

THE EMPTY TOMB

By Milton Smith

Some time back, I was reading about a man by the name of G.B. Hardy. Mr. Hardy was a respected Canadian scientist who told how he was led to consider the question of whether or not it was really possible for a living soul to survive the physical death of the body. His quest led him to begin examining various religions of the world. His honest mission was to try to discover if evidence showed that someone had actually “conquered death.” Mr. Hardy also wanted to find out if that someone who might have conquered death had also made a way for others to do the same thing. G.B. Hardy told how his earliest efforts at answering this question led him to examine the tombs of several prominent religious leaders. Unfortunately, he quickly discovered that the evidence showed conclusively that those tombs were still occupied.

When this respected scientist considered the sepulcher of Jesus, however, he quickly found out that this particular tomb had long been empty and that nobody in history had ever been able to produce the physical body of Jesus that had once occupied the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea.

Upon discovering that Jesus’ grave was left empty, Mr. Hardy began to study the life of Jesus and found that Jesus had actually predicted His own resurrection from the dead and thus His victory over the grave. According to Hardy, he was even more impressed because Jesus had once made the promise, “Because I live, you will live, too.” (John 14:19.) This honest scientist concluded that there was only one who had truly conquered death and opened the way for others to follow.

It is only Jesus who can reverse the curse of death. It was our Lord who once said, “I am the One who lives; I was dead, but look, I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys to death and to the place of the dead.” (Revelation 1:18.) Jesus once said to Martha, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me will have life even if they die. And everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.” (John 11:25.)

Those who choose to believe and respond to this wonderful promise will someday echo the words of the inspired apostle Paul, “Death, where is your victory? Death, where is your pain?” (1 Corinthians 15:55.)

Do you believe this promise?

— Tulsa, OK

THANK GOD FOR HIS FAVOR

By Danny Tunnell

A faithful Christian has God’s favor. “If God be for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31.) If our ways please the Lord, even our enemies will often be at peace with us. (Proverbs 16:7.) Nothing can separate us from the love of God. (Romans 8:35.)

The way to get God’s favor is to find out what His will is and do it. To access God’s favor it takes faith, and faith comes by hearing the word of God. (Romans 10:17.)

The word “favor” means to endorse and to support; it also means to assist. The Bible says that angels assist those who are the heirs of salvation. (Hebrews 1:14.) All of us need assistance, human and divine. When we have God’s favor, it makes things easier.

Favor also means to provide with advantages. We see that in the Bible. It was never accidental, as those individuals who knew God’s will set out to do it.

The Lord blesses the righteous with favor and surrounds him with favor as with a shield. (Psalm 5:11,12.) Everywhere he goes he has this divine assistance.

God’s favor is something that is granted, it is given, you can’t work for it. But it causes you to be successful when you would normally fail; it opens doors that normally would remain shut.

Noah found grace (favor) in the eyes of the Lord. (Genesis 6:5-8.) Others perished in the flood, but Noah and his family were spared.

God’s favor really shows up in the 91st Psalm. The pestilence (epidemic) may come and destroy thousands standing right beside someone, but it doesn’t come for the one who trusts in God. (Psalm 91:2; 5-7.)

God’s favor will cause you to be spared when other people fall by the wayside. “Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the Lord delivers him out of them all.” (Psalm 34:19.)

When you experience God’s favor always be thankful. Give praise and glory to God!

The devil opposes you. Isn’t it good to know that God is on your side as you obey Him and refuse to compromise with the world? (1 John 2:15-17.)

Daniel was thrown into the lion’s den. He never compromised his

devotion to God. (Daniel 6:21,22.) God’s favor was there when the three men were thrown into the fiery furnace. (Daniel 3:26-28.)

With God’s favor, there is no reason to be weak or to faint in the day of adversity. God’s favor brings joy, and the joy of the Lord is our strength. (Nehemiah 8:10.) Joy comprises one-third of the kingdom of God. (Romans 14:17.)

The Lord made all that Joseph did to prosper. God’s favor enabled Joseph to rise in Egyptian society. The Bible says that Joseph was “a goodly person, and well favored.” (Genesis 39:6, KJV.)

Would “well favored” describe your life? God favored Joseph because he honored God. In response to Potiphar’s wife’s advances, Joseph said, “How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” (Genesis 39:10.)

Why would God want to show any of us His favor? Find out what His will is, do it, and maintain your integrity. That’s to whom God grants His favor.

— Miami, OK

Old Paths

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“ask for the old paths” (Jer. 6:16)

DON’T FORGET!

By Dalton Key

When asked what learning was the most necessary, Antisthenes once replied, “Not to unlearn what you have learned.”

The Greek philosopher had a point. Remembering what we have already learned, what we should already know, is vital to life and growth. But it can also be frustrating as expressed in the words of one wit’s definition of memory: “A man’s memory is what he forgets with.”

Consider the Bible. Many of us have heard and read and studied the Bible for years. It has been a regular and important source of our instruction. Yet how much of this marvelous book do we remember? How many of the great events of the Old Testament can we recall? How many rich, New Testament texts can we locate? Can we show someone the plan of salvation as laid out in Scripture?

Paul writes of the gospel, “by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you - unless you believed in vain.” (1 Corinthians 15:2.) The King James uses the words, “If you keep in memory what I preached unto you.” How well do we “keep in memory” the sacred truths of God’s word.

You say you can’t remember the Bible? Don’t blame your brain. Researchers have calculated the brain’s storage capacity to be in the range somewhere between 10 terabytes and 2.5 petabytes. One terabyte is equal to 1000 gigabytes; one petabyte is equal to 1000 terabytes. Without getting into matters of higher mathematics, let’s just say that the brain has plenty of space for whatever Bible knowledge you’d like to store there.

Yet you still say you can’t remember the Bible?

I wonder? Could it be that we remember what we have a deep and intense interest in? Don’t we tend to remember best what we love most and spend the most time with?

The Psalmist wrote, “Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You.” (Psalm 119:11.) God’s word was not merely in his home, or on his shelf. It was in his heart. And how was this possible? “Oh, how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day.” (Psalm 119:97.) The Psalmist remembered what he loved!

Shouldn’t the same be true for us?

SOWING SMALL SEEDS

By Mark Lindley

The principle of sowing and reaping is a law of the natural world. For farmers, a time of sowing must precede reaping. What is true in the natural world is also true of spiritual things. The apostle Paul wrote, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.” (Galatians 6:7,8.)

The law of sowing and reaping is a universal rule that applies to Christians and non-Christians. It is an unchanging truism that we reap what we sow.

Fundamentally, there are three things necessary for sowing and reaping to occur: seed, ground, and time. A seed is a common and relatively small object, but it produces great results. Jesus said, “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches.” (Matthew 13:31-32.) The “seeds” sown by our words and deeds may seem small, but they produce significant results.

The ground in which we sow is life. In good times and bad, during all seasons and circumstances, we are sowing.

After sowing, there is a period of waiting for the harvest. In the natural world, the farmer waits for his crop to mature and has “long patience.” (cf. James 5:7.) Regarding spiritual things, after we have sown, we may reap in hours, days, weeks, years or in eternity. But we will reap what we sow.

Sowing “small” seeds of poor choices can lead to a bitter harvest of regret and sorrow. One may sow seeds of theft, stealing money from one’s employer, and reap a damaged reputation and loss of employment. One may sow seeds of addiction to alcohol, and reap the loss of health. If one never sows these seeds, the unwanted “plants” cannot grow.

It is also true that we may sow words and deeds of kindness, encouragement, gratitude, and love, and reap strong relationships and happy homes. (cf. Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:18-20.) As we journey through life, sowing small seeds for the Lord will pay great benefits. Sow good seed and reap a harvest of spiritual blessings!

— Ripley, MS

IT'S ALL ABOUT DESIRE

By Bobby Key

If the Bible is completely beyond man's grasp, how could one expect to know God and be saved eternally? Doesn't it stand to reason that the God who gave us the revelation by which one is drawn to Him (John 6:44,45), and by which He will one day judge us (John 12:48), enable us all to understand that revelation?

Otherwise, where is the hope of salvation for ordinary people like you and me?

"For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." (Romans 15:4.) Only through study can one "present himself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (2 Timothy 2:15.)

Much of the failure to understand lies in our unwillingness to understand. There is that failure to see which comes from a refusal to see. A man can deliberately shut his mind to truth which he does not wish to see; he can be deliberately dense toward teaching which he does not wish to accept. Nicodemus was like that. (John 3.)

If a man does not wish to be changed, he will deliberately shut his eyes and his mind and his heart to the power which can change him. When the invitation is offered by the Lord, some of us could say if we were honest, "No thank you; I am quite satisfied with myself as I am, and I don't want to be changed."

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled." (Matthew 5:6.) This is God's promise to all men everywhere. The common people still hear Him gladly. (Mark 12:37.)

Yes, we can all understand God's message. But we must have a genuine desire to understand.

— DECEASED

"And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says, 'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive; for the hearts of this people have grown dull, Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.' But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear." (Matthew 13:14-16.)

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled." (Matthew 5:6.)

EDITORIALLY SPEAKING . . .

JOY, EVEN NOW

By Dalton Key

As the drumbeats of war are increasing around the globe, and as domestic problems of crime, inflation, and societal upheaval are looming large, many of us seem to be barely hanging on, so obsessed with living in the fantasy worlds of "might-have-been" and "going-to-be" that we fail to see the everyday joy of the here and now.

Yes, in the midst of crisis, even now, there can still be joy.

I remember reading, many years ago now, a psychologist's assessment that 94% of people are simply enduring the present as they fill their minds with thoughts of better days ahead. I doubt that percentage has improved.

By and large, many of us are not happy now. We find little joy in today. Oh, yes! when the pandemic is past, when the economy rebounds, when the kids are back to school (or grown), when we are finally able to buy that new car or new house, when retirement finally comes (or comes back), when that someday, ever-elusive "something" takes place, then, and only then, will happiness be ours.

In our preoccupation with tomorrow's possibilities, we sadly fail to appreciate, or even notice, today's blessings. We become blind to the beauty of the moment.

You've heard it before: happiness is not so much the destination as it is the journey. But hearing and accepting are two very different things. The truth is this - if you aren't happy now, with what you have, where you are, as things are, you probably wouldn't be any happier were things to change.

I often take note of the words of a plaque occupying a prominent place in my study, words which simply say, "The really happy man is the one who can enjoy the scenery when he has to take a detour."

We've definitely been taking a detour of late. Are we enjoying the scenery?

The apostle Paul put it this way: "Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:11-13.) Not surprisingly, those words follow on the heels of these: "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4.) And a bit later, Paul affirms, "And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:19.)

Yes, the Lord will bless us. This we believe. But He is blessing us now, today, in the midst of our current situation.

We just have to keep our eyes open and our faith strong.

**"LOVE ONE ANOTHER"**

By Luke Bower

people as possible, find a pew that will allow a quick get-away, and as soon as the prayer is over we make our dash to the car.

I heard a quote which seems to capture the attitude of many: "To live above with those we know - now that will be grace and glory. To live below with those we know - now, that's a different story!"

Although this lifestyle might sound appealing to many of us, it is not how we are called to live as Christians. One of the greatest commands we are given is to love one another. How can we do that if we refuse to interact with one another? How can our good works be a light to the world if we refuse to let the world see them? One of our purposes for gathering together in worship is to encourage each other, but how can we do that without talking to, or interacting with, one another?

Even though it is not always

convenient and may mean stepping out of our comfort zones, we need to slow down and share our lives with others. Talk to the cashier at the grocery store. Don't work on slipping out of church services so quickly.

Let's make every effort to love one another and let our lives be a light to those we meet.

— Abilene, TX

"By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:35.)

Of Cows And Christians

By Joe Slater

A city slicker bought a farm and moved into the farmhouse. He went to his new neighbor and asked if he might purchase a milk cow. The neighbor sold him his prize milk cow, and the city slicker happily took the cow to the barn on his farm.

Within three weeks the cow went dry. The city slicker returned to his neighbor and complained: "That milk cow you sold me is no good!" The astonished neighbor replied, "What do you mean?" The city slicker explained: "She has gone dry! I can't understand it, either. If ever a person was kind and considerate to an animal, I was to that cow. If I didn't need any milk, I didn't milk her. If I needed only a quart, I took only a quart." The neighbor then explained that the way to keep milk flowing wasn't to take as little as possible from the cow, but to take as much as possible.

Isn't that true of the life of a Christian? Like milk cows, we must keep giving in order to keep the flow of Christianity alive. We are to give of our time, our talent, and our treasure.

If we give of these things only when an extraordinary need arises, we miss the opportunities and joys of day-to-day service.

In the case of the milk cow, there is always a need for more milk. Not everyone has a full stomach. All over the world there are hungry people. Besides, the "use it or lose it" factor is obvious. Likewise, there is always more to do in the Lord's kingdom. There are classes to be taught, discouraged people to be encouraged, sick and homebound people to be visited or called or written to, missionaries to be supported and encouraged, lost friends, relatives, co-workers, and neighbors to be contacted, and a world full of people to be prayed for. If we are content to do only a tiny bit, we may end up doing nothing at all. On the other hand, if we will give and give of our time, talent, and treasure, God will supply every need and give us additional opportunities to glorify Him and bless other people's lives.

— Justin, TX

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." (1 Corinthians 15:58.)

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