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A Journey of Faith

*He is
Risen*





Evangelical
Fellowship of
India



One in God; Together for Good.

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contents

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A monthly publication of EFI Publication Trust

Editorial Rev. Vijayesh Lal04	Adversity or Advantage Dr. A. K. Lama37
Easter - The Undoing of Death Rev. Dr. Jacob Cherian07	When Others Find Favour - Grace is in full supply Dr. Finny Philip39
Madhusudan Das: A true nationalist Mr. Sunil K Sahu13	None Crazier Rev. Kuruvilla Chandy41
His Death Demands Our Devotion Rev. Dr. David Mende18	Role Of Social Media In Mission Dr. Sanjay Avinash Mall47
Bye besetting sin, Thanks to The Blood! Rev. Dr. Duke Jeyaraj24	No Conversion! Just Turn the world upside down? Rev. Dr. J. N. Manokaran51
Unravelling a Mystery Dr. Shantanu Dutta29	The first Palm Sunday Dr. Sanjay Avinash Mall57
J. Signs, Wonders and Miracles Rev. Richard Masih32	Prayer63

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Editorial 



Rev. Vijayesh Lal

The death of a seed, the immortality of the meek

More than 520 people have been killed in Myanmar since the Military Junta overthrew the elected government in early February 2021. The dead include many women and children. The images are heart-rending. As in many other places on the globe, innocent, unarmed citizens fall prey to the power lust of a few. And it is not always the generals in uniform.

We, as a people, were shamed as the government of a state bordering Myanmar ordered us citizens not to extend help to

refugees from Myanmar. These orders, fortunately, were withdrawn after protests from civil society.

For us, there is a sense of 'deja vu' in Bengal and Assam, of repetition of ugly scenes in the last decade where our leaders have fought electoral battles fueled by soul-searing, communally charged and polarizing campaigns that put community against community. In doing so, win or lose, they sow seeds of future violence.

Such unbridled, and perhaps

immoral, pursuit of power is inevitably and always destructive. That is an axiom rooted in history of every people. That it is now an addition to the terrifying death and economic destruction caused by the Covid-19 pandemic multiplies impact manifold.

In the Bible, however, we see things differently.

Jesus had entered Jerusalem triumphant, and with the world at His feet. And yet as he nears a death foretold, we see that He gives us a vision of power that is so different than perceived by the world's kings and tycoons. Jesus demonstrates power through weakness, and life through death.

In John 12 from verse 20 onwards we read about a group of Greeks desiring to see Jesus. *When Jesus hears about it, he says, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone*

who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me. Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!" (John 12:23–28)

In the book of John, we find that the term 'hour' has been used many times to indicate the time for the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. In verse 23, Jesus says that the 'hour' has come when the Son of Man i.e., Jesus, would be glorified. Prior to this, He had said many times that the hour had not yet come but now He says it has come. And this glorification would be through His death on the cross followed by His resurrection.

He likens it to a seed (vs 24) and how it multiplies by its death. It is only as the seed dissipates that the wheat bears its life-giving fruit.

This paradox lies at the very heart of the Gospel: power through

weakness, glory through suffering, life through death.

The world does not understand it and continues to struggle, plot and even kill for power.

This hunger, the greed for power and self is doomed to decline, decay and inevitable destruction.

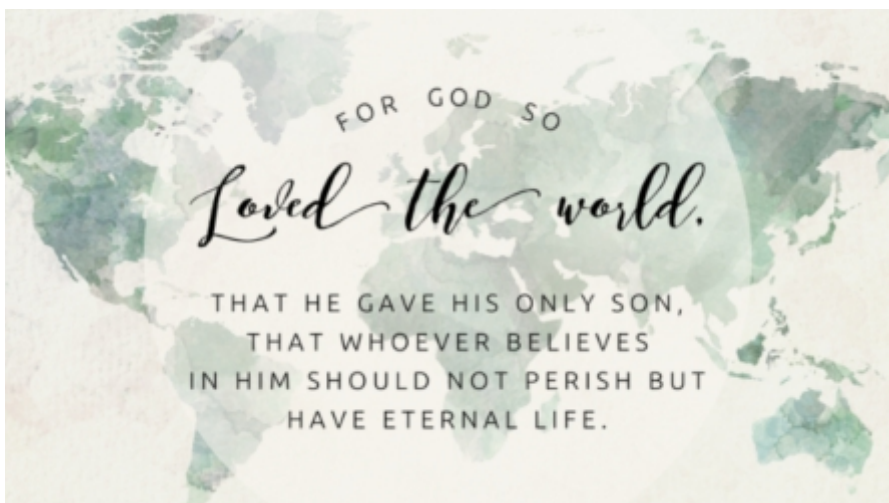
The exception to this axiom is the One who has defeated death, exemplifying His power through humility and meekness, by impoverishing Himself of all that man holds dear. He has given us life through His own death.

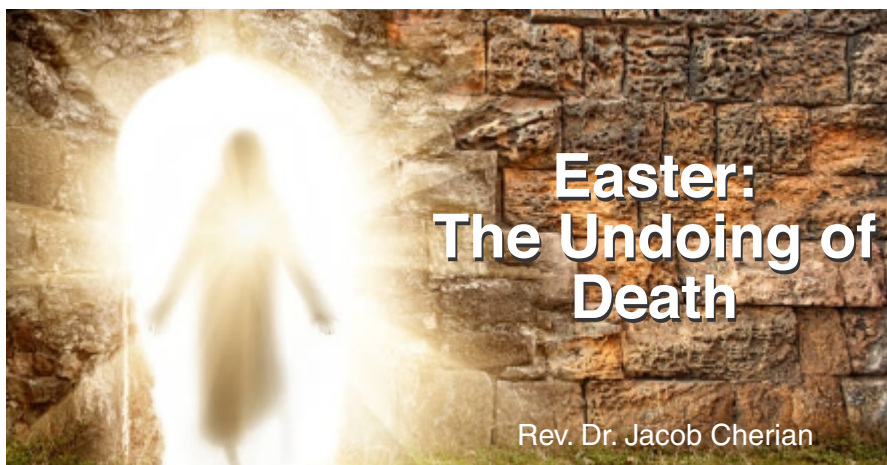
His example gives us the confidence to face an uncertain future of strife precipitated as

surely by military dictatorships as through the sort of ugly poll battles waged in democratic elections in many countries, rooted in race, region, caste and class distinctions.

His is a counter-cultural, life-changing message. And even though the world that does not understand it, may oppose the message and shoot the messengers, they will bear witness to the fact that the path to glory is through suffering, of power through weakness, and of life through death. The Genus and the species lives, and multiplies, because the seed dies.

Rev. Vijayesh Lal





Easter: The Undoing of Death

Rev. Dr. Jacob Cherian

On that momentous Sunday morning, almost 2000 years ago, while the world was still wrapped in its sin-induced darkness, the Light of the world rose from the dead! The Lord Jesus had shattered the bonds of sin and death. He announces: “I am the Living One; I was dead, and now, look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades” (Rev 1:18).

The four Gospels have different portraits of the resurrection of Jesus. Each set of narratives is precious and significant in its own right. The last two chapters of John are a great pastoral resource for God's people. Jesus gently and lovingly deals with his

disciples; he enables them to overcome grief, doubt, and shame to become glorious witnesses of his resurrection and joyful servants of God's people. Let us reflect on the events portrayed in John 20. (It will be great if you could also read along in your Bible).

John 20:1-10: The Tomb is Empty

Mary Magdalene comes to the tomb while it is still dark. John's Gospel is heavy on symbolism; the symbols of night and darkness, as well as light and day, pervade the narratives (1:4; 8:12; 13:27, 30).

Mary was probably not alone,

though John does not specifically mention it. (notice the “we” in 20:2; Mark 16:1). But why does Mary come to the tomb? To find some connection with the one who had given her life. She just sought some comfort in expressing her love for her Lord by anointing his crucified body.

However, she wouldn't have had any great expectations. In Jesus's time, there were a few stories of gods who died and rose again – not unlike the dying and rising of plants. But no one ever expected to see a real person emerge from the grave.

When Mary saw the stone removed and the tomb empty, she assumed the obvious: somebody had stolen the body. Mary ran to the other disciples. Then two disciples came running to the tomb. What was going on? They saw the strips of linen and the head cloth, still lying in its place inside the tomb. Peter shakes his head in incomprehension (cf. Luke 24:12). The puzzlement of the disciples, here and elsewhere in the other resurrection narratives,

is a further reflection of the event's authenticity.

The other disciple, enigmatically called “the beloved disciple” in John's Gospel (13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20), went inside the tomb. He sees and believes. In this Gospel, he becomes the first one to believe in the resurrection (see 2:19-22). As an ideal disciple in John's Gospel, he becomes one of the “blessed” (20:29); those who believe without seeing. (The only other beatitude in John is in 13:17.)

Remember this Gospel's goal is that the readers/hearers “may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing they may have life in his name” (20:31). For the beloved disciple, the sight of the burial cloths revealed the otherwise-unthinkable truth, borne out of love. This was no grave robber's doing. The Lord Jesus had been raised from the dead.

The resurrection happened at night, or early morning. No one except God and the angels witnessed it. The greatest cosmic fight had just taken place. Jesus

had entered the kingdom of death and emerged as the Victor!

The two disciples go back home; but not Mary. Jesus was, in a sense, her home, her world. She remains, struggling, in deep darkness and grief.

John 20:11-18: Mary, Weep not!

Mary weeps. Death brings deep grief. Always. Then she looks up to see two angels. They ask her why she was weeping. Through her tears, she cries: Someone has taken away the body of 'my Lord'.

Then the readers are told that her Lord stands close by and asks her the same question – teasingly, yet in infinite love. Mary does not recognize Jesus yet. She mistakes Jesus – now in his resurrected body – to be the gardener.

This grieving disciple is chosen to be the first one to see the risen Lord. Jesus tenderly calls her by name. No extended drama here, unlike his long-drawn conversation with two downhearted disciples before

they recognize him (Luke 24).

The Lord calls: “Mary”. Now, she recognizes that loving voice. “Rabboni!” she cries out ecstatically. The reader of John will remember the good shepherd whose sheep recognize the voice of their faithful shepherd who lays down his life for them (10:11, 14). Mary in her incredible joy clings to Jesus (Matt 28:9). But the Lord assures her that this was not necessary. There had been a radical change in the nature of their relationship.

Jesus's disciples would no longer need to seek out the physical presence of Jesus. Once Jesus ascended to the Father, our resurrected Lord would be present with believers, always, through the Holy Spirit. What a glorious assurance!

Then, Jesus commissioned Mary as a witness to the other disciples, whom he refers to for the first time, as 'my brothers'. This Easter, let us be reminded that, through Jesus our elder brother, all believers are included in the family of God as his children (Mark 3:34; Heb 2:11;

Rom 8:29). Remember too that on the cross, Jesus entrusted his mother to his beloved disciple (19:25-27). Disciples are welcomed into the eternal relationship that has always existed within the divine Trinity. Also, don't miss out the encouraging fact that all the four Gospels show that women were the first and dependable witnesses of the resurrection. Today too, women and men are given the same privilege by God, to be witnesses of the Lord Jesus.

John 20:19-23: Jesus reveals himself to Many Disciples

That same evening, the risen Jesus appeared to many of his disciples. It was not the empty tomb that convinced the disciples that Jesus had been raised from the dead. They saw him! He cooked breakfast; ate with them; bore the scars of the crucifixion. His was a real body, though different. This body was made of matter of the New Age that has been ushered in by Jesus. No wonder, the disciples did not easily recognize him (see 21:12). He offered to Thomas the visible and tangible proof of his

resurrected body. Thomas then moved from skepticism to the grandest confession: "My Lord and my God" (20:28).

After they had seen their Lord humiliated and crucified, the disciples would have felt that their abandoning everything to follow Jesus appeared to be a very cruel joke. They were hopeless; numbed into inaction. But something happened to change that situation. What else can explain the fact that these dejected disciples, a few days later, are bold witnesses, ready to take on the whole religious establishment which just a few days ago had handed Jesus over to be killed? No pious or nebulous idea of the soul being alive could have comforted or helped these tired and frightened disciples.

What else can explain Peter's boldness, except the fact that he was personally reinstated as a shepherd in person by the risen Jesus (21:15-19)?

A single definitive act of God had taken place. This would have cosmic implications. The living God had now won the battle

against the last enemy, death (1 Cor 15:26). This victory over death is now shared by all those who believe. The resurrection of Jesus is now the basic ground of our faith.

Many believers in Paul's church at Corinth were turning away from believing in a bodily resurrection; apparently satisfied with the more familiar Greek (Platonic) understanding of the immortality of the soul; probably a more spiritualized idea of the resurrection. Paul rebukes them in the significant resurrection chapter (Cor 15) of the total foolishness of their position and of the absolutely foundational plank of their faith being the resurrection of Jesus and their future bodily resurrection.

At Easter, and on every other day, we must celebrate the “undoing of death”. (I have borrowed the title of this article is from Fleming Rutledge's fine book with the same title). We now celebrate the coming of God's new creation, the inauguration of the kingdom of God in the life, death and resurrection of Christ. Paul is very

clear: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” (2 Cor 5:17).

The kingdom of God that Jesus announced, lived and still embodies in his resurrected body, is the theme song of the New Testament. The remaining stanzas will be sung when the fully-consummated kingdom arrives. The new heaven and new earth will arrive. The whole creation that is groaning will be redeemed (Rom 8:19-25). The resurrection of Jesus is the main signpost to that assured final victory of God, over all sin and evil.

A commonly used analogy from World War II is helpful. About 30 countries were divided up into two opposing military alliances – the Allies and the Axis – where some 100 million people were tragically involved. On June 6, 1944, often referred to as D-Day, the Allied forces landed on the beaches of Normandy, France. This day, in a sense marked the beginning of the end of the war. In the ensuing 11 months, several

battles continued to be fought in many of the European nations, and thousands upon thousands of lives were lost in these battles between D-Day and the final V-Day, declared on May 8, 1945. Finally, Western Europe was liberated from Hitler and Nazi Germany, and the War came to an end.

The life, death, and resurrection of Christ is like D-Day – the decisive victory has been won! Already! But not yet – fully. The battle is raging, though the end result is assured. V-Day, the Day of the victorious Lamb of God, the Second Coming, is on the way!

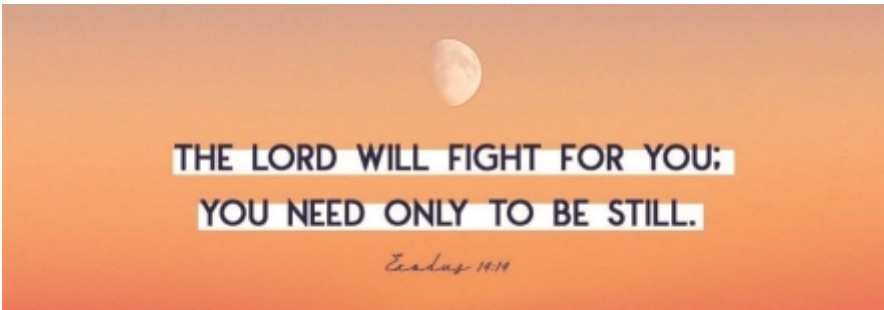
Meanwhile, you and I are called to be foot-soldiers of this kingdom, going around fighting the war with the weapons of the kingdom: bearing witness to the good news of Christ, speaking

truth to power, identifying life-denying policies in our communities, serving in sacrificial love, even serving those who may appear as enemies.

We are to follow the enthroned Lamb wherever he leads us (Rev 14:4; John 1:29), all the while praying, “Thy Kingdom come on earth, as it is in heaven”.



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Madhusudan Das: A true nationalist

Mr. Sunil K Sahu



The last phase of 19th century & the first phase of 20th century witnessed a great awakening of Odisha. It was the phase of New Odisha - in making. The Odias during this phase got an identity consciousness. This identity needed to be asserted. Many individuals & institutions were responsible for this resurgent trend in Odisha, Among them Madusudan Das was very significant. His life was dedicated to the making of new Odisha.

Barrister Madhusudan Das, was popularly known as **Utkal Gourav**. He was a born rich, lived like a lion & died as a saint. Choudhry Raghunath Das & Mrs. Parbati Devi from Satyabhamapur, a small village twenty km. away from Cuttack,

the oldest city of Odisha, were blessed with a male child on 28th of April, 1848. He rose to great heights of eminence & popularly called as Madhu Babu. He is the first Postgraduate & first lawyer of the state. He was the first elected member of Bengal Legislative Council & the Viceroy Imperial Council. He was the first Odia to establish industries in Odisha & organized the small & cottage industries. He was the first Odia Minister of Bihar & Odisha province.

Amongst all, Odisha will remember him for the architecture of new Odisha state, the only state made on the basis of language. For this, he visited London in 1897 to place grievances of Odias before Sir W.

Waidegbourn, an administrator-in-charge of Indian office for establishing separate state of Odisha. In this context, on 31st of December 1903, he convened **Utkal Sammellani** & his patriotic speech galvanized the people of the state . He took a very prominent role in amalgamation of different Odia speaking tracts lying scattered in different neighboring provinces into a great political entity. At the same time, he attempted socio-economic & cultural progress of the Odias. He was the moving spirit. His efforts were crowned with success when the Government of the Central Provinces restored Odia as the Court language of Sambalpur with effect from 1st of January 1902.

His speech in **Utkal Sammilani** was very powerful which formed a part of the nationalist discourse. I like to quote, "**in the fixed ocean there is one image of the moon, but when it flows with waves, many images appear. As I see my brothers, my heart is filled with the waves of love & I am very glad to see them. Hindus believe that the eight metals when united become such a metallic substance which does many useful works. Hence this brotherly**

love would animate the newly created Odisha to such an extent that it would undertake many useful & auspicious works. People of different places came to England & settled there. This union helped in the making of the English race & they have great contribution to the progress in Europe. We must consider this in the context of our motherland. For the spread of brotherly love, one should give up impure elements from the heart & allow pure, pious blood into it. Brothers, you & me have temporary existence, but our motherland is permanent. So, let us unite together & give up selfishness for the progress of our nation." This speech fueled the mass to go ahead with the mission.

He was not confined to the state only. He joined Independence Movement & Indian National Congress in 1886. He participated in Calcutta & Madras National Congress sessions as an active member. It is worthwhile to mention that in 1925, Mahatma Gandhi accepted his invitation & visited Odisha. Gandhi ji was inspired by his vision as an industrialist & he mentioned it in his letter of 16th March, 1928 from Satyagraha Ashram, Sabarmati. Gandhi ji was so

inspired by Utkal Tannery, that he established a tannery in Sabarmati Ashram. He appreciated the vision of Madhu Babu to boost up economic status of rural India by such units where skins of dead animals were used in tannery & rest of the body parts as manure. He was so impressed that he didn't hesitate to say it as 'educational tannery'. In his quest for a new Odisha, he wanted great economic progress of the nation. Odisha's economic potentiality was well known for its unrivalled filigree industry. There were silversmiths in Cuttack who were prized in the Cuttack exhibition for sixty years from A.D. 1840 to A.D. 1900. But this trade suffered a lot in the last decade of 19th century which was noticed by Madhu Babu. So, he established Odisha Art Wares in 1898 which got to be modernized in 1900. When Lord Curzon came to Puri in Dec.1900, he presented him a silver casket (Raupya dhara) which contained the greeting note of Odias. Madhu Babu was very elegant & was indicative of his inventive genius. The bottom of the casket was a filigree plate. Upon it on both the sides were placed two elephants made of ivory & in the middle, a golden

leaf was painted the image of a temple. He wanted to communicate to the Viceroy Lord Curzon that the Odias were vital, energetic & full of creativity & that they could not fall into a sudden stupor.

Madhu Babu was a born Hindu & named as Gobinda Ballav Choudhury. In 1866, the year of acute famine in Odisha, popularly known as '**Naa anka Durvikhya**' when more than one lakh people died of hunger. This year, he accepted Christianity & named himself as Madhusudan Das. After that, he was not allowed to his village, so he built a small house known as Madhu Kothi, later on used as the state office of the 'Kasturba National Memorial Trust'.

He had three main visions – industrialisation, empowerment of dalits & women & skill development of people. In his quest for industrialisation, he had the grand vision to be equal with European countries.

He set an example of a role model of a legislator in fighting epidemics like cholera & plague. He could convince people that those epidemics were caused by pathogens not by the curse of

spiritual powers. He raised the issue of epidemics in Feb.21, 1923 & sharply asked the Govt. as to why no sufficient budgetary provisions were made for improving public health & sanitation in rural India. His speech in Central Assembly assumes significance in the context of the global pandemic of 2020 & the inadequacy of medical facilities even in the highly developed countries to face the havoc wrought by COVID-19.

Mahatma Gandhi placed Madhu Babu & Leo Tolstoy in the same footing when he said that Madhu Babu preceded Leo Tolstoy in emphasising on dignity of labour. Much before Dr. Ambedkar, it was Madhusudan Das who deeply analysed caste system & said that due to caste system, India couldn't develop division of labour in the pattern of Europe. It was in his speech in Central Assembly in 1913, 27 years prior to Dr. Ambedkar's presentation 'Pax Britannica & Untouchables'. Prof. Bailley of Oxford University admired Madhu Babu for adopting lawful & constitutional methods to achieve his objectives in his article 'The Oriya Movement'.

Madhu Babu is a burning example on how to uphold religious tolerance & secularism. His landmark victory in Jagannath temple case which placed him in hearts of millions of Indians. Due to his brilliant advocacy, British Government forced to hand over the charge of the temple to him. But he handed over the judgment copy & key of the temple to Suryamani Pata Mahadei, the Queen in front of the temple. When the queen invited him to the temple, he denied with all humility as he knew that the religious sentiments of hindus would be hurt. Madhu Babu was a Messiah for many poor & downtrodden which was best manifested in Puri Mahunta case, in which he took up a poor Rayat's side against the mighty landlord who had engaged all leading lawyers, but Madhu Babu got a decree for his client, to whom he didn't forget to pay from his own pocket to return home.

Truly, Barrister Madhusudan Das was not only a true nationalist but also a true disciple of Christ. He always worked for dalits, women of India. He adopted two Bengali girls named Sailabala Das & Sudhansubala Hazra. Sailabala

was an educationist who had been trained in England & on whose name the famous Sailabala Women's college of Cuttack was founded. Sudhansubala was the first female lawyer of British India. This speaks volume of his endeavor for Women' Empowerment. In those days adopting a child, that to girl children & educating them abroad was an eye opener for many national leaders. In his last days of life, he lived in just two rooms & rest everything donated to the state.

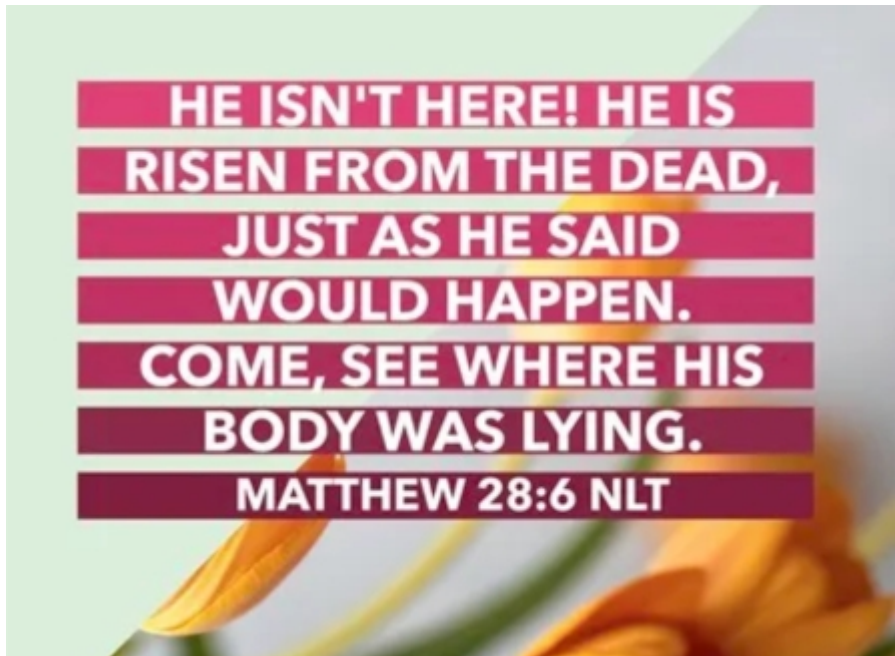
Is he not a saint, a true follower of

Jesus? Shall we all learn something from his life to glorify our Lord?



Mr. Sunil K Sahu

has done his post graduation in M.Sc. in Botany. By profession he is a business man. He writes on social, political and religious issues for different magazines and on social media as well.





His Death Demands Our Devotion

Rev. Dr. David Mende

Introduction

In *Disappointment with God*, Philip Yancey illustrates God's sacrificial love by narrating a poignant story: "Author Henri Nouwen tells the story of a family he knew in Paraguay. The father, a doctor, spoke out against the military regime there and its human rights abuses. Local police took their revenge on him by arresting his teenage son and torturing him to death. Enraged townsfolk wanted to turn the boy's funeral into a huge protest march, but the doctor chose another means of protest. At the funeral, the father displayed his son's body as he had found it in the jail--naked, scarred from electric shocks, cigarette burns, and beatings. All the villagers filed past the corpse, which lay not in a coffin but on the blood-

soaked mattress from the prison. It was the strongest protest imaginable, for it put injustice on grotesque display."¹

Yancey goes on to write, "Isn't that what God did at Calvary? The cross that held Jesus' body, naked and marked with scars, exposed all the violence and injustice of this world. At once, the cross revealed what kind of world we have and what kind of God we have: a world of gross unfairness, a God of sacrificial love."²

In this article, I give an exposition on Mark 15:33-41. In this passage, we see that as Jesus cries out in despair and dies, the centurion confesses Jesus and the women look from a distance. The sacrificial love of God is manifested in Christ's death. And

his death demands a clear response from us.

1. Jesus Cries out Due to His Spiritual Agony (15:33-36).

Matthew, Mark, and Luke mention different signs that accompany the death of Jesus. One of those signs includes “darkness over the whole land” (v. 33) from noon to 3 pm. Probably, the whole land of Judea was covered with darkness. This darkness is not due to a solar eclipse as it was a full moon during the Passover. The sign of darkness at midday is a sign of divine judgment, very similar to the plague of darkness over Egypt (Exod. 10:21-23). This sign also recalls the darkness that prevailed over the earth before creation (Gen. 1:2). Secondly, darkness also represents lament (Amos 8:9-10).

Mark records that “Jesus cried with a loud voice” (v. 34). Then, Mark records the fourth saying of Jesus as he hung on the cross. The Greek word translated as “cried” (Greek: boao) is used by Mark only here and in Mark 1:3, translated as “crying.” John, the baptizer prepared the Lord’s “way,” which is the way to the cross. Mark quotes Jesus’ actual words in Aramaic, “Eloi, Eloi, lemasabachthani?” and then

gives its meaning in Greek so that his Gentile readers can understand. Jesus’ words in Mark 15:34 are quoted from Psalm 22:1. Jesus identifies himself with the righteous man in Psalm 22, who suffers without any cause.

As he approaches his death, Jesus senses that the Father has forsaken him. Jesus’ abandonment is now complete! However, the following verses of Psalm 22 anticipate divine intervention and vindication as well. So, Jesus deliberately spoke the opening words from Psalm 22 as he was crucified. Also, the phrase “my God” is an affirmation of Jesus’ trust in the Father. So, although Jesus experienced abandonment by the Father, he believed that the Father will vindicate him. In that dark moment, God’s wrath was poured upon Jesus. His eternal communion with the Father was temporarily broken. Some say that as Jesus was crucified, he experienced hell, which is essentially separation from God. That’s why Paul writes, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21). Jesus bore the sin of the world as he was nailed to the cross (Jn 1:29).

Jesus took the curse of humanity on himself.

In verse 35, we see that the bystanders probably mistake Jesus' cry (Aramaic: Eloi) as an appeal to Elijah (Aramaic: Eli). Additionally, or alternatively, some Jews believed that Elijah would return from heaven when the righteous go through a crisis and rescue them. In fact, throughout Mark's gospel, his words are misunderstood (e.g., 4:13; 7:2–3, 17–18; 8:16–18, 21; 9:10, 32; 14:58, 61–64).

The reed in verse 36 (Greek: kalamos) is the same instrument with which the soldiers struck Jesus' head in verse 19. Someone, probably one of the soldiers, “ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink.” Sour wine was the wine that the laborers and soldiers drank. It was cheaper than the normal wine and quenched the thirst more effectively than water. Probably, the soldiers wanted to prolong Jesus' torture and keep him from dying quickly. So, they offer him sour wine. This drink recalls Psalm 69:21: “They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink.” And they continue to mock Jesus by saying, “Wait, let us see

whether Elijah will come to take him down.”

2. Jesus Dies (15:37-38).

Jesus went through roughly six hours of torture on the cross. Then he “uttered a loud cry” (v. 37). This loud cry is unusual because the victims of crucifixion died due to exhaustion. Some suggest that Jesus was able to utter a loud cry due to supernatural strength. This loud cry could be the cry of victory mentioned in John 19:30, “It is finished.” Jesus died around the same time that the animals were sacrificed in the temple every day.

As Jesus dies, the curtain of the temple was torn in two (v. 38). There were two curtains in the temple in Jerusalem. One was before the court of Israel (Holy Place) and another was one was before the unapproachable Holy of Holies. The high priest was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies only once a year, on the Day of Atonement. Probably, the curtain before the Holy of Holies was torn in two (Heb. 9:8-10, 12; 10:19-20; Mk 15:38).

The temple was already condemned by Jesus (Mk 11:17; 13:1-2). That's why Jesus was mocked by the bystanders, “Aha!

You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!” (Mk 15:29-30). But now the tearing of the curtain in the temple probably implies the departure of God's presence from the temple (Ezek. 9:3; 10:4-18), which also prefigures its destruction in 70 AD. The tearing of the temple curtain also symbolizes that humans can have direct access to God through Jesus. The temple sacrifices are now obsolete. Jesus alone is the way to God (Eph. 2:18). Through Jesus' sacrificial death, we have access to God.

3. The Confession of the Centurion (15:39).

At the beginning of Mark's Gospel, the heavens were torn open, followed by the Father's declaration that Jesus is his Son (1:10-11). Here, at the end of the Gospel, the curtain is torn, followed by the Roman Centurion's declaration that Jesus is the Son of God (v. 39). The chief priests and scribes wanted Jesus to come down so that they can see and believe (v. 32), but this Centurion, who was a commander over one hundred Roman soldiers sees Jesus being crucified and believes.

This Centurion probably saw several men die on the cross. But Jesus' death was different. When the Centurion saw the manner in which Jesus died, he changed his mind about Jesus. In Luke 23:47, the Centurion confesses that Jesus was a righteous man. At the beginning of his Gospel (1:1), Mark affirms that Jesus is the Son of God. Now at the end of the Gospel, we see that the Centurion confesses that Jesus is the Son of God.

The designation, “Son of God” was used by God to refer to Israel (Exod. 4:22; Hos. 11:1) and to David and his faithful son (2 Sam. 7:14; Ps. 2:7). Later, this phrase was used to refer to righteous individuals in apocryphal writings. In Mark's Gospel, this designation is used to refer to Jesus' unique relationship to the Father (1:11; 9:7; 5:7; 12:6; 13:32). When the term, “Son of God” is used to refer to Jesus, it means that he is God. Ironically, this confession comes from a man who was instrumental in Jesus' death. Scholars debate whether the Centurion realized the full significance of his words or not. Gentiles viewed heroes and the emperor as the sons of gods. Here, the Centurion recognizes Jesus as the son of

the one true God of Israel. Mark's readers would fully agree with the Centurion's confession that Jesus is indeed the Son of God!

4. Some Women Look From a Distance (15:40-41).

There were certain women at the cross, but they were "looking on from a distance" (v. 40). Mark identifies three of these women. Some of these women were wealthy. This same group of women share in the witness to the burial of Jesus (v. 47), bought spices to anoint Jesus (16:1), and were the first to hear the news of the resurrection (16:5-6). The names of two of these women were Mary. It was the most common name for Jewish women during this time. The first one is Mary Magdalene or Mary of Magdala, from whom Jesus drove out seven demons (cf. Lk. 8:2). The Bible never says that she was a prostitute as supposed by some. The second one is Mary, who is "the mother of James the younger and of Joses." We don't know much about her, but her sons were probably well known in the early church. The third woman is Salome, who is Zebedee's wife and she was the mother of James and John (cf. Mt. 27:56).

These three women followed

Jesus and ministered to him while he served in Galilee (v. 41). The two verbs, "followed" and "ministered" are in imperfect tenses in Greek, indicating that it was not merely occasional accompaniment and service, but a continual one. These women did a commendable ministry! So, Jesus had women disciples too, which was pretty unusual in those days. Mark tells us that "there were also many other women" who came with Jesus to Jerusalem to minister to him. These women exhibited the courage that most of Jesus' male disciples didn't. They ministered to Jesus till the end of his life!

Conclusion

The main message I want to highlight in this article is: Demonstrate your devotion to Jesus by confessing him, following him, and serving him.

1. We must confess that Jesus is the Son of God.

Those who are not saved must repent of their sins, confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and then they will be saved. Those who are saved must confess Jesus before people by being bold witnesses for him.

2. We must follow Jesus.

Following Jesus involves being

consecrated to him (2 Cor. 6:17). Also, it involves abiding in him (Jn 15:4-5). We must receive him, believe him, and receive his love. Following Jesus involves imitating him (Phil. 2:5-11). Furthermore, following Jesus involves obeying him (Mt. 4:20, 22).

3. We must serve Jesus.

Let's serve him in whatever way we can. Let's serve him wholeheartedly. Let's serve him sacrificially. Let's serve him joyfully.

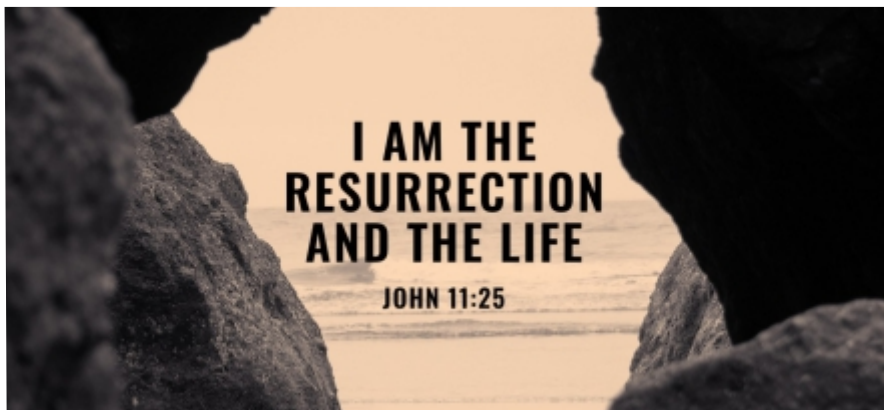
P.S. This article is adapted from Dr. David Mende's book, *The Passion of Christ: Expository Sermons on Mark 14-16*. You may contact him for copies of this book.

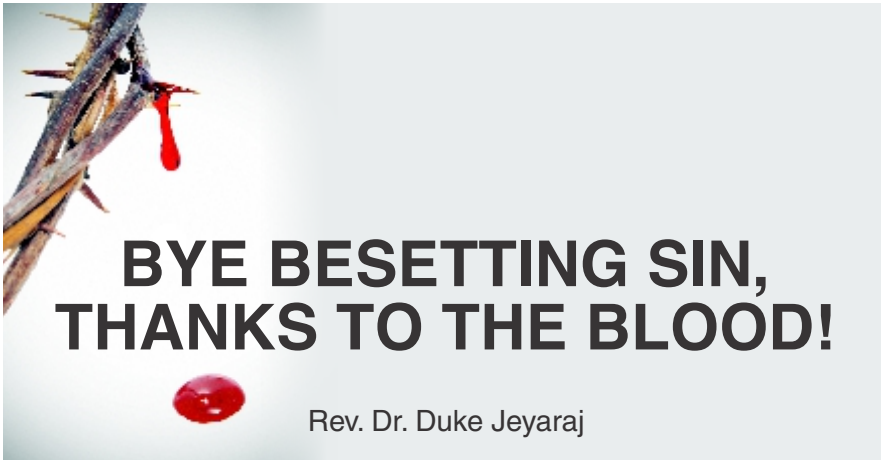


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1. Philip Yancey, *Disappointment With God: Three Questions No One Asks Aloud* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 216.
 2. Yancey, *Disappointment With God*, 216.





If it is not possible to overcome besetting sin in our lives as believers, the Bible will not even call us for it. But it does! Hear the writer of the letter to the Hebrews: “Therefore, seeing we also are compassed by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1 KJ21).

There are those who are merely satisfied with the cleansing work of the Cross. Does the Cross cleanse us from sin? Of course! Apostle John wrote, “the blood of Jesus his son cleanses us from all Sin” (1 John 1:7 ESV).

The Cross of Christ does more than just PURIFICATION. It gives us POWER over habitual sin. The Cross of Christ does more than just WASH away sin. It gives us the wherewithal to WALLOP sin! The Cross of Christ does more than just CLEAN sin. It enables us to CRUSH sin's grasp over us!

The connection between the Cross of Christ and victory over besetting sin is so clearly established in Scripture that we will have to be stone-blind or be heavily influenced by cultic hyper-grace hell-populating teaching not to notice it.

Apostle Peter expressed it clearly. He wrote, “He(Christ)

himself bore our sins on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness” (1 Peter 2:24 ESV). Apostle Paul penned the same thing using different words and imagery: “Those who belong to Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Galatians 5:24). And when he wrote in Galatians 6:14, “the Cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and to the world” he was saying this: “thanks to the deep work of the Cross in my life, the besetting sin of worldliness is now dead (crucify here means death) in me!” Jesus died so that we might have victory over sin in our day to day lives.

Let me talk about various “P’s” that help us understand how the blood of Christ gives us victory over daily, besetting sin.

PEACE & THE BLOOD OF CHRIST

Prophet Isaiah wrote, “the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him” (Isaiah 53:5). When we choose to sin against the Lord as a believer, the

first result is a loss of peace. The knowledge that we will lose our peace when we sin should strongly deter us from walk down the familiar path of sin. Yes, that journey to watch a web series full of erotic scenes is not worth it for it destroys our peace which was given to us because of the work of the Cross. Yes, that online affair outside the boundaries of marriage is not simply worth it because our serenity goes for a Six (to borrow a Cricket imagery)! Apostle Paul wrote, “we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us” (Romans 5:1 NLT) on the Cross. “When I commit a wanton wickedness against my Lord, my peace will go for a huge Six. I don’t want that to happen. So, I will overcome the temptation before me by tapping into the power of the Holy Spirit!” That is what we should say. That is what we should do.

PRECIOUSNESS & THE BLOOD OF CHRIST

The Bible says, “You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers,

not with perishable things such as silver or gold but with the precious blood of Christ” (I Peter 1:18-19). When we realize the preciousness of the blood of Christ, we will realize how atrocious it is when we keep returning to same old sin (that p o r n - w a t c h i n g , t h a t drunkenness, that abusive language, etc.).

Hosea's wife left him to go to the Red-Light area for prostitution. But that did not put a red light (stop) on his love for her. He bought back his wife from the Red-Light District operators by paying 15 pieces of silver, five bushels of barley and a measure of wine (Hosea 3:2). These things were by no means cheap those days. They were very expensive. Exodus 21:32 and Zechariah 11:12 tells us that the price of slave in the Jewish slave market was 30 shekels of silver. Translate that into today's world where to 'buy' a kidney also you need shell out a bomb. Imagine the price of one full individual, then! Hosea paid this monstrous amount, part in silver (15 pieces), part in

agricultural produce (five bushels of barley and a measure of wine). After redeeming her, Hosea told her not to return to the Red-Light area as a prostitute (Hosea 3:3). She had to put a 'red light' (stop) on her life of sin having experienced a love from her husband which did not stop even though she went into the red-light area! Having been bought with something far more precious that Prophet Hosea paid for his wife, which is the precious blood of Jesus, we must also take efforts to overcome sin. Since we were “bought” with a price – the utterly precious blood of Jesus – we must glorify God in our body, the Apostle Paul wrote (I Corinthians 6:20). We must stay away from sinful habits that destroy our souls and bodies – torrid habits such as masturbation coupled with porn-watching, alcohol/drug consumption, sexual activity outside marriage, etc.

THE PROFANING & THE BLOOD OF JESUS

The author of the book of Hebrews wrote these powerful lines: “How much worse

punishment do you think will be deserved by the man who has spurned the Son of God, and profaned blood of the covenant by he was sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of Grace?” (Hebrews 10:29 RSV). And when do we profane the blood of Christ? The same author answers this question very directly: “when we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth” (Hebrews 10:26 NIV). So, when we are tempted to watch that profane web series that is showing in that popular streaming service (Netflix and the likes) we must tell ourselves this: “If I watch that, I would profane the precious blood of Jesus which I do not want to do. So, I will overcome that temptation empowered by the Spirit!”

Yes, it is possible to beat besetting sin through the blood of Jesus!

THE PERSECUTION & THE BLOOD OF JESUS

John observed in the Book of

Revelation this: “And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not lives even unto death” (Rev. 12:11). Yes, end-time believers overcame “the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world” (Rev. 12:9) through the blood of the Lamb (the Lord Jesus Christ). The Devil tried to threaten these believers with severe persecution but because they were inspired by the blood of the Lamb they did not “love their lives so much that they were afraid of death” (EXB version of Rev. 12:11). Jesus was extremely bold as he marched toward the Cross. While his disciples ran helter-skelter when the Roman arrest party came, he said very boldly marched towards them saying, “I am he (the one you have come to arrest)!” (John 18:4-6). His bold voice threw the arrest party on the floor. They were flabbergasted. He was that bold! So, his blood gives us the courage in the face of persecution that can come to us for saying 'no' to sin. Therefore, when we say 'no' to sin inspired by the blood of Jesus, this

complaint that the writer to the Hebrews made about his congregation will be no longer true about us: “In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood” (Hebrews 12:4 RSV). Instead of compromising with sin trying to escape the brickbats, inspired by the blood of the Lamb we will conquer sin despite the onslaught of severe persecution which may come from the Government, from your boss in the place of work.

Keep connecting the above-mentioned four “P’s” – Peace, Preciousness, Profaning, Persecution – with the Cross of Christ! Habitual sin, which the Bible clearly warns us against (1 John 3:6), will be a thing of the past!



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Unravelling a Mystery

Dr. Shantanu Dutta

When I read the Bible for the first time and was not yet fully a Christian, the Resurrection was the concept, I could not understand. Good Friday, I got. Jesus dying for our sins, I understood. People had died and been martyred in history and so many of them and for all kinds of good and noble things. Jesus could easily be one of them. But none of those martyrs had ever risen from the dead. In fact, no historical figure had been known to have risen from the dead. Decades later, I still do not think I understand or comprehend the Resurrection of Our Lord completely. I just accept it as an article of faith that it happened. Of course, there is a mystery about it as the Apostle Paul himself indicates and so perhaps in this life, we will never know the full

story. I have heard sermons and read articles that want to "prove" the resurrection. I have also seen long explanations about how the resurrection could not have happened. I have never been enticed to engage either side of these arguments. To me the resurrection remains a mystery—one upon which the church of Jesus Christ is founded. What does it mean for us to say that our foundations are made of mystery?

If the Resurrection of Jesus seems to many of us to be a mystery that we cannot quite understand, and may have trouble believing in, then we have good company. Read all the varied stories of Jesus' Resurrection in the Gospels, and one cannot help but notice

something surprising. The experience of resurrection for Jesus' first followers was full of mystery and led some to believe but others to doubt. I think it is not by chance that most of the accounts of Jesus' Resurrection take place either in the half-light of dawn, or in the softening light of dusk, times that by their very nature seem to say, neither the eye nor the soul can fully take in what is happening. Mary Magdalene mistakes the risen Jesus for the gardener (John 20:14-15), and it is only when he speaks her name that Mary knows it is Jesus speaking to her (John 20:16). The disciples on the road to Emmaus are encountered by someone they take to be a stranger (Luke 24:16), and it is only when he breaks the bread at table with them that they realize this stranger is Jesus (Luke 24:31). The disciples who have been fishing all night on the Sea of Galilee see a stranger in the morning mist standing on the beach, but they do not recognize him as Jesus (John 21:4).

All of these stories seem to say that the risen Christ moves among us in mysterious ways that we find – at first – hard to take in, and it is only gradually that the

one we took to be a stranger turns out to be our risen Lord, mysteriously present in the garden with us, or on the road we are walking, or at the end of frustrating and seemingly fruitless hours of work. In other words, he comes near in countless ways, countless people, but we may not be able to recognize him for some time. Like those first followers, when we do see that it is Jesus himself showing up in our lives, then we have a choice about how to react – with belief or doubt, joy, or dismay. And we then get to choose what we will do – go back to business as usual or let him kindle in our hearts a fire that burnt up everything that was usual and find our ashes have become the humus of new and unexpected life, calling us the new ways of living, loving, forgiving, feeding, and serving.

Life, death, and resurrection speak of the divine plan for each of us. This same combination explains our experiences in many expressions of the church. All these are earthly realities. Maybe they are daily occurrences. But the mystery of them all is resurrection—something we know only through Jesus. If we are not in awe of the resurrection

of Jesus as a historical event, we may only see it as a fairy-tale. The resurrection is scientifically impossible, but historically true. The resurrection is history-making, earth-shaking, life-transforming, and eternity-changing truth. The Empty Tomb of Christ may not be the final stage of our journey, but the springboard from which to start again, full of hope, life, and joy. It is the testimony of so many that in every part of the world and also in our ecclesial community, continue to live life passionately and fearlessly and so testify to belong to the Risen Lord, even when they are rejected or killed.



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The Holy Spirit: Sent from Heaven
(1Peter 1:12)

J. SIGNS, WONDERS AND MIRACLES

Rev. Richard Masih

There are many who seem to be mad after signs, wonders and miracles. They may not cross the road to go and hear the sound exposition of God's word. But they are prepared to travel any length of distance, suffer any inconvenience and spend any amount of money to receive 'blessing' from a 'man of God'. They forget that God has already blessed them if they are God's children. This is what Ephesians 1:3 has to say, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places...." All that they need to do is to appropriate these blessings by faith through prayer. They need to see that there is no

obstruction for these blessings to flow in their lives, and through them in others' lives.

There were many sign seekers even during our Lord's days. Cf. "Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you." But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah" (Matthew 12:38). "And the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and to test him they asked him to show them a sign from heaven" (Matthew 16:1). Our Lord was not happy with the sign-seekers. He said to them, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe" (John 4:48). Apostle Paul

was not happy with such either, "For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom" (1Corinthians 1:22). Are we also of the tribe of sign-seekers? We should not seek after signs, wonders and miracles in order to believe. We should rather seek to live a peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. "...that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way" (1Timothy 2:2). "...that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days" (Luke 1:74,75).

An old lady was suffering from cancer. Her elderly son said to his friend that he would not believe in God unless God heals his mother of her cancer. In this, he was echoing the sentiments of apostle Thomas, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe" (John 20:25). He had put the healing of his mother as a sign of God's power and love, and a condition for his faith. His friend was a young believer and did not

know how to reply him. But one thing he knew later as he grew in Bible knowledge and spiritual maturity was that our faith in God should be unconditional. We also can't give to God an ultimatum or bargain with him. He is the sovereign Lord. We should let him do what he thinks is the best.

There are two types of signs-genuine and counterfeit. Of course, there are some who don't believe in the signs, wonders and miracles. They say that these and other gifts of the Holy Spirit (healing, speaking in tongues, etc.) were over with the days of the Apostles. But I believe that there are genuine signs, wonders and miracles, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit even today. For we read, "The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works" (2Corinthians 12:12). The only thing is that we need to beware of counterfeit ones. "The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders" (2Thessalonians 2:9). We read about the beast rising from the earth, "It performs great signs, even making fire come down from

heaven to earth in front of people” (Revelation 13:13). We should be on our guard. We should not be misled/carried away by false prophets and 'christs'. Our Lord has warned us, “For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand” (Matthew 24:24).

We should take care not to transform the so-called healers and the miracle workers into some kind of demi-gods and begin to worship them. This was the danger that was taking place in Acts 14:11-13, “And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, “The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!” Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds.” “But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying

out, “Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you...”“Even with these words, they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them” (v.18). Foolishly, we tend to repeat the same folly.

K. FAITH CONFESSION

Some believe in what is called 'Name-it-claim-it' theology. That is, if you confess something positively, it will be done to you. You can claim anything- health and wealth, success and prosperity, and make it happen. Their argument is that the Creator brought into existence just by speaking the things which were not there. They quote Genesis 1:3, “And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.” We can do the same, so they say. They also quote Mark 11:24, “Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.” They also quote Proverbs 18:21, “Death and life are in the power of the tongue....” In some sense it is true. The negative confessions will make us lethargic, sickly and depressive. But we are not the Creator. We can't speak on our

own and make things happen. So, according to some enthusiasts, everything is there, just for the asking, believing and speaking it out in faith. They say, believe it in your heart and confess it with your mouth. They quote Romans 10:9,10 in their support, "if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved."

Faith confession is good. It helps us to think, feel and act positively. Negative thinking, speaking, feeling and acting is demoralizing and destructive. But we must beware of having faith in our faith. I remember, years ago, a healing convention was going on in a particular place. A well-known healer had come with his son. But one particular night, the father was sick. His son was to take his place. A man had come for healing. His friend was sitting next to him. The friend assured him, "The son is equally powerful. Have you worked up some faith?" The sick man replied that he had. Isn't this puzzling? Is this man

having faith in his faith or faith in the Lord. Whatever faith we might have or might have worked up, however much we might shout and howl, jump and dance, unless it is God's will, it will not come through. Lamentation 3:37 should be an eye opener, "Who has spoken and it came to pass, unless the Lord has commanded it?" The answer is, "None." So let's first find out God's will in any given matter, then speak it out in faith. Since God has commanded it, it will come to pass.

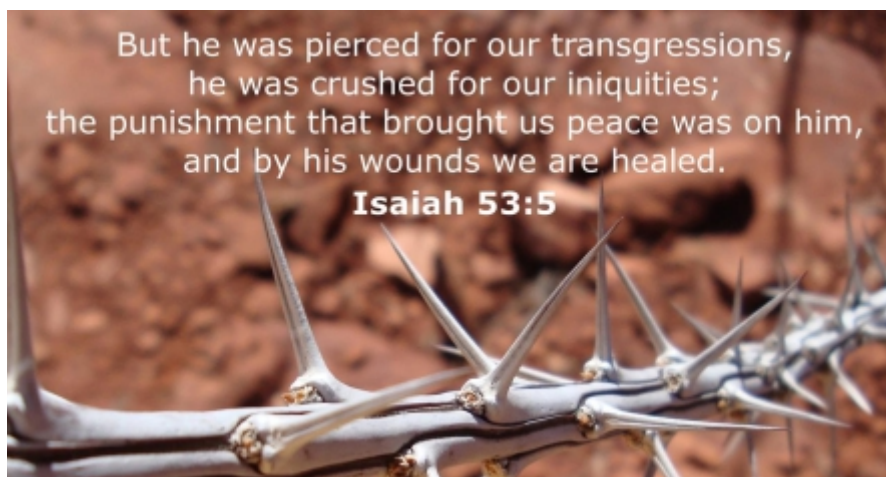
But along with God's will, we must also be sure of God's timings. Our Lord always moved with his Father's timings for his life. He said, "My hour has not come" (John 2:4). It says that no one could arrest him because his hour had not come (John 7:30; 8:20). Then he knew and said that his hour had come (John 12:23; 13:1; 17:1). Watchman Nee of China relates an incident of his student days in his famous book, *The Normal Christian Life*. He and his friends had planned to go to a nearby island for evangelism. While all the preparation was going on, his parents kept quiet. But just before the day of departure they said that he can't

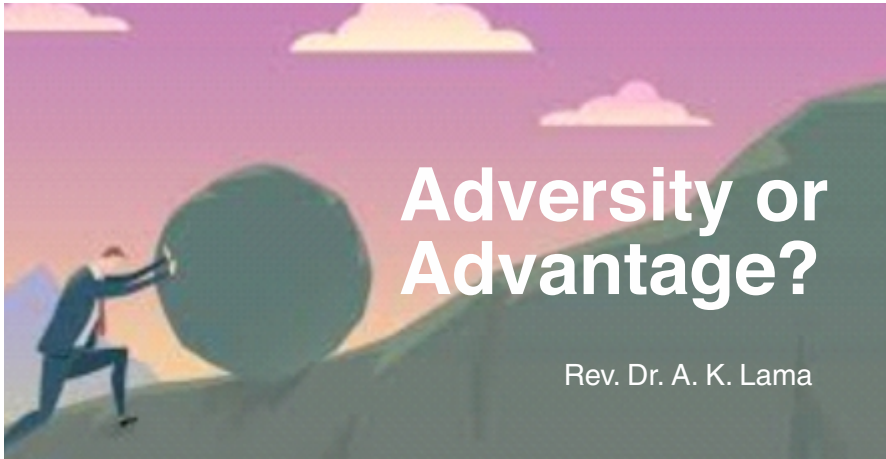
go. Watchman Nee was in dilemma. He could not disobey his parents. He was under their care. He could not explain to his friends why he was declining to go. His friends said that they would never trust him in future. This was too painful for him. In the later years, he was able to go for evangelism to that island. He understood the situation in this way. It was God's will for that island to be evangelized but it was not God's timing for him to go. So in every matter, let's discover God's will and then wait for God's timings. Faith confession is good. But it should be in the will of God, according to the word of God and in the timing of God.



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Adversity or Advantage?

Rev. Dr. A. K. Lama

Can something good come out of adverse circumstances? I was neither born with a silver spoon nor with a lineage of greater race, and or with a circle of powerful connections. I was always an outcast and never rewarded adequately for the merit. I saw some of my classmates enjoying the favor because of the connections their father had with powerful people, while I stood waiting in the line of the least. Sometimes, I wished I was born rich in an upper class of family with power and influence and born with a look of the race of the majority.

My situations are unique. Neither I belong to a major tribe in the northeast India, nor I have a look

that represents mainland India. When I am among Americans, some consider mean Asian who might not know English. But when I am among Asians, they wait for me to speak so that they can identify me if am a Chinese or Korean Asian. I disappoint both of them. My last name is Lama and I have disenchanted many from Nepal as they thought I am from Nepal. And of course, when I am among Indians, they look at me with disbelief when I speak in Hindi. Once, while visiting Taj Mahal, they refused to give me an entry ticket, but asked to me to go to the foreigners' counter.

However, looking back at my life, I discovered that I gained much from these adversities. It has

helped me to discover my potential. It has made me tough, courageous, and a survivor. I have gone the distance and reached the horizons beyond my ability. If everything was served ready made on the plate, I would have become complacent, lazy, and arrogant. Probably, my potential would have remained buried within. And of course, I might have failed to find a wonderful friend and Savior Jesus Christ.

For most of us, we are living in a world of adversity, prejudice, and injustice. But God has blessed us with potential to turn them into Blessings. Perhaps, for this reason, the Creator God incarnated purposefully in a manger as one born of an ordinary carpenter from Nazareth. And prejudiced Nathanael wondered, "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" (John 1:46).

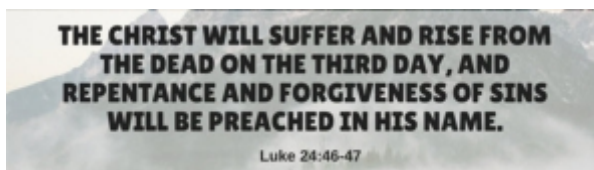
Are you like Nathanael? Are you stuck in low self-esteem and

inferiority complex caused by your adverse circumstances? Then it is time for you to remember what God said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." (1Samuel 16:7). Let us take care of our heart.

Prayer: "Dear Lord! Lift up our broken spirit and instill an absolute confidence in you. Gladden our heart for we are fearfully and wonderfully made by you. Help us to turn our adversity into advantage for your glory. Amen!"



Rev. Dr. A. K. Lama





When Others Find Favour - Grace is in full supply!

Dr. Finny Philip

Forty days of spirituality leading up to the celebration of Easter! It is a time of preparation and an opportunity to go deeper with God. This means that it's a time for personal reflection that prepares our hearts and minds for Good Friday and Easter - a time to see ourselves clearly through reflection and contemplation in light of what Jesus did.

One of the best things we can do during Lent is to monitor our character. How are we doing with our character? Although we may maintain high standards of spirituality, if we have less grace, mercy or favour to give, it's a clear sign that our character needs some serious work. A sure sign that God's grace is in short supply

in our life. On a spiritual level, grace and mercy run out in our life when God runs out in our life. If we need more grace, then we need more God and more of his character to be reflected in our life.

The Hebrew word *chanan* (favour) occurs 56 times in the OT and is generally translated as "finding favour" or "mercy." Many times we attribute this quality to God and stay away from doing it by ourselves. In its root meaning, "finding favour" is not only from God but people often sought and found favour with those in higher position around them.

For example, Jacob sought reconciliation with his brother Esau and, found his favour (Gen.

33:8, 10). Joseph found favour with his Egyptian master, Potiphar (Gen. 39:4). The people of Egypt found favour with Joseph, who saved their lives (Gen. 47:25); Ruth found favour with Boaz (Ruth 2:2). David found favour with Jonathan, son of Saul who sought to kill David (1 Sam. 20:3). Esther found favour with King Ahasuerus, who made her queen of the Persian Empire (Esther 2:17).

In each instance, the Bible reminds us that those on the superior side granting favour had the power to judge, condemn, and destroy those of an inferior position. Instead, each showed grace and favour by helping the other in their time of need. In doing so, they showed grace and mercy for their troubles. God is surely at work – and grace, compassion, and favour are in adequate supply in these instances.

We often judge others in their sin

and distress. We drive them into rejection and destruction. The Scripture reminds us that we could show Chen and reach down, help them up, and lead them to better places in life. We should also show the same grace to others that we have experienced. That is precisely what Jesus did, as apostle Paul writes: For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake, He became poor so that you through His poverty might become rich (2 Cor. 8:9). May the Lord help us to abound in the qualities of grace and mercy in our lives.



Dr. Finny Philip



1 Corinthians 6:11 KJV

And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

NONE CRAZIER

Rev. Kuruvilla Chandy

A lunatic is described as being “touched”. The idea is that someone who is out of touch with this world or reality has been touched by God. The mad hear voices and have elaborate conversations with invisible beings. If they are not hearing God and talking to God, who is it that they are in touch with – that, is the question behind the idea of people being touched.

The concept of lunacy being evidence of divine intervention in a person's life goes back to ancient Greeks, but is held even today in some way or the other by many religions. However, from a biblical point of view, we cannot believe that any abnormality of any kind is created by an act of God per se. According to the

Bible all abnormalities are aberrations caused by the Fall of humanity. Any abnormality is a malady or sickness, which is why we seek to be cured, if possible.

Fanaticism, especially of the religious variety, is considered to be a type of insanity. And then we have people like Hitler, Stalin, Idi Amin, who were genocidal and get categorised as the lunatics of human history, though ascribing madness to such people would absolve them of guilt because insanity is a plea that can be entered when seeking pardons for crimes.

Still, is lunacy something to be attributed to God?

In 1980, the South African film

director Jamie Uys directed the comedy film, *The Gods Must Be Crazy*. The movie tells the story of a Kalahari Desert tribe discovering a glass bottle dropped from an airplane. The tribes-people believed it to be a gift from their gods, just like all the plants and animals that were given by the gods for their benefit. They found many uses for this unusual gift from the sky. However, since there was only bottle it soon became a cause for fighting within the tribe. It was then decided that this gift from the gods was not good, which may be why the gods themselves got rid of it. So, they choose one to travel to the edge of the world and throw away the gift that was causing dissension.

I suppose the movie title suggests that when heaven begins to lose it, that must be because the gods have gone crazy. Well, there was such a time indeed, when heaven lost it and one came from the Father's home to our sad, sad world. It was very definitely, a crazy thing to do.

God's Foolishness

Paul referred to the "foolishness of God" (1 Cor. 1:25). While the apostle certainly didn't believe

that there was any foolishness in God, who is all-wise, his argument is that God did something totally scandalous and unacceptable among all peoples, whether religious or sophisticated.

From a human point of view, God must have been crazy to send His own beloved Son into a sinful world. It was a contaminated world that the Pure One was coming to. Not only that, God sent Him knowing that the world would be hostile toward Him. Even the people among whom He would live would not be accepting of Him (Jn. 1:11).

No human in his or her senses would have done what God did. As the apostle Paul pointed out most people would not give their own lives to save another, but some might be willing to give their lives for someone righteous and noble (Rom 5:7). That is how humans do it. They choose something worthwhile to invest in. They do not pour themselves into what is not worth saving or having. But God doesn't do it our way. His thoughts and ways are not our thoughts and ways (Isa. 55:8-9). "Yet the proof of God's

amazing love is this: that it was while we were sinners that Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8, Phillips). Eugene Peterson put it this way in *The Message*, “God put His love on the line for us by offering His Son in sacrificial death while we were of no use whatever to Him.” If that isn't crazy, what is? Isn't it insane to give up what is precious for something worthless?

Most Eccentric

Think of God's foolishness in terms of eccentricity. The root meaning of the word eccentric comes from two Greek words: *ek* meaning “out of” and *kentron* meaning “centre”. Thus, an eccentric person is one who is off-centre or not-centred.

We humans centre on ourselves. We are self-centred because that is the way to become successful – to know what we want and to go for it. If God was self-centred He would not have saved us. He would have just written us off and not spent His love on saving what wasn't worth it.

Look at what God did in any which way you want and you have to admit that what God did, you wouldn't do, because it would be foolish to waste your resources

for what isn't worthwhile. Parents give up on stubbornly wayward sons and daughters. Siblings give up on siblings who are the black sheep of the family. Husbands and wives give up on each other on the flimsiest grounds of incompatibility. Adult sons and daughters give up on aged parents when they become burdensome.

Dare we say it? We have a crazy God. He is just crazily in love with sinners, not for their sinfulness, no doubt, because it hurts God to see people lost and damned for all eternity.

Anyone Like God?

The prophets and kings of the Old Testament liked asking the question, “Who is a God like You?” The answer “there's none like God” was implied in the very question.

Who among the gods
is like You, Lord?
Who is like You –
majestic in holiness,
awesome in glory,
working wonders? (Ex. 15:11;
cf. Deut. 3:24; 2 Sam. 7:22; Ps.
71:9; 86:8).

The focus was mostly on how

wonderful and powerful God is and how He favoured His people: Lord, the God of Israel, there is no God like You in heaven above or on earth below – You who keep Your covenant of love with Your servants who continue wholeheartedly in Your way (1 Ki. 8:23).

Then, there was a later minor prophet who dwelt on there being no God so gracious and kind as the Lord:

Who is a God like You,
who pardons sin and forgives
the transgression

of the remnant of His
inheritance?

You do not stay angry for ever
but delight to show mercy.

You will again have compassion
on us;

You will tread our sins
underfoot

and hurl all our iniquities into
the depths of the sea (Mic. 7:18-
19).

The Different One

Of course, others like to say that there are no differences among the gods. There is just one God called by different names by people of different views. For instance, people equate the incarnation of our Lord with

mythological incarnations of other religions.

The truth is, there is no other God who has incarnated Himself.

- Religions that claim to have incarnations, boast of having many incarnations. On the other hand, when the Eternal God was incarnate, He didn't need to do it again and again and again. Once was enough: but that once was eternally significant.
- Other incarnations were only in disguise. They never became human subjecting themselves to the humiliation of being stripped of all divine power. When God was incarnate in Jesus, He became human, experiencing all the trials and sorrows of life in this fallen world (Phil. 2:6-8)
- Other incarnations never die. They never give their lives. They just do what they came to do and then vanish or exit with all their divine powers intact.
- Other gods disguised their powers temporarily but in the end displayed all their power to only destroy those who were unknowingly mocking or torturing them. That is what Krishna told Arjun:

Whenever there is decay of righteousness, O Bharata, And there is exaltation of unrighteousness, then I Myself come forth;

For the protection of the good, for the destruction of evil-doers, For the sake of firmly establishing righteousness, I am born from age to age (Bhagavad Gita 4: 7-8)

On the other hand, here's what Jesus said about His mission: For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him (Jn. 3:16-17).

Crazily Overboard

Just look at the enormity of what God did to Jesus: "God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us" (2 Cor. 5:21). You probably didn't notice the weight of those words because we are so used to reading the scriptures to see what benefits there are for us. So, we gloss over those heavy words about Jesus being "made sin" to quickly read "so that in Him we might become the righteousness

of God". It becomes easy to take the first idea in our stride because we are eager to move on and grab the benefit of righteousness that Jesus bought with His life.

The prophet says that God took our burden of guilt and put it on Jesus
We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to our own way;
and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all (Isa. 53:6).

Which earthly, human father would have done what God, the Heavenly Father, did? Yet it was the Lord's will to crush Him and cause Him to suffer, ... the Lord makes His life an offering for sin(v.10)

Wasn't that a bit extreme? Isn't that insane? The foolishness or insanity of God is that He loves us and was willing to pay the price of our redemption with His own beloved's life.

"The message of the cross is foolishness" (1 Cor. 1:18). The apostle said that his own people, the Jews wanted signs (of divine power) and the sophisticated

Greeks looked for wisdom (v.22). “But we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength” (vv.23-25).

And what is more, God hasn't given up being crazy. The craziness didn't end that first Good Friday. The Resurrection followed and the Risen Lord Jesus told His weak followers, “As the Father sent me, so send I you.” He has chosen weak and foolish people to carry on His work:

- Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise;

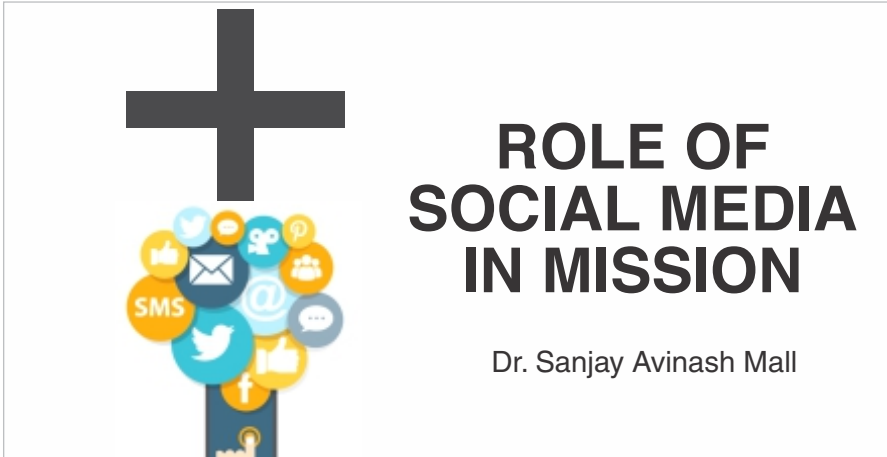
God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: 'Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.'(vv.26-31).



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EPHESIANS 3:20-21

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.



The media has always played a very important role in the lives of people. This includes the print media and electronic media. Prior to the advent of the electronic media all of us relied on what the print media had to tell us. This includes the daily newspaper and the magazines that we subscribe to in our homes. However, over a period of time things have changed. What was available in the print media started being available in the electronic form. We can now read the newspapers on the phones that we carry. A few years ago, we would purchase magazines that were of interest to us. This has reduced to a very large extent. This also has a reason as the

printing cost of this material is huge in which publishers and organisations are not willing to invest in. Reading of hard copies of books and journals, is now a thing of the past. I am not sure how many college and university students now visit the library to read, consult and study reference books. Many people now prefer to listen to speeches on the You Tube rather than reading either the soft or hard copies of books magazines or journals.

Social media always had a role in the lives of the people. Earlier it was used to convey news and other information of important events to friends and relatives in different parts of the world. The

people also used it as a powerful means of communication. It was also used for raising funds for charitable purposes by humanitarian organisations. Very seldom it was heard that a wedding or a funeral was live streamed for people who could not be present on site. The medium was also exploited by unscrupulous elements to spread false information, some of which could not be verified also.

Things have changed a lot after the pandemic struck the world. As the churches were closed, the clergy explored the option of bringing the church service to our homes. In many cases, the service was streamed through Facebook or Zoom. In other cases, the service was recorded and uploaded on YouTube depending on the preference of the pastor concerned. This was not limited to regular worship services alone. Suddenly, the social media was being used to live stream funeral services as people could not travel to their hometowns to attend the funerals of their loved ones and helplessly watched the last rites of their

parents and loved ones being performed on the computer screens.

The restrictions imposed by the country wide lockdown did not allow weddings to take place. However, when it was lifted, gradually weddings started getting solemnised. In the case of weddings too, the ceremony was attended by most of the friends and relatives through the zoom links that were sent to the concerned people.

The way of teaching children has also changed with the pandemic. Once upon a time we could not imagine how lessons could be taught to the students outside the classrooms. The social media has brought the classroom learning to our bedrooms. This has its harmful effects as it has nullified any physical activity that the children were used to. In addition to this, the children are also not able to meet and play with their friends. The time that the children are spending on the screen has increased and has its own harmful effects on the health of the children. The parents of the

affluent families have been able to provide these facilities to their children. However, those belonging to the poor and the marginalised sections of society in the rural and urban areas have not been able to do so. In some extreme cases, this has also led to children committing suicide as their parents were not able to provide smart phones to them to attend their online classes.

The social media, at this time, has played a very critical role in our spiritual lives and that of our children as well. In spite of the lockdown, we were able to attend the worship services online in the comfort of our homes. This also provided the preachers to preach to additional congregations as compared to the people ministered to in real time services. During this time, the people normally connected with their native churches than attending the service of their local churches. These are issues beyond the control of anyone.

A new development that was observed during this time was the increase in online preaching on

the pandemic by speakers from different parts of the country. Zoom links were circulated for people to join these meetings in the evenings. The pandemic also gave the opportunity to the people to listen to the Word of God throughout the week as well.

While the social media has played an important role during the pandemic, I feel that its role also needs to be curtailed at some point of time. This is in context of the church attendance. Once the churches have reopened, it is the duty of the people to go to church. What I have observed in the church that I attend is that people have not started coming back to church. While they are not attending the online service on Facebook page of the church, they are also not present in the sanctuary either.

The reading of the Word of God also needs to be taken seriously. We read in the Book of Nehemiah that the people were weeping as the scripture was being read to them by Ezra the priest. However, these days we find that instead of carrying their bibles to church or

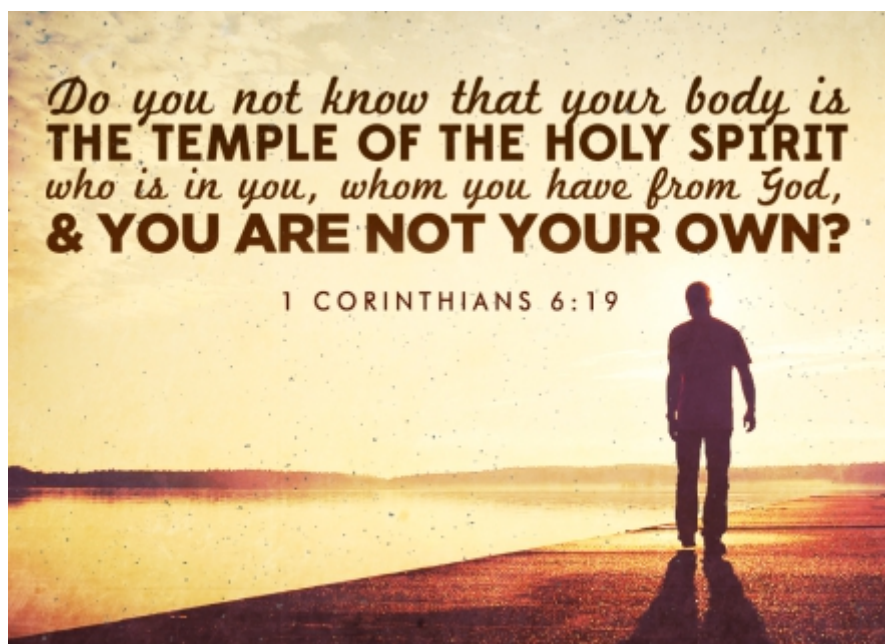
using the ones kept in the pews people now prefer to use the Bible which has been downloaded in their phones. I feel that this practice should be discouraged.

Things have changed a lot since the lockdown was clamped on the night of March 24, 2020. The pandemic provided an opportunity for the work of GOD to continue in spite of many limitations. The Word of God was live streamed into our homes with the help of the internet and the hard work put in by mission

workers. It is time that we continue to explore how we can continue to work for the extension of His Kingdom with the technology that He has blessed us with All for His Glory.



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No Conversion! Just Turn the world upside down?

Rev. Dr. J. N. Manokaran

A missionary couple came to a small town. As they observe, they felt these people need education, modern medicine, hygiene and general discipline for progress. They decide to stay there and start a school. Initially, the children were not interested. Parents did not want to send girls to school. Literally, they had to bribe (compensate) the parents for loss of work. Within ten years, the literacy rate shot up, mortality rate came down, general community discipline enhanced and there was visible overall progress. Only about half-a-dozen families were Christians while hundreds of parents of the students who studied were not. The missionaries died and were buried, their tombs unmarked.

Similar incidents have happened in thousands of locations around the world. Was there conversion or the world turned upside down?

Revolution and Transformation

Some political ideologies seek revolution, that turns the governing structure and policy changes literally upside down. Such revolution happens mostly by violence. However, gospel brings holistic transformation in communities, societies and nations. Gospel transformation is through ideas, that are non-violent.

Thessalonica

Paul as usual preached in the synagogue, some Jews believed,

some God fearers (Gentile seekers) and women of high standing believed. (Acts 17: 4) Jews were jealous and got help from goondas or criminal gang and instigated them against Paul and Silas. (Acts 17:5) The mob shouted: "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also." (Acts 17:6)

Not a tsunami

It was not a volcano eruption or tsunami or cyclone that was the reason for world turning upside down. It was something else. What did the duo do to invite such magnificent statement?

Three sabbaths: Three terms

They went to the synagogue on three sabbaths and they Proclaimed, Proved and Persuaded them.

They *proclaimed* the Lord Jesus Christ was indeed the Messiah.

They *proved* from the Scripture that Messiah should suffer, die and rise again.

They *persuaded* people to accept this truth and some became the followers.

This seems to be an innocent talk. Why were the Jewish people upset? That too, to instigate a wicked mob against the preachers?

1. Exclusive deity?

One evangelist was sharing the gospel to a village head in India. The man questioned: "Do your God loves so and so as he loves me?" The evangelist said: "yes." Then he mentioned about another person, another person belonging to lower caste and several other caste groups. For all the evangelist said: "Yes." The village head: "I do not need a God who loves all equally. I need a god who will love me exclusively." Jewish people were enraged as this man, that their privilege as people of God is reduced and equated with Gentiles. How can Jewish God love Gentiles?

2. Equality

Paul's proclamation was that all were equal sinners. There is no hierarchy. All have to repent. All have equal chances to become saints. That erases all distinctions and discriminations based on caste, clan, class, race, nationality, culture, language,

region, gender, master/slave and places them all at par. All are born equal. All are equal sinners. All are in need of a Saviour. That savior is Lord Jesus Christ. Jews again felt that they are deprived of their high spiritual status.

"From Roy to Ambedkar via Phule, Gokhale, Tagore, Gandhi, Periyar, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay and many more, there was a long line of social reformers who worked assiduously to liberate their compatriots from the burdens of the past. For the Hindu society they knew and had experienced was at once *unequal, uneducated and unfree*." [1]

3. Messiah must suffer

Suffering has no meaning according to most philosophical traditions. Paul declares that the Messiah should or must suffer. The paradigm of the world was that of 'power' and not suffering or death. God's wrath on humanity for their sin was borne by the Messiah, died in substitution for sinners, buried and rose again from the dead. Messiah, Lord Jesus Christ did not just die for the sake of Jewish nation for the whole sinful humanity.

Buddhism developed philosophies, meditation and psycho-techniques to escape from sufferings. But Lord Jesus Christ faced suffering and death head on, defeated it and resurrected to be alive for evermore.

Jews also expected Messiah to be powerful king as Son of David and bring the whole world under his rulership.

4. Sacrifice?

The Jews must have puzzled about Messiah being the sacrifice. Yes, Lord Jesus is the sacrifice and also the priest. For Jews, David the great king was the model. Messiah should be politically powerful to amass military power and gain global domination. Paul declared a Messiah who is for a spiritual kingdom and eternal kingdom without any reference to Jewish kingdom.

5. Ghettos Vs. Ecclesia

In the Roman Empire in almost all cities, Romans had their colonies, so did the Jews with their synagogues. There were others living in their own

conclaves or ghettos. Paul spoke of 'ecclesia' called out people from all conclaves or people groups or nations or races, coming together as one mystical body of Lord Jesus Christ. Jewish people who were over-conscious about their purity and pollution of others, could never understand the concept of 'church' made of people called out of darkness and walking in light.

6. Gender equation

Women were not treated as equal in the Jewish community. Generally, a male Jew will pray somewhat like this: "Thank God that you have not made a slave (brute or animal), a woman or a gentile." And Paul preaching resulted in the salvation of 'not of a few of the leading women.' (Acts 17:4) Paul giving equal spiritual rights to receive salvation for women was not according to their paradigm and prayers.

7. Status of slaves

Paul must have shared his testimony. He was a violent persecutor of the church. When he met the Lord in the Damascus road, he was blinded and asked

to wait in Damascus. God sent Ananias to pray for Saul/Paul. Though reluctant initially, he went and addressed Saul as: 'Brother Saul.' Enemies reconciled as brothers. On advise of Paul, Philemon later had to reconcile with Onesimus – a runaway slave, accepting him as brother and beloved. (Philemon 1:16)

8. Rich in faith

James writes about not being rich in worldly riches but being rich in faith. (James 2:5) Wealth, possession, riches in this world were equated with rubbish or garbage or even loss according to Paul. (Philippians 3:8) Rich man who was indifferent to the needs of his neighbour (beggar) at his gate was not rich in faith. Beggar with faith ended up in heaven while rich man without faith ended up in hell. (Luke 12:16-21)

9. Truth and Heroism

The idea of heroes was to demonstrate victory, awesome power and annihilation of enemies. The new gospel paradigm is that a hero is the one who stands for the Truth, righteousness and justice and

refuses to bow down before tyrants, injustice and unrighteous authorities. Lord Jesus refused to ask for clemency from Pontius Pilate. Apostles were martyred for truth. Millions of Christ followers have been martyred around the world.

10. Leader or servant

Lord Jesus taught leadership is to serve. They are not called to 'lord' over others but to serve, in effect foot wash others. Sadly, red beacon creates a status for a leader today.

11. Grab or Give

Zacchaeus was a notorious tax collector for the Roman Empire, who extracted from people, more than that was to be paid to the government. Yet, he was lonely. Lord Jesus Christ meets him by summoning him to come down from a tree on which he had climbed. Offering friendship, Zacchaeus' life was changed. Grabbing is not life purpose, instead giving becomes life purpose of this tax collector.

12. Dignity of labour

Paul was a tent-maker, a

professional who provided homes for people. As much as possible, he supported himself, while he accepted generous offering given to him. Lord Jesus Christ served as a carpenter for at least eighteen years of his life. It was a blue-collared job. Instead of rejecting work done by hands as 'polluted' work, all works could be done unto the Lord for His glory.

13. Worship nature or Harness nature?

Sachin Tendulkar (as famous cricketer) has been made to introduce solar power system. India could have discovered solar power. When a culture worships sun, rivers and wind; cannot harness their power for productive purposes.

14. Monogamy

Christianity taught a husband to love his wife. No other religion teaches us this. In fact, God only has authority to define marriage, as he only originated that institution. Some of the Greek philosophers were homosexuals. Women were empowered and liberated by the institution of marriage – monogamy.

15. Empowerment or Enslavement

Powerful leaders enslave their own people. In history also, we have numerous examples. Even in the time of King Solomon also it happened. Gospel empowered slave Onesimus. Philemon, the slave owner also was transformed. Gospel brings reconciliation between the oppressed and oppressor, which results in transformation; not just political revolution.

16. Self-less service

In the footsteps of Lord Jesus Christ, Christ's followers did great service to humanity. For example, Christian community as a caring community created modern medicine. Other forms of medicine could not grow without sharing knowledge and caring community to care for the sick. Nurses in India were first from Christian community as they were willing to serve for the sick – in the midst of dirt, vomit...etc. Mother Teresa gave dignity to the dying.

Serving the poor, marginalized, dying, lepers, AIDS victims...demonstrated self-less service to humanity.

17. Individual Freedom

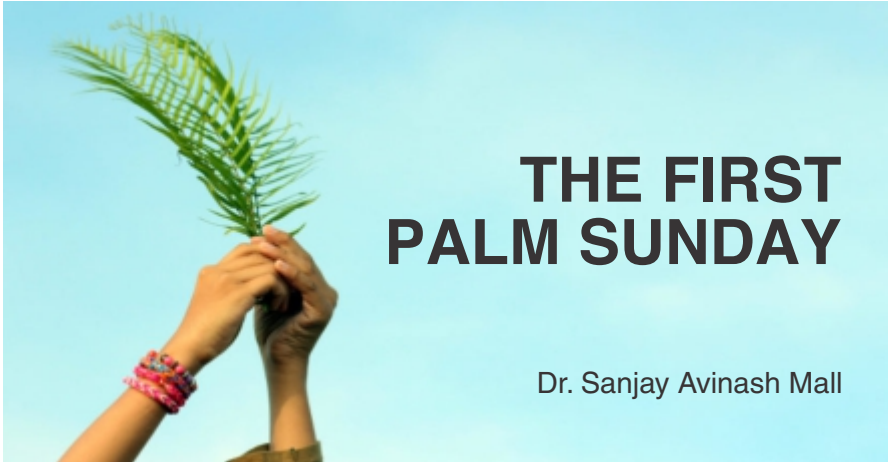
Roman Empire promoted the idea that the State was Supreme. All individual freedom should be surrendered to the Empire to have global domination. Christian faith provides individuality and escape from anonymity, obscurity and nothingness. Human beings are created in the image of God and would live as individuals eternally. (Genesis 1:27)



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[1] Ramachandra Guha, The closing and opening of Hindu mind
<https://www.telegraphindia.com/opinion/the-opening-and-closing-of-the-hindu-mind/cid/1810757>
accessed on 28 March 2021.



THE FIRST PALM SUNDAY

Dr. Sanjay Avinash Mall

The first Palm Sunday was celebrated by the people of Jerusalem, who had no idea that this would become the starting of the Passion week as it is now known all over the world. Christians all over the world have, since then, observed this day and the following week with a lot of religious fervour all over the world and it is now an indispensable part of the church calendar.

When we read the Bible, we find that there is a large crowd that is following Jesus as he makes His entry into Jerusalem riding on a donkey. It would have been quite a sight to see the King of the Jews riding on the foal of a donkey. In the eastern world, the ass could

be a noble animal. In those days, often a king came riding on an ass. And when he did that, it was a sign that he came in peace. The horse was the mount of war. The ass was the mount of peace. So, when Jesus claimed to be king, he claimed to be the king of peace. He showed that he came, not to destroy, but to love; not to condemn, but to help; not in the might of arms, but in the strength of love. This once again proves that God is Love.

When we read the bible carefully, we find that there are at least nine different types of audiences who formed the larger crowd that followed Jesus as He made His entry into Jerusalem. Let us take a look at all these audiences and

what the First Palm Sunday meant for them.

- **The two blind Men who received their sight:** Mathew 20:29- 34: In this short passage, we read that two blind men are sitting on the roadside. On hearing that Jesus is passing by, they called out to Him addressing Him as Son of David. This shows that they knew what His ancestry was. As is the custom of the world, the powerful always try to silence the marginalised. Jesus pays heed to their cry and calls them and asks them what they want Him to do for them. As they were blind, they expressed their desire to Jesus that they wanted to see, and their sight was restored. In verse 34, it is mentioned that Jesus had compassion on them and restored their sight and immediately they followed Him. So, for these two men, it was the biggest day of their lives as their sight was restored to them. Thus, they were part of the crowd that followed Jesus as he entered Jerusalem. We find that they

were grateful to Jesus, as they followed Him once they had received their sight. It is quite possible that one of the men who received their sight was Bartimaeus. He was the Son of Timaeus. Thus, we see that his misery of not being able to see was further compounded by the fact that he did not have a name and identity of his own. He was known by his father's name and that is how he had been addressed all these years. He too called out to Jesus as He was leaving the city. As expected, the crowd wanted to stifle his voice, but Jesus called him and restored His sight to him. In the Gospel of Mark, it is mentioned that he too followed Jesus as he made His way to Jerusalem.

- **The Disciples:** The disciples too were with Jesus at this time. We read that Jesus asked two of His disciples to go ahead and get the donkey, on which he planned to sit and enter Jerusalem. Scripture does not mention the names of the disciples. However, for the disciples too this was a time of praise. When they

came to the Mount of Olives, the disciples too started praising God. When the chief priests and teachers of the law objected to the praise and worship by the disciples, Jesus told them that if the disciples kept quiet then the stones would come alive and cry out.

- **The Owners of the Foal:** It is very much possible that Jesus had sent word to the owners of the donkey that He would need it. So, they were prepared to receive someone who would come and untie the donkey. The owners of the donkey raised no objection when the disciples untied the animal to take it to Jesus. The foal was a special animal. It was supposed to be one on which no one had ever ridden. Thus, this foal was a very sacred one. The red heifer which was used in the ceremonies of cleansing had to be a beast that has never been under a yoke. The sacredness of the occasion was underlined by the fact that the ass had never been ridden by any man before.
- **The Crowd:** It was the Passover time, and Jerusalem and the whole surrounding neighbourhood was crowded with pilgrims. At that Passover time, more than two and a half million people had crowded their way into Jerusalem. The law was that every adult male Jew who lived within twenty miles of Jerusalem, must come to the Passover. However, not only the Jews of Palestine, Jews from every corner of the world made their way to the greatest of their national festivals. Jesus could not have chosen a more dramatic moment to make His entry into Jerusalem. It was a city surging with people keyed up with religious expectations when He came. The crowd received Jesus as a King. They spread their cloaks in front of Him. They greeted Him as a pilgrim. "Blessed is he who enters in the name of the Lord", was the greeting which was addressed to pilgrims as they came to the Feast. They shouted "Hosanna!" as the word means Save now! It was the cry for help which people in distress addressed to their

king or their God. The crowd could also have had many other people who had been healed by Jesus or had benefited in some other way as he ministered to the people. We do not know but Zacchaeus too could have been part of the crowd, as in the beginning of the chapter, we read that Jesus had gone to his house. A crowd consists not only of men but women also. If women were there, then we can be sure that children too would have been there. For the children, it would have been a time of enjoyment as well as we will see further. The crowd also included people who were with Jesus when he had raised Lazarus from the dead. They also continued to spread the word about Jesus.

- **The Moneychangers and People selling doves:** The time when Jesus entered Jerusalem was that of the Passover. The function of the money-changers was to change unsuitable currency into the correct currency. Every Jew had to pay a temple

tax of one half-shekel, and that tax had to be paid near to the Passover time. A month before, booths were set up in all the towns and villages, and the money could be paid there, but after a certain date, it could be paid only in the Temple itself. It would be there that the vast majority of pilgrim Jews from other lands paid the tax. This tax had to be paid in a certain currency, although for general purposes all kinds of currencies were equally valid. However, they would charge exorbitant amounts of money from the pilgrims who had come to worship, and there is no doubt that the temple money-changers made large profits out of it.

At this time of the Passover, the people were supposed to offer sacrifices. It was convenient for the people to purchase the animals outside the temple. However, there was a fear that the officials inspecting the animals for defects would reject the animals purchased from outside as not being fit for sacrifice. Thus, the pilgrims were left with no choice but to

purchase the doves from within the temple courts. This was also a way of exploiting the helpless and hapless pilgrims who had come from outside of Jerusalem to worship and offer sacrifices in the temple. There would have been no harm if the prices inside the temple for the doves were the same as outside. However, the pilgrims had to pay an exorbitant amount for the birds. The birds which were sold for four pence outside were being sold for seventy-five pence inside the temple. No doubt Jesus said that you have made my Father's House a den of robbers. The place where the animals for the sacrifices were sold was called Bazaars of Anna's and was the private property of the family of the High Priest of that time. Thus, for the people doing business within the precincts of the temple the entry of Jesus on the first Palm Sunday spelt doom for their business.

- **The Blind and the Lame:** The blind and the lame made their way to the temple as they were in need of healing. Jesus healed them and for them, this day became the most

important day of their lives as they could now see and walk without any support whatsoever. Their status in their families and their society had changed. They were not disabled anymore but were as able as the person next to them.

- **The Chief Priests and Teachers of the Law:** This was the most disturbed and frustrated group of all the people who were present on that day in Jerusalem. The account in the gospel of Mathew states that when the Chief Priests and Teachers of the Law saw all that Jesus did, they were indignant. They also started looking for a way to kill Him. The Pharisees were totally confounded as they admitted amongst themselves that the whole world has gone after Him. The chief priest and the teachers of the law started to hatch a conspiracy for killing Jesus on that day.
- **Children:** Children are very happy at times of celebration. For them, going to Jerusalem at the time of the Passover would have been a very joyous

occasion for them. In fact, they formed the praise and worship team of Jesus on the first Palm Sunday. The children were shouting in the temple area. This caused a lot of irritation to the chief priests and teachers of the law. When they spoke to Jesus about what the children were saying, He gave them a befitting reply that from the lips of infants and children God has ordained praise.

- **The Roman Soldiers:** We do not read in any of the gospel accounts that there were Roman soldiers deployed on duty to maintain law and order on the First Palm Sunday. However, we can safely assume that the government machinery had taken the security aspect into account and stationed soldiers in different parts of the city to maintain law and order on that day

Thus, we see that there were several audiences who were part of the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. The question that comes to my mind is with which one of these groups we identify ourselves. I am sure that none of

us would like to identify ourselves with the foal on which Jesus rode into Jerusalem. The disciples who were sent to untie the donkey and bring it to Him, were told that should anyone ask why they were untying the animal they were to respond that the Lord needs it. On that day, an animal was used by our Lord because it made itself available to Him. We are all caught up in the affairs of our life and are very busy. It would be worthwhile for us to pause and reflect to see if we have made ourselves unconditionally available to our Lord.

If we have not, then let us make a commitment and make ourselves available to Him for His use and for His Glory.



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Intercessory
Prayer
Points



April 2021

1 THURSDAY Thank God for the new month. Thank God for his protection over us despite the rise in Covid-19 cases. Thank God for enabling us to serve Him despite many challenges. Pray for your pastor as he prepares for the Good Friday service. Pray also that your church will have a lively worship commemorating Christ's sacrificial death for mankind.

2 FRIDAY Good Friday. Thank God for sending His Son our Lord Jesus Christ to die for sin's atonement. Pray that many hearts may turn to Jesus with repentance and gratefulness.

3 SATURDAY Pray that you may quieten your heart and reflect upon your life in the light of God's great love for sinners. Pray and recommit your life to Him as a living sacrifice for His glory.

4 SUNDAY Easter Sunday. As we celebrate this Easter Sunday privately this year too, pray that God would renew our hearts with

a great sense of victory and hope. Pray that our Lord Jesus Christ would be lifted high and worshipped.

5 MONDAY Pray that the Risen Lord Jesus would become more and more real to you as you submit to His sovereignty.

6 TUESDAY Pray for Myanmar. As civilian deaths have crossed the grim total of 500, pray that God in His mercy and grace will intervene and work in ways that is best for all the people and His Church. Pray that God would enable people to rebuild and restore what was lost.

7 WEDNESDAY Pray for the children as they start the academic year this month. Pray for their enthusiasm, God's provision and protection on them throughout the year.

8 THURSDAY Covid-19 cases are rising again throughout the country. Pray that God would bring healing. Continue to pray for those

affected by this pandemic. Pray that people who have lost their loved ones, would be comforted. Pray for people who are down with the virus that they would find hope in God.

9 FRIDAY Pray for all the churches and organizations that they may demonstrate integrity and transparency in all their financial handling and dealings. May they act as role models for others to follow.

10 SATURDAY Pray for your pastor's family, especially that they would be protected from the enemy's schemes and attacks. Pray that the Lord would provide all their needs.

11 SUNDAY Pray that Christ's death and resurrection may bring new encouragement, strength and motivation to live a godly Christian life.

12 MONDAY Continue to pray for persecuted believers. Pray for healing and courage to share the Gospel boldly. Pray for freedom to choose, practice and share our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

13 TUESDAY Pray that child labour would be eradicated and every child would enjoy their childhood. Pray for God's protection over them.

14 WEDNESDAY Pray for people working in the red-light areas. Pray that they would yearn for God and his help. Pray for restoration of the body and mind. Pray also for the NGOs who are reaching out to them, to have grace and lead them to Christ.

15 THURSDAY Pray that every woman would have a right to health, a right to live and survive pregnancy and childbirth. Pray also that women would be a source of spiritual nourishment to her family.

16 FRIDAY Pray for the ministry of EFI. Pray that the Lord would mightily use EFI to support and strengthen the churches and individuals.

17 SATURDAY Pray for the persecuted Church that they would find comfort and strength in Christ, the head of the Church. Pray that their sufferings will not be in vain.

18 SUNDAY Pray for the churches in India. Pray for continued strength. Pray also for the unity in the church. Pray that God's Word would be taught and obeyed by the help of the Holy Spirit.

19 MONDAY Pray for our nation that we may be submissive to God and be a blessing to the nations around us.

20 TUESDAY Pray for Covid-19 disease to stop spreading further. Pray that each individual would take the responsibility and take appropriate steps. Pray for medical teams and others who are working closely in identifying and isolating and treating the patients. Pray for God's intervention and healing.

21 WEDNESDAY Pray for those whom you know are not yet in the Lord. Pray that God would draw them to Christ. Pray that the Holy Spirit would make them desire eternal life and accept Christ finished work on the cross.

22 THURSDAY Earth Day. Pray that we may be a good steward of His creation. Pray for all those who are working towards making the earth a better place to live in.

23 FRIDAY Let us pray today for those in the remote places that they would be provided with basic medical facilities. Pray for the state leaders to be mindful of their plights and work towards this goal actively.

24 SATURDAY Pray that we may not be weary of doing good. Pray for fresh desire and the ability to serve God with excellence.

25 SUNDAY Pray for your pastor's sermon to be lively, convincing

and convicting. Pray that your worship service would lift our Lord Jesus Christ high above all.

26 MONDAY Pray for the children who are in the juvenile homes. Pray that the Holy Spirit would minister and lead them to the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Pray that they would be changed and lead a better and responsible adult life.

27 TUESDAY Pray for the people who are struggling with drug abuse. Pray that they would turn to God who is mighty in power and experience relief and release.

28 WEDNESDAY World Day for safety and health at work. Pray for the people in your workplace. Pray that you would show Christ's love to them and be a good influence to them. Pray that there would be safe environment and health care at all workplace.

29 THURSDAY Pray for God's servants who are called for specific mission. Pray for strength, and dependence on God. Pray that God would protect them and their families and no harm would come upon them.

30 FRIDAY Thank God for all the blessings in the month of April. Thank Him also for the opportunities to serve Him.

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