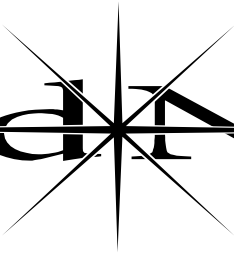


The Good News



Newsletter— January 2016

A Publication of University Baptist Church, Hattiesburg, MS

The purpose of University Baptist Church is, through guidance of the Holy Spirit, to assemble and worship God, to love and encourage one another, to proclaim the gospel of Christ, to minister to all people, and to live in peace.

In a world where difficult issues remain, University Baptist Church continues its commitment to be a church where “there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male or female, for (we) are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:28)

REST AND TRUST

(read Psalm 25:55-6)

When we learn to rest and to trust
it comes as a blessing and not a must
Learning to abide within his love
is like resting upon the wings of a dove

Quietly we wait in times of need
waiting for Him to take the lead.
Softly we listen, trusting in his voice
knowing that in all things, it is always His choice.

As we learn to pray and rest in his trust
we acknowledge His every word as truth and just.
In all our prayers both day and night
He will continue to show us of His everlasting light.

James R.

FORGIVEN

I write this as I notice that, even I who has place myself through wrong choices, yet know through the Bible, Holy inspired scripture, Mark 2.5 “When Jesus saw their faith he said to the paralyzed man, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.'”

Whether I am troubled by circumstances, like the sailors in Lake Michigan (I was reading about), I remember riding across the Great Lakes. I was an 8 year-old, it was a 48ft ChrisCraft. This was my first experience of being in such a large lake where I could not see the shore. That was when my grandfather Mulligan told me to look through the binoculars to see land. I scanned the lighthouse and felt relief immediately. Let me set the scene. The Great Lakes can get real choppy—there are 200 ft. boats traveling through the waters. Now let's go back to Biblical dates. Jesus is in the boat, the point is I know for all days to come Jesus is my guiding light, that through this journey all Christians are involved in each day, the true calling is one of this “What Would Jesus Do?” It became a cliché in the 1990s. Everywhere it was on display. Many a youth ministry was funded, field trips, church outreach groups. Now I am sure somewhere, someone said, “Hey, look at that person, he has a Jesus t-shirt yet he just swore or did some act that was wrong,” yet now I sit here and can say this. The difference now is Romans 6: 1-14 our sins have died in Christ, we are forgiven and must intend to walk with the righteousness of a Holy God, not my thinking, thus I and all believers are forgiven, which translates to give us a new found freedom. Lastly, Galatians 5:22, the fruits of the spirit, I am called to learn this. I see it all the time, “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, good-faith, gentleness, self-control. Now those who have crucified the flesh, those who belong to Christ.” Since we live by the spirit, we must not become conceited, provoking one, envying one another. We could all use gentleness. I am now realizing more and more how I act is my responsibility. I truly hope that during this season of Joy that everyone who reads this understands that forgiveness is a daily chore. The core of this writing is through our journey we live, we see that God clearly knew about charity. Jesus instructed Matthew, through holy-inspired words to reach out to the lost, lonely, and the least, during this celebration, that all Christians join in, thus even the men here on Death Row are now getting cards ready to send out for Christmas, the uplifted spirit, as God is ever present, through the leading of the Lord, we men are getting a building that doesn't leak, where the new commissioner and MDOC are getting their act together. I'm sure some of you know about the largest, longest criminal enterprise run by Chris Epps—the ex-commissioner—in state history. We inmates were the ones who sat in water every time it rained. You taxpayers were taken for a ride. Also, you see when I first came here, the first hour I was here, coming here 8/24/2013 at noon, I was asked, “Do you want to be baptized?” I was worried and then I realized in my darkest hour there was Jesus. Even when King David had killed a man to be with his wife, in the Psalm 51(a prayer for restoration), David had sinned grievously, murder, adultery, particularly Psalm 51: 10-13, “God create a clean heart and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not banish me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore the joy of your salvation to me, and give me a willing spirit. Then I will teach the rebellious your ways, and sinners will return to you.” I write to all of you who read this, contribute, and work diligently to provide the funding for this outreach. Gratitude, Thankfulness, and Hope for 2016. God bless each and everyone, Merry Christmas. And most of all, if you see a person ask them do you have a church you go to? At the end of Jesus' life he could have chosen to do anything but he came to tell all. “Go out into the byways, highways...” Thank you all again in closing for letting me share words, scripture, joy and spirit with all that Jesus has given to me.

Timothy. E.
Death Row

FISHERMEN

“And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishers. And he said unto them “Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.” Matthew 4:18-19

When I asked the Lord into my heart it was behind these two verses. It was May 28, 1988. I could see Christ in my mind's eye playing out the very scene with me as one of those fishermen. I thank Jesus for it, (good or bad) daily. But (Yeah there usually is a 'but' laying around somewhere) it took years to understand that the promise my Lord and Savior made was meant literally. Having been an enforcer, on the street and behind bars of one of the biggest and most violent street gangs in this country, I would never take part in recruiting new members and 'blessing' them in. I knew that being part of that lifestyle would end them up in prison, or in their graves. I just couldn't do it. Recruiting is a whole lot like fishing. When you cast that net into the water (depths of humanity) you never know what you are about to pull in. Especially in prison! There will be those that we witness to as Christian fishermen that hate the very name of Jesus Christ. And you will and must be able to let the love and peace of Christ deal with any fallout. Whole-hearted rejection is a strong possibility. Reasons range from the mundane (Nah, that ain't for me) to down-right demonically inspired (! you and that Bible!) responses. Believe it. I've seen it firsthand. Two pieces of scripture will be instrumental when that happens. John 12:47-50 and 2Peter 3:19 (2 Peter 3 in its entirety is really powerful.) I suggest as one witnessing, incarcerated Christian to another, that you apply these scriptures to memory.

As a fisherman in the wide open, the waters they ply their trade in can lose its appeal when an unexpected squall (or storm) blows up. Because to the inexperienced it can be dangerous. The spiritual storms we face as convicts are no less tempestuous. Remember, do not risk stepping out of alignment with God's word by overreacting or just plain old returning evil for evil (1 Peter 3:9). Receiving and sharing God's wisdom is so valuable that it's worth the death of our foolish pride. God wants His word to permeate our hearts and minds. That way, we will become people who see life from His perspective, and can offer wise, loving counsel to others. Cast your net lately?

“And the servant of the Lord must not strive but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient. In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves. If God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth, And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him as his will” (2 Timothy 2:24-26)

Tony B.
Parchman

THE VALLEY OF DRIEST BONES

To the hearer I speak. To the reader I write. For the cause of the kingdom I strive. The circumference of a Death Row inmate is dry at best, in the realm of one's own mind does he perceive things of his own, but the heart of a true believer meditates all day long. The valley of no shore here in this life yields no color to grains of already dead sand but I know a place with bays of joy, skies of hope, and waters teeming with life. Death Row days are but a single, notwithstanding the fact that time has stopped her clock – broken valley – birth – no bridges seen, but I've got a Book wrought in blood, spined with stripes and bound by piercing. The pages flow with a river known to no man's mortal sight, of generous glory does the picture spill – Jesus too of Death Row died. He now lives and of His truth I shall cross this ol' valley of dry bones with Jesus at the helm. I ask not of the placement of the bow, for as in as much as the stern my joy shall sing for at the feast of Jesus I dwell.

David C.
Parchman Death Row

Quotes/Words of Encouragement
Justin U.

“People will watch our walk before listening to our talk. The best witness combines good behavior with appropriate words, reflecting the difference Christ makes in our lives.” - Poh Fang Chia
(Ref. Matt. 5:16)

“Our faith does not rise out of our own dreams and solutions. The foundation of faith is in God alone and what He can do in and through us.” - Mart Dehaan (Ref. Psalms 127:1)

“Every person has a job to do in God's family; there are no spectators. In God's family we weep and laugh together. We bear each other's burdens. We pray for and encourage one another. We challenge and help each other to turn from sin.” - Poh Fang Chia (Ref. Ephesians 4:7-16)

“True love our Father enables us to be patient and kind. In his Son He has given us the ultimate example and the means of loving one another forever.” - Anne Cetas (Ref. Ephesians 5:2)

“Our actions in obeying God show Him more love, honor, and praise than any other words we might say to try to appear good.” - Dave Brannon (Ref. 1 John 3:18)

“When God looks at us, He is more interested in our hearts than our height, the state of our soul than the structure of our face. He doesn't see us as too old, too young, too small, or too big. He zeroes in on the things that matter – our response to his love for us and our concern for other people. - Jennifer Schuldt (Ref. 1 Samuel 16:7)

“God knows exactly what we are facing each day and He has given us His Spirit to guide, to comfort, and to strengthen us. Think of the challenges you face at the moment and then write these words beside each challenge as a reminder of His faithfulness and His care: 'For this, I have Jesus.'” - Marion Stroud (Ref. Isaiah 49:13)

“To lift up the hands in prayer gives God glory, but a man with a pitchfork in his hand, a woman with a slop pail, give him glory too. God is so great that all things give Him glory if you mean that they should. If whatever we do is done for Christ, we'll be amazed at the joy and meaning we'll find in even the most ordinary tasks.” - Poet Gerard Manley Hopkins (Ref. Colossians 3:23)

“God is big enough to listen to our anger and loving enough to show us, in His time, the path forward.”
-Shelley Beach (Ref. Proverbs 29:11)

“Whatever our situation, let's shine for Jesus where we are. He can provide the grace we need to reach even those who don't agree with us.” - Poh Fang Chia (Ref. Matthew 5:16)

Almighty God Inspires Us Through Ever

Some years ago, a dear friend and brother in Christ sent me a poem that continues to inspire me. Sadly, my good brother and friend passed away from the shingles two years ago. I'm thankful that God allowed me to know him and his family.

In memory of Mr. Sam Mitchell of Blue Springs, MO. I want everyone to enjoy the poem sent to him by another friend – Mr. Anthony Owens, entitled, “I Pray”:

I pray that through my writing
I might touch the hearts of men and women
To plant a seed that may lead,
Perhaps to being born again.

I pray the spirit guides me
Not just to amuse or entertain,
But to open eyes to the prize
For which the Lamb of God was slain

I pray my words may comfort
Those who are feeling pain and help them to
Know the joy of counting loss as gain

And when my pen falls silent
If any man should tell my story
Let this stand out without a doubt
He wrote to bring God's glory!

I hope that this poem inspires each of you to testify about your love for God and how he has transformed your life. I thank God for you all and many blessings to you.

Justin U.

We are all beautiful in God's sight

Isaiah 53:2: For he shall grow before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness or beauty that we should desire him.

The following was written by Stephen Powers in 2001 . He had two strokes and currently has an aneurysm on his brain.

We as children of the almighty God know that God does not care what we look like because he loves us all the same. When Jesus walked on the earth as a human being he did not care what we looked like. He was sent to heal the sick and the blind. Jesus healed the lame so they could walk. He healed the mute so they could speak. Jesus did not care what we did wrong. We as believers need to love others just as our Lord. Jesus loves everyone—no matter what you look like or what you have done. We should watch for the Devil and his demons, they want us to destroy each other with harsh words. There are a lot of people in the world who make fun of others. Let us be mindful of what we say to others— words do hurt . We need to lift each other up everyday, showing one another the love of Jesus. Help us Lord to look on the inside of a person and judge not on the outward appearance. For man looks on the outward appearance but the Lord looks at the heart.

1Samuel 16:7

Brother in Christ Stephen Powers

The Debt is Paid

George E.

When Christ gave His life
We were redeemed and justified.
The debt for sin was paid
When our Lord and Savior died.

Let's give praise to God
for the greatness that He's done
He paid the ransom for sin
when He gave His only begotten Son.

Now shall we rejoice
or shall we moan
for someone so great
now that He's gone?

I'll say "Rejoice,
cause the debt is paid!"
and Jesus sits in Heaven
on His heavenly throne.

Now fasten to this Rock
which cannot be moved;
hold on tight
and claim it as your own.

For Jesus is the Savior
and the Lamb of God.
So serve Him faithfully
and praise Him alone!

I am having trouble being perfect.

Several brand new Christians came up to me the other night and asked me how I managed to keep it all together as a Christian. They were a little puzzled by my laughter and thought that I might be laughing at them. Rest assured I was not. I had just found it humorous that anyone would think I had it all together.

After digging a little deeper into their question, I came to realize that they were laboring under the misconception that mature Christians had conquered all their fleshly desires and were victorious over the sins of their lives. I asked them what had given them such an idea and they quickly referred to 1 John 3:6, “No one who lives in him [Christ] keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.” (NIV).

I had openly shared my testimony and life with them, so they understood that I was a man who had some rust on his armor, thus they felt safe in asking me for advice. Bottom line, they were struggling with the fleshly desires that all men have, but were unsure how to handle them. How does one handle sin that won't take a break?

As we disciple new Christians, there is a danger or a tendency to place unrealistic burdens on them. Many come to believe that perfection is possible if one only believes hard enough and will read their Bible one hour a day. In soaking up their new experience in Christianity, many quickly fall under the misconception that Jesus has delivered them from all their sins and every aspect of the old man. Few seasoned believers ever sufficiently explain spiritual warfare to new believers or even inform them that committing the first sin after salvation does not condemn an individual to Hell.

So, what should we tell new believers in order not to confuse them? Start by telling them that as long as we breathe on earth, sin will dwell within each of us whether we are the Pope or the local dog catcher. Then teach them that our earthly challenge is to engage the enemy and fight the good fight of faith: only Jesus was perfect and without sin.

When it comes to fleshly desires, have a battle plan: First, fight every weakness and sin with the Word of God as the standard understanding that Jesus is our strength. Second, listen for the prompting of the Holy Spirit. And thirdly, always get up after every failure, confessing the sin to our God who offers us grace in order to learn from our mistakes. God does not expect us to be perfect on earth, He just expects us to engage the enemy.

Some insight from a friend of mine... we come to God as a raw block of wood which God then puts upon His lathe called the Holy Spirit. At first turning, big chunks just seem to fly off as we begin to take on a Christ like appearance. Then as we mature, we learn that God progressively goes from knives to coarse sandpaper to finer sandpaper as we eventually approach the final stage... the finished soul. It is during these finishing stages that we truly learn about obedience and our need for God's grace.

As my friend pointed out, with each new stage of refinement in the maturing process, we become ever increasingly aware of our growing need for God's grace.

Just a thought from a Friday morning breakfast.

JGK

The Good News will begin posting facts, stories, or writings about the death penalty on this page. If readers and contributors would like, we invite discussion in the form of articles or prayer. Thank you.

- In 1996, thirty-eight states, the United States government, and the United States military impose the death penalty.
- There have been 290 executions since 1976. The number of prisoners on death row in the United States exceeds 3,000.
- California and Texas lead the nation in the number of condemned prisoners.
- The United States is one of fewer than a half dozen nations that execute those convicted of capital offenses as juveniles. Since 1990, the United States has executed six juvenile offenders—more than any other country.
- Since the death penalty was reintroduced in the United States in 1976, more than sixty condemned prisoners have been released from death row. They were wrongfully convicted and sentenced to die for crimes they did not commit.
- Since 1900, there have been at least twenty-four documented instances of executions of innocent persons in the United States.

Cabana, Donald A. *Death At Midnight: The Confession of an Executioner*. Northeastern University Press, Boston, 1996.