



LENT

University Reformed Church Lenten Booklet 2013

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the absolute best news you will ever hear. This collection of messages is intended to bring thanksgiving, encouragement, and joy through many individuals sharing their interactions with the Good News.

We have called this a Lenten booklet because that is when we are publishing it. It can be used at any time of the year; you can start any time you like. We have many excellent writers at University Reformed Church; we expect that at least some of their styles will resonate well with you. File some away to repeat to yourself on good or bad days – preach the gospel to yourself! Pray that God will bring some to mind in your interactions with believers and non-believers – preach the gospel to others! Make it a point to thank the authors – reflect the gospel to them. And, when you see the gospel in action, write down your experience, in case we make a new book next year.

Allan Knapp - Editor

Index for URC Lenten Gospel Book 2013

Title	Author
Introduction	
1 Angels are Leaning In	Ben Falconer
2 What Does the Cross Reveal	Jan Stacey Bieler
3 The Battle is Won	Jon Saunders
4 The Great Transaction	Thom Spalding
5 Of First Importance	Allan Knapp
6 Distracted From Holiness	Nick Settingington
7 Hezekiah's Heroic God	Kevin DeYoung
8 But Then I talked to My Maker	Saralee Howard
9 Doxology Bubbling Over	Allan Knapp
10 The Builder is Better	Brad Atchison
11 The Old Weathered Cross	Jim Schultz
12 The Once and Always Gospel	Brad Beals
13 None Is Righteous	Allan Knapp
14 Room Full of Paintings with Jesus on the Cross	Tom Bieler
15 The Bronze Serpent	Allan Knapp
16 Amaziah's God of Plenty	Kevin DeYoung
17 Lively Stones	Howard King
18 Sanctuary	Jan Stacey Bieler
19 What Must I Know	Allan Knapp
20tiiime is on my side, NO it ain't	Peeter Lukas
21 Christmas - Waiting for Messiah	Allan Knapp
22 At the Right Time	Allan Knapp
23 Road to Emmaus	Allan Knapp
24 Laying the Groundwork	Allan Knapp
25 God Moves His People	Allan Knapp
26 Discussion Starters and Exits	Allan Knapp
27 Roles	Allan Knapp
28 The God Who Hears	Nick Settingington
29 Ahaziah, Athaliah, and the Promises of God	Kevin DeYoung
30 Seek the Risen, Ruling Christ	Brad Atchison
31 Holy, Holy, Holy	Allan Knapp
32 Jesus Christ, Our Sure Foundation	Jan Stacey Bieler
33 Jesus' Compassion	Jason Helopoulos
34 How Majestic Is Your Name	Allan Knapp

35	His Promised Presence	Thom Spalding
36	The Disabled Man in Me	Dan Lohrman
37	Comfort and Consolation in Christ	Jason Helopoulos
38	Are We There Yet, Daddy?	Peeter Lukas
39	Blow the Trumpets	Kevin DeYoung
40	Saul to Paul	Allan Knapp



Lenten 1 ~ Angels are Leaning In

Do you ever wonder why some people make such a big deal about the Gospel? Of course we believe it is good news and the only means of sinful people being made right with their holy God. But is it possible we can emphasize something too much? Besides, do you ever get tired of hearing the same old message? Isn't there something more exciting? Isn't there something new?

In Peter's first epistle, he is writing to encourage believers who are experiencing various trials in life by reminding them of the infinite value of their salvation in Jesus Christ. At the end of 1 Peter 1:12, he writes, almost as a throw away comment, that the contents of the Good News are "things into which angels long to look." Why would angels—who live in glory worshipping the Almighty day and night, who are morally blameless and perfectly do God's bidding, who've seen God's work in every period of salvation history and have in some cases participated in bringing it about—long to look into the Gospel message?

There is something that we as redeemed sinners experience that angels can only imagine. They can conceive of the idea of being freed from bondage to sin, but they don't know what it feels like. They can understand the concept of forgiveness, but they haven't needed it themselves. Angels are intensely interested in the glorious salvation message that we have received in Christ Jesus. And our Heavenly Father saw fit to give us—broken, sinful, human beings—this message of hope, of new life, of reconciliation, and of grace in the midst of trial.

So the next time you are wondering what's the big deal about the Gospel, or you are doubting God's love for you, or you are struggling under the weight of some grief, remember that the Lord has entrusted to you such incredible, glorious, and inexpressible good news—a message that even the elect angels are leaning in right now to hear us articulate and cherish. Thanks be to God!

Ben Falconer



Lenten 2 ~ What Does the Cross Reveal?

In one chapter in *The Cross of Christ*, John Stott discusses “What does the cross reveal?”

*The Glory of God

Jesus showed the glory of God during his life through his miracles or “signs,” as the gospel writer John called them. Though Jesus was humiliated in front of a crowd of Roman guards and mockers, the cross was the place where the Son of Man was glorified.

*The Justice of God

“The cross demonstrates with equal vividness both his justice in judging sin and his mercy in justifying the sinner.” (Stott, 2007) The righteousness of God continues to be revealed wherever the gospel is preached today.

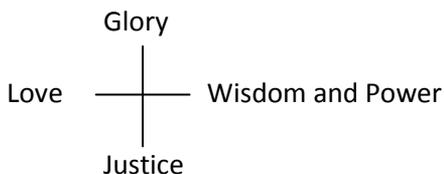
*The Love of God

“This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” (1 John 4:10). God gave His Son to die for us – sinful, godless, rebellious, and helpless people.

*The Wisdom and Power of God

The cross both meets our needs and satisfies God’s own character. “For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength. (1 Corinthians 1:25) Let us echo Paul’s response: “Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!” (Romans 11:33)

These four revelations create a cross:



As I center my life more on the cross,
knowing in my heart
more of Your glory, justice, love, wisdom and power,
I will be freed from my past hurts and failings.

I will be eager to listen and learn from You this day,
Eager to love You through serving others,
Learning to lay down my life because You laid down Your life for
me.

I will walk into the future with freedom to follow You
with my whole life, for my whole life.

Jan Stacey Bieler



Lenten 3 ~ The Battle is Won

As a Spartan I have always found Greek history interesting. One of the great battles in Greek history was fought on the plains of Marathon. The Persians were about to attack Athens from the sea and Athens realized that they needed more help.

The problem was that help was far away and the attack quickly approaching. One man, brave Pheidippides, volunteered to be the runner to go and ask for help. Legend has it that he ran 150 miles, through the mountains, in two days to plead for help from the men at Sparta.

His plea was heard, the Spartans arrived, and the battle at Marathon was won. This was such an overwhelming victory Pheidippides laced up his shoes one more time to run 26.2 miles (the distance of the modern marathon) through the villages of Athens shouting “Νικωμεν!” meaning “we have won!” It is believed that after his final victory run Pheidippides collapsed and died of exhaustion.

To steal a phrase from the great Martyn Lloyd-Jones, the message that Pheidippides proclaimed was not a message of advice but a message of news. Gospel in Greek (euangélion) literally means good news. It is a divine revelation that the war is over and the victory has been secured.

Suppose Pheidippides had been shouting 20 things that the villagers must do to make them ready for battle. Certainly, you will listen to him but you will be afraid because you do not know what the final outcome will be. All Pheidippides has brought is some good advice which might bring about works, but they will be works that are rooted in fear and uncertainty. But that’s not how the story ends. Pheidippides runs through the town shouting a message of great news, “the battle is won!

Good advice brings about works rooted in fear. The works wrought by God’s Good News, on the other hand, are rooted in certainty. Clearly the Christian gospel - the news of Jesus absorbing the wrath of God on our behalf and then rising in resurrection glory – is more than simply good advice on how to live better. It is the best news you can ever hear.

Νικωμεν! Nike! He has won on our behalf!

Jon Saunders



Lenten 4 ~ The Great Transaction

I remember when it hit me – out of the blue! Walking towards my room in the residence hall I stopped at a drinking fountain. While sipping some water – boom – the words of scripture came to me, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21). “Wow, Lord”, I thought, “What an awesome transfer! Thank you!”

This great divine transaction – so simply described, and now imbedded deeply in my heart. I’ve thought about that drinking fountain moment and passage many times over the last 30+ years, and am grateful for his gift of eternal life – a reconciled life, made possible by the sacrificial Lamb of God. It’s like I’m now wearing a beautiful, multi-colored robe, like the one Joseph wore, except this garment is the righteousness of Christ. It “covers” me completely so God only sees the spotless sin-free nature of his Son – his righteousness.

The transaction was not “fair” – why should I reap the benefit, while Jesus suffered the dreadful consequences of my sin? But thanks be to our heavenly Father who chose for his Son the path that led to Calvary; I can now walk with Him forgiven and made righteous.

Thom Spalding



Lenten 5 ~ Of First Importance

One of the earliest creeds, as recorded in 1 Corinthians 15:3-6, testifies to both the scriptural and historical integrity of the gospel.

“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.”

Two events are key - Jesus died and he rose again. Both happened according to the scriptures, which roots them in the understanding of the One True God of the Israelites. If “the scriptures” is referring to just one passage, it might be the afflicted lamb of Isaiah 53. But what a glorious realization it is that ALL of the Old Testament that points to the Messiah - the redeemer; prophet, priest, and king; the promised seed and blessing; the great I AM - all are achieved in Jesus. He himself claims to be the fulfillment of all the law and the prophets as He miraculously opened the minds of His disciples to understand the scriptures (Luke 24.44-47).

Just as the whole of God’s recorded plan points to these two events, real-life proofs anchor them in history. When Jesus died, he was buried. You don’t bury live people; He was dead. He was a real person, and he really died. Then Jesus astonishingly rose from being dead. The proof was that he appeared not only to his best friends but also to hundreds more. He rose from the dead, he is alive, and the Corinthians were invited to interview any of hundreds of eye witnesses who saw and talked to Him. It’s the truth.

Allan Knapp



Lenten 6 ~Distracted from Holiness

Heb 12:14 *Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.*

Let us consider briefly two things. First, there is a great **need** for holiness because there are many things that can distract us from it. Jesus warns us of the seed that is choked out because of “the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches” (Matt. 13:22). While most Christians understand the negative impacts of lust, greed, immorality, shameful speech, etc. upon the soul, few are mindful of the destruction that comes from the ordinary cares and deceitfulness of the world. This is especially problematic for 21st century Americans, who have access to more stuff than ever before. Second homes, vacations, time-shares, boats, hobby cars, iStuff, sporting goods, etc.—all these are not morally evil when used or owned properly. However, the hidden secret behind all these things is that they take time, energy and resources to maintain. It’s subtle and deceitful, but eventually one can become so distracted with the cares of this world that he forgets God, or worse, says *there’s no time for God!* Distractions are everywhere, and not always are they morally dubious things.

Second, the ultimate **reward** of holiness is that we get to see the Lord. This is an echo from words of Jesus: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matt. 5:8). Failing to work out our salvation with fear and trembling makes grace *cheap*. Our sin put Christ on the cross, and the more we disregard our sin the more we denigrate his redemption. We must look to Christ—the perfect, sinless one who endured the punishment that our sins deserved and who gave us his perfect righteous. Indeed *he* “became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and **sanctification** and redemption” (I Cor. 1:30). Our sanctification is possible only because he became sanctification for us. He gives us all we need through the Spirit to live out this divine command and to see him in radiant glory. Brothers and sisters, let us *strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.*

Nick Setterington



Lenten 7 ~ Hezekiah's Heroic God

So the Lord saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib king of Assyria and from the hand of all his enemies, and he provided for them on every side (2 Chronicles 32:22).

Several years ago I read a fascinating book entitled *What If? The World's Foremost Military Historians Imagine What Might Have Been*. It's a book of counterfactual history where scholars suggest how history would be different if key conflicts—the Battle of Brooklyn, Midway, D-Day, etc.—had gone differently.

The first chapter, by William McNeill, is about the plague that saved Jerusalem in 701 B.C. Assyria was threatening to destroy Jerusalem and wipe Judah off the map. This was no idle threat. Nation after nation had fallen to this superpower from the north. But God would not abandon his people. "Because you have prayed to me concerning Sennacherib king of Assyria," the Lord reassured King Hezekiah, "I will defend this city and save it." Overnight the entire army was wiped out and the city spared without one drop of Israelite blood.

These events confirmed for the Jews the implausible and world-changing belief that their God was the only true God, making the failed siege of Jerusalem the most fateful might-have-been of history. "Never before or since," writes McNeill, "has so much depended on so few, believing so wholly in their one true god, and in such bold defiance of common sense." Our God is best when the odds are against him most.

Kevin DeYoung



Lenten 8 ~ But Then I Talked to My Maker

She is in the middle of a personal wilderness, a cold icy Michigan evening, when she comes to Shared Pregnancy Women’s Center, a non-profit ministry helping women who are unexpectedly pregnant. She is lost and knows not where to turn. She walks slowly up the front steps, her legs scarcely able to hold her up. She is still married but her husband had left her and their children almost a year ago. She is pregnant now not by her husband but by a longtime friend....she cares for him and he for her but she is ashamed and full of doubt. She looks at me—a sixty-year-old white woman wearing a wedding ring-- fearing disapproval. I listen.

We talk about the baby. In the midst of the wilderness of desertion, she succumbed to temptation. She has repented. Not just regret—she repents. Still, she is desolate. Embarrassed. Fearful. Together we walk slowly to the ultrasound room. There deep within, the sonographer finds a beautiful unborn child—about twelve weeks along. Legs kicking, baby waves. One hand first. Then both hands up, like the hands of worshippers. Both hands move back and forth. “Jazz hands,” I say, and we laugh.

“Maybe I can do this,” she says about continuing in the pregnancy. “I thought about abortion,” she tells me quietly. “But then I talked to my Maker.” She leaves, her steps a bit steadier than before. I stay and fill out paperwork, trying to piece together gospel words I will text to her later that evening. We will talk over the next weeks. For now I point her to Isaiah 44:22. “I have swept away your offenses like a cloud, your sins like the morning mist. Return to me, for I have redeemed you.”

Saralee Howard



Lenten 9 ~ Doxology Bubbling Over

One of the great benefits of knowing that Jesus Christ made a substitution for us on the cross, taking our sins onto himself and giving to us his righteousness is that the joy of that fact bubbles over at surprising times. The righteous man meditates on the word; the word is wonderful; the righteous man is overwhelmed with joy and amazement. Check out Paul in 1Timothy 6.11-16. He is ramping up and getting excited about the way his disciple Timothy ought to live. “Avoid all these bad things! Do all these good things! Remember that all those to whom you confessed your faith know you are capable of great things. And you know that God and Jesus are with you right now, and Jesus will come back at just the right time...”

And then, all of a sudden, Paul is just so overcome by all of the great things that Jesus has done and will be doing, that he breaks into a delightful doxology – a description of the grandeur of God –

“He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.”

Paul does not miss a beat. His interlude in the spirit ends and he lands back in advice mode – this time about how to deal with rich folks. But for that short interlude, Paul is sharing a brief glimpse of what heaven will be like – the re-created heaven on earth, in the presence of THE King, the One True God, the only Sovereign, whose unapproachable light will be all the lamp that is needed.

Allan Knapp



Lenten 10 ~ The Builder is Better

"For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses— as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself."

-Hebrews 3:3

It still seems revolutionary. The first time I read *Desiring God* I heard that God is infinitely better than anything in this world. It made sense, and yet, it seemed revolutionary. God is better than creation. God is better than life. God is better than the richest foods, the most beautiful scenery, the funniest TV shows, and the most dramatic books. If it's in the sky, on the earth, or beneath the sea, it's not as good as the Lord.

In this same way, Jesus is better than Moses. The creator of the entire universe came down to mediate the issues between man and the God head. Moses, though a great servant, could not do what Christ has done for us. He could not breathe life into dead hearts and bones (Ezekiel 37). He could not transform the hearts of man (Ephesians 2:1-9). He could not give them son-ship through his spirit (Romans 8:13-17). Moses was just a sinful prophet relaying the word of God to the people. He could only give us the law of God, which could convict me of my sin but never save me (Romans 3:20).

Jesus is better because he could fulfill the law and redeem us from its curse (Matthew 5:17, Galatians 3:10-14). We must move forward, understanding that though the Law is an integral part to our faith, it is not the ends of it. It is a passing ministry of glory that has been superseded by something better. The ends of our faith is this: *"beholding the glory of the Lord, (which leads to us to) being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another."* (2 Corinthians 3:18)

Brad Atchison



Lenten 11 ~ The Old Weathered Cross

I came upon the Garden peninsula exit exactly 340 miles north of Lansing. Turning off U.S.-2, I began following the narrow two lane blacktop towards Fayette State Park. Although the historic town site is a scenic wonder, the sixteen mile trip to the park is not picturesque. I was late for my 5th Annual Photogenic Fayette workshop set-up meeting, but that was the least of my worries.

My professional and personal lives were full of uncertainty. This was my last trip to Fayette as the field site coordinator. My Mother was bedridden with Parkinson's disease and my Father was losing the use of his legs. Thrust into the role of primary caretaker, my relationships with friends and family seemed to be unraveling. I felt like a boat drifting with no anchor.

Nearing the park entrance my thoughts focused on a sight unique to this road. Within an isolated cemetery was a 20-foot high cross made from two massive weathered beams. The cross blended into the landscape on this overcast day. In previous trips I had photographed the cross and even poked fun at the cross by naming it The Old Rugged "Yoooper" Cross. Then the sun came out. The cross and its shadow dominated the scene. Now I stopped my car and stared in awe. Maybe these beams were from a church that once stood there? At that moment I could imagine the crucifixion and the blood Jesus shed for me.

Nothing more happened. No voices, no shouting and no miracles. But deep within my soul a prayer was answered and a calmness came over me—the calm assurance that I had been seeking. That cross connected the Christian dots in my life. Dots like my Grandmother's prayers in a mining town church and my uncle Ray explaining why C.S. Lewis books calmed him while recovering from a heart attack. I got back in my car. I still had a long way to travel in my Christian walk. But now I had an anchor—The Cross.

Jim Schultz



Lenten 12 ~ The Once and Always Gospel

*I call on the LORD in my distress,
and he answers me.*

²*Save me, LORD,
from lying lips
and from deceitful tongues.*

³*What will he do to you,
and what more besides,
you deceitful tongue?*

⁴*He will punish you with a warrior's sharp arrows,
with burning coals of the broom bush.*

Psalms 120:1-4

David's words here refer to his enemies, but they can also be read as a prayer for deliverance from our sin-sick selves. David has no defense against this enemy. He is in distress. And like David, we have no defense against our chief enemy, our own sin, except that we turn to Christ and say with the psalmist, "Deliver me!"

That prayer and God's answer to it—as very broad categories—comprise the Gospel.

The gospel saves us in that it delivers us from the curse of sin. It spares us God's righteous judgment (no warriors' arrows or burning coals for us; Christ took them instead). It secures for us an unblemished legal standing before God—justification—but it doesn't stop there. The gospel also delivers us from our daily struggle with sin, lying lips and deceitful tongues included. That's sanctification.

Yet this is no "let go and let God" proposition. God calls us to stand and fight, even describes the armor and weapons we're to use. But neither is it a matter of trying harder or of taking firmer grip of our bootstraps. We don't have it in us to obey God's word no matter how hard we try. And yet God calls us also to obey his word. So what's the Christian to do?

Our first experience of the gospel guides us: We cry out just as we did when we first realized we needed a savior. We say, “Deliver me, O LORD!” because the gospel that justified us then is the same gospel that sanctifies us now and tomorrow and every day until we see him face to face. “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

Brad Beals



Lenten 13 ~ None Is Righteous

The curse is so bad, so pervasive, and so full of deceit that people don't recognize its awful nature. Romans 3.10-18 gives a devastating summary of the effects of the curse on ALL people. A sampling of the verses pulled in from six different psalms, a proverb, and a chapter each from Isaiah and Ecclesiastes includes: "None is righteous; they have become worthless; no one does good; the venom of asps is under their lips; in their paths are ruin and misery; there is no fear of God before their eyes." It is much worse than needing a hand slap or a brief timeout to get our thoughts together; we're talking about being the *source* of ruin, misery, and snake poison!

Even worse, there is no effort, improvement plan or rehabilitation program that will make us any better. Realize the encompassing nature of the basic 10 commandments, and meditate for a moment on your inability this day to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your strength." We can't get ahead on the goodness scale, we will be held accountable to a God who is more holy than we can imagine. We're dead.

But once we realize our miserable status, Romans 3.21-26 reveals the good news! The central historical act of Jesus offering his life on the cross as a sacrifice sets in motion a boatload of theological vocabulary, each of which is wonderful for us who believe. There is justification - the righteousness of God is available by His grace as a gift! There is redemption - a paying of the price for our continual law-breaking! There is propitiation - God's wrath is satisfied! There is forgiveness - wiping the slate clean now and in the future through faith in Jesus Christ!

Bottom line, the just and holy God provides a means to remove the curse from his people. You might complain about all the high-priced theological words, but we don't even realize the desperation of our cursed nature until we hear all the components of the Good News.



Lenten 14 ~ Rooms Full of Paintings with Jesus on the Cross

In visiting museums in Europe, one generally finds a room from the middle ages filled with images of Jesus on the cross. I have often wondered how much this offends our generation, and sends us away to go enjoy impressionism as an alternative (even modern art is less uncomfortable). I have wondered how important crucifixion paintings must have been, to have so many of them available even today. They were in hospital rooms to look upon to assist healing. Of course there was no TV or internet then, and art was an important means of visually communicating ‘We killed the son of God by nailing him onto a cross – can you believe we did that?’ Maybe there was a fascination with this grotesque image, similar to the way we are fascinated with all the ways people can die on TV.

Am I so offended because I helped nail his hands onto that cross with my self-righteous anger, or my expectations to be served or entertained, or my insistence of having things my way? Paul bluntly enumerates other ways to drive the nails in with our earthly nature in Col 3:5-9: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, anger, rage, malice, slander, filthy language, lies, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Nevertheless, these motives and actions energize compelling TV shows and movies that hold our attention sufficiently for advertisers to sell products, which are meant to give us hope that we can have lives as exciting as those in the dramas we watch. But, is the message of advertisers and script writers trustworthy (what pain is hiding behind the glittering images)?

Despite the pain from the nails in his hands and feet, Jesus had his focus on the Kingdom of Heaven. He discussed this with the crucified robber next to him. He asked God to forgive us, because we didn’t yet realize that by pounding the nails in, we were also preparing the way for us to follow him into the Kingdom of Heaven. Indeed Jesus has offered us a limited time opportunity to establish roots in eternity. Paul offers some practical advice on how to leave the earthly nature behind: “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” (Phil 4:8).



Lenten 15 ~ The Bronze Serpent

John 3.16 is probably the most famous gospel Bible verse ever. One Halloween when the kids were young, my costume was a rainbow wig and a white sign with black letters: John 3.16. Everyone recognized the zealot who managed to get his message broadcast at every big sporting event. You don't see that guy so much anymore. I don't know if he quit or was refused admittance or the TV people stopped showing him like they stopped showing streakers, but he was famous for a time. The verse is still famous – "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

It turns out that John 3.14-15 gives a vibrant answer to the question of whether you believe or not. "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life." The context is the episode in Numbers 21.4-9, where God punished the whining and complaining Israelites with "fiery" poisonous snakes. After the people repented, God told Moses the remedy – Moses would attach a bronze serpent to a pole and whoever looked at it would live. For the bitten Israelites, they had to believe enough - in what Moses told them that God had told him - to look at the snake on the pole. Some looked and lived; some didn't and died.

Your "Do I believe?" test is not as simple as gazing at a specific relic, but it is clear there will be some action involved; you need to be doing something. A good start is making use of the "means of grace":

- Read the Bible regularly
- Pray
- Worship with other believers
- Take Communion
- Confess sins

If these are unclear, identify a Christian and talk to him/her about who Jesus is and what all these actions are about.

Allan Knapp



Lenten 16 ~ Amaziah's God of Plenty

The man of God answered, "The Lord is able to give you much more than this" (2 Chronicles 25:9b).

Amaziah's reign was far from perfect, but it did include a great victory.

Amaziah marshaled together 300,000 fighting men to fight against Edom. Just to be safe, he hired 100,000 Israelite mercenaries for a hundred talents of silver. But a man of God warned the king otherwise, saying "the Lord is not with Israel" (v. 7). "But what about the hundred talents I paid for these Israelite troops," asked Amaziah (v. 8). The man of God replied with one of my favorite lines in the Bible, "The Lord can give you much more than that" (9). So Amaziah dismissed the troops and won the battle.

God seems to enjoy victory most when it seems most improbable. He turned away most of Gideon's men, accomplished salvation through death on a cross, and displays his glory in jars of clay. God loves to beat the odds. And he loves it when we trust him for more than we can ask or imagine. Some people think this means that God will make them rich and healthy. That's the wrong application of this passage. But never taking risks for God is also wrong. Recklessness is bad, but so is faithlessness. "Depend on it," Hudson Taylor famously remarked, "God's work done in God's way, will never lack God's supplies."

Kevin DeYoung



Lenten 17 ~ Lively Stones

As University Reformed Church goes forth in the new building on Timberlane, we hear many comments about how nice the auditorium is and how the various rooms will facilitate the congregation. There is some talk about windows, colors and accessibility. All of these concerns must be addressed. The neighbors around Timberlaine were pleased that the building would once again be used as a church.

In 1 Peter 2 we read, "To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious. Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner stone, elect, precious and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded" (King James Version).

As much as we want to appreciate University Reformed Church's new building with the fine appointments or we are concerned about renovations, we need to remember that it is the Chief Corner Stone (Jesus Christ) and his Lively Stones (Us) which must be seen as the working force in our community.

Howard King



Lenten 18 ~ Sanctuary

In Judith Couchman's book, *The Mystery of the Cross: Bringing Ancient Christian Images to Life*, one chapter describes the practice of 'sanctuary'. After the Israelites conquered Canaan, eleven of the tribes settled into their designated lands. However, the Levites' or priests' towns and pasturelands were distributed throughout Canaan. In those areas six cities of refuge were to be established (Numbers 35:6). People who had unintentionally murdered someone could find refuge from the retribution of the family of the murdered person in these six cities.

At the end of the fourth century AD the Roman government recognized the Christian sanctuary laws for churches. Beginning in 600 AD England had sanctuary laws, but they varied with locations and rulers. Stone crosses, inscribed with the word *Sancturarium* stood as signposts along the highways, directing sinners to their haven. Sometimes, if those fleeing reached the boundaries of the church property, they would be safe. In some churches the fugitive needed to sit on a "peace stool" near the altar to gain sanctuary.

"Whatever sin we commit, however many times we fail, He forgives us. God waits in the night of our souls, swinging open his broad door of grace when we flee to him and repent. He accepts us however we arrive: sweaty from the escape, wild-eyed with fear, the blood-stench of crime on our sleeves, and doubting that sanctuary from sin –our haunting spiritual crimes– actually exists. Still we believe it." (*Mystery of the Cross*, 187)

You tell me to seek Your face.

Where else can I go?

You have the words of eternal life.

Sanctuary crosses remind me to flee to Your presence.

Help me this day to quickly turn to You

To sit on your peace-seat

So You can cover my sins

with Your strong blood that brings sinners to life, even eternal life.

You shelter me under Your wings

From the winds and waves of life

From foolish words and deeds.

May I know the stillness of being kept by You today and forever.

(Sanctuary crosses can still be seen in England today.

<http://www.panoramio.com/photo/66940057>)

Jan Stacey Bieler



Lenten 19 ~ What Must I KNOW

Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 1

Q1. What is your only comfort in life and in death?

A. That I am not my own, but belong – body and soul, in life and in death – to my faithful savior Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven: in fact, all things must work together for my salvation. Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.

Q2. What must you know to live and die in the joy of this comfort?

A. Three things:

first, how great my sin and misery are;

second, how I am set free from all my sins and misery;

third, how I am to thank God for such deliverance.

This is a brilliant gospel summary to memorize, especially if everyone else in the New Members class is doing it. The Heidelberg Catechism edition we use in the class has a plethora of scripture passages to support each answer; checking the references allows one to explore the context and content further. Many gospel truths are stated or implied: the depth of sin under the curse, the need for a savior, Christ's death and resurrection, heaven, and the Christian's commitment to love and thank Jesus by obeying His commands. Other truths are included: the existence of and freedom from the devil, God's promises to be with us and to work things for our good, and the nature of the Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The verb in Question two, "know," is a preciously subtle way of stating that salvation is by faith alone. I cannot earn it; I must do what Jesus taught – repent and believe.

Allan Knapp



Lenten 20 ~ "...tiiiime is on my side, NO it ain't!"

I was a Beatles fan in my youth. They were more "acceptable" than the rouge Rolling Stones. At my "advanced" age I still find myself disagreeing with Mick Jagger's wailings. "Our lives are a vapor". Should I disagree with the truth of these words of God?

Both my body and my memory bow to its truth even more today than 10, 20, 40 years ago.

Psalm 103:2 - "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits..." David tells us two things in this verse: We can and do forget God's blessings to us, and we are exhorted to NOT forget. A memory indicates that something did occur at some time in the past, and with a little help, we might be able to jog those memories and find lost things. I have a folder in a file cabinet entitled "Stuff". It's a single location to place disconnected pieces of paper factoids, to be rifled through when needed.

David has five folders of memory jogging remembrance in Psalm 103:

Verse 4a - the LORD "redeems your life from the pit"

Verse 4b - the LORD "crowns you with steadfast love and mercy"

Verse 5 - the LORD "satisfies you with good"

As good as these are, the Psalmist's first go-to folders in Verse 3 - the LORD "forgives all your iniquity" and "heals all your diseases."

We need to preach the gospel to ourselves regularly because there's a hole in our souls, and the gospel seems to keep dripping out of it. We forget, and Christ and the gospel become mere sideshows in our lives. How long have you been within the saving orb of Christ's forgiveness and love? One year? Ten years? 20, 40 years? You've then known the forgiveness and healing of ALL of your sins and ALL of your diseases. And as the years go on, that word "ALL" grows more and more precious to you. If you've grown less "sure" of yourself, that's good. If you've grown even more sure of the gospel and its extraordinary "yeas and amens" that's even better. God Himself has preached "Shalom" to you. To drink richly of that word "ALL" is to preach the gospel to yourself, to God's glory and your good, both now and for all eternity.

Psalm 103:2 - "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not ALL his benefits..."

Peeter Lukas



Lenten 21 ~ Christmas – Waiting for Messiah

For four hundred years the Israelites had been looking for the Messiah. The four Gospels describe many people whose hearts and minds were touched to let them know the Messiah has come, even when the Savior was just an infant.

Mary, the mother of Jesus received a startling angelic announcement, and she sang a great song. She was the virgin predicted in Isaiah 7.14. Her betrothed, Joseph, had a dream (and another dream later, to help keep the baby safe) letting him know that Mary was chosen by God; she was faithful; she would be a good mom; and he should marry her. Mary's cousin Elizabeth knew about Jesus because her own special in-utero baby, who would become John the Baptist, was jumping up and down. The Magi from the East started their journey well before the birth, following a star that led them to Jerusalem, and then learning about Bethlehem because the Jewish scholars knew Micah 5.2. Shepherds out in the field received a double angel treat – the announcer angel scared them wide awake and told them where to look for the baby, and then the whole chorus shows up to sing God's praises. And two mostly-retired people were in the temple when the infant Jesus was brought in for circumcision. Simeon was waiting for the Lord's Christ, and the prophetess Anna recognized that the redeemer had come.

The Holy Spirit worked in a multitude of marvelous ways – angel announcements, plus a back up choir; dreams; stars; prophecies from scripture and prophets listening; and a bouncing baby boy. All these people told their stories, remembered what happened, and treasured the events in their hearts. But the general populace did not catch on or make a big deal (except maybe Herod, who tried to have the baby killed, thus fulfilling Jeremiah 31.15) because the time for that had not yet come. The Messiah had been announced and everyone still had to wait a bit.

Allan Knapp



Lenten 22 ~ At the Right Time

Romans 5.6 has an intriguing clue about God's redemption plan. Out of all the moments in creation, "For while we were still weak, at the *right time* Christ died for the ungodly." What made 2000 years ago the right time for Jesus to die? Remember that after the resurrection, the plan was for believers to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. They had to get to those places, they had to speak what they knew, and it would be great if the people they talked to had some context. And indeed, the foundations were all set.

- The Romans were in charge. They had built excellent roads. Their brutal enforcement of laws, as illustrated by the flogging and crucifixion of Jesus, made robbers think twice about robbing. The roads and sea lanes were safe.
- The Greeks had been around before the Romans and spread their language widely. Most people could speak Greek as well as their native language.
- The Jewish religion with a monotheistic (one God) base was well established in Judea and had spread when Jews were dispersed all over the world by captivity and persecution.

God is such a good planner! We know from the Bible that he promised to give the apostles the right words to say through the Holy Spirit (Mark 13.11). And we can see from history that He also arranged for safe and timely road trips, provided straightforward verbal communication, and placed people to be witnessed to in the entire world.

Read the first chapter of [The Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory](#), by Jean-Baptistie Sawadogo and Marcia A Munger for a fuller development of the Right Time.

Allan Knapp



Lenten 23 ~ Road To Emmaus

The resurrection makes a HUGE difference. In Luke 24.13-35, Cleopas and his friend were dejected and discouraged as they made the long seven mile trek from Jerusalem to Emmaus. Not only did they “look sad,” but they did their best Eeyore impression as they described to a newcomer how the prophet Jesus, mighty in deed and word before God was condemned and crucified by the chief priests and rulers. “We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.” And there were more events they just plain did not understand – that morning the tomb was empty, the body was gone, and some women claimed to have seen angels. It was too much.

It turns out that the newcomer was Jesus! He called Cleopas and his friend chumps, which means “foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken.” And the best part for us is that Jesus explained everything them, “beginning with Moses and all the prophets he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.” Wow! So those two guys had a doctoral level course in prophecies fulfilled. They went back and told their buddies, who told others, who told others. So when you see claimed references to the Messiah in the Old Testament, even if it seems pretty obscure, it was probably covered by Jesus on the first Easter!

As for Cleopas and the other fellow, their attitude and outlook was changed forever once they were allowed to recognize Jesus. “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road?” They jumped up immediately and rushed back to Jerusalem. My guess is the return trip took a third the time as the going. And others had seen the risen Lord! Joy upon joy, the day turned out infinitely better than it started!

Allan Knapp



Lenten 24 ~ Laying the Groundwork

Jews were spread all over the world by the time the Holy Spirit showed up at the Pentecost celebration held after Jesus died and was resurrected. Many of those nations were represented at the festival – Acts 2 says “every nation under heaven,” and specifically mentions “Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians.” ALL these people from places way beyond Jerusalem heard the commotion of the believers speaking in tongues, and they understood the apostles in their native language! They were “ALL amazed and perplexed.” This is certainly part of the Holy Spirit providing the Power (Acts 1.8). And it had to leave a lasting impression on all involved.

Some of these visitors or alien residents believed in Jesus Christ that day and became part of the early church in Jerusalem. Some returned home immediately after. They all must have been sharing the story around the dinner table, at the local bar, over the water cooler at work, and across the back yard fence. The rest of the book of Acts follows a few of the apostles, particularly Paul and his friends, to testify that the gospel reached Rome. But all these Pentecost hearers had spread the word far and wide even without Paul. The groundwork had been laid, the topic introduced, and curiosity peeked. The Apostles were to be the witnesses to Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and the ends of the earth; they were to entrust the gospel to faithful men who would pass it on to other faithful men. And, the Holy Spirit was planting seeds all over the world based on the power shown at Pentecost. What a plan!

Allan Knapp



Lenten 25 ~ God Moves His People

The followers of “The Way” in the first seven chapters of Acts learned how to do church. They were taught regularly by wise leaders. They prayed and saw answers to prayer. They shared with those who were needy. They witnessed to non-believers through their words and their actions. They experienced an explosion of church growth. They participated in church administration and personnel matters. Best of all, they were believers in the Son of God.

They also had bonus events to build their faith and understanding. The apostles were regularly doing miracles. Church discipline was administered with abrupt finality on Ananias and Sappira. Apostles were jailed and then set free. At his speech and stoning, Stephen saw a vision of the Lord, and all who were there saw his face “like the face of an angel.”

Then everything changed. The Jews’ jealousy and hatred boiled over and they began persecuting church members, so that most were forced to flee for their lives. Where did they go? All over Judea and Samaria. What did they take with them? How to do church; how to be witnesses; how to live as believers of Jesus Christ. God was actively directing and amplifying his plan as announced at the Ascension. The witnesses would certainly tell the good news – Jesus was a righteous man who was crucified, dead, and buried and then rose again from the dead. Those who believe in him would have their sins forgiven. In addition, the church members would be able to testify and teach about how a community of faith can grow together – teaching, prayer, sharing, leadership, discipline.

It must have been a huge hardship to be chased from a comfortable, joyful, contented community in Jerusalem to fearfully settle in some rural or small village neighborhood. But the believers told their stories and shared what they had learned. They were not all eyewitnesses of the risen savior, but they were all eyewitnesses of the peace and blessings He bestows. And the kingdom grows.

Allan Knapp



Lenten 26 ~ Discussion Starters and Exits

One of the hardest things in being a witness of the gospel is the opening remark to get a discussion started. Not a problem for Philip in Acts 8; he had an appointment set up by an angel. He is told to go south to the road, then to jump on the running board of the chariot going by. Maybe to this point Philip was just being obedient, but as soon as he sees the Ethiopian eunuch in the chariot reading verses from Isaiah, the intent is clear. Philip asks the Ethiopian if he understands the passage, and the eunuch admits he needs guidance. The eunuch asks who Isaiah is talking about. Philip then has the opportunity to tell the “good news about Jesus.” The Holy Spirit works in the man’s heart, he commits to Jesus, he sees water and asks to be baptized.

What do we learn about witnessing? Be obedient. Look for context clues; try to find out what the witnesser is thinking about. You might not start with Isaiah but be ready to explain the gospel from many different starting points. Expect the Holy Spirit to prepare the situation, give you words to say, and work in hearts. And don’t neglect closing the deal – seek a commitment.

You may think Philip’s event is not possible anymore, but such things happen more than we expect. I just talked to my friend Justin, back from several months in China. He showed a picture of the man who ran up to him and asked if he could answer some questions about Jesus!

You also probably don’t need to think a lot about how to get OUT of a gospel conversation, but Philip certainly did have a unique exit method – the Spirit carried him away, and he found himself at Azotus, wherever that is. The eunuch did not mind – he went away rejoicing and presumably started churches in Ethiopia. Philip was none the worse for the experience – he kept preaching the gospel in all the towns he went through.

Allan Knapp



Lenten 27 ~ Roles

The key gospel-spreading role outlined for us in Acts 1.6-11 is that we are to Jesus Christ's "witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." As Jeremy Visser pointed out in a sermon at University Reformed Church, our potentially scary role is easier once we realize the roles played by the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The disciples wanted to know if Jesus was going to kick out the Romans and re-establish the kingdom of Israel. Nope. God the Father knows the schedules, the plans, the end times, the events to come. That information is need to know, and you don't need to know. So relax, God has the schedules taken care of. While the Father is in charge of governance, the Holy Spirit will be providing POWER. This is the same Spirit and same Power that showed up at Jesus' baptism by John. And it is now available to us!

Then Jesus leaves. He says, "Gentlemen, the Father governs, the Holy Spirit provides power, and I am out of here!" The disciples were left gawking at the sky. Awkward. Fortunately, angels and Jesus and others let everyone know that His duties will be reigning at the right hand of the Father (Acts 7.56) and interceding for us (Romans 8.34).

Our role as a witness may be scary, but we can catch the comfort and know the joy when we realize God the Father, Holy Spirit and Son have our backs – taking care of the times and circumstances, providing awesome power, and interceding on our behalf. Our role is to draw close and learn more about Jesus, then tell others what we found out – be witnesses.

Allan Knapp



Lenten 28 ~ The God Who Hears

A short, simple, yet profound phrase is found in I Kings 17:22:

*“And the LORD heard (or listened to) the voice of Elijah...”
Have you contemplated the stunning reality that the self-contained, self-sustaining, all-powerful God of the universe hears when his people talk to him?*

One way to contemplate the profundity of this gospel truth is to consider the alternatives. The god of deism is high and lofty yet uninterested in the affairs of men. The plural gods of eastern religions are selective listeners, only interested in the requests that pertain to their expertise (like fertility, or love, or rain, etc.). The non-god of atheism and the unknowable god of agnosticism are forever silent, which makes the cries of men in times of calamity nothing more than unintelligent babbling. The god of Islam is not a personal god who cares about for the intimate affairs of one's life.

Only the Christian God, the God of the Bible, is transcendent (high and exalted) yet imminent (with those who are contrite and lowly in spirit, Is. 57:15). He is a God who is powerful enough to be sovereign over nature yet personable enough to care about the affairs of men. This God has revealed himself in the humble glory of Jesus Christ so that we would have a true source of divine help in our times of need. Only in the gospel do we have access to the uniquely transcendent yet imminent God. Jesus is the unique mediator who intercedes for his people and makes access to God possible.

God heard Elijah because of what Jesus would do on the cross 900 years later. God hears us because of what Jesus did on the cross 2,000 years ago. The gospel is what makes the transcendent imminent. Let us delight in this gospel-grace. Let us savor the unique privilege we have to talk with God and to be confident that he hears our prayers.

Nick Setterington



Lenten 29 ~ Ahaziah, Athaliah, and the Promises of God

“Behold, the king’s son! Let him reign, as the Lord spoke concerning the sons of David” (2 Chronicles 23:3b).

The Christian life starts with the promises of God. He makes claims about himself and gives us promises. Then, having trusted in those promises, we respond in faith and obedience to God’s commands.

Sometimes, however, the promises are hard to believe, like during Athaliah’s reign. The dark days started with her son, Ahaziah. In his one year reign, he managed to do evil, get entangled with the house of Ahab, and get himself killed while visiting Joram. Once dead, his wicked mother, Athaliah, assumed the throne and promptly murdered all the royal princes in order to secure her own power. For seven years it looked as though God’s promise to David had failed. No one from his line would ever again sit on the throne. No covenant, no Christmas, no Christ, no cross.

But God’s promise had not failed. Jehosheba and Jehoiada were secretly hiding away one royal prince, and in his seventh year they presented Joash as king. Just like Moses and Jesus, Joash was hidden away from a cruel tyrant and then revealed as the deliverer of God’s people. Athaliah was killed and Joash began to reign. God had kept his promise. David’s line endured. The Christ would come.

Kevin DeYoung



Lenten 30 ~ Seek the Risen, Ruling Christ

"If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God."

Colossians 3:1

In searching for comfort, security, joy, and relief from busy schedules, let's make sure not to forget what this season is about: to seek to know our crucified and risen savior. Easter is about the empty tomb and the hope that comes with it, a risen and ruling Christ who has crushed (and been crushed for, Isaiah 53:4-11) our sins. Paul reminds us of what happened here. Christ's resurrection united us with Him as God has *"raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places"* (Eph. 2:6, Col. 3:1a).

Paul encourages us to seek Jesus and everything above. Why? In a sense it's obvious. He's Christ. Everything was made by, through and for him (Col. 1:16). He upholds all of creation (Col. 1:17). He's first born of the resurrection (vs. 18) and he's supreme (vs.18). He and his kingdom are good.

And yet, Paul's reasoning is more specific. He tells us to do this because Christ is *"seated at the right hand of God."* Paul uses a common phrase (*"right hand"*) from the Psalms to show that Christ is the greatest object of our security and comfort (Psalm 17:7, 18:35), salvation and deliverance (Psalm 108:5-6, 138:7, 139:10) and our eternal pleasure (Psalm 16:11). Seeking the risen, ruling Christ allows us to put away our tawdry treasures, our failing comforts, our false security and our fleeting happiness for an eternal joy, comfort, security and relief that will never be robbed. So today, this season, and for the rest of your journey to the gates of splendor, look to the risen and ruling Christ for hope. God sent his son to die and be raised so that you may taste, touch, see and experience *"in the coming ages...the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus"* (Eph. 2:7). So rejoice, trust, hope and rest that the tomb is empty and your sins have been canceled (Col. 2:14). Do this so your joy may be fulfilled in seeking the risen, ruling Christ and his good pleasure.

Brad Atchison



Lenten 31 ~ Holy, Holy, Holy

Traditional hymns are a great way to tell the gospel for several reasons

- It's a song, so you can remember the words (at least you can mumble along until a familiar line)
- Tying the verses back to scriptural references allows one to go deeper in context and content
- These are not flash in the pan tunes; they will likely last a while longer
- There is emotion, feeling, and beauty in the singing

Holy, Holy, Holy (words by Reginald Heber in 1826 and tune by John B Dykes in 1861) is a glorious worship hymn, with voices upraised to echo what the first verse says – “our song shall rise to thee, Lord God Almighty.” Three times holy, three persons, blessed trinity. The whole creation exalts the creator; saints, cherubim and seraphim acknowledge His greatness in multiple ways. Only the One True God is holy and perfect, radiating power, love and purity. The need for a savior is expressly stated as sinful man can't even look on God's holiness; the redeeming role of the second person of the Trinity is implied – as saints are able to adore the Lord in heaven.

1. Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee;
Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty!
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!
2. Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore Thee,
Casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;
Cherubim and seraphim falling down before Thee,
Who was, and is, and evermore shall be.
3. Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness hide Thee,
Though the eye of sinful man Thy glory may not see;

Only Thou art holy; there is none beside Thee,
Perfect in pow'r, in love, and purity.

4. Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
All Thy works shall praise Thy Name, in earth, and sky, and sea;
Holy, holy, holy; merciful and mighty!
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

Allan Knapp



Lenten 32 ~ Jesus Christ, Our Sure Foundation

This hymn traces history from Jesus Christ's appearance as our sure foundation of the church to His return as mighty King.

Jesus Christ, our sure foundation, He whose purpose stays the same,
Building for himself a nation, giving those he calls his name.
Praise we now and evermore, Jesus we adore!
God has giv'n to us salvation, Jesus Christ has borne our blame.

Shepherd, Guardian, he who teaches, On whose grace the Church depends
Tending it through hist'ry's reaches, and will keep it to the end.
Praise we now and evermore, Jesus we adore!
He who from the first did seek us, Savior, Ruler, Guide and Friend.

Jesus, come your kingdom bringing, How we long to see its sight!
Ev'ry saint Christ's praises singing, Stands before th'Eternal Light.
Praise we now and evermore, Jesus we adore!
Exaltation ever ringing, Christ, our King, return in might.

Who is Jesus Christ?

- He is our Savior who bore our blame and sought us out.
- He is our Friend who calls us by his name and calls us "friend."
- He is our Shepherd who teaches us.
- He is the Guardian upon whose grace the Church has depended through the ages .
- He is our Ruler whose steady purpose is to grow us into his likeness.
- He is our Guide who directs our steps and keeps us to the end.
- He is our King who is coming again in might.

He is building for himself a nation of followers through the ages and around the world. "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God that you may declare the praises

of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” (1 Peter 2:9)

How do we respond to such good news? How do we help others respond?

- We join the Church through the ages by praising Him now and forever.

How can we adore Jesus today? And help others to love and adore Him?

- We join the saints in singing our praises while standing before Jesus, the Eternal Light.

What darkness do we need to flee from?

We praise him now and evermore. We long to see His kingdom come. Maranatha!

Jan Stacey Bieler



Lenten 33 ~ Jesus' Compassion

In Mark 6 we have a beautiful picture of the Lord's knowledge of us and what He does with that knowledge. Christ's disciples have been laboring the entire day and Christ is an observant shepherd. He knows that they are tired. And this knowledge of their affliction leads Him to say,

“Go away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.”

In the next scene of this passage Jesus and the disciples begin crossing the sea to find a place to rest. However, before they can reach the other side they see the crowd, to whom they had been ministering, has beaten them to the other side. We are told,

“When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.”

Again, the Lord knows the affliction of His people. So what does He do with this knowledge of the crowd's affliction? He has compassion and so He begins to teach them. After they have been sitting there for hours and there is no food, again the Lord looks out upon the people and has full knowledge of their need. And what is His response? The same as before, He has compassion. He comforts them by multiplying the fish and the bread and feeds them.

He knows the disciples' tiredness, the crowd's ignorance, and the peoples' hunger. He knows His people intimately. And that knowledge is not just bare facts to Him. He is not like the court reporter who just jots it down. Rather, this knowledge moves Him with compassion. Do you know that He knows you? Do you know that He is aware of your affliction? And most importantly, do you know that He acts on that knowledge with compassion?

Jason Helopoulos



Lenten 34 ~ How Majestic Is Your Name

In Psalm 8, the phrase *“O LORD, our LORD, how majestic is your name in all the earth!”* is a magnificent begin and end to a praise song with the gospel snugly hidden inside. Jesus quotes verse 2, *“Out of the mouths of babies and infants...”* to clearly identify himself with the LORD being praised in the psalm. There is an echo of the Creation in Genesis 1-2. The creator is praised for his handiwork: the heavens; the seas; birds and sea creatures; beasts of the field; and man is given dominion over every living thing that moves in all the earth. The curse of Genesis 3 is also present with the foes, enemy, and avenger of verse 2. It is clear that God is mighty and man is small – *“what is man that you are mindful of him?”* - and the coming Messiah is hinted at, using Jesus’ phrase for himself - *“son of man”*.

The writer of Hebrews uses this psalm as additional description of the fullness of the gospel message. Readers are warned In Hebrews 2.3-4, not to *“neglect such a great salvation, which was ”* announced by Jesus himself, confirmed by eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ, affirmed by God’s miracles, and surrounded by distributed gifts of the Holy Spirit. That is quite a positive testimony.

Beyond all that evidence, Hebrews 9 ties to Psalm 8.5 to emphasize two things - the mighty sacrifices made by Jesus and the appropriateness that He would be *“crowned with honor and glory.”* Not only did Jesus taste death for everyone (by the grace of God), but to do so, He needed to be *“Made lower than the angels for a little while.”* Jesus becoming fully man was a definite demotion, even if temporary. The appropriate response from those of us for whom the sacrifice was made is Thanksgiving, along with praise and honor, to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Hebrews is right to emphasize that we ignore this awesome assistance at our own peril.

Allan Knapp



Lenten 35 ~ His Promised Presence

A couple years ago we were really feeling the pinch of the recession. Money was tight and there were many stressful moments wondering how the bills would be paid. In the midst of these struggles God reminded me in two separate scripture passages that He remained trustworthy.

“Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5). I love that verse - it reminds me of what’s important – the promise of His presence in the midst of every challenge.

Moses had just died, and Joshua was about to lead Israel into the promised land. Lots of battles and hardships were before him, and the Lord encouraged him, saying, *“Be strong and courageous ... for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:9).*

My pray is this - “Heavenly Father, whatever this day holds - blessing or hardship – I trust in you and believe that I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Amen”

Thom Spalding



Lenten 36 ~ The Disabled Man In Me

In John 5:1-15, we read about a disabled man by a pool called Bethesda. The unusual setting for this story has always intrigued me.

Picture this: many blind, lame and paralyzed people are sitting around a pool. What are they doing? They're waiting for the water to stir. The first person in the pool when the water moved was believed to be healed. But this man, who had been disabled for 38 years, was too slow, too weak or disabled to win the race into the pool.

Recently, it struck me - I am like that unnamed man. No, I am not severely crippled or unable to walk. So how are we alike?

First, I always seem to have some big problem that I need fixed. Over the years, I've been "paralyzed" by health concerns, family struggles, finances, relationships, career and more.

Second, I typically ask God to get me out of the difficult situations – my way. "Can you give a lift into that pool over there?" On my own, I am as helpless as this invalid man in creating meaningful change that lasts.

Third, and most important, Jesus offers a simple question that has a deeper meaning. "Do you want to be healed?"

And like the invalid, I respond with a laundry list of obstacles and alternatives. I offer my plan. "What I need you to do is..."

But Jesus offers a different answer. His lasting solution surprises as he heals both body and soul. "Get up, take up your bed and walk." This is extraordinarily good news for the disabled man - and for me!

As I ponder this story, I realize that, like that invalid man, my deepest problem is not my list of personal concerns. Jesus later told that same man, "Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you." Like him, my root issue is sin.

What's needed? To know Christ and the power of his resurrection. What I really need is renewed faith in Jesus - who doesn't need the pool to heal me.

Dan Lohrmann



Lenten 37 ~ Comfort and Consolation in Christ

In 2 Corinthians 1:3-4a Paul says, "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction...*" (2 Corinthians 1:3-4a). That word "*comfort*" means encouragement or consolation. God is the God of all comfort or encouragement or consolation. It is the same word that is often used to speak of the "*consolation of Israel*" throughout the Scriptures. Consolation in most of these passages speaks of deliverance from all hostility. Simeon, that old man in Luke 2, was said to be waiting for the "*consolation of Israel.*" And when He saw the Lord Jesus Christ, he said, "*My eyes have seen your salvation.*" Simeon connects this "consolation" not with an event, a moment, or even some thing. He identifies this "*consolation*" with the person of Jesus Christ. He not only brings us consolation and comfort, but is our consolation and comfort.

God knows what His people need in the midst of their afflictions. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, He comforts us in "*all our affliction.*" "*All*"--there is nothing outside of His knowledge or care. And His response is not a platitude, a "*buck it up,*" or even a soft shoulder. His response is the gift of His Son, who is Himself our comfort.

Jason Helopoulos



Lenten 38 ~ “Are we there yet Daddy?”

A child’s sense of time and distance is almost non-existent. They can’t grasp these, therefore, an almost certain impatience settles in. “When are we going to get there Daddy?” The youngest and the oldest saint alike ask that question of God. Trials and “frowning providences” squeeze that question from our hearts - “This is so very painful - I can hear my heart beating when I breath - how much longer Lord?” And when we acquire more joy and more sorrow as the years of life fly by, that’s the occasion to preach the gospel to ourselves.

I agree with the words of hymn writer Helen Lemmel “...the things of earth grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.” What must the apostle John have seen when he experienced Rev.1:17,18 - “When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, “Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.” And John wrote a book filled with glorious superlatives, at times almost too glorious for pen and paper to contain. The destination of heaven makes our pilgrimage more than worth it. And we know that we’ll make it there because Christ died as our perfect sacrifice, He was resurrected as our Forerunner, and He now prays as our Intercessor. We’ll make it there, a lying fool of an Accuser notwithstanding.

A sentence from the ever quotable C.S. Lewis has impressed me for the past few weeks. When we get to heaven, Lewis wrote, we’ll simply exclaim in God’s presence, “Oh -- Oh -- now I understand!” Heaven allows us to work the gospel backwards, from eternity to today. I can better understand today’s sorrows and mysteries and deprivations because a sovereign Lord enthroned in heaven is in the midst of everything. I can better enjoy the sweet comforts of life now knowing that they’re gifts from our eternal God’s hand, not merely “lady luck” or fate or even worse, the product of my so-called “talent”. Heaven is the reflexive home of our hearts - it adds its own melody to the gospel within our hearts.

Our whole lives are being molded to follow Christ and the gospel more and more, until one day we no longer have to ask the question “When are we going to get there?” All of heaven will shout - “Welcome, you are here!” and we’ll respond with our own shout - “Now I understand!”

Peeter Lukas



Lenten 39 ~ Blow the Trumpets

And when Judah looked, behold, the battle was in front of and behind them. And they cried to the Lord, and the priests blew the trumpets (2 Chronicles 13:14).

The account of Abijah's life in 1 Kings 15 is brief and bleak. But the picture in 2 Chronicles is longer and more positive. The two accounts are not contradictory, just written for a different purpose. Kings wants to show how the exiles got into the mess they're in. Chronicles does the same, but also wants to point a way out.

Israel and Judah were at war and it was not a fair fight. Jeroboam, king of Israel, had an army twice the size of Abijah, king of Judah. But Abijah believed in more than numbers. He believed that God was on his side and would fight for Judah because they had not forsaken the Lord as Israel had done.

But the battle was not going Judah's way. Judah was attacked and ambushed on all sides. Then came the turning point: they cried out to the Lord for help (v. 14). God wants us to feel weak. He puts us in the battle, being attacked from the front and the rear, so that we will see our inability, and complete dependence upon him. He wants us to cry out to him, so he can win the victory and get the glory. We have not because we ask not.

Kevin DeYoung



Lenten 40 ~ Saul to Paul

Even the most antagonistic enemies of the gospel can be saved. A well-trained Pharisee named Saul terrorized the early Christian church. He watched as Stephan was stoned, holding other people's coats so they could have a better throw. He raided meetings and homes, dragging followers of "the Way" to prison. He took his fervor on the road, traveling to Damascus to round up believers there. But God had other plans for him.

In the miraculous conversion described in Acts 9.1-19, a light from heaven flashed and blinded Saul, he was knocked to the ground, and the voice of Jesus spoke to him. While blind for three days, he had a vision of a man named Ananias laying hands on him so he would regain his sight. When Ananias showed up, the prophetic vision event happened for real, and Saul was healed and baptized.

Saul immediately began proclaiming the central truth that Jesus is the Son of God. And he "confounded" the Jews by proving that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah. Saul knew the Law and the Prophets better than most; he had been well trained; he proves to be an excellent debater. But his best asset was the knowledge gained from meeting the risen Christ and receiving the Holy Spirit.

The Jews of Damascus were perplexed and then angry that the havoc-maker of Jerusalem had changed; at the same time Christians were fearful of subterfuge. But the change was real and Saul, later called Paul, became the chief evangelist to the gentiles. His Pharisee training and Roman citizenship were helpful, but his letters to the churches made it clear that the only important thing was Jesus Christ, and Him crucified (1 Corinthians 2.2).

Allan Knapp