

The Good News

Newsletter - February 2015

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)

Until my Associate Minister brought this topic up, I want to confess, that Valentine’s Day had never had much spiritual impact on me. As a kid all I knew was that my elementary school teachers liked to make it an occasion of embarrassing (and I thought pointless) letter writing. We were all required to sign small pre-fab valentines for each member of the class and put them into little decorated boxes on everybody’s desk. To this day, I consider all that pretty silly. Maybe there was a point, but I never saw it. I did remember hearing that it had something to do with some old saint, but since we could count the Catholics on one hand in my rural Mississippi town, we didn’t get much of an explanation. So, until I was old enough to use it as an excuse to try and convince young women that I had a poetic sensitive side, I was happy to let the matter stay that way.

However, as with most faith legends, there is a kernel of truth worthy of consideration if we will look for it with fresh eyes. With a little help and research (much easier than in those long ago non-computer days) I have enjoyed hearing a story that truly does speak to me, and I hope this year’s St. Valentine’s Day will seem a little more relevant to your life.

As best we can discern, a man named Valentine lived in ancient Rome. He lived in rooms above the street and apparently made medicines from herbs he picked in the fields outside the city. He was a doctor and tried to help the people who needed cures and comfort. If people didn’t have money to pay him, he would accept something they had made, like a pair or sandals or some warm bread. It was not common knowledge that Valentine was also a priest. That had to be a secret because this was in a time when the Emperor persecuted Christians. In fact, one of the stories says Valentine got in trouble for marrying young couples, for it was believed that if soldiers married, they wouldn’t be as brave in time of war. Because of this, he lived in constant danger.

The story has it that one day an older man brought his blind daughter to Valentine to see if he could help her. The girl’s father took care of prisoners in the big jail in Rome. Though he knew it would be very hard to do the girl much good as she had been blind since birth, Valentine gave her a soft compress to make her eyes feel better and would take no money from her father. From that day on, Valentine prayed always for the little girl among those he remembered. They became friends and sometimes Valentine would take her with him outside the city when picking herbs. The little girl loved to pick the first fresh crocuses that bloomed and take those to her father. Sadly, the day came when Valentine was discovered to be a Christian priest, was arrested, and carried to the jail where the blind girl’s father worked. He was stunned to realize that the kind doctor who had befriended his little daughter was a Christian. Perhaps this challenged his thinking about these enemies of the state. Then when the soldiers came to take Valentine to his execution, he asked first for paper and pen, wrote a note, and gave it to the jailer, making him promise to give it to his daughter. That night when the jailer went home he gave the rolled up paper to his little girl. She asked, “What does it say father?” Just then a crocus that had been rolled inside fell to the floor. The old man read, “*From your Valentine.*” According to the legend of St. Valentine, when the girl reached down to pick up the flower, she was surprised to realize that she could see it in her hand.

It is the love of Valentine that we celebrate with this day, for in the darkness of his persecution and even facing death itself, he showed the power of Christ to light the darkness and banish blindness of all kinds. Some of us are in real prisons, some of us are not, but the world will always want us to give in to anger and resentment, to lash out in bitterness. But whoever we are, we have the opportunity to be conduits of Christ’s love. That light is always needed most in the darkest places. In that sense, the believer should perhaps celebrate the idea of Valentine and also wish to be “*your Valentine.*”

-David Walker, University Baptist Church

True Freedom (Acts 16:23-34)

What constitutes freedom or imprisonment? Do you actually have to be in jail to be imprisoned? If you're not in prison, does it mean that you are truly free? In Acts 16:23-34, we learn that Paul and Silas have been thrown into prison for trying to help a demon possessed girl. If there was ever a time to say things aren't always what they seem, this would be it! So, here we have Paul and Silas, who have basically been thrown under the jail, and we have this Roman guard assigned to keep watch. The guard can come and go as he pleases, but is he really *free*? Are Paul and Silas really the ones in this story who are imprisoned?

The world would declare that the Roman guard is the one who is free, but this is not the case. Yes, Paul and Silas are physically imprisoned, but their souls and spirits are soaring in salvation. This is the difference between these men, Paul and Silas have the assurance of salvation and true freedom in Jesus Christ. Hebrews 10:35 tells us, "Do not therefore, abandon that confidence of yours; it brings a great reward." When the earthquake opened those cell doors, the guard was terrified at the mere thought that prisoners might escape. He was so terrified, in fact, that he drew his sword to take his own life.

The next part of this story makes me think of Romans 8:28, "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God and who are called according to his purpose." So often in life we see tragic things happen, and we ask God why. Paul and Silas were helping save a girl from demonic spirits and as a result, were thrown into prison. But like so many things we look at in life, it's often the things we don't see that say it all, and that is, "all things work together for good." God's glory, his will, is not conditioned on events, but rather events are a condition of his glory. It's what I like to call *synergistic sovereignty*.

Let's apply it to the same story. Paul and Silas have both been imprisoned for doing the very work that God sent them to do in the world. So, this is a messed up situation, right? Remember Romans 8:28, "all things." Paul and Silas, with the power of the Holy Spirit, stopped the Roman guard from taking his own life, and, here it comes, introduced him to the confidence and true freedom that comes with faith and salvation. "All things work together for good!" Like so many reading this, I wish it was always so easy to see.

Let's go back to the focal point of this scripture though. Today, so many people are imprisoned by worry, greed, prestige and power. Everyday people, like myself for so many years, believe they can find freedom in things of this world, but this is a warped and worldly perspective. True freedom is the gift of salvation and salvation is a gift of faith in Jesus Christ. You could lose everyone and everything, be sitting on death row, a thousand miles from home and still be filled with joy and freedom through faith in Jesus Christ. Now that is True Freedom!

Song of the month: Mouthpiece, "Dave Chapelle"

By, Kingdom Kid

Christmas time 1996, Myrtle Beach, SC, it didn't seem like Christmas. It seemed like a ghost town, rooms were \$100 a week on the beach. I was looking to escape the holiday blues. I saw this group outside place on the beach. It turned out to be a women's homeless shelter. The group would approach women on the beach and witness to them. The next block up, women were walking the streets, and I found myself for the first time, realizing that these problems are all over the world. I saw how these women were discriminated against. One night at the motel, the owner didn't want them there even though they needed a place to stay. He told me to leave because I was trying to help them. Soon, the police showed up and asked me to leave.

I believe that as men, we should reach out to women through Christian programs to help rather than take advantage of them. I went back to Myrtle Beach in 2006. This time the group was at a completely different address. The shelter had added a church and a school to help the women get the education they needed to go on to college. This year, remember the lost, the lonely, the least. Jesus is there reaching out to them.

Tim Evans
Death Row

All Your Works are Wonderful

*All your works are wonderful
You are wise in all your ways
We have seen your perfect plan
And your power on display*

*All your works are wonderful
Earth and heaven, sky and sea
Even still creation pales
In the light of Calvary*

*All your works are wonderful
Constant faithful, ever true
Timeless law and tender grace
Draw us even now to you*

*All your works are wonderful
You are wise in all your ways
Though unworthy yet we stand
In your presence filled with praise*

From Experiencing God: Music for Knowing and doing the will of God

Submitted by: Jason K., MS Death Row

There will come a time when you believe
everything is finished.
That will be the beginning.

_Louis L'Amour

The Light

Sometimes when I'm out here, I sort of feel like I'm standing alone and all around me are different tunnels. They are dark and scary, but at the end of one, there is a light. I'm so alone, and confused. I know this tunnel must be the one, it must be right. Halfway through, the light disappears and just as in life, there're obstacles to face and decisions to make when that light goes out. I just want to get back where I started so I can try again. Try another tunnel to find my way. I know, I know, if my mind isn't right and I don't do right and make the right decisions based on my values, principles, morals, no matter what that obstacle is, if I don't make good decisions and do the right things with "God," it will be a struggle hard to survive and hard to live. And if you get right with him, sure enough, there will be a light all lit up at the end of this tunnel. So I say "yeah," let's try this tunnel because the light will always be on. If you go down the wrong path, just start over again. You will reach the end of the tunnel...

He said, "I am the *light*."

Sherwood B.

Places

I have recently watched several episodes of "Sacred Journeys" on our PBS/MPB outlet. All of the places, the destinations, of those pilgrimages had in common some sort of physical connection to a venerated person connected to, or founder of, a particular set of beliefs, the term "holy site" is usually used to define these places.

Of course, each religious group has its own practices when it comes to defining "holy site." Some, such as Christianity and Islam, even have overlapping places that are considered holy. For example, places in Jerusalem. Our Christian beliefs teach that our God becomes a part of, and resides within, us when we accept the gift he sent in the form of Jesus. That acceptance of his sacrifice should make us one with God. Nowhere in any scripture that deals with the way Christians should live and conduct their affairs do I find a commandment to spend thousands of dollars and travel thousands of miles to Jerusalem. Tour companies, often owned by non believers, make millions each year from people seeking a closer relationship with our faith.

I concede that travel often enriches our life experience, however, the question must be asked, "is one place on this planet, all of which our God created, along with the heavens above, is any 'holier' than another?" There are saintly people walking, teaching, feeding the poor, and helping the sick, on all continents. Not all are necessarily of one belief either. A humble church in the Mississippi Delta where God's word and God's works are taught and acted upon is a holy site. A quiet place in the woods where one can sit, and communicate through nature with our creator can be a holy site.

I am not trying to diminish the importance of historical places connected to someone's religion. Rather, I am of the belief that all his creation is holy. With that in mind, we can know that our prayers to him have the same weight, whether from behind the bars of a prison or at Mt. Calvary. As long as his place is in our heart, we are a "holy site."

Soaring

*Sometimes God takes away our props that we might lean on him,
Allows temptations so we'll triumph over sin...
Sometimes he takes away our strengths for doing earthly things,
To rest our bodies that our souls may soar on eagles' wings...
Let's not resent it when he says, "come ye apart—
Be still or chafe at disappointments that are his sovereign will...
Oh, let's not doubt or question why with unexplained delays,
But keep on soaring 'neath his wings with gratitude and praise.*

-Alice H. Mortenson, submitted by Roger T.

*This poem was written by Alice H. Mortenson and submitted by Roger T.

In September 2014, Roger T. lost his mother and grandmother as they went home in Heaven to reside with our Heavenly Father and Christ our Lord. Let us all come together and pray that he receive God's help and guidance through these trying times.

We love you brother. God bless you! - Justin U.

Musings on Time (Eccl. 3:1-15)

Time. What a great invention. With it, we can measure the speed of an electron and the distance to our sun. we use it to tell us the age of the universe and how much longer we have left to work. What power we've given to time. Time. What time is it? If anyone reading this hasn't given their lives to Jesus Christ, then it's most certainly time to do that. If you are saved, then it's time to rededicate yourself and reflect upon what a life in God's hands means for you and for the people around you. It's always a good time for that.

Time. All good things come in time—for those that love Jesus. Think about the last time your prayers were answered. How long did it take from the moment you uttered it until you realized God had answered it? Could you have helped move things along? My answer to the last question is almost always yes. I am convinced that if I had been just a little more patient and more obedient through seemingly unrelated events, then my prayers would have been answered sooner and smoothly instead of in spite of me. I get impatient and want our God, who lives outside of time, to work on my time. I know, right? A time for all things.

Time. What does it mean to you? Should it mean anything to us Christians when God's promises contain words like forever and eternity? And when did a created concept become the master over its creators? I propose that we all re-evaluate our idea and use of the thing we call time. Let us get back to the teachings of our Savior and trust God, giving no thought for tomorrow. Seek God's kingdom today, everyday, and all the things we need now will be given to us. That includes the things that need to happen today for God to grant our prayers for tomorrow. Take back your time by giving it to God. Time. What time is it for you?

Time. Time. Time...

-Roger Gillett
Forrest Co. Jail

Signs

I was a man that was confused about God because I always wanted to see a sign from Him. I used to pray and cry my eyes out about my situation in life, but at the end of the day, I was walking under my own understanding. I didn't have any faith in God, even though I used to read the Bible and pray at times. Having no faith and walking under my own understanding, caused me to fall for many of the devil's tricks. But what I realized, is that when you are seeking God without faith, you are setting yourself up for failure. Plus, the devil comes at you harder because he knows that you are seeking God. My lack of faith caused me to drift away from God which put me in a state of unbelief at times. That's the devil's moment! That moment is to strike us in the weakest point in our lives in order to destroy it. But God is merciful! Something I realized, is that God will allow us to go through terrible times in life in order to save our life. Sometimes it takes us going through a real bad situation to call on Jesus and change our lives. But it's only through faith that our lives are truly changed. We will never understand the mind of God or why he does things the way he does, but he sure knows what to do to get our attention! So no, I see that a sign can come from a situation in life and definitely through trials and tribulations. And that sign can mean, "Get your life right with God!" I truly thank God for allowing me to see. Signs! A lot of people are lost waiting on signs.

-Pedro Alvarez Jr.
Forrest Co. Jail

The Year of Prayer

Another year has come and another year has gone by like a gust of wind. I would like to challenge everyone this year (2015) to do something totally outside of the box, but that'll be very pleasing to our spirit and our Heavenly Father. We, as servants to God, are not here to serve ourselves but the will of our Almighty God. Having said that, the challenge that I speak of is that every spiritual soul pray all year long for our fellow brothers and sisters and that we ask of God nothing for ourselves. He already knows our needs even before we know our needs and the whole point of this challenge is to learn to trust each other, to pray for one another, so that we can share a heavenly and astonishing bond. (Psalms 139:1-5). Our God sent his son as a sacrifice for us, so why not sacrifice ourselves for the blessings of others?(Romans 8: 26-32).

I hope and pray that all God's children will participate and pray for one another in the spirit of lifting up one another and showing compassion for those in need. Please join me in this mission this year and share his love with the world!

God Bless you Always! Read 1Samuel 12:22-24, Psalms 55:17-18, 1Timothy 2:1-6

My Prayer

Dear Father,

*I come not for that which I
want or need,
But for my fellow brothers and
sisters I intercede.*

*You sent him as a sacrificial lamb
for all others,
To nurture all your children like
nursing mothers.*

*Please be merciful to the lost and
gracious to the found,
Let your presence shine brightly
and your blessings abound.*

*I ask that you touch each heart
warmly and sufficiently,
To show every soul that it's about
more than me...me...me... - Amen!*

- Justin H. Underwood

GOSPEL GAMES

G C R U D N E N C O U R A G E M E N T G Q A P A I P
 V T G I F T S A H C L T W T D J O O N C Z A I Z R F
 L X O H Y K Q L R J Q W Y Z M K Z I C A N D P O X H
 P A H C O B E A I T H G D A E F D E X L J O M K Y A
 D _ Z W F J K N S A G K F W N I O C R O W I N G B D
 Q N C O M F O R T C B J O C B O R Y Z N S A F I C Y
 L O V P N O L Z I G E I N A Y B R D T E Y G S B A E
 A I W I M D D N A W Q Q P T S C D E V N A G C G Z
 B S C H D P M L N I J U S T I N G U I D A N C E C X
 J I C S I Z J M N L O P O W E R D I O M E E P X W M
 U V K N K B B C A B Z O Q Z Q O A R N T P C V L G L
 S O V O Z Z E Y G F N G O J U F N X B T O A C G L D
 T R C I B L K C P O K N S K I F Y B A K H E U N W B
 I P S T H N C G I Q P Y Y H P T N N I J Z P R H S L
 F K _ A N S D T H E N B D N N O C B A N B W T J Z B
 I W C L H J A Z L G V C C A B E D C G O O H A V E K
 E C B E K V F H W M Y E A O N C H R I S T O G D V W
 D D W R L O J C S D H V D C H A S E E H Q V N D O Y
 Y H I A J E P X L N F A V O R Q L F C B I U A D L C
 G Z S V K D W I E B X Q L G A M E R C Y R K A J W B

Find the 24 words below that are hidden in the puzzle. There are 17 hidden letters in the 24 hidden words you have to find. These 17 letters all have a line under them and will help you figure out the secret word that goes with the hidden Phrase, which will also uncover the fun facts and theme of this month's Gospel Games. Good Luck!

"HIDDEN WORDS"

FAITH FAVOR UNDER JUSTIFIED CHRISTIAN GIFT CHRIST ABIDING POWER RELATIONSHIP
 RECEIVED PEACE GROWING ACCEPTANCE SALVATION LOVE COMFORT MERCY GUIDANCE
 PROVISION ENCOURAGEMENT HOPE EQUIP PROMISE

"BIBLE VERSES/CLUES"

John 1:14-16, Acts 7:33, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Galatians 1:6, Hebrews 4:16

"HIDDEN PHRASE"

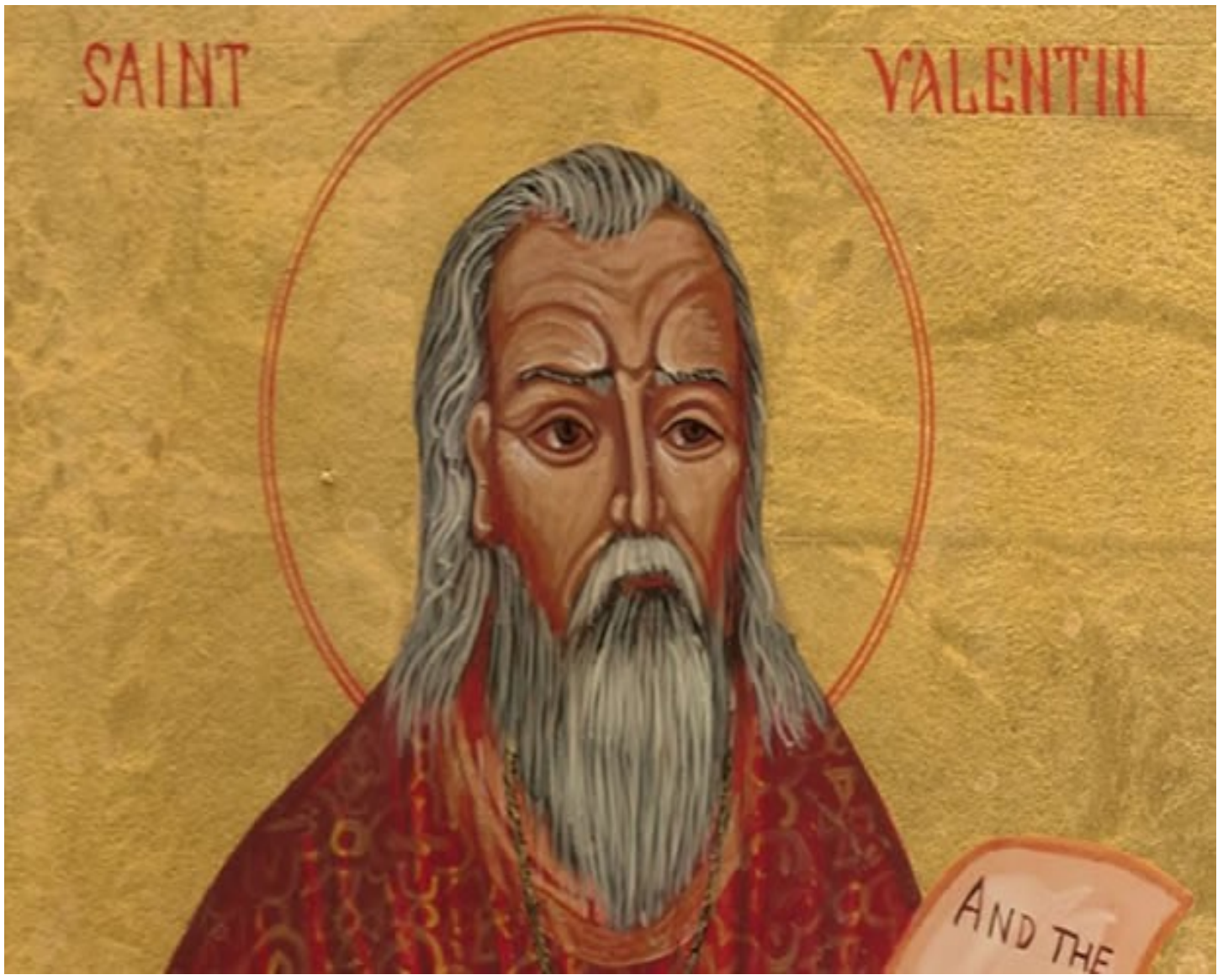
_ _ _ A _ E _ I _ _ L _ _ E _ I _ E _ _ A _ _ O _ _ _ O _ _ _ O _ _

"Fun Facts"

_____ (secret word goes here) in the Old Testament is the translation of the Hebrew noun 'chen' and the verb 'chanan'. In the New Testament it's the Greek 'charis' and is used approximately 150 times. The history of the Greek word had a long history in the secular Greek before the New Testament. When the Old Testament was translated into Greek, 'charis' or _____ was used to translate the Hebrew 'chen' and so it came to be associated with an objective relation of undeserved favor given by God to man and forms the background of the Christian meaning of _____ in the New Testament. The best way to avoid being led astray by Satan is to grow in the _____ and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The purpose of Gospel Games is to not just inspire you, but to challenge you to pick up your Bible more. Inspiration is great to get us started but its habit that will keep us going. I encourage you to pick up your Bible everyday and spend time with the Lord, it's the only way.
Romans 10:17

With Love In Christ,
Dustin B.
AKA: Kingdom Kid



Some suggested topics for the Newsletter

Thank you for the continued letters, thoughts, and poems you send in to us each month. We want to know more about who you all are. Story seems to be one of the best ways to get to know who someone really is and so we encourage you all to look at some of these suggested topics to see if any inspiration comes as we seek community with one another. Please know that these are not to restrict your writing; you are certainly welcome to choose to write on another topic or in another form. They are simply some ideas as all writers need somewhere to start. Thank you for your continued contributions to this newsletter and happy writing!

- Choose a story or a character from the Bible and tell us how it speaks to your life or how you connect to it.
- Make up a short story.
- Tell us about a character you've read in a book or watched in a movie that inspires you and why.
- Tell us your favorite song. What is it about this song that draws you to it?
- Write a song or send in a piece of original artwork.