

2008—THE NEW YEAR

Levi Sides, Jasper, AL

The year 2008, a Leap Year, offers us added blessings, for it will present three hundred and sixty-six days of unspotted, unspoiled, and unused time. It is a clean slate of opportunity, a reflection of what *might be* rather than what *has been*.

The beginning of another year reminds us that the Lord God is sovereign in His universe. He determines the boundaries and limitations of time. "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

Time is a precious commodity to be used well in the new year. To do this we come to understand that time is a *gift*. A widower whose wife had died at a relatively young age said, "If we had known we had so little time left to be together, we would have lived our lives much differently than we did. I thought we had a lot of time left to do this or do that." When we recognize that time is in the hand of God, that it is a gift from God, we become much more appreciative of time.

Time is an *opportunity*. To some it will be nothing more than a fleeting resolution that will blaze across the pale sky of self-determination and fade into the midnight of lost hopes and forgotten dreams. To others it will usher in a new day of optimism, hope and genuine change. It will be the opportunity to achieve those things which for some reason or another were left undone in the previous year. In the parable of the talents (Matt.25:14-30), Jesus speaks of the master giving certain responsibilities to his servants and then going away for a long time. The opportunity lay in the gap between the time the master left and the moment he returned. Each person with a gift had opportunity to invest it well

and use it wisely. Two invested wisely and one did not. Therein lay their eternal destiny.

Time is a *responsibility*. Paul tells us to redeem the time (Eph.5:16). We must make the most of it. Use it wisely. We have the responsibility to use time to develop ourselves as persons. We have the responsibility to use time to reach others and bring them to Jesus Christ. An unknown poet has written:

Sixty seconds make a minute,
 May we please the Savior in it;
 Sixty minutes make an hour,
 May we feel His saving power;
 Twenty-four hours make a day,
 O'er us give His will full sway;
 Seven days make a week,
 Make us humble, lowly, meek;
 As weeks into months must turn,
 Let us more of Jesus learn;
 As the months shall make the year,
 Free us from worry, doubt, and fear;
 As the years make up our life,
 Give us victory in the strife;
 When eternity at last we see,
 May we live it, Lord, with thee?

PRAYER

"Father, help us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom. We pray this in Jesus' name." Amen.

WOT

EDITORIAL

THE IMPORTANCE OF ONE

In the parable of the lost sheep, we are shown just how much our Lord Jesus Christ and God the Father value the soul of every individual on the face of the earth. While ninety-nine were safe within the sound of the shepherd's voice, and under his watchful eye, one sheep wanders away (Luke 15:4). There may be any number of reasons why this sheep wanders away from the rest of the fold. It could be that this sheep is simply rebellious and desires to wander away. This sheep may wander away because of the negligence of the shepherd (mind you, if we are to pursue this idea, then we must not think that this sheep is lost because of negligence on the part of the Great Shepherd, but rather on the part of earthly shepherds, or elders). Perhaps the sheep wandered away without realizing that he was getting farther and farther away from the fold and from the protection of the shepherd. No matter the reason for the sheep wandering away, the point to be stressed is that the sheep is lost and in need of being found. While the faithful shepherd would not neglect his duties to the rest of the flock, it is of the utmost importance that the wayward sheep be rescued. Apart from the protection and care of the shepherd, a sheep is in very grave danger. Without the guidance of the shepherd, a sheep may starve to death or die of thirst. Out of reach of the shepherd's rod, the lone sheep is in immediate danger of predation from his adversaries. Realizing the desperate situation of his lost sheep, a faithful shepherd will leave the flock that is in good standing, and will brave the elements, the darkness, the dangers which may lie around any corner in order to rescue that which is lost (Luke 15:4). So it is, when the lost sheep is found, there is great rejoicing (Luke 15:5,6)—rejoicing because one who was lost is now found, one who had once known the protection of the fold and the care of the shepherd now knows that once again. Of course, this parable, at least to a degree, is representative of the life of every accountable person on the face of the earth. Unfortunately, the ending is not so happy for everyone. Nevertheless, we have all wandered away from the Lord and gone our own way (Isaiah 53:6). In spite of our rebellion against the Lord, he came searching for us (Luke 19:10). He paid the ultimate price for our rebellion and for our

redemption; the innocent Lamb of God bled and died for a world full of rogue sheep. This is how much our Lord values each soul.

While there are many lessons we can learn from this parable, and many different angles from which we can approach this lesson, I am convinced that the key to this parable as well as the other parables in Luke chapter fifteen is the importance of one. We can learn from this parable, as well as the parable of the lost coin and the prodigal son, that our Lord would exhaust every possible effort to reclaim a lost soul (and he did, by going to Calvary), and so, too, should we. If there were no sinners on the face of the earth save for me, my Lord would have gone to the cross for my sins. While ninety and nine safely lay in the shelter of the fold, the gracious and merciful Son of God still went in search of the one who went astray. The sinless Son of God knew the value of one soul (Matthew 16:26), and that no price could be paid to redeem the souls of mankind apart from his shed blood.

I fear that in too many congregations of the Lord's church we have lost sight of the importance of one lost soul. We live in a world that is enamored with numbers and statistics and immediate results. This craze has not been lost on our denominational friends and neighbors. The recent community church mania is nothing but a reflection of our society's infatuation with statistics and over inflated numbers. The denominations have for years taken advantage of a number hungry, statistic driven culture. Whenever a new program is initiated, vast hordes of people flock to see what the new craze is all about. Popular thought would have us to believe that they must be doing something right with all of the numbers who support such a program. This, of course, is worldly, carnal thinking. The support of the multitude does not guarantee something is right. As a matter of fact, the Bible points out that there is grave danger in following a majority mentality in many instances (see Exodus 23:2; Matthew 7:13,14). Unfortunately, such worldly thinking often negatively influences those who should know better. A numbers mentality has infected many a congregation of the Lord's church. In many congregations, the thrust of the work is focused

inwardly, on the ninety nine who remain in the fold, with little or no consideration given to the one who has wandered away. The proof is abundant. Churches who claim allegiance to the Savior and to the Scriptures, those who claim to be churches of Christ, are appeasing the masses by building gymnasiums (a.k.a. Family Life Centers), hiring glorified baby sitters to serve as youth ministers (not all youth ministers fit this categorization, but far too many of them do), by hosting "Weigh Down Workshops" and every other program imaginable in an effort to satisfy the membership. All the while, the one wanders farther from the call of the Shepherd's voice. Many elders (shepherds, bishops, pastors, overseers) in the Lord's church cower and cater to numbers. For fear of having members attend elsewhere, and losing their contributions, many elderships will give in to the demands of those within the safety of the fold. All the while, the one wanders farther from home. Even many congregations and elderships who would never consider going to the extremes mentioned above are not immune from the immediate results craze. Often the first things to be trimmed from the church budget are evangelistic efforts. When an overseas missionary does not show

the results we think he ought to achieve, we often exercise very little patience, cut the support, and look for another work that will gratify our hunger for numbers. All the while, the one wanders farther into the wilderness.

The parable of the lost sheep should open the eyes of both Christian and non-Christian alike. For those who may not be children of God, realize that the Lord valued your soul enough to come to this earth and give his life in your stead. Will you not obey him who died for you and come into the safety of the sheepfold? Obey the gospel by believing in Jesus as the Son of God (John 8:24), repenting of your sins (Acts 17:30), confessing your faith in Jesus as the Son of God (Acts 8:37), and being baptized for the forgiveness of your sins (Acts 22:16). For those who already are a part of God's family, this parable should impassion each of us to search out those who have gone astray, those who are outside of the sheepfold, and exhaust every possible, scriptural avenue to bring them back into fellowship with God and His faithful children.

WOT

FILL YOUR HEART WITH THANKSGIVING

Helen Steiner Rice

Take nothing for granted,
 For whenever you do
 The "joy of enjoying"
 Is lessened for you.
 For we rob our own lives
 Much more than we know
 When we fail to respond
 Or in any way show
 Our thanks for the blessings
 That daily are ours...
 The warmth of the sun,
 The fragrance of flowers.
 The beauty of twilight,
 The freshness of dawn,
 The coolness of dew
 On a green velvet lawn.

The kind little deeds
 So thoughtfully done,
 The favors of friends
 And the love that someone
 Unselfishly gives us
 In a myriad of ways
 Expecting no payment
 And no words of praise.
 Oh, great is our loss
 When we no longer find
 A thankful response
 To things of this kind.
 For the joy of enjoying,
 And the fullness of living
 Are found in the heart
 That is filled with thanksgiving.

STEWARDS OF GOD

Bill Burk, Seagoville, TX

Every Christian is a steward of God. A steward is one who manages the goods and possessions of another. The Bible teaches that "the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein" (Psa. 24:1, KJV). Everything we have comes from God (cf. Jas. 1:17). Therefore, as good stewards who desire to be found faithful (1 Cor. 4:2), we must seek to use the things with which God blesses us to His glory (1 Cor. 10:31). In Matthew 25:14-30, Jesus sets forth the parable of the talents. This particular earthly story with a heavenly meaning reminds us of the need to be good stewards. Just as the master expected each servant to use the talent/ talents given him wisely and faithfully, the Lord expects us to use the items with which He has blessed us in the same, trustworthy way. The parable also teaches us that one day we will give an account of how we managed the things of God (2 Cor. 5:10).

In a discussion such as this, the need for elders to be discerning, faithful stewards is paramount. Paul, in the three-chapter letter he wrote to the evangelist Titus, spoke of an elder (bishop) being "blameless, as a steward of God" (1:7). The Lord has placed within the management control of Shepherds several things that demand proper handling. Consider that elders must be faithful...

STEWARDS OF THEIR OWN SOULS

Paul, in preaching to the Ephesian elders at Miletus, said, "Therefore take heed to yourselves..." (Acts 20:28). Elders must faithfully manage their own lives if they desire to do God's bidding. Elders must meet several definite qualifications that touch every area of their lives (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9). Constant examination is therefore needed (2 Cor. 13:5). In order to manage others, an elder must first manage himself.

STEWARDS OF THE SOULS OF OTHERS

In the same passage mentioned above Paul said "Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers..." (Acts 20:28). Elders are to serve as shepherds who follow the example of the Good Shepherd who gives His all for the sheep (John 10:11; cf. Luke 15:4-6). Again, in Acts 20:28, Paul urged the Ephesian elders to feed or shepherd the church. The sheep do not belong to the elders but to the

Lord. Therefore, God's pastors must watch for the souls of the Lord's sheep as those who will give an account (Heb. 13:17). How necessary it is that they manage such valuable assets appropriately.

STEWARDS OF THE SCRIPTURES

An elder must know God's word and properly handle it. Savage wolves will strive to enter the flock. Men will rise up speaking perverse things to draw away the disciples after them (Acts 20:29-31). Elders must then hold fast the faithful word as they have been taught, so that they may, by sound doctrine, both exhort and convict those who contradict (Titus 1:9). Elders must rightly divide the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15) so God's people can be properly fed and protected (cf. 1 Pet. 5:1-4).

Every Christian is expected to be faithful in his stewardship. However, no one should be more concerned about this responsibility than godly men who serve as elders. As this congregation searches for men who may lead in this capacity, let us search out those men who know what it means to be good stewards; mature men who will manage God's things and His people accordingly.

WOT

FREE BIBLE CORRESPONDENCE COURSE

If you would like to study the Bible in the privacy of your own home and at your own pace, enroll in a free Bible correspondence course. All materials are free of charge, and you are under no obligation to continue the study. Brother Hap Johnson will be glad to get you started in study of God's word today. Request your free study by writing to the church office at the Sixth Avenue Church of Christ, 1501 Sixth Avenue, Jasper, Alabama, 35501. You may also call us at (205) 384-6446.

REPENT WITHOUT DELAY

Jim Faughn, Paducah, KY

I remember being in a worship service where a prayer was led that I will not soon forget. At least I will not soon forget one phrase in that prayer: "Father help us to repent without delay. You have promised forgiveness if we repent, but you have not promised tomorrow if we delay." Before I could say an "Amen" to that prayer (and since I participated in that prayer) I thought (and have continued to think) about a lot of things. The following things are not exhaustive, but maybe there will be enough to make all of us do a little thinking.

First, none of us have a perfect record. The message of Romans 3:10 and Romans 3:23 both make that perfectly clear: "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: (Rom. 3:10)." " For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23)."

Second, repentance is necessary in order for any of us to be right with God. Repentance is necessary as part of our "primary obedience" to the gospel. In Luke's account of the "Great Commission," Jesus instructed his apostles "...that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem". (Luke 24:47) When those on the day of Pentecost heard the divinely inspired answer to their question, "...Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:38), the answer was to "...Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost". (Acts 2:38)

I have also considered the fact that repentance is not an act that must be done only prior to my being baptized into Christ. From the case of "Simon the Sorcerer" recorded in the eighth chapter of Acts to the book of Revelation where there is instruction for both individual Christians and congregations of God's people to re-

pent, the record is clear. The Bible teaches that, when a Christian discovers that he or she is living in disobedience to the Lord, he or she must change course. In other words, repentance is also necessary for Christians.

These verses also teach about the wonderful love of our Father. They teach that He, indeed, will forgive those who truly repent. They even teach that He wants all people to repent (cf. 2 Peter 3:9).

Repentance, then, is both necessary on our part and is a desire of our heavenly Father. That part of the sentiment expressed in the prayer is absolutely true.

It is also true that whatever we need to do needs to be done without delay. This is especially true with regard to our relationship with God.

Surely all of us are also familiar with the warning found in James 4:13-17 about the danger inherent in thinking that there will always be a tomorrow. As James writes, we should remember that "... (our life)...is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away". (James 4:14)

In view of these passages of scripture and many others, I hope you will join with me in thinking again about that prayer. It *is* a prayer to which we could scripturally say, "Amen." It *is* true that God has promised forgiveness if we repent. It *is* also true that He has not promised tomorrow to any of us.

Along with saying "Amen," may we also all make the commitment that our lives (not just our words) will demonstrate our agreement with this prayer. Let each of us determine that, whenever we find ourselves living contrary to God's will, we will, in fact, **repent without delay.**

WOT

NEW WEBSITE IS ALMOST HERE!

The website for the Sixth Avenue Church of Christ has undergone a complete overhaul. Our website is now more user friendly, and you will find additional tools to strengthen your faith. We will be cataloguing all issues of *The Words of Truth* on our new site. Our domain name has also changed. **The new website for the Sixth Avenue Church of Christ is www.sixthavenuechurch.org.** Effective immediately, the old web address is no longer valid. If you have links on your website to our site, please take note of this change, and update your links. In just a short time you will be able to visit our new site and make use of the tools and information available. Many thanks to brother Tony Oravet for his hard work in developing our new website.

“PREACH THE PREACHING THAT I BID THEE”

B.C. Goodpasture (deceased)

God does not commission men to preach without telling them what to say. He does not leave them free to select anything which a passing whim might suggest. Men, in light of their own limited wisdom, are incapable of formulating a system of dependable teaching. **"Oh Jehovah, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23 ASV).** Men, apart from the leadership of divine revelation, have ever gone farther and farther into the meshes of sin and paganism.

When the Lord sent Jonah, the son of Ammitai, to Nineveh, He commanded him to **"preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee" (Jonah 3:2).** The prophet was not left to his own will and resources to originate a message for the Ninevites. His instructions were specific. The Lord did not, in a general, indefinite way, tell him to "preach" to Nineveh. Rather, He said specifically, **"preach... the preaching that I bid thee."**

Jonah was limited to what God said. He could not add; he could not subtract; he could not devitalize his message by "toning it down." He must thunder into the ears of the Ninevites the severe and startling message, **"Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (Jonah 3:4).** This very thing he did on reaching **"that great city."** His preaching produced results.

The messengers of God, whether human or divine, or both, have always been limited to the will of God. They have had, and have, freedom to speak only within the will of God. Of Jesus it was written, **"Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me), to do thy will, O God" (Heb. 10:7).**

Jesus said, **"I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me" (John 5:30).** Again, **"My doctrine is not mine, but His that sent me" (John 7:16).** **"As my Father hath taught me, I speak these things" (John 8:28).** **"I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, He gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak" (John 12:49).**

These Scriptures show conclusively that Jesus spoke and did only those things which the Father commanded. His freedom of action to do and teach was limited by God's will. The Spirit of the Lord was upon Him, because the Lord had anointed Him to preach. But He,

even though He was the only begotten Son of God, could preach only the good tidings the Father authorized Him to proclaim. God was the Author of His message.

The Holy Spirit is limited in His teaching to the will of the Father. In giving the promise of the coming of the Spirit, Jesus said of Him, **"The Comforter, even the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said unto you... He shall guide you into all the truth; for he shall not speak from himself; but what things so ever he shall hear, these shall he speak: and he shall declare unto you the things that are to come" (John 14:26; 16:13 ASV).**

The Holy Spirit, as a teacher, is limited to the will of God, **"what things so ever he shall hear,"** in His instruction. Apostles and angels, likewise, can proclaim only the message of God. **"But though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach unto you any gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema" (Gal. 1:8 ASV).** The curse of God rests upon the angel or man who dares to deviate from the teaching of the gospel.

If God will not permit apostle, or angel, or the Holy Spirit, or even His own Son, to depart from the message He has authorized, it certainly should not be difficult for us to understand that we are not allowed the freedom of setting aside or of perverting the gospel of Christ. God has commissioned us to preach the gospel, and we are not at liberty to preach anything else. We cannot mutilate the gospel, except at the peril of our own souls and of those who hear.

This gospel is the faith once for all delivered unto the saints (**Jude 3**). It is the sound doctrine (**Titus 2:1**). It is the only word that is able to build us up and give us an inheritance among all those who are sanctified (**Acts 20:32**) and it must be faithfully transmitted from one generation to another. **"The things which thou hast heard from me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2 ASV).** It must be taught fearlessly and faithfully. **"Speak thou the things which befit the sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1 ASV).** **"Hold the pattern of sound words which thou hast heard from me" (2 Tim. 1:13 ASV).** And, finally, **"If any man**

teacheth a different doctrine, and consenteth not to sound words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; he is puffed up, knowing nothing, but doting about questionings and disputes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, wranglings of men corrupted in mind and bereft of the truth, supposing that godliness is a way of gain" (1 Tim. 6:3-5 ASV).

All faithful and sound preachers proclaim the doctrine, or teaching, of Christ. They are, therefore, doctrinal preachers. Every preacher that God has authorized was a doctrinal preacher — he proclaimed the teaching of God. The time has come when many professed Christians do not relish "doctrinal preaching" — the very kind, and, in fact, the only kind that is divinely authorized. No one can be a faithful preacher who is not a doctrinal preacher. The kind of preaching that is needed first, last, and all the time is doctrinal preaching — preaching that condemns sin in every form, preaching that sets forth the whole truth, preaching that distinguishes the New Testament church from the various denominational bodies. This kind of preaching will not please worldly-minded church members, but it will please God and save lost men and women. Regardless of circumstances or consequences, we must "**preach... the preaching that I bid thee.**"

A man's usefulness as a gospel preacher is determined much more by his knowledge of God's word and his willingness to proclaim it boldly and faithfully than by his academic attainments and his ability to please men.

WOT

IT TAKES FAITH TO BE A CHRISTIAN

Eva Nell Brown Naramore

It takes faith to be a Christian,
With desire to do God's will;
Humble attitude with wisdom
Gives us vision to fulfill.
Faith that's strong enough to move us,
To obey the gospel call,
Will lead us to true salvation,
Like it moved a man named Paul.

When the Israelites crossed Jordan,
They were walking on dry land,
Going to the land of promise,
Faithful, keeping God's command.
It takes faith to make the journey.
It takes faith to conquer doubt.
There are steps that we must follow,
With no changes in the route.

With the choice we make before us,
Of what's right and what is wrong,
We need faith with love and courage,
Giving hope to keep us strong.
If we need to mend the bridges
That the storms of sin tear down,
Faith with love entwined together
Is the best of substance found.

When the test of life is given
From the questions ready-made,
And it's time to give the answers,
What will be the final grade?
Faith will take us to the harbor,
On the voyage winds will cease.
When the heart of love is anchored
On the sea of perfect peace.

ASK A BIBLE QUESTION

QUESTION: Does Jesus speak of one or two resurrections in John 5:24-29? If two, please identify and show the difference!

ANSWER: Jesus, in John 5:24-29, clearly speaks of two distinct resurrections that are in sharp contrast with one another. FIRST, there are two kinds of death from which we are raised. Vs. 25 speaks of “the dead” and vs. 28 speaks of those “in the tombs.” The reference simply to “the dead” (v. 25) is consistent with spiritual death, the condition of every unsaved sinner (Eph. 2:1, 5; Col. 2:13); the reference to “the tombs” (v. 28) suggests physical death (cf. Jam. 2:26). Also, the former reference implies that not all the (spiritually) dead will hear the Son’s voice (Gospel), but those who do hear will live (John 10:10; Rom. 6:4; 2 Tim. 1:10). The second category clearly is universal: “all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth.” SECOND, there are two descriptions of resurrection. Vs. 25 speaks of those who hear Christ’s voice “will live.” This is an echo of vs. 24; an appropriate way to describe the spiritual resurrection of regeneration in baptism (Titus 3:5; Rom. 6:3-4; Col. 2:12; 3:1). Vs. 28 speaks of the resurrected as “coming forth from the tombs,” which clearly pictures a bodily resurrection (1 Thess. 4:16; 1 Cor. 15:23). THIRD, there are two different times when the two resurrections will occur. For the first one, Jesus says “an hour is coming and now is.” That he says both “is coming” and “now is” means that the transition was beginning to occur at that very time. It did not technically begin until Pentecost (Acts 2), but He indicates that its time is already present because everything is poised for it to begin. Of the second resurrection, though, Jesus simply says, “an hour is coming” when it will happen. His description in vs. 29 is basically eschatological (future) in nature.

—Mark N. Posey
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