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01 Oct 06

The mid autumn moon
Elder Cheng Wei Nien

The celebration of the Mid-Autumn festival started during the Soong dynasty when farmers rejoiced after harvesting. It is like the "Thanksgiving Day" in America. The hot summer was over and the cold winter was yet to come. The climate was neither too hot nor too cold. It was just nice for an evening stroll. The sky was usually clear and the moon was bright. It was very conducive for young couples to get to know each other better and to discuss their future plans. Today, the Chinese still treasure this day for young couples to tie their knots and for businessmen to discuss their business prospects. Moon cakes and lanterns add to the fun. Unfortunately, superstitious Chinese changed this very pleasant festival into idol worshipping. *"Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things"* (Rom 1:22-23). Indeed, the moon is beautiful; it was created by God for our enjoyment and not for us to worship. We should worship the Creator rather than that which was created. God created not only the moon, He also created the sun and the stars.

The moon is there for us to realize how great our God is. When we see *"the heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork"* (Ps19:1), we ought to humble ourselves and realize how small we are in the midst of His creation. The psalmist said, *"When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?"* (Ps 8:3-4). Although we are but tiny creatures in this big universe, God is mindful of us, in that He is *"not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance"* (2 Pet 3:9). He was willing to send His only begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to die for our sins on the cross, in order to save us. How sinful it is for men not to worship such a wonderful God who loves them, but instead, turn away to worship idols like the moon, and also for men who only like to enjoy the moon and the moon cakes, but refuse to acknowledge Him as their Creator and God!

The moon is to remind us that while there is yet time we must worship the Lord. One day, the sun, the moon and the stars will shine no more. Our Lord warned us that *"immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven"* (Matt 24:29-30). This is the day our Lord will come and judge the world. We must therefore fear Him and serve Him before all these things happen. The psalmist said this: *"They [believers] shall fear thee [the Lord] as long as the sun and moon endure, throughout all generations. He [our Lord Jesus] shall come down like rain upon the mown grass: as showers that water the earth"* (Ps 72:5-6). The Lord will come and judge those superstitious and rebellious people

who, instead of worshipping Him as the Creator, worship the moon and all kinds of idols. They must repent and turn to the Lord while the sun and the moon are still shining.

The moon and the sun are there not for men to worship but to declare the glory of God. Before God created living things, He "*made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also*" (Gen 1:16). He also separated the year into four seasons and each season has three months. In the middle of each month (according to the lunar calendar) there will be a full moon. Thus, the moon and the sun declare to us the wonderful creation of God who also controls seasons and the tides of the sea. As the psalmist said: "*He appointed the moon for seasons: the sun knoweth his going down*" (Ps 104:19).

Who is in control of all these? None but the Almighty God. Therefore, "*Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, ... While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain*" (Eccl 12:1-2). "***Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man***" (Eccl 12:13).

08 Oct 06

"My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways" (Proverbs 23:26)

Elder Foong Kon Yu

In agricultural communities, autumn is celebrated as a harvest period. There is celebration during this time in almost every culture. In the tropics, it is harder for us to imagine what autumn is like. It is a time when leaves would turn yellow and soon they fall and are ready for the winter snow. It is also a time when the fruits and other crops ripen. God designed that the ripened fruits will be ready for germination in spring. The Chinese have two autumn festivals, one is mid-autumn festival and the other the end of autumn festival. The mid-autumn festival is when the "moon fairy" is worshipped. There is a celebration on the fifteenth day of the eighth month too and we are told to stay off this heathen worship of the goddess of heaven. This is strictly a heathen practice and we are not to take part as a religious affair (1 Kgs 12:32; Jer 7:18; Jer 44:18). The Lord warns us not to provoke Him by joining the worship but to obey His voice (Jer 7:19-23). The festival celebrated at the end of autumn is when the Chinese would eat sticky rice balls. These rice balls are made of glutinous rice flour and the intent is to make the "the god of the kitchen" unable to open his mouth in making the end of year report to his boss. This of course is a heathen practice. We may eat of the moon cake and the glutinous rice balls but these should not be offered up as prayer items. The Scripture calls the harvest celebration the Feast of the Tabernacles described in Numbers 29:12-40 and Leviticus 23:34-43. During this time of celebration, the people are supposed to bring in their offerings and then express their thanks for the blessing of a harvest.

The people were instructed to have offerings for the atonement of their sins. The offering was over a period of eight days. We have conflicts of schedules and sometimes it seems too difficult for us to come to church, much less to remember all the offerings stipulated — goats, rams, bullocks and lambs without blemish. Of course, all the animals that the people offered came from God's blessings. They should also be thankful that God accepts all these offerings. The heathen could have offered ten times or hundred times more but their offerings were just wasted. They do not have a God to accept all these. No wonder David prayed the most touching words recorded for us in 1 Chronicles 29:12-14 "*Both riches and honor come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all. Now therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name. But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee.*"

Thank God that by the death and sacrifice of Jesus, we are made free. We no longer need to make all these offerings. "*And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God'* (Heb 10:11-12). How should we respond to this? How we respond to the calling and commandments of God determines how grateful we are.

Think and digest on this. First, man is lost in sin. Despite all the offerings he makes to his gods, there is no hope. Then there is God who instructs His people on how and what to offer so that their sins can be forgiven. There is hope but the procedures for offerings are no easy task. Finally, there is a free offering that was done on our behalf. We are to accept the Lord Jesus as our Saviour and we are guaranteed a place in heaven. Our prayers go directly to God. There is no need of another mediator other than the Lord Jesus Himself. If today God appears before you and gives you an assessment form, how would you rate yourself from 1 to 10 (assuming 10 is the highest). You are grateful? Where are you each week during prayer meeting? Remember, what does the Lord say to each one of us? "*My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways*" (Prov 23:26).

15 Oct 06
Magnify the Lord
Yang De Gang

"And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence" (Colossians 1:18)

"And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour" (Luke 1:46-47). Jesus said, "He [Holy Spirit] shall glorify me" (John 16:14), teaching us that the Holy Spirit loves to glorify our Lord. Therefore, anyone who seeks the Holy Spirit to dwell in their hearts naturally loves to glorify Jesus too. The life of a believer is one that seeks to place Jesus above all in everything. The Apostle Paul said, "... but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death" (Phil 1:20). How, then, can we magnify the Lord?

1. Fear the Lord

During worship service, we must have a solemn attitude. *"Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools...and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few" (Eccl 5:1-2). "But the LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him" (Hab 2:20). Therefore, be early in Church to prepare our hearts; prepare what we will say to God, sing, pray and listen to the message. Christians nowadays seem to have lost the fear of God and adopt a lackadaisical attitude during worship service!*

2. Serve the Lord

Although the modern Christian is surrounded by many social duties, serving the Lord is always the first priority. This seems paradoxical: if we love the Lord more than anything else, then we can become a good husband, wife, son, daughter, brother or sister. Indeed, if we place the Lord above all things, then the Holy Spirit certainly guides us to become a better person, and enables us to build a good relationship with people. Of course, there may be times where duties clash but trust the Lord to help us and guide us with His wisdom. *"Let all things be done decently and in order" (1 Cor 14:40). Serve the Lord with gladness and enjoy the blessings He bestows.*

3. Obey the Lord

In 1924, Paris, Olympic sprinter Eric Liddell had a very good chance of winning the 100m gold. The Englishman, however, decided to miss the finals because it fell on a Sunday and he wanted to keep it holy for the Lord. His decision shocked the world and England was utterly disappointed. Many regarded Eric Liddell to have lost his mind, while some decided that he was totally foolish and irrational. Eric Liddell prayed and still held on to his decision to miss the 100m finals. Instead, he decided to take part in the 400m race that was held the following Tuesday. Unexpectedly, he won. Such a testimony of putting the Lord above

anything else! We may encounter similar temptations which can cause us to deviate but we pray that the Lord grant us the strength to overcome them.

Let us remember, our Lord wants us to follow Him with one heart, soul and mind. "*For them that honour me I will honour*" (1 Sam 2:30).

22 Oct 06

The man of God (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Elder Su Ching Chun

1. Who are the Children of God?

I remember once when the children were young, we went shopping in a big mall. One of them got lost and we became very worried. Soon after, we heard an announcement through the PA system calling for me. I was relieved after knowing that the missing child was found. I am sure some parents may have similar experiences. The missing child could be located because he knows his father's name.

Today, we are children of God through Jesus Christ our Lord. We know our heavenly Father and we know our sins are washed away. The Apostle John said very clearly "*Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not*" (1 John 3:1). How wonderful it is to be loved by God! Indeed, our value lies in the manner God loves us, making us His children. Therefore, we must live as worthy children by being Christ-like.

2. The Way of a Man of God

Paul wrote to Timothy, telling him the things to take note of, as Timothy looked after his church members, and to teach them the Word of God. A true believer has the Word of God in him, and thus is able to differentiate between good and evil, truth and error. This should be the guide in our everyday living. "*All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works*" (2 Tim 3:16-17). Indeed, we ought to strive to be more like Jesus till the day we meet our Lord. With this objective in mind, our daily living can be one of love, faith, meekness, long suffering and fear for God.

3. Drawing Strength from God

The man of God draws strength from the Word of God. We can grow spiritually by feeding on His Word so that we know right from wrong. Also, we are able to provide when fellow brethren are in need, caring for those in sadness, understanding those who are weak, comforting and praying for each other. Of course, we are not perfect but we have one God, who wants us to be united as one, propagating the Gospel and the ministries in the church. Therefore, we are all family members in the church and should be united to build on each other's strength. This way, we will be able to withstand the attacks from Satan who is ever so eager to weaken us. "*Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour*" (1 Pet 5:8).

Pray more, so that our hearts may stay vigilant. Pray earnestly so that we may do the will of God. What pleases God more than a prayerful heart? Wouldn't God be very glad to bless us

bountifully if we do so? God is the source from whom all blessings flow. Let's draw strength and wisdom from Him, so that we may be "*the man of God*."

29 Oct 06

Beware, lest thou forget

Elder Cheng Wei Nien

Today is Reformation Sunday. We commemorate the reformation of the Protestant churches. Why should we remember something that happened 500 years ago? What has Reformation got to do with us today? If we do not remember, we will soon forget how our spiritual forefathers fought and led us out of the spiritual darkness of the Roman Catholic Church. Not only must we remember, we must also ensure that our next generation knows why we are Protestants. "*That thou mightest fear the LORD thy God, to keep all his statutes and his commandments, which I command thee, thou, and thy son, and thy son's son, all the days of thy life; and that thy days may be prolonged*" (Deut 6:2).

"...*lest thou forget the LORD, which brought thee forth...*" (Deut 6:12). The Israelites were in Egypt. The Lord blessed them so that they were "*fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty...*" (Exo 1:7). But soon they forgot the God who blessed them. So God allowed a new Pharaoh who knew not Joseph to come up and oppressed and enslaved them. The children of Israel cried to the Lord and He sent Moses to bring them out of the land of slavery in Egypt. In order that they should not forget the Lord, the Lord instituted the Passover and commanded them that they should not forget the Lord "*which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage*" (Deut 6:12). However, having enjoyed the land flowing with milk and honey, "*the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim: And they forsook the LORD God of their fathers...*" (Jud 2:11-12). The Lord allowed another Gentile king Nebuchadnezzar to exile them to Babylon.

Lest thou forget "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29). The children of Israel had forgotten the Lord but the Lord had not forgotten them. After 70 years the Lord let them return to their homeland. Sadly, once again they slowly forgot the Lord. God sent His only begotten Son, our Lord Jesus to come to the world to save us. "*He was in the world, ... and the world knew him not ... and received him not*" (Jn 1:10-11). Finally, they crucified and killed Him. But God raised Him up the third day and made Him the propitiation of our sins. The night before Jesus was betrayed, He instituted the Lord's Supper and said: "*this do in remembrance of me*" (Lk 22:19). Before His ascension, He commanded His disciples, "*teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you...*" (Matt 28:20). The disciples and the early Christians therefore went about preaching and establishing churches. They held fast to the teachings of Christ till the 16th century.

Lest thou forget "The just shall live by faith" (Rom 1:17). During the 16th century, the church became Roman Catholics, when the priests kept away the Bible and taught the people to worship Virgin Mary. They also placed statues of Mary and many other 'saints' everywhere for people to worship. They even printed indulgences for people to buy so that they could sin without fear. Believers once again lived in darkness and under the grip of the Romans. God sent a faithful servant, Martin Luther who, during his search of the scripture, came across the text "*the just shall live by faith*" (Rom 1:17). He bravely nailed his 95

theses on the door of his church in Wittenberg and defied the Pope in Rome. He returned the Bible to believers, destroyed the images and reformed the Christian faith. On 30th October 1517 he founded the Reformed Faith of the Christian world. Many were martyred but the church grew from strength to strength.

Lest thou forget "*that in the last days perilous times shall come*" (2 Tim 3:1). The Bible reminds us that "*the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables*" (2 Tim 4:3-4). Slowly, the efforts of Reformation were forgotten and modern theology, Neo Evangelicals, Ecumenicals and Charismatics slowly crept into the churches. We have to be careful lest we forget our fundamental faith that had been very costly fought for by our spiritual forefathers.

05 Nov 06

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:19)

Elder Lawrence Sim

The epistle of 1 John stirs up all who profess to know God, to have communion with Him, and to believe in Him, and that we walk in holiness, not in sin, showing that a mere outward profession is nothing without the evidence of a holy life and conduct. It also helps forward and excites real Christians to communion with God and the Lord Jesus Christ, to constancy in the true faith, and to purity of life.

That essential Good, that uncreated Excellence, which had been from the beginning, from eternity, as equal with the Father, and which at length appeared in human nature for the salvation of sinners, was the great subject concerning which the apostle John wrote to his brethren. The apostles had seen Him while they witnessed His wisdom and holiness, His miracles, love and mercy, during some years, till they saw Him crucified for sinners, and afterwards risen from the dead. They touched Him, so as to have full proof of His resurrection. This Divine Person, the Word of life, the Word of God, appeared in human nature, that He might be the Author and Giver of eternal life to mankind, through the redemption of His blood, and the influence of his new-creating Spirit. The apostles declared what they had seen and heard that believers might share their comforts and everlasting advantages. They had free access to God the Father. They had a happy experience of the truth in their souls, and showed its excellence in their lives. This communion of believers with the Father and the Son is begun and kept up by the influences of the Holy Spirit. The benefits Christ bestows, are not like the scanty possessions of the world, causing jealousies in others; but the joy and happiness of communion with God is all-sufficient, so that any number may partake of it; and all who are warranted to say, that truly their fellowship is with the Father, will desire to lead others to partake of the same blessedness.

A message from the Lord Jesus, the Word of life, the eternal Word, we should all gladly receive. The great God should be represented to this dark world, as pure and perfect light. As this is the nature of God, His doctrines and precepts must be such. And as His perfect happiness cannot be separated from His perfect holiness, so our happiness will be in proportion to our being made holy. To walk in darkness, is to live and act against religion. God holds no heavenly fellowship with unholy souls. There is no truth in their profession; their practice shows its folly and falsehood. The eternal Life, the eternal Son, put on flesh and blood, and died to wash us from our sins in His own blood, and procures for us the sacred influences by which sin is to be subdued more and more, till it is quite done away. While the necessity of a holy walk is insisted upon, as the effect and evidence of the knowledge of God in Christ Jesus, the opposite error of self-righteous pride is guarded against with equal care. All who walk near to God, in holiness and righteousness, are sensible that their best days and duties are mixed with sin. God has given testimony to the sinfulness of the world, by providing a sufficient, effectual Sacrifice for sin, needed in all ages; and the sinfulness of believers themselves is shown, by requiring them continually to confess their sins, and to apply by faith to the blood of that Sacrifice. Let us plead guilty before God, be humble, and willing to know the worst of our case. Let us honestly confess all

our sins in their full extent, relying wholly on His mercy and truth through the righteousness of Christ, for a free and full forgiveness, and our deliverance from the power and practice of sin.

Our God is a gracious and merciful God, and He will take care of us if we look to Him in sincerity in faith. The apostle Paul reminds us that "*we are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed*" (2 Corinthians 4:8, 9). We are reminded to "*cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise*" (Heb 10:35, 36).

Remember 1 John 1:9 "*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*"

May the Lord be merciful and gracious unto us all! Amen.

12 Nov 06

"... they called upon the LORD, and he answered them"(Psalm 99:6)

Elder Foong Kon Yu

Our extremity can become God's opportunity. If we admit our helplessness, surrender our will to God, He can and will help as always. King Hezekiah was under great stress when the propaganda was spread against him. In Isaiah chapter 36, we read how the king of Assyria sent his envoy to Israel with intention to demoralize the people so that they will be cowed into submission. He sent an envoy who made very skilful use of half-truths. He was right in that the people cannot be saved by the Egyptians. He was also right in saying that the other gods was not the answer to their salvation but he was wrong to put Jehovah in the same category. There was a clever blend of ridicule, threats and cajoling. On purpose, the envoy spoke loudly in the Hebrew language so that all the others could hear (Isa 36:11). Today, we replace this with mass media broadcast that has a wider reception. The king's advisors were worried about what the people will hear of the accusation of the Assyrian envoy. The Israelites were helpless and they could do nothing against the enemy. The Assyrian army was strong and their voice was loud. This is always the case in the secular world in that those who are the richest, the strongest, speak loudest. Have we faced similar situations? We are at our wits' ends. We have been "out gunned". We are upset and try our best to limit the accusation to the knowledge of as few people as possible. We may not want to cause others to stumble, as there are half-truths. We may not want to develop a topic for common conversation (or gossip and speculations). However, this may not be within our control. Notice that Hezekiah did not attempt to answer any of the charges. He was silent and he commanded his people to be silent too. "*But they held their peace, and answered him not a word: for the king's commandment was, saying, Answer him not*" (Isa 36:21). It is pointless to engage in endless arguments that draw us further away from the truth. The king instead rent his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth and went straight into the house of God (Isa 37:1).

Here is a model of the right response to a threatening situation, not with blind optimism but in context of repentance. Hezekiah prayed. He laid all the threats and accusations before the Lord. He did not ignore them nor give in to them. He realized that the prophet Isaiah was praying for him and the nation (that was now under threat) as well. What a blessing and joy it is to know that we have praying partners. We are taught in the scripture to seek help from others to join us in prayer. "*Moses and Aaron among his priests, and Samuel among them that call upon his name; they called upon the LORD, and he answered them*" (Psalm 99:6). Letting others know about our problems and coveting their prayers also help us "share the burden." We may receive sound advice and help from those who have gone through similar experiences. However, the most important of all, they can pray together with us. It is a joy to know that our brethren share our blessings as well as our anxieties. Here is the pattern of Hezekiah's prayer. He appealed to the Creator God, acknowledging His authority over all. Then he asked God to note all the threats and insults spoken by the enemy. He remembered that God alone is God. God knows everything and the intent of every spoken word. He looks at the inner man. Whatever the evil intention of man, it cannot be hidden. Beware that we are accountable for each word we speak. We may choose to use words to hurt others and with intention to win an argument. Very often, these words are only half-

truths. Worst of all, we take the words of what others say and then repeat them after rephrasing, adding or subtracting to make them appear as the truth. This is not truth! Be forewarned that God hears all (and reads all as well).

As Hezekiah prayed, God showed to the people that He is in control. God is and will always be in control. All glory to His name. He smote the Assyrian army. The originator who planned to topple Israel with half-truths was not let off the hook. We read that the king of Assyria (Sennacherib) himself was killed as he was worshipping. He was praying to his own little god. He wanted to start propaganda against a Godly man. In turn, he was killed by his own sons because someone else started propaganda against him. Here is the contrast. Sennacherib's prayer led to judgment and Hezekiah's prayer led to blessing and assurance. Here is a little note to remember: **No God, know anxiety. Know God, no anxiety!**

19 Nov 06
Harden not yr hearts
Elder Su Ching Chun

"While it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation" (Heb 3:15).

1. The hardened hearts of Israelites in the wilderness: When Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt God demonstrated His power through the miracles that were performed. The people experienced God through such extraordinary happenings and praised God for His mercy on them. They also thanked Moses for his great leadership.

However, they encountered problems with food and water in the wilderness, and they began to murmur and blame Moses. They said very irresponsible things. *"And the children of Israel said unto them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger" (Exo 16:3).* When there was no water, they murmured again: *"Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?" (Exo 17:3).*

Have the people forgotten so quickly the sufferings in Egypt that they began to murmur when they met some hardship in the wilderness? Such hardening of hearts and murmuring did not please God. These people were not allowed to enter Canaan except for Joshua and the second generation descendents.

Drawing a lesson from the episode, we realize that we also murmur, just like the Israelites did. We thank God for His blessings when the days are smooth sailing and peaceful. When troubles arise, we begin to question God: Are you not the source of all blessings? Have you not listened to my prayers? Why haven't my problems been solved?

2. The Israelites rejected Christ: In Jesus' ministry, He performed miracles, healed the sick, cast out evil spirits and preached the Gospel. Jesus proved that He is the Son of God, the Messiah and the way to everlasting life. Sadly, the Israelites hardened their hearts once again to deny that Jesus is the Messiah. They sent Jesus to the Cross even though no crime was found against Him. Such was the extent of human hearts that hardened against God and provoked the wrath of God. In A.D. 70 Israel fell and the Israelites were dispersed all over the world.

3. The Lesson: We are the children of God, bought by the precious blood of Christ on the Cross. How can we ever forget such mercies, much less begin to murmur whenever obstacles were encountered in life? Is it God's fault that we face problems? We are too used to blaming others and fail to take a step back, calm ourselves down and look to God in prayer to seek his guidance and help. We also need to learn to be patient as we wait for God to help us in His time. If we all learn to trust the Lord fully in all things, like our salvation through faith in Christ, we shall be able to obey and trust with patience, humility and meekness in the likeness of a true child of God.

26 Nov 06
Humility
Mr Yang De Gang

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt 11:29-30).

"Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble" (1 Pet 5:5).

There was once a Chinese scholar who wrote a poem which translates as: "The greatest literature belongs to China; where in China the best comes from San Jiang; and in San Jiang it belongs to my hometown; and in my hometown, it comes from my brother; and it is from me where my brother learns literature." Well, not exactly a humble scholar as we see his arrogance in the poem. Indeed, many people are proud and like to elevate themselves. However, as a believer, the Bible teaches us to be humble and we ought to show it in our lives.

A humble, godly person desires the Word of God. "*Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the LORD: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth" (Hos 6:3).* The reading of the Scriptures and prayer are the two pillars of a Christian life and our humility can often be measured against our attitudes towards pursuing spiritual maturity. A humble person yearns to know more about God.

A humble person submits himself to God in all things. Humility is an attitude in a Christian because he yearns to rely on God and not himself. Many faithful servants of the Lord had shared their experiences, saying that submission, reliance and help from the Holy Spirit is the only reason for accomplishing anything for the Lord. Indeed, what we do in this world, whatever success we may have is but a grain of sand in the eternity of time and vastness of the universe. It comes to nothing unless we rely on God. "*Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts" (Zech 4:6).*

A humble person glorifies God in all he does. When the disciples of John the Baptist said to him: "*Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him" (Jn 3:26),* John replied simply: "*He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).* This is a clear example of humility. If there is an increase in the church, success in the mission fields, will we forget to glorify God?

Hudson Taylor said "When we seek an increase in our spiritual lives, we are seeking for a personal gratification. Instead, we should seek to please God and be a blessing to others." Therefore, we have to constantly remind ourselves "*that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death" (Phil 1:20).*

Jesus not only teaches humility, He also practises it by washing the feet of His disciples. I pray that we can all enjoy the blessings from God to all His children who seek to be humble in Him.

03 Dec 06

The multitude of heavenly host
Elder Cheng Wei Nien

In three weeks' time it will be Christmas. The whole world is looking forward to this very auspicious day which began at the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ 2000 years ago. Many choirs are practising their pieces to sing in places of worship and other public areas.

Christmas carols are already in the air everywhere in the shopping malls and in many places of entertainment. Unfortunately, to many people, this music means nothing to them except that it is a time for fun and indulgence. For us, believers, Christmas must bring to our hearts not only joy but thanksgiving. Two weeks ago, we had a combined praise service in Calvary. The English and Mandarin choirs put their strong voices together and brought out music with great strength and conviction. It reminded me of a greater choir which sang on the very night of the birth of our Lord Jesus and Saviour.

"I bring you good tidings of great joy" (Lk 2:10). Although our combined choir looked big in the church sanctuary, it was small compared with the multitude of the heavenly host (v. 13). This was in the actual night of the birth of our Lord. No earthly choir can ever match this. The message was even greater: *"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord"* (v. 11). One wonders why such an important message was announced to only a group of shepherds and not to the whole world. In fact, it was indeed announced to the whole world but only the shepherds heard it because they were "watching by night". The rest of the people were spiritually asleep. This is so even today. The Christmas message is still being announced to the world but only a few are spiritually awake to receive it. The shepherds, having heard the good tidings of great joy,

"came with haste, and found...the babe lying in a manger" (v. 16). Having seen this, *"they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child"* (v. 17)

Although the world was asleep and missed the gospel news when the multitude of host sang, they were able to hear the news from the shepherds who became great evangelists after having seen Christ. Believers today are also shepherds who have heard the gospel news. It is therefore important that we too become evangelists and go about spreading this important news to the world.

"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain" (Rev 5:12). The multitude of heavenly host did not stop singing after Christmas. They continue to sing in heaven round about the throne praising our Lord Jesus Christ who was the Lamb that was slain on the cross for our sins. John the apostle saw this and said: *"And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing"* (Rev 5:11-12). One day, we believers will be in heaven joining this heavenly host numbering thousands of thousands, singing praises to our Lord Jesus Christ. However, not all who hear the Christmas songs on earth will be there. Only those

who believe and accept Jesus as their Lord and Saviour will be there. Friends, will you be there also?

"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven" (1 Thess 4:16). One day, the multitude of heavenly host together with the archangel will come to earth again, this time accompanying the Lord himself. The trumpet shall sound and great things will happen. *"... the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord"* (I Thess 4:16-17). Once again, not all will hear the sound of the trumpet and singing. Only those who are in Christ will hear it. They will be received to meet our Lord and Saviour in person and *"so shall we ever be with the Lord."* The rest will be left behind to suffer the great tribulation. So friends, are you among those who will be received to meet the Lord when He comes with the multitude of host? Make sure that you receive the Lord this Christmas.

10 Dec 06
Christ liveth in me
Elder Foong Kon Yu

What would your reply be when someone whom you are witnessing to tells you that he is not good enough for heaven as he is a sinner. The perception of most people is that heaven is a place for people who are not sinners. If that is the case, I am afraid that heaven would be vacant. Yes, heaven is a sinless place filled with people who were once sinners. However, these sinners are now sinless because their sins have been washed away by the blood of Christ. Here is the answer to that reasoning. As Christians, we are more exposed to dealing with sins honestly. That question of sin has caused some new Christians (and may be old Christians too) to be uncertain if they are true Christians. At times, they think they are true Christians. Then at other times, they seem so hopelessly sinful that they wonder if God's new life is really in them.

Sin in our lives can sometimes cause us to doubt whether we are Christians. Yet, in the Bible, we find believers trusting in God — even when sin seemed to be strong in their lives. The Apostle Paul deals with this in Romans 7:24-25 "*O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.*" Sin is there and Paul was not spared though we know that he walked closely with God. He was sad as he thought of how sin overcame him too. Take note that Paul also thanked God that his sins were all washed away through the Lord Jesus Christ. When we think of sin, we also think of God purging them away. Psalm 65:3 "*Iniquities prevail against me: as for our transgressions, thou shalt purge them away.*" This does not give us a license to sin wilfully; we should not doubt that we are Christians who are drowned in sin.

Some sins begin with our human weakness, and come upon us unexpectedly, although we do not want to sin. At other times we intend to sin. These sins contain all kinds of other evil mixed in them. We must make a distinction here. Unexpected sins come from our human nature and will always trouble the Christian. Sins that we want to do, and that bring other kinds of wrongdoing along with them, make it very hard to see whether a person is a true Christian. Nevertheless, when we turn away from serious, deliberate sins against God, we regain the sense of being true believers. After David had sinned against God by numbering the Israelites, he repented of his sin: David's conscience was troubled after he had counted the fighting men. He confessed his sin. 2 Samuel 24:10 "*And David's heart smote him after that he had numbered the people. And David said unto the LORD, I have sinned greatly in that I have done: and now, I beseech thee, O LORD, take away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly.*" Notice that David calls himself God's servant here. Even though he has sinned deliberately, and had been foolish, when he turns from sin, he immediately knows that is a true believer.

How do we handle those unexpected sins that come into our lives because we are naturally weak and sinful? Romans chapter 7 deals with this. Certainly, Paul knows that he is a sinner, yet he thinks of himself as a believer. He knows that he fails to keep God's law yet he blames himself and not God or His law. Like you and me, Paul is clear that he wants to do

good and keep God's law and turn away from all evil. Romans 7:19 "*For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.*" Sin is a burden and we do not like it in any way, and we want to be free from it. Romans 7:24 "*O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*" The scripture says that even when we may be living under the pressure of the power of sin, there is something in us that is fighting against it. Paul is glad that the struggle ends in victory over sin. Romans 7:25 "*I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.*"

Are you like Paul when you find sin unexpectedly getting the better of you? Do you blame yourself, not God's law, when you fail? Do you blame yourself against sin and do you want to do good? Is there something in you that fights against sin, and that is glad when you do God's will? If so, sin may get the better of you when you least expect it but you can still think of yourself as a believer. Be forewarned, avoid sin and fight against it. The more you do so, the more certain you will be of God's love for you. Galatians 2:20 "*I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.*"

17 Dec 06

Change in the life of Matthew the tax collector
Elder Su Ching Chun

What kind of a man was Matthew? We know that Matthew was a Jew who collected taxes at the customs from people and traders passing through Capernaum by the appointment of the Roman government. In those days, these tax collectors were able to collect a portion of tax as commission for themselves. However, they abused their power many a time and the Jews hated these people.

It was when Jesus was preaching in Capernaum that he saw Matthew at the customs, and said unto him: "*Follow me.*" Matthew arose and gave up his lucrative business to follow Jesus upon hearing the Lord's call. This is a drastic change, especially for a person whose purpose in life might very well be to amass more money. Nevertheless, we also know that our Lord has the power to change lives. Hence, when Matthew was called, he certainly was not able to refuse.

Following his change, Matthew held a family worship in his home and invited his friends. Among those invited were ex-colleagues in the tax collecting trade, Jesus and His disciples. The Pharisees were the first to fire their salvo. They said "*Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?*" They actually meant: "If your master know the background of these people, he should be too ashamed to be even eating from the same table as them." Matthew, the host, did not comment on the remark, knowing very well that what the Pharisees said was not wrong. He did abuse his powers on his own people. Naturally, Jesus' reputation will be at stake by calling him to be his disciple and to eat together.

Jesus countered the Pharisees' remarks personally with these words: "*They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.*" Indeed, the Pharisees thought themselves to be righteous, putting people down with their 'holier-than-thou' attitude. More importantly, they were only interested in their "holy" outward appearances and were seldom interested in the welfare of their brethren. However, our Lord came to seek sinners and those in need of help. Jesus need not have come if there were no unrighteous people on earth. But all have sinned and Jesus' purpose is to seek sinners like us. It is not unlike the analogy of a patient being treated by the doctor. Matthew was a sinner but Jesus saved him and gave him a new life.

Let's consider what Jesus said next: "*I will have mercy, and not sacrifice.*" Do we understand its meaning? Jesus said this to correct those who thought themselves highly as teachers at the time. Jesus has great mercy for sinners like Matthew and us. Let's draw a lesson from this incident to understand the love of God for us, and also the spirit of a repentant sinner to become a worthy vessel for the Lord.

24 Dec 06
Lessons from Joash
Yang De Gang

Joash was seven years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem. His mother's name also was Zibiah of Beersheba. And Joash did that which was right in the sight of the LORD all the days of Jehoiada the priest (2 Chronicles 24:1-2).

Someone who does not care about happenings around him is like the two persons who escaped into a life boat during a shipwreck. In this particular life boat, there is also a hole on one end of it and these two persons watch the people on that end frantically scooping water out to prevent the boat from sinking. One of the two said, "Thank goodness, the hole is not on our end!" In this respect, the Bible is like a mirror by which we can reflect on our own ways.

In Israel's history, Joash is Judah's last King. His life gives us many lessons. When Joash died, he was forty seven, right in his prime. *Joash did that which was right in the sight of the LORD all the days of Jehoiada the priest.* When Jehoiada died, Joash became a totally different person. What lessons can we learn from his life?

1. A believer must mean what he says. Joash only did that which was right when Jehoiada was around. He relied on Jehoiada, not God, for his spiritual foundation. His faith is passive, not active. Maybe Jehoiada was strict and gave Joash many advice, but in the end, Joash showed that he did not really fear God after Jehoiada was gone. God wants our faith in Him to be manifested both in the heart and by our mouth. A child can be brought up in the most faithful Christian family but his faith must be tested. He must display his unwavering faith in God through all circumstances. God wants every one of us to build a true relationship with him. This is proven by our hearts and by what we say.

2. A believer must be a Christian inside and outside. The life of an Israelite is centered on God and His laws. The priests and prophets taught this from the beginning. Joash first faced pressure from some leaders who wanted him to permit idol worship. He buckled under the pressure. When Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, reprimanded Joash, Joash would hear nothing of it. He even ordered Zechariah to be stoned. After this, the Syrian king attacked and won the battle. Joash ordered the wares in the temple to be offered to the king as ransom to leave his land. Joash relinquished God from his heart.

Today, a Christian will certainly face pressure from our surroundings. They can be different opinions, practices or religion. One cannot love God and also love the world at the same time. It is one or the other, never both. Therefore, when we choose to be a Christian, be a true believer both inside and outside.

3. A believer must finish what he starts. Joash was king for forty years. Then he died. We too have a start in life and will also meet our end one day. In this ever changing world, how can we stay steadfast? The Chinese idiom says: in a river, either you row your boat and advance, or you get carried backwards by the current. There is no middle ground. Are we

rowing our boat in this life's journey? We must finish the course of our life advancing for God.

We have an unfinished journey ahead of us. Let us not be like Joash. Let us instead stay faithful in the Lord, complete our race and face God joyfully one day.

31 Dec 06

My Grace is sufficient for thee! (2 Cor 12:9a)

Elder Lawrence Sim

The year 2006 came and will lapse into history in the next few hours, and looking back, it was just like yesterday when we ushered in the new year. Time flies and we will enter the new year 2007 very soon. Time and tide waits for no man! Now we are here, the next moment, we may be gone. Do you realize this? But, our God is the same yesterday, today and forever, and He is in control of our lives.

In the last 60 days (2 months) alone, we heard of 7 sudden deaths which were reported where the deceased failed to wake up from their sleep. The young, the middle aged and even the health-conscious people die in their sleep. Does this worry you? Are you concerned about your life? Where would you be if the Lord calls you home anytime? Death has no sympathy for anyone, and it strikes anyone, anywhere. What is your plan for eternity? Have you received the salvation grace of the Lord Jesus?

This year, we saw more disasters like typhoons, floods, earthquakes, diseases, suicide bombers, air crashes, train crashes, bus crashes with many lives lost, etc. which occurred around the world almost daily. Reflecting back on 2006, what have you done for the Lord? You wonder why time flies away so fast. The Bible tells us in James 4:14 " *Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.*" So, what have you **not** done for the Lord? Are you still waiting for something to happen before you start to do something for the Lord? The day may not come as you planned; man proposes, but God disposes.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:2, Paul reminds the people: " *For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night*" and in 2 Peter 3:10, Peter reminds the people: " *But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.*" Are you ready for the Lord's return?

God has given you your talents, and He knows your abilities and limitations. Remember God's assurance to Paul: " *My grace is sufficient for thee*". So, we must not give excuses that we can't do this, or that. If you think you can't do, pray and ask God for directions and wisdom. He has promised that He will not leave you nor forsake you if you look to Him, and call upon Him. How wonderful and marvellous is His love!

Calvary B-P Church has been much blessed this year. Many people have come forward to serve according to their ability and capability. Are you serving, or are you looking for some areas that you can serve in? We thank God that, while we labour together, the Lord enabled us to grow. Some have planted, some have watered but God gave the increase (1 Cor 3:6).

Today, we bid good-bye to the year 2006 which would slip into history very shortly, and we look forward to the new year 2007. Have you any plans to serve the Lord next year? We pray that you will arise and come forward to offer your services for the Lord. " *See then*

that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (Eph 5:15-16).

To live without Christ is to die without Him. To die without Christ is to spend eternity without Him. Remember: "Only one life, t'will soon be past; only what's done for Christ will last". Pray that the Lord will continue to shower His blessings upon us in the new year, as we continue to serve Him! Amen.

Blessed New Year to one and all!

---The End---

