live? (Roman 8:1). Or we are spending our days on this earth in the manner of the man whom Jesus had described in one of his parables in these words: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, what shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops? So he said, I will do this, I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul: 'Soul you have many goods laid up for you for many years; take your ease; eat, drink and be merry.' But God said to him 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' So is he," Jesus said, "who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." (Luke 12:16-21).

The man in the story above had everything any person on earth would want to desire to have. Sure, he thought, physically he had made his life on earth secured. But he had made no provision or preparation for his soul. (Matthew 16:26)

This is the same folly most people are making on earth today. They would work day and night to make their life on earth easy and comfortable and secured. But never think about their eternal soul. Man is a dual being, he is both soul and body. (Genesis 1:26, 27; 2:7). Christ taught: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." (Matthew 4:4). To a crowd of people who were seeking Him for some physical benefits, Christ reprimanded and said, "Do not labour for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures for everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you because God the Father has set His seal on Him." (John 6:27). Jesus was here alluding to His forthcoming death on the cross for the propitiation for the sins of the world, according to the plan and the will of God. (John 3:16). Every person, therefore, need Jesus Christ. Because it is in Him that a person becomes the righteousness of God, (2 Corinthians 5:21). To be spiritually and eternally secured every person on earth must accept Christ the Son of God, and repent of every

wrong and be baptized for the remission of sins, and then live right every day following in the steps of Christ. (Acts 2:38; I Peter 2:21-24). Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people. Make it sure then, if you want to go there.

Why We Believe In Hell

J.C. CHOATE

Because we do believe in hell, sometimes we are accused of preaching hell fire and brimstone. It is implied that we enjoy telling people that they are going to be cast into the lake of fire as punishment for their sins. It is true that we do believe in the hell that the Bible talks about, and that the wicked will be sent there some day, but we don't want anyone to go to such a terrible place. And we certainly find no joy in seeing people stubbornly going on their way to certain damnation.

But why would anyone go to such a terrible place or why would a loving God send anyone to hell? Such questions means that we need to explain further what hell is all about. Hell was prepared originally for the devil and his angels. Speaking of the wicked, Christ says that on the day of judgment that the judge shall say to them, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." (Matthew 25: 41). The devil represents sin, ungodliness, and wickedness. He is the very opposite of what is good and right. He is God's enemy, and he has angels that have sided with him. Therefore, hell was prepared for them. At the same time, it should be pointed out that hell was not prepared for the souls of human beings. Although man is a sinner, God has provided a way for man to escape hell. It is only when he rejects God, and the salvation that he offers through his Son, Jesus Christ, that man is lost and sentenced to hell. But even then, it is not a matter of God sending him there. Man sends himself, and therefore, he has no one to blame but himself.

Hell is often described as a place down below while heaven is said to be up on the sky. The Bible doesn't really reveal where either place is but both places have been prepared for those who shall be judged to go there.

As already indicated, hell is a place of punishment. Christ

warned those who would call his brother Raca, or vain and empty, as being in danger of hell fire. (Matthew 5: 22). Speaking of sending his angels to gather out of the kingdom all things that offend, Christ said of them, "And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth." (Matthew 13: 42). John, wrote, "And death and hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire." (Revelation 20: 14, 15). He also said, "But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death." (Revelation 21: 8). It should be pointed out that there is physical death, and the second death that he speaks of in the foregoing verses has reference to that of being separated from God. Being cast into hell, a place of eternal punishment, means that one is cut off from God, and there is no hope for such a person.

When John the Baptist described the coming of Christ and his work, he said, "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: Whose fan is in his hands, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." (Matthew 3: 11, 12). Here it is pointed out that Christ would have the power to baptize with the Holy Ghost, and of course this was having reference to his promise to the Apostles, that he would send the Comforter or Holy Spirit, and then we read of their being baptized with the Holy Spirit. (John 16: 13; Acts 2). But Christ would also have the power to baptize with fire. This would have reference to the wicked being cast into the lake of fire. Then he illustrates it by saying that he would purge his floor and gather the wheat, or the righteous, into the garner, but the chaff, or the wicked, would be burned up with unquenchable fire.

Speaking of the wicked, we read, "The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who

worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name." (Revelation 14: 10, 11).

Jesus said, "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." (Matthew 10: 28). Again, he said, "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell? (Matthew 23: 33). Jesus has reference here to the religious Pharisees and hypocrites of his day.

The Hebrew writer said, "He that despised Moses law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sore punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? (Hebrews 10: 28, 29). Paul said, "...the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." (2 Thessalonians 1: 7-9). Speaking of the wicked and the righteous, Christ said, "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal." (Matthew 25: 46). Again, he said, "But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth," (Matthew 8: 12). Paul wrote, "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 6: 23). John then said, "And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever." (Revelation 20: 10).

Christ told the story of the rich man and the poor man, and what happened to them, to help us to understand the difference in heaven and hell. We read, "There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate full of sores, And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lifted up his eyes, being

in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue: for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence. Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." (Luke 16: 19-31). Hell is therefore real and we must therefore take every precaution so that we will not go there.

There are some who try to say that when a soul is cast into hell, that it is annihilated or destroyed immediately, and that is the end of it. As we have seen, however, when one goes to hell then he will be punished and tormented for ever and for ever. Both are eternal.

Let us now draw some final conclusions from the scriptures that we have read. The devil and his angels will be in hell. The wicked, the ungodly, the hypocrite, those who have been deceived in religion, those who have engaged in the works of the flesh, the unfaithful, and so on, will all have their part in hell.

My friends, we have been warned, told of the salvation that Christ provides, and every effort has been put forth to keep us from going to hell, and to prepare us for heaven. But the Lord will not force you to obey him. The decision is yours. Our prayer is that you will accept the salvation that Christ offers. Paul says, "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." (2 Corinthians 6: 2). Christ invites us to come to him that we might have rest. (Matthew 11: 28-30). The Hebrew writer exhorts us not to neglect our salvation. (Hebrews 2:3).

Are you saved? Are you preparing to go to Heaven? If not, then you are lost and hell awaits you. My friend, hear the Lord

while there is time. Believe in him, repent of your sins, confess Christ as the Son of God, and be baptized to wash away your sins. If you will, Christ will save you and add you to his church. (Mark 16:16; Acts 2: 38, 47). Then you can live for the Lord, remain faithful to him, and heaven will be your home one day. Whatever you do, please don't go to hell.

Was Peter A Pope?

ROYCE FREDERICK

Some people teach that Peter was "the first Pope. They teach that the church was **built** on Peter, that he became the **head** of the church on earth after Jesus returned to heaven, and that he was followed by a **succession** of popes down to the present time. They further claim that Matthew 16:18-19 supports these teachings. Are these claims true? Let us examine them by studying Matthew 16:13-19 and other scriptures.

A STUDY OF MATTHEW 16:13-19

Peter confessed Jesus. "*When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, 'Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?' (14) So they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' (15) He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' (16) Simon Peter answered and said, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God' "* (Matt. 16:13-16).

Some people were afraid to confess Jesus because of what His enemies might do to them (Jn. 9:22; Jn. 12:42). But Peter was not afraid, not ashamed, and not unsure. God had shown abundant evidence that Jesus is His Son. Peter had seen Jesus work many miracles by the power of God. He had heard the wonderful teachings of Jesus. And he had seen the sinless, unselfish life of Jesus. Peter confessed — "acknowledged"—that Jesus is "*the Christ*" which means "the anointed one." He also confessed whose Son Jesus is: "*the Son of the living God.*"

Jesus blessed and confessed Peter. "*Jesus answered and said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in*

heaven" (Matt. 16:17). Jesus confessed Peter's original name, "Simon." As Peter had done, Jesus also confessed whose son Peter was: "Bar-Jonah", which means "son of Jonah."

Jesus was keeping a promise He had made earlier: *"Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven"* (Matt. 10:32-33). Jesus was not saying that Peter was more important than anyone else. Peter was the one who spoke up quickly, as he did many times (see Matt. 16:22; 26:35; Lk. 9:33). Jesus was ready to confess any of the disciples — "whoever" would confess Him.

Jesus continued His confession. *"And I also say to you that you are Peter..."* (Matt. 16:18). Jesus had given Simon the Hebrew name "Cephas" (Jn. 1:42). "Cephas" is the same as "Petros" in Greek and "Peter" in English. Jesus had also given names to some of the other apostles (Mk. 3:17). So, Jesus confessed Peter by the name which He himself had given him.

Jesus used the meaning of Peter's name to teach about the solid base for His church. *"And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it"* (Matt. 16:18). Notice that Jesus did **not** say, "On you I will build My church." He made a transition from **"you are Peter"** to **"on this rock."**

The New Testament was written in Greek. The meanings of the two Greek words "*Petros*" ("Peter") and "*petra*" ("rock") are similar, **but not identical**. "*Petros*" is masculine and means "a stone," while "*petra*" is feminine and means "a mass of rock."

"This rock" upon which Jesus built His church is **far greater than Peter** or any other mere person. **"This rock"** is the solid fact which Peter had confessed—that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. **"This"** is the reason Jesus had asked the question, *"Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?"* (Matt. 16:13). The main purpose of the discussion was to focus on the true identity of Jesus.

Just as Jesus tells us to build our lives on the rock, not on the sand (Matt. 7:24-27), He built His church on a massive rock which cannot be shaken.

"On this rock"—on top of the massive rock base—Jesus built

His church. Jesus referred to Himself as *"the chief cornerstone"* (Matt. 21:42)—the most important stone in the foundation. The chief cornerstone sets the course for construction in every direction. If the chief cornerstone is not perfect, the other stones in the foundation and in the walls will be laid in wrong directions. The apostle Paul emphasized this point when he wrote, *"For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ"* (1 Cor. 3:11). Jesus is the only one who is able to serve as the perfect chief cornerstone.

After Jesus, all of the apostles are given equal importance in the foundation of the church. Paul wrote that we have been *"built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone"* (Eph. 2:20). Peter cannot be *"the rock"* under the church, since he is one of the foundation stones **on top** of *"the rock."*

Peter never claimed to be the rock under the church, nor the chief cornerstone. He said that Jesus is *"the chief cornerstone"* (Acts 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:7) and Christians are *"living stones"* in God's *"spiritual house"* (1 Pet. 2:5). Peter had a time of weakness (Matt. 26:69-74). But after Jesus returned to heaven, Peter became a **strong stone** in the church. He boldly confessed Jesus before the very people who had murdered Him: *"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ"* (Acts 2:36).

Jesus claimed ownership of the future church: *"...I will build My church..."* (Matt. 16:18). Although Jesus had apostles and disciples by the time of Matthew 16, the church did not yet exist. Jesus later *"purchased"* the church by dying for each of its members (Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:25; Rom. 5:8). After He returned to heaven, Jesus began His church with power on the Jewish day of Pentecost (Acts 2).

Jesus promised to give Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven. *"And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven"* (Matt. 16:19).

The beginning of the kingdom was in the near future when Jesus preached, *"the kingdom of heaven is at hand"* (Matt. 4:17; see Mk. 9:1).

The beginning of the kingdom was in the **past** when Paul wrote: *"He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us in the kingdom of the Son of His love"* (Col. 1:13).

The beginning of the kingdom occurred on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. For the first time, **Peter used the keys** by telling **Jewish people** how to enter the kingdom. Peter said, *"Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"* (Acts 2:38). About 3,000 people entered the kingdom that day by obeying the gospel of Christ (Acts 2:41). That was the beginning of the kingdom, which is the Lord's church.

Later, the first **Gentiles** (non-Jews) entered the kingdom when **Peter used the keys again** (Acts 10). The Gentiles entered the kingdom in the same way as the Jews — by being baptized in water for the forgiveness of their sins (Acts 2:38; 10:47-48; 15:7-11; 8:36-39; 22:16; 1 Pet. 3:20-21; Gal. 3:26-27). Now, the kingdom **remains open** to everyone. All people are invited to enter the kingdom by obeying the gospel of Christ (Mk. 16:15-16; 1 Tim. 2: 4; 2 Pet. 3:9).

"Whatever you bind" and *"whatever you loose"* did not mean that Peter could change the doctrines which would be taught. It meant that the truth would be revealed from heaven. Before He died, Jesus promised the apostles, *"...when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come"* (Jn. 16:12-13). On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles in a powerful way (Acts 2:1-4). That day, the Holy Spirit began revealing the remainder of the Lord's will through Peter and all of the apostles (Acts 2:14, 42). In his last letter, Peter wrote that Jesus had kept His promise to guide them into all truth: *"...His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue"* (2 Pet. 1:3). The faith *"was once for all delivered to the saints"* (Jude 3).

Today, no person or group of people has the authority to reveal new truth from the Lord, or to make official proclamations

for His church. When we hear any teaching, we must compare it with the teachings in the New Testament, which Jesus revealed through Peter, and the other apostles in the first century A.D. We must *"Test all things; holdfast what is good"* (1 Thess. 5:21).

EVIDENCE FROM OTHER SCRIPTURES

Peter was a married man. The people who choose popes do not permit them to be married. But Peter had a wife. *"Now when Jesus had come into Peter's house, He saw his wife's mother lying sick with a fever. So He touched her hand, and the fever left her..."* (Matt. 8:14-15; see Mk. 1:30; Lk. 4:38; 1 Cor. 9:5). Peter did not conform to men's requirement that a pope be unmarried. Also, notice that *"forbidding to marry"* was foretold as a demand made by some people who would depart from the faith (1 Tim. 4:1-3).

The Christians in the first century did not regard Peter as a pope. God caused the apostles to be faultless in their teaching, but it was still possible for them to stumble in their conduct (see 1 Cor. 9:27). Once, Paul rebuked Peter, because Peter let his fear of men cause him to stumble in his conduct (Gal. 2:11-12). Paul's rebuke of Peter shows that Peter was not regarded as a pope. After the rebuke, Peter later expressed love and respect for Paul (2 Pet. 3:15).

Peter never claimed to be a pope. Instead, he referred to himself as *"an apostle of Jesus Christ"* (1 Pet. 1:1; see 2 Pet. 1:1). That was the highest office or title he ever claimed.

All of the apostles were equal in authority. Peter was outstanding, but he did not have more authority than the other apostles. In fact, on one occasion, *"the apostles" sent Peter and John* to take care of some work of the church: *"Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them"* (Acts 8:14). This clearly shows that Peter did not have authority over the other apostles: *"...a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him"* (Jn. 13:16). Other verses likewise show that the apostles were equal in authority (Matt. 19:28; Acts 2:42; 2 Cor. 12:11-12).

The idea that Peter was the first pope is a tradition of men, a man-made doctrine. Jesus rebuked some people by

asking, *"Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition?"* (Matt. 15:3). We must never permit any tradition of men to have religious authority over us.

The title "Pope" violates a direct command of Jesus. The title "Pope" means "father," and the pope's followers often call him "Holy Father." But Jesus commands us not to use "father" as a religious title: *"Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven"* (Matt. 23:9).

Peter refused to let men worship him. Each pope today permits people to bow to him, kneel before him, and kiss his ring. In contrast, notice how Peter reacted when a man tried to worship him. *"As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. But Peter lifted him up, saying,— 'Stand up; I myself am also a man:'"* (Acts 10:25-26). It is a sin to worship any man or any image on earth. Jesus said, *"You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve"* (Matt. 4:10; see 1 Jn. 5:21). Peter did not accept worship and does not belong among the popes, who do accept worship.

ONLY ONE HEAD OVER THE CHURCH

The church of Christ does **not** have two heads, one in heaven and one on earth. Christ did **not** appoint Peter or anyone else to be head of His church on earth. When Peter, and the other apostles, and the prophets had finished writing the New Testament, none of them had mentioned any person as head of the church on earth. Christ was still the only head. About thirty years after Christ returned to heaven, Paul wrote that He *"...is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence"* (Col. 1:18).

Christ did **not** give men the authority to set up national or worldwide headquarters, or to select a head over His church on earth. To be the church of Christ, we must follow the will of Christ as revealed in His New Testament. Christ rules over His church by ruling over each local church which obeys what He says in His written word.

A Unique Port

J.L. LEIFESTE

A seaport, or harbor, is a body of water where ships can take refuge. At the same time, they can safely unload burdens of cargo and gather provisions to continue their voyages.

The apostle Paul visited more than thirty different seaports during his life (Acts 13:4-5, 13; 14:25-26; etc.). He probably recognized advantages and disadvantages in each one. Seleucia (Acts 13:4) was the harbor of Syrian Antioch, from which Paul and others spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul sailed in and out of the Philippian port of Neapolis (Acts 16:11-12; 20:6). He preached in Macedonia's most important seaport, Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-9). The harbor of Piraeus led to Athens (Acts 17:14-15). After Paul's moving farewell to the elders of the church from Ephesus, they sadly followed him to the ship in the harbor at Miletus (Acts 20:17-38). Christians from Tyre accompanied Paul to the shore, where they knelt and prayed before he left them by ship (Acts 21:3-6).

As a prisoner on his trip to Rome, Paul revisited many ports. He also saw new ones. Finally landing at Puteoli, brethren gave him lodging seven days before the guards took him on to Rome (Acts 27:1-28:16).

To the apostle Paul, some ports held good memories and friendships. Despite disappointments connected with some ports, the gospel was preached in, and from, these places. Each port must have been important and unique to Paul. They were parts of his travels and preaching, and members of the church of Christ lived in or near many of them.

Spiritually, we are like seafaring ships. Everyone searches for contentment, safety, help in times of need, and relief from life's worries. Many people's spiritual lives resemble ships drifting about in search of a unique port that offers these things. The church that Jesus Christ established delivers a warmth and fulfillment in mental, emotional, spiritual, and even physical ways that the world cannot supply. In certain ways, His church is similar to a unique, spiritual seaport.

All of us need refuge from sin and the harm it causes. No

mere human can reach entire purity and save himself (Rom. 3:23; 1 Jn. 1:8). Therefore, God provided a plan of salvation and eternal life through the sacrifice and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ (Jn. 3:16; Rom. 4:24-25; 6:23; 1 Jn. 3:5; 4:10). We can discover refuge in Christ, in the body of Christ, which is His church, just as if a unique, spiritual port appeared on life's horizon (Eph. 1:3, 7, 22-23; 5:23; Col. 1:18). The map to that port is in God's word. It is the good news of Jesus Christ. God offers His plan of salvation from the spiritual death of sin (Mk. 16:15-16; Acts 4:12; Rom. 3:21-26; Heb. 9:14). We must carefully follow all directions of the gospel message to enter into Christ and anchor our lives in Him (Gal. 3:26-27; 2 Thess. 1:6-9; Rom. 1:16; 6:3-6; 8:1).

The clear water of this harbor is true goodness (see Phil. 4:8). The flavorful salt of the earth, opposing evil, spreads across its shore (see Matt. 5:13). As Christians, we receive spiritual peace while trusting in God against life's disturbances. Our souls find repair from life's damaging spiritual and emotional storms. We unload heavy cargos of cares, problems, and fears (Matt. 10:29-31; 11:28-30; Jn. 14:27; 1 Pet. 5:7). We re-provision in many ways (Ps. 23; Jn. 10:9; Rom. 5:1-5; Phil. 4:6-7). God gives help for this life (Matt. 6:26-33). He also gives hope and assurance of salvation after our one life on this earth (Rom. 15:13; Heb. 6:18-19; 9:27-28; 1 Pet. 1:3-5). All who have entered into Christ and remain faithful will be taken to the wonderful, eternal destination in heaven (1 Tim. 1:19; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; Heb. 3:6, 12-14; Jn. 14:1-3).

All of the members of the Lord's church on earth are humans, with weaknesses and failings. Yet, by the grace of God through Christ, faithful Christians continue growing spiritually (1 Jn. 1:7; 2 Pet. 1:5-11; 3:17-18). The world can see the beauty and reality of this unique port in the lives of faithful Christians (Rom. 12:2; Jas. 1:21-27). Godly love sparkles across its calm, unbiased, inviting waters (Jn. 14:21-23; Eph. 2:4-5). Each Christian glows as a beacon to guide lost souls to the safety of the church of Christ (Matt. 5:14-16; 2 Cor. 4:3-6; Eph. 5:8; Phil. 2:15). We teach His gospel so that others can anchor in this port (Matt. 28:18-20; Mk. 16:15-16). Members of His church have a godly love for all people, and a special, godly love for other members of the church (Lk. 10:27; Gal. 6:10; 1 Pet. 1:22; 2:17;

1 Jn. 4:7-11, 19-21). We enjoy common spiritual goals while sharing brotherhood and Christian help (Gal. 6:1-2). In this port, we joyously give as well as receive. True Christianity shows the church as a port of safety from the deadly dangers of false teachings and ungodliness (Eph. 4:14-16; 1 Tim. 3:15; 4:1-6; 2 Tim. 4:1-5; Gal. 1:8-9; 5:19-26).

Christ provides our only spiritual safety for this life and for eternity. He provides refuge in His body, the church, to everyone who obeys His gospel. Learn the truth of the New Testament to find your way to its contentment, and then help others find their way to anchor with us in its shining waters.

"The Lord has done great things for us, and we are glad"
(Psalm 126:3).

Jesus Christ—A Real Hero

JOHNNY RAMSEY

In Zech. 9, the triumphal entry of the Messiah into the city of Jerusalem was foretold some five centuries prior to its fulfillment in Luke 19. When we also study the parallel accounts of this climactic event in Matthew and Mark, we learn many powerful truths that put the spotlight on the sovereignty of God and fickle nature of man. Mark records it: *"And they bring the colt unto Jesus, and cast on him their garments; and he sat upon him. And many spread their garments upon the way; and others branches, which they had cut from the fields. And they that went before, and they that followed, cried, Hosanna; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord"* (Mark 11:7-9).

We learn from the above passage, that the Savior could not be compromised by the applause of the masses nor deterred from His task of spiritual redemption by the shallow concepts of the crowd that yearned for an earthly potentate who would deliver them from Roman rule and give them prowess in governmental realms. The Jews arrogantly failed to see the need for deliverance from sin by a redeemer who came out of Zion (Isa. 59:20). They wanted someone like Judas Maccabees to be their political-warrior hero.

HE WAS NOT WHAT THEY EXPECTED

In Luke 19 and 20 we have vivid portraits of the power and glory of the Man of Galilee, and yet also the humility and devotion of the Son of God. The greatest One who ever lived would ride into Jerusalem on a donkey—a symbol of peace and meekness—rather than on a prancing white horse or a black stallion that would convey prestige, nobility and tyranny. Truly, Jesus fulfilled the prophecy: *"For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace"* (Isa. 9:6).

The nature of Jesus is shown by the great apostle Paul when he wrote, *"Now I Paul myself entreat you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ"* (2 Cor. 10:1). The Lamb of God had come to take away sin (John 1:29; Rev. 5:5-9) and not to sort out earthly empires. It disappointed the Jewish leaders that the Nazarene tolerated the Roman rulers, whom they despised. The Messiah they looked for would be zealous for worldly empires and nonchalant toward spiritual revival. Tragically, their perversion of the Scriptures and misplaced emphasis caused them to be ignorant of the real work of the Prince of Glory. *"Hosanna"* was their exulting cry, based on Psa. 118, but their concept of *"save us, we pray,"* had nothing to do with spiritual deliverance.

MANY ARE DISAPPOINTED IN JESUS

There are many today who are disappointed in Jesus, also. Thousands still stand at the foot of the cross and demand that the Lord do this or that before they will believe Him (Matt. 27:39-43). It must break the Lord's heart to hear the foolish arguments of carnal minds that reject the Savior and demand provision for secular benefits and casual delights. Nothing is so shallow as the cheap grace and carnival atmosphere of congregations that would make Christianity an excursion into politics, gimmicks and social grace, rather than evangelism, spiritual growth and emphasis on the divine realm. The simple message of the cross is still offensive to many (Gal. 5:11), but it is the *"wisdom and the power of God"* (1 Cor. 1:18). Let us notice why Christ is still rejected today.

First, the very simplicity of the gospel system is a problem to those with pseudo-intellectualism. Satan has always used this

trick to turn men away from God: *"But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve in his craftiness, your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity and the purity that is toward Christ"* (2 Cor 11:3). Those who think more highly of themselves than they ought to stumble at the plain, simple and straightforward nature of God's truth. Such folk prefer complicated error to the *"simplicity that is in Christ."* How sad!

We read in John 6 of multitudes of former friends of Jesus who turned aside to follow Him no more. They were disappointed in Him because of the uncompromising nature of His teaching. At the very foot of the cross several expressed great displeasure concerning the nature of His death. Even at Calvary our Lord was an embarrassment to them. Our Redeemer once confessed (Matt. 8:20) that even foxes of the field and birds in a nest had more earthly comfort than did He! The Savior did not call the noble, the wealthy or the famous to be His apostles. To the lowly, unlettered Galilean fishermen the basic leadership of the heavenly movement was entrusted. Not one single credential of greatness—as men of the world evaluate greatness—did our blessed Lord present to document His claims of eternal power. Is it any wonder, then, that Paul would later write, *"For behold your calling, brethren, that not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God chose the foolish things of the world, that he might put to shame them that are wise . . . that no flesh should glory before God"* (1 Cor. 1:26-29).

TRADITION GOT IN THE WAY

The Jewish leaders of the first century were upset with Jesus because their vaunted traditions and pompous rites were ignored, and often even rebuked by the Son of God. The elite were often shocked by His absolute honesty and disregard for cultural refinement. The wealthy business leaders were shocked by the Lord's evaluation of real riches and His disdain for *"filthy lucre."* Even after Christ's ascension back to glory, the fearless apostles were a distinct disappointment to those enamored with emperor worship, idol temples and animal sacrifices. The gospel of Christ ruined many a lucrative business based on pagan deities and sensual goals (Acts 19:19).

LOVE FOR THE WORLD LED TO HIS REJECTION

Today, the peddlers of smut, dope and pornography are disappointed in the ethics of Christianity. The purveyors of illicit, immoral wantonness cry out against the high moral tone of the Bible. Lawyers in divorce courts beg for "situation ethics" and existential mores because Matt. 19:1-9 stands as a permanent roadblock to their racket of marriage brokerage. The hippies on college campuses and the Hollywood sex-mongers live in filth and failure and fear because they, too, will one day have to give account to the Judge of all the earth. And they know, deep down, how disappointed in them He truly is.

But the greatest application of this thesis belongs in our very own midst. Thousands of church members, through the years, have been disappointed in the real Christ—not the dreamed-up, imaginary Jesus, who (according to their whims) just smiles and winks at everyone's weaknesses. But the Bible-revealed Christ demands purity, sincerity, faithfulness, scriptural worship and a clear line of demarcation between the world and His kingdom. Unbending loyalty takes more fortitude than comfortable association with society. Sadly, some are just not willing to pay the price.

JESUS WAS MEEK AND LOWLY

It is interesting to note that Jesus would ride on an animal no one had ever ridden before (Luke 19:30). Just as He was born of a virgin and would be placed in a tomb where no body had ever before been laid (Luke 23:53), so would the Savior make His entry into Jerusalem upon a beast of burden that had never been used by another. The prophet foretold, "*He grew up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground*" (Isa. 53:2), an obvious reference to the virgin birth. When a dead body was cast into the grave where Elisha the prophet was buried, and touched the bones of Elisha, the dead one revived. When Christ arose from the grave, no one could say it was because of similar circumstances, for no one had ever been in that tomb before!

THE OFFENSIVE CHRIST

In Gal. 5:11, we read of "*the offense of the cross.*" To some in the church at Corinth, nothing was as distasteful as the

preaching of the crucified Savior (1 Cor. 1:18-25; 2:1-5). In Athens, Paul was mocked for preaching the resurrection of Christ (Acts 17:32). To be perfectly honest, Jesus was *"a rock of offense"* and *"a stone of stumbling"* to many in the Roman empire (Rom. 9:33). Why did Jesus offend so many? He was despised in the region of Gadarenes because the people there thought more of swine than of souls (Mark 5). The Master Teacher offended the Pharisees because of His blunt rebuke of their traditions and customs (Matt. 15:7-12). There was even *"division among the people because of Him"* (John 7:43). The absolute authority of the Lord caused a sword of separation within some families (Matt. 10:34-36). When Christ comes upon the stage of life, the human scene must give attention to His claims. One cannot remain neutral in regard to the Man of Nazareth. Jesus plainly reminds us all in Matt. 12:30 that men are either *"for or against"* Him.

WHY WAS JESUS SO CONTROVERSIAL?

1. *His perfection made it uncomfortable for others.* To be in the presence of the Son of God made anyone else's fame pale into nothingness. His deeds, His speech, His attitude and endeavor formed a matchless framework of beauty. The Scribes wanted power, but Jesus unfolded the Scriptures. The righteous pretense of the Pharisees folded before the marvelous purity of the Messiah. The arrogant claims of the Sadducees were easily put asunder by one clear word of logic of the Savior. Since very few people enjoy being "upstaged," Jesus was intensely hated (Mark 15:10).

2. *His salvation was spiritual, not temporal.* The word, *"Hosanna,"* had become a popular cry of deliverance among the Jews in Jesus' time. Since it was a term of release from bondage, meaning, *"Save us, we pray,"* it was popular with a people who so resented the Roman yoke. He came not to deliver Judaism from Rome, but to deliver sinners from Satan's way. He said, *"My kingdom is not of this world"* (John 18:36), and those whose hearts were on physical things were distraught.

3. *He embarrassed the socially elite.* In Mark 2 and Luke 19, the Savior's propensity for eating with sinners caused a revolt within the ranks of the "upper crust" of society. Jesus came to *"seek and to save the lost"* (Luke 19:10), but the doctors of the

law were upset when large crowds came to hear Him teach, because He had not gone to one of their schools (John 7). The piercing logic of the Lord was constantly embarrassing (Mark 12:24; John 8:39-40). He unveiled their evil hearts of selfishness in the "elder-brother" (Luke 15) and their ritualistic piety in the story of the priests and Levites who "*passed by on the other side*" (Luke 10). No wonder they were offended and sought to kill Him. Are there any sadder words than those in John 1:11? "*He came unto his own, but his own received him not.*"

HIS GOODNESS LED MANY TO REJECT HIM

It is hardly conceivable that anyone as wonderful as Jesus would have as many enemies as He did. How could anyone spurn such unselfish love? Even though we cannot answer these questions completely, it remains a sobering, heart-breaking fact that thousands of His day turned a deaf ear to Heaven's will, expressed so capably in Jesus, the Son of God.

We are all familiar with the crowning achievement of their hatred—the cruel crucifixion of the Christ. He was unwelcome at birth, opposed throughout life, and when He died, the highest ambition of many had been realized. Why were they offended in Him, why was He rejected? (Gal. 5:11; Rom. 9:33; John 1:11).

God's Promises

BOBBY KEY

A Christian brother writes, "I am persuaded that God has lost control of the world. Evil is predominant and good is short-lived. There is rebellion all around us, and I have concluded that wrong is stronger than right. I have learned to live with the motto that most things will turn out bad. Everything bad that can happen has happened to me. Everything I've tried turns sour after awhile; I have fewer breaks and more bad luck than most."

There is no doubt that this brother is in the valley of despair. For too many of the world's problems there seems to be no human solution, but "the gloomier the outlook, the brighter the uplook"; the darker the night the brighter God's promises shine. We have

assurance that God's hand is not shortened that He cannot save (Isaiah 59:1). I am persuaded that for every human need ~ for your every need—there is a divine promise to meet that need. Let us study a few of these together.

HOW MUCH SHOULD WE WORRY ABOUT OUR DAILY NEEDS?

"But my God shall supply all your needs according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19). "How much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him" (Matthew 7:11). "But they that seek the Lord shall not want (lack) any good thing" (Psalm 34:10).

WHERE CAN I TURN FOR WISDOM IN SOLVING MY PROBLEMS?

"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him" (James 1:5).

IS THERE A REMEDY FOR MY SIN AND GUILT?

". . . Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21); "He is able to also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him" (Hebrews 7:25). "He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Hebrews 5:9). One who puts his faith in Christ and does His will has the blessed promise that his sins are forgiven. "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more" (Hebrews 8:12). "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

IS IT POSSIBLE FOR A CHRISTIAN TO BE FAITHFUL AND VICTORIOUS?

"Thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ" (II Corinthians 2:14). "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen" (Jude 24, 25).

IS THERE VICTORY OVER DEATH, OUR LAST ENEMY?

"Death is swallowed up in victory. O death where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? ... but thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Corinthians 15:54-57).

IS THERE ANY PLACE TO TURN WHEN I AM BURDENED WITH PROBLEMS?

"Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you . . . but the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that you have suffered a while, make you perfect, establish, strengthen, settle you" (I Peter 5:7,10).

DOES GOD HAVE PLANS FOR OUR FUTURE?

"I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:2, 3). Our God has promised, "He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son" (Revelation 21:7). It is comforting to know that one day God shall wipe away all tears, and there will be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying. There shall be no more pain (Revelation 21:4).

IS GOD ABLE TO KEEP THESE PRECIOUS PROMISES?

"Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us." (Ephesians 4:20). God is honest; He cannot lie. He has always kept His word, and we may rest in full assurance that He will do even more than He promised.

God is accessible and approachable to all who will come to Him. For the Christian, the door is always open in heaven. To overcome pessimism and gloom, read God's promises — they will increase your faith.

Christ is a merciful and faithful high priest. He has suffered, was tempted, and he is able to succor them that are tempted. We must have strength from above. God cares. There is a door opened in heaven. (Revelation 3:8; 4:1). This signifies opportunity and access to God. Through Him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father (Ephesians 2:18). God opens the door and no man can close it.

Christianity Will Eliminate Short-Weight Scales

ELWOOD HOLT

"But he that looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and so continueth, being not a hearer that forgetteth but a doer that worketh, this man shall be blessed in his doing" (James 1:25). Take a brief glimpse into the perfect law of liberty.

Two elderly women were talking one time, and one remarked, "Oh, but that was a grand sermon the preacher gave us Sunday." She was the proprietress in a small grocery store. "What was the text?" inquired her friend. "I don't remember," said the old lady after considerable thought. "What was the sermon about?" "I do not remember a lot about it," she replied. "Well, in what way was it good and helpful?" "It was grand because it made me come to my store and dispose of all the short-weight scales and measures I had, and put in honest ones. Hereafter, I am going to be honest with God and man. That's why the sermon was wonderful to me."

When the Bible talks about a "hearer that forgetteth" as James mentions in our text, it does not mean that one is expected to remember every word that the preacher says from the pulpit or every word that he reads from the book. It means that one is guilty of sin when he fails to retain enough of God's message to make corrections in his heart if such corrections need to be made. While it is true that the average person does not listen closely enough to the spoken word, many who cannot tell you just what the preacher talked about through the sermon, get enough of it to accomplish wonders in their lives. We need to be close hearers of the word of God. We need to be attentive when we read and study his word. But, when a chapter is prayerfully read, or a sermon is closely heard, enough will be retained to cause us to have compunction of conscience when we do wrong. And, it will cause us to go out and make things right with our neighbors and fellowmen if we have been wronging them. It will make the fellow who has been using the wrong weights throw them away. It will make the one who short changes his customers quit it and make restitution if at all possible. It will cause the one who is overly fond

of scandal peddling to stop that, too. The best preventive against character assassination is a good dose of the word of God.

The best counteractive against malice, greed, avarice, covetousness, envy, jealousies, and strife, is a portion of the word of truth taken into the heart. I do not feel that I ever preached a sermon in vain. I believe with all my heart that every lesson that I ever delivered, though it may have been forgotten for many, many years, is still doing good in someone's heart. God's word has that characteristic. Nothing can kill it. It has been crushed down a million times, but has always risen up to haunt its would-be assassin. God's word is the cure for our spiritual heart trouble. "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8). But, the heart is purified by "obedience to the truth" (1 Peter 1:22). Obedience is absolutely essential to a pure heart. The good moral man must not die short of obedience, for in obedience he accepts Christ as the author of his salvation (Hebrews 5:8, 9). Christ is not the author of eternal salvation to those who will not obey him.

When you hear the word of God, try to retain all of it that you can. You can develop greater ability the harder you try to do this. And, if your mind slips occasionally as to what the preacher's text was, or just where the particular chapter you have in mind is located, you will be able to apply the holy principles that will abide with you as heaven-sent benedictions anyway.

"Take heed what ye hear," said Jesus. He also said, "Take heed how ye hear." It matters what we hear. Error heard and obeyed will enslave the heart; truth heard and obeyed will liberate the soul from the bondage of iniquity.

The word that caused the little store keeper to throw away her dishonest weights can help you make whatever correction there is to be made in your life.

We recommend that word to you, our friend. May the Lord help us to study and meditate with open minds, be willing always to make such corrections in our own lives as are requisite to our soul's eternal well-being. **GOD'S WORD, THE TRUTH, SHALL MAKE YOU FREE.**

