

Virtual Christian Magazine

Hope And Encouragement
For The Real World

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."—1 Peter 1:3-5

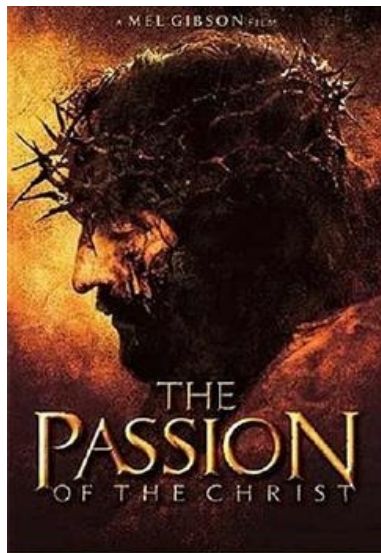
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In this age of materialism, we all must strive to place our priorities in proper perspective. God's Word, the Bible, provides the guidance we need daily to put Him first and not allow anything or anyone to take our focus from God.

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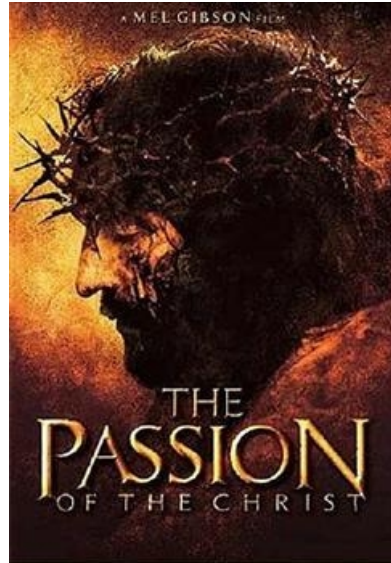
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Christ's Passion Toward You and Me!

By Janet Treadway

While on earth, Christ provided many examples for us to follow. His compassion for humankind surpassed anything we can possibly accomplish, but we are to strive to demonstrate compassion as He did. Only then can the message of Christ's life be truly conveyed.



LAST YEAR, BEFORE PASSOVER, a friend and I went to see the controversial movie *The Passion of The Christ*. Yes, there were some things in there that were contrary to my beliefs, but it still had a profound impact on me. What stood out in my mind throughout were Christ's character and His great passion for us. Christ's life reflects the great courage, forgiveness and mercy that Christ displayed for all of us. Christ was a servant and a good shepherd, for a good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.

Yes, He came with a vital message, but before the message could have an impact on our lives He had to become a servant first. He gave so much to all of us by His great caring and sacrifice. By His example—His life of giving to us—we are able to respond to His truth. Our Father in Heaven demonstrated that great love for us as well, which John 3:16 illustrates. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." How many of us would sacrifice our only child for the good of mankind?



We can preach and preach about God's laws and pay lip service, but it will be our caring that will help win people's hearts to God's way of life. It will be our pouring out of love and concern to others that will electrify and cause them to yearn for God's truth. Christ knew that, and He demonstrated that by His acts of kindness and supreme sacrifice for us while on this earth.

People need healing, they need nurturing and they need love. If those needs are met,

then the preaching of God's truth can have an impact on their lives. Nothing illustrates this more clearly than my own personal experience. Thirty years ago I was able to understand how caring can make a difference in your life and have an impact on your spiritual life.

I was a stranger and they took me in

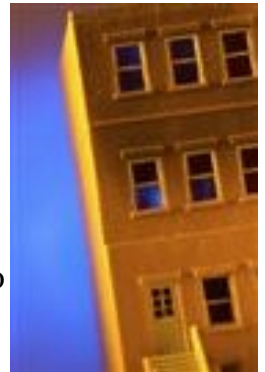
Because of the great difficulties and a desperate situation I was living under when I was 19, I made a difficult decision to leave home. Leaving with virtually no money, no job, no home to go to, no food and only one change of clothing, I would have been homeless that day and on the street had it not been for the pastor and a loving family.

Under normal circumstances it is not recommended for anyone to just pull up and leave without counsel and advice from someone. That was the only choice I felt I had at the time. So after leaving, and with one phone call to the pastor, a family came to my rescue.

They picked me up from a bus station and freely took me into their home. I can relate to the verse that says, "I was a stranger and you took Me in." In Matthew 25:35-36 it says: "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me" (New International Version). Christ taught that if you do this for one another, then you are doing it for Him.

This family did not know me nor did I know them until that day we met at the bus station. I was a stranger, desperately needing help, and they took me in, fed me, clothed me, took me to church, helped me find a place to live and collected things that I needed for my new apartment. But most of all they helped me to feel safe for the first time in several years.

This experience has had a lasting effect on me and has caused me to be driven to give back to God and to His people for all that has been given to me. I had to have help and caring before I could even begin to receive God's truth. It was the caring, not the preaching, that made me ready to receive God's truth.



I wanted to go God's way because this family demonstrated what God must be like. I wanted to be like them. It made me want to know who this great God was that they served. My life was forever changed by the example of this caring family who took a stranger in. They taught not by preaching but by their sacrifice of caring as Christ demonstrated to us.

Christ taught by example and caring

Christ's ministry on this earth was not only about teaching, but was also about His example of service. While He was being beaten, the movie would flash back to Christ teaching and instructing the disciples how to care, love, forgive and be good shepherds.

People need healing, they need nurturing and they need love.

1. He taught courage by example: He did not waver or give in to His pain from His tormentors, because He kept His mission focused in His mind. His mission was to save us from sin.
2. Christ taught forgiveness: While being spit on, tortured and beaten, He was still able to offer up prayers to His Father in heaven, asking God to “forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Luke 23:34).
3. Christ taught mercy: When a woman was brought to Him who had committed adultery, He intervened and showed her great mercy.
4. Christ taught what a great servant is: He was willing to give up all status that He had in heaven and become a human. He suffered in the flesh though He could have called on God at any time to stop the suffering. He humbled Himself as a servant, knelt down and washed His disciples’ feet. He taught them to do the same thing. Philippians 2:5-8 says, “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a *servant*...he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!” (New International Version).
5. He taught what a good shepherd should be: “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep” (John 10:11).

The caring must come first, then the teaching

It is easy to have many words, but what about actions? The family that helped me 30 years ago helped me by example and caring. They gave much, and I will always be grateful to them.

Christ was a man who gave much, by His profound examples, while He was on this earth. By His great sacrifice for us He is able to have an impact on our lives. We must follow that example by reaching out to others. When possible, we must meet their physical needs first through acts of kindness and caring.

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Like Christ, we can help win people over by caring and sacrificing ourselves daily. It is through this sacrifice of caring that people’s hearts will be ready to be taught to live God’s way of life. After all, **“No one cares how much you know, until they know how much you care.”**

Christ was tortured, beaten, rejected, betrayed, spit on and made fun of for you and me so that we might live. In order to do this, He had great passion of godly love for all of us. Let’s have the same great passion for one another!

Recommended reading

To learn more about Christ’s life and all He sacrificed for mankind, request for our free booklet [*Jesus Christ: The Real Story*](#).

Hope for Unbelieving Loved Ones

By Melvin Rhodes

What does one say at the funeral of an atheist—especially when the atheist is one's own father?



A FEW YEARS AGO I unexpectedly spent the first few days in January in England, in my hometown of Grimsby. I wish I could have made the trip under more pleasant circumstances.

I received word early one Sunday morning informing me my father had died suddenly, unexpectedly—if you can say that the death of anyone who has reached the age of 75 is unexpected. Several months earlier I had accompanied both my parents on a bus tour of central Europe. Then my father had seemed healthy and alert. I expected him to live for a few more years. But it was not to be.

He woke up one day with a pain in his leg spreading to his abdomen. He lay back down. Within minutes he was gone. It had been so many years since he had seen a doctor, at first the family physician would not give him a death certificate and wanted to perform a postmortem examination. He changed his mind when he looked at my father's medical history. He had suffered two heart attacks in 1986. All indications were he had suffered a third heart attack.

Religion, in his mind, was for weak people who needed a crutch to lean on.

Dad was not a religious man. In fact, he was opposed to all forms of religion, especially the Christian kind. He had been a lifelong committed atheistic communist, dismissing religion as “the opium of the masses,” calling on the words of Karl Marx, founder of modern communism.

The funeral arrangements

Members of my family did not necessarily expect me to attend the funeral, since the trip from my Michigan home would be long and expensive and I had spent time with my parents only a few months earlier. But I wanted to go. *I needed to go.*

I also wanted to officiate at my father's funeral, with my mother's consent. I could not bear the thought of someone who did not know my father talking about Dad going to heaven when my father never believed in the place, nor would he have wanted to be there if he had.



When I arrived in Grimsby I called the funeral director to discuss arrangements with him. My mother had chosen to have my father cremated, which is a considerably more common practice in England than in many other countries. However, in contrast with funerals involving burials, a crematorium in England is normally able to allow only about a half hour for each service.

A funeral takes place every 30 minutes in a crematorium. The speed at which families have to say good-bye to their loved ones gives little time for anybody to reflect on that person's life, much less think about the meaning of death and whatever waits beyond the grave.

My brother and his wife requested singing "The Lord's My Shepherd" at the funeral. Their daughter, my niece Judith, had written a poem about Granddad she wanted to read. My mother had asked the hymn "The King of Love My Shepherd Is" be sung before I spoke. All this was to be a part of our allotted time.

Included also was the walk into the hall as the family slowly followed my father's coffin. So, I was left with about ten minutes for my message. What can you say about your father in 10 minutes?

Except for one of my brothers, no one else in the family, immediate or extended, held any firm religious convictions. None had ever read a Bible. I have four brothers. All of them know that I am a church pastor and are aware of some of my beliefs.

What do you say about an atheist?

I decided to be honest and open about Dad, which is the way he always wanted things to be. He felt no shame or embarrassment about not having a religion. To the contrary, he was proud of the fact. Religion, in his mind, was for weak people who needed a crutch to lean on. So I began by saying he had no religious beliefs and always ridiculed the idea of going to heaven.

I then went on to show that in this respect he was biblically quite sound—we do not go to heaven when we die. In that brief 10 minutes I read from Ezekiel 18:4, showing the soul is not immortal; Ecclesiastes 9:5, which reveals that "the dead know nothing"; John 3:13, which tells us "no one has ascended into heaven"; and Acts 2:34, where Peter told the multitudes that even righteous King David had not ascended into heaven. But then I asked: "Does this mean we will not see Dad again?"

What a comfort it is to know the truth of God, that God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" and receive eternal life.

I quoted from 1 Corinthians 15:19-23: "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep...For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming."

“Those who are Christ’s” will be resurrected at His return, wrote Paul. But what about everyone else—the vast majority of people who, like my dad, never knew Christ? What about them?

The apostle Peter wrote that God is “not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). These words encourage those who lose loved ones who did not believe.

The Bible reveals more than one resurrection

Revelation 20:4-6 puts it all together for us, with a little help from the Old Testament. This passage takes us forward in time to the 1,000-year rule of Christ, the Millennium, following His return. At the beginning of that time those who are Christ’s (1 Corinthians 15:23) are resurrected to rule with Him, to sit on thrones alongside Him (Revelation 20:4).

This passage takes us forward in time to the 1,000-year rule of Christ, the Millennium, following His return.

This resurrection is to eternal life. Verse 6 says: “Blessed and holy is he who has part in the *first* resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years” (emphasis added throughout).

We learn from this about a *second* death for some. This means there must be a *second life*, another physical life similar to the first one. If there is not to be a second life, there can be no second death.

Verse 5 helps us understand: “But *the rest of the dead* did not live again *until the thousand years were finished.*” Who are the rest of the dead? By definition, they must be those who are not Christ’s, those who never knew Jesus or never knew Him well enough to accept Him as their Savior, through whom one can receive eternal life.

Verse 5 calls the resurrection to eternal life of those in Christ as “the *first resurrection.*” This shows, then, that there is a *different*, subsequent resurrection for those who were *not* Christ’s. Upon these the second death *does* have power, so it must be a resurrection to a physical existence.



The second resurrection is described in more detail in Ezekiel 37. Here the prophet described a vision in which he was projected into the future to see a valley full of dry bones, the skeletons of people long dead. Verses 5 and 6 follow: “Thus says the Lord GOD unto these bones: ‘Surely I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live. I will put sinews [muscles] on you, and bring flesh upon you, cover you with skin, and put breath in you; and you shall live. Then you shall know that I am the LORD.’”

Could it be any clearer? Here is a prophesied resurrection to a second *physical* existence. If it weren’t physical, there would be no need for muscles, skin and breath. Spirit beings given eternal life (those in the first resurrection) do not need these. Only physical human beings do.

Continuing with Ezekiel's vision, we see that once God has reassembled these bones, covered them with muscle and skin and given them life, He promises to give them the opportunity to "know that I am the LORD." This is *their* opportunity for salvation, an opportunity they never had before. This is *my father's* opportunity for eternal life.

I intend to be there when he wakes up, 1,000 years after my resurrection to an eternal spirit existence as one of those who is "in Christ," 1,000 years during which those in the first resurrection have the opportunity to transform this world into a perfect world ruling with Jesus Christ in the Kingdom of God. A thousand years is not too long to wait, especially when you are a spirit being and a part of God's spiritual family.

Here the prophet described a vision in which he was projected into the future to see a valley full of dry bones, the skeletons of people long dead.

As Peter tells us, "with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (2 Peter 3:8). Time will simply fly by when we are working with Jesus to prepare the world for the second resurrection—the return to life of literally billions of people who have neither known the true God or His Son and will learn their ways for the first time.

What a glorious future we have to look forward to! Trying to encourage people through a time of great persecution, the apostle Paul pointed the Thessalonians to the hope of the resurrection in his first epistle to them. After describing the first resurrection towards the end of 1 Thessalonians 4, the apostle adds in verse 18: "Therefore comfort one another with these words."

Recommended reading

What a comfort it is to know the truth of God, that God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" and receive eternal life. His marvelous plan includes the resurrection of those who never knew God in this life, as pictured in His Holy Day plan. If you want to know more, be sure to request our free booklet [God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind](#).

Few understand what the Bible really teaches about life beyond the grave. [What Happens After Death?](#) will guide you through the Scriptures to discover the encouraging and awe-inspiring truth so few understand. Both booklets are free.

The Perfect Prophetic Storm

By Mario Seiglie

The Bible prophesies a time when two earthshaking events will combine to overwhelm humanity. What are these events—these prophetic storms?



THE PERFECT STORM IS THE TITLE of a recent movie based on a true story about a hapless crew on a fishing vessel which sailed into the combined force of a hurricane and another major storm. Not surprisingly, the ship and its crew members perished, disappearing in the storms' fury. Perhaps if they had faced only one of the storms they could have survived, but the power of two massive and deadly forces was simply too much for the crew to handle.

The movie stressed the unusual combination of factors leading to the tragedy. The crewmen possessed abundant experience, and the ship had weathered many other storms. They thought their well-equipped craft could ride out just about anything nature threw their way. But when they faced the fury of two storms, their efforts proved futile.

The tragedy is an apt analogy for events the Bible prophesies will occur when a combination of forces is unleashed on the world in the time of the end. Just as the seasoned fishing crew assumed it could handle whatever came its way, many people assume society can handle any crisis the future brings—through scientific achievement, economic growth, military prowess and political cunning.

Political and religious leaders want their followers to believe they are amply equipped to weather any dangers. "We have been through two world wars,

The tragedy is an apt analogy for events the Bible prophesies will occur when a combination of forces is unleashed on the world in the time of the end.

epidemics, the Great Depression and social upheavals,” they reason, “and we have survived them all. Now, we have even more technological tools at our disposal. We can prevail over any crisis.”

Thus society can lull itself into a false sense of security, thinking the world will never face a “perfect storm” of deadly events.

Prophecy enters the scene

Yet biblical prophecy foretells what we might call the perfect prophetic storm. It will come at a time when two great events will converge to overwhelm humanity.

Jesus Christ prophesied a combination of forces would lead to what He called “great tribulation, *such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be*” (Matthew 24:21, emphasis added throughout).

The apostle Paul described this same future time: “For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, ‘Peace and safety!’ then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape” (1 Thessalonians 5:2-3).

Two incredible events will bring about the coming perfect prophetic storm. What are they? Can we avoid the brunt of their consequences? We can be thankful God’s Word not only describes what will surely happen but shows us how to spiritually prepare for the onslaught of lethal events.

This first storm system is prophesied to astound the world by its power.

As Paul explains: “But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober... For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:4-9).

What are the double prophetic storms destined to unleash the devastating end-time events from which mankind as a whole will not escape?

The first prophetic storm

In Revelation 13:1-3 Christ reveals to John the first of these two storms, the rise of the prophesied “beast”:

“Then I stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a *beast* rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name. Now the beast which I saw was like a leopard, his feet were like the feet of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority. And I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed. And all the world marveled and followed the



beast.”

Much of the symbolism here is explained in other parts of Revelation. A similar prophetic beast appears in Revelation 17 but is ridden by a woman. “And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns” (verse 3).

What does this beast represent? “Here is the mind which has wisdom. The seven heads [of the beast] are *seven mountains* on which the woman sits, and they are *seven kings*; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while... And the ten horns which you saw are *ten kings*, who have not yet received a *kingdom*, but they receive authority as kings with the beast for one hour... *These will wage war against the Lamb*, and the Lamb will overcome them” (Revelation 17:9-14, New American Standard Bible).

Here we read that each of the seven heads is a symbol of a king and his kingdom (verses 9-10). Elsewhere in the Bible a mountain is also used as a symbol of a kingdom and its king (Isaiah 2:1-3; Daniel 2:35, 45). The last head, the seventh kingdom, is destined to be of short duration.

As the final, seventh head of the beast power nears, “five [kings will] have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come” (Revelation 17:10). Since the last head of this beast, along with ten rulers, “will make war with the Lamb [Christ],” the previous six kings must have ruled in former ages (verse 14). As the end time approaches, the seventh head of the ten-horned beast is symbolic of the kingdom headed by a ruler with ten kings who will “receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast” (verse 12).

This first storm system is prophesied to astound the world by its power, which comes not so much from human might or cunning as from “the dragon,” another name for Satan (Revelation 12:9). As Revelation 13:2 explains, “...the dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority.”

As the Bible describes, God will allow the final rebellion of mankind to take place before He sends His Son, Jesus the Messiah, to reign on earth: “For God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose, to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled” (Revelation 17:17).

The second storm

The second storm system foretold for the end time is a second beast system, described in Revelation 13:

Just as with the first system, the devil is behind the power of the second beast and gives its leader powers to deceive the world.

“Then I saw *another beast* coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a *dragon*. And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived” (verses 11-14).

Just as with the first system, the devil is behind the power of the second beast and gives its leader powers to deceive the world. Impressive miracles by the second beast will help persuade people to support and obey the first beast. This second has horns as a lamb; that is, it seems to be as meek as a lamb but speaks “like a dragon” (verse 11), thus revealing the satanic origin of its power.

The two beasts are “the beast” and “the false prophet,” respectively. They are allies at the end time, with the first governing and warring while the other manipulates the people of the world through religion.

“And I saw *the beast*, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. Then *the beast* was captured, and with him *the false prophet* who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast...” (Revelation 19:19-20).

What kind of a system does the false prophet head? Biblically, the description *false prophet* refers to a religious figure deceitfully claiming to represent God (see Deuteronomy 13:1-5 to understand the difference between a true and false prophet).

Moreover the woman who rides the beast is the symbol of a false religious system based in a great city governing much of the world. “And the woman whom you saw is that great city which *reigns* over the kings of the earth” (Revelation 17:18). So the false religious system will carefully orchestrate an alliance to rule with the kings of the earth.

To wield such influence and power, the system must be of enormous size and wealth, since the world’s rulers will permit her to reign with them. This is precisely what the Bible reveals: “The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues” (Revelation 17:15). It will truly be an international religious, political, and economic system spanning many nations and languages.

Protection and persecution

When these two leaders appear on the world scene, they will astonish the world, and time will be short. Soon after their appearance, the persecution against the true followers of Jesus will increase. The Bible reveals through its symbols that some of the faithful will be miraculously protected while others will not. Christ warns His disciples that some of them will be martyred (Matthew 24:9). So, although there is a promise of protection, some of Christ’s brethren are destined to die as His faithful witnesses.

God gives a clear promise of protection for some in His Church (Revelation 12:13-14). On the other hand, verse 17 shows us Satan wars against the woman “and her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.”

Christ knows it will be difficult to remain faithful during the end time, so He encourages His Church to hold steady. “Behold, I am coming quickly! *Hold fast* what you have, that no one may take your crown” (Revelation 3:11).



Paul also tells us that maintaining “the love of the truth”—holding to the teachings of the Bible as opposed to the false teachings of the coming great religious system—will be important in the last days. He warns some will be lost in the coming storm “because they did not receive *the love of the truth, that they might be saved*” (2 Thessalonians 2:10).

When these two leaders appear on the world scene, they will astonish the world, and time will be short.

Another prophecy advises us that when the storm finally arrives *it will be too late to prepare for it*. “And he said to me, ‘Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand. *He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still...*’ Blessed are those who do *His commandments*, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city” (Revelation 22:10-14).

According to this scripture, eventually the world will divide into two distinct groups: those who are obedient to God and keep His Commandments to the end and those who will remain stubbornly disobedient. Christ wants His people to be spiritually prepared, watching world events so the perfect prophetic storm will not take God’s faithful by surprise.

“But take heed to yourselves,” Jesus warned, “lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man” (Luke 21:34-36).

Let’s be sure we heed God’s counsel. Take His warnings to heart. Begin preparing now so you can weather the coming perfect prophetic storm.

Recommended reading

To better understand the dramatic events shaping your world, be sure to request your free copy of [The Book of Revelation Unveiled](#). You’ll learn much more about the earth-shattering events—the prophetic storms—that are sure to come on all the world.

Also be sure to request [The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy](#) to see where the major English-speaking nations fit in Bible prophecy.

You Go! I Am Coming!

By Robert Berendt

God provided a blueprint for us to follow through His Holy Days. As we honor them, we honor God. Through the keeping of these days, we demonstrate our belief in God and Christ guiding our footsteps.



A BOUT 40 YEARS AGO, when God was calling me into His truth, the strongest driving force that I felt came through an understanding of the magnificence of the life of Jesus Christ here on earth. I considered myself a Christian, and I firmly believed that being a Christian meant being a follower of Jesus Christ. I realized I had been giving lip service but not following in His footsteps. I had not really believed He was who He said He was. I had not understand the full importance of the Bible guiding my feet.

I have found, since then, that I was not the first to lack in belief towards Jesus Christ. Many scriptures exist demonstrating almost all those present with Jesus failed in their comprehension until after His resurrection. His resurrection, however, captured their attention. One story I have found to be most motivational and inspiring is recorded in John 7.

I have found many clues in this chapter that have helped me better understand some of my own shortcomings. First of all, I realized that I, like the brothers of Jesus (verse 5), did not believe Him. In my case it had to do with ignorance due to not studying the Bible, and in relying on the explanations of men who I thought were constantly striving to live by the Bible. I actually listened to ministers tell me “this is what the Bible says—but...” I cannot accept any “buts” today. The Bible is the only recorded Word of God—and is not to be tampered with.

Chapter 7 is broken into several logical parts according to our thinking. Verses 1-9 record the disbelief of the brothers as to who Jesus was. Verses 10-24 tell of Jesus bringing the Word of God and living by it. Verses 25-31 reveal the ongoing search for the Messiah. Verses 32-36 tell of the puzzled queries of the Pharisees. Verses 37-39 yield the promise of the Holy Spirit, which was to come. Verses 40-44 ask the question “Who is He?” Verses 43-52 express the rejection of Jesus by the religious authorities. I did not want to remain among those who rejected Jesus. I wanted to emulate Him.

One point of great interest to me was that this whole chapter records events taking place during a time called the “Feast of Tabernacles” (verse 2). I was somewhat confused, because I thought it was a Jewish feast. How amazed I was to learn that, as recorded in Leviticus 23:33-44, it is *God’s* feast. Jesus did go and keep this feast as He kept every feast day God had given to His people. *He went though His life was in danger and despite the fact He had to walk or ride a donkey and perhaps ride in small boat over a distance of over 100 miles (160 km) as the crow flies.* He traveled past hostile villages and through dangerous territory to attend the Feast of Tabernacles. I had never even heard of this feast. How could I be like Jesus Christ and not do the things He did in His worship of God? I could not reconcile these facts, so I have kept the feast ever since 1965. What a blessing to understand the significance of these great days as well as the grandeur of all of God’s Holy Days.

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Living by God’s doctrine

John 7:16-19 has strong words to say about what I was learning. Jesus said He was living by the doctrine of God the Father—not His personal doctrine. He says, “If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority.” Jesus went on to state He was sent by God, the religious leaders did not know God, and thus they could not recognize Him. How greatly the position of nonrecognition is paralleled today. What a duplication of the past is evident when we see the image, deeds, footsteps and direction of Jesus Christ changed, manipulated, canceled or mocked. In a way, humans have continually sought to kill Christ rather than follow Him. A true Christian will follow His example.

In John 7:37-38 Jesus spoke boldly in the temple telling of the promise of the Holy Spirit to those who believe in Him. Those who thirst for truth and oneness with Jesus Christ and God the Father will be given this great gift.



I learned much about the precious gifts of God through the keeping of His Holy Days. The Feast of Tabernacles is the one time where a person could spend eight or more days in fellowship with those of like minds—like-minded with one another, and more importantly like-minded with Jesus Christ. It is the oneness with Jesus Christ that binds us all together. Believing is not enough—actions reflecting belief must follow. These days were set aside by God to look forward to the time when the Kingdom of God will be established on earth and Jesus Christ will be the great King and Priest. Justice, godliness, lawfulness and peace will be poured out upon the earth. God’s law will go forth to all the nations and there will be no more wars. This glorious time, which lies in the future, is taught by keeping these days. That future moment is being experienced and reconfirmed by those who determine to attend.

I also learned that a person can keep this season even if something like an illness or other serious matter prevents traveling to a chosen site. You can even keep it at home—but the will of God is we join together and keep these feast days in larger groups. God’s ministry tries to choose convenient places in which to meet. People are expected to adjust accordingly. Our first feast days in the past were kept in tents due to the cost of travel and our restricted finances. No doubt Jesus Christ knew what life in a tent meant.

Belief is not enough

James 2:19-20 states that demons believe. They also tremble. We humans ought to see that belief is not enough and trembling is not enough. As James wrote, “Faith without works is dead.” Our works involve following the example of Jesus Christ who taught and lived in the flesh according to the doctrine of the Almighty Father. I want to emulate Jesus Christ. I want to emulate the Father. I believe all humans have some sort of desire to find the Creator of life and learn of Him. God says He has placed eternity in man’s heart (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Humans worship almost anything—but that is not good enough. It is through Jesus Christ that we can grasp the true direction. If we are to be like Him, we need to accept and capture His values and way of life. I am speaking of the godly values. We do not need to wear a robe and sandals and live in the Middle East. We do need to clothe ourselves with the spiritual garments God has designed.

Believing is not enough—actions reflecting belief must follow.

Recommended reading

Please request our booklet [God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind](#), which will provide more insight into God’s overall plan for mankind mirrored through His Holy Days.

Pluck Out the Eye

By Luke Hopper

In this age of materialism, we all must strive to place our priorities in proper perspective. God’s Word, the Bible, provides the guidance we need daily to put Him first and not allow anything or anyone to take our focus from God.



THE SCRIPTURES OF GOD PROVIDE GUIDANCE to our everyday lives. Many scriptures exist which provide us help in leading more godly lives. All Scripture is given for “doctrine, for reproof, for correction” (2 Timothy 3:16). But, one particular scripture digs deep into the human psyche and can actually be a little frightening, especially to those new to the study of God’s Word. And, as we will see, this scripture is one that must be taken according to its intent, rather than the literal, raw words actually spoken. It is found within the Gospels of the New Testament.

Christ is speaking in His Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:29-30. “If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you [it is better off] that one of

your [body] members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell [Gehenna fire]. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members [that right hand] perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.”

Once in a great while we may have heard a news report where someone has applied this scripture literally, by cutting off or poking out a body part. This is an example of someone who probably is very depressed and desperate. Yet we know that this scripture’s intended meaning is not the actual raw words spoken, that is, to actually pluck out the eye or cut off the hand. To do so really would not solve a person’s problem with sin. The eye or the hand is not the cause of sin. To pluck out the eye or cut off the hand is not going to erase the temptation to sin. But this scripture is painting us a picture. It gives us a symbolic and rather graphic lesson in the real magnitude of sin and where it leads, ultimately to Gehenna fire.

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The lesson is this: It would be better, much better, to *symbolically lose* an eye or a hand in this life as a Christian soldier in our battle against sin than it would be to keep our members whole, yet lose out on eternal life because we simply did not resist sin. The lesson is *we must avoid sin at all costs*. We must stay away from sin and from those temptations causing us to sin, because the consequences of sin are serious. And in this war against sin, sacrifices may be necessary. Symbolically, limbs may be lost in our battle to resist.

In the Amplified Bible, Matthew 5:29 reads, “If your right eye serves as a trap to ensnare you or is an occasion for you to stumble and sin, pluck it out and throw it away. It is better that you lose one of your members than your whole body be cast into hell.”

Causes of sin

We know that the Bible and Jesus Christ point us to a way of life that is opposite of sin. Our job is to follow that way of life—and to do what it takes to avoid being trapped. Our calling demands we resist sin and the natural pulls of the flesh. As followers of Christ, we are obligated to do what we have to—even if it takes major sacrifices to keep from sinning—in order to obey God fully.

What is it that causes you and me to stumble, to become ensnared, to fall down and sin? How can we better prevent sin?

Let’s notice the context in which we find this scripture we have just read. In Matthew 5:27-28, we find, “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman [or a man] to lust for her [or him] has already committed adultery with her [or him] in his heart.”

Whatever has to be done to avoid sin, we must do. Even from Old Testament times, the letter of the law was against adultery. Married couples were expected to remain faithful to each other physically. Christ came, as we know, to bring fuller teaching to the people. He expanded God's law beyond the letter of the law to a spiritual level—to its real, full, intended meaning. He personally taught and applied the law to the heart and mind of the individual. Christ is revealing in this scripture that sin is not only something based on physical action but also on thought. Old Testament people lived with a mindset that they could think all the bad thoughts they wanted, so long as they did not actually perform it and did not actually break the letter of the law. For us today in the New Testament era, we cannot even think a bad thought without it putting us on the verge of sinning, of breaking the spirit of the law.

Too many want to carry the Christian label yet want to live in sin at the same time. And this behavior is wrong.

Now, referring back to verses 27-28, we understand that prolonged looking and lusting upon a woman or man is wrong, because basically the only thing that prevents the thought, the lust, from maturing into real-life action is the lack of the right circumstances. And, given the right circumstances, anything can happen. We need to realize all of us are subject to doing crazy things at times, given the right circumstances. The only thing that prevents a lot of sin is simply that the right circumstances are not there. The wrong thought is there, but the time or setting doesn't allow the thought to become action. Christ is teaching us that we need to dismiss these kinds of thoughts before they lead to action. We may have to do things that hurt. We may have to make sacrifices to prevent sin—to avoid certain things or certain people, whatever it takes.



To successfully prevent sin, we have to be constantly on guard. If you are married, you cannot go around flirting with the opposite sex. You are playing with fire. If your workplace has a mix of male and female employees, you have to be on special guard. Many affairs arise in the workplace. We may have to better control the movies and TV we watch. And we simply must say “no” to the pornography so prevalent on the Internet today. Symbolically, we may have to remove the offending member—to remove that thing that brings temptation into

our lives—to avoid sin. If we cannot control the bad side of TV or the Internet, we may need to “cut it off” and remove it from the house. Could you do this if need be? It comes down to exercising some good old-fashioned character.

Let's notice Matthew 18:8-9. Christ here repeats Himself to emphasize the importance of doing all to avoid sin. “If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire.”

Bottom line, we have to do whatever it takes, no matter how painful, no matter how many sacrifices are needed. We have to personally avoid the temptations around us. We are obligated to lead a life free of sin. If we want to carry the label of a Christian, then we have to think and act like Jesus Christ. Too many do not. Too many want to carry the Christian label yet want to live in sin at the same time. *And this behavior is wrong.* We see examples every day of “Christians” who live contrary to the moral teachings of the Bible. They live together, have affairs, live a gay lifestyle,

are involved in chronic crime, etc. God abhors their using His name in vain by calling themselves Christians (Matthew 15:8-9).

Riches versus eternal life

Now let's go on to another commandment that some may struggle with. Let's turn to Matthew 19:17-22. This is the incident concerning the rich young man who came to Christ and wanted to know what he had to do to gain eternal life. Christ, seeing in this man's life a great lesson for us all, said, "But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments." He said to Him, "Which ones?" Jesus said, "You shall not murder," "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "Honor your father and your mother," and, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." The young man said to Him, "All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?" Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions."

This young man, no doubt, was striving to follow God and probably devout in following the law. But he fell into the same trap and snare so many of us have fallen into. He could not see himself as he really was. He could not see that he was breaking the first of the commandments in question. He could only see his obedience and goodness in life. He could not see that he worshipped a god different from the one true God. He could not see that he put his riches above God. Until Christ made him choose between his riches and being a disciple, he could not see much wrong in himself.

Again, Jesus said, "If you want to be *perfect*, [if you want the best thing to do in your current life] go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." The rich young man was probably stunned when he was presented with this choice in life. He had a choice to follow Christ and be with the other disciples or a choice to keep his wealth and go his way. As we know, the rich man simply could not give up his secure bank account, his comfortable house, his designer wardrobe. He would not give up his lands and houses and livelihood—all that he had—which was great. He would not give it up and walk with Christ. He was not willing to spiritually chop off a hand or pluck out an eye to put God first in his life. He looked to the security of his own riches rather than the security of treasure in heaven. If we had been the young rich man, would we have done the same? Well, probably so, unless a strong measure of God's Spirit was upon us. Wealth has a strong pull. Security of money in the bank has a strong pull. And Christ cautions those who are wealthy, not to be trapped.

Bottom line, we cannot put God in the backseat and give Him a few selected minutes each week. Nothing should separate our relationship with God.

Next, notice in Matthew 19:23: "Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.' When His disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying, 'Who then can be saved?'"

The disciples were probably shaking their heads and thinking, "This road to salvation is a tough road. Who can be saved?" Christ was warning them, *and us today*, about materialism. Few rich people, in fact, few people in general, seem to be strong enough to balance and keep their money and possessions in proper perspective to their worship of God. Why? Because wealth is so

appealing to the carnal nature. And it is so hard to part with, once one has it. The rich young man could not give up the physical comforts of life in return for discipleship and promises. Promises of something better in the future. Promises requiring faith and obedience and sacrifice to God. Man's carnal nature leans toward a pocket full of gold and silver more than the promises of God.

Other spiritual roadblocks

What else might come between us and God? What else is hindering our strong spiritual relationship? Well, one's work or job could be worshipped. It's not necessarily how much we love our jobs as it is the volume of time spent working—preventing us from developing a better and closer relationship with God. Unnecessarily going to work early, staying late and working weekends will take their toll in many ways. Sometimes our health is hurt, sometimes our family suffers and definitely our relationship with God suffers. Those who are loyal, dedicated, hardworking employees can let their jobs become their main focus in life. Work can crowd out one's spiritual life. We can end up worshipping our jobs, our hobbies, our "things in life," our homes, even our families. Bottom line, we can not put God in the backseat and give Him a few selected minutes each week.

Nothing should separate our relationship with God, even our families. God created the family unit for our good, it is a blessing, it is a help—but never should we let it be a hindrance in worshipping and serving God.

Let's read further in Luke 14:26. "Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, 'If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.'" The word *hate* here should *not* be viewed as having malice or ill will toward one's family, but simply realizing that devotion to family—to father, mother, spouse and children—must come second to our devotion to God.

It is easy to let the things of this world come before God. Nice homes, nice cars, big bank accounts and even family. Sometimes, to avoid the sin of putting things ahead of God, we might have to eliminate whatever prevents our full devotion to God. Would we quit our job if it were a source of sin in our lives? Would we sell or cease our hobbies if they separated us from God? We all struggle with finding the right balance in life. I am not the judge of these other gods in your life. I struggle myself with these things. The young rich man could not give up his wealth.

We next look at another scripture showing us what attitude God desires us to have towards Him. In Luke 14:33, we read, "So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake *all that he has* cannot be My disciple." We must be willing to give up everything for God. *Everything*. What couldn't you give up? The young rich man couldn't let what he had go. He didn't have the faith to follow Christ and put Christ first in his life. Remember, we need to remove, "pluck out," the temptations or get ourselves away from the temptations. If things in life are separating you from God, "cut them off" and cast them from you. Of course, this requires wisdom. You may need to seek the counsel of God's ministry.

Building godly character

If anything stands in the way of our obedience to God and His commandments, we have to make the sacrifice to obey. If your boss demands you work on the Sabbath, you have a decision to

make—to work or keep the Sabbath. To keep from sinning, you may need to cut off your right work hand, symbolically, so you can honor God and keep the Sabbath. Of course, you need to use wisdom in how to go about this. You may want to seek legal help. You may need to get counsel before taking any action. But, in the end, we must sacrifice whatever it takes to stay right with God. *Nothing can stand in the way of obedience to God.*

All of this that we have talked about is simply the process of building righteous, godly character in our lives. Truly, our purpose in life is to develop the character that Jesus Christ had—choosing right over wrong. We need to direct the mind and body to obey God and not sin.

Can we ever put too much emphasis on obeying God? NO! We must strive to overcome sin and develop righteous, godly character. If any circumstance or influence tempts us to sin, if it challenges our allegiance and obedience to God—then that member must be plucked out or cut off symbolically. The sacrifices we go through in perfecting ourselves add mightily to the character that Jesus Christ is creating in us.

Let's always put God first and not let anything separate us from Him. In return, we will have the promised life eternal, worth more than the riches of this world.

Recommended reading

To read more about God's great gift of eternal life, read our free booklet [*The Road to Eternal Life*](#).