



Newsletter—July 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)

Incarcerated but Free

*Prison was once able to confine me
But I've learned to unlock the chains on my mind,
So I could forever remain free.*

*Many years the prison has been my residence
For a crime committed, I know
And this here is evident.*

*I was placed here and told to correct myself
And to seek repentance for my crime.
But as each day passed, I sat and prayed,
Seeking repentance for my mind.*

*For in the mind we are made to sin
When the heart isn't pure.
And crimes, we know, are only a manifestation
Of the thoughts that we conjure.*

*Although I've reaped what I had sown
From the person that I used to be,
Today I gladly give testimony
Of being “incarcerated but Free!”*

Joseph Williams/VA

Three Little Words

I am not a good man. Although it pains me to admit the truth, the evidence is irrefutable. I am a justly convicted criminal who has served time in prison for my crimes and is wracked with guilt for my sins. Even though I had rediscovered my belief some years before and mourned the self-inflicted loss of my previous life, I still hadn't moved beyond asking, "how did I get here?" It had been three years and I was still beating myself up for all the mistakes of the past.

A hurtful remark from a petty, miserable guard made me realize there was a different question I should be asking myself. The evil little man had said, "you asked to be here." Instead of the spiteful response he wanted, I remained quiet because the little voice that I'd spent most of my adult life ignoring whispered, "okay, now what?"

Three little words that acknowledge my past and challenge me to plan for the future. It took years, but those words developed into what I half-jokingly call my "Master Plan." I quickly realized I couldn't succeed alone. This was a shocking revelation to a man who prided himself on his self-reliance. I would need friends and allies. I started spending more time with those who have a strong guiding morality but aren't flashy about it. I wanted to become a friend, not an object lesson or charity case. Several people became friends, and we did what little we could to help each other. I let my actions be my testimony. Others are called to speak the Word; I simply try to live it, no matter how imperfect the results.

Eventually, I left prison. Through a string of improbable coincidences too bizarre not to be Providence, I was introduced to an amazing family who, in turn, introduced me to the group publishing this newsletter. The people of UBC have given me so much, and asked for nothing in return. I keep offering, and while sometimes they accept my help, it's never enough. All I can do is pay my blessings forward. I am not a good man, but through grace and the love of my friends, I am becoming a better man.

Jason Bradley

It is God

The sands of the sea shore is God's stop sign to the ocean's mouth. As the billows across the waters dance on its face. The earth and her contents belongeth to the Lord from its north to south. It's life—to the helights of eastern solid mountain base: God hath within its own lively stead set west in her place. When the deep tis angry at best, or it be of waters at rest.

It is God!

For God creates motion, and from his womb gave teams of life to the ocean. Peace and liberty he wills as he may. So the next time the mountain waters smile or thou seest the valley billows angry face, know that Jesus hath for his purpose. Set it all in place.

It is God.

By Jesus and David Cox

Nuggets

What about alcohol? References in the Bible are wise choices, moderation:

1. Teenage drinking is illegal. The Bible does not justify breaking the law unless one does so in order to obey God's commands. Acts 5:29, Romans 13:1. It is okay to disobey your government if the government forbids a practice that God's commands, such as prayer or witnessing. Never once does the Bible tell teenagers to drink alcohol.
2. The Bible repeats that drunkenness is a dangerous sin. Proverbs 23:20, 29-35 & Ephesians 5:18.
3. It is wrong to be addicted to or mastered by any substance, including alcohol (1 Cor. 6:12). Many people are prone to alcohol addiction. I wrote this because during my teenage years, I became an alcoholic and alcohol is directly linked to me being on death row today.

Last week, I was watching Good Morning America, and the ticker tape running stated that there were new studies out that:

1. 1,200,000 college students drank alcohol in excess and smoked pot during the school year
2. The most problematic situation is drunk driving.

Picture this: imagine riding around in a car with a loaded gun with the safety off. Eventually the gun will go off. I forgot, the gun is in your hand the whole time. Now that I made that clear to all—what part of that situation do you want to take part in?

The results of car crashes: I lost 4 friends in high school. Everyone was going to a concert and the highway was very crowded. In the '70s, the police would watch the traffic leaving the concert and point a car to a lot that meant they were a no go for driving.

The reality is, alcohol is a choice. I was young once, I know about parties and how most say, "I'll just have a few beers." The choice must be made—please regard alcohol with serious understanding. I was exposed to alcohol by my parents who were alcoholics. They owned a bar in downtown Detroit where I was allowed to work and alcohol was readily available to me.

I close with this: "The groundwork you do today is the foundation for you to stand on tomorrow." Please remember during the 4th of July and summer fun, if you drink even one beer, give the keys to someone else. Even a bump up in a parking lot could mean a \$10,000 fine. Remember the example you lead with is what our children will follow. Conversations about alcohol are important. I never had that. Alcohol has ruined so many lives, if even one person reads this and abstains, it will have been worth the article. Choices and nuggets of wisdom really impact our futures.

In His peace,
T.N. Evans

Heavenly Humor

A minister parked his car in a no parking zone in a large city because he was short of time and couldn't find a space with a meter. So he put a note under the windshield wiper that read, "I have circled the block 100 times. If I don't park here, I'll miss my appointment. Forgive us our trespasses." When he returned, he found a citation from a police officer along with this note, "I've circled this block for 10 years. If I don't give you a ticket, I'll lose my job. Lead us not into temptation."

Author Unknown

Secure in the Promise
Hebrews 2:1-3:15

Hebrews 2:1-4 is the first of five solemn admonitions: 2:1-4 Hear Him, 2:5-9 See Him, 2:10-18 Trust Him, 3:1-6 Consider Him, 3:7-15 obey Him. These directions are to encourage believers to pay attention to what God says in his word. During Old Testament times God dealt with those who disobeyed his word. In these last days, we have a greater obligation to obey because we have the complete scriptures and the full revelation of God in Jesus Christ (Colossians 2:9). Are you serious about what God says to you? Well we will start with the above mentioned subtitles and the confirming verses of scripture for each:

1. The plea of the sinner—John 12:20-21 We wish to see Jesus. The Greeks desired to see Jesus. The Greeks who came to Jesus at this time were Gentiles who had become converts to Judaism. They had come to worship at the feast for they no longer followed the religious practices of their ancestors. Their coming to the Lord Jesus pictured the time when the Jews had rejected the Lord Jesus. The Gentiles would hear the Gospel and many of them believed. No reason is given as to why they come to Philip. Perhaps his Greek name and the fact that he was of Bethsaida of Galilee made him attractive to the Gentile proselytes (people converted from one opinion, creed, party to another). Their request in v. 21 was noble indeed. “Sir” they said “we wish to see Jesus.” No one with this desire is ever turned away. Perhaps Philip was not too sure whether the Lord would see these Greeks. Christ had previously told the disciples not to go to the Gentiles with the Gospel. So Philip went to Andrew, and together they went to see Jesus.
2. The Privilege of the Saints—Hebrews 2:9 We see Jesus. “But we see Jesus.” Because of what the Lord Jesus has done, we behold him, we see Jesus. This word “see” does not mean a casual look. The word “see” used here comes from the Hebrew word *ra’ah* meaning: to gain understanding. We recognize that in him is something our little minds do not grasp. We look upon him in faith, in trust, in wonder, in awe, and in worship. All of this is wrapped up in the phrase, “we see Jesus.” Do you “see” him today? Has the Holy Spirit taken the veil from your eyes so that you can “see” Him? “We see Jesus.” Notice that Jesus is his human name. At his divine conception the angel announced, “...thou shall call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins.” (Matthew 1:21).
3. The Promise of the Scriptures—1 John 3:2 “We shall see” him (Jesus). “And our eyes at last shall see Him, through his own redeeming love” (evoked in a melodious line from a Christmas card). There ought to be a catch in our voice when we say or sing that. If we have any love for Jesus right now, our deepest longing out to be that we would come face to face with him at last, to “see” his smile, to catch his facial expression, to begin to know him in a whole new way. And that, of course, is what’s promised here in 1 John 3:2 with a mysterious twist to it. John says what we are going to be hasn’t yet been revealed, but we know that when he is revealed, we shall be like Him, “as he is!” Everything John says throughout the letter hinges on this promise. Take it away and you lose the whole point. God Bless.

Tony B.
Parchman, MS

Language

I had intended to title this as “Words” but in the June, 2016 issue of this newsletter “The Power of our Words” appeared. Not wanting to usurp a title already used, I settled on the above. On the facing page of the above titled piece, I had submitted an article, “Awkward Questions.” In that piece, near the end, some words I had intended to use in a quote got scrambled. As printed, they invoked puzzlement, among other reactions because they made little sense. The quote should have read, “For those who understand, no explanation is necessary; for those who don’t, none would suffice.” That’s not what was published.

As many of you may know, I have an extensive background in aviation, both as a pilot and an air traffic controller in the military. In that field, a system of radio communications known as “standard phraseology” has been developed. This was done for several reasons, among them to say what needed to be said in the shortest possible time and to avoid confusion among those to whom English (that’s the international language of aviation) is a second language.

Non-standard radio calls have led to fatal accidents. Among them is one of the worst in airline history. For instance, fog shrouds the airport with only a couple hundred yards of visibility. Yet, it is still possible for operations to continue if everyone follows the proper usage of words. One aircraft is halfway down a 10,000 ft runway. Another wants to take-off on that same runway. He calls the tower for take-off clearance. The proper tower reply should be, “Hold your position.” No mention of the word take-off. Instead, the tower says, “you are not cleared for take-off.” The pilot, pre-programmed for hearing the words clear” and “take-off,” which the tower would have used if the departing aircraft had a clear runway, applied full power. Four thousand feet later, the two Boeing 747s collided and hundreds died. As brother Dave Gardner, a ’60s comedian used to say, “teeth, hair, and eyeballs all over the place.”

Is there a “standard phraseology” for Christians to use when communicating with one another and non-believers? There was a time in centuries past when a person could lose their life over one letter when describing the importance of Christ. Some would say he *is* God, others he was *as* God. If the warring sides captured you and you said it wrong, you could be put to death as a heretic.

I maintain that there is a Christian language that uses “standard phraseology” that defines the core beliefs that all Christians share. We all know what John 3:16 says. We know that without his sacrifice and the love of God, there would be no salvation. Beyond those standards, it can get tricky though. Different denominations can insert what others may claim to be “non-standard” or even heresy. Just as a French or German pilot may use English in aviation communications, they do so with an accent. Sometimes that can even lead to a misunderstanding. But it does not change the fact that they are fully qualified pilots flying a safe airplane. It is up to the controller to use the standard phrase, “say again last transmission” when not sure of what is going on. Both sides of the conversation use this to get misunderstandings cleared up.

Short of using vulgarity over the air, there is some leeway when trying to understand and accommodate the two parties in an aviation situation. We too, as Christians must try to stick to “standard phraseology” to define our core beliefs that are the very foundation of our religion. When we deviate from that form of communication, it brings the chance of a fatal misunderstanding into play. The price for those misunderstandings can lead to more than a loss of license for pilots or disciplinary actions for controllers, it can lead to an eternity of separation from our Lord.

Richard Jordan

Faith is a Challenge

Is faith more of a challenge in prison or out of prison? I think it's easier in prison. If you want to stay out of trouble, and that's what a lot of guys do for protection, take refuge in religious groups and sometimes it pays off for the best. That made me think about myself and others whom I have come to know pretty well in my 24 years—some of whom accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior. But after getting out of prison, they lost all sight of the faith and started doing the same old things that brought them to prison in the first place. Once they are back in prison, they ask for forgiveness and with a snap of a finger, they are Christians again.

How many chances does God have to keep giving us when we keep on doing the same thing over and over again? Can anyone go through life without doing anything wrong? As Christians under the crucible of incarceration, time can be your best friend or your worst enemy. If you use time productively in the pursuit of knowledge that is carried into action and be mindful of what you are feeding your heart, you will succeed in winning over your enemies. You will also realize that true freedom is not the ability to move physically unfettered, but as Christ is reported to have said, "to love God with all you heart, mind and soul," one can postulate in one's mind that he loves God while the heart and soul can be soiled with impurities.

Nothing oppresses man more than having a false understanding about his Lord and creator and one's own role in creation. To see and perceive God clearly is to see what God says in the Bible. Again, it is easy to claim faith and love of the creator when everything is going your way, but how you live and act when "Hell is your daily companion" is when you will discover whether you have faith or flair. If you are in prison you are free to see God as you wish and neither handcuffs nor shackles should obstruct your ability to conduct yourself in a way befitting of your faith. It is trials and tribulation, hardship and difficulties that give true merit and shape to your faith. As my friend once told me, "Don't judge people" get them to judge themselves because they can see their wrongs without anybody telling them.

Sherwood B.

Offer All From The Little We Have

So he said, "truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all. For all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, but she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had." Luke 21:3-4

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

We as believers know that Jesus Christ offered all that he had to save our lives. But as we read this passage about the poor widow who put all the she had into the temple's treasury, we know if this poor widow can give all of her livelihood to the temple's treasury, then we as believers can give to those that are in need. As believers, we can encourage others about how they can offer their livelihood to Jesus as well as helping their fellow brothers and sisters in need. Sometimes we have to sacrifice our own needs to help others. But the devil wants us to offer our livelihood into causing trouble, suffering, hatred, and misery to our brothers and sister and to others. The devil also wants us to be selfish to the needs of others and not caring for them. We all need to offer our livelihood to the Father and his son Jesus Christ to do and to trust in their words as well as obeying the words. We need to offer what little time that we have left here on this earth to love and forgive those who hurt us and the people that we love to make the little time that we have left in giving to the needs of others. So, if our Lord offered his love to all then we need to offer our love all as well.

Stephen Elliott Powers

Still Searching

"Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" And he said, "Who are you Lord?" Acts 9:1-5

Some people have a gradual conversion experience in which they slowly begin to understand the importance of Christ. They may attend church or read their Bible and increasingly, inch by inch, come to put their trust and faith in Jesus. Others, like Paul (Saul), have an immediate changeover to love Jesus. They, as some say, "get it." Paul was on his way to find and kill more Christians as had been his enterprise in Jerusalem. He had already succeeded in the capture and public murder of numerous Christians (Acts 8:1) and had heard news of a slew of Christians hiding in Damascus. Jackpot! This would certainly find favor from the high priest.

Yet, as Paul was on his way to Damascus, he was blindsided (literally) by Jesus. All he had to ask was why Paul was persecuting him and Paul knew he was the Lord. Paul's conversion took about 3 seconds. He went from persecuting Jesus to preaching Jesus because he had finally found the revelation of Christ, his purpose to live.

Paul was previously persecuting followers of Jesus because that was what he thought his happiness depended on. But it wasn't, was it? Obviously Paul was not content with his conduit of merriment because he always required more. He requested permission from the high priest to go elsewhere and persecute more Christians. Paul was still searching for his peace and he would always continue to until he found Jesus. Paul was searching for his happiness in hurting others. Where are you searching for your happiness? In power? Celebrity? Drugs and alcohol?

I was searching for peace in money, drugs, and women. But these are unsatisfying channels because no matter how much you have, it will never be enough. I sometimes brought home a girl a night while I was in college. One time I brought home eight different girls in one week. I also made fifty dollars an hour coaching tennis. I paid all of my bills in the first week of every month and spent the rest of my income going out to bars, buying weed and cocaine, or getting new toys. I had it all—my own place to stay, a sports car, women. The "guy's dream." But no matter how much money I made, I still stole. No matter how large my stack of drugs would be, I always bought more. The moral to the story is I always wanted more. I put my hopes and happiness in debauchery. It didn't matter how much I had, I was still searching for more.

One day, another human being paid the ultimate price for my continual search, and now I am in prison. One might imagine how malcontent I was when I first came to prison. If I couldn't be satisfied with all of my excess outside, how would I handle having nothing on the inside? Poorly. I didn't join a gang, but I prospected. I engaged in fights, gambling, and mouthing off to the guards. I had refused to turn to Jesus, even though I began meeting with a preacher each week. Life was far from good. Eventually, exactly one year into my incarceration, I sought out a permanent solution to a temporary problem: suicide.

I had my Saul to Paul experience in the hospital room where I had found Jesus (or rather he found me) and I haven't stopped yet. I should have easily died that night, but by God's grace, he gave me two things that night. 1) My life back. He knew I was looking in all the wrong places for joy—so he gave me one more chance to go in the right direction. 2) Purpose followed by never-ending joy. I do have an addictive personality and now I am addicted to Christ. Never in my life have I found something so fulfilling as Jesus. His word, his promises, and his love.

Two weeks after I emerged from the hospital, I emerged from the waters of baptism with a whole new and different view of life. In nine months I read the Bible cover to cover twice, as well as various commentaries on the Bible to help strengthen my understanding. And then I felt the call to preach. I happened as I read Acts 9:15 and I wasn't quite sure of how to go about it. But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of mine to bear my name before the Gentiles, kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him many things he must suffer for my name's sake." Acts 9:15-16.

Luckily, as is customary for God, he provided an opportunity for me to get my feet in the door of the pulpit. A group Bible study available to inmates was led by an evangelist named Dr. Harland. After study one day, he told me that he wouldn't be here next week, and asked if I would lead the study.

I conveyed my nervousness and without me saying, "yes," he told me I would do great. I prayed hard about this. What would I speak about? How would I lead the congregation? I spoke to God and he spoke back. As God had responded to Moses (Exodus 2), when I told him I was not a good speaker, he said, "I know, but I AM." When I said that I wasn't a good leader, he said, "I know, but I AM." And when I said that I wasn't brave enough to do this, he said, "I know, but I AM."

Essentially, God communicated that all I had to do was trust him and he would make sure the sermon was good and well-spoken. He gave me the ability to discern the needs of the inmates and lead the congregation. And what was my message? It was that I had gone from still searching to being found.

"For me to live is Christ, to die is gain." Phil. 1:21

Matthew Wilbanks

Forgive Me

*Forgive me Lord, for I have sinned
So many shortcomings it's hard to blend.
Forgive me for leading my children astray
I stand before you, broken today.*

*Forgive me for causing mother heartbreak and pain
I have no one but myself to blame. Forgive me for my lustful heart
And for being the devil's angel from the start.*

*Forgive me for believing lies when I know the truth;
For striking down others without any proof.
Forgive me for breaking the commandments of stone
I beg your mercy before you call me home.*

Clarence Daniels/ CA

Prayer Closet—No Clothes!

*I pray for all souls lost and all
Souls found*

*I pray for those still rising and those
Returned to the ground*

*God bless the wicked to see their
foolish ways*

*God bless the good and lengthen
Their days*

*Take it to prayer for all need the
Hand of God*

*Let him be your thunderbolt and
Your lightning rod. Amen.*

Justin Underwood

Dear Good News readers and contributors,

It has come to our attention that there have been several mistakes and missing articles in the last few month's editions of the Good News. Please be assured that we are working diligently to right this. We apologize for any articles that have been missing or misrepresented due to our oversights. Thank you for making us aware of this. We are grateful for the many contributions and contributors to this newsletter as well as all those who support this ministry.

Grace and peace to you all,
Kat Spangler