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06 Apr 08
Annual Congregational Meeting
Elder Cheng Wei Nien

Once again, we are drawing near to our Annual Congregational Meeting. This is our yearly event required by our constitution. This year is also our election year. We are coming together to elect/re-elect our pastor, elders, deacons and deaconesses. This election is important, not only because it is required by the government; it is important for members to come together to choose our leaders and show our unity in the Lord. You may ask: why must I come to the ACM? Let's see what the scripture says (1 Thess 5:11-13).

“Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another” (v.11). The church is a big family and every one of us is member of this family. It is therefore important that at least once a year, we come together to get to know each other, to familiarise ourselves with all the activities of the church during the year and to encourage one another unto good works. Our pastor has taken the past few weeks' bulletins to enlighten us about the election and the expected qualities of the candidates. We will also receive the annual report, carefully prepared by our clerk of session. Please read through it and come together for a warm fellowship and mutual encouragement. Our church has two congregations — the English and the Mandarin. Besides these we have the Cantonese group and the Hokkien Fellowship, etc. How much do we know about members of the other congregation/groups and what are they doing in the church? Is there anything we can do to comfort, to encourage and to edify one another? Come to the ACM, not to criticize and find fault, but to comfort and to uphold one another in the Lord.

“To know them which labour among you and are over you in the Lord” (v.12). Do you know the people who labour for the Lord among us and what are their functions and responsibilities? Some may be more prominent than others and we know them, but there are many who labour behind the scene quietly and we may not know who they are and what are their contributions. By reading the annual report, and coming to the ACM we will get to know them so that we can pray for them more meaningfully. We may not know all the individuals who labour among us, but we should know the work of the various ministries in our church. It may encourage you to come and co-labour with them if what they do touches your hearts. The term “over you” refers to the leaders of the church. This is especially important when we come to election. We must know who are the leaders we are going to elect and get to know them as people who are or will be overseeing the activities of the many ministries of the church. These are people who have laboured or will come in to labour for the Gospel and for the spiritual well being of all of us as members. We must therefore know them, pray for them and support them.

“To esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake” (v.13). We have to esteem these leaders whom we have elected. Some church leaders who, for some reasons or others, may not command as much our personal respect as others. Nevertheless, the apostle Paul stresses that all must be esteemed highly by us for two important reasons. (1) There must be an attitude of affection (in love) for all God's servants. (2) for the office and the nature of responsibilities they are holding before God. They are accountable not to us but to God. Therefore we must esteem them highly as God's servants, not because of who they are, but “for their work's sake.” We must therefore elect them prayerfully and having elected them, esteem them “very highly.”

“And be at peace among yourselves” (v.13). The importance of peace in the church among all members cannot be over emphasised. Much dissension in today's churches comes from

members not giving due respect to their elected, and God-ordained leaders, so that these leaders lose their effectiveness to govern and control. This is not to say that leaders can consider themselves exempted from their obligation to behave in the manner that will command the respect of members. The leaders themselves must work in harmony with one another as humble servants of the Lord. "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" (2 Tim 2:24-25). Let us therefore pray that the ACM will go on smoothly and peacefully to the glory of God the Father. It is also essential that you must come and attend the meeting.

13 Apr 08
Solid gold or gold plated?
Elder Foong Kon Yu

When new both a gold plated object would look and feel the same as one made of solid gold. Wear and tear due to time will expose the difference. This is similar to our endurance and ability to stay on a job. When we are first assigned a job, we look at it in three ways: a little apprehensive if we could do a good job, confident that we will finish the job well, and over confident, so much so that we eventually end up doing a job below expectation.

We all know the theory on the steps to complete an assignment. First we pray, then we set to aim for timely completion. Having started with enthusiasm, the next most difficult is the perseverance. This is similar to running a marathon race. Half way through, our legs feel tired, we are out of breath, our mind begins to wonder as to why in the first place we take such a challenge. The successful one would look at the finishing line. He may end up being the last to cross that line but he has the satisfaction that he has completed what he set out to do. He would be able to sleep better than if he had given up half way. In order to drive himself he might have imagined that his loved ones are waiting for him there to tell him what a great job he has done in completing the race. He would imagine the cameras clicking away. When the Apostle Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 4:7 *"I have fought a good fight, I have finished [my] course, I have kept the faith"* he meant that he reached the finishing line. Does not this phrase seem all too familiar? Though it is good to have that verse given to encourage the family of one who has gone to the Lord, it is also a reminder that we all ought to fight on and not give up.

In any case, we are not alone in the fight. God is always by our side to encourage and to give us strength. Again and again we read how the Israelites and Christians faced great obstacles ahead. There are always two views to the same picture. All those scouts sent to view the land of Canaan reported that the land was indeed good but it was not possible to take over that place. If you read Numbers chapter 13, you will notice this verse stands out among those who made the report. Numbers 13:33 *"And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight."* In other words, though Canaan was filled with milk and honey, occupying it would be impossible. However, Joshua and Caleb had a different perspective. Numbers 14:7-9 *"And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land, which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land. If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey. Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the LORD is with us: fear them not."* What is the difference? The first report is made from the angle of man but the report of Joshua is made from the angle of God. When you look from the bottom things appear big but when you look at things from the top, things appear small. In God's eyes, nothing is big since all are created by Him. He looks at us (however big you may be) as grasshoppers. Isaiah 40:22 *"It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in."* I wonder if you can identify who are the grasshoppers, the Jews in the eyes of "the giants" or "the giants" in the eyes of the Lord God.

Be assured that whatever the task may be and however big it may appear in our eyes, God will help us to completion. There is only one condition; that is we are to fear them not (obstacles) but to look to the Lord. God has awards awaiting us to claim. Over and over we read that God's people have fought a good fight and have finished the course and kept the faith. The issues that they encounter are not smaller than ours. When we take up challenges either as new session members or as members assigned with new tasks, let us shine in the end like objects made of solid gold.

20 Apr 08

When all men shall speak well of you
Elder Su Ching Chun

“Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets.” (Luke 6:26). In the Old Testament, false prophets make false proclamations against their conscience for their selfish gains. They falsely proclaimed that the nation would prosper, wars would be won, all of which were music to the ears of the kings and the people. However, pleasant words are not necessarily true words. When one seeks words of praise but not the truth of God, the endings are most certainly sad.

Let me cite an example from 1 Kings Chapter 22. Ahab and Jehoshaphat were planning to go into battle to take Ramoth-Gilead together and hence sought the advice of their prophets. Ahab’s four hundred prophets spoke against their conscience and praised how wise Ahab was, saying he would certainly win the war. Only Micaiah spoke truthfully, advising the two kings to avoid going into battle, or the consequences would be certain defeat. Ahab did not listen to Micaiah; he went into battle and not only lost the battle, but he lost his life too.

We yearn to hear good things about ourselves. When we hear good things about ourselves, we naturally feel happy. But criticisms often make us feel unhappy or even furious. This is a common human reaction to comments made about us. We like to hear good things and we like being praised and respected. If good people speak well of you honestly, thank God! Perhaps you have been very considerate of other people, kind and have done good works.

On the other hand, if evil people speak good words of you, beware! Think carefully about what they say for evil thoughts come out of evil minds “For they sleep not, except they have done mischief; and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall” (Prov 4:16). Why would an evil person esteem a God-fearing person? Consider this: if both good and evil persons approve of you and say good words of you, what does that make you? A hypocrite? Or perhaps you do different things to please different people, without taking a firm stand of which side you belong to? This is not unlike the Pharisees whom Jesus rebuked, whom he called hypocrites.

As such, be careful when the world speaks highly of you. Do not get high headed. Neither seek to do things that please man; rather only seek to please God. Man sees only the outer appearance while “the LORD weigheth the spirits” (Prov 16:2). “Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil” (Prov 3:2). Only then can we truly be a person who does good works, be worthy of true praises from God’s people.

Finally Jesus said, “Let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil” (Matt 5:37).

27 Apr 08
Not to be ministered unto, but to minister
Pr Wu Tien Te

Thank God for the Annual Congregational Meeting and session election last evening. The participation of each member, every vote that was cast and every prayer offered show the support of the congregation to the matters of the Church. For the newly elected session, we should pause and ponder upon the words of our Lord saying "not to be ministered unto, but to minister" (Mark 10:45).

Have the right focus

We must have read or heard news reports on general elections in other countries. The election processes are complicated and the competition fierce. Candidates use various strategies in order to win a seat in the government. Once elected, their status would be enhanced. Little wonder even the disciples were arguing who should be the greatest. Our Lord gave them a lesson: servants are "not to be ministered unto, but to minister."

Our Lord Jesus was born in a manger, without fanfare or servants to serve Him. Jesus came not to be ministered unto, but to minister. When Jesus started his ministry, He "*went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd*" (Matt 9:35-36).

We see that the focus of Jesus' ministry was on man, not things. Jesus ministered to people whenever the opportunities arise, seeing to their physical and spiritual needs. Likewise when we serve in the church, we have also to focus on the needs of others.

Focus on giving

Jesus gave His life a ransom for many, a ransom not for the righteous, but for sinners like us. Jesus stressed that we should give our all when we serve, and at times having to sacrifice while serving. "*The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head*" (Matt 8:20). Jesus went to the cross for the ultimate sacrifice for sinners.

For the newly elected session members, they have their daily lives, work and family to care about. Now, they have taken on the added responsibility to serve in church. All these responsibilities require effort and time. Apostle Paul encouraged us by saying "*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord*" (1 Cor 15:58).

For the congregation, this is the beginning after the election. We must remember to uphold our leaders before God for they also have weaknesses which require your prayers. We must also encourage them and give them our support, just like you need to be encouraged and given support at times.

Dear friends, brethren and church leaders, let us all remember what our Lord has taught us. We must focus our service on the needs of others and on giving our all. I pray that the Lord continue to bless Calvary BP Church as we build the next chapter of our church together.

04 May 08

Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence... (Philippians 2:12)

Elder Foong Kon Yu

Each of my classmates still recalls the day we had a taste of the cane. It happened in the mid sixties when parents would be happy if their children were caned for correction in school, and you would dare not talk about it at home else there could be more caning from your parents. Complaints about or to the school? What is that? It never happened in those days. On that day, our form teacher was sick and we had a fun time, so much so that the noise level reached the Headmaster's (Principal) office. We were immediately quiet when we saw Mr G Singh walked across the basketball court with his long scary disciplinary tool. He said that we were like mice dancing and screaming when the cat is not around. When form teacher, Mr Lim was not around, it was out of sight, out of mind so far as our discipline was concerned.

As Christians, sometimes we feel too that God is absent. There are so many prayer requests that we put forward to God, but He seems so quiet that our prayers appear to be in vain. At best our ways are mediocre as we can only see from a human perspective. We are unable to have a helicopter view and our knowledge of what happens in the future is but guess work. Who would know that some of our modern useful inventions can be so harmful when used improperly. Nuclear energy can be the most efficient power but it can be extremely destructive too. Often times we become impatient and do things the way we think best without waiting for God's answers. No time, we say! Thank God He always has time for each of us. Abraham could not wait for a son, so he had Ishmael with Hagar. He had an excuse. He was old and had "no time". This folly caused endless quarrels which continue till today. Though Abraham was a prophet, as a man, he could see no further than anyone of us. How would Abraham have guessed the problems and misery he brought to his descendants through one of his own decisions without God?

Some would be slothful and think that since there is no one around, we can do what we want with the talents that God blesses us with. The Parable of the Talents (Matt 25:14-29) tells us clearly that there is reward for the useful application of our talents and punishment for wasting our talents. When we are working for the Lord we would be diligent. Our aim is to please the Lord. He is present. He knows who the faithful servant is. He will see and hear all that we do or say. Yes, he also hears our unfruitful selfish quarrels and gossip. Aaron and his sister Miriam were talking and expressing their unhappiness of Moses. They were punished because God heard their unfair and unwarranted comments about their own brother. *"And they said, Hath the LORD indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not spoken also by us? And the LORD heard it"* (Num 12:2).

Adam and Eve could never have imagined that the fruit they took caused the human race to be driven out of paradise. All this happened because in their hearts, they thought they could do what they liked since God was out of sight. God may be out of sight to us but we are never out of His sight. We may feel that God is absent from us but we are always present in His circle of care and concern. He never leaves us alone.

Mice misbehave when the cat is not around. Humans are no different. We do whatever we like defying the very God who created us. We have all theories on our existence. Some people are so sure that we come from monkeys that they speak as though their immediate parents are monkeys. They are so convincing in their write ups that it appears that they were present when life first began millions of years or should it be billions of years now (as we grow a little older, this figure seems like increases by the billion that nobody keeps count). God clearly states that He created Adam as the first man, yet many choose to believe the theory of evolution. To them God is absent just because they do not see Him physically. They blindly choose to ignore the environment that God asks us to observe. *"For the invisible things of him from the creation of the*

world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened" (Rom 1:20-21).

We should be like the Philippians. They behaved and obeyed what Paul instructed them to do. Paul was pleased when he wrote Philippians 2:12 *"Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."*

11 May 08

Filial Piety according to Proverbs of the Bible
Elder Cheng Wei Nien

Today we celebrate Mothers' Day. Traditionally, on this day, children will buy their mothers a nice bouquet of flowers or a small present or bring them out for a nice dinner. This may be a token of their appreciation for what their mothers have done for them, or it can be just a matter of doing their duty. The non-Christians, looking at this, will scoff at us for having done so little. For them, at least, they will burn some silver paper, offer some food at the altar, go and sweep their ancestor's tomb. What does the Bible teach us about how we should show our love to our parents? It teaches us to honour our parents while they are on earth and not after they have died, when it is too late to do anything for them. It is good for our church to devote one Sunday a year to remind us that we should honour our parents. The question is: is this all we need to do? Let's see what the Bible has to teach us from the book of Proverbs.

Proverbs 1:8: "*My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother.*" For a start, it is clear that honouring our parents is not worshipping them when they are dead. It is to hear and obey them when they are yet alive. We must not take our parents' instructions as something ridiculous, burdensome and as restrictions on our liberty. We must count it a joy to have them imparting to us their life experiences. Their teaching should be "an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck" (Prov 1: 9). To hear and receive their teaching willingly and joyfully is so much more beautiful than presenting to them a bouquet of flowers once a year.

Proverbs 10:1: "*A wise son maketh a glad father; but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother.*" Again, we see that a filial son (or daughter) is not one who makes their parents happy once a year on Mothers' Day but one who makes them happy every day throughout the year. Honouring our parents involves our daily walk and behaviour. It is to make wise and prudent decisions in life that will make them happy. "*The father of the righteous shall greatly rejoice; and he that begetteth a wise child shall have joy of him*" (Prov 23:24). Where can we get wisdom? "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*" (Prov 9:10).

Proverbs 15:5: "*A fool despiseth his father's instruction; but he that regardeth reproof is prudent.*" To despise and disregard is opposed to honour. How can we honour our parents and at the same time despise and disregard them? The world today is full of young upstarts who look down on their less educated parents and shout back at them when being reproofed, only to show their regrets by wearing sackcloth and wailing loudly at their parents' funeral. Honouring parents is not just by bringing them to dinner once or even twice a year but rather in every way and every day show our respect and accept their reproof willingly and with humility. A proud and self-confident son or daughter can never honour their parents no matter how much money they spend on them.

Proverbs 19:26: "*He that wasteth his father and chaseth away his mother, is a son that causeth shame and bringeth reproach.*" Parents, when they are old, are usually frail and sickly. They tend to be nagging and sometimes over demanding. How can we neglect them at this stage or even chase them out of our house when they are no longer useful to us? Yet there are children today who do just this but later make a display of their filial piety by burning paper house, cars, TV sets, paper money, etc. for their departed parents. A true filial Christian son or daughter will make extra efforts to meet their needs and demands when the parents are alive when they need them most.

Proverbs 20:20: "*Whoso curseth his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in obscure darkness.*" There are many 'filial' children today who surround their ailing parents not because they care but because they are eyeing the inheritance they might get. If they do not get what they think is their rightful portion, they start to curse them even to their graves. Such behaviour should not be found in those who know God and His Word. "*An inheritance may be gotten hastily at the beginning; but the end thereof shall not be blessed*" (Prov 20:21).

Wishing you all a happy Mother's Day!

18 May 08

Surely the Lord in this place; and I knew it not

Dn Kenny Neo

How easy for us to forget the invisible presence of God in His sanctuary when we come to worship Him. We look at the things that are seen and not at the things that are not seen. As a result, we do our own things during worship service – chit-chatting, roving eyes, wandering thoughts, preoccupied with things of this world; reading the bulletin during preaching or singing. Alas! Never did we realize how disrespectful we are toward the holy and highly exalted God who liveth and seeth all things.

Some even come as though there is no God in the sanctuary. They come casually or haphazardly - habitual late-comings, improperly attired, distractive and distracting others, half-heartedness service, half-hearted singing, men-pleasers. Where is God in their thoughts and minds? The hymn-writer wrote,

We have not feared Thee as we ought,

Nor bowed beneath Thine awful eye,

Nor guarded deed and word and thought,

Remembering that God was nigh.

Spurgeon, annoyed by his congregation for being easily distracted by those who walked in during worship service, decided to tell his congregation that he will announce the name of the person so that they need not turn their heads to see who it was.

How different when we present ourselves before a great man when we are invited to his meeting. Our attitudes are quickly and consciously changed. We come prepared - early, properly and pleasantly attired, fully attentive, ready to give applause and honour.

This glaring disparity in our attitude toward God and men is lamentable. How can we come into this divine consciousness or spiritual awareness of God in His sanctuary? *By faith Moses endured, as seeing him who is invisible.* For faith is the evidence of things not seen. Only a living and saving faith will enable us to see the invisible God.

Moses further gives us a glimpse of the vision of God on the mount. *And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake.* It was so awesome and it begat in him a reverential fear for God. Hebrews exhorted us to *have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire.*

Jacob's encounter with God was a real, divine and personal. He had an awesome awareness of God that scripture testified that *he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.* He was not scared or frightened as unbelievers. When God condescended Himself to reveal to Jacob, it created in him an affectionate reverence for Him. His heavenly encounter with God brought Him to a divine consciousness of His Presence for he said, *"Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not."*

AW Tozer said that "the Presence of God and the manifestation of His Presence are not the same. There can be the one without the other. God is here when we are wholly unaware of it. He is manifest only when and as we are aware of His presence." *In God we live, and move, and have our being.*

Thus saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word. We may rightly phrase it negatively – Thus saith the LORD: but to this man will I not look, even to him that is not poor and not of a contrite spirit, and trembleth not at my word.

Lord, give us faith to know Thee near,

And grant the grace of holy fear.

25 May 08

Are you prepared?

Pr Wu Tien Te

Natural disasters recently in China and Myanmar have taken many lives. Many families and homes were lost. The once happy sounds of families and the voices of loved ones were gone, just like that. The pictures and news from the news media showed us devastating scenes of the aftermath. While we feel for the victims, they are the ones who experience the most pain. Nevertheless, we certainly can draw some lessons from these disasters. Are we feeling: thankfully it is not us who are experiencing the destruction? Or are we being made more aware and vigilant of the return of our Lord, being ever more prepared to meet Him?

The disciples asked Jesus "Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" (Matt 24:3). Our Lord used chapters 24 and 25 to describe the end times. If we study the scriptures carefully, we see that events are unfolding. Oil prices are shooting skyward, there is extended inflation, and even the price of rice is increasing. There is genuine hardship around us, just like what Jesus said: "there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places" (Matt 24:7). What Jesus told the disciples applies to us, very much like the trailer of a movie showing us a snippet of the whole show, telling us to stay focused on what will come after. Of course, we do not know exactly how the story will unfold, but Jesus said "Watch therefore Therefore be ye also ready" (Matt 24:42, 44).

Dear friends, the signs around us are alarms to alert us of the things to come. We must be awake and not be slumbering anymore. The Lord had warned us to be ready!

Things happen in a flash of an eye, and lives are lost as easily. By God's grace we are living today. Apostle Peter said "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet 3:9). While we wait for the return of our Lord, let us give thanks for the life and breath God gives us each day and to ponder if we have been doing the work God wants us to do before Jesus returns. Have we been backsliding in our spiritual lives? Or have we ceased to pray? How are we serving God? Are our family ties close? Dear brethren, we should buck up when we still have the opportunity to do so. "Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near" (Isa 55:6).

While the Lord tarries in His return, there is still opportunity to come to God. We pray that God will grant us strength in these perilous times that we will not be afraid but to walk ever more closely with Him. Are you prepared?

01 Jun 08

Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God
Elder Cheng Wei Nien

The church is the body of Christ and every believer is a member of that body. For the body to grow and function healthily, every member must work together and each perform his or her duty faithfully. "For as we have members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many are one body in Christ and every one members one of another" (Rom 12:4-5). For all members to work harmoniously and effectively, humility towards one another is the key to achieve this goal. On the other hand, "by pride cometh contention" (Prov 13:10) and "Pride goeth before a fall" (Prov 16:18). Calvary has just elected a new session, which consists of a pastor, elders, deacons and deaconesses. We welcome all these people to come on board to serve the Lord. In order for the session to function properly and for the church to grow from strength to strength we need the support and co-operation of every member. Above all, humility towards one another is the most important essence for the growth of this church. The apostle Peter had this in mind when he wrote to the "Elect, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father" (1 Pet 1:2) which includes all of us.

The Humility of the Elders. The elders are to "feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind" (1 Pet 5:2). "Feed the flock" does not mean feeding them only the Word of God which is very important, but also taking care of their spiritual needs and well-being, being compassionate to their weaknesses and shortcomings. "To have oversight" does not mean only to exercise strict control but to help and encourage them when their needs arise. "Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensample (examples) to the flock" (1 Pet 5:3). "Not for filthy lucre" does not necessarily mean for monetary rewards but also for popularity and prestige.

The Humility of the Younger. This is not only confined to the younger members of the session such as the deacons and deaconesses but to every member of the church. The apostle Peter was quite aware that the younger generation could be better educated and are more knowledgeable than the older ones. That was why he started by exhorting them: "likewise ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elders" (1 Pet 5:5). To submit here means to respect the elders for their years of experience and spiritual maturity. Refusal to submit may lead to strife, contention and disharmony, which the body of Christ must never have. In fact, in order to magnify the Name of the Lord, all must be "subject one to another, and be clothed with humility" (1 Pet 5:5). In this way, all our talents and knowledge can be put to good use for the Lord and for the extension of His Kingdom.

Why must we be humble? "For God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble" (1 Pet 5:5). Pride is the opposite of humility and God dislikes proud people. "The pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world" (1 Jn 2:16). Why was the fallen angel cast down from heaven? He was "full of wisdom and perfect in beauty." But God said to him: "thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness: I will cast thee to the ground" (Ezek 28:17). It would be a great pity if some of our bright and capable young men and women cannot be used by God because of their pride and haughtiness. On the other hand, God will give "grace to the humble" (1 Pet 5:5). So let us come to serve Him with joy and humility.

God will exalt the humble. Too often, young and enthusiastic men and women are in their haste to show their knowledge and ability, sometimes with good intentions but they end up causing friction and misunderstanding with others. Let us come and serve the Lord, waiting upon Him to lead and guide us. Be humble and serve "under His mighty hand so that He may exalt you in due time" (1 Pet 5:6).

08 Jun 08

Trivial Matter??

Elder Foong Kon Yu

There are many questions, whenever 1 Samuel 6:1-11 is read. Most of these are actually directed at God. In the past I had questioned too as to why Uzzah was struck dead over what appeared to be a trivial matter. The background of this incident is to be found in the neglect of the ark for half a century from the day it was returned from Philistia. The Philistines seized the ark in the Battle of Aphek (1 Sam 4:11) but discovered to their dismay that it was a dangerous trophy. The Philistines expected blessings. On the contrary there was suffering wherever the ark went. Out of curiosity, some peered into the ark when it was returned to Israel. This was outright against the commandment of God and you may say it is contempt of reverence for God's word. Disobedience. Death!

To neglect the ark was to neglect God Himself. It was effectively to deny both the supremacy of truth and the covenant mercy of the Lord. David was eager to bring the ark back to Jerusalem so that it again can be the centre of Israel's worship. Accompanied by a large cavalcade, David marched to retrieve the ark of God. The goal was simple enough; move the ark back to Jerusalem. They placed the ark on a new cart and fearing that the ark might fall off Uzzah put forth his hand to hold it. He was struck dead! Why was God so angry? We may even say that even if Uzzah sinned, it was so trivial and that it was done with good intent to prevent the ark from falling. God's reaction was so fierce! How can the penalty of death be justified? We are only human to ask these questions. David was unhappy with God too. Obviously he did not think that God's action was justified. What does it mean? Are we in danger of being struck dead like Uzzah too? What does it mean for us today, in the light of Jesus Christ?

Let us look at the whole incident in the light of our scriptures. Firstly, there was no indication that David asked the Lord as to whether, when or how he should move the ark to Jerusalem. Secondly, had the scriptures been consulted, it would have been discovered that the ark was to be covered by a curtain of badger skins; that it be carried only on the shoulders of the Kohathite priests, of the tribe of Levi. Poles are to be run through the rings on the sides of the ark. No one was to touch the ark, not even a Levite (Num 4:5-15, 7:9). God's purpose was to teach reverence and obedience of His word yet now the ark was placed on a cart albeit a new cart. Thirdly, the idea of placing the ark on a cart was the idea of the Philistines. They do not have the scriptures so they are forgiven of their ignorance. The Israelites had the written word of God.

The death of Uzzah also reminds us that we are called to be completely satisfied with the straightforward practical obedience of God's word. We are not to subtract or add to the scripture to justify our actions or for our convenience. It should never be! God is just in that He gave all the needed instructions and warnings. What God has not required of us in scripture is not to be required or enjoined by men, and indeed, by the church today. For any of us to go beyond or aside from what is commanded in the scripture is to presume to be wise above what God has written. He warns us of the consequences of sin and in particular of the sin in altering His word. We are to obey and accept for the word of God is truth. God also knows that we will fall short and cannot get out of sin by ourselves. For that He is gracious to give us a way out. Jesus Christ had to die because sin has to be paid for in blood. Only the pure sinless blood of Jesus is good enough to pay for all the sins of this world. Again for our own good and salvation we are to accept Jesus as our Saviour in simple faith.

The method that David used was wrong because it was not what God has written. The problem was not the physical technique itself by placing the ark on a cart. It was a matter of self-centred pride that did not care to submit itself to God. We are so prone to try to improve on God's methods. We are attracted to building our own carts. Think of the carts that have been built for worship, fellowship, doctrine and even church membership. We devised new plans and have our

own self formed ideas to justify what we say rather than what God says. How easily we clothe our own ideas with the borrowed mantle of divine authority and end up "*teaching for doctrines the commandments of men*" (Matt 15:9).

The ark that we read in the scripture is no longer physically present with us. Today we have Jesus Christ as our ark. He is the ark of covenant, the Saviour of all who trust in Him. Let us then approach our Lord Jesus with reverence and in obedience of His word and commandments.

15 Jun 08

Who is the prodigal son?

Elder Su Ching Chun

Jesus told the parable of two sons: *"and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living... and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land."* This son lost his wealth in wanton living, and he became so poor that he had to feed pigs and even thought about eating what he fed the pigs. According to Jewish laws, pigs are unclean animals, and Jews do not touch them, much less to eat their food. This son found himself in a desperate state, and it is natural that he remembered the happy and bountiful times he had in his father's place.

At this time, the son thought of the love of his father for him, and *"when he came to himself, he said... I will arise and go to my father"* (Luke 15:17-18). He rehearsed the words he would say to the father to ask for his forgiveness. This loving father, however, longed for the return of his son since the day he left. Our heavenly Father longs for the return of sinners in the same way.

The father saw his returning son from afar and went to hug and kiss him. The son told his father what he wanted to say, *"Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son"* (v. 21). At this time, his father ordered the servants to bring out robes, rings and shoes, reinstating this son into his position at home. This son did not have the chance to ask to become a slave. He was repentant and was forgiven. He shall not become a slave in his father's home. Similarly, sinners like us shall become children of God after salvation, not slaves.

Now, there is a slight problem with the elder son, who heard about the return of his lost brother. He was angry and refused to attend the feast prepared to celebrate his younger brother's return. The father came out and said to him *"Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine"* (v. 31). The elder son could not see the love of his father for all his sons and the compassion the father had for his repentant son who had returned. All the elder son had was hatred and anger. Our heavenly Father is ever gracious and longsuffering *"not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance"* (2 Pet 3:9).

What lessons can we draw from this parable?

1. The younger son broke his father's heart, but the elder son could not understand his father's heart.
2. Are we like the younger son such that we forget God when we attain wealth, status, knowledge and power? Did we begin to slacken and not attend worship service and stop serving?
3. The parable reminds us that the younger son is not the one whom we should be sorry for but instead it should be the elder son who thought he was righteous.
4. Are we like the elder son at times to think we are one up because we serve God faithfully?
5. Did the elder son go into the house in the end? If you were the elder son, what would you do?

22 Jun 08

How do we cope when we feel “it’s unfair”?

Pr Wu Tien Te

When we watch a television series, we feel happy when the good people triumph over the bad ones, and they live happily ever after. Perhaps we feel dissatisfied if the conclusion is the opposite. Or maybe we feel that it is not right that the bad people in the show get away with the evil doings. Do we feel the same with our lives in reality? Are we affected by unhappy events? In the Bible, David was a man after God’s own heart, but he had to escape from Saul because Saul wanted to kill David out of jealousy. We may feel that it is unreasonable that a man like David had to go through these unnecessary troubles. How do we cope when we feel like this? Psalm 37 offers some help.

Trust in the Lord, and do good (Psalm 37:3)

As God’s children, it is unavoidable that we meet with injustice and things that we think are unfair to us. Often, the unscrupulous people seemingly get the better deal. Do you get passed over for promotions, get lower salary increments or poorer examination results than those who are against God? Or perhaps you think it is better to do what the people of the world are doing so that we do not lose out? Apostle Peter reminds us *“For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men”* (1 Pet 2:15). When the children of God understand what pleases God, we will strive to do good even in an unbelieving world. We will trust in the Lord and seek the strength to be able to continue to do things that are pleasing unto God.

Commit thy way unto the Lord (Psalm 37:5)

We will face numerous problems in life. These problems can become burdens that add pressure. Sometimes we feel that these burdens are overbearing. If we do not deal with them properly, we may impair our health. David the psalmist said *“Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me?”* (Psa 42:5, 11). But David further encouraged us by saying *“hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance”* (Psa 42:5, 11). Indeed, we thank God for allowing us to come and give Him our burdens (Psa 68:19).

Cease from anger and wait for the Lord (Psalm 37:7-8)

When we have given our best efforts but the results are not up to our expectation, will we be disappointed or be angry? We may wonder why people who do not know God do so well! We place too much emphasis on things we did not achieve and do not see what God has planned for us. David encouraged us to be patient and wait for the Lord. When we wait for the Lord, our perspective shifts from that of a man to God’s own. In such a way, we will be able to trust in the Lord that He will lead and guide us.

Dear friends, when we feel that justice is not done, stop and take stock. Do not let our emotions affect our relationship with God. Do not let these “setbacks” affect our service and lose our joy in the Lord. I pray that God will help us and lead us.

29 Jun 08

“One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple” (Psalm 27:4)

Dn Kenny Neo

Here is David, a man of God, going through great troubles, perhaps persecuted by his enemies and fleeing for his own life. One would think such a man as David would long to be back in the palace or at home to be with his loved ones at such a time. No, but his heart yearned to be in the house of God. This was his ONE consuming desire above all other desires — to dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of his life. What for? It was to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in His temple.

What was the beauty of the LORD that David could behold in adoring wonder and wish he could enjoy it all the days of his life? It is the glorious attributes of God and His divine perfections that greatly attracted David. He never gets bored beholding but rather it inspired him in his pursuit of God. The more he knew about God, the more he was attracted to Him. The more he knew God, the more he loved God. We know people with wonderful personality and excellent character draw admiration and attract others to them. Should not the perfect God attract His people? Sadly and truly, Tozer wrote, “It is scarcely possible in most places to get anyone to attend a meeting where the only attraction is God. *“For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ’s.”* We have greater attraction in our loved ones, worldly pleasures and entertainments, friendship, wealth, earthly ambitions... etc. Where are the lovers of God?

Can we be attracted to God in our Church today? Yes. Think and meditate on the wonderful hymns sung in our worship service, the Lord’s Supper administered and the expository preaching that attended to it unless we have lost the art of true worship. *Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined.* The truth is that God is the most winsome and attractive of all beings and to behold His beauty is one of unspeakable pleasure. The best hymns are those that are full of God and have His attributes in them. The best hymns are also best sung in secret before the Lord.

Faber wrote this beautiful hymn:

My God, how wonderful Thou art,
Thy majesty, how bright;
How beautiful Thy mercy seat
In depths of burning light!

How wonderful, how beautiful,
The sight of Thee must be;
Thy endless wisdom, boundless power,
And awful purity!

Father of Jesus, love’s Reward!
What rapture it will be;
Prostrate before Thy throne to lie,
And gaze, and gaze on Thee!

Spurgeon well summed up in his hymn on the Lord’s supper,

Amidst us our Beloved stands,

And bids us view His pierced hands;
Points to the wounded feet and side,
Blest emblems of the Crucified.

What food luxurious loads the board,
When at His table sits the Lord!
The wine how rich, the bread how sweet,
When Jesus deigns the guests to meet!

If now, with eyes defiled and dim,
We see the signs, but see not Him;
O may His love the scales displace,
And bid us see Him face to face!

Thou glorious Bridegroom of our hearts,
Thy present smile a heav'n imparts!
Oh lift the veil, if veil there be,
Let every saint Thy beauties see!

When Christ, the Lover of our soul, is earnestly preached from the pulpit, our spirits should be stirred, our souls within us leap for joy, our love for Him rekindles, our hearts should burn within us when the preacher expounded to us the things which concern Christ. Are you a lover of Christ? To worshippers of God, true biblical expository preaching is a heavenly feast. Awake, O sleepers and dreamers in the pews, behold your heavenly and eternal lost.

David's other reason is to enquire in His temple. He enjoyed sweet communion and divine fellowship with God in His temple. He has so much to speak with his God. There is no better day and greater joy than to be found in the Lord's house on the Lord's Day. Our worship of God should give us a foretaste of heaven and eternal rest.

---The End---