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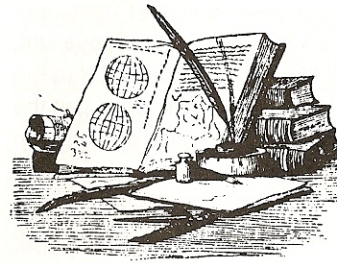


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The Editor's Preface

-- 1 --

A piece of ancient Chinese poetry reads like this:

I begin to work at sunrise
And retire at sunset.
As I work hard everyday,
The imperial sway has no part in me.

This short epigramme indicates an agrarian life following the rhythm of day and night. Without modern lighting facilities, night in the ancient world appeared too overwhelming for people to see and to work. Jesus Christ in his ministry was very conscious about His work for the Father. He remarks, "We must work the works of Him who sent me, while it is day; night comes, when no one can work" (Jn 9:4). The concept and practice of the "work" (deeds, fruits) is one of the main concerns in the theology of the Gospel of John. In the Fourth Gospel Jesus is working, just as the Father has worked (Jn 5:17). The work He does is the will and word of God (Jn 4:34). His doing is the work of God, which people must accept. And this is faith (Jn 6:26-28). Those who do the work of Abraham (believe and obey the word and work of God) prove to be the children of Abraham (Jn 8:38-41), just as Jesus does the works of the Father. Since Jesus and the Father are one, those who believe and do the work of Jesus Christ, believe that Jesus is Messiah, preach the gospel of the Kingdom and fulfill the commandments of God, to do the works of the Father.

Recognizing the mutability and mortality of human life, one must work for the Kingdom while he is still alive. Taking into consideration Jesus Christ's work of ministry we must understand the scope of His

love and the purpose of the Incarnation as expressed in the Prologue of the Johannine Gospel (Jn 1:1-18, cf. 3:16, 20:31, 1 Tim 1:15). Those who work for the Lord, will find that the more they love and work for Him the sweeter the Lord Jesus and more fruitful His sacred work grow. But the workers for the Lord must undergo a fundamental process of faith growth. To illustrate the importance of how we need to know Jesus and have a corresponding faith in His work, let us read the article "On the Way to Bethany" to reflect the questions posited by the Gospel of John concerning the work of Jesus the Son of man:

1. Jesus states that the Father dwells in Him and so He carries out His work. Do you abide in Jesus and His words of teaching, or do you lay down human precepts as a substitute for the divine will and word?
2. Jesus works not for His own glory, but for the glory of the Father who sent Him. Are you working out of self-conceitedness and striving for the recognition and commendation of people?
3. All the passion sayings of Jesus Christ refer to the suffering, death and resurrection of the Son of man (Mk 8:31-3; 9:30-32; 10:32-34). The way of the Cross is thus the teaching on discipleship, linked with sufferings. Do you enjoy material prosperity or do you learn from Jesus's meekness, humility, and material poverty in serving the Lord's work?
4. In the incident of Lazarus' resurrection, Jesus wept for the Jews' hardness of heart, lack of spiritual insight, and for their going against the truth and faith. Would Jesus weep today?

-- 2 --

Included in this issue are also some short essays and sketches which serve to shed some light upon the various aspects of faith expressed in a Christian's daily life. The grace one has received of peace, joy and righteousness in the Lord can only be preserved by the daily renewal in fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ through prayer, meditation, charity, and Bible studies. The secret of this fellowship with the Lord lies in faith. For this reason, everyone must understand the implications of faith and its relation to the grace of God. With faith one sees the divine act of creation and believes what God prepares for us in the future. An active faith is, according to the Gospel of John, the proper understanding of and response to the revelation in Jesus. The revelation of God in Jesus has been manifested in history as the Incarnation, His ministry characterized by an all-embracing love and divine power, and the ministry of the early church through the eschatological downpouring

of the Holy Spirit. In our present age, we have seen how the Holy Spirit has come to move, abide with, and guide the true members for the Kingdom. To receive divine blessing, faith is as essential as ever before.

There are two ways of coming to faith: through seeing and through hearing. The way of sight, however, does not guarantee anyone a genuine faith in Jesus. Many of Jesus' contemporaries witnessed His signs and wonders, but were still hardened in their hearts. Some saw Jesus and came to believe in a superficial way, while others came to authentic faith as soon as they learned about the meaning of messiahship. Why did some people see Jesus and His sign but not believe in Him? "Misunderstanding" is one of the key answers. People who misunderstood Jesus as a supplier of bread and fish failed to see that He is the living bread, whereas the others only considered the messiahship from the sociopolitical perspectives. They did not understand that Jesus came to establish a Kingdom which transcends mundane bounds.

God blesses those whose faith comes from hearing His words. In the Old Testament, prophets were revealed visions, but from time to time the spoken word or "oracle" remained the common means of prophetic communication. The oracles are introduced by "Thus says the Lord" and supported by the divine approval and blessing. The chosen people received blessing through their faith and obedience but encountered catastrophes when they forsook God and His commands. In the New Testament, the relationship between God and His believers is likewise dependent upon how they hear, believe and act upon first the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ and then the apostolic message (2 Tim 1:12-14; 1 Cor 15:3-4; 1 Tim 3:16; Ac 2:14-39; Eph 2:19-22). The gospel of salvation or word of truth brings people to the Lord Jesus Christ and His "way, truth, life;" (Jn 14:6; 20:31; Ac 4:12, 10:43; Jn 3:3-5; Tit 3:5-7; Gal3:26-4:7). It is thus crucial for one to respond to and believe in the message. Then he who believes would call upon the Lord for deliverance and salvation (Rom 10:12-18). Hearing requires a discerning faculty of mind (Ac 17:11) and a determination to follow Jesus and do the will of God (Lk 11:28; Mt 7:24-26). Jesus remonstrated Thomas for his slowness to believe and an assumptive demand for a sign, even though the risen Lord had already appeared to the other disciples (Jn 20:19-24).

Another vital aspect of a Christian's faith is its application. As convincingly expressed in the Book of James, without practice faith is dead. When one sees other people in hunger or shuddering without enough warm clothes, his mere remark that they go home and enjoy a

good meal or put on a heavy coat contravenes a Christian ethic. Similar to what is required of love, faith is also an externalization of inner goodness and compassion. A faith commendable in the sight of God must be active, pure, and full. Men and women of great faith in history have demonstrated one common trait; they obey the command of God and accept seemingly impossible situations. By faith the impossibility is converted into a wide possibility. One recalls that Isaac was told by God to remain in Canaan during a severe famine (Gen 26:1-5). It was upon the covenantal promise that Isaac believed and obeyed God. The practical faith produced for him a quiet fortitude even before the harrassment of the inimical Philistines. Isaac's faith in God not only transformed a barren landscape into a fertile field but also converted the enemy to acknowledge God and to seek a peaceful resolution. Through the providential care and protection, Isaac was able to receive a "hundredfold harvest" (Gen 26:12-14) and make a treaty with the oppressive Philistines. One cannot miss the clear spiritual teaching: the name of the locale Beersheba, the place where Isaac the man of peace and prosperity dwelt, fittingly signifies a "well of plenty" or "well of treaty" which comes from the practical faith and moral excellence of Isaac. The writer of the book of Wisdom correctly points out the common experience of the chosen people in their worship of God:

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
and do not rely on your own insight.
In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths.
(Proverbs 3:5-6)*

-- 3 --

Next, we come to the question of truth. Truth is given a definitive meaning in Jesus's words of self-revelation: "I am the truth". To the Jews, Truth and Word in Psalm 119 are identified with the Law of God. In Jesus the Law or Wisdom of God is endowed with life, for in Jesus there is everlasting life. The glory revealed in Jesus was "full of grace and truth", and so in the age of the New Teatment, Jesus Christ, as a contrast to Moses and the Law, is the giver of the new spiritual law, summarized in the love of God and humanity. Jesus is the incarnated Word and in Him there is light, life, and truth. As a Son He speaks and acts according to the Father's will. The Word which He speaks from the

Father is truth, as the Father never changes and is the source of Truth and Life. Jesus the Incarnated Word provides a perpetual supply of the living bread and living water for the true worshippers. Through faith in Him believers receive the Truth (Eph 1:3-14) which saves and sanctifies them through His precious blood (in washing of regeneration: Tit 3:5; Jn 3:5) and through the Holy Spirit (2 Thess 2:13). Truth motivates the believers to comprehend the power of the faithfulness and love of God. Jesus came to the world to save both Jews and Gentiles (Ac 20:28; Rev 5:9-10). He has given the promised Holy Spirit, which is identified as the Spirit of Truth (Jn 14:16-17, 26; 15:26; 16:13) to teach, to guide, and to comfort the believers in the community of faith characterized by Christian love.

Just as the truth is the true life of God (Jn 1:4), the saving truth (Jn 8:32) is the true life for people (Jn 8:12) and is inseparable from the Holy Spirit. We believers must receive the truth by doing the truth, the Gospel of the Kingdom, by worshipping God in spirit and truth (Jn 4:23-24), and fulfilling the moral demands of God (Mt 5-7; Jn 3:21). The truth is thus understood and practised on the ordinary human plans instead of the conceptual world of ideas. The "way, truth, life" given by Jesus Christ in His saving Gospel is communicated by the Spirit (Jn 16:13), and made real by those who speak for and live in the truth. Just as Jesus is the true light of the world, and the coming of the light judges the world of unbelief (Jn 3:19-21; 9:39-41; 15:22-24), His disciples must keep themselves apart from the domain of falsehood and darkness (Col 1:13) and become a light to the world (Mt 5:14; Php 2:15).

The rejection of the truth results from a moral and spiritual failure. False judgement generates false standards, and severs one from the true course of God's way. In this sense, human presuppositions cause one to become blind to the divine will and inevitably misinterpretation of the divine word for the sake of convenience or dogmatism will come into existence. Hence, those who contravene the truth have fallen short of the glory of God. They tamper with God's word and have fallen prey to a different gospel, another Jesus and a different spirit (2 Cor 11:4).

Strictly speaking, the spiritual failure of those who reject the truth stems from the prince of this world (Jn 12:31; 2 Cor 4:4; Eph 6:11-12). The Jews did not hear Jesus' words because they were the children of the devil (Jn 8:43-47). Their false standards were derived from listening to their father, the devil (Jn 8:38-44). They not only were blind to the true identity of Jesus, but also refused to listen to the truth preached by Jesus Christ. In this way, they rejected the truth of the knowledge of God

in Jesus and the freedom imparted by the truth and grace of Jesus. Thus the Pharisaic fervency in God has ironically become a stumbling block to their coming to terms with "the righteousness of God" (Rom 10:3-4). This is a profound lesson for contemporary Christians, because the zealous Christians might fail to truly know the Son of God and His Truth. This sort of spiritual blindness will produce a wrong interpretation and an inadequate presentation of the divine words and sacraments. In the long run both the guides and the guided might unwittingly fall into falsehood and darkness.

The article "the Saving Hand of Our Lord Jesus Christ" shows an aspect of the divine love and power. Through the power of the atoning blood of the Lord Jesus Christ who loves us, salvation starts with the deliverance from sin and evil in this age, and completes for the worthy believers with the ultimate salvation into the Heavenly Kingdom (2 Tim 4:17-18, 7-8). The Saving Hand of God is expressed in the healing of diseases and deliverance from troubles and harms. Our church abounds in healings and miracles, which confirm the message (Mk 16:15-18; Heb 2:3-4) and testify for the loving care of the Lord for His people. However, we must always remember that our faith should not be grounded upon miracles and healings alone. We need to make progress in spiritual knowledge and wisdom, and do the will of the Heavenly Father, lest we should accept the Lord through miracles or stirring pulpit oratory, but should unfortunately be rejected by the Lord for an evil, unbelieving heart (Heb 3:7-14).

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A cursory examination of the Old Testament will immediately reveal that the Lord is depicted as the "Divine Warrior" (Ex 15:3; 2 Kgs 5:24; Ps 28:9). The Psalms vividly describe how the Lord in His epiphany at the sanctuary is seen as victor in conquest of chaos and all its manifold manifestations. He utters a terrifying thunder-roar, as we have seen in the graphic language of Amos (Amos 1; 4; Ps 18:7-15; 29:3-9; 68:7-8, 33; 104:1-8). In nature, He shoots arrows of lightning and hurls hail and fiery coals (Ps 18; 77), He breaks the dragon's many heads and kills water-courses by drying them up (Ps 18; 74; 77; 89). In the human world, Yahweh mows down those who pit themselves against Him (Ps 110), or throws them into a faint of terror at His appearing (Ps 48; 77). Surrounded by thousands upon thousands of chariots (Ps 68), God has kings and His covenanted host to fight with Him. Captives are to be

taken and prescribed judgements executed upon them (Ps2; 110; 149).

Furthermore, one can find in the "War Rule" of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Book of Joshua the concepts and customs of the holy war. In Chapters 1-11 of Joshua pervades the holy war theme: the conquest of Jericho, the second attack on Ai, the Judaeian and Galilean campaigns (chs 2, 6, 8, 10, 11). In addition, there are two stories of failure to carry out the holy war, the first attack on Ai and the treaties with the Gibeonites (chs 7 & 9).

It is through explicit legal enactments (Deut 20:1-20; 22:10-15; 25:17-19) and militaristic speeches (Deut 7:16-26; 9:1-6) that the Book of Deuteronomy expounds the principles of the holy war. The holy war begins with the Lord's promise of success and an exhortation to fight bravely (Josh 1:6-9; 6:2; 8:1; 10:8; 11:6). The narratives emphasize that it is God who takes the initiative in the course of the war. He sends Israel into battle and ensures its success. Because the almighty God is fighting for them, Israel need only trust and be confident. That the Lord directs the war is brought out metaphorically by the vision of "the commander of the Lord", who appears to Joshua with a drawn sword in his hand (Josh 5:13-15). While encouraging Israel, Yahweh strikes terror in the hearts of its enemies before the battle even starts (Josh 2:9, 24; 5:1; 9:24; 10:21).

After God has given His instructions to Joshua, Joshua obeys. Joshua in turn instructs the people, and they obey. This conspicuous theme stands out as one perennially important matter in the Old Testament: Obedience of the people is central in the holy war stories. Verbal repetition is used to stress the fidelity with which the command is carried out (Josh 1:2, 11: 6:2, 6-8; 8:1-2; 11:6-9). To convey the divine initiative in the battle, the Bible imagistically describes that:

"The Lord threw down great stones from heaven" (Josh 10:11)

"The Lord fought for Israel" (Josh 10:14)

Meanwhile, divine intervention is implicit in sudden collapse of the wall of Jericho (Josh 6:15-20) and Joshua's stretching his javelin toward Ai (Josh 8:18; cf. Ex 14:16; 17:9-13). The discussion in this issue of how the Lord is the banner of victory ("Yahweh Nissi") to Moses and the Israelites at Rephidim picks up the theme of the holy war in the Old Testament, which is relevant to our spiritual warfare today. In the history of the chosen people as a "corporate personality", the almighty God granted power not only to such individuals as the judges, whom He

raised for national deliverance, but also the army of the Lord as a whole. By the name of the Lord of hosts and the God of the armies of Israel, David valiantly approached the Philistine giant Goliath. David's trust in the power of the Lord confirms the historical faith of Israel; "The Lord saves not with sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's and he will give you into our hand" (1 Sam 17:41-47).

The battle at Rephidim exemplifies the military wisdom of Israelites. The Israelites were fighting for a collective survival under the guidance of the Lord. The victory over the Amalekites comes from the concerted prayer at the hilltop and the military tactics in the battlefield. The Israelites' wilderness wandering and their battles have a typological significance. The battle against Amalek represents the Christian contention against the flesh (Gal 5:17-24; Rom 7:18-23; 8:5-8; Jas 4:5). The way to win this spiritual battle is through every Christian's life of prayer and reliance on the power of the Lord (Jas 4:7-8; 1 Pet 5:7-9).

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The editor would like to express gratitude to those who have been involved in the preparation of the publication of this issue. As an organ journal of the International Assembly of our church, we must strive for edification, information, and quality. The editorial board would take this opportunity to announce the themes of the coming issues and would like to call for papers for the specific themes, in addition to various subjects of evangelism and pastoral work:

No. 9 (December 1986): An introduction to the Bible study: authority, inspiration, and personal edification of the words of God, etc.

No. 10 (June 1987): Genuine faith in a crooked age.

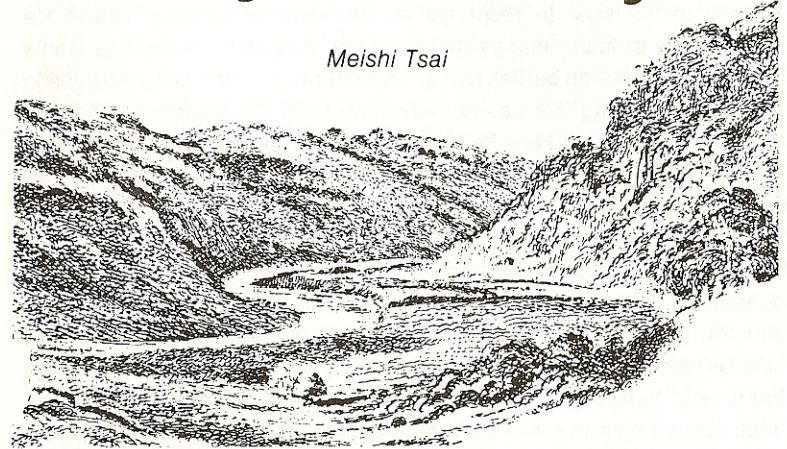
No. 11 (December 1987): Love which moves the world.

In your daily life of prayer, please remember the Lord's work: world evangelism, spiritual construction of the individuals as well as the whole church in faith, hope, and love, and what is of no less importance, please pray for and contribute your effort to the field of literary ministry and this journal. May the Lord bless you.

The Editor
June 1986
Heidelberg, Germany

On the Way to Bethany

Meishi Tsai



The raising of Lazarus in John 11 is one of the most vivid and dramatic accounts in the Gospels. A careful study of this Chapter will enable one to see two themes standing side by side: the "cognitive dislocation" on the part of the disciples and Jesus's weeping at the tomb of Lazarus. Before analysing the chapter itself, a few questions must be asked: Why do the disciples often fail to understand the true intention of the Lord Jesus Christ? Is it because they must wait for Jesus's resurrection and receive the Holy Spirit to comprehend Jesus' words and deeds? Or is there a special theological purpose in showing that the knowledge and faith of the disciples did not conform with the divine measurements? In addition, one must ask: Is Jesus's weeping due to His deep affection for the dead, or are there some other underlying reasons for His grief? In this chapter one sees how the Lord Jesus Christ demonstrates His work ethic and gives timely teaching to His disciples. And what is more important, the way to Bethany is a journey into the manifestation of the Heavenly Father's glory and into a world of unbelief to which Jesus emotively reacts.

1. LET US GO INTO JUDEA AGAIN (JN 11:7).

Jesus has learned of Lazarus's serious illness, but continues to

stay beyond the Jordan for a few more days (Jn 11:6). As a rule, one would normally expect Jesus, the great physician, to have hurried to Lazarus' bedside. From the fact that many people have come to Him (Jn 10:41-42), one infers that Jesus is busy about preaching the gospel and tending to the sick. In response to the news of Lazarus' illness He immediately predicts that Lazarus will not die (Jn 11:4). Just as God's higher purpose often baffles human comprehension (cf. Is 55:8-9), Jesus has his own timing. He has already seen from the beginning what will come to be, and so He continues His work east of the Jordan. One recalls how the suffering of Joseph and Job was an ironic fulfillment of God's ultimate deliverance. Just as the Scripture states, the end of a thing is better than its beginning (Ecc 7:8) and God lets everything in the world work good for those who love Him (Rom 8:28). So far as Job is concerned, suffering submitted the spiritually hubristic man to the almighty God (Job 42:5-6), whereas the falsely accused Joseph saw the final deliverance not only for the Egyptians but also for the Hebrews in the time of famine (Gen 50:19-21). Now, not until His "hour" has come does Jesus begin to move from the eastern Jordan. There in a humble village He will perform an amazing grace, to prove that He is the Lord of life and resurrection, and glorify the Heavenly Father.

While He is about to set off, His disciples try to dissuade Him from going to Bethany, the reason being that the Jews might stone Him. Not long ago, Jesus already had a controversy with the Jews about His personality and authority (Jn 8). The Jews claimed descent from Abraham, but belied their claim by their evil works. As a contrast, Jesus is not a mere true descendant of Abraham; He is greater than the Old Testament worthies (Jn 8:53). The Christological significance in the entire debate lies in the fact that Jesus is "from above" (cf. Jn 3:13) and that even Abraham rejoiced to see Him (Jn 8:56). Apparently, Jesus refers this statement to His divine origin and eternal power as the Father Himself in the Old Testament whom Abraham received at the tent of Mamre (cf. the use of the Spirit of Christ who moved the Old Testament prophets in 1 Pet 1:11, Christ with whom Moses would share suffering in Heb 11:26, and the Spirit of Christ who motivated Noah to preach the message of righteousness to the spiritually bound people in 1 Pet 3:19-20). After hearing Jesus say all this, the Jews were outraged and tried to stone Him for blasphemy. The disciples' concern for His safety reminds one of how Simon Peter, from the human standpoint, tried to hinder Jesus from going to Jerusalem to be crucified and fulfill the goal of God's redemption (Mt 16:21-23, Mk 8:32-33). Now Jesus must go into

Judea. There the death of Lazarus is for the glory of God and that the son of God may be glorified by means of it (Jn 11:4). As is His custom to give a timely instruction to the disciples when circumstances arise (cf. Mt 12:46-48; 10:10-23, 36-43; 16:13-21; Jn 6:66-70), Jesus teaches the disciples that one must work while it is daytime. During the hours of daylight movement is free and uninhibited, but darkness brings an inevitable cessation of activity. Likewise, Jesus's ministry is of limited duration, and thus He must make use of His time to do God's work regardless of any persecution (cf. Jn 9:4). He further teaches that while in daylight (in the image of daytime as life and dark night as death), a figurative expression for the days of acceptance (2 Cor 6:2), every one must do the will of the Heavenly Father. No one can work when his life comes to an end or when the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus has rendered impossible work for the Lord. Jesus in this verse gives a clear and positive answer to the question of v.8. One must be aware that the "hour" and "light" provided by the Lord Jesus presses us to work for His glory (cf. Ac 4:29-30; 26:18; 2 Tim 4:2; Php 2:15; 1 Thess 5:5-8; 1 Cor 15:58).

Thus, the disciples of Jesus Christ must not be hindered by any circumstances from preaching the Gospel, for suffering is a divine necessity (1 Thess 3:3). But they must have wisdom and courage to face the challenge. Jesus has promised that He will be with them and send the Comforter to teach and to guide them (cf. Mt 10:16-20; Jn 16:33; 17:12). Defying the danger of persecution and death, Jesus resolutely journeys toward Jerusalem to carry out the will of the Heavenly Father (cf. Lk 9:51; 13:22, 31-35; 17:11; 18:31; 19:11). Now at Bethany, a village near Jerusalem, the raising of Lazarus anticipates His own resurrection and the possibility of eternal life for His believers.

To Paul, a valiant Christian soldier, imprisonment and affliction are always at side threatening, but he is prepared to accept the challenge for Christ (Rom 8:35-39; 2 Cor 5:14-15; 2 Tim 4:7-8). His comment on his imminent journey to Jerusalem and martyrdom aptly states his feelings:

"And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, bound in the Spirit, not knowing what shall befall me there; except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may accomplish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to

testify to the gospel of the grace of God" (Ac 20:22-24).

2. THE DISCIPLES THOUGHT...(Jn 11:11-13).

The disparity of thought between Jesus and the disciples begins to emerge in their conversation and interaction. Jesus' comment on the death of Lazarus as being sleep (Jn 11:11) is taken by the disciples to be ordinary rest in sleep. Perhaps the euphemistic expression for death is beyond the immediate grasp of the disciples, but the misinterpretation of Jesus' words shows their not being sensitive to the Master's intention. Elsewhere in the Bible one comes upon several occasions in which the disciples' "cognitive dislocation" is apparent in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ. The examples are as follows:

Firstly, when the villagers in the region of Samaria refuse to receive Jesus, James and John react strongly. They demand a retaliation and presumptively wish to invoke fire from heaven to consume the hostile Samaritans. Jesus rebukes them and states that He comes not to destroy but to save life (Lk 9:51-56). The Lord Jesus is full of compassion (Mt 9:36; 12:17-21), loves His enemy (Mt 5:38-44; Lk 23:34; Rom 12:17-21), and humbles Himself to serve all men (Mt 20:28; Php 2:5-11). Unfortunately, the disciples are short-sighted, impetuous, and lacking in love (cf. Jas 1:20; Jn 18:10-11).

Secondly, Jesus tells many parables about the mystery of the Kingdom: the sower, the weeds, the sheepfold, and others (Mt 13:2-9, 24-30; Jn 10:1-4). The disciples, however, fail to comprehend their meaning (Mt 13:10, 36; Jn 10:6). One finds the secrecy motif in Mark, in particular. But this secrecy motif is concerned with how Jesus reveals Himself to the disciples, not to the crowd. Even for them He remains incomprehensible in His revelations, including Jesus' Passion (Lk 9:43-45; 18:31-34). Receiving the Holy Spirit is the key to the disciples' understanding of the meaning of Jesus' ministry, but the disciples' lack of spiritual understanding serves as a warning to all Christians today (cf. Php 1:9-10; Col 2:10-14; Eph 5:17).

Thirdly, on one occasion Jesus warns His disciples of the danger of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. The disciples take it as a ground of murmuring (Mt 16:5-12). In this particular incident the Lord reminds them of the multiplying of bread and fish as the evidence of His inexhaustible power and compassion. Furthermore, He corrects their misgiving by explaining that the leaven does not refer to bread, but

hypocrisy, teachings based on human precepts, and all kinds of bitterness.

3. "I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE" (Jn 11:25).

Jesus plainly points out that Lazarus has 'already died. He is glad that He was not there with Lazarus, for through the approach to Bethany and the miracle (or in Johannine terms, the sign) the Lord Jesus Christ wants to make them believe His identity, authority, and power. Now at the outskirts of the village, Martha, Lazarus' sister, has three rounds of dialogue with the Lord Jesus. Each of them repeats the same cognitive deviation already shown by the disciples prior to their entry into Bethany.

The first thing Martha says to Jesus is: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (Jn 11:21). Martha is well aware of the fact that Jesus has the power of healing, and there is reproach in her words, because she wanted Jesus to come earlier. But Martha's faith in Jesus is seen through her request for Jesus to pray to the Father.

In reply to Martha's, Jesus states, "Your brother will rise again" (Jn 11:23), meaning that Lazarus will be resurrected now, in Bethany. However, her cognition takes a turn when she speaks from a historical, mortal perspective; "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day" (Jn 11:24). Martha, unfortunately, does not expect Jesus to awaken Lazarus at this moment (Jn 11:4, 11). Thus Martha receives little comfort from Jesus' words, for her thoughts are far away in the supramundane realm and an indefinite future. She has overlooked a vital truth in Jesus' promise: He is able to give life, just as He did in the case of Jairus' daughter (Lk 8:49-56) and the widow's son (Lk 7:11-17).

Immediately following Martha's second saying, Jesus utters what is perhaps the greatest saying in the Bible, certainly the most soul-stirring statement of the "I am" sayings in the Gospel of John: "I am the resurrection and the life" (Jn 11:25). To quicken the fallen world, Jesus the Incarnated Word must come and be Himself "the Resurrection and the Life", the source and the first cause of living existence. His presence in Bethany and His promised blessing pinpoints not only the Last Day but also the present moment. After having affirmed this truth, Jesus tells Martha: "He who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die" (Jn 11:26). In the first part of this statement He refers specifically to Lazarus, and the second, the people including Martha, Mary, and His followers, who are still living and believe Jesus Christ, will never see eternal death in the

Kingdom of the Father (Jn 5:28-29; 14:1-3; 1 Jn 2:25; 5:11-12). Jesus concludes His second saying to Martha with a question: "Do you believe this?" (Jn 11:26). He is asking whether Martha believes the dual aspects of the resurrection: the case of Lazarus at hand and the eternal life of the righteous in the future.

Insensitive to Jesus' intended meaning, Martha directs her faith not to His immediate presence and His reviving power, but to His already-acknowledged status and authority and what He will do in the future as the Judge (Jn 11:27). To the dismay of the Lord, Martha has totally missed the point. The gap between the Lord's revelation and the recipient's slowness to seize its truth has widened.

Martha returns to the village. Mary rushes to Jesus, repeating her sister's very words (Jn 11:32, 22), reverently prostrating herself before Him. Seeing Mary and all the people weeping, Jesus is deeply touched by their deep love for Lazarus, but at the same time, He is grieved at the failure of the faith and knowledge on the part of His disciples and the two sisters. Jesus is deeply moved and, according to the Greek language of John 11:33, is "indignant", in the sense that He is disappointed at how the Jews have fallen short of what Jesus rightly feels they should by now have attained, seeing the many great works that have been done before their eyes. It is partially correct when someone, seeing Jesus' deep emotional arousal, comments that Jesus loves Lazarus (Jn 11:34). But Jesus is truly frustrated and anguished in His spirit. The Jews neither see nor believe the historical moment - the presence of Jesus Christ who expects His own world to accept Him (cf. Jn 1:11). Here in Bethany, not far from Jerusalem and the cross, Jesus is performing His last sign for the glory of the Father and for revelation that Jesus is the Father.

As Jesus approaches the tomb, someone in the crowd says, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" (Jn 11:37). Judging from the context, this man is mocking, but does not know what he is saying. Upon hearing this, Jesus is again deeply troubled in spirit, for it never occurs to the crowd that they are witnessing a prelude to the great historical mission of the Messiah!

Jesus stops outside Lazarus' tomb and orders that the stone which blocks the tomb be removed. Martha comes forward and unwittingly hinders Him, saying, "Lord, by this time there will be an odour, for he has been dead four days" (Jn 11:39). Jesus turns impatiently and chides her, "Did I not tell you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" (Jn 11:40). Martha, completely engulfed in her grief and her own thoughts, has forgotten that the Lord of life (cf. Lk 7:11-17; 8:49-56),

who created the universe out of nothing and stilled the storm, can easily call Lazarus to life. Martha, a good elder sister and housekeeper, who has been "anxious with many things" (cf. Lk 10:20-41), is not yet enlightened. Out of her folly, she obstructs Jesus at this most meaningful moment in which He is about to reveal Himself as the Son is performing the work of the Father (Jn 11:41-42). With His remonstrance, the story comes to an emotional and narrative climax.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, one sees that on the way to Bethany, the disciples, Martha, and the Jews have failed in their faith and knowledge of the divine will. Behind the emotionally charged narrative, one can sense the grief and disappointment which move Jesus to tears. In a parable, Jesus has compared His generation to a number of children playing at the city gate (Lk 7:31-35). One group of children plays the flute and bid their companions to mourn. But neither group is willing to follow the other's choice. Jesus uses this parable to show how the Jews refuse to respond to any kind of message brought to them by John the Baptist and Jesus, who tell them to mourn and repent. The Jews tell the ascetic John to eat and drink and the joyful Jesus to mourn. Neither Jesus nor John will satisfy them. The world and the messengers of God do not go together, for this is a generation of perversity of faith and hardness of hearts. Even Martha in the company of the faithful professes that she believes Christ and His power, but at the crucial moment even she falls short of a genuine faith.

Take the following points as a summary of the teachings in John 11:

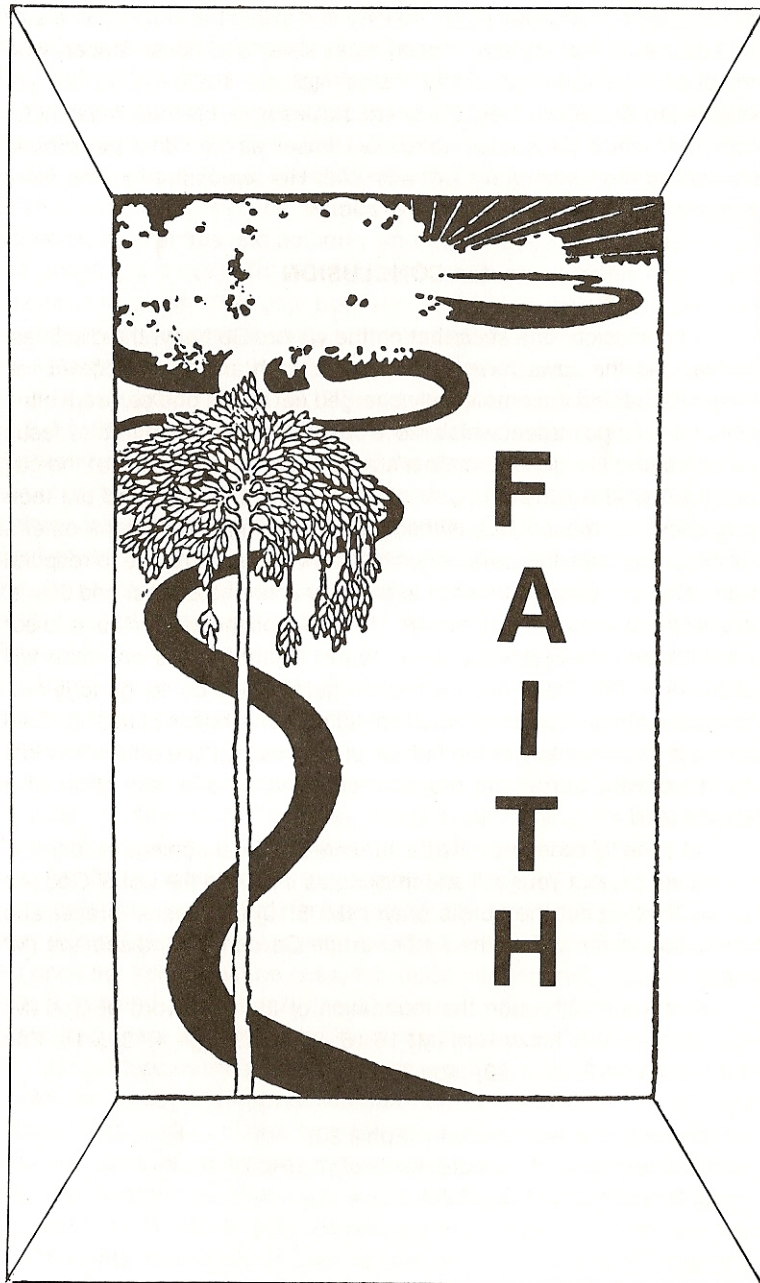
Never project your will and thinking as if it were the will of God (Ac 21:14). Think about the Lord's prayer (Mt 6:10) and Jesus' prayer and submission to the will of the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mt 26:42).

Build your faith upon the foundation of the true word of God (Mt 7:24-26), and truly know Him (Mt 16:16; 24:32-33; Eph 4:13; 5:18; Php 1:9-11; Col 1:9-12; Jas 1:22; Jude 20-21).

Do not grieve the Holy Spirit (Eph 4:30).

Understand what the Lord wants of you (Ac 22:10).

Glorify the Lord (1 Cor 6:20).



"Faith" is a very important word to Christians. It is a prerequisite for receiving the grace of God. As the Bible says, "Without faith it is impossible to please Him" (Heb 11:6). But how many true Christians have a strong faith? How can this seemingly intangible faith be made concrete? Examples from the Bible will tell us the true meaning of faith and testify to its importance.

Faith - By the Brook of Cherith

The wicked King Ahab of Israel (reigned ca. 869-850 B.C.) and his wife, Jezebel, led the people of Israel away from the worship of YAHWEH and brought them to serve Baal, arousing the anger of God. God sent the prophet Elijah to announce the punishment that draught would come upon the land, unless King Ahab and all the people would turn away from idolatry.

The Lord told Elijah to go eastward and take shelter by the brook Cherith, east of the Jordan. There he would drink from the brook, and be fed by the ravens (1 Kgs 17:3-4). Elijah followed God's instruction and stayed by the brook Cherith. His life was sustained by the divine arrangement. As we are well aware that faith means absolute trust in God's words, it was here that Elijah manifested his faith. He relied totally on the survival plan of God and accepted his seemingly hopeless situation in stoic quietude. Centering his whole heart on God rather than ravens, Elijah exemplified an absolute belief in the words of God.

Faith - in Prison

During the apostolic era, the gospel was spread rapidly far and wide, but persecution also arose. James, one of the twelve apostles, was executed by Herod Agrippa and many others had to flee for life. Earlier while the persecution was intensified, the Council arrested Peter and arranged a public trial. But the wrongly accused apostle retained his great faith on the eve of his trial. In defiance of the impending death, he enjoyed an unusual tranquility in the Lord. Being bound with two chains, he could still fall asleep between two guarding soldiers. He remembered the words of the Lord, "For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his (physical) life for my sake will find it (eternal life)" (Mt 16:25). Peter's imprisonment and tranquility in faith tell us that we will count our lives as of little value when we prefer to be with God.

Faith - in the Stormy Sea

Once Jesus and His disciples were sailing on the sea of Galilee. Jesus was asleep. Suddenly a great storm arose (Mt 8:24). The waves soon began to rock the boat. At this crucial moment, the disciples lost their faith. In desperation, they woke the Lord Jesus, saying, "Teacher, do you not care if we perish?" (Mk 4:38). Alas, they seemed to have forgotten that, with the presence of the Lord, they would be protected from all adverse circumstances. Jesus manifested His power and glory in calming the storm, and rebuked His disciples in disappointment, "Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?" (Mk 4:40). They had been with Jesus and witnessed His miracles, but they did not have a genuine faith to totally trust God.

This incident makes us aware of how faith requires a complete calmness and trust in the presence of tribulations or dangers. One must wait for the Lord to manifest His mercy and glory, just as Moses exhorted the troubled Israelites when they were pursued by the Egyptians: "Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today" (Ex 14:13).

Our faith must be genuine, unchangeable and unshakable in the Lord. True faith is perfect and will have an amazing impact on our daily life. "Whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith" (Mt 21:22). The Lord says, "If you can! All things are possible to him who believes" (Mk 9:23).

Let us remember:

Faith is expressed by a total belief in God's words, exercising no judgement on His ways from human assumption.

Faith is expressed by a conviction that our life is meaningless if the Lord is not the centre of our existence.

Faith means hope and reliance on the Lord, waiting calmly for His mercy and glory even in times of adversity.



Jesus is a merciful and almighty physician. During His earthly ministry He performed many miracles which attracted many people to Him. Many of His miracles have spiritual teachings. In this bible study we will examine the miracle recorded in John 4:46-54.

I. So He Came Again to Cana in Galilee (verse 46a)

The Lord Jesus testified to the Samaritan woman that He was the Messiah who gives the living water. Through the testimony of this woman many believed in the Lord. The people requested Jesus to stay but He stayed only two days. After that He departed for Galilee, because there was more important work for Him to do in Cana (Jn 4:39-43). It was at a wedding feast in this obscure town that Jesus had previously turned water into wine. In Cana now He healed an official's son. On this small town Jesus had bestowed grace upon grace.

Teaching:

1. Jesus worked very hard daily while He was on earth. We should follow His example and work diligently for the Kingdom. Wherever we go, we should share with men the grace of the Lord. A person who

knows Christ should testify for Him and glorify Him everywhere (2 Cor 2:14-15).

2. Although Cana was a small, unknown town, God's grace abounded there. God manifests His grace to the humble and the weak (1 Pet 5:5; 2 Cor 13:9). A humble person who serves God will enjoy His divine blessings and magnifies His name.

II. There Was An Official Whose Son Was Ill (verse 46b)

Though this official held a high position, he could not do anything about his son's illness. Perhaps he had asked many physicians for help and had spent a great deal of money, but the condition of his son was not improved.

Teaching:

1. Human life is full of toil and trouble. Very often things happen contrary to one's wishes. There is no exception even for an official. Though he loved his son, this official could not use his wealth and power to help. Therefore a person should not think of himself more highly than he ought to, nor should he rely too much on others for help. It is not wealth, power, nor position, but God that is the source of his reliance (Ps 146:3-5).

2. Human beings cannot avoid illness. Even those whom God loves could become ill (Jn 11:3). In the midst of affliction we should have a strong faith and learn how to trust in God. We should also try to understand the will of God. If our family or church members properly understand the importance of a tested faith in God, then in affliction we can still glorify God.

III. When He Heard That Jesus Had Come to Galilee, He Went to Him(verse 47a)

When the official heard that Jesus was coming from Judea, he left Capernaum to seek the help of Jesus. Anxious about the divine power of Jesus, he went to Cana and personally requested for the Lord's help.

Teaching:

1. The Bible says: "Faith comes from what is heard" (Rom 10:14-17).

It is difficult for a person who has not heard to believe in Jesus Christ. We must preach the gospel, so that people would hear and receive the grace of salvation.

2. The high-ranking official in the reputable city of Capernaum humbled himself before Jesus the carpenter. God uses various critical situations to bring humble people to Him.

IV. He Begged Jesus to Heal His Son (verse 47b)

The official begged Jesus to go down and heal his dying son. Like many others, he hoped that Jesus would go to his house to restore his son's health. He had no peace until this was accomplished.

Teaching:

1. The official humbly drew near to Jesus, asking for help. This kind of active faith produces great strength and power (Mt 17:20). The Bible says: "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Mt 6:21). The official cared for his son who was very dear to him. His only hope lay in the Lord's mercy.

2. Through God's amazing grace the official's entire household believed in Jesus (verse 53). The psalmist says: "It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes" (Ps 119:71). There are times when God uses afflictions to lead people to Him, to help them understand His will, and to strengthen their faith. A lack of understanding the will of God during our affliction will result in meaningless suffering and a blindness in the divine blessing.

V. Unless You See Signs And Wonders You Will Not Believe(verse 48)

Earlier, through the Samaritan woman many people in Samaria believed in Jesus (Jn 4:39-42). As a contrast, the Galileans demanded to see signs and wonders. Much despised by the Jews, the Samaritans received God's blessings in a wonderful way. The key is that they opened their hearts to the Lord.

Teaching:

1. Signs and miracles confirm the message, but the Lord Jesus does

not want people to base their faith on miracles alone. In Cana, the Lord Jesus was disappointed by the unbelieving Galileans.

2. The people of Capernaum did neither believe nor repent, even though they saw the miracles performed by the Lord Jesus (Lk 10:15).

Jesus has often manifested His great power and showed love and mercy. Unfortunately, many people only seek after miracles but do not want to know the truth. The fact is, if one understands and receives the truth, then miracles will take place.

VI. "Sir, Come Down Before My Child Dies" (verse 49)

The official thought that unless Jesus went down in time, the child would die.

Teaching:

Like the much-distressed official, we have worries and anxieties from time to time, but Jesus is able to bear our burdens. We thus put our faith in our almighty God, who takes away our anxieties. And so, the Lord will respond to our prayer and supplication with thanksgiving and He will render to us peace and spiritual fulfilment (Php 4:6-7).

VII. Jesus Said to Him, "Go; Your Son Will Live" (verse 50)

In reply to the official's earnest request, the Lord Jesus gave him an unexpected assurance. For Jesus it would never be too late, nor did He have to go personally to the sick person's house to heal. He had only to speak the word and the child would be healed.

Teaching:

In our afflictions, we sometimes incorrectly make specific suggestions to God how to solve our problems. It is not good for us to impose our own will upon the Lord, just as a patient tries unwittingly to tell a physician what to do. The Lord has His own will and time, and His ways and thoughts are better than ours (Is 55:8-9). Therefore, we should simply learn how to trust the Lord (Prov 16:3). Instead of going ahead of God, we should have in our prayer a faith like a grain of mustard seed, so that the Lord will let our wishes come true (Mt 17:20). The official went home in faith and hope. He brought with him not Jesus in person but His

promise. It is the way with faith - believing in the word of God and walking by faith (2 Cor 1:20).

VIII. As He Was Going Down, His Servants Met Him And Told Him That His Son Was Living. (verse 51)

With the promise of Jesus, the official on the way home received the report given by one of his servants, that his son was alive. A miracle indeed!

Teaching:

Only a proven faith may be considered as a complete faith which enables people to receive the blessings from God (1 Pet 1:7). What Jesus said was indeed a severe test of the official's faith. A true faith, which extends beyond miracles and wonders, must be built firmly upon the words of God. Though the official did not personally see his son's recovery, he believed in Jesus' words, resulting in blessings (Jn 20:29).

IX. So He Asked Them the Hour When He Began to Mend (verse 52)

The official's son recovered the same hour when Jesus told the official, "Your son will live". This is not a coincidence but an act of the power of God. Teaching: The omnipotent God surpasses science and medicine. With a simple faith people will experience His wonderful grace for themselves.

X. He Himself Believed, And All His Household (verse 53b)

After the Lord had cured his son, the official unhesitatingly brought his household to Him. Peace and joy thus came to his family (Ac 16:31-34).

Teaching:

It is important for those who have been blessed by God to always remember His grace. We may recall how the Lord Jesus healed ten lepers, but only the Samaritan showed gratitude and praised God for the great deed of the Lord (Lk 17:17).

Make Sure to Know the Truth

What is the Truth? The truth is the abiding Word of God (Jn 17:17), which requires a spiritual understanding on the part of the reader. Unlike the ordinary human utterances, the prophecy of scripture comes from the inspiration and is not to be interpreted in a mundane way (2 Pet 1:20-21). The God-given "Scripture" or the Holy Bible, is manifested to the world as the truth. When we study the truth, there is a scriptural principle: be reverent and let the Spirit guide us. With a right attitude and a willingness to learn, the words of God will unfold before us as a light shines in the darkness.

1 The Lord Jesus said, "When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth". "All the truth" does not mean partial truths, like what the prophet Isaiah described as "here a little, there a little" (Is 28:10, 13). It should be a complete truth which God has revealed in the Holy Bible, which is full of symbolic and spiritual values. Some of the scriptures are literal, while others have allegorical or analogical meanings. We must study the whole truth along with history, culture, and theology, in order to understand what the words of God are. Let us focus on the essentials of the Gospel truth which have to do with our salvation. Unfortunately, many people are ignorant of the necessary and sufficient "truths" about the entry to and fellowship in the kingdom of God. They only emphasize love and zeal, and think that only faith alone justifies a person and brings forth instant salvation. Faith is not a mere state of mind, but is in compliance with the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ and the apostles. Thus it is important to know the truth about the washing of regeneration and the Spirit baptism (Jn 3:5, Tit 3:5). Others use unleavened bread and grape juice for the Holy Communion, but do not observe the seventh-day Sabbath commanded by God (Gen 2:1-3). As conscientious Christians, we must take into consideration all the essential teachings of the Bible, especially those which are related to our salvation.

A faith based on partial truths is definitely unsound. Paul states very aptly, "If any one imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know" (1 Cor 8:2). No one should claim to have knowledge of the complete truth even though they may appear to be pious or learned. Apollos, a person "well versed in the scriptures", knew only the baptism of John. Priscilla and Aquilla, two tent-makers, had to expound to him the way of God more accurately (Ac 18:24-26). Today, people tend to know a partial truth or stress certain aspects of Biblical teachings, and thus are unable to have the complete truth in the Word of God (Col 1:25). For this reason, it requires us to search and pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit who will surely guide a humble person and teach him the divine way.

2 The scripture says, "For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth" (2 Cor 13:8). No sincere Christian would wilfully contravene the truth. Instead, he is more than willing to strive for the truth and help propagate the Gospel of Salvation.

Human behaviour is an interaction of inner motives and external circumstances, but a subjective mind diverts people away from the truth. In his visit to Antioch, Cephas shared the fellowship meal with the gentile Christians. When the Jew from Jerusalem arrived, he feared the circumcision party and withdrew himself from them. Seeing this inappropriate action, Paul rebuked Cephas for failing to comply with "the truth of the gospel" (Gal 2:11-14). In the mind of Paul, the uncircumcised Gentiles were fellow brothers in Christ, justified in the blood of the Saviour. Cephas's act showed his personal bias which violated the principle that the gentiles and the Jews are one in the family of God (Gal 3:27-29). We uphold the scriptural principle and must not be intimidated by external circumstances, allowing no groundless presumptions or any personal prejudices to contradict the truth. When the apostles and elders in Jerusalem discussed whether the Gentiles

Make Sure to Know the Truth

needed to be circumcised, James stood up from the midst of heated arguments and spoke with the wisdom of God, asserting that the gentiles Christians should enjoy spiritual freedom (Ac 15:13-19). The Holy Spirit, the apostles, elders, and all the church came to the agreement with a definite spiritual principle (Ac 15:28-29).

3 In His farewell prayer the Lord Jesus said, "Thy word is truth" (Jn 17:17). Again to His disciples He said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6). These two scriptures reveal the important concepts of "truth":

- 1) The Word of God is the criterion of the Truth;
- 2) The Lord Jesus embodies the Truth.

A "truthful speech" or a "sure word" in the Bible has the same meaning as the "truthful word" (2 Cor 6:7; Tit 1:9). God is true and His Word is also true (2 Sam 7:28); His law is true (Ps 119:142); His witness is true (Rev 3:14). In short, the perfect truth is in God. None of His words, deeds, judgements or promises is untrue or unreliable. This is the reason why the unchangeable God is the center of the whole universe and the origin of all things (Heb 1:10-12).

The Bible says that God is always true, even though man might be found false (Rom 3:4). Where does the "falsehood" come from? It comes from Satan. The Lord Jesus clearly tells us, "He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (Jn 8:44). Why do the devil and his people lie? Because they are the adversaries of God and so have nothing to do with the truth. Nor is there truth in them.

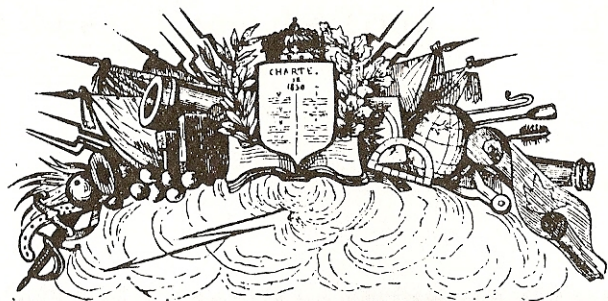
Truth and falsehood are in opposition to each other. Satan sinned

from the beginning (1 Jn 3:8). He is against God (Mt 4:9) and commits murder (1 Jn 3:12). He deceived human being with: 1) a lie which caused Eve and Adam to doubt the words of God; 2) hatred which caused Cain to kill his brother Abel.

Without truth in him, Satan, the enemy of God and the adversary of righteousness, is full of wickedness, and turns people away from the sure Word of God (Ac 13:10).

Dominated by the devil, the human beings in this fallen world are in darkness, and are subject to sin and condemnation, for as the psalmist says, "The wicked go astray from the womb, they err from their birth, speaking lies" (Ps 58:3). The degenerate mankind indeed needs the Gospel for deliverance and salvation.

The children of God must take the truth as a measuring rod for their Christian living - holy, faithful and righteous (Eph 4:22-24, 6:14), in order to combat the spiritual hosts of wickedness and this crooked and perverse generation (Eph 6:12). Let us ask the Holy Spirit to guide us into all the truth (Jn 16:13), and be sure to love the Truth (2 Thess 2:10) and resolve to renounce falsehood. On the one hand we strive diligently to discover all the possible implications of the truth (Php 3:12; Rom 8:2), believing that the Holy Bible is the only true standard of Christian faith (2 Tim 3:15-16), and respect and accept the Scripture in its true meanings, "rightly handling the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15) on the other. To uphold the truth, we must be spiritually-minded and let no personal presumptions take the place of truth (2 Cor 13:8-9). While we cherish the plain, unchangeable truths in the Bible (Ac 20:27), we ought to make the word of God fully known to people (Col 1:25). And what is more important, let us keep and contend for the faith (Jude 3), recognizing the importance of acting on it. In so doing, the grace of the Lord will be given to those who humbly research, understand and practise the divine words and the divine will. Amen.



Jehovah

Nissi

"And the Lord said to Moses, 'Write this as a memorial in a book and recite it in the ears of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.' And Moses built an altar and called the name of it, The LORD is my banner, saying, 'A hand upon the banner of the LORD! The LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation'" (Ex 17:14-16).

After the Exodus, the Israelites began their long, difficult journey in the wilderness, heading for the land of milk and honey. Soon they came to Rephidim and met their first enemy, the Amalekites. Joshua led the young people to encounter the enemy while the elderly Moses stayed behind the scene to pray. God gave the Amalekites into the Israelites' hands. Moses acclaimed that their victory did not come from their well-trained military skill or strength, but from the mighty power of God (Ps 66:3-4). To commemorate the guidance, strength, and final victory rendered by God, Moses built an altar and called it "Jehovah Nissi"

which means "The LORD is my banner". As the Bible states, "There is no wisdom and no understanding and no counsel against the Lord. The horse is prepared for the day of battle but victory belongs to the Lord" (Prov 21:30-31, cf. Ps 20:7). Later, the LORD commanded the Israelites to exterminate the Amalekites (1 Sam 15:1-3).

During the wilderness journey the Amalekites attacked the weak Israelites who lagged behind (Deut 25:17-18). Our Christian life can be compared to a pilgrimage through the wilderness for the heavenly home. The Amalekites represent our greatest enemy and obstacle on this journey: our carnal desires which are opposed to God (Jas 4:4-5). Vile desires fling at us from all sides. If we are not watchful, we may also fall prey to temptations and evil works of the flesh. As the battle against the Amalekites is perpetual, hence we must always advance our spirituality and subdue the flesh (1 Cor 9:27) thus upholding the banner of the Lord Jesus Christ.

CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS

By upholding the banner of victory, we Christian soldiers are fighting for Christ Jesus and His Gospel. The apostle Paul encouraged young Timothy to fight for the Gospel of salvation (2 Tim 2:3, 1 Tim 6:12), which saves both the evangelist himself and the hearers (1 Tim 4:16). In this fight we must be aware that our enemy, Satan, is like a roaring lion (1 Pet 5:8) and he uses hit-and-run tactics to attack the weak and weary believers.

A Christian soldier must undergo proper training in preparation for war. He must put on the whole armour of God (Eph 6:14-17). He should be girdled with truth, the controlling force of the winning battle, and puts on the breastplate of righteousness, to ward off evil and also to do justice, and to love kindness and walk humbly with God (Mic 6:8). His feet are shod with the gospel of peace, bringing reconciliation between God and man, and between man and man (Mt 10:7-13, 2 Cor 5:18-20, Eph 2:17-18).

To preach the wonderful gospel one must take up the shield of faith and helmet of salvation, to foil Satan's works. Jesus Christ teaches us that faith has the power to change the world (Mt 17:20, 21:21), because God responds to those who pray in faith. Along with faith, salvation is given as God's grace (Eph 2:5) through the atoning death of Jesus (Eph 1:7). By these, we will overcome all evil (Rev 12:10-11) and dwell in the love of God.

In the full armour of God, the sword is identified as the living and active word of God, sharper than any two-edged sword (Heb 4:12, Rev 12:10-12). Indeed, one is spiritually nourished and advanced by the words of God whereas the Holy Spirit sanctifies and commissions one to do His work. Jesus Christ has manifested His words of life and has promised the Holy Spirit to those who pray to Him (Lk 11:5-13, Acts 2:39). Let all Christians hear the divine words and do the heavenly Father's will, whilst pray for the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

GUIDANCE

The psalmist extolls God: "Thou hast set up a banner for those who fear thee, to rally to it from the bow" (Ps 60:4). In the battlefield, the banner which signifies leadership and confidence, supports the fighting morale and gives the hope of triumph. The soldiers will still fight on valiantly as long as the banner remains upright. In our church ministry, our Lord Jesus Christ is the banner which sustains our faith. Sometimes we are weak, but the compassionate Lord will sympathize and keep us from temptations that we cannot endure (Heb 4:14-16, 1 Cor 10:13). Jesus Christ once warned that Satan would sift Peter like wheat, but He had already prayed for the revival of his faith (Lk 22:31-32). The Lord will do the same for us, provided we turn to Him for consolation and the renewal of our strength when we are in sorrow and weakness (2 Cor 12:9, Php 4:4-7, 13).

The Holy Spirit guides us to contend for the truth (Jude 3) and to maintain the original faith, power, and spiritual experience of the community of faith in the apostolic era. He also helps us to resolve arguments or speculations and removes proud obstacles to the knowledge of God (2 Cor 10:4-5). The Holy Spirit is our ever-present banner.

Christian soldiers must also be aware of the need to strive forward constantly in faith, love, and hope (Php 3:12-14). Having understood that the Lord is our banner, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, we have to fulfill our duty as His disciples: always love and serve God and man. If we can be faithful with our duty, the Lord has promised us reward in His Kingdom. Meanwhile we look forward to His second coming, for all things will then come to rest and become new in His Kingdom of heaven. The Lord as our Shepherd (Ps 23:4) will wipe away our tears and we will forever be with Him (Rev 21:1-5).

Godliness

"While bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come." (1 Tim 4:8)

Bodily health and fitness, obtained through physical training is very important, but brings limited benefits relative to godliness which benefits all things.

Godliness, a virtue that comes from one's fear of God, may be obtained through spiritual cultivation. By study of the Bible, attending worship services, praying, keeping the Word, and following the guidance of the Holy Spirit one will develop in himself a godly person who obeys the Lord's will, and glorifies Him in speech and conduct. He is humble and has spiritual wisdom. In this way, he leads a meaningful life.

Joseph set a good example in godliness. Because Joseph dared not sin against God, and relied on Him totally. For his integrity and faith God blessed him.

The Saving Hand of Our Lord Jesus Christ

One day, an artist with his teacher went up into the mountains to paint. He set up his easel and began painting. After a while, he finished. As the painting was quite large, he backed away from it, to appreciate his beautiful creation from a distance. He was unaware that he was backing off towards a sheer drop over the cliffs into the deep ravine below. His teacher saw that he was totally entranced in his own work, and that there was only one way to save him. He took up some of his paints and threw them onto the painting, thus destroying it. The artist was furious.

"Why did you do it?" he shouted.

"Go and see where you were standing just a few seconds ago," replied his teacher.

The artist went back to the spot where he had been standing, and it was only then that he realized that his teacher had saved his life.

This story illustrates our relationship with the Lord and what He does to save us.

When we first believe in God, it seems that His grace is fresh, new, and living. We dare not neglect His teachings. But after a period of time we become less alert and begin to slacken in our faith. Perhaps in pursuing our career we are ensnared by the temptations of wealth and self-glorification. Gradually we begin to look lightly on the Truth and the teachings of God, and stray from His loving arms. Intoxicated in our own success, we fail to realize that we are standing on the edge of a spiritual precipice and almost falling over. We cannot see the Lord's anxious

face or hear His loving call anymore. At this point the Lord intervenes, not willing to see us die spiritually. He reaches out and shatters our beautiful but dangerous dreams.

Startled, we become angry and complain to the Lord. We bring all our discontentments to Him and blame them on Him. For the sake of our shattered pride we doubt God, and question Him: "Why, God, why?"

It is only when looking back and considering carefully that we discover how God with His merciful love has saved us from the deep, dark valley of sin and wickedness.

What we see as trials is actually the grace of God showered upon us to improve us spiritually. When facing trials, instead of grumbling to God, let us pray to Him, kneeling before the throne of grace and asking Him for spiritual strength and wisdom. The Lord Jesus will wipe away our tears, and we will surely see the light of God shining radiantly before us.

"Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb 4:14-16).

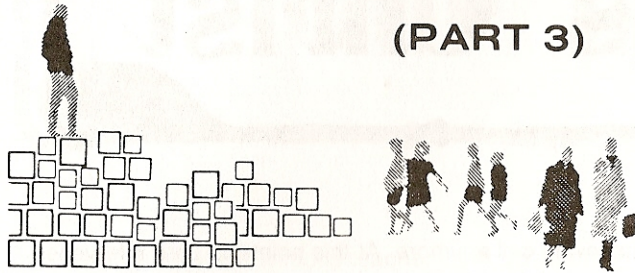
"For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant; later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Heb 12:11).

VIEWING LIFE

THROUGH

ecclesiastes

(PART 3)



THE WISE AND THE FOOLISH

"A wise man's heart inclines him toward the right, but a fool's heart toward the left" (Ecc 10:2).

Here, people are seen as belonging to two distinct groups, the "wise" and the "foolish". This has no relation to a person's intellectual capacity or intelligence, but refers to the level of spiritual wisdom and perception. The word "heart" refers to the inner being, from which all actions come (Mt 12:35). "Right" and "left" represent good and bad; of belonging to the spirit and belonging to the flesh. One way leads to heaven, the other to hell. We can see this by examining the differences between the wise man and the foolish man.

The wise man fears and honours God, for "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov 9:10; Ps 111:10). The foolish man, however, disregards Him having as his only god his greed for gain. He may even deny the very existence of God.

Another characteristic of the wise man is his spiritual discernment, for "a wise man will know the time and the way" (Ecc 8:5). With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he can clearly see the path to salvation, and knows at all times what is right and what is wrong. The foolish man, however, lacks this discernment, and acts on impulse and according to his passions. He confuses good for evil, and evil for good, light for darkness, and darkness for light (Is 5:20). For example, the Pharisees accused Jesus of using the power of Satan to cast out Satan. Nowadays, many Christians are also in great confusion with regard to the Holy Spirit and evil spirits. We pray that we may be like Daniel, possessing a spirit of "insight, intelligence, and wisdom" (Dan 5:11).

The wise man is humble and able to accept advice and criticism (Prov 12:15). We can see many examples of this humility in the Bible and can learn from these great men of faith, like David, Peter, Apollo, and many others. The foolish man, however, is unreasonable and stubborn, and will listen to no one but himself. To this the Preacher says, "Better is a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king, who will no longer take advice" (Ecc 4:13).

SOWING THE SEEDS

"In the morning sow your seed, and at evening withhold not your hand; for you do not know which will prosper, this or that, or whether both alike will be good" (Ecc 11:6).

Sowing seeds is every Christian's responsibility to the world. There are two types of seeds to be sown - the seed of the Word (Mk 4:14) and the seed of good deeds.

We must sow the seed of the Word throughout the whole world, for this is the commission of Jesus to all of us, His disciples. Paul says, "Preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season" (2 Tim 4:2). This is true, for even a small testimony on our part is useful. Even if there is no initial response from the listener, the seed may already have been sown, and with the passage of time the blessed ones will receive life-giving rain (the Holy Spirit). The seed (the words of God) will then germinate, and grow in them. Take the example of the boy's five loaves and two fish in the feeding of the five thousand. As long as we are willing to offer what we can to the Lord, it will never be in vain. There are many souls waiting to be saved in the world, and we must make this our task to work

together to preach the gospel.

The second type of seed is the seed of good deeds. The Bible says: "And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that you may always have enough of everything and may provide in abundance for every good work...and increase the harvest" (2 Cor 9:8-10). To do good deeds is to help the needy, no matter how small this help may seem. We can learn from the Lord Jesus, who looked on the suffering people with compassion, travelling far and wide to help them. Like Jesus, we should do good works out of love and with a "warm heart" (Tit 2:4; Gal 6:10), not hypocritically.

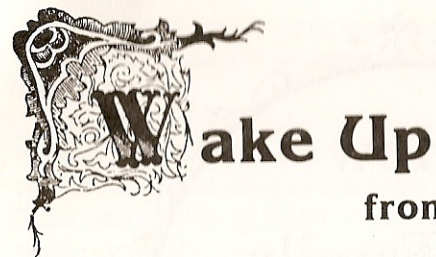
THE WHOLE DUTY OF MAN

"The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God, and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man" (Ecc 12:13).

Besides spreading the gospel and doing good deeds, it is also our responsibility to fear God and obey His commandments. We fear the Almighty God, for whatever good or bad we do will be judged by Him on the Last Day. Since we are His children, stamped with His Holy Spirit, we keep His commandments as a manifestation of our love to our Heavenly Father (1 Jn 5:3). We should take the example of Jesus, the Son of God. While manifested in the flesh, He humbled Himself and was obedient, even to death. Therefore God exalted Him, giving Him a name above all other names. By His grace we are saved and born again to be the children of God. Therefore we should be obedient to His will and fear the Lord, keeping ourselves from the world. Then, when the time comes, we will be exalted by God, and will appear with the Lord and be brought into glory (Heb 2:10; Col 3:4).

CONCLUSION

The Preacher uses the idea of vanity to show us that all worldly things are transient and futile. However, we have much more in life than to "eat, drink, and be merry" and then to die. The Preacher tells us that God is real; He is our omnipotent Creator, and He is our merciful Saviour. In this sinful, corrupted world of vanity, the Lord has opened up a new way of life for us, so that someday we may be freed from this world and enter into the heavenly kingdom to enjoy eternal bliss.

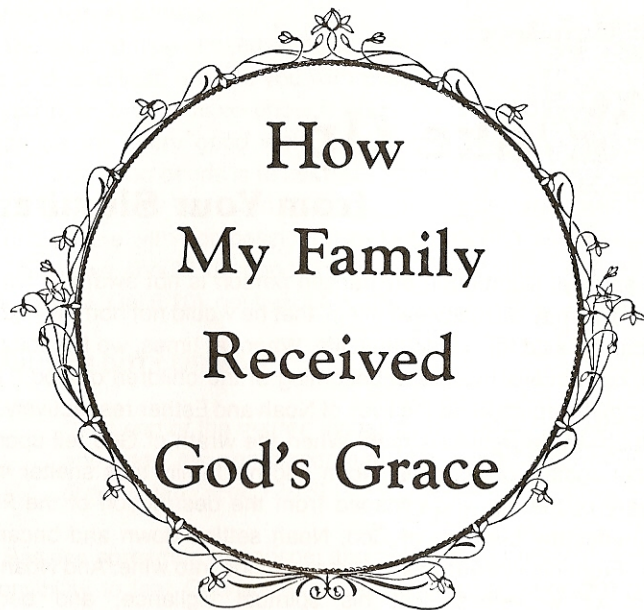


A spiritual slumbering or drunken person is not aware of his own actions, and may do many evil things that he would not normally do. The same can be said for our spiritual life. When, at times, we fall spiritually asleep, our actions may be unbecoming of the children of God. Let us learn from the episodes in the lives of Noah and Esther respectively.

Noah was a righteous man. When the wrath of God fell upon the decadent society of his days, Noah and his family took shelter in the sanctuary of the ark and escaped from the destruction of the Flood. Later, under the blessing of God, Noah settled down and became a farmer. From his vineyard came grapes made into wine. And Noah, in a moment of weakness, lost his spiritual vigilance, and became intoxicated, thereby staining his hitherto clean record.

The story of Esther tells how an ordinary Jewish girl rose to fame, as she was chosen to be the consort of Ahasuerus, king of the great Persian Empire. In the imperial favour and glory, her humble origins soon faded away. Unfortunately, her race was threatened and was on the brink of extermination (Est 3). Esther remained passive, ignorant of what was happening outside the palace. Her foster father, Mordecai, came to give a timely admonition, while Esther was not sure whether she could risk her life to see the king (For the entry without king's summon would incur a punishment by death). Mordecai's patriotic remark (Est 4:13-14) boosted her courage. She immediately called for a nationwide prayer and fasting on her behalf, preparing to violate the custom and present an appeal to the king.

These two incidents reflect how easy it is to become spiritually asleep. As Paul rightly pointed out, "Therefore let any one who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor 10:12). When a person is blessed and enjoys numerous gifts from God, it is important that he remains alert and watchful. One must not be carried away in one's own achievements which are but an outcome of the divine providence. Instead, he must glorify and praise the heavenly Father, the Creator of the universe and the arbiter of human destiny.



How My Family Received God's Grace

Testimony

Baptized by the Holy Spirit

I first attended services at the True Jesus Church on a Sabbath day, the 11th October, 1980. I prayed earnestly to God for the Holy spirit and to draw my family and me to Him. Soon later, I felt a current of warmth flowing from my head downwards. A peculiar tongue and joy rushed from within me like a stream. After the prayer, thanks be to our Lord, I was told that I had received the precious Holy Spirit. The words of God convinced me that I had found the Church established by Jesus Christ, preaching the truth of the Bible, accompanied by the Holy Spirit with miracles and signs.

My First Vision

In a dream on the same night I received the Holy Spirit, I was cornered by two hooligans. As they closed in, I felt lost and started to pray to the Lord.

A man in white garments appeared. He took my hands and brought me into the clouds until we came into wilderness. There he sat me on a rock.

A voice said, "Trust in the Lord and you shall be delivered." A streak of light flashed skywards. I looked and my hands which this man had just held, were dripping with blood! I woke up and quickly checked. There was no sign of blood on my hands. Concerning my dream, a deacon in the church explained that Jesus had suffered and died for us; He shed His blood for the remission of our sins. God would like me to appreciate this point.

The Grace of God upon My Husband

Early the following Sabbath morning, I got up to pray. Again the Holy Spirit instilled great joy in me. After the prayer, I read the Bible in John 6:35: "Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst'", also "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). Later, I explained to my children that we must believe in Jesus Christ to be saved. I thank the Lord that after hearing these, my children were all willing to receive the grace of God. At the church, we all prayed specially for my husband who had excruciating pain in his left leg for almost a year. The pain was so severe that he could not put on his socks and shoes without assistance. He had seen many doctors but none could help nor cure him. But praise the Lord for He relieved my husband of the pain once and for all during that prayer; not only this, He blessed my husband even more by giving him the invaluable Holy Spirit. Mere words cannot express the joy we all felt then.

My Second Vision

The same night I had another dream: I saw a man in white with a glorious chariot by his side. He invited all of us to come with him to which we promptly accepted. The landscape around us was extremely beautiful beyond description, and became even more spectacular as we progressed. The road grew narrower, and we finally reached a magnificent city with huge walls of marble. There were two guards above the closed gateway. As we approached the entrance, the gates swung open. What a sight and wonderful fragrance! Flowers of every

colour and size filled the city. There were rows upon rows of splendid houses. I noticed that they were all empty: our guide told us that they were reserved for future occupants.

We toured the rest of the city and then turned into a rough, winding road with dreary and gloomy surroundings. Suddenly I saw a woman I knew running ahead of us. I called out to her, but she ran even faster and disappeared into a deep, dark pit. I cried "Hallelujah" and jumped out of the chariot intending to see what had happened to her, but the guide restrained me. "It is not a place where you should go," said he. At this point my husband woke me on hearing my cry. Thankfully, I recalled how God had let me experience the glory of heaven and the horror of hell.

Jesus' Blood Washed Away My Sins

Thanks to the Lord, within a month, my entire family of six were bestowed with the Holy Spirit. We were among those baptized in December 1980. As I stepped into the water, I saw the sea and the spray of the breaking waves turning red with the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. It was truly amazing! I knelt down, repented and accepted His blood to wash my sins away. After the baptism, on my walk back to the shore, I looked back and the sea remained red with a man (I believe he was Jesus Christ) carrying a baby in his arms in the midst. I could no longer constrain myself but only cried out to the others, "Jesus is there! The Saviour of the world! Look, all of you!" Meanwhile the man with the baby still in his arms rose up to heaven. I remembered at that moment what Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of heaven" (Jn 3:5), while "unless you turn to become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 18:3). Thank you, Lord!

That was how my whole family was reborn, and became His children, now striving to grow in the likeness of our Lord Jesus Christ and in His chosen Church.

All glory be to God. Amen.

Witnessed by Mrs Chingmui Chang
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