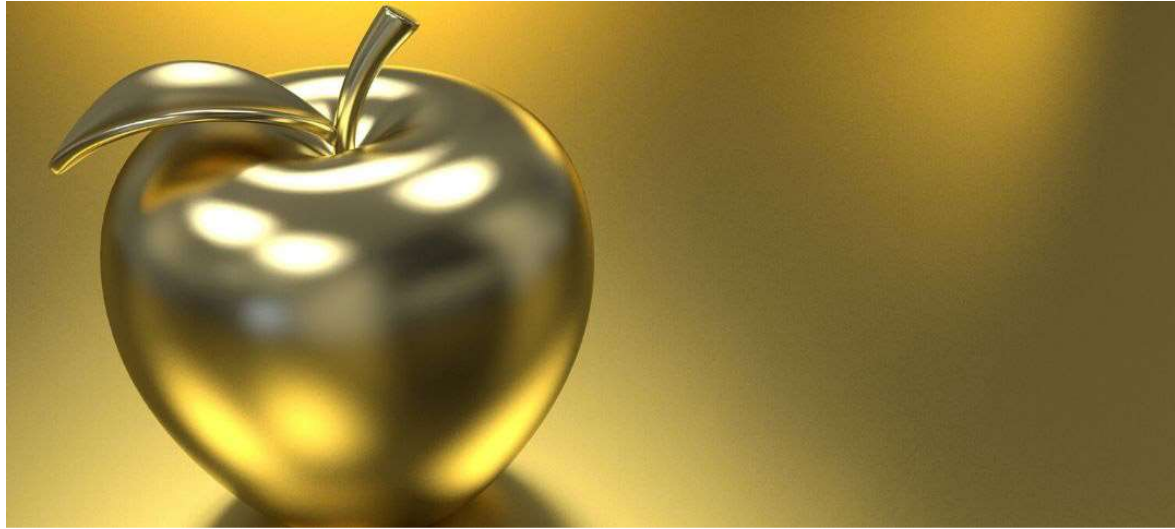


Bulletin Minis



Scott Alewine, Pastor
Covenant Baptist Church
April 2024

BULLETIN MINIS

It has been customary over the last decade to author short devotional-type messages in the Sunday bulletin at Covenant Baptist Church. I have been asked to gather these and post them in some fashion. After a significant delay in choosing to do so I have at last endeavored to comply. The simplest way is what is found in this document where I have copied all the messages I have in bulletins and collected them into a single document. Starting on December 28, 2014, the last entry will be that one on the Sunday immediately preceding the finishing touches of proofreading and formatting and other preparatory actions for release to the church.

I want to commend the church for supporting the ministry of the Word at Covenant and for valuing these mini devotionals in spite of what the post-processing revealed in the way of grammar and typing errors.

If you are blessed in any way then of course God is the source. The encouragement I received from others would be the second factor of note.

Not all these entries are mine. None of the hymns included originate with me (duh). Where I have quoted others I have often included the person who is the author. All the rest you can assume were written by me.

This document is organized by the date in which these mini devotionals appeared in the church bulletin. There are significant gaps due to the temporary moving of Sunday morning services to Zoom during the start of COVID at which time no bulletins were made, and then in periodic returns to Sunday morning Zoom when the virus was flaring up or there had been exposure among the church membership. A few dates are skipped merely because there was no article on that Sunday. A couple of bulletins have escaped my attempts to locate them.

Due to the length of this document the primary method of sharing is digital. You will be able to print hard copies from the digital document if you desire.

Scott Alewine, Pastor
Covenant Baptist Church
April 27, 2024

END OF THE YEAR (DECEMBER 28, 2014)

As we come to the end of 2014 we have ample reasons to focus on the Lord and not on the things of this world. We are to fix our eyes upon Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. Unless we do, we will grow weary and lose heart.

But it is also fitting to thank the faithful of this church for your support and service here. A church is not a building but people. Yes, people disappoint us many times, but as we love each other in the will of God we appreciate the family God has given us and we must never take it for granted. Even one small step from the will of God is often the beginning of a great slide that many never overcome. So we thank God for faithful servants and Christian fellowship that provides encouragement daily to one another, lest any be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

We should expect great things from God, not because we earn them but because God is a great God and zealously performs His will in the earth. So let's pray and labor for the best year ever.

OUTREACH TRUTH (April 19, 2015)

One important fact about outreach was stated again by Dwight Stone as a few of us met with him as he was passing through the area recently. He said that most effective evangelism is done by the individual Christian living a Christian life among the lost. This is the most effective way to reach friends, family, and mere acquaintances. They see a different life and seek to understand the reason for the hope that is within us. It is not wrong to do other types of evangelism, but the most effective seems to be that which is shared in everyday life doing everyday things.

Don't be discouraged or deceived by the thought that you cannot do effective outreach because you are a common person without training in evangelism. The Lord's primary plan is for individual Christians in their individual lives to shine the light of the gospel through their walk with Christ and reach the world with the good news of salvation through our Lord Jesus. Instead, let your light so shine that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

HAPPY MOTHER'S DAY (MAY 10, 2015)

What a joy to remember the blessings of loving mothers. Where would we be without their tender guidance and affection? True, not all children are equally blessed, but those of us who have been are ever grateful to God for the compassion and warmth of God's wisdom. Mothers are worthy of honor for all time, and children who give high honor to their mothers are children who are doing something pleasing to the Lord. So we honor all our mothers today, but such honor is fitting for every day, because good and godly mothers build a nation and infect future generations with godliness and respect.

MARK (MAY 17, 2015)

John, also called Mark (Acts 12:12, 25; 15:37, 29)

Cousin of Barnabas (Colossians 4:10)

Helper of Paul & Barnabas in 1st missionary journey

Deserted and returned to Jerusalem. (Acts 13:13)

Accompanied Barnabas on 2nd missionary journey (Acts 15:39)

Restored to Paul's acceptance as a fellow worker (Philemon 24)

A useful servant to Paul (2 Timothy 4:11)

Close association with the Apostle Peter
Wrote to believers in Rome who were primarily Gentiles
Wrote gospel between 50 and 70 A.D., more likely in 50's
Focuses most on Jesus as the Son of Man
Emphasizes the works of Jesus more than His words
A fast-paced, constantly moving gospel
By far the shortest of the gospels

WORSHIP (MAY 24, 2015)

Probably one of the real absences in much of church attendance these days is the aspect of the worship of God. Our gatherings are for several things. We truly *get* from the Lord when we gather. He *gives* us the joys of fellowship and the teaching of His Word. We are all to edify one another in the body of Christ. But the focus of our gathering must be the worship of God. When we sing, we worship. When we hear His word, we worship. We say to God "you are worthy." When we receive the truth with obedience, we worship. God desires that we worship in spirit and in truth. The Bible speaks of exalting the Lord together. That is a very serious function of the gathering of the Church.

We know the modern day church movements are very much about satisfying and serving those who attend. Let's make our gathering about the satisfaction and exaltation of our great God! Let us praise His name together!

WHEN THINGS ARE NOT RIGHT (MAY 31, 2015)

A number of the Psalms begin with complaining to God about something that is not right. The wicked are prospering. The righteous are diminishing. Prayers are not answered. Tears flow continually. The psalmist even says, in the King James Version, "my steps had well nigh slipped" when he saw the prosperity of the wicked.

The child of God can be assured of running into many things in this world that are not right. The world itself is fallen. People are in power that evidence not one speck of righteousness or fear of God. The world goes from corrupt to more corrupt, and the Bible says this will continue until the end.

However, the Lord assures us that in His kingdom, all things remain right. Our trials are designed by Him for our growth and peace as we grow more mature in our faith. Hardships showcase His power to deliver. It is our part to trust Him

UNBEATABLE (JUNE 7, 2015)

The world is quick to ridicule the Church when local congregations or individual Christians, whether real or fake, fail. They assume that Christian failure is a failure by God. Didn't Jesus say He would build the Church? But what of all the unfaithfulness and worldliness observed in so many professing believers?

The Bible does not proclaim that Christians are unbeatable, but that our God is. "The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of His heart to all generations" (Psalm 33:11). In fact, the weaknesses of men are placed alongside the omnipotence of God as a striking contrast to His power. "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26).

Christians can indeed be disappointing, and all care should be taken that we are victorious and faithful. But God works all things after the counsel of His own will. He uses His disciples, but He doesn't depend on them. And our failings will never defeat the plans and purposes of God Almighty.

PROACTIVE (JUNE 14, 2015)

The typical way typical people react to all-too-typical events is reactively. "Reactive" means to act after an event. If it's a good event, then we have a good reaction. If it's a bad event, then it's a bad reaction.

This places our spirit at the mercy of forces beyond our control.

Although we understandably and commonly react to many events that suddenly come upon us, we do not have to be reactive only. The better word for the Christian is "proactive." The proactive Christian takes the initiative by acting rather than reacting to events. Rather than waiting for the times to change, we act as though the times had already changed, even before they do.

"Rejoice in the Lord always." "Hope in God." "I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth." "In everything give thanks." "Prepare your minds for action, keep sober *in spirit*, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

THE BLESSED REUNION (JUNE 21, 2015)

This past week Elisabeth Eliot died at the age of 88. In January, 1956, her husband, Jim Eliot, and four other missionaries were killed as they made contact with the Auca Indian tribe they were seeking to reach for Christ in the South American jungles. Their lives together had barely begun, having been married just over 2 years. She "did the next thing" and continued her service to the Lord, staying in contact with the Aucas, and bringing them the gospel of Jesus Christ. She served in a variety of significant ways in the 59 years since her husband's martyrdom.

The Aucas who later came to Christ reported that on the day they killed the missionaries they beheld a group of some kind hovering in the trees above them, and singing a strange song. After hearing recordings of choir music played later by missionaries they identified that as the sound they heard the group singing. Perhaps it was the angelic choir welcoming the missionaries through gates of splendor.

We don't know about the angelic choir, but we can be assured that Elisabeth Eliot had a joyous welcome and blessed reunion.

HEATHENS APLenty (JUNE 28, 2015)

The Bible, recognizing God's choice to govern His world by human leaders, encourages Christians to pray for kings and all who are in authority (1 Timothy 2:1). The aim of such a prayer is that "we might lead a tranquil and quiet life, in all godliness and dignity." In spite of what they themselves desire, God desires to bring all men to salvation and "to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4).

The failure of leaders and judges to seek what is acceptable to God means that instead of peace and godliness we will have chaos and wickedness. The recent court decisions are not about the Constitution. Other justices at other times with the same Constitution would have decided differently. The issue is less

fear of the Lord. Whereas previous judges would have recognized God more readily, the modern man is more apt to blaze a new trail, and issue judgments to fit the times. Rather than curbing wickedness, they support it.

So, let's pray our leaders know, love, and seek the will of God.

A LESSON FROM MARBLES (JULY 12, 2015)

When I was a child we knew how to play. We didn't have video games or the Internet. We didn't have 1,000 channels to watch on TV. We couldn't find a pay-per-view movie. All our phones were connected to the house. So, in order for us to play we had to entertain ourselves with non-technical amusements.

I used to play with marbles. Kids would laugh at that today. I made up all kinds of games with marbles. One game I played with marbles, being a boy, was marble fighting. One marble would collide with another until one marble shattered into pieces. The strongest marble always won.

Our world has chosen to collide with the Lord Almighty. Rather than obey His laws, our world has made newer and bolder steps to rebel against them. Our little marble world is challenging the unconquerable Rock of Ages. In the end, only the Rock of Ages will remain, and those sheltered in Him.

“Our God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:29).

WE KNOW SOMETHING (AUGUST 23, 2015)

Christians know that the nation is blessed whose God is the Lord. Our world thinks the opposite, in most cases. Since the world is ignorant of this basic fact, we must take our knowledge to the throne of God and beseech His mercy on our land before our sins weigh us down to perdition.

STALE BREAD (AUGUST 30, 2015)

None of us likes to experience opening the bread bag and finding a slice of moldy, dry bread. Stale bread is old and undesirable. We like bread as fresh as we can get it, and with nary a green spot on it.

We hear often in the world of “the same old thing.” There is occasionally an outcry against such ongoing practices to such a degree that people say, “We aren't going to take this anymore.” The sharing of the gospel is always fresh and new, even though it is old and established. The gospel makes new creations in salvation. The gospel halts the old practices and ushers in new. The gospel is a fresh breeze to weary souls. In a world that can never be satisfied in its alienation from God, the gospel is the fresh bread of life.

THE EYES OF THE LORD (SEPTEMBER 6, 2015)

“Were the Ethiopians and the Lubim not a huge army with very many chariots and horsemen? Yet, because you relied on the LORD, He delivered them into your hand. For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him.” (2 Chronicles 16:8-9)

This marvelous verse about God actively seeking to manifest His strength was spoken to Asa, a good king who made a bad mistake when he called upon the Syrians to help him instead of calling upon the

Lord. In a tight spot, Asa forgot the past reliance on God. May we ever rely on the Lord in spite of how dark the days seem. His eyes are always on us.

THE NEED FOR SEASONING (SEPTEMBER 13, 2015)

It has come as quite a shock to Christians lately how evil the world is, and how foolish its decisions. Thinking itself to be the vanguard of progress and the healer of all injustices, the world is running at breakneck speed toward the nearest cliff. Who knew it could be so blind and lost? Oh yea. The Bible tells us this.

This is why it is so important for Christians to be salt and light. Without it, the world is left to its own craziness, with no restraining influence. Our Lord is ever wise when He says, “You are the salt of the earth.” “You are the light of the world.” The world really doesn’t change. It is a ship racing in darkness toward hidden reefs which will tear out the hull and plunge it to the bottom of the sea. Whether appreciated or not, it is the Christian that will reveal the sane and wholesome life the world needs to mimic.

THE GOSPEL (SEPTEMBER 20, 2015)

Sin Against God
Conviction, Confession of Sin
Preaching Jesus Christ
Repentance
Faith in Jesus Christ unto Salvation
Righteousness in Christ
New Creation
Witnesses
Eternal Life

WHOSE CHURCH? (SEPTEMBER 27, 2015)

We all know the Church belongs to Christ. It is His body; He is the Head. Christians are placed by Christ into the Church and its local assembly, and it is such an important relationship that we are told to lay down our lives for the brethren. Believers often refer to “my church.” It is our spiritual home, our place of worship and learning and fellowship. When believers disinvest in the local church, it becomes “your church” or “that church” and not “my church.” This is one of the first signs of unfaithfulness and detachment from the church. The saints are equipped by the church “for the work of ministry.” This is how the church grows and prospers. So yes, the Church belongs to Christ. But when we say “my church” we proclaim we truly belong to it in faithfulness.

IS IT THE END? (OCTOBER 4, 2015)

Russia is bombing Syria. Iran has been given the capability to create a nuclear bomb through recent concessions by our own country. Israel is looking at enemies in every direction. Our nation has plunged more openly and deeper into immorality by continuing to promote abortion, and now has sought to redefine sexuality and marriage. “In the last days, perilous times will come.” Humans are always to be ready for the end, because it could come at any moment, either our end or the end of all things. Believers are especially to redeem what time we have, and live for the Lord as though we lived on the brink of

eternity. We are not to stand around gazing into the skies, but we are to live in anticipation of the coming of Jesus Christ at any moment.

WELCOME TO HOMECOMING (OCTOBER 18, 2015)

We worship God's faithfulness at Homecoming, and hopefully re-ignite our flame for service to our great God. We welcome old friends today, as well. Thank you to those serving in our song and music service this day, Lena Kittrell and Woody Brazell. We will have lunch following the service, and all are invited. We look forward to a great time of fellowship.

Charles Spurgeon still speaks from the grave, with volume after volume of sermons and writings left from his ministry. Called "the prince of preachers," he served the Lord in London for 38 years. However, his sermons went far and wide and continue that trek today. It is estimated that he preached to 10 million people in his lifetime. Our church is very familiar with Spurgeon's devotional book, Morning and Evening. A strong Calvinist, Spurgeon held firmly to the Scriptures even while it was becoming fashionable in many Baptist churches to get on the "downgrade," with some churches making unholy alliances with those who denied the cardinal doctrines of the faith. Spurgeon died on January 31, 1892 at the age of 58.

THANK YOU! (OCTOBER 25, 2015)

We had a great gathering for Homecoming last Sunday, and I want to thank all who pitched in with such effort to make it the success it was. Thanks to all who labored to get the kitchen ready both in the construction efforts and setting up the room for our Homecoming dinner. Thanks to all who prepared food and ministered in the morning service. It was nice to see those we have not seen in a while from out of town, and also in town. It is a joyful thing to gather with loved ones, especially who are of like mind in the things of God. The Bible declares, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity" (Psalm 133:1). We live in a hostile world and the Lord has placed us in a family to weather the storms of this life and the attacks against Christianity that are on the increase in our own land. We cannot be lone rangers, but must bind our hearts together in one purpose and one love. As the song goes, "I'm so glad I'm a part of the family of God." John says, "Behold what matter of love the Father has bestowed on us that we should be called the children of God" (1 John 3:1). Children of God! How truly blessed we are!

OUR GREAT GOD (NOVEMBER 1, 2015)

When Satan tempted our Lord in the wilderness, he essentially wanted to get our Lord's eyes off of God and onto him. Our Lord repulsed every temptation of the devil by holding firm to the Word of God and the God who gave it. The devil's methods will vary from life to life, but we can rest assured that he will seek to get our eyes off of God. Perhaps it will be to stir up anger at God for something He is allowing in our lives. Maybe it will be the noise of the world as it screams chaos and rebellion all around us. It is easy to be discouraged and hopeless if our eyes turn from the Lord. But what does the Scripture tell us? "Fixing our eyes upon Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith...." This is the way of hope for us, and the comfort for us in all the temptations of the devil to turn us to his side. We must cling to God as those on a ship cling to keep from being tossed into the stormy sea. Then when we are safe in the harbor we will praise God anew for keeping us safe in His loving care, because He is our great God.

SAME SCORE (NOVEMBER 8, 2015)

Another week and the same old score as every other week. So predictable. So expected. What score am I referring to? You may think I mean the world is running up the score again on God and Christian values.

That Christians were again the scourge of the world this past week. That the ungodly are triumphing.

But no, I mean the Lord is running up the score on the ungodly. Remember Psalm 2:1: “Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing?” The nations rage and plot to overthrow the godly and even to overthrow the God of heaven. The kings and rulers take their stand “against the Lord and against His Anointed.” What folly! Yet this is the constant game the world plays each week. Holy Scripture tells us what might not always be visible in this world. That the Lord laughs at them and holds them in derision. And the Lord does what He chooses regardless of the world’s opposition. So it’s not God or His people who are in danger of being routed. It is the world that faces the unstoppable and unbeatable wrath of God.

GOD’S PAYMENT (NOVEMBER 15, 2015)

Paying bills is part of life, and few of us are eager to see the bills show up in the mailbox. However, there is a payment we are eager to see made, and that is the payment God has promised to pay one day. “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. Injustice is a hallmark of departure from God. Those who are murdered, abused, wrongfully injured, slandered, and otherwise mistreated in the eyes of God will see the day of God’s wrath upon the wicked. For now we seek the wellbeing of all, and leave the wicked to God, not taking our own vengeance, but leaving room for the wrath of God (Romans 12:19).

By God’s grace, even the most wicked of men may still be brought into God’s kingdom. But barring that, justice demands to be satisfied, and God’s justice will be satisfied in full. The murderers of the innocent in Paris this past week, bold in their foolish belief they would meet a smiling God when they died, could testify to the real truth that “Vengeance is Mine; I will repay,” says the Lord.

THANKSGIVING (NOVEMBER 22, 2015)

Thanksgiving in America has a long history, and we all have many memories of family gatherings on the fourth Thursday of each November. Thanksgiving generally arises because rational men recognize the kindness and goodness of God toward us, and wish to make a holiday to emphasize such providence.

It is like the cherry on top of a tall hot fudge sundae. The proper understanding of such an emphasis is 364 days of thanksgiving PLUS a special day of emphasis just to make sure we are even more thankful.

We all know that is not the way the world views it, but instead views Thanksgiving as THE DAY we give thanks. But Christians are to offer God continual thanksgiving. It is ours to give, and we do not depend on the world, who is more easily distracted with turkeys, eating, gatherings, and football games.

The Christian thanks God all year AND on Thanksgiving Day. On this special day we lift the Lord higher in our mind and heart, even amid all the seasonal gatherings and feasts.

HOPE IN GOD (NOVEMBER 29, 2015)

Hope in God is a common exhortation in Scripture. We live in a world of impossibility in so many areas.

And what is not *technically* impossible is nonetheless *seemingly* impossible. Can you save your children? Can you turn the nation to a godly course? Can you make church members more faithful and loving? Can you make the nations receive the gospel unto salvation? Can you make the government support Christian values and reject corruption? Without hope, we will give up. But hoping in God makes us strive for the impossible, for nothing is impossible with God. He is pleased that we trust Him for

impossible things. Yes, we use our minds and are realistic about possibilities, but we have a mighty God who can do all things.

COMING AND GOING (DECEMBER 6, 2015)

“Coming and going” is sometimes used to describe the flow of the world. We advance toward and we depart from, be it people, places, or things. This is a season of much coming and going. Shopping centers are crowded, and cars jam the highways. There is this party to drop in on, this family gathering to attend, and all these preparations to make. However, a much weightier proposition to consider is our coming and going in reference to Jesus Christ. The wise come to Jesus. “O come let us adore Him.” “Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord.” Of the unbelieving Jews, Jesus said, “You will not come to me that you might have eternal life.” To the weary and burdened Jesus said, “Come unto me...and I will give you rest.” There is salvation to those who come to Jesus, but those who go from Him will one day come to appear before Him in judgment.

JOHN G. PATON (DECEMBER 13, 2015)

We have been blessed for years in our church with an annual presentation of the life of a great missionary from Dr. Belcher and Beverly with the Lottie Moon concert. However, Dr. Belcher is no longer traveling as he cares for Mary Anne, so this year we have the life of a great missionary named John Paton, presented in the writing of John Piper. John Paton served the Lord in the New Hebrides islands of the South Pacific, reaching tribes that had never heard the gospel of Jesus Christ. His life teaches us the awful state of the natural man in the persons of those he sought to reach, and the courage needed in this hostile world for a Christian to proclaim the precious name of the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. But we also learn of the mighty power of the gospel to transform lives. If the people in the tribes of New Hebrides could come to the Lord, then so can others in this dark world that we might naturally think are immune to the calls of the gospel.

FAMILY BLESSINGS (DECEMBER 20, 2015)

We will be gathering with family in a few days for Christmas celebrations and it is a good time to be reminded of the blessing God has given us in families. Of course the family of God’s people is included in this blessing, for we are, in Christ, brethren who are called to maintain unfeigned love for one another. My family is thankful for the people of Covenant and the years of your support and care of us. We wish you all the best in the will of God and fruitfulness in all your labors for the glory of our great God. May you each grow closer to Christ and love Him more each day.

Zip, ZAM, ZOWIE, AND SWOOSH (DECEMBER 27, 2015)

A by-product of family gatherings is the realization of the swift passage of time and the changes it brings. Kids are growing up while adults grow increasingly older. Our memory stretches back to times when there were others present at Christmas who no longer are. We have old pictures and take new pictures to preserve and recall times both current and past. We joked that there are now only 364 days left until next Christmas. None of us can imagine it ever getting here again, but each year, as the Lord spares our lives, it does. The Lord uses the pace of time to instruct us in the present. Moses, who lived 120 years, said the years are soon cut off, and we fly away. Thus his prayer; “So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” The unwise do not reckon on the passage of time and present the same foolishness year after year. How truly blessed we are if we are wiser over time and closer to the kingdom of God.

FROM THE MCPHERSONS (JANUARY 3, 2016)

Billy and I have gone along a path that has highlighted our need for God. We have been in situations where our strengths were irrelevant and our weaknesses were glaringly evident. Through those desert marches we have been drawn closer and closer to God. We learned to thank Him for the hard times and difficult journeys, trusting that through them He accomplishes His best work. We realize that needing Him is the key to knowing Him intimately, which is the gift above all gifts.

To you our church family, we say thank you. What joy and peace it brings knowing we are a part of a family who truly loves the Lord, who faithfully prays and shows unconditional love. We love you and to God be all glory and praise.

—Beverly—

FORGET THE HEART? (JANUARY 10, 2016)

Your car refuses to run. You turn the key and get nothing but a grinding sound as the car refuses to start. What could be wrong? One thing we know. It's not the engine! Maybe it's the key. Perhaps the seat has a tear in it. Could be faulty windshield wipers. Maybe the antenna. Rear-view mirror? Spare tire? One thing the world knows about human behavior is that it can't be the heart. Yes, there is terrorism, but it's not their religion. Sure inner cities are war zones, but it's not because they are without Christ. No, we can fix it with a higher minimum wage. Or by outlawing guns. Or maybe some night basketball.

However, the Lord tells us the root of man's problem: "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked." "Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life."

HOLD YOUR GROUND (JANUARY 17, 2016)

When people go up stairs, they are careful to maintain the step they have just reached, lest falling backward, they tumble to the bottom, risking certain injury. We learn early how to mount a staircase and get to the top. We take one step at a time and make our footfalls sure. This is so elementary that many think nothing of it. However, due to age or injury, steps can become a much more daunting task. In a weakened state, it is even more critical to hold your ground and keep your footing as you ascend to the top. The Bible teaches that we should always walk as those who might fall backward. "Let him who thinks he stands, take heed, lest he fall." We are, weekly, exposed to public figures that have fallen backward in some fashion. They got off this, but then jumped back on. They vowed to be this, but then turned out to be that. Once they brought us joy, but now they are a burden to our hearts. Do we want to be such? No. But it requires that we take heed to our steps. 1 Peter 5:8: "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. "

GOD'S WISDOM AND GREATNESS (JANUARY 24, 2016)

In our Tuesday Bible Study this week we examined the words of God to Job and his "friends" at the conclusion of the book of Job. Job and his friends had wrangled for almost the entirety of the book regarding the problem of evil. Job's friends viewed evil circumstances as proof of sin, and felt God was judging Job for some sin. Job maintained his integrity as a righteous man, and expressed real shock as to why God would put Him through so many grievous trials. In the end, the Lord compared His nature with that of humans. The more God speaks, the smaller men become, and the greater God becomes in our sight. God does all things well, even though His wisdom is beyond our reckoning. He is still infinitely wise. After reading God's response, there could be no doubt that the things Job faced were perfectly

tailored to the will of God, and were just and righteous in themselves. When we fail to see God as He is, then He eventually is seen as pretty much like the rest of us; someone we can figure out and even criticize. But knowing God the way He is causes such foolish thinking to vanish. Read the latter chapters of Job and see what I mean.

SUPPORTING & SOLDIERING (JANUARY 31, 2016)

We support our brave soldiers, as every patriotic American should. Not just in this day, but in the days past, we remember the sacrifices made to defend this country and promote the way of freedom in the world. Many of us give thanks to those we see in public who wear the uniform of one of the branches of our armed forces. They are a unique group: “The few, the proud, the Marines,” for example.

However, among Christians there is not to be two separate classes of supporters and soldiers. We support each other as soldiers ourselves. All Christians are in the battle against the devil’s wiles. We all are to be in active service. All Christians have been drafted into the army of the Lord. The weapons of our warfare are not common. “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds....” The Marines are looking for a few good men. Christ is looking for all Christians to serve by His power. Furthermore, Christ expects us to support one another in our service to Him.

GIDEON NEXT SUNDAY (FEBRUARY 7, 2016)

Our church supports the Gideons whole-heartedly in their ministry of distributing Bibles all over the world. Our annual Gideons report is next Sunday. Mr. John Floyd will be with us to report on the ministry of the Gideons this past year. If you desire to support the Gideons with a contribution, Mr. Floyd will receive this at the back door after the service.

JUSTICE (FEBRUARY 14, 2016)

There was great rejoicing, along with an ample supply of hatred and mocking, when Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia was found dead yesterday. Others, who believe the Constitution should not be twisted to legalize immorality, mourned the loss of a firm conservative voice on the Supreme Court at a time when such voices are in short supply. It’s a reminder to us, however, that God’s justice and morality do not die with a man. The Lord guards the paths of justice (Prov. 2:8). The enemies may rejoice, but our God reigns in justice.

PROVERB (FEBRUARY 21, 2016)

My son, give attention to my words; Incline your ear to my sayings. Do not let them depart from your eyes; Keep them in the midst of your heart; for they are life to those who find them, and health to all their flesh. Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life. Put away from you a deceitful mouth, and put perverse lips far from you. Let your eyes look straight ahead, and your eyelids look right before you. Ponder the path of your feet, and let all your ways be established. Do not turn to the right or the left; remove your foot from evil. (Proverbs 4:20-27)

PERSISTENCE (FEBRUARY 28, 2016)

The world probably thinks it has the market on persistence. We often hear of how people are accomplishing great things, both personal and corporate, by merely sticking to it and not giving up. It is

true that perseverance is an admirable trait, and we all should practice it, well, with persistence. However, I think it is wrong to surrender such a noble quality of character merely to worldly pursuits.

Christians are to be the most persevering people in the things of God. We are to persevere in service to God, in giving, in hearing, in studying, in praying, in hoping, in believing, in praise, in thanksgiving, and in love. We can do all things through Christ, who strengthens us. We have need for endurance, so that after we have done the will of God we will receive what is promised, and this endurance we have in Christ. He has not only made the spirit of the Christian new, but He has made it resolved and dedicated to the will of God. We sow seed in anticipation that the harvest will come, and we do so even when the ground seems not to be receptive. Thus we preach the word in season and out of season. We *choose* rather than merely act on feelings. We act in faith. If we are Christians, then our persistence in the things of God should stand out.

THE GOSPEL (MARCH 6, 2016)

The gospel is so crucial that Paul said, “Woe unto me if I don’t preach the gospel.” The gospel is the power of God unto salvation to all who believe.” “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing through the word of God.” After hearing the gospel at Pentecost the people were cut to the heart, convicted, and subsequently believed in Jesus Christ. The gospel is good news, for it is a message from God that solves man’s most fundamental problem—alienation from God. The gospel, recognizing the disease of sin that abides on all mankind, proclaims the answer: Jesus Christ. Jesus bore our sins on His body on the cross, paying sin’s penalty of death. He rose from the dead unto life, defeating sin’s penalty. By faith in Him our sins are transferred to His cross and paid for in Him, and His righteousness and the resulting life is transferred to us. Repentance of sin and faith in Christ cures man’s chronic disease.

DON’T TOPPLE (MARCH 13, 2016)

In our technological world we enjoy useful gadgets that only a few years ago would have seemed like science fiction. Dick Tracy could talk to people on his wristwatch, and now almost everyone has a phone so advanced we could watch the Dick Tracy show on them if we wanted. However, with the new technology comes an old problem. Someone recently toppled over a railing and into the sea while texting. New technology still requires old-fashioned common sense.

It is the devil’s delight to distract us and dishearten us. We are supposed to abandon all hope, forfeit all joy, slump our shoulders, and stare at the ground in utter dejection. And if we are distracted by the evils of this world why wouldn’t we? However, the Bible has an answer to the problem of toppling over railings and plunging into the abyss of despair. Keep your head up! Hebrews 12 tells us to lay aside every weight, and the sin that so easily besets us, and to run with patience the race set before us, **looking unto Jesus**. If you do not consider Jesus in life’s race, you “become weary and discouraged in your souls.” We cannot always rejoice in the world, but we can “Rejoice in the Lord always.” So keep your head up and don’t topple into the devil’s trap.

RELICS & REALITY (MARCH 20, 2016)

It is very much part of the fallen nature for humans to elevate things to the place of God. This is the spirit of idolatry, and is practiced by veneration of objects. There is much superstition that accompanies such practices. The relics are viewed as possessing magical qualities. Thus, in the days before the Reformation (and ever since in those who were not reformed), it was considered added grace to have

pieces of wood from the cross of Christ, drops of Mary's milk, etc. So-called holy water would be sprinkled on troops before battle by Roman Catholic priests. Crosses are worn by some today as a kind of good luck charm.

Spiritual possessions are the true reality and power in the Christian life. And these things point to Christ. We are to be enamored with our Lord Jesus, and not distracted from Him by objects. This is why the 2nd command was given—to have no graven images of God. While some groups believe objects to be helpful in worship, and a likeness to God especially so, it is forbidden in the 2nd commandment. Even the serpent that Moses was commanded to make to heal the people from snakebites had to be destroyed later by Hezekiah, for it had become an idol to the people. The substance of our faith is Jesus Christ!

WHAT GOD LOOKS LIKE (MARCH 27, 2016)

The Bible declares that “No one has seen God at any time, but the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, has declared Him” (John 1:18). Jesus shows us the Father. As He said to Philip, “If you’ve seen Me, you’ve seen the Father.” That is a fact that Philip should have known from spending as much time with Jesus as he had (John 14:9). Jesus’ words and power declared in themselves His divine nature. It was not up to His disciples to make Jesus into God; Jesus was God in Himself, and His works testified to this. In false religion, its adherents have to animate their god, because he does not exist. They have to present him to the world as powerful and significant, but they have only acts of human power to show. This is very observable today. A god that does not exist has to be foisted upon the world as though he really is alive. He cannot act for himself, so his followers have to prop him up and make people fear him. Thus we find human acts of terror attributed to the power of a false god. But the Lord Jesus does not need to be made into God by human actions; He is God from all eternity, and His power itself is what reveals His nature. The resurrection of Jesus is one such demonstration. As Paul says, “And declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.” That is what God looks like!

THOSE Still Alive (April 3, 2016)

We are now a week past our Easter celebrations remembering the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And yet, for many, Jesus is dead again. Or maybe they never really grasped that He was alive last Sunday. Here the world shows its heightened foolishness. Many in the world believe Elvis is still alive. The same can be said of John Kennedy, who really did not succumb to his injuries, but exists in a vegetative state on an island in the Pacific. Think that rapper got shot and killed a few decades ago? Nope, he’s still rapping. In fact, it is common for conspiracy theories to arise soon after the death of someone who is loved and adored by millions of people. It can’t be that they died. They must still be alive. Their lives are still impacted by this belief, even though a falsehood formed by wishful thinking.

Jesus is indeed alive. No doubt was left as to His death, for that was clearly proven by the cross and the piercing of His side by the soldier. There was also no doubt as to His burial, for it was well known where He lay. Then, furthermore, there was no doubt as to His resurrection, for the stone was rolled away and the tomb was empty. Then He appeared to many after His resurrection before being taken up to heaven. We serve a risen Savior!

BEGRUDGING? (April 17, 2016)

Of-times we encounter individuals who give us begrudging service. We may quip upon leaving, “They really love their job!” Begrudging service is service at the bare minimum, under compulsion. It is without love. It is an inconvenience to the one serving, and it makes the ones being served feel like non-entities. Begrudging service will make us stay away, lest we again be made to feel like a bother or an intruder.

Our Lord is the infinite opposite of begrudging. The Bible tells us that He is liberal in His grace, lavishing it on us. It is His joy to save the lost, and rejoices before the angels of God over one sinner who repents. He seeks the lost to save. He pays the highest price with firm resolve and certain success. Relieving the misery of the sinner is the Lord’s delight. It is more precious to Him than food is to us, for He has food to eat of which we do not know, as He told His disciples after His successful witness to the woman at the well in Samaria. He says, “Let the little children come to me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.” Our gracious Lord is not begrudging, but pours His blessing upon us in measureless kindness and compassion. We may be surprised He saves us, but let us never view it as begrudging.

MADNESS (April 24, 2016)

I know you have asked it. If not out loud, at least to yourself. And maybe every week, even every day, and perhaps several times a day. The question you ask is, “Has the world gone stark-raving mad?” And the answer to that question is, “Yes.” I will not provide examples. They are too numerous to mention, and every day seems to top the previous one in madness. Yet, all this madness is considered very sane and rational. It is referred to as loving and inclusive. Non-judgmental. Enlightened and progressive.

Solomon calls a person who does not walk in the fear of the Lord “foolish.” In a spiritual and absolute sense they are “mad.” It is madness to live in the sight of God in a way that angers Him, that operates against His nature and will. But “the fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’” He says this in his heart, by his actions. He lives as though God did not exist, even if he believes theoretically that He does. “It is an abomination to fools to depart from evil” (Proverbs 13:19). “A babbling fool will be ruined” (Proverbs 10:8). “The mouth of fools spouts folly” (Proverbs 15:2). “Let a man meet a bear robbed of her cubs, rather than a fool in his folly” (Proverbs 17:12). Yes, the world is mad; let’s not be surprised. We are all mad without the grace of God.

SANITY (May 1, 2016)

After a bit last week regarding the insanity of our present world system, it is much more refreshing to turn to the matter of sanity. Sanity in a practical sense is called wisdom. The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord (Proverbs 1:7). The fear of the Lord can be illustrated by a yellow jacket’s nest in the ground. The wise avoid it; the foolish do not alter their course, and get stung. When we recognize the Lord’s sovereignty, His good and holy law, His upright counsel, His shepherding love, and His thorough knowledge of how we are designed to live, then we are only wise by fearing the Lord. The fear of the Lord is not being afraid of the Lord, but respecting the Lord’s right to rule us, and the rightness of His ways. This is a practical respect, meaning that it is practiced. Respect for the pain of a bee sting is not wisdom unless the nest is avoided. The reason there is so much foolishness in the world today regarding morality is due to the fact that men do not listen to the Lord or respect His laws. But the wise are ever

examining actions based on what God tells us about them. Thus the wise escape disasters while the foolish walk on and are punished.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY (MAY 8, 2016)

On May 8, 1945, victory in Europe was celebrated—VE Day. Hitler’s Germany that had terrorized the world for the years of World War 2 had been defeated. Euphoria erupted. Citizens gathered to cheer, dance, shout, wave, and listen to speeches announcing something they had hoped and prayed for, but which seemed to be always too far away to grasp—victory.

Victory is a biblical concept for the children of God. In fact, the victory has already been secured by Christ, who has made us more than conquerors already (Romans 8:37). We have overcome the world by our faith (1 John 5:4). We have overcome because greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world (1 John 4:4). We already have victory over death by the resurrection of Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:54-57).

But we also await the final trumpet heralding eternal victory. When the 7th angel sounds: “And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!’” What a day of victory that will be!

ANOTHER LESSON IN TIME (MAY 15, 2016)

When he said it I was there, and I dismissed it quickly. What he said was almost 4 years away—too far to even consider. Yet he said it. What he said was that in May of 2016 he would again meet the Freshman class of Anderson University at this very spot and convey to them their diplomas as college graduates. Ha! But there we were yesterday when he said, “I made a date with you 4 years ago....” There he was keeping the date. He who said it was the president of Anderson University. And in spite of how far distant it was at the time, and before one class had been taken by any member of the Freshman class, the day arrived as he said. “The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.” The race of time never takes a pit stop. All who have ever lived have been young with all of life before them, so many years ahead that it made no sense to even think of them ending. And for all, time marches them right to the end, whether they be wise or foolish. The biblical prayer is that the Lord would teach us to number our days so we might gain a heart of wisdom.

THE NEED FOR HARD GROUND (MAY 22, 2016)

A good piece of solid ground is coveted as a safe place to stand. We build our houses on such ground. The sand will be worn away in storms, but the rock remains in the fiercest weather. Life is portrayed in Scripture as a storm we are passing through, and there is constant need to be on solid rock to endure the winds and the waves. Twenty-seven times in the Psalms God is referred to as a rock. He is not just fled to when the storm hits, but is lived on as the constant, firm foundation for our lives. Psalm 62:6: “He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defense; I shall not be moved.” By living on our God we have the basis for a solid life, free from self-induced calamities, and safe and firm when our enemies target us for destruction.

NO GREATER LOVE (MAY 29, 2016)

“Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.” Jesus spoke this to His disciples while teaching them to love each other (John 15). Just as the Church thrives when people love in this fashion, so our nation has prospered by the deaths of many who laid down their lives for this

country and our way of life. Their sacrifice is often maligned today by the latest crop of surly politicians.

We are told there are no just wars, and that victory should make us feel guilty. On the contrary, the victory of our forces over evil empires makes us proud. We are indebted, not ashamed. We do not skulk and hide our gratitude, but shout it loudly and boldly. Men died for our country. Men sacrificed their lives for a nation of strangers, as well as for their own families. Rather than cowardly excusing the evil of enemies, they stood up and stood fast and said, “You may not continue unchallenged.” They fought and they won. They bled and they died. And we honor them as any grateful nation should. And when love was practiced the way they practiced it, it was not only our nation, but millions of others in many other nations who gained from it. Thank God for the soldiers who expressed the greatest love!

NUMBERING OUR DAYS (JUNE 5, 2016)

In an attempt to have insurance pay for blood glucose test strips that will communicate with my new pump, the insurance company denied the request on the basis of there being a meter they already cover that will work with my pump. “What meter?” I asked. Upon being told, I looked and found the meter—and that it had been discontinued back in 2012. I commented to the pharmacist that my insurance company needs a calendar to see what year it is. Calendars help us number days and years. But that is not of any moral good to us. But when Moses prays, “Lord, teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom,” he is giving us a strong moral directive. Because of the brevity and uncertainty of time, we are to live our lives in wisdom, for wisdom is preparation for the world to come, and is prudence in our present world. We have newly experienced the abrupt cessation of life, “for it is soon cut off, and we fly away” (Psalm 90:10b). When men live as though there was no end in sight, the day comes upon us as a thief. Many who may be ready for the next day are woefully unprepared if there is NO next day. But the wise fear the Lord and live in wisdom. And should the Lord show up in the morning, at noonday, or in the night, they are ready. We don’t need a calendar for that, but we do need wisdom.

IS GOD FAIR? (JUNE 12, 2016)

If the ice cream truck showed up at school and offered sundaes to only half the children a scandal would ensue. “Why do they get sundaes while we don’t?” asks the other half. And they have a good point. However, God does not save all people. The Bible declares, “Many are called, but few are chosen.” The narrow way does not bring in the bulk of humanity, but the broad way has many. The Lord does not give all people of the earth the same exposure to the gospel. Some on earth have never heard of Jesus Christ. Whereas all school children might be equally fit for ice cream, no one is fit for salvation. The Lord owes it to none. The Lord has chosen to save some of the unworthy. It would be just to condemn all, but our God has mercy on some. As humans reckon it, God is unfair. We naturally think we are all equally worthy of salvation. But since none are, God cannot be unfair when He acts in grace and mercy to save some.

DOES GOD WANT TO SAVE? (JUNE 19, 2016)

We all agree that more people should come to Christ. We are not seeing a lot of conversions in our day. Most church additions are “horizontal,” merely disgruntled church-goers moving from one church to another. Why are we not seeing more come to the Lord? Does God really want to save?

Jesus told us that He came to seek and to save the lost. The Bible tells us there is joy in heaven over one sinner who repents. Jesus came preaching the gospel so that men might be saved. The inspiration of

Scripture by the Holy Spirit is for carrying the gospel into all the world. Jesus commanded us to go into the entire world and preach the gospel to every creature. We have the assurance that all the Father gives to Jesus will come to Him. God does indeed want to save, and He is and will. Men don't want salvation, and because of that we must sow the seed with fervent prayer.

FREEDOM (JUNE 26, 2016)

“It is for freedom that Christ set us free.” These are Paul’s words to the Galatians in chapter 5 of that epistle. It would seem to go without saying. It is an axiom. If we are made free, then it is to be free. If Christ has set us free, then freedom is what He wants us to experience. Since we are still in the flesh, it seems that from the time we are set free we are targets of people and things that would bring us into bondage. Once justified by faith in Christ, there is nothing we must do to be acceptable to God. We are like those who have been released from the hospital after spending months hooked to machines. Once we are declared cured, we leave the machines and the hospital, and live our lives without being tied to them. They are no longer needed for life. In the case of our own attempts to earn favor with God, there is nothing we can do that can make even the first move in that direction. All our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment. But once the righteousness of Christ is given to us by grace, then we are to live free from all the efforts humans make to gain God’s favor. We continue in good works, but now as an expression of life, enabled by the Holy Spirit. “If the Son shall set you free, you shall be free indeed.” Physical freedom is greatly sought by the downtrodden. How much more should freedom in Christ be pursued and lived?

WHAT HATH GOD WROUGHT (July 3, 2016)

On May 24, 1844, Samuel Morse transmitted “What hath God wrought” in the first test of his telegraph line connecting Baltimore and Washington, D.C. The phrase is taken from Numbers 23:23 in the KJV, where Israel is spoken of as the work of God. It is appropriate for God to receive praise for all the accomplishments in the world of men, including matters which appear on the surface to be wrought by humans. Should the telegraph, that rudimentary technology for sending messages over long distances, be seen as a work of God? Should our nation, founded by men who did not all believe in the core Christian principles taught in the Bible, be credited to God’s blessing? In both cases, yes! Where blessing exists, God is the author. It is the mark of maturity and wisdom to recognize this and attribute to God praise for the things He has wrought among us. It is to His honor and glory to have so blessed a people as He has us, and our payment is thanksgiving and praise. We might well sing of our nation, “God mend thine every flaw.” “Our country, ‘tis of thee!” And for all the blessing bestowed on an undeserving people, “To God be the glory; great things He has done!”

VIOLENCE FILLS THE LAND (July 10, 2016)

Before the Flood, we are given this assessment of mankind: “The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence.” Just before this we are told that the thoughts and intents of men were “only evil continually.” We live in a day of increasing violence and division among men. The world will target peripheral matters that are beside the point to address this. We know that and we expect it. But Christians know we must target the heart of the problem, which is the heart of man. The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked (Jeremiah 17:9). We are to guard our hearts with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life (Proverbs 4:23). The failure of our age is a failure to guard and nurture our hearts so as to advance righteousness in ourselves and society, and thus please the Lord, for the Lord was grieved that He had made man in the run-up to the Flood.

BECAUSE IT IS SO (July 17, 2016)

A student once encountered a final exam in which the only question was, “Why?” Others in the class began writing feverishly, but she merely wrote, “Why not?” In typical modern grading, she received an A. Many feel there is no real basis for why we believe or do what we do. One choice is just as good as another. But a stronger foundation for why is “because it is so.” Why do we proclaim the greatness of the Lord? Because it is so. Why promote only one way to heaven? Because it is so. Why speak of Jesus as King in a world that seeks to cast His cords from them? Because it is so. Belief in the virgin birth? Because it is so. Embracing the deity of Christ? Because it is so. Hold unswervingly to the sovereignty and providence of Almighty God? Because it is so. Why cling to God’s unfailing love even when we are sad? Because it is so! We don’t make reality; God does. We live in reality because it is so.

WHAT THE LOST NEED TO KNOW (July 24, 2016)

The lost are typically not alarmed by their lost condition. There is no physical pain associated with being unsaved. Most of the time people feel fine without God, and any consequences they may be experiencing from not having God’s favor are missed. The lost need to know about Jesus Christ. They need to hear of His redemption on the cross, where He took our sins upon Himself and died to pay sin’s penalty on our behalf. He rose from the dead in victory over sin, and to bring us to life. By faith we identify with Christ, and transfer our sins to His body and receive His perfect righteousness. By faith in Christ we become partakers of what Christ has done. When the Father sees us, He sees Christ in us, and He is well-pleased. To be saved a sinner must repent of His sin and leave it, which is only possible by the Holy Spirit convicting us and drawing us to Christ. This is accomplished by understanding the demands of the law of God upon us, and that if we fail in any part to keep the entire law, we are completely guilty before God. However, Christ kept the law for us, and so repentance and faith is this interchange of us abandoning our sins and receiving His gracious forgiveness.

PLANTING, WATERING, & INCREASE (July 31, 2016)

Christians are engaged in an effort to win the world to Christ. It is the Great Commission, to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. A lack of gospel belief is at the heart of much of the ills of our society. Sin and its consequences are attacked by the arm of flesh, which fails us. Instead, we must seek a heavenly prosperity of new crops springing forth from the earth as the gospel seed is planted. This is a process. Paul remarked to the Corinthians, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.” We have our part in God’s field, and are fellow-laborers together with all the saints. We cannot be discouraged if our seed does not quickly spring up from the earth. Perhaps we are the first to plant. Others will come along to water. But in the end, God will give the increase. Don’t think we love farming more than God. It is God who has set us to work in His field. He desires the salvation of the lost. He seeks to save them. It is He who rejoices when one sinner repents, more than the 99 righteous persons who need no repentance. He will gather the wheat into *His* barns, and we will come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves. Let us not grow weary in doing good, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.

THE OLYMPIC ATHLETE (AUGUST 7, 2016)

The 2016 Summer Olympics has opened amid fears of terrorism, mosquitoes, dirty water, unfinished buildings, corruption, and, of course, world-class athletes. For many, the hope of being an Olympian is a

dream from youth, and is attained by only a select few. Beyond that, to win a medal of any kind is a very unique accomplishment. To win the gold medal seems beyond imagination.

However, Christians are Olympians. The common knowledge of the Olympic Games makes a fitting comparison to the race we Christians are to run. “Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win” (1 Corinthians 9:24). “Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1). We don’t run for a perishable crown, but for an imperishable one (1 Corinthians 9:25). Christians must discipline themselves as much as any athlete, although the focus is on spiritual success. “Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.” We may not be athletes, but we must be Olympic Christians.

SACRIFICE (AUGUST 14, 2016)

There has been a shift in church life in lots of various ways over the past several decades. Years ago more emphasis was placed on the duty to attend church. People saw the Christian life as the will of God and viewed the church as a wholesome responsibility that would not just aid themselves, but their family, and all of society. Today the landscape is quite different. There is not the same respect given to the Lord’s command to gather together as believers, nor is the attitude of the world warm toward the things of God as much as they once were.

Sacrifice is the missing ingredient. John wrote, “By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren (1 John 3:16). That’s the element that suffers most in a self-seeking world. If church members are not willing to sacrifice their lives for others, we are missing the most basic element of church life. Often the cry is, “Change the church!” and our church has many areas that could bear improvement. But what is the church? It is PEOPLE. So to change the church, change the people. When our hearts are changed by God’s Spirit, that’s change we can thrive on.

WINDSHIELD WIPERS (AUGUST 21, 2016)

It seems to happen too little these days, but rain falls to the earth from time to time. Children who want to play will say, “Rain, rain, go away; come again another day.” Others will say, “Rain, rain, come and stay; please don’t quickly go away.” Rain does not cancel our normal activities, and that means we will often have to drive in rain. That means rain on the windshield. And that means we need windshield wipers. Windshield wipers are our way of saying the rain won’t stop us; we will just wipe it off the windshield and keep right on going.

Our bodies do not come with windshield wipers. But a poet has said rightly, “In everyone’s life a little rain must fall.” Rain is often used to depict disappointments and heartaches. We endure a storm of suffering, or a downpour of discouragement, or a drizzle of sickness. We must in those cloudy days clear the windshield of our eyes and keep beholding the glory of the Lord. We must part the clouds and see the hidden sun, and keep on our way. We must be as the faithful in Hebrews 11 and trek onward when the way is hard. We are a house on a rock that the winds and rains can beat against, but will not fall. So press on!

GIVING AND TAKING AWAY (AUGUST 28, 2016)

It is the character of the worshiper of a false god to design his god after his image, according to how he wishes him to be. Because it's all really imagination. Someone has created the false god and endowed it with certain imaginary qualities as the creator sees fit. However, the one and only true God created us and exists independently of us. The Westminster Confessions of Faith rightly declares that God is "alone in and unto Himself all-sufficient, not standing in need of any creatures which He hath made." Our duty is to love God as He is, and to live according to His nature, for any wish we have for God to be other than He is will make a false god, and will cause us to put our weight on vapor. Thus it is that Job, losing all his possessions and his children, remarked, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." Do we say the same? Are we content to let God be God, or do we seek to imagine Him as something other than He is? Do we prefer that God be different? Or can we exult and praise Him with the fullest of love for being exactly what He has been from all eternity? We rejoice that the Lord gives. But sometimes He takes away. Loved ones die. Health deteriorates. Trials arise. May our response be as Job's. Blessed be the name of the Lord!

SAVORING THE MOMENT (SEPTEMBER 11, 2016)

Time waits for no man, and the older we get, the more astonished we probably are about how fast time flies. The young are in a hurry for time to pass. There's that driver's license to get. That job is waiting where they envision making so much money and buying so many nice things. One day their hopes are realized and they are grown. It's then that the period of longing begins for the old times. When they were in school. When they didn't have to work. When they ate daily of their mother's cooking. When they had more time for play.

Part of our sacrifice of thanksgiving to God is that we savor each moment He gives us. "In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." Savoring begins with contentment. Contentment is satisfaction with the Lord's sovereign choices for our life. The Bible tells us the Lord is good, and we experience that in the multitude of kindnesses He pours upon us. Paul tells us that the Lord lavishes grace upon us. He is no tightwad. We are indeed to look forward and not at what lies behind, but while we are in the present, the child of God will savor all the moments of God's blessings and be thankful.

REFRESHMENT (SEPTEMBER 18, 2016)

In 1929, the Coca Cola Company came up with a slogan intended to encourage drinking Cokes. "The pause that refreshes." The picture is of one who has been working hard, beads of sweat dotting their face, until that glorious moment comes when, hot and tired and thirsty, they pause. They grab a Coke, open it, and take a drink. Then they are refreshed. They get renewed energy, cool off, and are no longer tired. They are rejuvenated. There is much refreshing in the Christian life. The Lord's Day is a gift from God to refresh us, where we cease our normal labors and refresh ourselves in the Lord and His family.

Salvation is said to usher in times of refreshing from the Lord (Acts 3:19). Paul spoke several times (Romans 15:32; 1 Corinthians 16:18; 2 Timothy 1:16; and others) of being refreshed by other believers. A faithful messenger refreshes the soul of those who send him (Proverbs 25:13). How often does this world weary us? Or our own weak bodies? Or our fragile spirits? We must refresh ourselves in the Lord and by those means He has provided for us to gain new strength and vigor. Our ultimate refreshment comes from considering Jesus, who endured such hostility of sinners against Himself, lest we become weary and discouraged in our souls.

A SUNNY OUTLOOK (SEPTEMBER 25, 2016)

After a hot summer, we have finally arrived in the Fall. This means we will experience cooler temperatures and beautiful leaves. Before we know it, Fall will give way to Winter, and we all know what that means in these parts—snow, ice, sleet, freezing rain, bitter cold, and the occasional blizzard. Or rain, I guess. But the Christian has a sunny outlook because of the Lord. Every day, our Lord is the same, and in particular the psalmist says we should give thanks in the morning for His lovingkindness. “It is good to give thanks to the LORD, and to sing praises to Your name, O Most High; to declare Your lovingkindness in the morning, and Your faithfulness every night (Psalm 92:1-2). We look ahead in the morning to God’s lovingkindness throughout the day. This means he is going to love us today. We don’t have to earn His favor; we have it fully in Christ. People may be mean to us. Circumstances may be unkind. But as certain as the sun rising in the new day, so certain can we be that our Lord will love us and be kind to us. Even under clouds, we have a sunny outlook. It is not so with the lost, for they live beneath the storms of God’s impending judgment. Yet, the Lord is also lovingly kind to them, for He offers them the gospel that they might be saved!

PROTEST? (OCTOBER 2, 2016)

Protest has again reared its ugly head in our society as the means by which peace will come. Refuse to stand at the national anthem. Protest every criminal shooting as racist. Silence any who disagree with your position, either by stifling free speech or being offended by anything that they personally find distasteful. And of course we have the chorus of Hollywood types who have already vowed to leave the country if you know who is elected President. Humans are in unrest because of sin. They cannot be satisfied, for nothing in this world can fulfill them since they are alienated from God and weighed down by unforgiven sin. “There is no peace, says my God, to the wicked.” Instead Isaiah describes them as the troubled sea that cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt (Isaiah 57:20-21). Men should protest their own ignorance instead of asking others to respect it, and rather than protest they should seek repentance.

THE POWER IS ON (OCTOBER 16, 2016)

Electricity is a convenience of the modern era. Most of the generations preceding us did not have electricity. They could never suffer a power outage as we just did since they had never faced a power “in-age.” Although power outages may be infrequent, they do happen enough to where people have backup sources available to them like generators. In religious circles this also happens. Men try to get a piece of all religions in hopes of finding the right one. If Christianity fails, then they have some stock in Scientology. Some suppose that justification by faith could never work without a bountiful influx of accompanying good deeds. They just don’t want to put all their eggs in one basket and risk everything on one theological position. But the Bible accurately describes our God as a Rock. He is not going to fail us. His power is not going to go out. His word is not going to mislead us. He is not only omnipotent, but eternally so. He will never lose His power.

WHAT TO DO WHEN OPPRESSED (OCTOBER 23, 2016)

Oppression is something Christians feel more and more in our wicked world that has aligned itself against God in more ways than probably ever before in our lifetimes. The oppressed feel the weight of authority pressing down upon them, an authority and power that is mightier than we in this world. This authority is against the ways of God, and disrespectful of those who honor Christ as Lord and King.

Oppression is intended to make us shrink from God, give up hope, and give more attention to those who run the world rather than to our God, who reigns in heaven. When Israel, in Egypt, felt oppressed; they finally cried out to the Lord, and He sent Moses. Over and over in the time of the judges oppression came upon Israel due to disobedience. But when they cried out to the Lord He sent a judge to deliver them. We must do the same. “And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily.” Our hope is not in the arm of flesh, but in the Lord. As the world looks breathlessly for a good election result, may we unceasingly look to the Lord to bring justice and righteousness to our land, and deliver His people.

HOME COMING (OCTOBER 30, 2016)

Homecoming is a time we recount God’s blessings and re-dedicate ourselves anew to His service. God is faithful. That means He NEVER fails in ANYTHING, but ALWAYS keeps EVERY promise and UNERRINGLY brings His plan of redemption to its PREDESTINED end.

Psalm 89:8: O LORD God of hosts, Who is mighty like You, O LORD? Your faithfulness also surrounds You.

Isaiah 25:1: O LORD, You are my God. I will exalt You, I will praise Your name, For You have done wonderful things; Your counsels of old are faithfulness and truth.

Hebrews 2:17: Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

God’s faithfulness is ever a call for us to be faithful to Him by His grace, and to sing, rejoice, rely upon, hope in, exalt, and praise His great faithfulness!

THANK YOU (NOVEMBER 6, 2016)

Thank you to all who helped to make Homecoming the blessing that it was. We are appreciative of the First Baptist Church of Sandy Run for bringing their congregation down, for Barry Pruitt in delivering the message, and the unnamed musical group from the church that sang such great songs.

Thanks to all our folks, too, who cooked and cleaned and arranged and fixed up as needed.

Barry reminded us of the precious blood of Christ and He who shed that blood for the remission of our sins. It is precious in God’s sight, for the Father is satisfied with the payment made on the cross by His beloved Son. It is precious in our sight because it is the means by which our great debt is paid—a debt that we could never pay ourselves.

1 Peter 1:18-19 Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

NEWS FLASH! THE ELECTION IS OVER! (NOVEMBER 13, 2016)

What happened this past Tuesday? That’s what I’ve been hearing and reading since Election Day. I am familiar with the question because I asked the same thing in 2008 and 2012. One thing different this year

is the mass freaking out taking place in various parts of the country. For some, democracy is fine if they win, but if they lose they want it reversed. Lots of tears have been shed. Scores of celebrities have threatened to leave the country, and what a heartbreak that would be! It is acceptable to analyze why elections go as they do. It is certainly observable that voters often vote for the wrong candidate and with the wrong motivation. Some voters want evil to continue, and choose their candidates accordingly. And that is wrong. But one thing stands out above all these acts of voting. “The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD” (Proverbs 16:33). In God’s will of decree, His sovereign will, all things transpire as He chooses. In God’s will of command men may violate His good pleasure. But the ultimate truth is that NOTHING usurps God’s sovereign decree in His rule from heaven. So what happened this past Tuesday? The lot was cast into the lap, and the Lord chose Donald Trump the next president. In God we trust.

COURTING DISASTER (NOVEMBER 20, 2016)

My first trip to the roof of a house was a terror-filled experience (not to mention every other time since). As you know, I don’t care for heights. So first is the ladder. Then is the getting off the ladder without falling off the roof. Then there is the roof. Once the madness of being on the roof is over, then comes the really fun task of stepping back on the ladder and getting back to earth. Once on the roof, I always found it most tolerable when experienced as far from the edge as possible. At the peak it’s best. But a lack of respect for the edges is courting disaster.

In essence, all sinners live on the edge of a roof that drops off into eternity. There is no safe place on the roof of life unless the Lord Jesus has made us ready for everlasting life. Jesus depicts the departure from this world as a sudden, unexpected event. “Sudden destruction” comes. Sinners “likewise perish” as those on whom the tower fell. One moment life is being lived in “safety,” but in the next they are gone, and the end could not been seen approaching. This is why Paul emphasizes “today” as the acceptable time for salvation. We have no assurance of tomorrow, and there’s too much at stake to court eternal disaster.

ANTS (DECEMBER 4, 2016)

God made ants. Those little insects that are either a marvel to behold or a pain to endure, depending on whether they are red and biting you. They are smallish creatures. They certainly make no huge impact on world affairs. Most of them are born and die without any notice. They dig a hole in the ground and live there in an orderly community. When their hill is destroyed they simply build it back. What are they good for? Aren’t they too insignificant for any real purpose?

Yet, the Lord uses ants to tell us to be diligent. “Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise, which, having no captain, overseer or ruler, provides her supplies in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest.” Even the most insignificant in the eyes of the world can be useful in the service of our Lord.

PIVOTING TO THE SECULAR (DECEMBER 11, 2016)

People thankful to God for spiritual blessings have always tended to celebrate with holidays. Spiritual blessings are of such monumental importance that special recognition is both appropriate and beneficial in keeping us in remembrance of the hand of God extended in kindness toward unworthy sinners. And that is enough for the godly. But for those who do not know God or value the gifts of God there is the

secular pivot. Easter becomes bunnies, Thanksgiving becomes turkeys, and Christmas becomes Santa. All Saints Day is eclipsed by All Hallows Eve (Halloween). Perhaps the world thinks that pivoting from a spiritual to a secular holiday is making the best use of the situation for those who do not really care for theology or Christianity. However, it is actually pivoting from eternal truths to temporary celebrations. There is a reason we have spiritual holidays. It is because God has stooped down to save men from the wages of sin and to offer salvation in Christ for all eternity. If that isn't for the world, then they pivot and make it about some other things that can also be good—family gatherings and traditional customs. But if the sacred is lost to the secular, the result is shallow by comparison. Christians embrace eternal truth first, lest we lose the holiday to vanity. We will praise and not pivot.

I'LL TELL THE WORLD.... (DECEMBER 18, 2016)

On December 7, 2014, a familiar figure mounted the pulpit in a customary role of presenting to our church the life of a great Christian in order to inspire our own missionary efforts. That beloved figure was Dr. Belcher. His subject on that Sunday morning was Joseph. The previous year he presented John Newton. In fact, our church heard every life Doc ever prepared to present in narration and song, and several more than once. With Beverly accompanying, he took us to places we could otherwise never go. We viewed life through the eyes of men and women of God as they struggled to make a way for the gospel of Jesus Christ. We heard of their hardships and their triumphs. We wished we could be like them. We rejoiced in a Lord who has stooped to the lowly sinner in bringing such men into the world to announce that there is Good News in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Doc was unable to be with us last year because he was caring for his ailing wife. Now Doc is himself ailing and unable to do what once he did. His first concert I ever heard was at Columbia Bible College. It was of Adoniram Judson. In that he sang, "I'll tell the world that I'm a Christian." We all miss Doc. But we all have memories still capable to remember his ministry and to tell the world that we are Christians and to support gospel ministry!

NOW WHO'S IN CHARGE OF THE WORLD? (JANUARY 1, 2017)

Here we are entering a new year and once again we have no idea what will happen in it. I have heard just about every idea imaginable. The devil delights in our fear of the future instead of our confidence in God. How does the Bible speak of the passage of time? With fear and anxiety? Are we to sorrow as others who have no hope? Is pessimism our lot in life as things go from bad to worse in our corrupt society? Shall we give up all hope of a national revival? What is our disposition to be? "By awesome deeds in righteousness You will answer us, O God of our salvation, You who are the confidence of all the ends of the earth, and of the far-off seas" (Psalm 65:5). "For the LORD will be your confidence, and will keep your foot from being caught" (Proverbs 3:26). "In the fear of the LORD there is strong confidence, and His children will have a place of refuge" (Proverbs 14:26). How can we be hopeless and lifeless if our confidence is in the Lord? Won't we say each day that all things are possible with God? Aren't immovable objects inclined to move at the mighty hand of our God? Yes, the world will be shaky on their sand, but the people of God will stand strong on their Rock. He is in charge of the world and does all things after the counsel of His own will.

WHAT TO GO TO (JANUARY 8, 2017)

We are still early in the New Year, and it will benefit us to consider a very old creature once again. In fact this creature is cleverly mingled into the name of our church, Covenant. CovenANT. Yes, as Solomon tells us in Proverbs 6: "Go to the ANT." Solomon is more precise than that, for he says in full,

“Go to the ANT, you sluggard.” So the opposite of an ant is a sluggard. A sluggard is a man. An ant is, well, an ant. A sluggard is lazy and not a self-starter. A sluggard has to be pushed and pulled and yanked and carried to his duty. Not an ant. An ant works incessantly without captain, overseer, or ruler. An ant is pure motion. A sluggard is molasses in winter. An ant accomplishes much. A sluggard accomplishes nothing. The ant works with a team of ants, doing its part, contributing to the whole, and displaying a busy harmony. A sluggard is an impediment. A sluggard has to be gotten around or over, for he blocks all who would be diligent and ambitious. The sluggard deflects blame by saying, “There’s a lion in the streets” to justify his laziness. The ant gives no thought to lions, but only to active duty. The sluggard is always on leave while the battle rages. So let us consider the way of the ant and be wise.

POISON (JANUARY 15, 2017)

The world is full of God’s bounty of things of which we can safely partake and enjoy. The Promised Land was said to flow with milk and honey. Some of us have encountered scuppernongs while walking through woods or by rivers. Even those green apples are tasty, although they may leave you with a bit of a tummy ache. But poison is a different matter altogether. Poison can be deadly. It is adverse to health and strength. Ingesting it requires immediate and fervent action to rid ourselves of it. The Bible speaks of poison both in the active and passive senses. There are some who poison by their contentious words or their false teaching. “The poison of asps is under their lips.” They produce strife, anger, wrath, and upheaval. When the gospel was believed in Iconium, the unbelieving Jews poisoned the Gentiles against the brethren and stirred up trouble. Poison, used in a spiritual sense, has a lingering effect upon the heart and mind. Divisions caused by a poisonous tongue are not easily healed. Error proclaimed by a lying tongue takes hold and, for very many, will never be cured. So what does that leave us to do? “As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word...” The cure for spiritual poison is God’s Word, received by us and proclaimed to others!

CIVIC DUTY (JANUARY 22, 2017)

The new administration was received this week both by supporters and protestors. The supporters gathered (and watched) in Washington to celebrate the inauguration of our 45th president. Others marched, yelled, assaulted detractors, beat up cars, kicked buildings, and in one case even set themselves on fire in protest. Of the 12,392 categories of protest, exactly 12,392 will avail nothing to change anything (except to make a lot of people glad those people didn’t get what they wanted in the election). Instead of these infantile displays, the Bible tells us what the real change agent is. “Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:1-4). Granted, the protestors might not like the change that takes place when those in power are converted to Christ and godliness is sought for our land, but it will be good and acceptable to God, and it’s high time our nation was satisfied by what pleases God rather than ourselves.

QUIETNESS (JANUARY 29, 2017)

In attending various yearly “balls” in High School, where teenagers would gather within an enclosed space to hear loud music and yell at each other in order to converse, a great contrast was available at the end of this revelry. Immediately upon exiting the building, there was an enormous quietness. Part of that was from the temporary hearing damage from the assault our ears had taken for four straight hours. But

the main reason was that we had removed ourselves from the noise. We had gone from loudness to quietness. Isaiah says this is the way of surrender to Christ and salvation. "In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength" (30:15). "Confidence" is better translated "trust." Israel ran from God. They were like the troubled sea that cannot rest. But if they returned to the Lord, they would find rest. In place of warring against God, there would be quietness and trust. This would be their true strength, found in the Lord. Men fancy they are stronger on their own, but we are only stronger when at peace with God. A man independent of God is a weak and war-torn man. The only way to end the war is in surrender, in return, in rest, in quietness. Sadly Isaiah adds, "But you would not." Israel would not. Will we?

O. M. A. (FEBRUARY 5, 2017)

In 1964, at Christmas, I received the be-all end-all gift for boys facing the harsh realities of life. It was the #1 boys toy that year. A boy needed nothing else after this. How can that be? Because it was the Johnny Seven O.M.A. The O.M.A. stood for "one man army." The seven referred to the seven distinct weapons in this one toy gun: grenade launcher, tommy gun, anti-tank rocket, armor-piercing shell, anti-bunker missile, machine gun, and pistol. With all that firepower, Johnny must have stood for Johnny Wayne. But boys grow up and become men, and now we know more, or should. What do we know better now than when the Johnny Seven O.M.A. came out? That we are not a one man army. The real battle against spiritual forces opposed to Christ is waged by the Church, which is a body of believers all given their necessary place in Christian warfare. Leaders equip the saints for the work of ministry. We all are to make disciples. We are the family of God. We must be one army in action, with many men, women, and children in active duty. We all pull in the same direction. We encourage each other. Together we never surrender. We are refusing to become entangled in the affairs of the world so that we may please our commanding officer. One Man Army? No, we are the Church, an army no man can number!

GIDEONS SUNDAY (FEBRUARY 12, 2017)

We welcome to our church this morning Mr. Wayland Burns (and there is a high probability that I have misspelled some portion of that name since I misplaced the notice from the Gideons). Mr. Burns will be giving the annual Gideons International report on the distribution of Bibles. One of the greatest ministries possible is making the Scriptures available. Although we in this country are awash with Bibles, many of our citizens are still ignorant of it, and many young people are completely unfamiliar with the Word of God. All youngsters have phones, but not all have Bibles. The Word of God is living and active, and the sword of the Spirit. That is a weapon all need. Not only in this country, but to the farthest parts of the earth. Let's pray and support the work of the Gideons both nationally and internationally. And let's pray that the Bibles distributed in all the various places they are put will yield a great increase in our Lord's harvest. Mr. Burns will be at the back at the conclusion of the service if you would like to contribute to the ministry of the Gideons. You can also avail yourself of a number of other ways to participate in the Gideons ministry at the Gideons card rack on the bookshelf. We are thankful to Mr. Burns for being with us today.

TUG OF WAR (FEBRUARY 19, 2017)

Once upon a time, someone somewhere devised a game where two teams would each grasp opposite ends of a long rope. This rope would straddle some kind of undesirable spot—mud, water, ditch, poison ivy, beehive. At a certain point this game would begin and each team would try to pull the other into the

undesirable spot. At the point at which the other team is vanquished, the game ends with one side drenched, muddy, or worse, and the other side reveling in victory. If the devil were to make a game to show what the church should *not* be, then tug of war would be that game. We are to pull all in the same direction, for the same aspiration of the glory of Christ. We are to support one another, not seek to plunge others into an abyss. We all rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. We don't waste our efforts in one spot, getting nowhere, but strive to advance to higher spots in the will of God. And when we all pull in the same direction, with the same zeal and vigor evidenced in the tug of war game, we don't spin our wheels, but strive mightily, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame. We will RUN with patience the race set before us. The devil loves when few pull or all pull in opposite directions. That's his game.

THE POISON WELL (FEBRUARY 26, 2017)

A well is one of those things that, although existing in modern times, is no longer prominent in daily life. At one time people would go to the well and fetch water. The water needed to be wholesome, for from it many were affected. A poison well was a root of disease and death. The well of people is their heart. Out of it are the issues of life. If it is poisoned, then all of life is affected in a deadly way. The heart proceeds to wicked actions and wicked words. This goes against the original design of our bodies, meant to serve God in truth. We are to keep our heart with all diligence. Once it gets poisoned, even the thinking process is twisted and a person may live in total darkness and ignorance, all the while believing themselves to be wise. There is a madness in our world today that prevents men from even grasping the concept of truth or the simple meaning of language. If we reject a single belief of this corrupt generation we are branded as hateful, racist, xenophobic, unchristian, lacking in compassion, and shameful. Believe Jesus is the only way to heaven? You are a bigot. Believe in different roles for men and women? You are sexist. We are to speak the truth in love; something those who brand us as haters do not do. But we are to speak the truth nonetheless. It is loving to do it, but it will not be called loving by those who hate it.

THE WAY OF HATE (MARCH 5, 2017)

As we gather today to worship, learn, and fellowship, we are governed by God's Word that commands that we love one another, even to laying down our lives for the brethren. Love is forgiving, kind, longsuffering, and does not seek its own, but seeks the benefit of others. Love covers a multitude of sins. That means that we protect those we love. We do not gossip or spread unflattering information that would tend to discredit or shame another. We believe the best in those we love. We endure those occasions when someone rubs us the wrong way. However, the way of hate seeks information to discredit and destroy at the first opportunity. We see it constantly in the realm of politics. There are thousands and thousands now whose top priority is finding something disreputable about the new president, his cabinet, his family, and probably even his dogs and cats. "A lying tongue hates those who are crushed by it" (Proverbs 26:28). Hate is the forerunner of destruction. Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, taught that you don't have to murder to face judgment. Whoever is angry with his brother without cause is in danger of judgment. Those who spew hatred in the form of saying, "You fool," are in danger of hell fire. The way of hate is to tear down and scatter, but the way of love is to build up, protect, and unite.

VICTORY (MARCH 12, 2017)

The concept of victory in our world is often measured in material goods. Who has the most money, the better score, the nicer things, the fewer hardships, and the greater popularity? The Christian standard for victory is far different. We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. The child-like are valued by God far above the proud. We are bondslaves of Christ. Those who would be the greatest among us must be servant of all. God does not call many wise or noble according to the flesh, but He calls the foolish things of the world, the weak things, the things that are despised. God rejects the proud Pharisee who prays from an attitude of superiority, but He hears the prayer of the sinner who will not even lift His eyes to heaven, but beats His breast in humble petition. Do you seek great things for yourself? That was the question to Baruch from Jeremiah. “Do not seek them” was the answer. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds. God always leads the child of God in triumph, and diffuses the aroma of His knowledge in every place. Who was the greatest giver? The widow who gave all she had to live on. Who was the mightiest warrior? David, who slew Goliath with weapons of faith more potent than any slingshot. Our victory is assured in the Lord Jesus Christ!

WHO ARE YOU CALLING STUPID? (MARCH 19, 2017)

A new new morality has gripped the world, and it is very much the old old immorality. No longer content to make minor alterations in God’s order, the modern world has wreaked havoc on traditional morality, stating required beliefs all must follow or be branded a heretic. That is bad enough, but it gets more insulting, because the new morality does not just define what they believe is right and wrong, but also who is wise and who is stupid. The wise, of course, are those who hold to the new morality—same sex marriage, transgenderism, gender dysphoria, man-made climate change, abortion on demand, etc. The stupid are those who oppose these wise men who have taken the mantle of Elijah upon them. But what does the Bible say about their new morality? “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.” “The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverse mouth I hate.” “Do not let your heart envy sinners, but be zealous for the fear of the LORD all the day.” “The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe.” Who are the fools in God’s sight? The ones calling those who fear the Lord stupid. And although many wilt at this assault on God’s law, the righteous cling to God and are the truly wise.

ACQUIRED TASTE (MARCH 26, 2017)

“O taste and see that the Lord is good.” The Bible tells us that those who do not know the Lord have no appetite for the things of the true God. Reading the Bible. Prayer. Worship. Learning. Service. Fellowship. Theology. These are boring. The world is eager for things to quench fleshly appetites, but food for their soul is not one of their cravings. Believers have an appetite for the things of God, but we often find professing believers to be anything but hungry. The possibility of profession falling short of true faith is a definite possibility, but it is also true that true believers might have little taste for God at times. This is not because the soul will not delight in God. It is due to not sitting at the table to eat.

When believers taste the things of God they are satisfied. They are the richest of food. When an unregenerate man tastes of the things of God he finds them bitter. But the saint finds them sweet. However, tasting must be done. Neglect causes us to lose our appetite. Some foods just aren’t tasty. But the most delicious food must be eaten first by the will. Candy must be eaten for the first time once, and afterward we wonder what we did before we had candy to enjoy. So it is for the saint in the things of

God. Once we feast on God we are hooked forever, and must return for regular meals. It begins by tasting and ends in heavenly delights.

THE WALK (April 16, 2017)

Easter is celebrated in a variety of ways, both secular and religious. One common denominator in the celebration of Easter is that it occurs on a single day of the year. Some add a few more days of celebration here and there, but overall it is a one-day observance. However, the Bible tells us that being raised to life in Christ, which the resurrection of Jesus provides, is to be lived in a perpetual walk not limited to a single day. “Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4). That widens the scope of Easter considerably. Let the world have their momentary Easters. The Christian will feast on the Lord throughout the year, and not just *be* new, but *live* new.

THE PEACEMAKER (April 23, 2017)

Wars and rumors of war have been a staple of civilization. We currently live under a higher threat of nuclear confrontation with the boasting of the leader of North Korea. It is easy to imagine a conflagration breaking out at any moment, and not just from North Korea, but from any number of world hot spots. There is a war now being waged against Islamic terrorism, spanning the globe. Other wars could be noted. All of this makes for anxiety and fear. It should cause us to turn to the Lord. “He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two; He burns the chariot in the fire” (Psalm 46:9). Peace is sought in many ways without mention of the Lord. Only the Lord can both stop the nations from war and change the hearts of men to pursue peace. It seems a world wanting peace would be more intent on seeking the Lord.

THE APPOINTMENT (April 30, 2017)

“It is appointed for men to die once . . .” All our days are written in God’s book before we’ve lived one of them. When those days expire, so do we. We generally don’t know when the appointment is. No one calls us to remind us of it. We can’t put it in our calendar. The appointment takes some quickly and without notice. Others see the day approaching although not so much as to know when it will arrive. It is an appointment made for all men, “and after this the judgment.” Thus we mustn’t delay preparation for the appointment. We must be ready at all times. Ready to meet the Lord. Ready to depart this world. Ready for eternal life. We may cancel earthly appointments, but this one must be kept.

SINGING THE MERCY SONG (May 7, 2017)

“I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever; with my mouth will I make known your faithfulness to all generations.” Note the duration words in this verse. “Forever,” and “to all generations.” See the vehicle of communication: “sing,” and “my mouth.” And what of the subject matter? “The mercies of the Lord” and “your faithfulness.” Many things are worthy of forgetting and ending. The mercies of the Lord and His abiding faithfulness are worthy of perpetual and eternal remembrance, celebration, and worship. We are the beneficiaries when God does not treat us as our sins deserve, but according to His tender mercies. So also when we consider God never fails us but is always faithful. It is a song and message that should lift our hearts today and all days henceforth.

FOXES AND BIRDS (MAY 14, 2017)

“Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head” (Matthew 8:20). Jesus made this statement in response to a man who said he would follow Jesus wherever He went. Jesus’ reply spoke of the cost of discipleship, for our Lord had sacrificed the most basic human joys in order to travel throughout the land proclaiming the gospel. Foxes and birds had homes, but not our Lord. He was itinerant. He was guided by His pursuit of the lost. He said, “I need to go through Samaria,” for the Samaritan woman was there. In a place where His popularity soared He said, “Let us go into the next towns that I may preach there also, because for this purpose I have come forth” (Mark 1:38). What a wonderful Savior!

GETTING MAD AT GOD (MAY 21, 2017)

Our world sees itself as darlings of God, sweet children whose very existence demands blessings from heaven. With this attitude, any circumstance that wanders from this expectation is considered to be an affront to what we deserve. So it is that we often see people that are mad at God. We get mad when people treat us in a way that we did not expect, or in a way that is even unwarranted. When sickness comes, prayer is made to God that it might be removed. For many, if it is not healed, anger rises toward the Lord. “Why didn’t God heal my sickness?” Bitterness follows close behind. A person in such a state of being may soon fall away seemingly beyond hope. A righteous man has a different attitude. Hear Job: “Though He slay me, I will hope in Him.” Hear Daniel’s friends: “Even if He does not (deliver us), we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.” Is our trust in God of that nature?

REMEMBERING THOSE WHO DIED (MAY 28, 2017)

With the fall of man came unavoidable conflict with other people and nations and the onset of wars. Some nations will aggressively pursue conflict, while others must defend themselves from such. This scenario requires military men and women to protect and defend our nation. Sadly, this also means that our brave military personnel sometimes die in the service they perform for our country. It is fitting for a grateful nation to remember those who have made the ultimate sacrifice in the defense of our way of life. Some Christians speak of all fighting as evil, and in so doing unintentionally impugn the dignity of those who have fought and died for our nation. But our Lord understands the need of nations to defend themselves in a hostile world. We owe these soldiers honor and thanksgiving, and we should thank God most that we have had men and women who were willing and able to defend our freedoms, and also those who died courageously. It is not evil to defend our nation from those who would do us harm, but it is a great evil to leave our land undefended while the ravager seeks our ruin. We need soldiers who will stand in the gap for the land, just as we need men and women of God to do the same for our spiritual well-being. So we remember those who have died. There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for his friends. These honorable soldiers, however, lay down their lives also for those they have never met and will never know.

RUNNING ON EMPTY (JUNE 4, 2017)

How many times have you run out of gas simply by not paying attention to the gas gauge? Most drivers don’t run out of gas because they know a very central truth about driving a car—you can’t run on empty. There has to be actual gas in the tank. It doesn’t work to *sincerely believe* there is gas in the tank when there isn’t. You can’t simply believe in gas, you have to put gas in the car. You don’t get gas in the car merely by driving by a gas station either. You have to stop and go through the act of getting gas into the

tank. It is also ineffective to pull up to the pumps, try to get gas, and then not get it due to a technical or mechanical issue with the pump. Even if you *try* to get gas without getting it, it still doesn't count for gas. The same can be observed for religion. Believing you have the right religion is not enough if you don't have what the Bible describes as true religion. Trying to be a Christian and failing does not offer any merit before God. Doing things that Christians do like go to church and give an offering does not make you a Christian. You can sit in your car all day and pretend to be driving, but unless you have gas in your tank you cannot progress further. Unless we really know Jesus Christ we cannot be a Christian.

Without Him we are running on empty and playing the game of make-believe.

MAKES ME FEEL FINE (JUNE 11, 2017)

A song from my teenage years proclaimed, "Summer breeze, makes me feel fine." When the weather gets hot a breeze is a gift from heaven. We had such breezes this past week. Yes, we know the hot days are coming, but how great to have a day of cooler weather and refreshing breezes. Peter refreshed a lame man one day at the Temple, as told in Acts 3. The lame man hoped to receive alms from them, but instead he was cured of his paralysis and ended up walking, and leaping, and praising God. His world had changed in an instant. He was whole again. He would not have to beg anymore. The burden of paralysis had left him, and he stood with Peter and John almost as in a dream. That day he would walk home. But Peter then faced those who were not lame—those who walked to the Temple. Could they be refreshed? Did they even need refreshment? Peter preached Jesus Christ to them and commanded, "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord." The lame man had been burdened with a physical malady, but the greater burden was the load of sin that lay upon those without Christ. If they would repent, times of refreshing would come from the Lord, and that for eternity. What refreshment could compare to when God blots out our sins?

OUR FATHER (JUNE 18, 2017)

Our God is Lord, King, Sovereign, Majestic, Exalted, Infinite, Glorious, Transcendent. His ways and thoughts are as high above ours as heaven is above the earth. He is enthroned in the heavens in unlimited power. Yet, when Jesus taught us to pray He directed us to say, "Our father in heaven." Our father. He is our Lord and Master. We are His bondservants. We have no right to dwell in His family, and yet we call Him our Father. As our heavenly Father He is the perfect Father and fully willing and able to preserve and care for His children, and instruct us in the right way. The Lord chose to adopt us as His sons through Christ. If earthly fathers give good things to their children, how much more will our Father in heaven give good things to those who ask? If we have had fathers to discipline us as they thought best, should we not even more so be subject to the Father of spirits and live? (Hebrews 12:9-10). Our heavenly Father disciplines us always for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. If our earthly parents can no longer care for us, our heavenly Father still holds us in His loving care. He is Father to the fatherless. By grace He delights in His children. We should be the most thankful of children, and abounding in praise, for look who our Father is! He is the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

NO EMPTY VESSELS (JUNE 25, 2017)

Kitchen cupboards typically are supplied with ample containers for holding liquid. These vessels are stored empty and filled as needed. When they are empty they remain in this state until they are filled again. Thus, glasses are mostly empty and only occasionally filled. Not so the human spirit. The human

spirit is constantly full. Jesus said to the Pharisees, “You are of your father the devil, so the things of your father you do.” The devil’s ways filled them. The Christian has the Spirit of God and is to be continually filled with Him (Ephesians 5:18). Therefore, we do the things of the Spirit. It is the nature of sinners to be full of evil. A sinner’s mouth is full of cursing and bitterness (Romans 3:14). If a person does not love God, then he loves the world. “If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” We must walk in the Spirit so as not to fulfill the lusts of the flesh. “You who love the Lord, hate evil.” There is no empty, neutral position where someone exists between evil and good. The man who cleansed his own life after a spirit departed was soon possessed by seven additional spirits more wicked than the first (Luke 11:24-26). Let’s not deceive ourselves. We are always full. The need is to always be full of what is right. To think on these things. To be driven by these things. To be filled with the fullness of God.

THE DEVIL LOVES MISERY (OURS) (July 2, 2017)

When Satan appeared before the Lord and heard the Lord’s pleasure in Job, the devil’s highest desire was to make Job miserable. The Lord allowed it, and the devil delivered great misery to Job. The test proved the genuineness of Job’s love and devotion to God, but it also revealed the devil’s love for our misery. The Lord tells us to rejoice in Him always. The devil wants us depressed, discouraged, disheartened, disillusioned, and hopeless. “There is a lion in the streets,” the fool says, and mopes at home. “We will not have enough to live on,” we fret and the anxieties of our heart make us ever more miserable. The saint is directed to “lift up our eyes to the hills, from where our help comes from,” while the devil directs us to a world that is passing away before our very eyes. The devil delights in showing us how unthankful we should be, and that we don’t have enough blessing from a stingy God. But the Lord says to give thanks in everything, and that He lavishes blessings upon us to such a level that eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man the things that God has prepared for those that love Him. People say, “Have a good day.” The devil says, “Have a miserable day.” The Lord says, “This is the day I have made; rejoice and be glad in it!”

THE FIRST STEP (July 9, 2017)

Anything we do requires a first step. The first step may seem insignificant because of the many steps that must follow any successful enterprise, but if you think about it, the first step is the most crucial. Without the first step there can be no others. It is true that many start and do not finish, but every finish requires a start. That is the first step. The sluggard says, “There is a lion in the street,” and will not take a first step. The first step is the beginning of commitment to a worthy cause. There are many first steps for the Christian. A Christian is a living, breathing servant of Christ whose steps will be directed in many directions during his time of service. “A man’s heart plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps” (Proverbs 16:9). Our heart commits to a way and takes a step, but the Lord is the one who sovereignly guides and directs us to bear much fruit in the choices and commitments we make for His glory. The problem is many professing Christians will not take the first step to the most basic duties of the Christian life, nor persist in the way once a step is taken. The encouraging thing is that you are always a step away from returning to the path should you wander from it. Zechariah states it simply, “Return to me, and I will return to you.” A single first step back to God.

THE WINDING RIVERS (July 16, 2017)

I grew up a short walk from a creek that flowed out of Warrior Mountain and into the North Pacolet River. The North Pacolet flows into the Broad River near Pinkneyville, SC. The Broad River becomes a

very large river before joining the Saluda River to form the Congaree River in Columbia. The Congaree flows 47 miles before merging with the Wateree River just north of Lake Marion to form the Santee River. The Santee pours into the Atlantic Ocean just south of Georgetown. No man planned the course of these rivers; their course is determined by the slope of the land through which these waters flow. The land turns them wherever it will. The Lord does this with the most powerful rulers on this planet. “The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes” (Proverbs 21:1). See here the sovereign rule of our Lord over the heart of kings. He turns them to His will. This is why Cyrus decreed that the Jews return to build the temple. It is why Artaxerxes commissioned Nehemiah to return and build the walls. It is why Darius re-commissioned the work of building the temple after it was halted. It is why we hope in the Lord and pursue great things to His glory. If God be for us, who can be against us?

DOES THE LORD HATE YOU? (July 23, 2017)

Our world has a very strong belief about the love of God. This belief can be stated as, “God loves everyone.” It is true that love is a characteristic of God (“God is love”), and that the Lord loves all people in a general way. He makes the rain fall on the just and the unjust. He is good to all. The Lord provides food and shelter even for His enemies. However, when the world speaks of this type of universal love from God to mankind, it ignores the righteousness of God and His awesome justice. God’s general love does not keep sinners out of Hell. His particular love toward His children is required for that. Although the Lord loves in a universal manner, He does not save every person, and some are loved today who will be the objects of His wrath and anger for all eternity. This is because the Lord does not love or tolerate unforgiven sin. So to the question, “Does the Lord hate you?” David answers in Psalm 5:5: “You (the Lord) hate all workers of iniquity.” This is solved in Christ, for God loves His Son, in whom He is always well-pleased. The love of God for His children is unchanging and never wavers.

We are loved with an everlasting love. He does not view us through our sins but through Christ’s righteousness. Even when we sin we do not forfeit God’s eternal love.

SOMETHING WE ALL HAVE IN COMMON (July 30, 2017)

All along the roadways of America are those claiming to have the skill to tell your future. Some can do it by phone. Horoscopes are in every newspaper. There are psychics, mediums, witches, wizards, occultists, astrologers, metaphysicians, and mentalists. There are tea leaves to read, stars to decipher, dreams to interpret. And what is the end result? Darkness and blackness. None of us knows what the future holds. The Bible states it explicitly, “You do not know what will happen tomorrow.” This can be a bit terrifying. Life may be seen as speeding into the darkness with no headlights. Surely we will perish when we encounter the unseen! The biblical solution is to trust in the Lord. “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths (or “make your paths straight” so that you don’t run off a curvy road). Although we all share ignorance of the future, we don’t all share trust in God. “Those who know your name will put their trust in you” (Psalm 9:10). “But as for me, I trust in You, O LORD; I say, “You are my God” (Psalm 31:14).

THE MORE THINGS CHANGE... (AUGUST 6, 2017)

In my life I have noted things deemed unhealthy today may be healthy tomorrow. A good practice today will be considered dangerous in days to come. Like that new outfit you bought? In a few years it will be out of style. Then in a few more years it will come right back in style again. This makes it hard to trust

in the ways of man. The Lord has provided us with a more solid foundation in His Word. “Forever, O Lord, your word is settled in heaven.” “For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.” A sailor can plot his way by the stars because they stay in place. That is how we can be sure of living in the most healthy and happy way—by taking heed to God’s Word. The Word of God never dies; it remains living and active and sharp. The Word of God never misleads or becomes outdated. All Scripture is given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and is profitable in all ages, so that the people of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. Following the world’s standards makes us dizzy for they are ever-changing. It’s like getting off an amusement park ride that spins us to where we can’t walk. But we stand on the Word of God with firmness because God is the author.

IS EVERYTHING THE Will of God? (AUGUST 13, 2017)

It seems most decisions are made today based on feelings. That is, when a choice is placed before us as to what we should do—where to go to church, or whether to move to a new house or city, or whether or not someone should pursue that man or that woman in romance—the decision comes down to how we *feel* about it. That is a *subjective* basis as opposed to an *objective* basis. An objective basis relies on absolute standards outside of our feelings in making decisions. However, among Christians it sounds too secular to rely on feelings, so many follow their feelings and declare them as the will of God. Then they aren’t selfishly doing their own will, but the will of God! The will of God is an objective guideline. So to designate feelings as the will of God is a contradiction of terms. Generally, Christians merely replace “I felt like” with “God led me.” This results in a strange phenomenon—everything we want to do is presented as the will of God even if Scripture is violated by the decision. How many professing believers leave churches because they feel like it, even vetoing the many biblical commands to forgive and forbear and maintain unity? The sovereign Lord must be our objective focus. Everything we choose to do is NOT the will of God simply by claiming that it is. Christians must stop playing that sanctimonious game with the will of God. We can’t choose our way and then declare it to be God’s. God’s will is God’s will. Our feelings are our feelings.

IS IGNORANCE Bliss? (AUGUST 20, 2017)

Tomorrow at around 1:14 PM the moon will start to cross the face of the sun in Orangeburg. At 2:43 PM the moon will entirely cover the sun until 2:45 PM, a total of two minutes and 23 seconds. At 4:07 PM the moon will complete its circuit across the sun and return us to full sunlight. That is the scientific, astronomical explanation for why it will be pitch dark tomorrow afternoon. Of course, there are alternate theories. In 840 A.D. a Roman emperor was so distressed by a solar eclipse that he stopped eating and starved to death, thinking that it was some portend of disaster. The ancient Greeks believed solar eclipses occurred when the gods were angry with humans. The Norse believed a hungry wolf was eating the sun. Many cultures believed some sort of demon or wild animal was feasting on the sun. It was felt that banging on pots, playing loud drums, or yelling at the eclipse would scare the monster away and save it. Some cultures sacrificed humans to ward off the evil. The ancient Chinese fired arrows to scare it off. If we are ignorant we can run the gamut from silly to murderous. “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge,” God said through Hosea. Our so-called enlightened age believes so much that isn’t true it’s scary. See the results! Ignorance is not bliss; knowledge of the truth is.

TOO FAST (AUGUST 27, 2017)

For two and a half minutes on Monday we beheld the wonders of a solar eclipse. It was more beautiful than imagined. It was a special declaration of the glory of God in a world that is constantly declaring the glory of God. It was no chance occurrence but was calculated to the second by the laws of nature that God Himself has implemented. It was designed in the creation of the heavens and the earth so that the sun and the moon would be the same size as seen from earth, allowing for a full occlusion of the sun by the moon. It was the first total solar eclipse I had ever been in, and only the second of any kind I have been alive to witness. Once the darkness lifted and the sunlight quickly lit up the world again the common reaction was, "That was too fast." That is characteristic of things in this world. Even the years of our lives are soon cut off and we fly away. But Revelation 22 assures God's children that in heaven we will serve Him and see His face. This will go on forever and ever. What is too fast here, too fleeting, too brief, too soon a distant memory, will in that day be transformed into a forever present glory as we behold the beauty of the Lord. It is called eternal life in the Father's house, where we will never grow sick or tired or sorrowful or old. That beauty will eclipse the eclipse, and it will not be too fast, for it will never end.

FISH ALIVE (SEPTEMBER 3, 2017)

"Any dead fish can float downstream; it takes a live one to swim upstream" The dead fish goes with the flow of the river. That's all it can do. The spiritually dead, by nature, go with the flow of a wicked world. They are conformists. They mimic the evil all around them. Not in every way. Even dead fish look different one from the other. But they love the world; love the praise of men; love to show how progressive they are by agreeing with the latest immoral trends; cherish the accolades the world gives to its own. It is when a person is born anew to a living hope, to walk in newness of life, to be raised from the realm of the spiritually dead, that they start to swim upstream. They choose not to conform to the world's evil. They choose to courageously follow the Lord, following the example of the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 who loved not their lives to the death. They say, "I will obey God rather than men." They will believe and deliver a different message than the world is accustomed to hearing. They will be the true lovers of mankind. Not the "I'm ok; you're ok" crowd who ignore the ramifications of separation from God, but like faithful heralds they cry, "Flee from the wrath to come." Christianity is not for cowards. Any dead sinner can follow the crowd and conform to the world. A Christian follows the Lord.

FAST (SEPTEMBER 10, 2017)

When I was 8 years of age or so I began to be filled with the knowledge of the greatness of my physical abilities. In my mind I was faster than greased lightning. As a frequent viewer of the Bugs Bunny/Road Runner cartoon hour, I likened myself to the speed of the Road Runner. I was not shy about offering to show my great speed to others. So that day came when I challenged my granddad to a short race "from here to over there," because I assured him I would beat him. He would have been around 67 years old at that time. Surprisingly, he took me up on my offer...and beat me. I was young and fast, and he was old...and as it turned out, faster. People often make that mistake today in a different way. The new things of the world are considered more likely to win the race than the ancient. The old doctrine from an old Bible is not fast enough for our age. We seek the sleeker, leaner, more progressive, new ideas and new morality. The young whipper-snappers of our day think too highly of themselves and scoff at eternal truth. However, the truly fast trust in the Lord. They renew their strength. They mount up with wings as eagles. They run and are not weary. They walk and do not faint. Solomon advised his son, "My son, fear the LORD and the king; Do not associate with those given to change." That's plenty fast enough.

THIS IS ON US (SEPTEMBER 17, 2017)

One of the exciting days we experienced while growing up was having a birthday. It often still is, in spite of the fact that the years start to pile up after a while. On my birthday my grandmother would give me a dollar and send my name in to the radio station for a birthday drawing where I might win another dollar. Presents, a cake, sometimes even a party came with my birthday. But who instigated such things? My family. I didn't expect anything from outsiders on my birthday, so if anything was to be done for me it had to start in my family. If Jesus is to receive His proper praise and worship, it must be His family that instigates it. The world does not want to mention the birthday of Jesus at Christmas, but the family of God does. The world sees man at the root of every wondrous climate event in the world, blaming humankind for angering their precious Mother Nature. So who is going to behold the works of the Lord, who has made desolations in the earth? (Psalm 46:8). It will have to be the family of God. Thanksgiving is approaching, and who will be those who must undertake the sacred duty to give thanks to God? That would be the family of God. Who is to make each day a day of thanksgiving to the Lord? Again, that would be us. We can't depend on the world to give what is due to the Lord. This is on us.

FULL PRAYER (SEPTEMBER 24, 2017)

The Lord graciously welcomes us to bring our petitions to Him. We are to think first of the Lord before we seek the help of men. As we walk with Him we can ask the desires of our heart, for our heart will be in tune with the Lord's will and we will not waste our praying on selfish requests we plan to consume on our own lusts. But even with a good heart and mind regarding the Lord and prayer, we can still pray in a less-than-full fashion. Most prayer requests fall in the category of petition. That is, we ask for ourselves things we desire. This is *not* wrong, but it is far from a complete prayer life. We also commonly make intercession, which is prayer for others. What elements of prayer are most often neglected? Praise, thanksgiving, and confession. We are to enter God's presence with praise and thanksgiving and be ever mindful to confess our sins that we might be forgiven of our sins and cleansed from all unrighteousness. That is full prayer!

HOW MAGICIANS DO IT (OCTOBER 1, 2017)

One of the fundamental abilities successful magicians have is that ability to distract us from what they are doing with one hand so they can do something else with the other hand. Drawing our attention to a place where nothing is really happening enables them to astound us because we didn't see what was going on where we weren't looking. There is nothing improper with that; it is just part of the craft of a magician. However, it is sinful for the devil to distract us from the Lord via the vehicle of the world in which we live. Every day the clamor of the world naturally welcomes us to look and see and despair. To lose hope. To give up on prayer. To abandon the Bible. To withdraw from fellowship with believers. To make the weapons of our warfare carnal, trusting in natural wisdom and human ability rather than the power of God. "Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain" (Ps. 73:13). Don't fall for it! Paul taught us to not fall prey to the trickery of men (Eph. 4:14). Hold to the truth and let us fix our eyes always upon Jesus.

NOT SO BAD (OCTOBER 8, 2017)

As much as we hate bad news, it is better to know of it and fix it, than to be ignorant. However, when it comes to human behavior and sinfulness, sinners like to be told we are "not so bad." In fact, we could not be worse. The doctrine of total depravity is the foundation stone of any serious dealings with God.

Those who are well do not seek a physician, but only those who are sick. If we are not so bad, then we foolishly think we can survive without God. If we are not so bad we can better our world by our own abilities, good deeds, optimism, and education. God is honest with us. He says we are in darkness, dead, blind, lame, deaf. We are weighed down with sins. We don't seek God. We have altogether become worthless. We have no natural feelings of guilt before God, but are taught to dismiss any guilt as "guilt feelings." In other words, they will pass away so don't worry about them. Total depravity declares that we are all infected with the same chronic rebellion against God. We are enemies of God and separated from Him. This makes us capable of all manner of evil. Not all will do the same evil, but the same potential is there. The not so bad won't seek God; but the chief of sinners will run to Him.

LEX REX (OCTOBER 15, 2017)

This simple Latin phrase means "Law is King." Not petty human laws. God's Law is King. God's Law is absolute and unchanging truth. What was morally wrong yesterday is morally wrong today. If something was praised by God as absolutely righteous, it remains righteous today. This is why homosexuality and heterosexual sins are still sins even in a permissive age. The same for stealing, killing, and lying. God sees sin as sin because sin is defined by the character of God, which never changes. So why is morality in a state of flux today? That would be because of Rex Lex—King is Law. This is the complete reversal of Lex Rex. Today every man does what is right in his own eyes. Every man is the king of his own life. Congress and the Supreme Court routinely make laws of morality (or immorality), regardless of what the Bible says. So the Bible, the law of the King, is discarded. The world no longer holds to the concept of Lex Rex. Instead, human pride elevates modern thinking to the level of law. Today good is called evil and evil good. Paul says that men did not like to retain God in their knowledge, and so God gave them over to their Rex Lex debased minds, to do those things they ought not. Regardless of the world's philosophy, God's Law is still King.

VANCE HAVNER (OCTOBER 22, 2017)

The year 1901 was a monumental year, as I'm sure you all know, for in that year my grandmother entered this world, leaving it 100 years later in 2001. But in that same year on October 17 another monumental birth took place, that of Vance Havner. Dr. Havner was also born in the North Carolina mountains in a community called Jugtown. He said he never knew a day in his life when he did not feel that he should preach and write. When he was growing up the preachers would come every 4th Sunday for the monthly sermon at Corinth Baptist Church, and stay at their house the Saturday night before. "Father always let me sit up late on those Saturday nights, before the open fire, and listen to him and the minister talk about the things of God. It beat all the television that has been seen since." After pastoring several churches in the Southern Baptist denomination, Dr. Havner hit the road in a full-time evangelistic ministry where he spoke all over the country in revivals, Bible conferences, graduation services, and in pulpits all across the land. At the time of his death in August 1986, Dr. Havner had written 38 books. He preached over a period of 73 years. Dr. Havner's words still live as he spoke the timeless truth of the Word of God. It is a great joy to have him preach today at our Homecoming service.

THE POLITICS OF HATE & PERSONAL DESTRUCTION (OCTOBER 29, 2017)

It's a bit humorous to watch our nation's politicians and media decry hatred. They decry it in the most hateful terms. In essence they declare, "How dare you hate like that! I hate you for doing that, you hater!" It is not surprising that hate rules the world, because the whole world lies under the sway of the evil one, and he is a hater from the beginning, and a murderer, and a liar. So the people in the world seek

the destruction of those who disagree with them, or who are opposing them in elections, or who don't conform to their personal, often godless, morality. Hate is the fountain from which these disturbing acts arise. Jesus identifies this in the Sermon on the Mount when He declares, "But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire. "Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift." This is another reason the world should seek the gospel of Christ.

Jesus cures the sinful hate and desire for destruction, and brings seasons of healing in the land.

EVERY MAN A THEOLOGIAN (NOVEMBER 5, 2017)

It is often claimed, and more often thought, that theology is only for a select few in our society who have taken holy vows, or answered a call to preach, or are employed as a professor in a Christian school or college setting. Everyone else can do without it. The fact is that every man is a theologian, either in truth or error. And every man *should* be a theologian for there is no greater subject matter for humankind than the knowledge of God. Theology is not some idle curiosity. Our eternal destiny depends on it. Ignorance is no excuse. All are required to seek and know God. Case in point occurred yesterday at my front door. In a short period of time two Jehovah's Witnesses declared to me that we are saved by works, we are not dead in trespasses and sins, that we cannot know we are saved since we must stay saved until the end to know that, and that Jesus could have sinned and fallen from His standing with God. I shared with them, "By grace are you saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works lest anyone should boast." And that Paul knew he was saved from day one, along with Lydia. And that Paul told the Ephesians they had been saved, "who were dead in trespasses and sins." They couldn't grasp the truth, but continued to resist and reject it. A biblical theology is not just nice to know, it's essential.

Ignorance of God is eternally lethal.

GUILT & FORGIVENESS (NOVEMBER 19, 2017)

The world has recently had to come to grips with something that the Bible student knows very early in his study. The world is learning that humans are corrupt, wicked, abusive, lying, predatory, cruel, selfish, and mean. It is also learning that all this inappropriate behavior is widespread. Without meaning to, the world is close to stumbling upon the doctrine of original sin. It has wandered to the outskirts of what the Bible declares when it says, "All have sinned," and that we are "dead in trespasses and sins." The world recognizes that some are worse than others, but they are still in need of understanding how all are guilty before God. Guilt is an awful thing to bear. It is a burden of tremendous weight. When it is discovered, we fear it will plunge us to hell immediately. David, in sinning against others, recognized that his sin was at its heart against God only (Psalm 51:4). We see the frowns of a justifiably angry God. Frowns we had missed before are now acutely felt. It is here we note a vast difference between the world and the Lord. The world remembers your guilt, and never truly forgives. It is held like a weapon, loaded and ready to use against us. It is never forgotten. But the Lord separates us from our sins when we come to Him for forgiveness. He washes them away. He chooses to remember them no more. He severs them infinitely from us, as far as the east is from the west. Our God forgives guilt!

THE WORLD'S PREDICTIONS (NOVEMBER 26, 2017)

The Bible tells us many things before they happen. Details of the birth of Jesus are given and are accurate to the details, even though spoken hundreds of years before His birth. The same is true of His

life, His miracles, His suffering, His mission, His death, His resurrection, and His ascension. Such prophecies draw our gaze to the Son of God and the sovereign plan of our Almighty Father. Biblical prophecy encourages our trust in God. But what of the world's predictions? Frankly, they encourage us NOT to trust in the world. How many times in the last 20 years have we heard of mankind's imminent destruction because we drive cars? The world makes predictions for the same purpose as the Lord does—to encourage belief and trust, but the end result is mockery and derision from the world's prognostications. The times are in the hand of the Lord. He alone can illuminate the future to us. What He says comes true. This Christmas season is a prime example.

KICKING & SCREAMING (DECEMBER 3, 2017)

It is stunning how hard it is for people to do the right thing in our world. The Bible says that when lawlessness abounds, the love of many will grow cold. Lawlessness is selfishness and self-centeredness, thinking of ourselves above even the laws of God. The result of that is a decline in consideration of others, self-denial, sacrifice, and laying down our lives for others. We have to fight insurance companies, who don't want to pay out on a medical need. We have to fight Congress, which doesn't want to give tax breaks. If we prevail, it can be termed as dragging them kicking and screaming to our side. But our Lord is love personified. He has not left us to the consequences of our rebellion, but in mercy and love has saved us, even offering His only Son as payment for our sins. That is love, not that we loved Him, but that He loved us. He is not stingy, but showers His love liberally upon His children.

KEEPING AN OFFENSIVE MINDSET (DECEMBER 10, 2017)

By "offensive" I refer to the opposite of "defensive." When we enter our homes we maintain an offensive mindset. We belong where we are and don't have to make apologies for being there. A burglar in our home must maintain a defensive mindset. He must be careful about making too much noise or shining a light. Every sound he hears makes him wonder if he has been discovered and must soon face judgment. When doing the will of God we know we are in the right place. When we are in Christ we are not only welcomed to the throne of God but are told to come boldly. When we speak of the moral law we don't have to be shy about what the Bible teaches, although we will be troubled if we wander from it. And we must never be ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ, no matter how the world views it as so unsophisticated and worthless. It is the power of God unto salvation!

THANK YOU (DECEMBER 17, 2017)

Special thanks to the David and Debbie for hosting the Christmas dinner on Friday night.

We should all be thankful for the family of God as we gather and enjoy fellowship in Christ. Christian fellowship is a gift of being in the body of Christ, in the family of God, loved by our Father, encouraged and comforted by the Holy Spirit, and saved to the uttermost by our wonderful Savior.

Christ has created our unity, and it is given to us to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, and I am thankful for our church's attention and efforts to that end. How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!

THE INCARNATION (DECEMBER 24, 2017)

Only God can save, but God's holiness must be preserved in doing so. God cannot, as many imagine, just pardon a sinner as though sin was nothing. Sin must be removed, not ignored. It was temporarily

and symbolically removed in the Old Covenant by means of sacrifices, but these sacrifices could not take away sin. Only the Lamb of God, taking human flesh, and dying to pay the price for sin, could atone for sin's debt. By rising from the dead He paid the wages of sin, thus settling the debt forever. However, the payment is only applied to those who place their faith in Christ. Faith in Christ means trusting in Christ alone for our righteousness and the removal of our sin. Our sin transfers to Christ on His cross, and He dies for it. His righteousness transfers to us by that same faith. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved." All that Christ accomplished is accomplished on behalf of all who place their faith in Him. He died; we died. He was buried; we were buried. He rose; we rose. He ascended to the Father, and such is our destiny as well, when we shall be with Christ forever. The Father is pleased with Christ; and in Christ the Father is just as pleased with His children. This is the great Christmas gift—salvation in Christ alone.

IN WITH THE NEW (DECEMBER 31, 2017)

It's nice to have new things. Many new things were given and received during the Christmas holiday. It makes life more pleasant if something new replaces an old thing that had largely stopped working. Even more significant is the Lord giving a new heart. "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 36:26). One of the many things we admire in our Lord is His power to make people new. He can heal the sick, relieve the broken-hearted, put the pieces of a shattered life back together, place a happy song into a sad heart, and make our feet to walk on solid ground after tripping and stumbling over all the rocks and pits we encounter in our wicked world. Tomorrow begins another new year. How should we face it? If we fasten our eyes on the world we will face 2018 with gloom. It is man's tendency to dig the hole deeper. But our Lord is the mighty God who brings in new things that we thought might never come. He says in one place that He will do a thing that will make the ears of all men tingle. Such is the hope we have in our great God. Let's pray that He makes our ears tingle in 2018. Not in judgment, but in salvation and power and glory and joy.

BUT HOW WILL IT BE IN MARCH? (JANUARY 7, 2018)

Our new year has started off in spectacular fashion, at least weather-wise. Not only did it snow, but it snowed such that I could call my family in NC and say "we have snow" when they didn't. And it is still on the ground on the 5th day after it snowed. That means it's colder than normal, too. Remember those hot summer days when we hoped and prayed it would cool off? Consider the Lord's answer this past week. To many of us, snow lightens our spirits and brightens our faces. All snow eventually melts in these parts. Then we will go right back to wondering when it will ever snow again. The New Year has similarities. Each New Year turns into an old year. So the question for us is, "How will we be when the new wears off?" Will we be delighted and hopeful in March? Will we maintain our trust in God into the summer? Will our prayers still be strong in September for a blessed 2018? Will we slack off service in October if we can't see any tangible fruit in our efforts? Will the fall speak of falling leaves and discouraged hearts? Or will we hope in the Lord from this day and forevermore? Will we plant our seed and hope in the mercies and faithfulness of our God to bear fruit in it? A steadfast person is firm in all weathers; in the end as much as the beginning.

DECEIVED (JANUARY 14, 2018)

The Bible identifies a very present danger to the entire world—deception. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked. For whatever a man sows, he will reap." Deception brought about the sin that was the downfall

of all mankind in the Garden of Eden. Solomon warns, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.” The coming of Jesus was a light shining in a dark place. He is the light of the world. The Word of God is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. There is a right way and a wrong way. A broad way and a narrow way. The true God and false gods. The world is in double danger. Not only does the whole world lie under the sway of the wicked one, who is the great deceiver, but they also are deceived about their state of deception. The post-modern philosophy currently dominating our world says that nothing can be known absolutely. That means that you are ok just as you are. So you really aren’t deceived. To be told you are is a hate crime these days. Therefore, there is no need to repent. No need to be born again. Like the Pharisees who did not believe they were sick, a physician for your soul is thought to be unnecessary. How awful to live in darkness and believe you are living in the light! We pray for enlightenment in the hearts of men. Coming to Christ is the cure for the most fundamental deception.

AVAILS MUCH (JANUARY 21, 2018)

One of the most well-known instances in Scripture of piling good words one on top of the other is in Ephesians 3:20, where Paul tells us God is able to do “exceedingly abundantly above” all we ask or imagine. Other translations render the three words as “far more abundantly.” “Abundantly” is good by itself. “More abundantly” is even better. “Far more abundantly” throws it into the stratosphere.

Similarly, there is a trifecta of good attached to fervent prayer in James 5:16: “The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” “Fervent” means prayer that is offered with great intensity and feeling. We *really really* want this prayer to be answered. The fact that it is prayed by a righteous man means it is no selfish request, but one in the will of God. The idea of “fervent” prayer is that it is both powerful and effective. Because it is fervent, it is effective, for it is in the will of God. Thus, one Greek word covers both the strength of the praying and its effect. Such a prayer “avails much.” It does not just avail, which in itself would be exciting. It avails *much*. Beyond even what we imagined and hoped it would. Its success is tied to the vehicle of prayer, but it is effectual because of the God who receives the prayer with favor. “Effective” plus “avails” plus “much” is a formula we don’t need higher math to understand.

GULLIBLE? IS THAT SOME KIND OF BIRD? (JANUARY 28, 2018)

The world needs gullible people to carry out much of its commercial and political aims. “How am I going to get re-elected when I have done the same bad things every time I have gotten elected in the past?” The answer? Gullible voters. “Who do I need to call, who will believe there is a problem with their credit card, and who will end up giving me money to ‘fix’ it?” You need only call a gullible person. A gullible person is someone that can be taken advantage of, misled, duped, and cheated. That’s always a bad outcome, but even more so when it comes to spiritual gullibility. The Bible tells us that the devil goes about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. The devil seeks gullible people. Paul revealed that Satan has devices (2 Cor. 2:11) to take advantage of us, which prompts us to always be aware so as not to fall into them. That is really the mark of a non-gullible person—to be on guard against deceivers, and to think through every action in light of the teaching of Scripture. The opposite of gullibility is discernment. Discernment is a form of wisdom. The foundation of wisdom is the fear of the Lord. Without a solid hold on the truth, we will be “children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting” (Ephesians 4:14).

ALWAYS THERE (FEBRUARY 4, 2018)

Each individual walks a very different path through life. Some see the world. Others don't get much past the edges of town. Some children have lived in ten different cities by the time they leave for college.

Others don't really leave home until they go to college. It's true that "home is where the heart is," and it's nice when we are blessed with a perpetual dwelling place in this world. A place called home. Even when we leave it we know it is still there, right where we left it. We take comfort in knowing we can go back and find things much as we left them. I had that blessing from the Lord. Several in our church have been similarly blessed. We speak of our Father as "in heaven." He never moves. He doesn't leave us nor forsake us. He doesn't change so that we don't know how we might find Him when we go to Him. He is always home. "My Father's house has many dwelling places," Jesus told His disciples. "I go to prepare a place for you." That place is in the Father's house. Not down the road a couple of miles in a separate mansion. But under the same roof, figuratively speaking. Knowing this helps us to feel like we have a place even when we sometimes feel we are alone. The prodigal came to his senses one day in the pig pen and said, "I will arise and go to my father." So may we, because He is always there.

WHERE IT'S STRAIGHT (FEBRUARY 11, 2018)

Paul called his generation a crooked and perverse generation. With all our advances in technology and quality of life we look around today and see the same thing in our generation. "Crooked" was used of a road that did not take you to your destination in a smooth and straight way. Instead it was winding and meandering, making travel harder. "Perverse" means to distort the way of God, and turn aside from it. Further we often see the perverse heralding their chosen way as good, right, and noble. Then those who do not hold to their perversity are judged to be hateful, narrow, and cruel. A society can become so crooked and perverse that they do not blush, but instead become more bold and determined in perversity. Such was the way in Sodom. So much perversion in our world leads us to despair if we spend too much time considering it. However, even though the world is so crooked as to cause astonishment among the saints, there is a place where everything stays straight according to the proper standard. It does not shift with the opinions and philosophies of mankind. At the throne of God all things remain straight. God holds the straight ruler by which all else is measured. There is no debate. No protests. No rallies. No stirring up crowds to oppose the right way. It is straight with God and God will straighten out all things one day.

PROTECTING KIDS (FEBRUARY 18, 2018)

Another tragedy this week in a school in Florida has brought out once again those seeking to make political hay out of a tragedy. The outcry is, "We must protect our kids!" We are all for that. Why don't we start with the millions of unborn children who are aborted every year, who never get a chance to see the light of day because they are not protected from those who want them dead? From there we could go to removing the atheistic humanism from the curriculum of our schools and providing a classical education with a proper respect for God. We could teach them how God created the world with a purpose, protecting them from meaningless and aimlessness that flows from the nonsense that the world and life have come merely by chance. While we're at it we could get more Bibles in the hands of kids, and encourage them to read it and know it. We could share the gospel with them so they might be protected from all the harmful vices in the world that Solomon's son was instructed to avoid—by fearing the Lord. Then how about protecting our kids by providing a loving and stable home where father and mother raise them and shield them from all the enticements that kids naturally fall into without proper

supervision? Protect our kids! I wholeheartedly agree. I only wish the world agreed with its own suggestion.

AMAZEMENT (FEBRUARY 25, 2018)

We look at the world in amazement. One amazement is the beauty of God's creation. That's a good amazement. The other amazement is not good at all. That's the amazement of the continual manifestation of foolishness in our world. Most of us are fully aware of how crazy our world currently is. On top of the cavalcade of secular madness, I read this week of people in a church in California going to cemeteries to lay on graves of saints to suck in their spirits. To be fair, we all have the capacity to be a stark-raving lunatic. We got that ability in the Fall. The Bible judges wisdom and foolishness by our nearness and likeness to the Lord. The wicked don't fear the Lord. We are wise only by the grace of God when He instills a new heart and a right spirit within us. When you witness the world's insanity and incredulously utter, "How can they ...?" we will likely find the answer in their relationship with the Lord. Foolishness is parading our own ways over God's. It is deeply ingrained: "Though you grind a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with crushed grain, yet his foolishness will not depart from him— Proverbs 27:22. It's troubling to see, but let's not see it as something different or hopeless to correct. Foolishness is still fixed by faith in Christ and following His Word. A new creation in Christ is truly amazing!

DO YOU REMEMBER? (MARCH 4, 2018)

Memory is a gift of God in a number of important ways. Many people mourn their loss of memory over time. The aged say their memory is not what it used to be. Some speak of having a "senior moment" when recollection is slow. It might be encouraging to those who are older to note that youngsters also have memory problems. Why didn't your child do his chores? He forgot, of course. Memory is more than the natural processes of the brain to keep a store of happenings and events, of numbers and addresses, of dates and names. Memory is, more importantly, a matter of the will. We see this when the Lord *commands* us to remember. "If you should say in your heart, 'These nations are greater than I; how can I dispossess them?' -- "you shall not be afraid of them, but you shall remember well what the LORD your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt..." (Deut. 7:17-18). The fearful heart is to be directed by the mind to a calm place by purposeful recall of the Lord's prior works on our behalf. In that way, memory is not a thing of the past, but a thing of the present. The memory of the Lord's prior faithfulness and displays of power transport the past to now. That way we don't just remember as a product of the brain, but we remember as a product of the will. Such remembrance is not trivial, but encouragement, hope, and confidence in the Lord.

EXTREMES (MARCH 11, 2018)

In the Lord's communication to us in His Word, He sometimes uses the contrast of extremes. He speaks of enormous entities that swallow all the normal-sized things we deal with every day. When He wants us to understand how certain and lasting our forgiveness is He says "As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our iniquities from us." When He wants to define the scope of His sovereignty and authority He says, "He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth." If we wonder how the Lord thinks of us as His children, He tells us through David, "How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand." In encouraging Abraham that he enjoyed divine favor and would be blessed abundantly, the Lord told him, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you

are able to number them.” And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be.” Our Lord is so great that we can’t wrap our feeble minds around the majesty of His person. He is the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.” Our God is extremely great and His blessings upon us have that same characteristic.

CONTENTMENT (MARCH 25, 2018)

On Wednesday night we studied Genesis 42 where Joseph’s brothers came to Egypt to buy grain, and thus encountered Joseph for the first time since cruelly selling him into slavery around 20 years earlier. The question was asked in our discussion time after the sermon as to why Joseph would not have sought to go back to Canaan before his brothers arrived. He would have had 7 years in which he could have done that. It’s a great question because it makes us think of something beyond the most obvious reason. Clearly Joseph had lots to do to get ready for the coming famine during those 7 years. He just got a new job, second in command in Egypt, so it might have been awkward to take a journey which would take him away for at least a month. Plus he had the assurance of the dreams he had dreamed while still a teenager in Canaan, that assured him that his brothers would someday come to bow down to him. But I think the deeper reason was that Joseph was content. He was at peace in the situation God had placed him. He was not bitter or vengeful. He was not impatient. He did not live as though he could not rest until his brothers had gotten what was coming to them. Even his longing to see his father and younger brother did not upset his contentment. O that we might be so content in the will of the Lord!

FACTS (April 1, 2018)

Our world is not great on facts. It’s not that facts aren’t available. The problem is that facts are filtered through personal philosophies and opinions, and then are very often diluted, denied, ignored, or forgotten. There are facts that God gives us that we could not know unless revealed by God. God graciously gives us these facts so we can think in truth and be saved from many harmful errors. God tells us that we are all created by Him by a powerful act of speaking all things into existence. The world says it was definitely by the Big Bang. God tells us the only way to heaven is through faith in Jesus Christ. The world says, “No. There are a lot of ways to get to heaven.” Jesus warned that those who did not believe would perish in Hell. This week we heard reports that the Pope had declared there is no Hell. The Vatican denied it as to it being a quote, but did not disavow it. Whether it is walking on water, raising the dead, healing the sick, the nature of the Scriptures, the reality of heaven, the virgin birth, the deity of Christ—in so many areas the facts of God are dismissed and the fancies of men are vigorously held. So it is with the resurrection of Christ. It is historical fact. It means the world has not rid itself of Christ. And it means God’s children have a living hope in our Lord Jesus.

Why Teddy BEARS? (April 8, 2018)

If you’ve ever needed a hug or some tenderness when no one else is around to help, then you have probably experienced the healing power of a teddy bear. Need someone to watch over you, who never closes his eyes? Yes, that would be a teddy bear. Who doesn’t need that perpetual smile on their face, always happy to see you, and ready to listen to whatever you say? Want to squeeze out some worries? Try that plush, soft teddy bear. How many frightened children have cried themselves to sleep clutching a teddy bear? The Lord has given us a family. We are to be all that a teddy bear is. “Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love.” “Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.” “Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be

tenderhearted, be courteous.” “Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.” We are not made to be alone, but to be loved, understood, and built up in the family of God. That’s what teddy bears do and far more should we!

THE GOD OF ALL COMFORT (April 15, 2018)

Paul begins 2 Corinthians with the declaration that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort. “Comfort” assumes the need to be comforted. Paul says He comforts us in all our “tribulations” that we may in turn comfort those who are “in any trouble.”

Those are the times we need to be comforted. This is no small blessing. Who among us this morning does not need some kind of comfort RIGHT NOW? Is that not the prayer of many today? Troubles and tribulations. Hardships and trials. Sickness and pain. Discouragement and hopelessness. Disappointment and heartbreak. Our hearts are fragile. Our minds get troubled. Burdens pile up on our weak shoulders. What to do? Who else but our Lord is the God of *all* comfort? ALL comfort. For whatever it is we need comforting in. The Holy Spirit is called by Jesus “another comforter” (John 14:16) or another advocate or helper, as the modern translations render it. “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you” (John 14:18). We are like an orphaned child, but the Lord does not leave us that way. Instead He comes to us and embraces us, welcoming us into His family and nurturing us as we live in this world. May the Lord so comfort each of us today and always.

THE GOD OF WEATHER (April 22, 2018)

“While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer, and day and night shall not cease.” So said the Lord after Noah’s ark was deposited on Mt. Ararat. It was a good thing for Noah to know, because it is certain he didn’t want to go through that again, nor would any man. The Lord even sent a rainbow as a sign of His promise to never again destroy the earth with a worldwide flood. He wants us to know that He controls the weather. And we can observe that all the things God said would continue after the flood have indeed continued. God’s promise remains firm. Yet, there are many today who live in a constant state of panic. “Something must be done quickly before there are no more crops, when seasons fail, and when the earth becomes an uninhabitable place.” The ones most understandably fearful of this were those who walked off the ark. This is why God’s assurances came to them. And as the assurances were to Noah, so they are to us. The weather is a topic of constant conversation in our world. “Climate” has been added to that in recent years. The effect is seen in cries and pleas and warnings and threats and doomsday scenarios. “Don’t anger Mother Earth!” The Christian should rather trust in our Father, who is Lord of climate and weather.

CHRISTIAN FRUIT (April 29, 2018)

We are all accustomed to fruit trees. A peach tree yields peaches. An apple tree will consistently and predictively produce apples. And so on. If the tree is healthy it will bear fruit in its season, year after year. A sick tree is known by its lack of fruit. The Lord has chosen this very familiar example to describe a Christian. Christians are born of the Spirit in the new birth, and begin to manifest the fruit of the Spirit right away. The fruit of the Spirit is characteristic of all Christians in that the Spirit has impacted us and changed our hearts so that we produce these things. “But the fruit of the Spirit is **love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.**” Christians have differing gifts from one another. But Christians have the fruit of the Spirit in common. The fruit of the

Spirit is not something we seek to get so we can practice these things; it is something we have by virtue of being born again and getting a new heart. Thus it is called the fruit of the **Spirit**. That doesn't mean we will practice the fruit of the Spirit without effort or obedience to commands. But it is our new nature to bear this fruit. It is expected and beneficial to ourselves and others in the body of Christ. If we be who we are, then we will bear this fruit in all seasons.

CLEAN (MAY 6, 2018)

Someone has said that “cleanliness is next to godliness.” While growing up I heard my mom tell me many times to “clean your room,” but not once to “dirty up your room really bad.” At the end of a day she never scolded me for not being dirty enough, but instead she told me often to “take a bath.” We had a washing machine in our house, but no sight of a dirtying machine. Either my memory has failed me, or she did not once tell me to put on some dirty clothes for school. And you should have seen me on Easter! On that day clean took on a whole new dimension. Dirtiness has followed all of us into adulthood. We still get dirty. We still wash clothes. We still take baths and showers. We still clean house. We still sweep off porches. Stores are still stocked with cleaning supplies, being replenished regularly because we keep needing to clean. So how wondrous is it when we hear that God cleans us once for all time through the blood of Jesus Christ? And not just clothes and other outward items. He cleans our heart. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” A clean heart enables us to produce pure fruit of righteousness. “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.” When we are cleaned by God, then we are truly clean.

THE MOTHER MACHINE (MAY 13, 2018)

No doubt many envision a day when mothers will no longer have to bear children, change diapers, or try to stuff tasteless baby food into a baby's mouth by pretending it is an airplane coming in to land. That job will be done by a machine. Or a computer. Or a robot. Somehow this doesn't sound like progress. To mechanize the process gives the sense of a cold, dispassionate mother machine. Mothers are not reproducible by machines. A good mother is a tender, compassionate, loving, and caring woman who has been blessed with a newborn baby. Yes, it's a lot of work and tons of bother, but it is a labor of love. And there are great rewards. But the real winner is the newborn blessed to be in a loving and caring family with a nurturing mother. That is what we remember on Mother's Day—how blessed we have been to have great mothers, and what an impact they have made in the way we are today. A machine will never be able to replace a mother's love. Why would we ever even envision them doing so? What God has made is good in every way. So we are thankful today and all days for God's gift to us of mothers. In His wisdom we have been blessed beyond our wildest hopes and dreams. When a child is hurt, scared, or lonely, you never see them running to embrace the dishwasher. It's their mother they want.

TASTE TESTER (MAY 20, 2018)

There are people in the world whose job it is to taste food for others. Sometimes it's for a ruler to know that it is safe to eat what is being served. Others do it as a service to customers who might want to eat at a certain restaurant. Some just do it as a friend, to report that “it tastes good,” thus prompting the other friend to eat it, too. I certainly wouldn't want the job of taste tester because I don't like to taste everything. But our Lord performed a tasting function for all mankind. “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by

the grace of God, might taste death for everyone” (Hebrews 2:9). All men are destined to die for their sins because the wages of sin is death. But Jesus paid the debt of our sins with His own death. Because He died, we do not have to die spiritually. Our bodies will come to an end in this world unless Jesus comes first, but the spiritual debt that is carried by us has been paid in full. This is by the grace of God. It is the gift of God in giving His Son. People are always eager to avoid an untimely physical death, but that can't be avoided forever. Jesus provides the way to avoid eternal death. Whoever lives and believes in Him shall never die (John 11:26).

THE VALUE OF LIFE (MAY 27, 2018)

God is the Creator of life. In the beginning He made animals and humans. He breathed into all beings the breath of life. He commanded that life be protected, and that if a man murdered another man he was subject to death himself (Genesis 9:6). The Garden of Eden revolved around the subject of life, and the tree of life was in the midst of the garden. In the last two chapters of Revelation we read about the water of life, the book of life, and the tree of life that define our redemption as abundant life. The Lord restores sinners to life through Christ, where every sinner that repents and trusts in Christ passes from death to life (John 5:24). It is called “eternal life.” Not just life that will not end, but life that will be a wellspring of life marking our every moment forever. Furthermore, God tells us He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn and be saved (Ezekiel 33:11) “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints” (Psalm 116:15). Jesus showed up at the tomb of Lazarus and taught that if we believe in Him we will never die, and then He demonstrated His power to accomplish that by raising Lazarus. Laying down our lives for others is the greatest expression of love. God is the fountain of life (Psalm 36:9). Sinners may not put a premium on life, but God, who is our life, does.

SUGAR SUBSTITUTE (JUNE 3, 2018)

When I was diagnosed with diabetes in 1974, I knew it would mean the end of sugar in my life. I had a Pepsi before going to the hospital on that Tuesday morning after learning the day before from Dr. Palmer that I might have diabetes. I think I also popped a few Hershey's kisses. Once the diagnosis was made I was told that I could not partake any longer in sugary things. No sweets. No desserts. No sugar on my Corn Flakes. Life was looking pretty glum. I learned quickly that there was something called a sugar substitute. Some good people had made a substance that sweetened food and drinks, but did not jolt the diabetic's body with sugar. Saccharin, fructose, and sorbitol powered these foodstuffs, and I can testify that they were quite a step down from the real thing. I still recall the unpleasant aftertaste left by most of the soft drinks of that day. It was better than nothing, but it was nowhere near the genuine article. Artificial sweeteners are much better today, but there really is no substitute for pure sugar. In a similar way there is no substitute for the gospel. Churches and pastors today are trying to make an impact with the social gospel and social justice approaches, believing for some reason that the problems in society can be fixed by Marxist and Postmodern philosophies. But the gospel itself, the pure gospel, is all we need to preach and share. That will fix the world. Nothing else can.

WHERE ARE YOUR THOUGHTS? (JUNE 10, 2018)

Colossians 3:1-2 If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.

We sometimes hear of people who have their head in the clouds, not able to keep their minds on what they are doing. That is the symptom of an undisciplined mind that is allowed to wander and doesn't

focus on the task at hand. Paul's admonishing in Colossians 3 is not about absent-mindedness, but about seeking first the kingdom of God in all things. "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." Our mindset is important. If we keep our mind on things above, then we can escape the sorrows of the world to a greater degree because we are looking unto Jesus. "For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls." It's better to have our mind on heaven as we live on earth.

OUR FATHER (JUNE 17, 2018)

"If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!"

Christians have a heavenly Father who is the infinite fulfillment of all earthly fathers in that our Father in heaven does all things in the most loving and wise fashion for and to His children. As Jesus noted, earthly fathers know how to give good gifts to their children. Our heavenly Father knows we have need of things before we ask. He tells us if He clothes the grass of the field and feeds the birds of the air, He will certainly care for His children! It is wonderful to know an earthly father's love and care. How much more to know the love of our heavenly Father!

IT'S TOO HOT (JUNE 24, 2018)

Goldilocks went for a walk in the forest one day and came across a house that was owned by three bears. The three bears, a Papa, Mama, and Baby bear, were not home, so Goldilocks let herself in. There was porridge on the table. One bowl was too hot. The other was too cold. But one was just right. After eating she went into the living room and found three chairs. The first was too big. The second was also too big. The third was just right. But as she settled down in the chair it broke into pieces. Still tired and needing rest she went upstairs to the bedroom. She lay in the first bed, but it was too hard. The second was too soft. The third was just right. Goldilocks was asleep when the three bears came home. They noticed the porridge had been eaten and the chair had been broken. When they searched upstairs, they found Goldilocks asleep in Baby Bear's bed. Goldilocks woke up and screamed for help and jumped out the window and ran into the forest. What is the moral of the story? Don't be so hard to please or bears will come home and run you off! Ok, maybe not exactly. But it is a reminder of how picky we can be and how discontent. Things in life are not all to our liking. Sometimes it's too hot; too cold, too big, too little, too soft, or too hard. God calls us to godliness with contentment and to be thankful in everything.

FREEDOM (July 1, 2018)

Freedom in the nations of the world is a great thing, and something that is ever under assault. There are always politicians who want to subjugate their citizens into bondage so they can run the show without being hindered by the "little people." Freedom is assaulted in Christianity as well as legalizers seek to make us rely on works to be made or kept right with God. Christ has set us free. "Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage." Our nation can never truly be free without salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. Until then, in so many ways, we observe people living in bondage within the kingdom of darkness.

THE LAND OF THE LIVING (July 8, 2018)

From time to time a movie will premiere that takes place in some other-worldly place. “The Land That Time Forgot.” “The Land Before Time.” “Land of the Giants.” “La La Land.” Humankind occupies different lands on earth. But we have a land in common. David called it “the land of the living.” That is where all we who breathe the breath of life live. In Psalm 27, David said he would live in this land with a constant desire to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of his life. To behold the beauty of the Lord. And to inquire at His temple. He said this while greatly harassed by enemies. He spoke of the wicked against him. Of an army against him. Of times of trouble. But he was not distracted by his enemies, but sought the face of the Lord. Though all forsook him, the Lord would take care of him. In the face of false witnesses bent on his destruction, he would continue to seek the Lord. “I would have lost heart, unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.” He would have lost heart; so will we if we don’t believe what he did, that we would see God’s goodness in our day. If all is hopeless what spirit do we have left in us? But our God of hope turns gloom into gladness. God is for us; who can be against us?

HOUSE OR TENT? (July 15, 2018)

Some of us like to go camping. Get a tent and pitch it by a river. Fish, hunt, hike. Sit by the campfire. Make biscuits and fry some potatoes. I can say I’ve been camping, but that’s pretty much as far as I want to go with it. I prefer a house. It is more comfortable and sturdy. Our tent just about blew away once, but my house has withstood the wind. I like the comforts of a house. I think most of us do. We expect more from a house, and it gives us a greater sense of stability. But hear the words of Solomon: “The house of the wicked will be overthrown, but the tent of the upright will flourish” (Proverbs 14:11). It is the error of fallen mankind to equate stability in the world with stability beyond. The rich man built bigger barns, but his soul was required of him and he lost it all. Looking beyond the comforts of this world, and its hardships, blessing is found in being upright, which means God blesses even our tent. Destruction is caused by wickedness, and God overthrows that house. We have plenty of flourishing in this world by God’s grace, but the riches of this world are uncertain. Godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come. May God make us upright and may He make us flourish!

JESUS AND THE WOMAN AT THE WELL (July 22, 2018)

By divine design (“He needed to go through Samaria”), Jesus encountered a woman in her daily routine of fetching water in a city in Samaria. First, he made contact with her by the simplest of requests, “Give me a drink.” This started a conversation since she was shocked to have a Jew speak to her. Jesus told her if she knew the gift of God she would have asked for living water. So now He has led her into spiritual discourse. She saw no way He could draw water. Jesus tells her He is not talking about this well water, that only temporarily satisfies thirst, but water that will quench thirst forever and give eternal life. Now she is super interested. Jesus used the matter at hand, water, to tie in to the gift of eternal life and her need of it. She says, “Give me this water.” She wants it but there is a matter to deal with first. “Go call your husband.” “I don’t have a husband.” To which Jesus responds that no truer words could be spoken since she has had 5 husbands and the one she now has is not her husband. Jesus had addressed her sinful lifestyle. Although she tried to deflect Him with a side question, Jesus brought her back on topic, and declared to her that He was the Messiah. She was convinced and spread the word throughout the city as she and many more came to faith.

TWIST & SHOUT (July 29, 2018)

In the glorious days of youth we do all kinds of things that we think fondly of later on, but would never even consider trying again. Bones get brittle and muscles tighten up and our backs, fronts, and sides cannot keep up with our former youthful enthusiasm. We also get more proper and refined. At 2 years old we would shout at the top of our lungs in a crowded restaurant, but later on we learn to be respectful and courteous, as well we should. Luke tells us of a man born blind near Jericho who sat by the roadside begging. Hearing a multitude nearby one day he was informed it was Jesus of Nazareth passing by. Laying aside all decorum he began shouting, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Those around him told him to be quiet. After all, he wasn't 2 years old. But he kept crying out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus stood still. He called him and asked him what he wanted Him to do for him. "Lord, that I may receive my sight." Jesus restored his sight and he enthusiastically followed Him, glorifying God. When all the people saw it, they gave praise to God. When we pray it is good to be fervent and specific and to believe that Jesus can give what we ask of Him. If we are asking Jesus for something in His will, let's act like we really want it. Come boldly to the throne of grace even if we have to shout. Perhaps Jesus wants to glorify Himself through us.

LASTING BEAUTY (AUGUST 5, 2018)

Almost every person on earth wants to be pretty. I say "almost" because there's always that one. The Bible expresses this when commenting on how men are to love their own wives: "So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church." But Solomon notes that "beauty is fleeting." It doesn't last in the physical sense. People are generally prettier when they are younger, although there are certainly exceptions. We can all agree, however, that if we live to be 183 years old we will likely not be as pretty as we were when we were 21. There are many products available from numerous companies sought by many to defy the aging process. If the fountain of youth is found in Orangeburg you can bet it will be the home of many Hollywood celebrities before long. It is common to place more emphasis on outward physical beauty than beauty of the heart. This can distract a person from the true beauty that does not fade away. This is what Peter was exhorting women about. Instead of obsessing over physical beauty, Peter says, "Rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God."

OUR VANTAGE POINT (AUGUST 12, 2018)

World history could be divided reasonably into three major parts: before Christ came to earth, while Christ walked the earth, and after Christ departed from earth. Those in the first category were anticipating Christ's coming, and prophecies announced the certainty that the Messiah would come to redeem Israel. Those in the second category are the far smaller group. A privileged few saw Jesus in the flesh as the Son of Man. "We beheld His glory," John declared. We live in the third category. We look back at the work of Christ and redemption completed on the cross and in His resurrection. We live under the New Covenant, which Jesus inaugurated with His own blood at His first advent. We have more revelation of Christ, and the Holy Spirit has been poured out on all believers. But we also look at things to come. A fourth category of world history is the world history still to come in the future. One day we will look back on this present age at the consummation of all world history when we dwell in eternity. We have a great vantage point on history in the present day, but not as great as the one we will have when it's all over. We have great privileges. This is what Peter told his readers—that prophets and angels desire to look into the things we now behold. Even though we can look back to salvation

accomplished we are not to be those who look behind, but to press on and look ahead, and set our minds on heavenly things. Because one day God will sum up all things in Christ.

SEEING CLEARLY (AUGUST 19, 2018)

“But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ. But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.” Here Paul speaks of the blindness of his nation who, having the word of God in Moses, did not see its true meaning, and that blindness persisted unto that day. They read the Old Testament, and yet they did not come to Christ. A veil lay over their hearts. The answer to their worst problem was there on the page and they read it without perception, and when they left the mirror of the Word they remained in the same state they were before they looked. Jesus characterized them as those who claimed to be able to see. Our Lord said if they were blind, then they could see, but since they say they see, they remain in darkness. Only when one turns to the Lord will the veil be lifted from their eyes. Peter told the people they acted in ignorance when they betrayed the Lord of glory, even though they had the revelation of God more than all nations of the earth. We must be careful. We have both the Old and New Testaments. Yet many read it without understanding, and some use it to justify their wicked deeds. If a person would truly see, he must turn to the Lord.

LONELINESS (AUGUST 26, 2018)

Vance Havner remarked that as he grew older he was being asked more and more to minister to the lonely. Loneliness is a sore trial. We all value a certain amount of time to ourselves, but many suffer the pangs of loneliness because friends and loved ones have passed on, and the former times of constant companionship are no more. The Lord Himself said, “It is not good for man to be alone.” Of course He was speaking of marriage, but the general principle still applies both in marriage and in life. We are social creatures. We strengthen each other. Fellowship is sweet with fellow believers. God has mercifully provided the lonely with a church home, and often many friends and family. But loneliness is a reality for many today—a reality they do not cherish. We can have times of loneliness and also be called to minister to those who are lonely. What does the Lord say to the lonely? “The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit.” The Lord has promised never to leave us nor forsake us. We also are not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. Ultimately as time places us more in the realm of loneliness, as often is the case, we must be careful not to be bitter, but to be content, for it is the Lord’s plan for us at that time. “The cheerful heart has a continual feast.”

HAPPINESS (SEPTEMBER 2, 2018)

One of the greatest blessings in life is to be happy. There are several ingredients that go into happiness, but the result is contentment, joy, peace, and a lot of other nice things. Happiness cannot be dependent on circumstances alone. Truly the way things are around us with our family, friends, job, etc. contribute a lot to the state of our happiness. However, there is a more solid foundation for our happiness.

“Whoever trusts in the Lord, happy is he.” “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.” “Happy are the people whose God is the LORD!” “Happy (Blessed) is he who has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the LORD his God.” When Cain was unhappy over the Lord’s rejection of his offering, the simple solution was to do well and God would accept his offering, and his countenance would be lifted up. We are happy when we are pleasing to the Lord. We are happy with fellowship among believers. We are happy to hear wise words from the Bible. “Happy is the man who finds

wisdom.” We rejoice when sinners are redeemed. We are to even rejoice and be exceedingly glad when suffering for righteousness’ sake, for great is our reward in heaven. Even in anxious times we are to seek God for that peace that passes all understanding. We should be a happy people.

SIDETRACKED (SEPTEMBER 9, 2018)

You decide on a vacation in the glorious mountains of North Carolina. You complete the arduous task of loading the car and head out. You can’t wait to get there but there are a few hours of driving ahead of you. You bravely begin your journey. But almost from the very time you leave your house you start to get invitations to turn aside from your way. The latest estimate is there are about 1.32 quadrillion zillion billboards between here and North Carolina, and you are about to see every one of them as you trek up the road. Many of the signs want to convince you to divert your travel in order to buy a few delightful things along the side of the road. At times it will be to your advantage to do so, but it could also delay you unnecessarily from the destination at which you are already eager to arrive. There are many sidetracks offered to the Christian in our world. They generally want you to turn aside from following Christ in order to do “better” on an alternate route. Jesus said a person is unworthy of the kingdom of God if he puts his hand to the plow and then looks back (Luke 9:62). Temptation is in itself an offer to turn aside from Christ. So is false teaching. We must keep our vehicle pointing in the direction Christ would have us travel and not turn aside.

WHY STORMS? (SEPTEMBER 16, 2018)

John tells us that Jesus did so many miracles while on earth that if all the books were written to report them the whole world could not contain them. The Holy Spirit has inspired the gospel writers to put in a relatively few to show our Lord’s power and majesty. Two of the most well-known miracles of Jesus happened on the Sea of Galilee. And both contained storms. In Matthew 8, the boat carrying Jesus and His disciples encountered a severe storm, such that the disciples feared they would capsize. Jesus was asleep in the boat, and when awakened he rebuked the wind and the waves and everything became calm. Then in Matthew 14 Jesus sends His disciples ahead of Him while He stayed on a mountain and prayed. When the winds and waves again tossed the disciples around they looked to see Jesus walking on the sea, approaching the boat. Peter had a go at walking on the sea, but he soon sank. When Jesus and Peter returned to the boat, the wind stopped, and the boat was immediately at the other side where they were going. Why those two storms? Because they gave the disciples occasion to marvel at the Lord, “What kind of man is this?” and “You are truly the Son of God.” I think the storms of this life will find very similar purpose if we will properly understand their design.

“YOU HAVE A LOVELY HOME” (SEPTEMBER 30, 2018)

It is a kindness, when we enter someone’s home, to compliment it as a lovely home wherever possible. It is more difficult if the home is decorated in orange when you are a Gamecock fan, but still it is good etiquette to be gracious and approving when you are invited in. Granted, some people will be a bit insincere in their commendation of a home, saying words just to be nice. However, that is never a problem when we enter the courts of the Lord. “Enter His gates with thanksgiving, and His courts with praise.” The beauty of the house of the Lord is the Lord Himself. When we enter His gates or walk into His courts it is fitting to worship and adore the Lord with thanksgiving and praise. The Lord lives in heaven, and we are given just a glimpse of it and its beauty. We are given much more in Scripture about the beauty of the Lord. Entering His presence we see His perfection. He is worthy of praise. We thank Him for all His gracious mercies extended to us by His omnipotent hand. We worship Him that He is

majestic and transcendent above all creation, and that He inhabits eternity. Our prayer life is to be more about thanking and praising God than asking Him for things. It is proper to do both, but when we enter His presence we should be magnifying Him first.

PRAYING & VOTING (OCTOBER 7, 2018)

Amid the tumultuous political events of the last few weeks (and it would be accurate to say the last few years as well) there has been a great call for more voters. What people who call for more voters mean is more voters that will vote for their side. Well, we all want that. What we don't hear as much is for more praying. People in power are especially targeted for prayer in the will of God. "First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity." And what is the main request? So that they "be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth." That is needed way more than voters.

GNATS & CAMELS (OCTOBER 14, 2018)

Our Lord accused the Pharisees of straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel. That means they were majoring on the most minor things, and conversely, were minimizing those things which were most weighty in the eyes of God. They would be careful to tithe salt, but didn't bother with justice, mercy, and faithfulness. They clamped down on keeping the Sabbath Day according to their own prescription and fussed when Jesus had the audacity to heal on the Sabbath Day. If their customs were violated they screamed bloody murder, but they plotted to kill Jesus and whoever else got in their way, which is literally murder. Yet they were considered the most righteous in their own eyes, paragons of virtue, and models to imitate. That is how our world also misses the mark. It decries the presence of crime, abuse, injustice, unfairness, racism, bullying, and many other ills, but won't lift a finger to further the spread of the one thing that will curb evil in our world—the gospel of Jesus Christ! And then it pushes the "right" of killing unborn children, speaking ill of any who do not conform to its ways, and furthering chaos and destruction by promoting and supporting as many immoral and ungodly causes it can imagine. It has a plan to even stop hurricanes, but ends up straining out gnats and swallowing camels.

HOMECOMING (OCTOBER 21, 2018)

Welcome to our Homecoming celebration. Covenant Baptist Church organized just over 30 years ago. Some of you have been around for all of those years. We are thankful to God for His faithfulness to us and His compassions that never fail. The same Bible we started with is the same Bible we have today, albeit in different translations. We serve the same God, have the same hope, and rejoice in the same truths. We are still saved by grace, and the gospel is still the power of God unto salvation. The world is still hostile to God, and the devil is racking up a lot of temporary victories still, and seemingly many more than he used to. Yet, God is still enthroned in heaven, sovereign, exalted, and certain to bring our final redemption, to His eternal glory. We have many of the same blessings we had at the beginning, and gratefully receive continuous additional blessings from our generous Lord. Our labors for the Lord are still not in vain, and we do well to commit ourselves anew to the field of labor the Lord has assigned to us. This is the day to rejoice and be glad in the Lord!

THE WORLD (OCTOBER 28, 2018)

It will serve us well to remind ourselves of the nature of this world. In the eyes of the world itself, progress is being made as the years pass, and if there is any lull in that progress, it lies within the power

of human will to fix it. This is called optimistic humanism. Many vehicles for the improvement of society are implemented with each passing day, it seems. Will it be psychology? Psychiatry? Education? Government? Politics? Commerce? Religion? For some the answer lies in the cessation of religion and politics, and somehow a wholesome and peaceful spirit will break out in society. The Bible tells us that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. Jesus said the world hated Him because He testified of its evil. The world consists of wheat and tares, and the tares, Jesus tells us in that parable, are the sons of the evil one. They will grow alongside the wheat until the harvest. While we are in the world we are in danger of the malicious attacks of the evil one, and so Jesus prays for His disciples in John 17 that we be kept from him while in this world. Yet, God loves the world and has given His only Son to provide redemption. The saved are rescued from the domain of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of the Father's beloved Son. Christians are not to love the world, nor the things in the world. The world is passing away and all the lusts in the world. But the kingdom of God is eternal.

I WISH I HADN'T DONE THAT (NOVEMBER 4, 2018)

Regret is part of life, as much as we wish it were not so. Some say they have no regrets, which is another way of saying "I refuse to acknowledge my sin and turn from it, but will continue to double down on it stubbornly and stand proud." The rest of us have regrets. The best regret is the early kind, when there is time to turn immediately back and avoid bad consequences. Unfortunately, some regret occurs after we are established in a practice or lifestyle we can't easily undo. The worst regret of this kind is our fall from the Lord in the Garden of Eden. We have zillions of reasons to regret that. But once we fell, we were fallen. We can't be unfallen. We can't put the fruit back on the tree and un-eat it. Surprisingly, although many less extreme regrets can never be reversed, this worst possible regret can be undone. When we turn to Christ for forgiveness, He turns our regret into eternal life. We still regret the offense, but when we are justified we are seen by God as though we had never sinned, holy in His Son. Of course, this regret reversal is not available to those who will not repent and trust in Christ. The proud and self-satisfied will ignore it. Maybe they won't even regret it. But a day is coming when there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, a sign of hopeless regret, to those who will not believe. That leads to eternal regret.

THANKSGIVING (NOVEMBER 18, 2018)

Sing praise to the LORD, you His godly ones,
And give thanks to His holy name.
Psalm 30:4

Always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father.
Ephesians 5:20

In everything give thanks;
for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.
1 Thessalonians 5:18

Devote yourselves to prayer,
keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving.
Colossians 4:2

Oh give thanks to the LORD, call upon His name;

Make known His deeds among the peoples.
1 Chronicles 16:8

HOPE IN THE LORD (NOVEMBER 25, 2018)

There is likely no better encouragement for these times than to hope in the Lord. This is the cupboard that is never empty. There is no dryness in this well. Hope in the Lord makes the cloudiest day bright and sunny. Hope is often thought of as happenstance, something that occurs only by accident with no guiding hand. We hope this and we hope that, but there is no person behind it. We just hope circumstances somehow mysteriously work out. Hope in the Lord is not haphazard, but is ordered by our loving and powerful Father. Hope isn't passive with the Lord, but He has given us hope that exists in all times by giving us His Son. We might rightly have no hope in the world because the nature of the world is destructive and unstable. It changes with the tide and with the wind. It is driven by shortsighted weaklings. Our hope in God is because He can do anything He chooses, and He is favorably inclined to His children. He will withhold no good thing from those who walk uprightly. David said, "Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him." The psalmist spoke of going through the valley of the shadow of death and fearing no evil, "for you are with me." We can hope in the Lord for as long as the Lord lives and is with us. "O Israel, hope in the LORD from this time forth and forever." Not in circumstances, but in the LORD!

WISE IN OUR OWN EYES (DECEMBER 2, 2018)

Sinful man boasts of his independence from God. He glories in all his accomplishments by the works of his hands. He elevates human knowledge as the highest knowledge and belittles those who resort to Bible knowledge. Being wise in your own eyes contributes to the already-overflowing pride sinners possess by nature. A man wise in his own eyes will not listen to counsel, but is eager to give it. His self-centered wisdom makes him confident and assured. He feels free and stable. Such wisdom is intoxicating and a hard addiction to overcome. The Lord warns us as Solomon warned his son. "Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him." "The rich man is wise in his own eyes, but the poor who has understanding sees through him."

PEACE (DECEMBER 9, 2018)

"There is no peace for the wicked" says the Lord (Isaiah 48:22). Let's start with that foundational biblical declaration from the Lord Himself through Isaiah. That means no one who is under the wrath of God because of unforgiven sin and the outworking of natural wickedness can have peace. That is not to say there won't be periods of peace, both between nations, individuals, and in ourselves. However, if the most basic relationship all men are responsible to maintain is not right, then no matter what other little bits of peace we have, we have no peace, because the overarching need of peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ is missing. What good is it to be at peace with the passengers on a plane that is plunging to earth? The greater need is for the plane not to crash. Also, being unregenerate keeps the wild, uncontrollable urges inside raging. Because our natural passions are not conquered, we stir up trouble all around. "Where do wars come from?" James asks. From our passions that war within us. Peace with God is a major theme of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. He came to bring peace through the cross to all who trust in Him. Peace with God.

GOD WITH US (DECEMBER 23, 2018)

In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve, after sinning by eating the forbidden fruit, ran from the presence of God. In their state of innocence they enjoyed hearing the sound of the Lord God approaching. In sin they were ashamed, learned to sew fig leaves together, and hid among the trees. The Lord dealt with their wickedness and promised a redeemer who would undo and heal the transgressions of that day.

When Joseph discovered that Mary, his betrothed, was with child, he thought to put her away quietly. But the angel of the Lord assured him that Mary was with child by the Holy Spirit—the child promised way back in Genesis 3 who would crush the head of the serpent. His name? Immanuel. God with us. We left God, but God came to us in our Lord Jesus Christ. And thus now it can be “us with God” eternally.

THIS THING CALLED LOVE (DECEMBER 30, 2018)

The greatest commandment is to love God, Jesus said, and we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. The second is like it, to love your neighbor as yourself. “Love does no wrong to a neighbor, therefore love is the fulfillment of the law” (Romans 13:10). “The fruit of the Spirit is love” (Galatians 5:22). “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10). “We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (1 John 3:16). This thing called love is a good thing to be practiced by all, not just our wedding couple!

Our church wishes Kevin and Laura the best for their new life as two becoming one. Let’s pray for them and rejoice with them and be thankful for the creation of marriage, the family, and all the wonderful joys that arise from it.

NEW THINGS OLD THINGS (JANUARY 6, 2019)

Most people like new things, but not just new things. We would never replace all our old things for new things. Some, yes, but not all. There are many things we want to stay just as they are. When the Lord makes new things, He does not nullify those things that we daily depend upon. The Lord never changes. We never want the Lord to be new. Yes, His mercies are new every morning, which just means He has a daily and constant supply of mercy. But it is because of His unchanging nature that these mercies are given to us so freely. One of the blessed characteristics of newness from the Lord is how it flows from God’s unchanging character. God may do new things and give new things, but He never becomes a new God. He doesn’t need to change, and by definition He cannot change, already being perfect in all ways. However, our God is not stagnant and boring. He is constantly fresh and new in the sense that He never grows old and stale, but He is ever the same God. We can never exhaust the beauty, holiness, power, majesty, kindness, knowledge, and wisdom, of our great God. So we rejoice when the Lord says, “Behold, I make all things new.” But we are overjoyed that our God never changes, that Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and that the love of God in Christ will never grow cold or pass away from us.

PESSIMISM OR OPTIMISM? (JANUARY 13, 2019)

“Whatever will be will be” is certainly true but not very profound. We can’t live that way in all areas of life. Yes, in some things we have to say that because there is nothing more to do but wait after we’ve done all we can. Or that something is completely out of our control and we have to pray and watch and hope in the Lord. But even in such a scenario, should a Christian be optimistic or pessimistic? That really depends on what we are basing our optimism and pessimism on. To believe in the ability of

humans to achieve whatever they choose and in the end to come out higher and better is optimistic humanism. Such optimism is ill-placed. It's fine to be optimistic that certain humans will perform well—we all hope for that if we go into surgery. But the future of mankind is pessimistic unless men come to the Lord. However, even with the world as it is, with sinners as they are, with circumstances beyond our control, Christians should be optimistic in the Lord. When we pray we should believe the Lord will answer. We should always hope in the Lord. Always rejoice in the Lord. Always lift up holy hands without wrath and dissension or doubt (1 Timothy 2:8; James 1:6). Unbelievers are “without hope and without God in the world.” But Christians have hope and God. We must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

OUR GREAT GOD (JANUARY 20, 2019)

Psalm 47:2 For the LORD Most High is to be feared, a great King over all the earth.

Psalm 48:1 Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, in the city of our God, His holy mountain.

Psalm 95:3 For the LORD is a great God and a great King above all gods.

Psalm 96:4 For great is the LORD and greatly to be praised; He is to be feared above all gods.

Psalm 99:2 The LORD is great in Zion, and He is exalted above all the peoples.

Psalm 104:1 Bless the LORD, O my soul! O LORD my God, You are very great; You are clothed with splendor and majesty.

Psalm 111:2 Great are the works of the LORD; they are studied by all who delight in them.

Psalm 126:3 The LORD has done great things for us; we are glad.

Psalm 135:5 For I know that the LORD is great and that our Lord is above all gods.

Psalm 147:5 Great is our Lord and abundant in strength; His understanding is infinite.

UNTIL WE FIX THIS (JANUARY 27, 2019)

I noted on Wednesday night that the state of New York has passed a law protecting abortion in all trimesters, and even to the point of a baby accidentally escaping an abortion, at which time nothing is to be done for him or her. On top of this inhumane and cruel practice, when the law was announced in the legislature that it had passed there were loud cheers and much applause. In a little over 50 years our nation has progressed from allowing abortion to cheering abortions. Many politicians are elected because they support abortion. And over 61 million babies have been killed in this country alone since 1973 via abortion. There may be no clearer practice by society that shows so clearly our degeneracy. Yet, the world is constantly speaking of how many are being killed by manmade climate change. It could be 3,000 or maybe even 30,000. And the world decries shootings where innocent lives are lost, maybe as many as 4, or 10, or 25, or 50, and they demand something be done to take guns off the street. But until the world can see fit to stop killing 61 million babies and counting, they will not convince me they care one whit about human life. Fix that first if you want to better society, I say. And if you can't fix that you have lost all moral authority to mourn other senseless deaths. This is only cured by salvation through the gospel of Jesus Christ, but it can be cured.

THE COMPLAINT BOX (FEBRUARY 3, 2019)

Some businesses have a complaint box. This is one of the most dangerous boxes a business can have. To encourage sinful people to complain is similar to providing alcohol to an Alcoholics Anonymous gathering. We complain by nature. We complain when things don't go our way. Or when something is not the way we think it should be. Israel complained about not having bread, of having bread, of wanting meat, of having too much meat, of oppression in Egypt, and of not being in Egypt after they left. They

were malcontents, discontents, moaners, and grumblers. They could not be pleased, and the least setback from their ideal life brought howls of protest. They existed, in their minds, to be served by God and Moses. Even God could not satisfy them. Moses at times preferred death to hearing their constant murmuring. Complaining is the loud yell of a selfish person. This vice is corrected by salvation, but never think Christians can't be complainers, for we certainly can. We are to forgive when we have a complaint against someone (Col. 3:13). And most importantly we are to cease complaining and be thankful instead. "Do not complain, brethren, against one another..." (James 5:9). "Be hospitable to one another without complaint" (1 Peter 4:9).

GIDEONS INTERNATIONAL (FEBRUARY 10, 2019)

We are happy to have Mr. Calvin Turner with us today to update our church on the ministry of the Gideons. Our church has been a supporter of the Gideons for the entirety of our existence. There are few ministries that could approach the rich and valuable service the Gideons provide in this world. Many of us have been impacted in some way in our lives by a Gideon Bible that was found or given to us. What the world needs is to come to faith in Jesus Christ, and the Word of God points the way to changed hearts and a changed society. The Bible never expires or grows old and irrelevant. Principles of morality, doctrine, theology, wisdom, praise, thanksgiving, encouragement, guidance, and many other core benefits are still to be found in the Bible. It will ever be so. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes, and that gospel is proclaimed in the Bible. And its power does not come from us, but it is powerful in itself. "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." We thank Mr. Turner for his willingness to come. He will gather any contributions at the close of the service.

WHILE WE SLEPT (FEBRUARY 17, 2019)

Once as a child spending the night at my grandparent's house, since my cousin was in town, I woke up to my cousin excitedly telling me to "come look." While we slept builders had begun to build a house next door and already had the framing up. They had clearly gotten an early start and work was being done while my cousin and I were slumbering. The world never stops, but every person retires from life every day (if we are blessed) to sleep. A lot happens while we sleep. Some things could happen that we should be awake to see so we can intervene, but a lot of times the sleep is too deep to be interrupted by events in the world. If we are asleep we can't be depended on to watch and be ready. So the Bible makes it clear that the Lord is not like us in this regard. "My help comes from the LORD, Who made heaven and earth. He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep" (Psalm 121:2-4). There are many applications to this blessed truth. Dr. Thomas used to joke that Hindus would come to the Hindu temple and ring the bell to wake their god up. Elijah chided the worshipers of Baal that perhaps Baal was asleep. But our God does not sleep or even get tired.

THAT SHARP TONGUE (FEBRUARY 24, 2019)

James tells us the tongue is so dangerous it cannot be tamed. It is a world of iniquity. It is set on fire by hell. It is full of deadly poison, likening it to the most feared snakes. The tongue has morphed into a worse creature today. Phones have been around a while, but now there is social media to help scatter the evil of the tongue around the world. Plus the news and entertainment media. The reputation of innocent people is slandered in the most awful way by unguarded words. The tongue is attached directly to a

spirit of hate. "A lying tongue hates those it crushes, and a flattering mouth works ruin" (Proverbs 26:28). It's not that the tongue is a bad creation, but that sin has perverted it into a weapon of mass destruction. "A soothing tongue is a tree of life, but perversion in it crushes the spirit" (Proverbs 15:4). If you want to do good with the tongue you have, it must be attached to wisdom. "The tongue of the wise makes knowledge acceptable, but the mouth of fools spouts folly" (Proverbs 15:2). Such power runs to great extremes, whether good or bad. "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit" (Proverbs 18:21). We need good tongues. "Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a word spoken in right circumstances" (Proverbs 25:11).

FROM CHARLES SPURGEON (MARCH 3, 2019)

A lie can travel half way around the world while the truth is putting on its shoes.

Anxiety does not empty tomorrow of its sorrows, but only empties today of its strength.

My evidence that I am saved does not lie in the fact that I preach, or that I do this or that. All my hope lies in this: that Jesus Christ came to save sinners. I am a sinner, I trust Him, then He came to save me, and I am saved.

Beware of no man more than of yourself; we carry our worst enemies within us.

In the same way the sun never grows weary of shining, nor a stream of flowing, it is God's nature to keep His promises. Therefore, go immediately to His throne and say, 'Do as You promised.'

AND CAN IT BE? (MARCH 10, 2019)

And can it be that I should gain
An interest in the Savior's blood?
Died He for me who caused His pain?
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be
That thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

He left His Father's throne above,
So free, so infinite His grace;
Emptied Himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam's helpless race.
'Tis mercy all, immense and free;
For, O my God, it found out me.

No condemnation now I dread
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine!
Alive in Him, my living Head,
And clothed in righteousness divine.
Bold I approach the eternal throne,
And claim the crown through Christ my own.

Amazing love! How can it be

That thou, my God, shouldst die for me?
—Charles Wesley—

WONDERFUL GRACE OF JESUS (MARCH 17, 2019)

Wonderful grace of Jesus,
Greater than all my sin;
How shall my tongue describe it,
Where shall its praise begin?
Taking away my burden,
Setting my spirit free;
O the wonderful grace of Jesus
Reaches me.

Wonderful the matchless grace of Jesus,
Deeper than the mighty rolling sea;
Higher than a mountain,
Sparkling like a fountain,
All-sufficient grace for even me.
Broader than the scope of my transgressions,
Greater far than all my sin and shame;
O magnify the precious name of Jesus,
Praise His name!
—Haldon Lillenas—

TEN THOUSAND TIMES TEN THOUSAND (MARCH 24, 2019)

Ten thousand times ten thousand in sparkling raiment bright,
The armies of the ransomed saints throng up the steeps of light;
'Tis finished, all is finished, their fight with death and sin;
Fling open wide the golden gates, and let the victors in.

What rush of alleluias fills all the earth and sky!
What ringing of a thousand harps bespeaks the triumph nigh!
O day, for which creation and all its tribes were made;
O joy, for all its former woes a thousandfold repaid!

O then what raptured greetings on Canaan's happy shore;
What knitting severed friendships up, where partings are no more!
Then eyes with joy shall sparkle, that brimmed with tears of late;
Orphans no longer fatherless, nor widows desolate.

Bring near Thy great salvation, Thou Lamb for sinners slain;
Fill up the roll of Thine elect, then take Thy power, and reign;
Appear, Desire of nations, Thine exiles long for home;
Show in the heaven Thy promised sign; Thou Prince and Savior, come.
—Henry Alford—

O COULD I SPEAK THE MATCHLESS WORTH (MARCH 31, 2019)

O could I speak the matchless worth,
O could I sound the glories forth which in my Savior shine!
I'd sing His glorious righteousness, and magnify the wondrous grace
Which made salvation mine, which made salvation mine.

I'd sing the precious blood He spilt,
My ransom from the dreadful guilt of sin, and wrath divine;
I'd sing His glorious righteousness, in which all perfect, heavenly dress
My soul shall ever shine, my soul shall ever shine.

I'd sing the characters He bears,
And all the forms of love He wears, exalted on His throne;
In loftiest songs of sweetest praise, I would to everlasting days
Make all His glories known, make all His glories known.

Soon, the delightful day will come
When my dear Lord will bring me home, and I shall see His face;
Then with my Savior, Brother, Friend, a blessed eternity I'll spend,
Triumphant in His grace, triumphant in His grace.
—Samuel Medley—

GOD IS WORKING HIS PURPOSE OUT (APRIL 7, 2019)

God is working his purpose out
as year succeeds to year:
God is working his purpose out,
and the time is drawing near;
nearer and nearer draws the time,
the time that shall surely be,
when the earth shall be filled
with the glory of God
as the waters cover the sea.

From utmost east to utmost west,
wherever foot hath trod,
by the mouth of many messengers
goes forth the voice of God;
give ear to me, ye continents,
ye isles, give ear to me,
that earth may filled
with the glory of God
as the waters cover the sea.
—Arthur Campbell Ainger—

FADe, FADe, EACH EARTHly JOY (April 14, 2019)

Fade, fade each earthly joy;
Jesus is mine.
Break every tender tie;
Jesus is mine.
Dark is the wilderness,
Earth has no resting place,
Jesus alone can bless;
Jesus is mine.

Farewell, mortality;
Jesus is mine.
Welcome, eternity;
Jesus is mine.
Welcome, O Loved and Blest,
Welcome, sweet scenes of rest,
Welcome, my Savior's breast;
Jesus is mine.

Jane C. Bonar (1821-1884)

Lift Up, Lift Up, YOUR VOICES NOW (April 21, 2019)

Lift up, lift up your voices now!
The whole wide world rejoices now
The Lord hath triumphed gloriously
The Lord shall reign victoriously

In vain with stone the cave they barred
In vain the watch kept ward and guard
Majestic from the spoiled tomb
In pomp of triumph Christ is come

And all He did, and all He bare
He gives us as our own to share
And hope, and joy, and peace begin
For Christ has won, and man shall win

O Victor, aid us in the fight
And lead through death to realms of light
We safely pass where Thou hast trod
In Thee we die to rise to God
—J. M. Neale—

JESUS, PRICELESS TREASURE (MAY 5, 2019)

Jesus, priceless treasure,
source of purest pleasure,
friend most sure and true:
long my heart was burning,
fainting much and yearning,
thirsting, Lord, for you.
Yours I am, O spotless Lamb,
so will I let nothing hide you,
seek no joy beside you!

Banish thoughts of sadness,
for the Lord of gladness,
Jesus, enters in;
though the clouds may gather,
those who love the Savior
still have peace within.
Though I bear much sorrow here,
still in you lies purest pleasure,
Jesus, priceless treasure!
—Johann Franck—

GRACIOUS SAVIOR, WHO DIDST HONOR (MAY 12, 2019)

Gracious Savior, Who didst honor
Womankind as woman's Son;
Very Man, though God begotten,
And with God the Father One;
Grant our womanhood may be
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee.

Jesus, Son of human mother,
Bless our motherhood, we pray;
Give us grace to lead our children,
Draw them to Thee day by day;
May our sons and daughters be
Dedicated, Lord, to Thee.

Thou Who didst with Joseph labor,
Nor didst humble work disdain,
Grant we may Thy footsteps follow
Patiently through toil and pain;
May our quiet home life be
Lived, O Lord, in Thee, to Thee.
—Emily Anne Eliza Shirreff—

HARK! TEN THOUSAND HARPS AND VOICES (MAY 19, 2019)

Hark! ten thousand harps and voices
Sound the note of praise above;
Jesus reigns, and heaven rejoices,
Jesus reigns, the God of love:
See, He sits on yonder throne;
Jesus rules the world alone.
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Alleluia! Amen.

Savior, hasten Thine appearing;
Bring, O bring the glorious day,
When, the awful summons hearing,
Heaven and earth shall pass away;;
Then, with golden harps we'll sing,
"Glory, glory to our King!"
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Alleluia! Amen.
—Thomas Kelly—

MY COUNTRY, 'TIS OF THEE (MAY 26, 2019)

My country, 'tis of thee,
Sweet land of liberty,
Of thee I sing;
Land where my fathers died,
Land of the pilgrims' pride,
From ev'ry mountainside
Let freedom ring!

Our fathers' God to Thee,
Author of liberty,
To Thee we sing.
Long may our land be bright,
With freedom's holy light,
Protect us by Thy might,
Great God our King!
—Samuel Francis Smith—

HE IS COMING AGAIN (JUNE 2, 2019)

Lift up your heads, pilgrims aweary,
See day's approach now crimson the sky;
Night shadows flee, and your Beloved,
Awaited with longing, at last draweth nigh.

He is coming again, He is coming again,
The very same Jesus, rejected of men;
He is coming again, He is coming again,
With power and great glory, He is coming again!
Dark was the night, sin warred against us;
Heavy the load of sorrow we bore;
But now we see signs of His coming;
Our hearts glow within us, joy's cup runneth o'er!

Even so, come, precious Lord Jesus;
Creation waits redemption to see;
Caught up in clouds, soon we shall meet Thee;
O blessed assurance, forever with Thee!
—Mabel J. Camp—

ONLY A SINNER (JUNE 9, 2019)

Naught have I gotten but what I received;
Grace hath bestowed it since I have believed;
Boasting excluded, pride I abase;
I'm only a sinner saved by grace!

Once I was foolish, and sin ruled my heart,
Causing my footsteps from God to depart;
Jesus hath found me, happy my case;
I now am a sinner saved by grace!

Tears unavailing, no merit had I;
Mercy had saved me, or else I must die;
Sin had alarmed me, fearing God's face;
But now I'm a sinner saved by grace!

Only a sinner saved by grace!
Only a sinner saved by grace!
This is my story, to God be the glory,
I'm only a sinner saved by grace!
—James M. Gray—

FAITH OF OUR FATHERS (JUNE 16, 2019)

Faith of our fathers, living still,
In spite of dungeon, fire and sword;
O how our hearts beat high with joy
Whenever we hear that glorious Word!

Faith of our fathers, we will strive
To win all nations unto Thee;
And through the truth that comes from God,

We all shall then be truly free.

Faith of our fathers, we will love
Both friend and foe in all our strife;
And preach Thee, too, as love knows how
By kindly words and virtuous life.

Faith of our fathers, holy faith!
We will be true to thee till death.
—Frederick William Faber—

JONATHAN EDWARDS (JUNE 23, 2019)

We should travel on as a way of obedience to all God's commands, even the difficult, as well as the easy, commands. We should travel on in a way of self-denial, denying all our sinful inclinations and interests. The way to heaven is ascending; we must be content to travel up hill, though it be hard, and tiresome, and contrary to the natural tendency and bias of our flesh, that tends downward to the earth. We should follow Christ in the path that he has gone; the way that he traveled in was the right way to heaven. We should take up our cross and follow him. We should travel along in the same way of meekness and lowliness of heart, in the same way of obedience, and charity, and diligence to do good, and patience under afflictions.

—Sermons and Discourses, 1730-1733—

THE PROUD TONGUE (JUNE 30, 2019)

Christians live in a constant state of awe and wonder. And I'm not even referring to the Lord, who is always an object of the Christian's awe and wonder. In this instance I am referring to the words of the proud. The words of the proud are not necessarily boastful words about themselves, but the belief and attitude that what they say actually matters, and should be recognized as authoritative and wise, even when it is utter nonsense. If we are born again we should never forget how naturally ignorant we are outside of having our minds enlightened by Jesus Christ. "The tongue of the wise makes knowledge acceptable, but the mouth of fools spouts folly" (Proverbs 15:2). "Folly is joy to him who lacks sense, but a man of understanding walks straight" (Proverbs 15:21). We really shouldn't be set off balance by the mouth of fools; it is part of our nature to be foolish before we gain wisdom through Christ. "But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised (1 Corinthians 2:14). Yes, sinners really are depraved and foolish, and cannot understand spiritual things or the mind of Christ until they know Him.

LO! HE COMES (July 7, 2019)

Lo! He comes with clouds descending,
Once for favored sinners slain;
Thousand thousand saints attending,
Swell the triumph of His train:
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
God appears on earth to reign.

Every eye shall now behold Him
Robed in dreadful majesty;
Those who set at naught and sold Him,
Pierced and nailed Him to the tree,
Deeply wailing, deeply wailing,
Shall the true Messiah see.

Yea, Amen! let all adore Thee,
High on Thine eternal throne;
Savior, take the power and glory,
Claim the kingdom for Thine own;
O come quickly! O come quickly!
Hallelujah! Come, Lord, come.
—Charles Wesley—

SOUND THE BATTLE CRY! (July 14, 2019)

Sound the battle cry! See, the foe is nigh;
Raise the standard high for the Lord;
Gird your armor on, stand firm every one;
Rest your cause upon His holy Word.

Strong to meet the foe, marching on we go,
While our cause we know must prevail;
Shield and banner bright, gleaming in the light,
Battling for the right we ne'er can fail.

O Thou God of all, hear us when we call,
Help us one and all by Thy grace;
When the battle's done, and the vict'ry's won,
May we wear the crown before Thy face.

Rouse, then, soldiers, rally round the banner,
Ready, steady, pass the word along;
Onward, forward, shout aloud, "Hosanna!"
Christ is Captain of the mighty throng.
—William F. Sherwin—

THE KING SHALL COME WHEN MORNING DAWNS (July 21, 2019)

The King shall come when morning dawns,
And light triumphant breaks;
When beauty gilds the eastern hills,
And life to joy awakes.

O brighter than that glorious morn
Shall this fair morning be,
When Christ, our King, in beauty comes,

And we His face shall see.

And let the endless bliss begin,
By weary saints foretold,
When right shall triumph over wrong,
And truth shall be extolled.

The King shall come when morning dawns,
And light and beauty brings:
Hail, Christ the Lord! Thy people pray,
Come quickly, King of kings.
—John Brownlie—

THOU DIDST LEAVE THY THRONE (July 28, 2019)

Thou didst leave thy throne
And thy kingly crown
When thou camest to earth for me,
But in Bethlehem's home
Was there found no room
For Thy holy nativity.

Heaven's arches rang
When the angels sang
Proclaiming Thy royal degree;
But of lowly birth
Cam'st Thou, Lord, on earth,
And in great humility.

O come to my heart Lord Jesus;
There is room in my heart for thee!
—E. S. Elliot—

THANK YOU (AUGUST 4, 2019)

In the late 80's Dr. Belcher started mentioning a church to me that was meeting in a restaurant in a place called Orangeburg, SC. I had been to India with Doc in 1987 and become acquainted also with Dr. Thomas, who also had some knowledge of that church in Orangeburg, having visited there himself. In the course of time I traversed the distance with Cindy and our first exposure to Orangeburg was that the main street was flooding during a heavy rain as we arrived. I was not even a Southern Baptist, but instead an independent Bible church pastor. Yet I came and met the people of Covenant Baptist Church. That, as we now all know, was 30 years ago. Some churches automatically move pastors along after 3 years. Some move them along a lot faster. But you have continued to support our ministry here for 3 decades. That speaks volumes of your love and kindness and obedience to our Lord. Dr. Belcher once bemoaned the fact that as he left he was sad to leave his people who he had himself cared for with shepherdly affection. Thanks to you we have a people. Cindy and I want to thank you all for your loving support and making a place in your hearts for us, as we have made the same in our hearts for you.

SURPRISE! (AUGUST 18, 2019)

Most people like surprises as long as they are pleasant. An unexpected delight is a welcome treasure, and one that lifts our spirit to great heights. “When the desire comes it is a tree of life,” Solomon wrote. To hear something costs less than you thought; to receive an unexpected gift; to hear good news from those you love; such surprises and many others make for happy moments in the midst of an often discouraging world. Life is full of surprises. But some things happen that are alarming and troubling, but not surprises. In fact, we are counseled by Scripture not to be surprised by them. A person walking a tightrope is not in the mood for a shock that might send him tumbling from the wire. We, too, can be surprised and thrown off balance unless we are ready. We cannot be surprised at the excesses of this sinful world. Our faith is not in the world, and we cannot allow it to drive us into despair and hopelessness. “Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you,” John tells us. Peter sounds a familiar biblical theme when he tells us not to be surprised by the fiery ordeals we suffer in this world (1 Peter 4:12). The “surprises” of the world are not surprising to the prepared Christian.

WE PLOW THE FIELDS AND SCATTER (SEPTEMBER 1, 2019)

We plow the fields, and scatter
the good seed on the land,
but it is fed and watered
by God's almighty hand;
he sends the snow in winter,
the warmth to swell the grain,
the breezes and the sunshine,
and soft refreshing rain.

All good gifts around us
are sent from heaven above,
then thank the Lord, O thank the Lord
for all his love.

Amen.

—Matthias Claudius—

THAT OLD-TIME GOSPEL SINGING (SEPTEMBER 8, 2019)

Christian music changes from generation to generation. The music of today is certainly a lot different than the music of the last generation of believers. That's not necessarily a bad thing, although it can be. But it can also be a good thing when solid Christian songwriting and singing are done in our modern times. Some, like me, enjoy those old southern gospel songs. One criticism of them is that they are often very shallow, but that doesn't distinguish them from many songs today. Some of them are gimmicky, but again that is also true today. One thing that may set them apart is the overwhelming focus on heaven. There are so many gospel songs about heaven. “When I Wake Up To Sleep No More.” “Shouting Time In Heaven.” “On Heaven's Bright Shore.” “Beulah Land.” “Touring the City.” “I Want To Go There.” “Stepping On the Clouds.” Sure, if all a person did was listen to southern gospel they would be neglecting the pure milk of the Word, but what a wonderful trip our minds take when we sing of heaven. “Set your mind on things above, not on things of the earth.”

ASCRIBING (SEPTEMBER 15, 2019)

“Ascribe to the LORD, O sons of the mighty, Ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.” (Psalm 29:1)

If you take a trip to the library, a rarer occurrence these days, you will find a section identified as “Fiction.” That means books with stories that did not really happen, but are created in the minds of the authors and published for the pleasure of readers who enjoy general storytelling. There is absolutely nothing wrong with this concept, and has been practiced from the beginning of time in various ways. However, it must be remembered that the stories are not ascribed in truth. The psalmist ascribes to the

Lord glory and strength. When we ascribe to the Lord glory and strength, we say, in the spirit of worship, that this is what God already has. Glory and strength are not given to God. God is glory and strength in Himself. But not only that, we are also rejoicing in the Lord’s glory and strength. Ascribing doesn’t change any facts about God, but brings them to the forefront of our minds and directs our thoughts to them. In turn, we are strengthened and edified by the Lord’s power and majesty.

THE RUINS OF BABYLON THAT GREAT CITY (SEPTEMBER 22, 2019)



NO CONDEMNATION (SEPTEMBER 29, 2019)

Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

—Romans 8:1—

SPURGEON’S HYMN ON PSALM 39: A PORTION (OCTOBER 13, 2019)

Behold, O Lord my days are made
A mere handbreadth at the most
Ere yet ‘tis noon my flower must fade,
And I give up the ghost.

Though I’m exiled from glory’s land,
Yet not from glory’s King;
My God is ever near at hand,
And therefore I will sing.

—Psalm 39:4 —

LORD, make me to know my end
And what is the extent of my days;
Let me know how transient I am.

WELCOME TO HOMECOMING! (OCTOBER 20, 2019)

“There’s no way it’s Homecoming again.”

Yes, it’s Homecoming again.

A good time of fellowship and hopefully seeing some we have not seen in a while.
As usual we will have lunch together following the morning service. All are invited.

Thoughts of home are naturally warm and happy, or certainly should be. We are thankful the Lord has placed His children into His family, and that He is a perfect Father, giving good gifts to His children. And that we have an imperishable and undefiled inheritance, a home eternal, that will not fade away, reserved in heaven for us.

COUNTING IT ALL JOY (OCTOBER 27, 2019)

Perhaps one of the strangest sounding verses in the Bible is when James tells us to “count it all joy” when we encounter various trials. Is he insane? To be fair, he doesn’t say to rejoice in the trial itself, but in its outcome. But still, joy is joy, and seeing the hand of God in our trials and the end He is accomplishing is a present joy, and not just something we are to consider joy at a future time.

To say, “I’ll be joyful someday” is not to hear what James is saying. The joy is to be now. And the joy he has in mind and in the plan of God will sustain us and aid us in our present struggles. This is that “peace that passes all understanding” that we get when we choose to be anxious for nothing, but instead to make our requests known to God. God gives the joy, but we must rejoice in the trial by seeing it from God’s perspective. Does He love His children? Does He always seek the best for us? Then we can count it all joy.

LET’S GO FLY A KITE! (NOVEMBER 3, 2019)

Unless you are Charlie Brown, you have likely had some good experiences flying kites. It’s simple fun, maybe even too simple for our technological world and digitalized kids. A good kite and some strong string (and plenty of it) and you are ready to soar. However, there’s a very fundamental concept that must be grasped by all kite flyers, and I don’t mean that the tail has to be long enough and don’t fly near power lines. Rule #1: Don’t let go of the string. A kite is for controlled flying. Let go of the string and it’s gone. This is what our modern world has done. The string of right and wrong was once attached to God and His Word, but sinners imagined a better world where the string was not necessary, and so it was severed from God. Now the kite has gone crazy. It soars where it shouldn’t be. It crashes. It hangs in trees. It drifts out of sight. We often think the kite of our world has flown as far off course as it possible could, but then we find it has wandered even farther away. O that we would never have let go of the string!

WHEN JESUS SHALL REIGN (NOVEMBER 10, 2019)

Every sign of care will leave us,
We shall then sing forevermore
When Jesus the King of glory shall reign.
Sowing and reaping, watching and waiting,
Every hardship will be o'er.
When Jesus the King of glory shall reign.

When Jesus the King of glory comes
All over the earth in power to reign,
We shall then have no fear of dying,
Glory to God there'll be no more pain.
Trials will all have passed away.
Hearts will then sing from day to day.
When Jesus the King of glory shall reign.

—The Inspirations—

IT'S STILL THE BLOOD (NOVEMBER 17, 2019)

Once I wandered in sin's black night
There was no way to make my rows right.
Then the old accuser to the Lord did cry
"He is a sinner, and now he must die."

Then I heard a voice say, "Father I'll go,
And I'll pay his sin debt in Calvary's flow.
I'll bear in My body the marks of the cross,
To save this child who is sin-sick and lost."

And it's still the blood that saves from sin.
It's still the blood that cleanses within.
From the highest star in heaven to the depths of the sea
It is still the blood of Jesus that brings victory to me.

—The Inspirations—

A PURITAN PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING (NOVEMBER 24, 2019)

O my God,
Thou fairest, greatest, first of all objects,
my heart admired, adores, loves thee,
for my little vessel is as full as it can be,
and I would pour out all that fullness before thee
in ceaseless flow.

When I think upon and converse with thee

ten thousand delightful thoughts spring up,
ten thousand sources of pleasure are unsealed,
ten thousand refreshing joys spread over my heart,
crowding into every moment of happiness.

I love thee above the powers of language to express,
for what thou art to thy creatures.

Increase my love, O my God, through time and eternity.

SWING AND A MISS (DECEMBER 8, 2019)

It is perfectly acceptable for the secular world to celebrate seasons however it so chooses. A winter festival, or a fall extravaganza, we all can enjoy. Where the world errs is in its total miscomprehension of Jesus. They think He's still a baby, or Santa, or a legend, or a symbol, or an option, or a disembodied variable waiting to be defined in the minds of human beings. They take a swing at understanding the manger, the cross, the empty tomb. But without the light of the gospel they swing and miss. Do that too many times, and they will strike out.

CHET BITTERMAN (DECEMBER 15, 2019)

Chet Bitterman
November 30, 1952—March 7, 1981

“The situation in Nicaragua is getting worse. If Nicaragua falls, I guess the rest of Central America will, too. Maybe this is just some kind of self-inflicted martyr complex, but I find this recurring thought that perhaps God will call me to be martyred for him in his service in Columbia. I am willing.”

—From the diary of Chet Bitterman, eight months before he entered Colombia.

SAINTS FINISHING THEIR COURSE (JANUARY 5, 2020)

This week we have seen saints finish their course as we all must someday do. God gives us the days we have—some longer than others.

The funeral for Michelle is this afternoon at 3:30. She remained faithful to the Lord through all her sufferings and leaves a heritage of trust in God to her family.

Dr. Belcher died Friday night after a lengthy battle with Alzheimer's. He was as active as he could be until his death. He had a great impact on our church through his Lottie Moon concerts and January Bible Studies. He leaves a great body of labor in writing, preaching, and teaching. His funeral will be held on Tuesday beginning at 10 A.M. with visitation at the Palmetto Funeral Home in Fort Mill, followed at 11 A.M. by the service. Burial will be at Bush River Memorial Gardens at 3 P.M. in Columbia.

HOPE IN GOD (FEBRUARY 2, 2020)

Why does the Bible tell us to hope in God? David talked to himself in the psalms and told his soul to hope in God, “for I will yet praise Him.” Positive thinking could include hope in God, but it also might not. Coping isn't necessarily a good word for hope in God. It sounds more like we are hanging on to

inner strength and hoping it doesn't fail. Hope in mankind is nice if you have people who are trustworthy, faithful, wise, and strong in spirit. But humankind is a mixed bag, and you are more likely to find disappointment if your hope is in the arm of flesh. But hope in God is a constant and sure foundation. God never changes. He loves His children. He has all power. He understands that we are but dust. He is the living God. Always faithful. Always wise. Always sovereign. Able to do all things. "Nothing is impossible with God." So that's why we hope in God. Because of God.

HOPE IN MAN (FEBRUARY 9, 2020)

Last Sunday in this spot I noted how the Bible encourages us to hope in God. The Bible is also faithful to instruct us in the opposite direction—hope in man. Whereas we are greatly encouraged to hope in God, hope in man is a dangerous counterfeit. "It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man" (Psalm 118:8). "Do not trust in princes, in mortal man, in whom there is no salvation" (Psalm 146:3). "The fear of man brings a snare, but he who trusts in the Lord will be exalted" (Proverbs 29:25). Our world constantly beats the drum of trust in man, either in ourselves or others. Even a faithful and trustworthy man cannot be the focus of our trust; how much less the faithless! Trust in man is a symptom of a pagan worldview that excludes God as any practical good. It mesmerizes us with vain hope that man will prevail and overcome major problems. Let's not be snared in such human disillusionment and deception.

WE SUPPORT THE GIDEONS (FEBRUARY 16, 2020)

We are happy to have Mr. Ken Giles with us this morning who will update us on the ministry of the Gideons. What purer ministry could there be than the distribution of Bibles! Our church has a part in that by our contributions and prayers in support of the Gideons.

Mr. Giles will be at the back door at the close of the service and will receive any donations anyone is desirous of giving, and we pray the Lord will use them mightily as Bibles are distributed.

"The Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

GUILT FEELINGS (FEBRUARY 23, 2020)

There is a significant difference between guilt and guilt feelings. People are commonly advised that they should not feel guilty about something that they are guilty of doing. Behind this is a belief that there is no true guilt, so you shouldn't feel guilty. However, guilt is an absolute reality before God. If we violate God's law we are guilty and stand in expectation of judgment. To dismiss the guilt as only "feelings" that should be ignored is dangerous. There is another aspect of guilt feelings that should be avoided, and that's when people are made to feel guilty when they aren't. Guilt feelings enslave many who aren't guilty. Christians can be held in the grip of feelings of guilt after they have been forgiven of their sins by the grace of our Lord. If we are guilty it is the mercy of God to feel guilty and to seek forgiveness from God. If we are not guilty, it is the mercy of God to enjoy freedom from even the feelings of guilt.

HOW WE ARE SAVED (MARCH 1, 2020)

Genuine faith in Jesus Christ—His perfect life, death, resurrection, and ascension—is the only path to heaven. As Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through

Me.” However, salvation is very personal and individual. Each person must face God alone, must come as an individual seeking God’s grace and mercy. And TODAY is always the time to seek the Lord’s forgiveness. But God deals with us in different ways in bringing us to salvation. The Puritans would say, “God does not break every man’s heart alike.” For some it is a long road. Others are saved suddenly with little seeking beforehand. Some are very religious and think they are saved, when they are not; but then the light shines upon them to show them the error of their ways. Some have dramatic conversions, while some are quiet and still. There is no mechanical prescription by which we may judge true conversion, but all are saved by grace.

EASY, HARD, FREE, COSTLY (MARCH 8, 2020)

Salvation is a free gift, yet it costs everything we have—our life. The price has been paid by Christ but unless we repent we will perish. Repentance means we turn from all the sin that is dear to us and has rooted in our hearts as we have pursued our own way and our own pleasure. This is very hard to give up, and repentance is a gift of God and a work of His power to make it happen. Otherwise we carry our sins to the grave and reap all the consequences. But if a sinner wants to be saved and experiences the kind of conviction given by the Holy Spirit that makes us loathe our sin and run to Christ, then salvation is easy. We don’t have to work to earn God’s favor, nor could we. By believing in Christ, the sins we wish to abandon and be forgiven of are taken from us as far as the east is from the west. We find that the righteousness of Christ is in us without one contribution of our own to it. It’s easy, hard, free, and costly, but the sinner can have it today because of our great Savior.

THE CORONAVIRUS (MARCH 15, 2020)

For the foreseeable future our world will be dealing with what has been classified as a pandemic by the World Health Organization. The impact is greatly unknown at this point, but it is wise to take precautions. There is no other world for us to flee to while this pandemic works itself out, and the Lord is sovereign over such outbreaks, and we pray He will use it to further His glory and draw others to seek Him. So as we live our normal lives let’s just use common sense. If you are feeling sickly, then you should stay home as long as you don’t watch Benny Hinn (for example) while there. There are flyers in back from the CDC to hinder the spread of this pandemic. We will operate our services on our normal schedule unless the situation dramatically changes. The leadership will stay on top of this. By each doing his/her part we hope to soon be past this and back to dealing with the normal cold and flu threats we encounter yearly. Rule #1: Don’t get sick!

IT’S GOOD TO BE BACK! (MAY 31, 2020)

When we last met on March 15 we didn’t know we would be spending an unprecedented 10 Sundays in virtual meetings (and an attempted virtual meeting on the first Sunday). What we always know is our God is not only sovereign, but also providential. He rules from heaven and accomplishes His purposes. I am confident that He is doing that and will keep on with it. He is more desirous of His glory than we are. The world system seeks to strike fear into our hearts for their own purposes—to make us trust in them for help and solutions. This pandemic has been used far too often for political aims. We’ve seen how the experts are not experts at all. We’ve seen how precious our freedom to worship is, and how desperate the wicked are to take that away from us. We’ve seen how swiftly the knowledge of the world becomes outdated and reversed. We’ve done our part to step back while we’ve seen what would transpire. Thank God that’s done. It’s good to be back.

THE WOMAN AT THE WELL (JUNE 7, 2020)

John 4:7-14 There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink." For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. Therefore the Samaritan woman said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water." She said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep; where then do You get that living water?" "You are not greater than our father Jacob, are You, who gave us the well, and drank of it himself and his sons and his cattle?" Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life."

THE BIBLE ALREADY SAID THAT (JUNE 14, 2020)

Even we who honor the Bible are sometimes surprised how right it is. "Things are so crazy today no one could have seen it coming." Not true! Jude writes of those who indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh (sexual perversion) (7). They reject authority (8). They revile the things they do not understand (10). The things they know by instinct are those things they destroy themselves with, like unreasoning animals (10). They are clouds without water, carried along by winds (12). They are autumn trees without fruit (12). They are wild waves of the sea casting up their own shame like foam (13). They are wandering stars for whom the black darkness has been preserved forever (13). They are ungodly (15), slanderers of God (15), grumblers, fault-finders, arrogant, flatterers (16). They follow after their own lusts (16). They cause divisions; they are worldly-minded; they are devoid of the Spirit (19). With the world full of such people is it any wonder when it explodes? The Bible has already told us.

BAPTISM (JUNE 21, 2020)

Our denomination is part of a wider scope of Christians who call themselves, "Baptists." Baptism itself is not very precise as a moniker for any group of Christians since Christians in general all believe in baptism. All are Baptists in that sense. The term, "Baptist," describes someone who believes in believers baptism by immersion. When people believed in the early Church, they were baptized, publicly declaring themselves as disciples of Christ. In many places that puts a mark on you that you are against the way of the world and for the way of Christ. Being baptized is a courageous act in pagan societies because it can stir up persecution and isolate a person even from his own family. Baptism courageously and firmly owns the fact that you belong to Jesus and commit yourself publicly to following Him and serving Him only. Baptism without that is just getting wet. The Lord desires that our faith be seen and our testimony heard, and baptism is a seminal way we do that. Let's gather with joy and thanks to God for those being baptized tonight.

FIXING OUR GAZE (JUNE 28, 2020)

Keeping our eyes on Jesus is something proper for all of us every day of every year. The world and the devil it follows seek to distract us from Christ and to become embroiled in the cares and insanity of the current age. And what an age it is! And how many distractions there are! Our faith and confidence in the Lord will be crushed if we allow the world to capture our focus for long. One glance back to Sodom and Lot's wife was a pillar of salt. Our souls will be brightened by less CNN, Twitter, Facebook, and Google. Elijah got so depressed he thought he was the only person in the entire land who had not bowed the knee to Baal. When he got the real news he found he was not at all alone, and that God was still fully

in charge. We can still glance at the madness surrounding us, but let us never get entangled in it. We do not bury our heads in the sand, but we fix our gaze on our Lord. When we behold Him who endured such hostility of sinners against Himself, we will not grow weary and lose heart, but mount up with wings as eagles.

OUR DUTY TO CELEBRATE (July 5, 2020)

It is stylish now in one segment of our population to be ashamed of the founding of our country. A leading agitator and critic outright refused to celebrate, believing this nation to be an illegitimate and evil entity. He doesn't mean our nation has wickedness because it has departed from God. He means that he has not been treated properly and he blames the whole country for this oversight. He will never be happy or satisfied. In light of such statements I believe it is our duty to thank God for the founding of this country. In so many ways the beginning is amazing. Our founding fathers purposely sought to remove this nation's rule from a group of elitists and to place the power in the hands of the people. This is almost unheard of. This nation is still a prime target by the citizens of the world as the place they want to live. Now, without doubt, it's a mess. A lot of that is from leaving the original design of the founders. But let's not let the waywardness of this generation take away our thanksgiving to God for the nation which we live in. May God have mercy on it.

THE DEVIL YOU SAY (AUGUST 23, 2020)

If you want a sense of why the world is the way it is let's examine how the devil is. The Bible tells us the whole world lies under the power of the devil (1 John 5:19) and that the devil is the father who inspires the actions of his children. The devil is a murderer from the beginning. He does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44). He is a destroyer and is the power seen behind the beast and the false prophet when they embark on subduing the world to their wicked, godless rule. He is a deceiver who has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God (2 Corinthians 4:4). He inspires lawlessness and chaos (2 Thessalonians 2:3). He is the great tempter, tempting even our Lord Jesus in the wilderness and seeking His worship. He is a schemer (Ephesians 6:11). He prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8). He rages with hatred, which increases when he knows he has only a short time (Revelation 12:12).

WATER, WATER EVERYWHERE (AUGUST 30, 2020)

There is a line in a movie where a bunch of thirsty men arrive at a body of water of which not one drop is drinkable. Probably the ocean. "Water, water everywhere, and not a drop to drink." A hardship indeed. To be thirsty without water or Diet Mountain Dew to drink. Our land is not necessarily thirsty, but it is dehydrated, suffering the pangs of death—decay and corruption. Our land should be thirsty, and not just a little. Every cell in its dried-up body is screaming for the water of life. People are acting out like a toddler deprived of his sippy cup. But don't offer them water. They don't want that. The world offers sour wine to quench the thirst of the dying. But the water of life? It's a crime to even mention it in many places. "We'd rather thirst to death than take that pure water of life! Leave us to die!" And so they are dying. The gospel would make every single issue the world faces better were it to be obeyed. And in this country there is still "water, water everywhere" because the gospel is available and proclaimed by God's people. God says to drink it freely and live. But to these dying, there's not a drop to drink.

WHO'S IN CHARGE? (SEPTEMBER 6, 2020)

Pride is such a thing that men get drunk with it. We know how people are when they are drunk. They say wild things. They stumble about. They sometimes sing even when they can't. They exude much confidence in how to fix things they know nothing about.

One thing that drunk men think is that they are in charge. Nebuchadnezzar said, "Look at this great Babylon which I myself have built." This provoked God to drive him mad until he realized that the Most High ruled from heaven and that he gave power to whomever He wished, even the basest of men. Something happens in a majority of people who rise to power in this world. They feel sovereign. They think they are smarter than the Lord. They strut and carry themselves in an elitist manner. They get drunk with power. But the Lord alone is in charge. He alone reigns. He alone is on the throne. He alone has the wisdom and power to rule this world. And He alone will always be the supreme ruler.

SIN & SINNERS (SEPTEMBER 13, 2020)

A lot of people, even Christians, choke on the doctrine of election. They get dizzy over the sovereignty of God as the basis for our salvation. The "fix" offered for the difficulty of such concepts is to manufacture a way of viewing salvation that errs in two very fundamental ways. They make God less sovereign. They make man less sinful. Or they make God less able while making man more able. So they say things like "God chooses us on the basis of what He sees we are going to do." Or, "God does His part, but man must do his part." This is offered to liberate us from the confusion that supposedly is created when we say that God is absolutely sovereign and man is totally impotent. But it can be no other than the Bible states it to be, that salvation is wholly of grace and wholly of the Lord. Sinners are dead in trespasses and sins and have no will or desire in themselves to be saved, even though all sinners are responsible before God because we sinned in Adam. But this gives us hope. Since God has chosen to save, and only He can save, then sinners will be saved.

HITTING THE TARGET (SEPTEMBER 20, 2020)

Many games played while children grow up involved aiming at a target and hitting it right in the center. Maybe it's tossing a plastic ball into a clown's mouth. Or it could be shooting a stopper gun at a target with round circles and a big one in the middle. There are dart games for children (the non-pointy kind) and a dart board where the center is again the goal of the thrown dart. But it could also be shooting a basketball through a hoop, throwing a baseball right down the middle, tossing a football perfectly into the receiver's hands, or even pitching horseshoes to make a ringer. However, all these targets are potentials to us. We might hit the target and we might not. We will most certainly miss some of the time. More likely we will miss a lot of the time. Let's contrast this with the Lord's target—His elect. Does He target them potentially? Is it merely possible that He might hit the target? No indeed. "All that the Father gives me will come to me" (John 6:37). Our Lord hits 100% of His targets. Not one of His elect will fail to heed His effectual call and run to Him.

RIP ROARING HATE (OCTOBER 4, 2020)

Fewer evidences of an unregenerate and darkened heart can be found than the evidence of hate. Our world is in full-bore hate mode practically every second of every day. The President is sick—many openly and loudly hope for his death. Instead of bringing calm and peace, the media stirs up more trouble via Facebook, Twitter, CNN, newspapers, and internet blogs. Professional sports, which could be a means of uniting us, instead is quick to emblazon the fields, uniforms, and stadiums with divisive

and controversial slogans. Hatred skews every circumstance into a million reasons to spew hatred. When a person is filled with hatred, nothing can be done to turn that hatred away. Every event is interpreted to cast the worst light upon the hated person. Hate is destruction. The destroyer is the devil. Hate is the devil's poison. Jesus said that even calling a person a fool would make one guilty enough to go into the fiery hell. The first fruit of the Spirit is love. If a person has no influence from God's Holy Spirit in an experience of true salvation, don't be surprised if he is eaten alive by hate.

PRAY FOR OUR NATION (OCTOBER 11, 2020)

First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time. For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying) as a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth. Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension.

—1 Timothy 2:1-8—

HOME COMING ANNOUNCEMENT (OCTOBER 18, 2020)

Homecoming

Next Sunday

In the Old Testament we see a number of festivals ordered for God's people to come together and remember His great faithfulness and His mighty deeds. Our Homecoming celebration affords us the opportunity to take a day where we particularly exult in God's faithfulness to us and His numerous blessings.

Invite your friends and family to join as we gather next Sunday, October 25, for Homecoming. We will have a lunch following the morning service. See Debbie if you have any questions about what you can bring.

HOME COMING (OCTOBER 25, 2020)

Homecoming

Welcome to our Homecoming celebration.

We want to honor the faithfulness of our Lord toward us and His wonderful blessings. We also thank our Lord Jesus Christ that He is building His Church, and that the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

“O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together.”

We will be gathering for lunch after the service.

All are invited.

Let's enjoy our fellowship in the Lord.

This is the day the Lord has made.

We will rejoice and be glad in it.

PLAYING CHESS (NOVEMBER 15, 2020)

Chess is called the game of kings. Checkers is easy, but chess is hard. Checkers move in two basic ways, but chess pieces move in a much more complex manner. If you look at a checker board you can tell pretty quickly who's winning and what the next move might be. With chess it's a lot more difficult.

Sometimes a player is setting up an assault on your king in a way that you can't even guess. Chess unfolds a lot slower than checkers and can literally burn out a weak mind. We can metaphorically say that God plays chess. He has the mind for it. He sees all the moves in advance. He knows exactly where He is going and what He is doing. He also knows what the opposing player is up to. Chess isn't hard for

God. However, for those of us who watch the Lord's moves in life we often don't have any idea what His plan is. There are moves we would not have made. In fact, the moves we see God make look wrong to feeble minds. "What is He doing? That will never work out!" But the secret things belong to the Lord. He does all things well. In the end we marvel at His wisdom and tactics. Perhaps some things recently make you doubt. But God plays chess. And He's good at it.

THANKSGIVING (NOVEMBER 22, 2020)

It's very tempting to grow discouraged about Thanksgiving. Typically, very little true thanksgiving is offered to God on Thanksgiving Day. For the Christian, thanksgiving is a year-long sacrifice that pleases God. But in a secular society, football, food, and family gatherings are the substance of the holiday. This year, however, we have a reason to be encouraged about the holiday itself. Turns out a lot of godless people want to stop Thanksgiving. (Christmas is next.) Those who support the wholesale slaughter of innocent babies in the womb say they care so much about life that they recommend (or even insist) that no Thanksgiving gatherings occur this year. Or that they be curtailed. "If even one life is saved by cancelling Thanksgiving..." Well, you've heard the line. Are they trying to save us from a virus? Not even. They are trying to separate us from God. Even the concept of giving thanks to our Creator—they can't stomach it. The virus is an excuse to cover their true intentions. So take heart! The devil doesn't like Thanksgiving, even with all the secular elements. Let our thanksgiving this year be greater than ever because the devil and his people insist that we don't.

ESTHER (NOVEMBER 29, 2020)

A favorite book of many is the book of Esther. It covers a time in the history of Israel when their foes sought to destroy them, but were brilliantly defeated, and the Lord wrought a great deliverance. However, some have questioned whether Esther really should be in the Bible on the basis of a surprising fact: God is not mentioned in the entire book. No one prays to Him. No one invokes His name. His law is not applied to any situation, even that one in which Esther found herself in chapter two. To me, this fact makes the book even more a favorite. Although God is not mentioned in Esther, He is everywhere seen. He is there when Esther is chosen queen. He is there when Mordecai incites Haman. He is there at that special get-together with Esther, the king, and Haman. He is there when Haman built the gallows on which he planned to hang Mordecai. He was there when he instead had to parade Mordecai through the streets in honor. God is still the living and active God even when unseen. That's true in our times as well.

HOPE IN GOD (DECEMBER 6, 2020)

Why does the Bible emphasize that our hope is to be in God? Well, consider this. Can you hope in men to fix the fraudulent votes in the last election, if indeed they exist? Can you hope in the media to tell you

the truth? Can you hope in social networking to keep your private information private? Can you hope in your body that it will remain strong and filled with the vigor of youth? Can you hope in the money in your wallet or pocketbook not to sprout wings and fly away? Can you hope in the promise of a politician? Can you hope in those who say, "Yes, I am definitely going to visit your church on Sunday?" Can you hope in food prices going down? Can ladies hope in their permanent being permanent? Can you hope in your computer never breaking down? Can you hope in all your texts getting through? See? We can truly only hope in God, who is always faithful, always keeps His word, loves and understands us, and who will one day take us to heaven as He has promised.

CHRISTMAS CHEER (DECEMBER 13, 2020)

At Christmas it is common to speak of the Christmas spirit, and note how people tend to have optimism and joy with the season. For some, Christmas cheer is purchased at the liquor store. Others think of the gifts they hope to get. Families get together and have boisterous gaiety in numerous celebrations. It is such a blessed time of year that unbelievers in power are intent on canceling it and keeping us at home (but probably not them). But who has the best reason for Christmas cheer? Not those who hasten after a false god. "Their sorrows will be multiplied who hasten after another god" (Psalm 16:4). Interestingly, sorrows are also multiplied to "those who linger long over wine" (Proverbs 23:30). The Christian can say, must say, "You are my Lord; I have no good besides You" (Psalm 16:2). And, "The Lord is the portion of my inheritance and my cup" (Psalm 16:5). We not only can have cheer, we must. "Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance, and my God."

THE COMING MONTHS (DECEMBER 20, 2020)

We previously arranged our schedule for the Fall and Winter months to meet via Zoom for the evening services. We have decided to extend that to the morning services during that same period of time, so starting next Sunday morning, the Lord willing, we will meet via Zoom on Sunday mornings as well. This has the benefit of saving the church money on utility bills at a time when funds are short, and also we are getting ahead of any further outbreaks of COVID, which has been more common of late in the Orangeburg area.

Additionally, we have chosen to cancel our regular Christmas dinner that was scheduled for this coming Wednesday night. We will still meet via Zoom on Wednesday night and do our best to make it a special Christmas gathering even without the good food and in-person fellowship we normally enjoy.

Special thanks to our church for your faithfulness this year and investing yourself in this family and ministry. We pray the Lord will enrich us all in His service.

BACK AGAIN (APRIL 4, 2021)

I want to thank God and all of you for the months of Zoom meetings we have had. Our previous Sunday morning service here at the building was on December 20, 2020. It was, I think, about the third time we had started services back at our building and then moved them again to Zoom. We maintain the ability to meet via Zoom and will do so when and if the situation warrants.

My thanksgiving is in regard to the good spirit and faithfulness our church has exercised during the Zoom period. Our fellowship has been sweet. We have been able to share our concerns. And we have still had the ministry of the Word. This period gave me time to travel to various locales to preach (via Zoom backgrounds). Some days I (your pastor) was in a snowy region. At other times the stars were out.

Mountains were visited. The constant reality was our love for each other and fellowship in His Spirit around His Word. You have maintained your devotion to this family. While many seek to halt the worship of God and employ a pandemic to justify it, yet the Lord is still on the throne in glory.

GOD NEVER LOSES (April 11, 2021)

We would need a mammoth calculator to count all the times this past week where the will of the Lord has been rejected. The sheer audacity of puny men who stand up against God is enough to make our head swim, as my grandmother used to say. Lunacy, pride, insanity, cluelessness—such words are not enough to properly express the mindlessness and rebelliousness of the human race against the God of heaven. God has commanded from heaven and men have refused to hear and obey. If we could have bought stock in STUPID a few years ago we would today have enough money from the dividends to pay off the national debt. But God, in spite of all human hostility, is not on a losing streak. He hasn't even lost. Not one time. He has never attempted something and failed. He has never been successfully opposed by sinners. And so it shall ever be. So let's focus on our never-losing God, lest our minds be rattled by the foolishness of unprincipled men. God never ever loses!

KEEPING FOCUS (April 18, 2021)

How long can a driver take his or her eyes off the road before it becomes a danger? Sometimes in a larger city one wonders if drivers ever look at the road. But most people would say that you can risk only a fraction of a second before it becomes increasingly more likely that you will have an accident. There are many things to distract a driver from watching the road. There's the radio. Phones. Billboards. Scenery. Other drivers. Road signs. Best Buy. However, the good driver does not require that all distractions be eliminated. That is unrealistic. A good driver makes sure that no distraction interferes with the proper operation of the vehicle under their control. Thus it is also for the saint. We cannot allow the world to distract us from the way of Christ. We cannot allow our priorities to be changed by the bluster of an ungodly world. We cannot allow it to discourage us and make us pull off the road and give up. We must always be "looking unto Jesus" and keeping to our love and service to Him.

UNBELIEF (April 25, 2021)

Unbelief is a chronic problem resulting from sin. Unbelief permeates every corpuscle of humans in their natural state. Unbelief is not just a passive, neutral position whereby unbelievers wait to be convinced to believe. Unbelief is an active rejection of the truth concerning God and His will. Unbelief is the cynical outworking of a predisposition to reject absolute truth. It is the product of a heart that has already concluded the Bible is fiction. That God is not real. That the laws of God are non-binding. That miracles are preposterous. That sin is a myth. That church gatherings are harmful. Unbelief is sinful bias. Unbelievers are not higher forms of life with more highly developed minds that have been brought into a state of pure logic and reason. Unbelievers are foolish. They have not even begun to gain wisdom, understanding, and knowledge because they don't fear the Lord. Never let unbelievers make you feel foolish or odd because you believe in God. Praise God for opening our eyes to truth.

IT IS GOOD (May 2, 2021)

It is good to give thanks to the LORD and to sing praises to Your name, O Most High;
To declare Your lovingkindness in the morning and Your faithfulness by night,
With the ten-stringed lute and with the harp, with resounding music upon the lyre.

For You, O LORD, have made me glad by what You have done, I will sing for joy at the works of Your hands. —Psalm 92:1-4—

At the beginning of the day we declare the Lord's lovingkindness as the foundation for our expectations for the hours that lie ahead. At night we recall the day just passed and declare how the Lord has exercised faithfulness throughout the day we have just lived. The Lord makes us glad by what He does.

THE HELP OF THE LORD (MAY 16, 2021)

“Thus far the Lord has helped us.”

—1 Samuel 7:12—

This was the significance of the stone named Ebenezer, which Samuel set up after the Lord subdued the Philistines and broke their oppression over Israel. It means that the Lord's help is current, right up to this very moment. With each new expression of God's gracious support, He has helped us “thus far.” The Lord's faithfulness, kindness, mercy, and grace exist well beyond the place where we set up the stone of Ebenezer. Wherever we stop to memorialize the help of God is only a point along the way where we have found the Lord's aid sufficient for the need. Were we to peer into the distance beyond our memorial stone, we could not see to the end of the help of our God. “From everlasting to everlasting, You are God” (Psalm 90:2). Thus far, to this very day, the Lord has helped us. We will find the same is true when we place the next stone of Ebenezer.

THE GIFT OF FREEDOM (MAY 23, 2021)

One glaring characteristic in the start of this country was the universal pursuit of freedom. Whether it be the Pilgrims seeking a safe haven to worship God freely, or the colonialists attempting to shake off the oppressive rule of the King of England, freedom was foremost in thought and action. Great sacrifices were made in the cause of liberty. “Give me liberty, or give me death,” Patrick Henry proclaimed in 1775. Freedom is also one of the hallmarks of Christians. “It was for freedom that Christ set us free...” (Galatians 5:1). “If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36). However, Paul noted that the Corinthians willingly submitted to bondage to false apostles. “For you tolerate it if anyone enslaves you, anyone devours you, anyone takes advantage of you, anyone exalts himself...” (2 Corinthians 11:20). We see this same surrender today both in religious and secular matters. It is a sinful defect in human nature to choose bondage over freedom. Ultimately, it is characteristic of the work of our great enemy, the devil, who seeks to keep his children forever in bondage to sin and error.

STIRRING UP TROUBLE (MAY 30, 2021)

Like one who takes a dog by the ears

Is he who passes by and meddles with strife not belonging to him.

—Proverbs 26:17—

Whereas Christians are called by God to love one another and seek the betterment of society by being a sweet savor of Christ to it, many in the world have an entirely different perspective. They not only *seek* to cause trouble, they *want* to cause trouble. “They cannot sleep unless they do evil” (Proverbs 4:16). Observe how the unregenerate behave in our country. They do not want solutions. They want to multiply problems and create more hostility. They want hate to rule. They are offended at every turn. They are never appeased. Never forgiving. Never understanding or patient. Then when their constant agitating

breaks forth in turmoil, they are quick to blame others and play the victim. The solution to our country's ill manners is regeneration by the Holy Spirit through the message of the gospel. Then love, joy, and peace will be stirred up.

YOU GOTTA HEAR THIS (JUNE 6, 2021)

A fool does not delight in understanding, but only in revealing his own mind.
—Proverbs 18:2—

Philosophies come and go, and the one guiding philosophy that has come into our current society claims we can't really know anything absolutely. This philosophy's by-product is to cast into doubt all things that once were absolutely certain. In the midst of such madness, there are those who try to hold on to the logical and even common-sense realities that have until recently been universally accepted. In the eyes of our insane world, such attempts are met with the most severe consternation. The new morality; the new science; the new biology; the new history; none of these disciplines want to be corrected or even opposed. There is no delight in understanding, but only in revealing the new mind (or mindlessness, as it turns out). Why are people's lives being cancelled because of comments that are averse to the accepted wisdom (foolishness, as it turns out)? Because fools are not about getting understanding. They only want to reveal their lack of it.

THE SBC (JUNE 20, 2021)

When our church started there was a battle within the Southern Baptist Convention over the nature of Scripture. Some held the biblical view that the Bible is inerrant in its original writings, kept pure by the Holy Spirit as authors recorded the very words of God. A significant number of other Southern Baptists believed the Bible contained errors of geography, history, science, etc., although a number of those would believe the faith parts were inerrant. That is known as the unbiblical position on biblical inerrancy. Eventually, the inerrantist position won out, and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship was born out of the Southern Baptist Convention comprised of the moderates and liberals who would not let go of their belief that the Bible was full of errors. That may now be ancient history, but it reminds us that our denomination is full of lost people. Many in positions of authority in the SBC are more concerned with what the world thinks of us than what God does. So the current battle is against Critical Race Theory and this whole trend of the world toward being "woke" in matters of social justice, alternate sexualities, etc. So, it's right back to following the world again instead of God. We must pray for more saved Southern Baptists.

BE OF GOOD CHEER (JUNE 27, 2021)

Our Lord Jesus spoke these words on several occasions, perhaps the most familiar being as He was preparing His disciples for His arrest in Gethsemane (John 16:33). The command is translated "take courage" and "take heart" in other translations, but my favorite is, "Be of good cheer." The full verse is, "I have told these things to you, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." What would you identify as the main source of your sorrow? What irritates you the most? What makes you most discouraged? Whatever the answer, it is in the world. The madness, chaos, perversion, foolishness, godlessness, hatred, ignorance, darkness, corruption, injustice, and all other things evil are rampant in this world. It seems as though the world has taken its throne on high and rules over the sons of men. But is it so? No, for Jesus has overcome the world. It still has that power to bring trouble galore. But what does our gracious Lord offer His children?

Peace and gladness. “Be of good cheer!” It’s a choice we make based on the reality of His unassailable triumph and eternal power. The Greek is in the active tense: “Be of good cheer and don’t ever stop!”

INDEPENDENCE DAY (July 4, 2021)

The original concept of independence in our country was that it was provided by God from the tyranny of British rule. In many ways it was a very improbable attainment since the British army was comprised of professionals, well-financed and well-armed by an established world power. Also, there were many “loyalists” among the colonists who opposed the fight for independence, preferring instead to remain under the dominion of King George. Independence without the guiding principles of God’s absolute sovereignty and holy law turns into chaos and oppression. True freedom is only attained through Jesus Christ. “If the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed.” But enslavement to sin makes our nation less and less truly independent and free. Today, independence is defined by greater distance from God. Men of corrupt minds think themselves freer the more space they put between the living God and their own desires. This is why true freedom will always be precipitated by a return to God. If our nation would be independent, it must break ties with the devil, the god of this world. Our country is still great in many ways and is wrought by God, but greater days await when we draw near to God instead of running away from Him.

Fixing vs. Avoiding (July 11, 2021)

We all likely have several things around the house that need fixing. It is common for things to fall into disrepair. However, it is not always a delight to get to the fixing part. It may not be a difficult fix, but the fix is avoided for a time. Yet, avoidance only makes the fix loom larger in our minds. At some point we will turn our attention to fixing the problem and enjoy a lighter heart as a result. Sinners tend to avoid God’s fix for their sin. You can tell them it is an easy fix in that it involves receiving a free gift—that Jesus Christ has already done all the work. However, true repentance is hard, for we must face the enormity of our sin and guilt before God and surrender our lives to Him in faith, breaking from sin and running to Jesus. So, sinners put it off indefinitely. Some vow to fix it someday, even as they take their last breath. Meanwhile, the weight of sin and guilt continues to press down on them, and finding a place to be relieved of it in the world is futility. But once our sin and alienation from God is fixed by the Lord Jesus Christ we are set free from the law of sin and death, and rise to new life in Christ. Fixing our sin through the Lord Jesus is the only answer, for our debt of sin truly cannot be avoided.

If THEY Kill BABIES (July 18, 2021)

“He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much” (Luke 16:10)

Mask mandates were again issued for Los Angeles County for all people, vaccinated and unvaccinated.

Some school districts have already mandated that little children will be required to mask up during school in the Fall. The purpose of these mandates is said to be over concern for saving lives. The former Planned Parenthood president and now a CNN medical contributor said that states “need indoor mask mandates now, and that’s not going to happen, so we’re going to get more preventable deaths.”

Preventable deaths, she says! Here we have a woman who presided over the top abortion provider expressing concern over deaths that could be prevented by indoor mask mandates. As though anyone who thought killing babies in the womb was bothered by preventable deaths! The preferred method of abortionists for avoiding COVID in children is to kill them in the womb. Our Lord tied faithfulness in

much to faithfulness in little. If masks work we'll need someone who doesn't kill babies to tell us that. Our Lord entrusts more to those who are faithful in little rather than to those who are unfaithful in much (Luke 19:17).

GOD'S WORKS AT CREATION (July 25, 2021)

One way we can see the importance of beholding the works of the Lord is to note how those outside of Christ act toward them. One blaring example is what the world has done with God's work of creation. In place of His mighty creative acts, the world has foisted evolution upon us—a mindless, non-scientific, aimless accident arising from chaos. The Bible tells us God made the heavens and the earth. He made light, and separated it from darkness. He created an expanse between the waters below and the waters above, calling the expanse, heaven. The waters He called seas. He created dry land and called it earth. He made plants spring forth producing vegetation of its own kind—fruits, vegetables, trees, flowers, etc. He made the sun to rule the day, and the moon to rule the night, and put all the stars in the heavens. He poured life into the sea and land animals on the earth. He made man in His image and breathed into him the breath of life. He gave him a companion suitable for him, and placed them both in a glorious garden in which they enjoyed their work and relationship, with each other and with the God who made them.

Seeing God's work in the beginning bolsters our devotion to God ever after. Behold the works of the Lord!

LET'S HELP OUR CHILDREN (AUGUST 1, 2021)

Our world has a very strange way of helping children these days. If a child is able to escape the womb, with so many mothers seeking to destroy them before they are born, they are faced with a slew of other matters that naturally call for help from adults. Some adults are zealous about helping them make proper gender choices. Other adults want to scare children to death about climate change. A vast number of public schools want to educate students in paganism and divisiveness and false religions, all while making sure they know that $2 + 2$ does not necessarily equal 4. So-called health experts want to mask them. Many advocate drugs for them so they can settle down and not be too rowdy in class. With friends like these, who needs enemies?

Christians should help children learn the fear of the Lord. To know and meditate upon the mighty works of our great God. To love the Lord from a very early age. To seek the Lord while He may be found. To build godliness and righteousness at the core of their young souls. That is help indeed! Let's help and encourage our children in these good things.

SPACELY'S SPACE SPROCKETS & COGSWELL'S COGS (AUGUST 8, 2021)

The sharp minds among us will recognize these two companies prominent in the classic cartoon, The Jetsons. George Jetson worked for Spacely's with the chief competition offered by Mr. Cogswell's company. I do not know what Spacely's sprockets or Cogswell's cogs did. I know they were important enough for two companies to make nothing but sprockets and cogs. Also, they sound small. I think if a sprocket or a cog went bad, then your aircraft would cease to operate. The failure of a little cog or sprocket might make your ship fall right out of the sky. The Lord does not make reference to sprockets and cogs, but He does speak of body parts, and that the Church is made up of little parts that are essential in the health of the entire body. As a Christian we all hold different places in the body of Christ, some prominent and others not. But God wants every sprocket and cog to work in serving Him and building up His body.

LOOK IN THE RIGHT PLACE (AUGUST 15, 2021)

One thing that is certain for all seeking to find a certain object you have lost is that until you look in the right place you will not find it. If you look for peace and joy in the world, a lasting bliss that will endure not only in this world but in that to come, you will never find it because it's the wrong place to look. There is absolutely no surprise whatsoever when we don't find something where it cannot be found. Yet people are constantly wondering why they are disappointed by the wisdom of the world; why things don't get better from generation to generation; why we still struggle with the same problems history tells us have been faced by every period of time. It's because people don't look in the right place. Do you wonder why the Bible never tells us to look for peace in the world? Because it can't be found there. That's the same reason I haven't found a chest of gold in my back yard. It isn't there. The only solution given by the Word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit, God's message to a world that languishes in the throes of sin, is to look unto the Lord and be saved, all the ends of the earth. (Isaiah 45:22)

REMEMBER YOUNG PEOPLE!

A few weeks back I challenged our young people to study the works of God in the Bible. To learn them and think on them and let them occupy their minds. To become more familiar with the works of God than with the works of people in the world. This will give a proper perspective on the world and produce the fear of the Lord. The fear of the Lord, not education, is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge. Without the fear of the Lord there isn't enough education in the world to keep you from being foolish. I also challenge the adults to help the young people know and understand the works of the Lord. We can encourage them in that task and duty. We can talk of God's works in the daily course of our lives. This is what God commanded Israel so that they would never forget the things the Lord had done for them. When they forgot the Lord they wandered from Him and fell into destruction. Young minds have a capacity for knowing the things of God. It begins with salvation and then continues with opening wide our mouths for the Lord to feed us. It's way better than any homework and will save your life.

SEASONS (SEPTEMBER 26, 2021)

Most people have much delight in changes of seasons. It's nice after the hard Winters we have in these parts to feel the warmth of Spring. It's especially nice to go from the heat of Summer to the cooler days of Fall, which we have been enjoying of late. What we might not realize is that seasons such as we know today are by-products of the world-wide flood in the days of Noah. Before the Flood, the earth was similar to a terrarium, with a vapor canopy surrounding the earth, and making for a moderate climate from pole to pole. It is believed that the extremes in weather were not part of the original design of the earth. When the canopy was broken to provide water for the Flood, the result is what we know today. Some areas are moderate while other areas have extreme heat and cold. Even in judgment, the Lord makes something beautiful in its wake. The chill of Fall. The blustery wintry blizzards (not so much here). These things may not have been common in the days before the Flood. However, the Lord has not left us in ruins post-Flood. Instead He enriches our seasons.

THE LORD KNEW ABOUT THESE TIMES (OCTOBER 3, 2021)

It is very easy to think that we live in the craziest times in the history of mankind, and we very well may. Not crazy in a zany way, but crazy as in certifiable loony. The latest version of the left's spending proposals was reported to reference "men who give birth." The male weightlifter in the Olympics was just proclaimed "Sportswoman of the Year." The danger is that such lunacy may discourage believers

who still hope in the grace of God unto salvation for our sinful world. Fret not. In the last days difficult times will come. Peter said we should be on our guard so that we are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men, and fall away from our own steadfastness (2 Peter 3:17). Paul warned us to make sure we were not taken captive through philosophy and empty deception—something that the world has not made sure of for themselves. These wicked days are the latest in a history of wickedness that has marched through time. It confirms the Word of God that people need the Lord, and that the Lord is just to judge those who reject the truth and grace of God. We must remain steadfastly sane in the Lord.

WHAT THE LORD DID THIS PAST WEEK (OCTOBER 10, 2021)

People who lived in earlier times viewed their pagan gods as easily upset, hard to appease, and in many ways in need of help from those who worshiped them. Their gods had rivals—other gods that fought for supremacy. Out on the water you would need to appeal to Poseidon. Maybe Zeus would be your go-to god for the mainland. The whole pantheon of pagan gods is too much to keep up with. And when the world got out of hand you really couldn't be sure that your god was on his game. The true God is no fanciful character dreamed up by pagans. He revealed Himself to us and always accomplishes His will. He is never frustrated. He has no rivals. He doesn't need to be informed about the goings on down here on earth. He never has a bad week. He never accomplishes less in a week than He intended. When things are all askew here He is catching the worldly wise in their own craftiness. We may fret; He never does. That's why He tells us not to fret. With the Lord enthroned in heaven, the child of God is perfectly safe even in the fiercest of storms. And what was true last week is true all this week as well.

HOME COMING ANNOUNCEMENT (OCTOBER 17, 2021)

As the leaves begin to fall and the hint of snow is in the air along with all those cold breezes from the north and prospects of ice on the fields of harvest, we look toward celebrating another Homecoming.

Homecoming will be on October 31 and will consist of the normal good times of fellowship and food around the worship of God and study of His Word.

We are a blessed people all through the year even though we are afflicted by many trials typical of this world. Yet, we remain resolute and firm in our faith and ask the Lord for a bounty of thanksgiving to Himself as His children recognize His faithfulness and kindness to us. If we ever needed the Lord before, we sure do need Him now. The Lord reigns. Let the earth rejoice.

HOME COMING APPROACHING (OCTOBER 24, 2021)

Every chilling morning breeze reminds us that Homecoming is approaching. Those little pellets of ice and snow that greet us at the start of the day are harbingers of a brutal winter ahead, but also of the bliss of our gathering in thanksgiving to God for His faithfulness to our church.

Homecoming will be on October 31 and will consist of the normal good times of fellowship and food around the worship of God and study of His Word.

Although the world does not treasure God's faithfulness and memories of His covenant love in past years, the people of God are famous for such remembrances and cherishing of God's bounty to us in Christ. His lovingkindness is everlasting. His compassion is great and reaches to the innermost part of our being. We have a great God.

HOME COMING (OCTOBER 31, 2021)

We truly rejoice in the Lord today for His lovingkindness is great to the heavens and His truth to the clouds. We might truly ask, as David did in Psalm 8, “What is man that you take thought of Him, and the son of man that you care for him?” The Lord is great to all, and His mercies are over all His works.

The Lord has done great things for us and we are glad. These things are fit musings for all times. Homecoming is the day we think back of all God’s blessings to us and renew our commitment to serve such a kind and gracious God.

We may have very little good news from the world, but in the Lord as He speaks to us in His Word we are showered with blessings of glad tidings. To Him be all glory!

We will have lunch here immediately following the service and all are encouraged to join us.

WHO’S BEHIND ALL THIS? (NOVEMBER 7, 2021)

I bet when you saw the above title you immediately thought the answer was “God,” and you would of course be right, but I am thinking of something more in the area of the underlings in this world. The powers behind those actions of evil men. For that we have this verse: “...the whole world lies in the power of the evil one” (1 John 5:19). Not that evil men are not responsible for evil in this world. Nothing could be clearer than that the Lord will judge the evil of men, and we can be assured that all the wickedness being dumped out in the world will have a full reckoning from our holy and righteous Sovereign. However, the devil is the god of this world, and as the above verse teaches, is the power manipulating ungodly men to his will. Yes, they follow his will gladly and willingly, but they do so as children of the devil, held captive to do his will. The devil will have his own magnificent day of judgment. He does not intimidate the Lord God. Men have a great capacity for evil in our naturally darkened, unregenerate hearts. Left to ourselves we are a factory of evil. See the power of the devil behind that evil and you can understand why things are such a mess.

THANKSGIVING (NOVEMBER 14, 2021)

In our country, thanksgiving is mostly a 1 out of 365 (366 on leap years) days practice. And on that one day that Thanksgiving is proclaimed as a holiday (and properly so), there are 1,440 minutes. How many of those minutes are given to thanksgiving? Probably the majority of the country makes sure to proclaim thankfulness to God for ZERO minutes and ZERO seconds. A great many more devote less than 60 seconds to thanksgiving, and that’s if they say grace before the Thanksgiving meal. Our nation is awash with un-thankfulness. Not giving thanks is a characteristic not just of unbelief, but of pagan ignorance and superstition (Romans 1:21). Thankfulness is the duty of every person made in the image of God. I commend setting aside a day for Thanksgiving, but the payment of thanks to God will not be sufficient from a holiday on which so few minutes are given to thanking God. Christians must carry the load in that regard. Let us not fall short of it. Thanksgiving is not merely a day for Christians, but a life. What a difference our lives are when we are a thankful people. But the point is that it glorifies God. We are created for that purpose—to glorify God.

OUR LORD’S FAVOR (DECEMBER 12, 2021)

There is a huge difference in the way people who love us treat us as opposed to people who do not. A purely formal type of relationship lacks the heart and drive to give the appropriate response, whether it

be compassion, aid, understanding, or diligence. Many areas in society that were designed to help us end up being adversarial to us. That's why people often fight their insurance company trying to get medicine the doctor said they need. If these companies can't see personal benefit for themselves, they are not much interested in benefitting others. Our God has every right and just reason to be an adversary to us, but the very opposite is true. Even those who are His enemies are abundantly blessed as He suffers long over their rebellion against Him. His children fall into an even loftier class of favor. He lavishes His love upon us. He is always eager to bless His children. Our relationship with Christ never degenerates into an "us versus them" state. Our Father loves us like He loves His beloved Son, because in Him we are pleasing in His sight and greatly loved.

OUR LORD'S FAVOR (DECEMBER 19, 2021)

There are many aspects of Christmas celebrations in our land that are not biblical. Not all are unbiblical by any means. The winter wonderland. Dreaming of a white Christmas. Family gatherings. Giving and receiving gifts. There is a spirit of Christmas that tends to turn even Ebenezer Scrooge into a nice person. Most people have very fond recollections of Christmas in years past, and it is generally anticipated with great eagerness in the years to come. We even have a saying that something is "slow as Christmas," which means that we look forward so much to Christmas that it seems to arrive much too slowly. However, without the Lord Jesus Christ as the center of our understanding of Christmas, other celebrations are only of this world. They miss the significance of the coming of Christ to redeem us from our sins and give us eternal life. The Lord is kind in giving joy to the world even in things worldly, but how rich we are as Christians who have the knowledge of eternal life and the graciousness of our God to come to earth to bring us to Himself. The Christian has the merriest of Christmases because we know what it's all about in the first place.

A GOOD START FOR THE NEW YEAR (JANUARY 2, 2022)

Psalm 92:1-2 It is good to give thanks to the LORD and to sing praises to Your name, O Most High; To declare Your lovingkindness in the morning and Your faithfulness by night...

Psalm 92 is said, in its title, to be a Song for the Sabbath. It speaks of a span of time beginning with morning and ending at night. It emphasizes two themes in the praise and thanksgiving to the Lord on the Sabbath Day. It begins with the anticipation of God's lovingkindness in the coming day, so it is declared in the morning. It ends with reflection on His faithfulness in the day when it is passed, and so it is declared at night.

Let's make it a song for the New Year. Let's anticipate God's lovingkindness on January 1 on the basis of His favor given to us by grace through our Lord Jesus Christ, with whom God is always well-pleased. Let's jump ahead to December 31 and know that the Lord will be faithful to His people and His plan all year. That makes for a Happy New Year!

NON-ENLIGHTENMENT (JANUARY 9, 2022)

Ephesians 4:17-19 So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.

This is a self-declared enlightened age. We now claim to view things progressively, shaking off the ignorance of the past. Our world glories in calling light, darkness; darkness, light; good, evil; evil, good; right, wrong; wrong, right; male, female; female, male. This age literally misses every question on the test and proclaims loudly how smart it is! The above verses reveal that it is not an intellectual problem, but a spiritual one that corrupts the intellect. The lost live in futility, with darkened minds, and hard hearts. A new heart and new mind is needed and this comes not from education or worldly philosophy, but from Christ.

THE ANSWER TO HUMANISM (MARCH 13, 2022)

Humanism is what the world hopes in. That is, what humans can accomplish. What humans can fix. What humans can teach. What humans can overcome. Humanism itself, as a philosophy and approach to life, believes in the power of humans to make the best society. So people hope in education, government, opinions, science, etc. for solutions to the problems humans face. That specific branch of humanism is called Optimistic Humanism. That means there is an inherent confidence that someday we will get it right as humans, with human power and wisdom. The other branch of humanism is Pessimistic Humanism. This branch still relies on human skill and cunning to overcome the issues of life, but not with so much assurance that it will succeed. The Pessimistic Humanist has felt the bite of reality—that humans really aren't doing a very good job at this fixing thing.

Of course humanism itself is opposed to the teaching of the Bible. We do not trust in the power of humans but in the power and wisdom of God. It is not healthy to get our morality and understanding from human foundations, but only from God. Humans are always disagreeing with God and His Word. They speak of an answer apart from “all this religious junk.” But let God be true, and every man a liar. The only answer to the very serious issues our world faces is the power, wisdom, grace, and mercy of our great God.

A REMINDER TO THE YOUNG (MARCH 20, 2022)

Now is the time for the young to read and learn the Bible. Let's encourage them to spend time daily in the Word of God and little by little gain understanding, wisdom, and knowledge in the things of God. There are many exciting stories as well as numerous teachings that will make their lives better as they mature. They will have answers to very basic problems of which the world is ignorant. They will protect themselves and those they love from many harmful consequences of foolishness. Most importantly, they will learn to know God and to love Him.

THE GIDEONS (MARCH 27, 2022)

We welcome Mr. Don Johnson as our Gideons representative this morning to report on the ministry of Gideons International. It has been the joy of this church to yearly provide time for the Gideons to update us on how the Lord is using them and enable us to contribute however we can to provide the Bibles they distribute throughout the world. It is hard to envision a more pure and vital ministry that that which the Gideons perform. Only God knows how often the Bibles they have distributed have borne fruit unto salvation or drawn a discouraged saint to the wellspring of living waters that is the Word of God. Our world is not doing very well using its own word, so the contrast to the Word of God has possibly never been greater in our lifetimes. Let's pray that the Word of God will take root in our society and transform it—a work of God that is impossible for mortal man to achieve. Mr. Johnson will stand at the back

following the morning service and you can give him whatever offering to the Gideons you desire at that time.

HOW OUR NATION CAN RECOVER (April 10, 2022)

“Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach (disgrace) to any people.” (Proverbs 14:34)

There are many solutions offered to the problems of our world. Some say we need new politicians. A new president. New congress. New Speaker of the House. New laws. Old laws. While these things may have some merit in some cases, none of these strike the heart of the problem. What we need in our nation is righteousness. We are not made to thrive in sin. We can't just declare immorality to be righteousness and circumvent the destructive effects that sin naturally and universally has on society. We, on the other hand, are made to do righteousness. Of course, because of the Fall, we cannot do it. We can only achieve our highest point when we do what is pleasing to the Lord. We are not self-destructive when we are righteous, and all of society is bettered. The above verse is an absolute truth. In all ages and among all people, righteousness exalts a nation and sin is a disgraceful reproach to every single person.

THE RESURRECTION (April 17, 2022)

Sometimes it is suggested that Christianity would be better received in the world if Christians would just jettison some of the sensational aspects that are so hard for the world to believe. The world scoffs at miracles so it is suggested we might want to make much less of them, or even deny them as merely the enthusiastic overreach of some of the early disciples. We should tone down the doctrine of hell, and widen the way to heaven. And of course we need to rethink the resurrection of Jesus Christ. People just don't rise from the dead, and if we keep insisting that Jesus did we are hurting our own religion, we are told. Well the other side of that is why not just tell the truth and challenge the world to accept it? Jesus did indeed rise from the dead. Shouldn't we proclaim it loudly? Why shouldn't God raise Jesus from the dead? Is it too hard for Him? Rather, let God be true and every man a liar. Do we really want God to be just as weak and impotent as humans? The resurrection of Jesus declared Him to be the Son of God with power. The world denies this at its own peril.

OUR MIGHTY CAPTAIN (April 24, 2022)

The passage we study today presents the Lord as a mighty captain with a drawn sword ready to embark in battle for His glory. Let us not forget that this is always the mind of the Lord. Although He may appear to be silent to our ears, He is the ever-living, active, and mighty warrior who zealously works His will in this world. He is not complacent and resigned. Don't allow discouragement to take over your heart when you see the rebellion of mankind against the Lord. He is still our mighty captain. Remember that the Lord sometimes gives what appears to be success to His enemies only as a means to make them fall harder. Esther teaches us this with Haman. Would we elevate such a wicked man as Haman and endow upon him many honors and riches? Not in a million years. But the Lord raised him so high that when he crashed the whole world reverberated with the glory of the Lord. We may not know precisely what God is doing, but we know that He *is doing*. And He does all things well.

DISCERNMENT (May 1, 2022)

We all can see that our world is increasing in wickedness and bearing the consequences of alienation from God. We pray the Lord will reap a great ingathering from fields that we hope are white for harvest. We pray the Lord will send laborers into the harvest field that souls might be won to Christ. We rightly

hope for a change in the ways of the world and that the course of this world, through the Holy Spirit's enlightenment and regeneration, will radically turn Godward and away from lust, covetousness, and pride. In the meantime, we are not left without protection. We must be discerning. We must protect those we love by detecting evil and blocking its entry and influence. We must have our radars constantly attuned to warn us when harmful doctrines and philosophies seek to worm their way into our lives and infect those we cherish. We must stand in the gap for ourselves and for those in our care. We don't have to be victims. We can and must be victors!

MOTHERS (MAY 8, 2022)

We must be careful that we don't allow the world to dictate and define the times for being thankful for the good things the Lord gives to us. We don't need Hallmark to decree that this day is the day we recognize—for one day of the year—people who are precious and beloved. We have commands from God that direct our thanksgiving. "In everything give thanks." "Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving." However, in the midst of a year in which we constantly thank God for His infinite kindnesses to us, we certainly don't mind a day specially set aside to remember those we can never truly forget. We love our mothers. For those whose mothers have passed from this world, we still love our mothers. Paul likened his gentle treatment of the Thessalonians "as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children." It is hard to imagine a more fitting example of unbounded love and affection than from a mother. So today we think of our mothers, and are we ever thankful!

CREATION (MAY 15, 2022)

The #1 wise, intellectual, sophisticated, honorable, scientific, factual, respectable, brainy, modern, progressive, sharp, knowledgeable, academic, logical, cerebral, scholarly, rational, and highbrow position on how we got here is via natural evolution. Or as God would judge it, the #1 foolish, silly, unwise, imprudent, irrational, stupid, crazy, unscientific, unfounded, unsupported, unproven, made up, fake, illogical, dumb, shameful, dishonorable, dull, and unscholarly position on how we got here. Our text today shows how significant the split between creation and natural origins is. The thinking in our world is completely opposed to what we see around us and what God has declared to us. It's not just a matter of opinion. Creation is the first act of God in this world and directs all beings to Him. Animals, plants, dirt, flowers, sky, stars, trees, rocks, rivers, seas, wind, rain, snow, clouds, and even insects don't rebel against their Creator. Humans do. Evolution is the big lie, and continues to infect our world with the consequences.

AN ENEMY? (MAY 22, 2022)

One thing that surprises us as Christians is how much animosity it expressed against what the Bible teaches as truth. Truth is our friend. To be reconciled to God is to be reconciled to truth. If something is harmful, truth tells us so we can avoid it or stop it. Truth is what gives us peace when tests come back showing we are healthy and have no cause for worry. Even though we want a good report from the doctor above all else, we still want the report to be founded in truth. Jesus proclaimed in His prayer to the Father in John 17, "Your Word is truth." Do we really want to imagine something false is true? Or do we want to be deceived by a non-truth? Truth is not an enemy unless it is made one by those who do not want the truth. The truth can only be true. It can't lie to you. It can't mislead you. It can't misdirect you. It can't give you false hope. The greatest peace is not in fantasizing something as true, but in knowing that something is true. Truth is the foundation of God's throne now and for all eternity.

DIRECTING OUR GAZE (JUNE 5, 2022)

We all would love it if every day the world inclined itself to encourage us. That every bit of great news was channeled to us without effort on our part. That there was nothing to filter out. No danger to ward off. We could meditate on things that are good without distraction. Well, we live in the real world, and the world is hostile to us. Christians must focus our gaze on treasures in heaven. We must fasten our minds on the Lord. We must think on Jesus, lest we grow weary and become discouraged. We have to choose what to expose our hearts to. We must watch our hearts with all diligence, since out of it are the issues of life. There is great reward in such endeavors. David said he would rather spend a day in the house of the Lord than a thousand in the tents of wickedness. To behold the beauty of the Lord. To inquire of Him. To fellowship with Him. Sometimes bad days crash over us no matter what we do, but those minds occupied on the things of God are in the strongest place to not only survive, but thrive in the goodness of the Lord.

IF WE COULD SEE BEYOND TODAY (JUNE 12, 2022)

If we could see beyond today as God can see;
If all the clouds should roll away, the shadows flee;
O'er present griefs we would not fret;
Each sorrow we would soon forget;
For many joys are waiting yet for you and me.

If we could know beyond today as God doth know;
Why dearest treasures pass away and tears must flow;
And why the darkness leads to light,
Why dreary days will soon grow bright;
Some day life's wrongs will be made right;
Faith tells us so.

If we could see, if we could know we often say;
But God in love a veil doth throw across our way;
We cannot see what lies before
And so we cling to Him the more;
He leads us till this life is o'er;
Trust and obey.
—Abigail Miller—

OUR FATHER'S LOVE (JUNE 19, 2022)

The writer of Hebrews has some solid advice for us as we face hardship. Quoting Proverbs he says, "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprov'd by Him; for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives." In other words, God does what earthly fathers do, only better. "Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live?" (Hebrews 12:9). "It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as sons" (Hebrews 12:7). Fathers who love their children discipline them, but they don't discipline the children of others. Earthly fathers can err in discipline even though their intentions are honorable. "For they disciplined us for a short time as

seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness” (Hebrews 12:10). Such discipline is not joyful in the moment, but afterwards yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness (Hebrews 12:11).

THE FACE OF DEPRAVITY (JUNE 26, 2022)

Depravity is our natural state of living hopelessly in wickedness, with no power in ourselves to escape. “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” “There is none righteous, no not one.” Some cover their depravity with good deeds and associations with organizations and causes that appear noble. In others the cauldron of evil that churns within us erupts like a volcano and cannot be covered up. In previous generations evil was viewed more shamefully by even the world. In our day men are proud of evil and trumpet it in all parts of the world with great fervor. Such it is with abortion. Abortion is a great evil obvious even to the most callous heart. Yet, with the Supreme Court striking down *Roe v. Wade* this past week we see an eruption of people who hysterically shriek in trauma that it will be, at least for a while, harder to kill the unborn. They will have to travel to other states. There will be a stigma to killing innocents in the womb—a stigma that already exists in the eyes of God. O these poor pregnant women who can’t swiftly murder their unborn babies, but instead will have their lives upended for 9 months while life grows within them! Their figures will be altered and their clothes won’t fit! This is one ugly face of depravity and why the world needs the Lord Jesus.

THINKING LOGICALLY (July 3, 2022)

Why does grass get brown when it doesn’t have water? Is it being too demanding? Is it weak and incapable of survival on its own resources? Perhaps it is being dramatic and trying to get attention. Is it lazy and refuses to go look for water? Grass gets brown without water because grass needs water to live and thrive. Why is our nation on a downward trend? Why is there so much confusion and anxiety about the future? Why are so many conflicting and questionable standards of conduct and judgment being foisted on us? Because we need the Lord to live and thrive. By forsaking the Lord (and He is hardly mentioned in the halls of power in our land) we have chosen the wasteland and should not be surprised when we start drying up. If we are to be blessed as a nation, then our God must be the Lord. We Christians must stand firm in Christ and labor for the Lord’s work to turn our nation to God. Neither grass nor nation can thrive without water.

SWALLOWING CAMELS (July 10, 2022)

The Pharisees were the most irritating enemies of our Lord. Not that they could stand against Him with their arguments, but their legalistic ways and sanctimonious pride were rooted in ignorance. They emphasized tiny, intricate, insignificant details as means to righteousness. At the same time they ignored the weighty matters of justice and righteousness. They couldn’t find the forest because they were focused on hugging trees. Yet, the Pharisees lived in arrogant bliss, seeing themselves better than others and rejoicing in the death of our Lord. Jesus said they strain out a gnat and swallow a camel. They were very careful with the small things, but they were totally oblivious to the larger matters. They tithed salt, but then fought with Jesus. The Pharisees sound a warning for all who would follow Christ. The important matter is Christ Himself. Miss Christ and all the details of religion are worthless and serve more to blind than to enlighten. Christianity is a love relationship with the person of Jesus Christ. All else flows from that.

THE NEED TO LOOK FIERCE (July 17, 2022)

In the competitive world of sports it is common to name teams in such a way that fear might be created. I was a member of the worst intramural basketball team in the 8th grade. Once we formed we needed to come up with a name that would suitably describe our innate ferocity. We came up with “Ramchargers.” The intramural season actually proved we were not the human version of a powerful automobile engine.

Character is the most important aspect of any team or person. If our character is good, then the good name assigned to us is deserved. If we are authentically honorable, we don’t need to pretend. False gods are always made to look scary since they didn’t really exist and are not able to truly inspire fear. Our God does not need to pretend He is great. He is great in Himself. His character is His name. The mighty God. The everlasting God. The Prince of Peace. The way, the truth, and the life. The Lord. The King. The God of all comfort. Our Savior. The Messiah. Thy name we praise!

DON’T JUST LOOK AWAY (July 24, 2022)

An integral part of living in this world is learning to look away from unhealthy and depressing things whenever possible. You may have chosen to turn away from news reports, and that can be a very healthy choice lest you be over-burdened by the lies and hopelessness it seeks to deliver. Lot compromised by going to Sodom and Sodom ended up vexing his spirit. We live in a Sodom world. We must be careful that we don’t spend time improperly bathing in the dirty water of this world. However, turning away is only the first part of the story for the Christian. We must also turn toward our Lord Jesus Christ. “Fixing our eyes on Jesus” (Hebrews 12:2a) and considering “Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart” (Hebrews 12:3). Don’t be surprised if your spirit sinks in the mire of this evil age if your gaze is held too long by this perverse generation. Don’t live half the Christian life! Turn away from evil, but be most sure to turn toward Jesus Christ!

100% (July 31, 2022)

“If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again.” Well, unless you are trying to succeed at flying by jumping off a building. That first try should be the end of it. However, there are many noble aspirations that are not at first successful. A student may pass with 70%, but the next attempt will hopefully be higher because he is very near to failing. We aren’t perfect, and although it is praiseworthy to try to be 100% we know that in some things we fail to meet expectations. Not so with the Lord. “As for God, His way is perfect” (Psalm 18:30). He works all things according to the counsel of His will (Ephesians 1:11). “For with God nothing will be impossible” (Luke 1:37). God lives at 100%. He never fails. He never achieves only a partial success. Even His enemies accomplish His will. He does not require the help of man or angels. He doesn’t need sinners to come halfway for Him to save them. We stand in awe of our God. We never ask of Him anything that is beyond His power. Whatever He chooses to do, He does. 100%.

DISCERNMENT IN LIFE (AUGUST 7, 2022)

In our series on discernment, we have seen that the Bible views truth as absolutely determined by God. Jesus Christ is the model of truth and righteousness, and it is only His name that brings salvation. His words form the solid foundation that will enable all who heed Him to endure the judgment and be saved. It has also been noted that our world is anti-truth because they are anti-God, and the latest philosophy of the world tells us we cannot know truth. Truth gives us a basis for judging the opinions of the world and discarding them as falsehood. For example, I have seen several people in the news who claim that they are Christians, and because they are Christians they support abortion. Or because they are Christians they support transgenderism. These are examples where the deluded and deceived make themselves the

source of truth. But then our discernment kicks in. We compare those words with God's Word and discern their error. We can't make God agree with us; we must agree with Him.

WHAT GOD IS DOING (AUGUST 14, 2022)

The Bible tells us that the secret things belong to the Lord. It further tells us that the Lord's thoughts are high above our thoughts. The Lord's understanding is unsearchable. "Who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor?" We often are perplexed by the ways of the Lord but we really would have the Lord no other way than He is. We don't want a God like us. We want a God like our God. Not one we can figure out, but one who is beyond our understanding. Whose greatness is immeasurable and infinite. So what is God doing when He does things that we don't like or understand? He is being the great and awesome God that we love. We are thankful by faith that He is just as He is, and that He is doing just as He does. That requires trust from us because we also know the Lord does all things well and loves His children with everlasting love. True, we don't know what God is doing. But we also have to say that we know exactly what He is doing, and what He is doing is good.

WHAT IF GOD SLAYS US? (AUGUST 21, 2022)

Job suffered through major catastrophes at the hand of the devil, who felt that Job would curse God if his blessings were withdrawn. He lost wealth, family, health, and friends. Scripture never tells us that Job ever knew why. The accusations against him, however, had been made by Satan. Still, the Lord gave permission for the upheaval Satan brought into Job's life. If we did that to those we love we would likely be hated as a result. Job came out victorious over the devil's hatchet job. "Though He slay me, I will hope in him" (Job 13:15). And so he did. His "friends" didn't help. And Job certainly took issues with God's decisions. But in the end Job was the one who was approved by God. "We count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful" (James 5:11). "Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons" (Hebrews 12:7 NIV). However deep the pain, God is faithful.

NEVER FRUSTRATED (AUGUST 28, 2022)

We often get frustrated. Frustration is a result of *wanting* to do while being *unable* to do. It's what you get when you can't get that knot untangled. Or when your car gets stuck in the sand or mud and resists all attempts to extricate it so you can get back on the road. We get frustrated with other people because they do not do what they should do and even hinder others from doing what is right and good. We are frustrated with bills. We are frustrated with age. We are frustrated trying to think of that word we can't think of. It's part of being human. Our God never gets frustrated. He has all power. He has all wisdom.

He has all authority. He does all things after the counsel of His own will. He doesn't have to work around anybody. His sovereignty is eternal. Who can hinder God? Who has ever thwarted God's will?

Sure, humans rebel against the will of God, but God's sovereign will is never breached. Even His commands that are violated are still part of His unconquerable Lordship and majesty. He does what He wants when He wants and how He wants. That is our God!

THE Will of GOD (SEPTEMBER 4, 2022)

In our prayers for Caleb and others in serious need of the Lord's healing power there is one thing that stands above all—the will of God. We are praying for God's will to be directed to help us. The encouraging thing in that is that if God wills, it shall be done. There is no lack of power in the Lord. There is nothing the Lord cannot do. Although He uses others to accomplish His will it is His will alone

that is the determining factor. He never says, "I wanted to help but I didn't have anyone available to help me first." If God wills, a heart will come for Caleb and he will receive it and be cured. And who loves us more than God? "And now, Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in You." Life is complicated and health issues are often very complex and there are many contingencies. With our God it is as simple as His will. He does whatever He pleases.

THE POWER OF GOD TO SAVE (SEPTEMBER 11, 2022)

In the passing of my Dad Friday night, a journey of 48 years concluded with a trip into the presence of God by a man who would have not have been considered a prospect for heaven during most of his first 41 years. The simplest way to understand it is the declaration that our Lord pursued my Dad and saved Him by His power at the exact time He chose to effectually call him unto Himself. My Dad didn't start seeking the Lord and exposing himself to church simply on a human whim. God drew him to His Son. "No man can come to Me unless the Father, who sent Me draws him." So it was with my Dad. He used to drop us kids off for Sunday School and then pick us up before the 11 AM service. The day after God's power drew him to Jesus Christ he was up on Monday morning before leaving for work to read his Bible, and he became a faithful servant and lover of God the rest of his days. His death is now his new beginning.

ANOTHER SEASON (SEPTEMBER 25, 2022)

After a hot Thursday this past week we slipped silently into Fall at around 9 PM Thursday night. Then on Saturday morning the heat was turned on in our house for the first time in many months. There is a lot of humanistic talk these days of mankind affecting the seasons, but seasons are of God. They will remain until the end. "While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease" (Genesis 8:22). The earth is not running itself nor is it being destroyed by trains, planes, and automobiles. As long as the earth remains we will enjoy the natural laws of God and the changing of the seasons. How many beautiful Fall days have we experienced with colorful leaves and brisk mornings and evenings? Seasons are one of the wonders of our great God. To Him be all praise!

A REMINDER FROM ESTHER (OCTOBER 2, 2022)

There is a very clear distinction between the way we view the rise of wickedness and the way the Lord does. Wickedness rises because of wicked men; we all agree on that. We, however, are very limited in what we can do to halt wickedness. The Church is salt and light and we share the gospel, but the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many there be that find it. The Lord, with all power, allows the rise and spread of wickedness until such time that He chooses to end it. In Esther that meant Haman rising to a prominent place of authority, with which he threatened the people of God. Our time is certainly full of wickedness, and evil men are wreaking havoc on the world, but none of this is out of God's reach and purpose. He will strike when the time is ripe.

THE LAW OF DISTRACTION (OCTOBER 9, 2022)

Our world is a very active and ever-changing place. What is a reality today will be different in a few years and maybe even in a few weeks. Trends come and go. Interest in the things of God is sometimes in season and then out of season. One thing that is persistent in our world is the devil's attempt to distract us from God. Even if we are engaged in good things like a proper job, the care of family, or needed recreation. Even good things in the hands of the devil can become distractions to keep us from the Lord

and His Word and from fellowship with His people. How many excuse their lack of desire for the things of God by noting how busy they are in the things of the world? If we allow it, the world will set all our schedules for us, and the one who holds sway in this world will be sure to exclude God.

Homecoming Announcement (October 16, 2022)

Homecoming is NEXT SUNDAY. Some of your friends and family will come to Homecoming when they won't attend other times, so now is the time to encourage them to join us to celebrate God's faithfulness to us and to renew our commitment to serve our Lord. We will have the usual schedule of lunch following the service. Don't tell any of those you invite that there might be broccoli present.

Home (October 23, 2022)

The psalmist remarked that the Lord's dwelling place was lovely, and that his soul longed and even yearned for the courts of the Lord (Psalm 84:1-2). He noted that even the bird has found a house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even the altars of the Lord (Psalm 84:3). "How blessed are those who dwell in your house! They are ever praising you" (Psalm 84:4). The house of the Lord was the symbolic presence of the Lord among His people, and to sit a day in the courts of the Lord was valued as better than a thousand days outside (Psalm 84:10). Is it so with us? Do we crave the presence of God above all the pleasures of the world? It seems too often we are content to dwell outside. But we are exhorted to draw near to God and walk faithfully with Him. At the end of this life, when our earthly tent is torn down we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens (2 Corinthians 5:1).

5 Points (October 30, 2022)

Tonight I want to begin a study on the 5 points, both of Calvinism and Arminianism. When Jonathan Edwards gave his farewell sermon to his church after they had dismissed him (and I certainly wouldn't want to answer for that in the judgment), he warned the church about the dangers of Arminianism. There is a reason he did that. From the beginnings of our denomination where we emphasized the doctrines of grace (Calvinism), the Southern Baptist denomination is now primarily Arminian in theology, though there have been some encouraging signs of return to our roots. "Wait a minute," some may say, "that sounds a whole lot like fancy doctrine that people in the church don't need to know!" (I hope you didn't say that.) Ignorance is one of the tools the devil is pleased to give us, and so many are not conversant in even the most basic aspects of theology. It is important that we understand the nature of man and the work of God in salvation, and this study, by God's grace, will help.

Ability & Responsibility (November 6, 2022)

One of the central claims of that approach to theology called Arminianism is that there must be ability before there can be responsibility. This is, on the surface, a true statement. We would never require any person to enter a hospital and heal every patient. Nor would we lay blame upon someone for not flying faster than a speeding bullet to rescue a hiker in the Grand Canyon. So, the Arminian reasons, we must allow for some ability in the sinner because the sinner is responsible to believe. However, when mankind was able, we fell into sin in the Garden of Eden. We became unable then and were cast upon the grace of God alone for our salvation. It is quite an effective deception to give sinners an assurance of an ability they do not really have. That's why many unbelievers put off bowing the knee to Jesus Christ, because they believe they can decide "at any time" since they have the power of will, and when they exercise it, God will save. What a dangerous doctrine that offers such false hope to the powerless!

WALKING PRAISE (NOVEMBER 13, 2022)

In Nehemiah we are impressed with his method of praying as he encountered a particular place where he hoped for God's help. The king asked him a question and Nehemiah prayed to the Lord in the process of answering the king. In this way Nehemiah prayed as he lived and not just when he pulled aside to pray privately. We can do the same with praising the Lord. I like to see people react in happiness to some blessing of the Lord and it has been my practice to give praise to the Lord on their behalf, that He is such a good God. Or when the seasons change and that nip in the air reminds me of home I will praise the Lord for the many pleasant memories He has given me from my childhood on. You may see an old picture of someone who has passed on from this world and utter praise to the Lord for that life. The Lord is good and there are in every day so many areas where we will find it natural to praise our great God. In so doing we give pleasure to the Lord who delights in the praises of His people.

GETTING FAT (NOVEMBER 20, 2022)

“Bright eyes gladden the heart; good news puts fat on the bones.” (Proverbs 15:30)

Although we tend not to see fatness as a good thing, the Bible uses the term to indicate someone who has been blessed. It speaks of one who is healthy in body, who has had sufficient provision for life. The psalmist was taken aback because the wicked were fat, which seemed to be inappropriate since they were most unfit for the blessing of God (Psalm 73:4). The proverb above connects fat on the bones with good news, thus noting that good news gives us contentment that bolsters our health and well-being, as opposed to bad news, which makes us fret, sapping the strength from our bones. How wonderful to receive good news! We feel it immediately in our bodies. It gives us calmness of spirit. Our heart is gladdened. Good news is a real blessing, not a manufactured one. The world denies truth and imagines good news where there is none. Christians live in good news.

STEERING (NOVEMBER 27, 2022)

We seem to be on the brink of having cars that drive themselves. Some of them, however, drive themselves off the road or into other cars. The technology is not quite to the point where we can sleep while our car drives us to our destination. We have to stay awake and steer. That is also the Christian way. There will never be an auto-pilot for the Christian life. We must not sleep as others do and miss the demands of the day. Nor are we to grow passive and let the world take us where it would have us be. If we are to do the right thing we must steer there. Our way through this world is demanding and there are many curves to navigate. If our eyes are taken from the road to what's on the byways we will venture in areas we were not meant to be and where no car can safely travel. With our eyes on the Lord and our path established in the things of God we are safe and at our best potential for accomplishing all we should in life. Trust in the Lord means steering in the way He has revealed as His will and He will bless that journey.

THE NEXT POINT (DECEMBER 4, 2022)

The plan for this evening's service via Zoom is to study the 3rd point of both the Arminian and Calvinist positions on the atonement and salvation in Christ. It is at this point that many turn away and walk no longer in the Calvinist way, assuming they ever walked in the Calvinist way to begin with. Is the atonement of Christ unlimited, or is it limited in some way? “Oh no!” people say. The atonement of Christ is unlimited and Christ died for every sinner in the same way to the same extent. But is it so? Did

Christ die savingly for every sinner and the only thing left is for the sinner to “activate” the death of Christ for their own by believing? Join us as we seek to gain a biblical understanding of that doctrine that has been labeled “limited atonement.” Be not afraid to face it. True doctrine is our friend.

PROMISES KEPT (DECEMBER 11, 2022)

It’s very easy to make promises and it takes no quality of character to make them. The quality of character comes in keeping promises. Those of poor character don’t keep their promises, so their vow to do so amounts to a lie. Some make promises they end up not being able to keep although they intended to carry through with them. We sympathize with this latter group, but the end result is the same: a promise or promises are not kept and the benefit we would have received from them is lost. What a difference with our God! He never lies and all His promises are kept because He has the power, sovereignty, wisdom, and will to bring His stated intentions to an appropriate end. We live *after* the fact of Jesus’ coming to the manger. But it was promised by God long before, and so it came to be.

THE WEEK BEFORE CHRISTMAS (DECEMBER 18, 2022)

We hear a lot about the birth of Christ and the happenings of Christmas Day. We also know of a goodly number of precursors to the event. We have the Messianic prophecies. We know of the all-too-familiar intrusions of government to move pieces into place (by God’s providence) so that Mary would be where she was supposed to be when Jesus was born. We know of the crowded inn that had no room for Mary and Joseph when they arrived in Bethlehem. However, we seldom hear of the quiet moments before the birth of Christ. Do you know of the family just down from the manger and what they were up to on that momentous occasion? And the very intriguing story of the man at the marketplace in Bethlehem who happened to see Joseph and Mary walk by his stand in route to the manger. Well, the reason is that they didn’t have a clue as to what was happening. It came suddenly and unexpectedly. Such are the ways of our Lord, so be always expectant.

ANOTHER YEAR (JANUARY 1, 2023)

As hard as it is to fathom, another year has passed and we observe it in the rear-view mirror as we continue driving off into the future. A few weeks ago families were hauling Christmas decorations out of the attic or garage or storage room, and now those same boxes and bags have headed back to their normal places, or soon will be. How should we view the start of another new year? It’s pretty easy to figure that out by noting what the Lord tells us to do with each day. “This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.” So that’s our path ahead. To rejoice and be glad in every day the Lord makes. In the Lord we have hope and can be optimistic. “In the world you have tribulation, but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.” It’s guaranteed that the world will depress us if we gaze at it, so let our gaze be on our Lord Jesus and only glances on this world. Let’s hope in God for we shall yet praise Him, who is the help of our countenance and our God.

DON’T BE DISCOURAGED (JANUARY 8, 2023)

Ok, so we are now 8 days into the New Year. Maybe you made some resolutions and/or set yourself on a path of reform in some of your ways, major or minor. This seems an appropriate time to give a very simple and obvious bit of advice. Don’t be discouraged if you are not off to a rip-roaring start on your new life in 2023. If you are, then you have possibly passed the toughest stretch of any change—the beginning. To quote Winston Churchill, “we are not at the end, nor even the beginning of the end, but we are, perhaps, at the end of the beginning.” Let’s press on toward the high calling of God in Christ

Jesus. Our Lord will help all efforts to please Him. Let's do our part to never give up. We even knew as toddlers than when we fell we had to get right back up. Don't abandon your good resolve, but instead double down on it and go forward. The devil never stops, and neither can we. And unlike the devil, we seek the glory of God, so onward and upward is our direction.

NEVER FORSAKEN (JANUARY 15, 2023)

In God's standard and gracious plan for all people, we do not live alone. Our Lord has made the family. A man and a woman are brought together in marriage, the Lord noting that it is not good for man to be alone. Children are born and nurtured in a warm, loving environment. Our God even takes note of the neighborhood in which we live, telling us to not only love one another, but also our neighbor as ourselves. Beyond this the church is the spiritual family of God, bound together by salvation and mutual tenderness and care for each other. And we have a father in heaven. However, the ideal is not experienced by every person at all times. Circumstances change. Children grow up and move out. Parents and grandparents get older and eventually pass from this world. What then? "For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the Lord will take me up" (Psalm 27:10). When others leave, the Lord remains. "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5).

THE KINDNESS OF GOD (JANUARY 22, 2023)

We expect famous people in our world to be a bit stand-offish, and not open and inviting to those beneath their status. We picture them prickly and annoyed by the constant requests for their attention. Even to get them to "look this way" is considered a major accomplishment. They set themselves apart from the common mass of humanity. If they do stoop to speak to the unworthy mob they often do so with the greatest condescension. We are just not in their class, and they are eager to maintain that great divide between the higher strata and the lower dregs of society. Our God is higher than the most elite of this world by infinity. He has an actual basis for separating from us—our great sin. But what do we find? Our Lord is kind in all His deeds. He stoops to the lowly. He has compassion on the unworthy. And He does not upbraid us. Although His glory is high above all creation, yet He is Immanuel. God with us. He is near to the broken-hearted. Our great God!

THE PATIENCE OF GOD (JANUARY 29, 2023)

We all know what it means if we say someone has a short fuse. Such a person can go from zero to explosion in a very short time. The catalyst is something that causes them extreme displeasure along with the natural impulse to give immediate recompense. We know from Nahum that God's wrath is always broiling. He never loses His wrath toward those He has chosen to ultimately judge. Our God is an avenging God! However, the Lord is patient. Patience is accompanied by long-suffering. Our Lord, totally in control and never passive in His emotion, does not instantly judge the wicked. He can. He has every right to. There are certain times when He seems to strike immediately. Often, however, we are given time. The Lord even blesses those destined for destruction. He gives them happy times. He knows what their end will be. He is not slow on His promise to judge the wicked. He is patient, not willing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

THE LITTLE GUY (FEBRUARY 5, 2023)

Who is looking out for the little guy? You know, the guy who does not have a lot of wealth and power. That person nobody knows but family and close friends. The guy who doesn't stand out in a crowd. Who is easily overlooked because of their lack of obvious benefit to anyone? Not a household name.

The common man. The plain girl. Solomon says in Proverbs that the poor is hated even by his neighbor, but those who love the rich are many (14:20). Our Lord entered our world as a lowly baby. He did not come to be served, but to serve. He resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. The Lord sets the example of true love in the way He deals with the little guy. “For though the Lord is exalted, yet He regards the lowly, but the haughty He knows from afar” (Psalm 138:6). Do you want to be greatest in the kingdom of heaven? Unless you become like children you can’t even enter heaven. To be the greatest you have to humble yourself as a child (Matthew 18:3-4). Others will despise the little guy, but not our Lord.

WAITING VERSUS DOING (FEBRUARY 12, 2023)

We live in a world of contingencies. That is, we react to things that occur beyond our control. Or we have to prepare for things that may or may not happen since we can’t direct the outcome. That tends to put us in an uncomfortable position. Things are uncertain. And if we depend on circumstances to change so our lives will be better, then we are at the mercy of a world system that is not inclined to favor us. One thing the epistle to the Philippians will teach us is that our joy, unity, fruitfulness, and duties cannot be contingent on this ever-changing and constantly-hostile world. Those who wait upon the world are never sure of the arrival of good news. But those who wait upon the Lord renew their strength. They mount up on wings as eagles. They run and are not weary. They walk and don’t faint. Philippians tells us not to wait for the best in life as a Christian. Rather we are to rejoice. We are to abound in love for one another. We are to support one another. We are to walk in gladness. No waiting. Christians choose living.

UP TO SOMETHING (FEBRUARY 19, 2023)

When as a child I was unusually quiet my Mom thought I might be “up to something.” That “something” was not thought of as a good thing, but that I was possibly doing something evil and avoiding detection. Of course my Mom was wrong EVERY TIME she thought that of me, but parents can relate to the same feelings. That suspicious silence. Proverbs warns us about the wicked who plot evil (1:10ff, for example). We wisely expect that the wicked are not content with not doing wickedness. They plot in quietness. They are up to something. We must move our minds, however, to the quietness of our God, who is also up to something all the time. Our great God is always up to something good. Sometimes we see it and sometimes we don’t. We can know with absolute certainty that whether visible or invisible He is working out His will for His glory and the good of His people. Better to think on that than the plotting of evil men. He catches the wise in their own craftiness, and withholds no good thing from the upright.

OUR UNIQUE LORD (FEBRUARY 26, 2023)

It’s hard for humans to handle power properly. Men in power tend to use it for selfishness. Men don’t think of power as an opportunity to help others. They more naturally think of it as a way to lord it over others. That’s one reason Peter explicitly commands elders not to lord it over the flock, because that is a naturally sinful outworking of authority. Men use power to spite others. To draw attention to their superiority. To stomp on the little guy. Who is more powerful than our God? And yet we find Him to be loving and kind. He stoops to men of low degree. Our Lord Jesus became like us, of no reputation. He humbled Himself to death on the cross. He calls us His brothers and sisters. He cares for us. He is approachable. He came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many. Although the transcendent God, He is equally immanent. He understands that we are but dust. He nurtures us and

cherishes us like a father treats children. He instructs the ignorant. He saves the lowliest of society. Our Lord is beautiful in power.

LITTLE PARTS (MARCH 5, 2023)

Many people are enchanted with the big things in life. If only we could get a big celebrity to proclaim the gospel! Or a big name music group to come throw a concert! We need professionals! The slick and fancy! Big parts. A lot of professing Christians excuse themselves from service to the Lord on the basis that they are small. They don't have the sense of presence needed to make an impact on the world. Their tongues are too slow to witness. Their reading comprehension is not great enough to study the Bible. Why pray when they have no big names to tout before the Lord of heaven? Even Moses fell into this sin when he told the Lord that he could not go say what the Lord told him to go say. Because he was slow of tongue. The kingdom of God is built with little parts far more than big ones. In fact, we all have to see ourselves as little parts in order to offer effective service to our God. The worst servants are those who think they are big shots. Are you a little part? Then you are ready to do great things for our Lord.

A PICTURE OF NEW LIFE (MARCH 12, 2023)

Although I have not fully surrendered the notion that it could possibly snow this winter, the prospects are growing dimmer and dimmer. It could still happen, but we must face the reality that our string of snowless winters is about to increase by one. However, there is a bright side to this. Spring is typically a glorious time of year. Bare limbs explode with fresh, green leaves. Dormant grass goes from blah to vibrant. The sun shines longer and longer. Birds sing. The very bitter cold of our Orangeburg winters turn into refreshing warmth. Ok, so I made up part of that. Spring is a wonderful illustration of new life in Christ. The old things pass away. New things come. The cold and dead spring to warmth and life. Things wake up. Our slumber in sin blossoms into being wide awake and excited about Jesus Christ. Just as trees get a fresh surge of sap, unbelievers get the fresh breath of the Holy Spirit bringing the new birth. Not only life, but eternal life sprouts in the life of those saved by the grace of God.

IN YOUR RIGHT MIND (MARCH 19, 2023)

Remember Jesus' encounter with a demon-possessed man who dwelt among the tombs (Mark 5). We are told he was very violent and unable to be restrained. Luke tells us he had not had any clothes on for a long time. He lived among the tombs. He gashed himself with stones. He screamed constantly, day and night. Jesus cast the legion of demons that possessed him out into swine, turning them to madness and a suicidal rush into the sea, where they drowned. Such a great commotion attracted the attention of the surrounding area after the herdsmen reported the loss of the swine. The people had to see this. And what did they find when they arrived? The man who had been demon-possessed was sitting down, clothed, and in his right mind. Outside of Christ we all have a depraved and corrupt mind. Our thinking is off. We approve of foolishness. We applaud wickedness. What a wonder when our great God exercises His power to take away our shame and put us in our right mind!

GET THEM WHILE THEY'RE YOUNG (MARCH 26, 2023)

It is a fact of geography and basic travel sense that the earlier you take a wrong road, the farther off the right path you will be and for the longest time. If you miss a turn at the very end of your journey it's a simple matter to backtrack and choose the right one instead. But when you err at the start you may be thousands of miles from the right trail when you realize it. This is some of the reasoning for the attack on children today. This evil world seems to have two plans for kids. They want, first, to protect the right

to kill them before they are born. But secondly, they want to guarantee they are as corrupted as possible as soon as possible. Groom them early and they will be far from God at the start of their young lives. God commands parents to teach their children the ways of the Lord from the very beginning. Get them on the right track. Guide them in the way they should go. Bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. It is more dangerous to be a child today. Let's be diligent to tell them about Jesus and the right way at the start.

EXPECTATIONS (April 2, 2023)

Expectations can be real or fanciful. Some people who start exercising and/or dieting on Monday have expectations of being in better shape on Monday night. Expectations are determined by the quality of that person or thing to which we look for some result. Expectations can be good or bad. We expect politicians to lie; we expect preachers to tell the truth. But sometimes politicians tell the truth and sometimes preachers lie. So expectations are a form of playing the odds. We expect certain restaurants to give good service, but others we expect the opposite. As far as we are concerned, we build up the expectations of others by our character. People should expect the highest and most noble behavior from us because we walk in honor and integrity. It's the worst of all commentaries on a person if no one expects anything good from them. Above all this is our expectations of God who always acts in righteousness. We are eternally able to rejoice in Him. We not only expect the best from our Lord, but as to His character He is always at His best.

ETERNAL LIFE (April 9, 2023)

Eternal life has two notable qualities: eternal and life. The repeated promise of our Lord Jesus in presenting the gospel is the giving of eternal life. "I give them eternal life and they shall never perish." "He who believes in the Son has eternal life." "He who hears my word and believes on Him who sent me has eternal life." "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." Physical life has a limit and the years of this life pass quickly. While in this body we must see to it that we do not eternally die, but rather that we inherit eternal life. Eternal life never ends. Also it is life indeed. Without the nature of sin. Without separation from our God. Living fully in His favor in heaven. United together in everlasting praise and adoration of our wonderful Lord. Feasting on the riches of His glory. Free from the restraints of this earthly tabernacle. This is what our Lord has freely given to those He has chosen! Life! Life! Eternal life!

OUR TRUE GOD (April 16, 2023)

Many have problems with God and disagree with His administration of the world. They reject His sovereignty over it. They offer alternatives to the reality of His creative power that brought forth this world and all life therein. They see God as outdated and no longer relevant. They envision a better world conforming to the fancies of men. The devil had the original better plan than God and it got him evicted from heaven and doomed to eternal darkness. But the devil is nothing if not persistent, so he is running the same scam on earth. The Bible says it will end with the same result. Has God been nullified? That was a question some posed when considering the unbelief of Israel in Romans 3. "Their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it?" Paul's answer is the answer for all such thinking. "Let God be true, though every man be found a liar." God is true. His Word is true. His wisdom is the only true wisdom. His way is true. His plan is forever true. He alone is the true God.

WHO IS HARMING WHO? (April 23, 2023)

For all of human history there has been and remains a disconnect between reality and fancy. For example, it is thought by the wicked that their way is the best for the entire world. Conversely, they believe that Christians, the Bible, the Church, and God are harmful to all humanity. Follow the wicked and reap good. Follow the Lord and reap bad. So the world fights to exclude non-wicked things from our world. That is why Christians are persecuted. The evil world has the perverse sense that goodness in the sight of God is actually evil. So the world seeks to stop the gospel. The world fights to keep the murder of the unborn legal and acceptable. The world insists that sin is healthy and non-destructive. What really is destructive in the eyes of the world? Rejecting the world's foolishness. Does all this sound a bit twisted? Well, what did Peter say about his generation? "Be saved from this perverse generation" (Acts 2:40). Only a perverse generation can conclude that God is bad for the world.

THE BIBLE'S TRUE NATURE (April 30, 2023)

The Southern Baptist Convention fought an important battle in the latter part of the last century, but it was a battle that should not have had to be fought. The Bible itself settles the issue. But as is so often the case, men who respect the wisdom of the world more than the wisdom of God had to step in and cast doubt on the Bible and on its reliability and authority. Unregenerate people are constantly doing this, but those claiming to be Christians are held to a higher standard. At issue was the inerrancy of Scripture. That is, in the original writings did God keep the authors of Scripture from penning errors? The Bible says that He did, that all Scripture is given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The opposers, however, insisted in only believing the parts of the Bible they wanted to believe. That makes them the authority and not God's Word. We believe in the inerrancy of the Word of God and all should! It is true, authoritative, and sufficient in all we need.

"I CAN'T" (May 7, 2023)

We who originate on planet Earth are well aware that there are things we can't do. "Can't" expresses inability. It can be contrasted with "won't" which means we refuse to do something. "Won't" is a hard thing to admit if the thing we won't do is something we should do. So in place of "won't" we often see the word "can't" used instead. "Can't" makes us like a hero who wants to do good but is hindered by powerful forces that keep us from doing it. We admire the person who tries against insurmountable obstacles. "Won't" is admitting that we are a rebel against God if we refuse to do what He has commanded. "Can't" as a smokescreen for "won't" may fool humans, but God knows when a can't is actually a won't. It is not uncommon that people also know the difference. God has given Christians the ability to do His will. We don't excuse ourselves when we are imperfect in it, but we strive to do it better. "It is God who works in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure." When Christians can't, they strive until they can.

MOTHER'S DAY (May 14, 2023)

Our society is currently being assaulted with a multi-front war on the family. However, when has this not been the world's focus? The family is such a wholesome and successful creation by our wise God that it naturally must be taken down by a world that is under the sway of the devil. Change the genders. Change the roles. Change the focus. Disturb the peace and security. Target parents for prosecution if they care for their children in opposition to the will of a school board. Fund and reward illegitimacy. Groom kids to make them more accepting of immorality and perversion. Indoctrinate students rather than educate them. And all that is if society fails to terminate them before birth. However, God made the

family and it will always be the best plan for a wholesome society and happy children. There is no substitute. There is a reason mothers are loved. Our first taste of tenderness and unconditional love is often a mother's touch. Mothers are of God. God is for us so He gave us mothers and fathers and families.

WHERE'S THE LOVE? (MAY 21, 2023)

Why don't those in leadership roles in this country want us to be happy? Why don't schools want children to be educated properly? Why is society so eager to promote destructive practices and beliefs that tear apart families and even the fabric of society itself? Or as Paul put it regarding his own situation, "Why are we also in danger every hour?" (1 Corinthians 15:30). Our Lord Jesus made a prediction that explains why love has been sucked from our world and replaced with the opposite. "Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold." Without the fruit of the Spirit producing true love, the world abounds in lawlessness that turns the hearts of the wicked toward their own desires and not the well-being of others. "If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." This is why the gospel is the answer for all the problems our world is trying to fix (or so they claim) by humanistic means. Only a new heart and new mind will open up a wellspring of love and care for one another. This starts with loving God and proceeds to loving man.

PATIENCE AND NEARNESS (MAY 28, 2023)

Peter tells us that the last days will be noted by the rise of mockers saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues as it was from the beginning of creation." After pointing out that they were leaving out of their considerations God's act of destroying the world by means of the flood, he straightened this thinking out. Time does not weigh on God like it does on us. "With the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day." Then the clincher: "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance." James wrote, "Be patient until the coming of the Lord," noting how a farmer waits for his crops to come in. "You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near." While men mock and ignore God, His coming is near. Mockers live out their unbelief by doubting. Christians live out their belief by being patient.

HOW PERVERSITY ARISES (JUNE 4, 2023)

Peter, preaching to the crowd at Pentecost, exhorted them to "save yourselves from this perverse generation." His appeal was urgent because the natural man quickly becomes overwhelmed by a perverse generation. Like being stuck in quicksand. When the opportunity arises the wise man will grasp for the offered vine or stick and pull themselves out before it's too late. To be perverse means simply to be turned away from what is right and good. It is a corruption of how God made us to be. Perversity unchecked turns quickly into obstinacy and stubbornness. Perversity arises from the unregenerate heart we all are born with, so it is essential that it be confronted with the hope of the gospel and faith in Christ as soon as possible. Every generation is perverse because the world follows the devil by default. We also have our own corrupt way built into us by reason of the Fall. The cure for perversity is found in the grace of God which both alerts us to our danger and throws us the lifeline of life in Christ, who sets us on the proper path.

FOCUSING ON THE GOOD (JUNE 11, 2023)

We certainly are well aware, and should be, of the perversion of our present world system. However, this cannot occupy and control our thinking. If we focus on the world we will never be happy or have peace. Instead we must note that all that the world is in evil, God is the opposite in good. The world spews hate; God is love. God is truly just and promotes what is just and righteous. He is unchanging. He is compassionate and merciful. He knows all things and exercises full sovereignty on earth and in heaven. He is always with us and our Lord Jesus has promised never to leave us nor forsake us. He is all-powerful and there is nothing He cannot do. He is always ahead of the exploits of mankind and no plan can prevail against His ultimate purpose. He is our solid rock. He is the hope of salvation. He alone can change the heart and mind and bring light into darkness. He is forever worthy to be praised. Our Lord Jesus has a name above every name. Our God will accomplish all His glory from this time forth and forevermore!

A GOD TO LOVE (JUNE 18, 2023)

We know the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and that knowledge of the holy one is understanding. However, godly fear is not the same type of fear as we have toward those people and circumstances that threaten us with harm. Godly fear exists in the context of a relationship with our God of love. God has demonstrated the greatest love possible toward us in the giving of His Son to die for us. Paul declared that nothing can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. He prayed that the Ephesians would know the love of God which surpasses knowledge. As though love in itself was insufficient to describe God's love, at times we see it rendered in Scripture as "great love." God's love is in fact infinite and eternal, and He will encase us forever in His love in heaven. We, in turn, are to love the Lord our God with every bit of zeal and energy and devotion possible. To know the Lord is to love the Lord. Only the wicked and ignorant could not love the Lord. It is the first and greatest commandment.

GOOD TIMES (JUNE 25, 2023)

Good times are what we all want to experience. Let the good times roll. Of course we know in this world we have tribulation. We encounter various trials. Sometimes the gospel is in season and other times out of season. All who live godly in Christ Jesus suffer persecution. Our Lord Jesus is hated every day by a world that holds a grudge against Him for speaking of its sins. The devil goes about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. Our world lies in darkness and always will until such time our Lord restores all things, but His people are stars in the universe. Our good times are not dependent on the world letting us have them. Our good times come from knowing Jesus Christ. We drink from the fountain of life. Out of our hearts flows a wellspring of living waters. We have passed from death into life. From darkness into light. We have gone from children of wrath to children beloved by the Father. We have risen from corruption and misery to righteousness and peace. "O taste and see that the Lord is good."

FREEDOM (July 2, 2023)

The Bible tells us that the whole world lies under the sway of the evil one, the devil. That's not hard to notice. The devil loves wickedness, and so we see wickedness throughout the land in an ever-increasing wave of excess. The devil is an oppressor, so we see our world leaders unconcerned about serving those under them, whom they supposedly represent, but instead we see them lording it over the common man and seeking their own glory. The devil loves division and so we see the world is only happy when

discord reigns, and if there is peace we find the world will stir up trouble as soon as possible. Those in the devil's kingdom can never be free. Freedom comes only through our great God and King, the Lord Jesus Christ. "If the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed." As the old hymn says, "My chains fell off, my heart was free. I rose, went forth, and followed Thee." America has many freedoms still, but true freedom is only found in Christ.

HE WENT ON HIS WAY REJOICING (July 16, 2023)

A man was troubled and on his way back to Ethiopia where he was the treasurer for Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and yet his mind was confused and his soul was not at rest. He was reading Isaiah where the prophet prophesied about a man who was led as a sheep to slaughter, and he didn't know who Isaiah was referring to. He was clearly a man being drawn by the Father to Christ, and the Holy Spirit directed Philip away from Samaria to join his chariot as it journeyed on a desert road from Jerusalem toward Gaza. The man was no doubt surprised when Philip ran up to the chariot and asked him if he understood what he was reading. From this Scripture Philip preached Jesus to him. He was baptized immediately after believing and as soon as Philip came up out of the water the Spirit led him away and the man saw him no more. But the man was no longer troubled. He went on his way rejoicing. Our Lord continues to seek and save the lost. When He saves them they go on their way rejoicing.

THE DIAGNOSIS (July 23, 2023)

When we are sick we are in a state where we fall short of our ideal strength and health. Sometimes we are just uncomfortable. At other times there is great pain. There may even be periods of light-headedness and confusion. Fever may make us see things that aren't really there. How wonderful when we return to health. It is a great opportunity to thank the Lord! God, through Isaiah, called the nation of Israel sick. "The whole heart is sick and the whole head is faint" (1:5). On top of that, no one was stepping forth to heal their sickness (1:6). Israel's sickness was not merely of a physical body, but a spiritual malady. Their way, their thoughts, their deeds, their behavior; all this was sick, a departure from what constitutes a healthy nation. The blessed nation is that nation whose God is the Lord. Sinful rebellion against God saps the life out of a nation. It sends a nation into the ways of destruction and dishonor. The solution was not more wickedness, but to run to the Lord for cleansing. "Come now, and let us reason together," says the LORD; "though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool" (Isaiah 1:18).

HOW MY PARENTS GOT SMARTER (July 30, 2023)

A momentous day came in my life long ago that I do not even remember, but I know it happened. I don't remember being born. I don't remember all the ladies visiting my Mom and saying, "O what a gorgeous child!" but I know it must have happened. But a day came when I was aware for the first time and I understood something of the world I had been born into. Young life really consists of a lot of coasting. I had no idea what to do. My parents made all the decisions for me. I trusted them to lead me through life and get me where I was supposed to go. A time came when my grandmother told me I got too big for my britches, which meant I was acting like I should be in charge. As I matured my parents got smarter, not by being smarter themselves, but by me being smarter about them. The more we know the Lord the smarter He gets, too. Not by being smarter, but by us being smarter. In some sense we are coasting again, but in an active sense. We are depending on our Lord to guide us in His infinite love and wisdom. O how we need Him!

KEEP THE DOOR CLOSED! (AUGUST 6, 2023)

My grandparents' porch was a favorite place for flies to gather and that was right outside the main entrance, which was the door into the kitchen. Many flies have been interviewed and it has been discovered that flies love to gain entry into a kitchen. So one very basic rule was that we CLOSE THE DOOR and not let the flies in. If a fly was found inside it was proof of either failure on the part of door closing, or tribute to the devious sneaky nature of flies. No fly EVER was in the house by the will of any human therein. But what about this verse? "The Lord has made everything for its own purpose, even the wicked for the day of evil" (Proverbs 16:4). The Lord has let plenty of flies into His kitchen. He does not delight in them. Yet He made them and placed them in this world for a purpose—for the day of evil.

"When a wicked man rules, people groan," and yet God puts wicked men in power. We must take encouragement in this. As bad as the wicked make our world, they are here to fulfill a purpose glorifying to the Lord in the Day of Judgment.

THOUGHTS AND PRAYERS (AUGUST 13, 2023)

The standard response, for some time, when terrible events transpire in our world has been to offer thoughts and prayers on behalf of those impacted. The world has taken a special interest in this phrase and lambasted it as useless. Instead, they say, we need to DO SOMETHING that actually will result in fixing the problem. You know, like pass a law. They think thoughts and prayers are vacuous dismissals of the problem and tantamount to saying, "We aren't going to do anything helpful." Samuel Thomas once said, "When we work, we work. But when we pray, God works." Unbelievers do not believe in prayer, unless maybe it's to Mother Earth asking her to forgive them for driving their car. The "thoughts" part of that formula just means we care and are inclining our attention to the situation. That's not bad, but by itself it's ineffectual as a fix, although the victims will appreciate the compassion expressed. It's when we pray that we really connect to the source of help. Our God is a very present help in trouble. That's true no matter what unbelievers think.

THE FAMILY OF GOD (SEPTEMBER 3, 2023)

Many of us enjoyed pleasant family times as we grew up. The family is God's plan and designed for the good of mankind. It doesn't always work as it should due to various issues, but when it functions as it should it is a warm and happy place. Even more so can this be said of the family of God. We are placed into God's family by being born again. Being in the family of God with brothers and sisters in Christ is not fully appreciated by the world. Many discount the value of the family of God. But we love each other. We pray for each other. We care for one another. We share a common goal of glorifying the Lord God. We all want salvation for the lost. We all live in hope and encouragement as we share our concerns and genuinely fellowship in the Lord. There is compassion and understanding. There is forgiveness and guidance. We are of one heart and one mind. The world wants this though they know it not. God's children have it and it is pleasing to the Lord for His sons and daughters to dwell together in the love and unity that He Himself has made in His body.

TRUTH IS GOOD (SEPTEMBER 10, 2023)

In some ways truth has taken a beating over the last several years, and in other ways truth has always taken a beating from one perverse generation to another. If the first century had a perverse generation as Peter stated at Pentecost, how much more perverse is our own? Truth is the domain of God. He defines truth and His Word is truth. The devil is a liar from the beginning and traffics in lies. Because our world

has gleefully celebrated the devil's influence we are inundated with falsehood on every front. When we build on truth we build on the laws of God and the stability that following Him brings. Truth is not our enemy; truth is the best of friends. As long as our world values lies over truth we will only become more perverse. However, there is also another observation. Truth is not really taking a beating; it is being beat upon. But truth remains just as strong as ever. Truth is as durable as God. You can beat on truth until your arm falls off and it will go nowhere. Truth is eternal. Truth will prevail. Truth *is* prevailing because God's word does not return void.

THE MERCIES OF THE LORD (SEPTEMBER 17, 2023)

One characteristic of the world is its entitlement. Those of the world feel entitled to the blessing of God. Entitlement is a belief that we are owed and deserving of certain privileges. Entitlement manifests itself both in a *demand* for privileges and in an *attitude* that we are worthy of even the riches of God. The Bible teaches that we are entitled to wrath and calamity because of our rebellion against God. God owes us nothing. Believers talk about the mercy of God rather than entitlements. "I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever." "The Lord is good to all, and His mercies are over all His works." "The Lord is gracious and merciful; slow to anger and great in lovingkindness." "Great are your mercies, O Lord." Whereas grace is described as receiving that which we do not deserve, mercy is often characterized by not receiving what we *do* deserve. However, mercy is also an active blessing in that God withholds from us what could justly be given while also in mercy giving us joy and gladness in its place. We are richly blessed because God is great in mercy and lovingkindness.

THE FLOODGATES (SEPTEMBER 24, 2023)

Floodgates perform a very crucial function: the control of water. Water is the elixir of life. Water has been harnessed to provide energy, irrigation, hydration, lakes, ponds, rivers, and streams. One of the wonders of the Roman Empire was the system of aqueducts that carried water long distances to where it was vitally needed. Floodgates control the flow of water in dams, levees, and reservoirs to name a few. Floodgates can be closed completely or opened in varying degrees to allow water through. When the floodgates are open all the way the water flows at its maximum rate and force. When we say in our own day that the floodgates are open, we are speaking figuratively. We usually mean that something is out of control that needs to be stopped. Our society is out of control. The floodgates are open. All manner of sin and degradation are praised and encouraged by our modern world. We need the outpouring of water to be channeled for the good of society, but when the floodgates fly open our world is flooded with evil and destruction. Only the Lord can stem this flow of wickedness. He can lock down the floodgates of evil in our world.

THE HARVEST IS PAST (OCTOBER 1, 2023)

Oft-times we comfort ourselves by thinking that deliverance **MUST** be soon to come. The world has been hurtling headlong into destruction for years on end with no sign of slowing down. The madness increases rather than abates. "Surely the wicked will not continue to say these crazy things!" we think, but then they do. Jeremiah witnessed it and noted the cry of the daughter of his people from a distant land: "Is the Lord not in Zion? Is her King not within her?" God's people despair while hoping for the intervention of their mighty God who seems to not be paying attention. "Harvest is past; summer is ended, and we are not saved" (Jeremiah 8:20). What can we do? Well, for one we cannot stop hoping in the Lord's intervention even though it seems a long time in delay from our standpoint. We must keep seeking the Lord and focusing on the Lord, lest we lose heart and faint. "O Israel, hope in the Lord; for

with the Lord there is lovingkindness, and with Him is abundant redemption.” Let us truly and always hope in the Lord!

WHEN YOU ARE DOWN (OCTOBER 8, 2023)

For most of the very young there aren't many cares. Life is a moment by moment discovery of new things. However, as years increase so do troubles. We have more responsibility and more people we care about. We are more aware of our personal struggles. As our Lord Jesus said, each day has enough trouble of its own. So what can you do when you are down? Logic would tell us that when we are down we need a lift. We can't lay inert and hope the world lifts us up. It's the world that most gets us down. We must turn our minds to things above the lowly state we find ourselves in. We lift up our soul to God. And God lifts us up. "Lift up the light of your countenance upon us, O Lord." "I will lift up my eyes to the mountains; from whence shall my help come? My help comes from the Lord." So often we are overwhelmed and laid low. Let's not make the mistake of staying there when we have a God who is on high and who cares for His hurting child. When we lift our soul to God it can be in no higher place.

A PREDISPOSITION (OCTOBER 15, 2023)

We all have predispositions. The important thing is that our predispositions are founded in truth. Hebrews 12:15 addresses a bad disposition and exhorts us to evade it. "See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled." A root of bitterness would have a predisposition to disfavor and think the worst of someone, not necessarily on the basis of facts, but on the basis of holding a grudge. The predisposition we want is that of love. "Love covers a multitude of sins" is a statement of the forgiving and gracious spirit that believes the best of others and does not seek a quick judgment on them even if they have erred. A hateful predisposition is blind to both truth and mercy because it wants neither. A loving disposition is that which God has. He does not excuse sin or compromise its price, but He is gracious and kind to provide the way out of the condemnation of sin and is full of compassion and lovingkindness to the unworthy.

WELCOME TO HOMECOMING (OCTOBER 22, 2023)

I went through a phase in my life where I took home for granted. That lasted 18 years pretty much. In that Fall I went off to college. I woke up in a strange place with strange people. Well strangers if not strange. I was no longer in North Carolina but in that state known as South Carolina. I looked out the window from my dorm and not a mountain in sight. All I wanted at that time was to go home. When I finally did it was like a dream. No more taken for granted, I saw home as the treasure God has given us. To have a family. To be loved and accepted and nurtured and even fussed over. Where people love you even though they know you the best. Church Homecoming is different but not altogether so. We are a family comprised of all believers in Jesus Christ and if we are in possession of wisdom we value this home and family. It is one that will persist into eternity. On this day others typically join us who aren't normally here so we rejoice together today that God has given us a home to come to for fellowship in Christ.

STAYING IN TOUCH (OCTOBER 29, 2023)

My family had a couple of little dogs once that were, as so often is the case, a very integral and loved part of our family. Their size accommodated their desire to station themselves near us and take naps. My Dad noted to me once a very signature feature of their sleeping style. "They have to be touching me," he said. So as long as some part of them was touching my Dad or another member of the family they were

capable of a peaceful sleep. It's a good picture of our own peace when we are touching our Lord by walking with Him and knowing His near presence at all times. David said even though he walked through the valley of the shadow of death he would fear no evil because his Good Shepherd was with him. His rod and staff comforted him. In another place he remarked on the joy of living in the presence of the Lord in the tabernacle. At first the prodigal felt his better place was away from his father. When reality dawned and sense kicked in he ran home willing to be a slave just to be near his father. This is peace indeed.

CHANGING TIMES (NOVEMBER 5, 2023)

Today we return to normal time and have abandoned Daylight Savings Time until March. Of course when the time changed times really didn't change. The same problems remain. Many of the same solutions that don't work remain. No cosmic changes occurred. The sun, moon, stars, and planets kept on doing what they've been doing. The absolute truth did not change, nor will it ever. The hour of Jesus' return did not change, although we still don't know when it is. Falling back an hour will not delay the judgment. Some say the point of Daylight Savings Time has long expired and it no longer serves its original purpose, but as President Reagan said, the nearest thing to eternal life on earth is a government program. For believers let this be a reminder that our God does not change. His promises are sure. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Our salvation is established on the unchanging rock of the person and work of Christ. Also, our Lord's timing is always perfect. So if something seems late, hold on for the Lord's perfect time.

A WORTHY ADVERSARY (NOVEMBER 12, 2023)

Almost all stories have an antagonist. An antagonist is a person or group that opposes the hero and makes life more difficult for him and others he has come to rescue. Antagonists are put into stories on purpose to make things more interesting. The hero needs to show His greatness by means of victory over a worthy opponent. The reader is left in doubt as to the hero's ultimate victory because the antagonist is a worthy adversary. There are tense moments of uncertainty while the hero battles the antagonist. Typically there are highs and lows for the hero until the end of the story. In the end the hero vanquishes the foe and we all breathe a sigh of relief. We have real life antagonists and from our standpoint we have serious concerns how, if, and when they will be defeated. However, it is not so with the Lord. The Lord has billions of adversaries in this world and in the spiritual realm. However, the end is never in doubt. The Lord has no worthy adversaries. He is not intimidated or fretful. He is unassailable. No one can defeat the Lord and it is best that we always think on that.

IT'S ON US (NOVEMBER 19, 2023)

Thankfulness to God is the most basic and reasonable thing to do in light of His many gracious blessings. The families he has given. The help in times of hardship. His mercies are new every morning and His faithfulness is great. He stoops to the unworthy. Our Lord even became man to provide redemption. Were we to count our blessings we could not reach the end. And it's not just the righteous that He benefits and blesses. The rain falls on the just and the unjust. Literally billions receive the goodness of the Lord who do not acknowledge Him or even believe in Him. They not only neglect to be thankful, but don't even believe there is a personal God behind all their bounty. Thanksgiving is proper for all people to render to our great God. But it falls on us to actually thank the Lord. We cannot leave such a solemn duty to the unregenerate world. Not only is the world unreliable to offer the sacrifice of

thanksgiving, but they are reliable *not* to offer it. Let us joyfully take up the slack and pour out our abundant thanksgiving to the Lord who so richly lavishes good things on us.

DOES JESUS CARE? (NOVEMBER 26, 2023)

Does Jesus care when my heart is pained
Too deeply for mirth or song,
As the burdens press, and the cares distress,
And the way grows weary and long?

Does Jesus care when I've tried and failed
To resist some temptation strong;
When for my deep grief there is no relief,
Though my tears flow all the night long?

Does Jesus care when I've said "goodbye"
To the dearest on earth to me,
And my sad heart aches till it nearly breaks—
Is it aught to Him? Does He see?

Oh, yes, He cares, I know He cares,
His heart is touched with my grief;
When the days are weary, the long nights dreary,
I know my Savior cares.
—Frank E. Graeff—

THE 5-YEAR-OLD PASTOR (DECEMBER 3, 2023)

In 1989 this church set tongues wagging throughout the Southern Baptist world when you called a 5-year-old to pastor here. Now, 34 years to the day, and 39 years old, I think it's appropriate to speak a word of appreciation to this church for the opportunity I have been given. I especially want to note those who are here now who were here then. Sadly, many churches call pastors and soon after he takes his position as pastor drift off to other churches or just stop coming altogether. We had that here at Covenant as well. The statistics will tell a story that most new churches lose 50% of their membership in the first year or two. Not because they should, but simply because they do. To you who are faithful and still here I owe special gratitude. Also, all kindnesses to me as your pastor are also kindnesses to my wife. When you call a pastor you get a family with him and how a church treats the pastor's family says a lot about the church. So thank you for your love and support and attention to the Word you have given these years.

THE 5 SOLAS (DECEMBER 10, 2023)

For Christmas emphasis this month I want to start a series on the 5 Solas of the Reformation: Sola Scriptura, Sola Gratia, Sola Fide, Solus Christus, and Soli Deo Gloria. The entire Christmas story is an outworking of the provision of salvation that is performed by God alone so that salvation is always according to grace. We get this truth from the sole authority of the Bible, God's inerrant word. Not just in the Christmas season, but all life at all times is centered on Jesus Christ, whether or not any individual person on earth personally makes Christ his or her focus. Our God is bringing all things to His desired

end in Christ. Our Lord Jesus cannot be ignored and dismissed because the Father has determined to wrap up all things in Him. So for the remaining Sundays in December let's pray God's blessing on the 5 Solas of the Reformation. These gave the Reformation saints the focus they knew the Church needed to return to the basic principles of the Christian faith.

THE THOUGHT THAT WON'T GO AWAY (DECEMBER 17, 2023)

It's easy to pick on practitioners of wildly wayward religions for believing things to be true that are not only untrue but far, far from it. However, there is a false doctrine that many Baptist churches are steeped in that just will not go away. That error, whether spoken or thought, is that there must be something in us that made God save us. The most modest will say the amount of good in them is microscopic, to such a degree that God had to do almost every bit of the work. But at least they did the least thing—they believed. Then God did the rest. Some disguise it by saying "God did it all" but then add "as soon as I let Him." No, the true doctrine of salvation is that it is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone to the glory of God alone. What a wonderful Christmas message this is! The babe in the manger was the manifestation of the grace of God in truth. "We saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth."

A TOTAL SUCCESS (DECEMBER 24, 2023)

We often groan over the commercialism that dominates the Christmas season, but let's face it—the vast majority of people are not believers in, or lovers of, Jesus Christ. They don't recognize the incarnation of the Son of God as an essential part of God's plan of redemption. They do not feel compelled to seek Christ that they might be saved and delivered from eternal woe. Most will keep Christ well away from any central focus of their lives. The world is more likely to abhor Christ than to adore Him. However, God's plan in sending His Son to redeem the world is a total success. All that the Father gives Jesus will come to Him. The Holy Spirit will open every heart of His chosen ones. Our Lord Jesus will lose none of His elect. All the praise and adoration intended in the design of God will flow in full measure to our great Savior. A certain salvation has been provided that is not dependent on our acceptance of it, but totally in the will and power of God to accomplish.

IT HAPPENS EVERY YEAR (DECEMBER 31, 2023)

Growing up I learned a phrase to indicate slowness. Something was said to be "slow as Christmas." Of course that means that those things you wish most to come tend to seem the slowest in actually arriving.

We all know it's just a feeling, but it truly is a real sense. Solomon said in Proverbs 13:12: "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but desire fulfilled is a tree of life." David spoke of longing for the courts of the Lord. Those who ascended to Jerusalem were excited to be approaching the house of the Lord and sang as they drew near. Well, Christmas has once again come and gone. However, we will still hope and wait on the Lord with expectation of His powerful works ahead. Just as mankind waited for the first coming of Christ, so we await His Second Coming. But our God is the living God. He is not sleeping. He is constantly working out His eternal plan in this world. We must continually hope in Him and serve the Lord and one another with confidence.

HAPPY NEW YEAR IN TRUTH! (JANUARY 7, 2024)

Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers. For I was very glad when brethren came and testified to your truth, that is, how you are walking in truth.

I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth. (3 John 1:2-4)

We say “Happy New Year” as a wish, hoping that those we love have good health, success in their ventures, and happiness all year long. Interestingly, John in the above verse wishes something similar for Gaius. God’s love may take us through difficult trials, but from our standpoint we pray for health and prosperity in the affairs of our beloved ones. Of course, we don’t experience non-stop successes in any year, new or old. But there is one thing John prays for that we can have throughout this New Year—truth. Gaius was a man of truth. John had no greater joy than to hear of his children walking in truth. Let us, too, prosper in truth in 2024!

THE STRONG BOND (JANUARY 14, 2024)

Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone? And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart. (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12)

It is pleasing to the Lord when His children, His Church, maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. However, as the above verses make plain, it is also pleasing to His people. We rejoice in the sweetness of fellowship and peace with our brethren. We crave more of such tender love and are supported by one another. The world can be a cold, cruel place, but with the family of God surrounding us, that bleakness is turned to warmth. We must protect and nurture this always.

Will It SNOW? (JANUARY 28, 2024)

Psalm 147:16-17: He gives snow like wool; He scatters the frost like ashes. He casts forth His ice as fragments; who can stand before His cold?

Psalm 148:7-8 Praise the LORD from the earth, sea monsters and all deeps; fire and hail, snow and clouds; stormy wind, fulfilling His word.

Some in our church would like to see a nice snowfall. Others would like to not see any kind of snowfall. Your pastor is on the side of those wanting snow this winter. It has been several years since it last snowed here in Orangeburg. Some might say that means we are due, while others will say it’s a trend that indicates we will never get snow again. The above verses from Psalms tell us that we will get snow when the Lord gives it and when He deems it best for His glory. Since the Lord does seek His glory and accomplishes His will, then YES it will snow. I’m just not sure if it will snow this year.

LET NOT YOUR HEART BE TROUBLED (FEBRUARY 4, 2024)

When Godzilla shows up from time to time (according to movies) the people pretty much have to let him have his way. Same with King Kong. Maybe when they grow tired of breathing fire and knocking down buildings they will just leave on their own. Many view trouble in this same way. Trouble comes and there is nothing we can do about it, we think. How can that be so when the Lord tells us to not let our hearts be troubled? How can we justify being troubled when David gives us his example of hoping in God and telling his soul to not be downcast? We will experience trouble in this world. Jesus said each day has enough trouble of its own. However, trouble can be kept from our hearts and minds if we refuse to surrender to it. Sure, it takes the grace of God and much seeking of the Lord. Friends will help. But

never accept that trouble in heart is inevitable. Trouble in the world is. But our hearts can be at peace from the trouble's designs. Our victory over trouble is trusting and communing with our Lord Jesus who has overcome the world.

HITTING THE RIGHT SPOT (FEBRUARY 11, 2024)

When your back itches there is nothing quite so satisfying as hitting the right spot and scratching there. Close is not enough. Only hitting the bullseye counts. Probably in all history people have collected the perfect back scratchers to do the job. Or we seek help from others who we instruct to "move up" or "a little to the left." We even have sayings. "You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours." For scratching that goes beyond dependence on worldly implements the Word of God tells us, "Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a word spoken in right circumstances" (Proverbs 25:11). The Bible speaks of a timely word, a word in season. "A word spoken in due season, how good it is!" (Proverbs 15:23). Our best and most valuable friends on earth will always be ready with an encouraging word. A timely word may strengthen legs that are failing and straighten a back that is bowed down and lift up shoulders that are drooping. This is the power of the tongue to bring healing and strength to revive us when we are down. A good word hits the right spot.

THE GREAT COVERING (FEBRUARY 18, 2024)

One of my favorite ways to clean my room as a child was to take all the stuff scattered on the floor and stuff it under the bed. Shockingly, my Mom did not consider that an acceptable cleaning, but it did give my room the appearance of cleanliness even though the mess was merely moved under the bed. There is a better covering we use toward those we love. "Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8). This does not condone hiding personal sin, but speaks of the desire to hide from the public those things that would damage the reputation of someone we love. When you hate someone there is eagerness to reveal every single shameful act they do. We see this much in the world of politics. But those who love "bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, endure all things" (1 Cor. 13:7). The unloving cannot wait to bite and devour those they despise. They sharpen their tongue like a sword. But, "He who conceals a transgression seeks love" (Proverbs 17:9a).

NOW HEAR THIS! (FEBRUARY 25, 2024)

God teaches us often by repeating things we already know, not so much to acquaint us with new truth, but to reinforce the old truth we should be following. Therefore I, your pastor, shall revert again to that in a word to first our young people and then the older. Read the Bible! If you young people will every day read and think on what the Bible says you will have a HUGE head start in a world that is increasingly not only foolish, but HORRENDOUSLY foolish. Adults are saying things publicly that anybody with the smallest amount of Bible knowledge knows is absolutely insane. Yet they seem not to know. Why? Because they don't know the Word of God. Say that last phrase slowly. WORD OF GOD. The Bible is God's message to us. Pay heed to it. Mull over it. Let it sink in. The alternative is dire—to live in public foolishness and everlasting shame. People are ignorant of the will of God in this nation not because of being deprived of it, but by depriving themselves of it. So to young and old, now hear this!
Read the Bible!

A BUNCH OF DRY BONES (MARCH 3, 2024)

The Lord somehow knew the day would come when we would need some really serious encouragement about the times in which we are living. A time when there seems to be absolutely no hope of change.

There is so much rottenness and corruption. Perversion is strong in our day, probably more so than at any other time in any of our lives. Many have sounded the death knell on our nation and they may be right. The way back even to common sense appears to be thousands of treacherous miles away. Where has evil not locked itself firmly in place? The same, however, was true of the whole house of Israel in the days of Ezekiel. The Lord gave him a prophecy of dry bones all jumbled up in a lifeless and hopeless pile. Yet, the Lord breathed into the dry bones and they all sprang to life and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army. Thus the Lord showed that the spiritual future of Israel was life. Can these dry bones live? The Lord can transform dry bones today, too.

COME OVER HERE AND SAY THAT! (MARCH 10, 2024)

One of my favorite lines in a Clint Eastwood movie was not spoken by Clint but by “Granny” who had heard the threats of the soldiers chasing Clint (Josie Wales) as to what all they would do with him once they caught him. Her reply to their bravado? “That big talk’s worth doodly squat.” Psalm 2 tells us that’s how the world talks about the Lord Jesus when they are at a distance from Him. It’s the way so many in our world talk about Jesus and the laws of God. How our Lord is slandered and blasphemed every day in our “enlightened” society! Psalm 2:4 says the Lord laughs at such big talk. What is the destiny of the big talkers who think like an inch and talk like a mile? Total defeat! “I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron. You shall shatter them like earthenware.” The only escape for these big talkers is to “Kiss the Son lest He become angry and you perish in the way.”

THE ENVIRONMENT (MARCH 17, 2024)

I am sadly coming to the realization that this winter may be snowless again. In the Fall I was confident this was the year. Turns out I was not only wrong but nowhere near right. When it snows in these parts it often changes attitudes to a similar wondrous brightness as that seen in the snowy day itself. Even if you don’t like snow you like a pleasant day with peaceful and joyful surroundings. We will have days like that in the Spring when it’s not too warm and all the leaves and flowers are bursting forth with new life. If the environment surrounding us is extreme then we will be found to run from it (even if it’s snow). Harsh weather keeps us away. It is the same if the environment among people is harsh and unfriendly. “The north wind brings forth rain, and a backbiting tongue, an angry countenance.” Christian fellowship is sweet by God’s design. Although many run from it, none should. We can control the environment by practicing the commands of our Lord to love one another.

WHY IS THE LORD SO PATIENT? (MARCH 24, 2024)

What is the likelihood that various portions of the wickedest and most perverse parts of our world would still exist if we were God? I would have gotten rid of a lot in the late 70’s. Today I would be prone to pluck nations from the face of the earth as the blasphemy of our great God runs unchecked and unashamed. The injustices currently so commonplace? Zapped. Now, we know that God will bring justice without fail and without exception. But why is the Lord so patient? We better be grateful that He is or none of us would stand. Were He to be as easily offended and spiteful as false gods are reported to be the world would not endure another day. The fact is, however, that our Lord is so patient because it is His nature to be so. It is borne out of love and compassion. God’s emotions are impassable. God does not fly off the handle. God gives occasion for the wicked to repent. He is still full of justice and righteousness. The attributes of our great God do not fight against one another. The Lord always does the right thing, and one of those right things is His patience.

THE LIVING GOD (MARCH 31, 2024)

Special holidays often come with an unpleasant side effect. We miss so many who have passed from this world who once were part of our celebrations at holidays. We all feel that pain. How thankful we are for the memories, but death is our great enemy separating us from those we love. Our God is the living God. He is the eternal God. He is the Ancient of Days. He is the everlasting God. He has no beginning and no end. Idols have no independent existence. They exist only in the imaginations of their followers. Our God exists in Himself and always has. That is sufficient fodder for much praise to the Lord. However, it also comes with a wonderful benefit. He has the power to restore the dead to life. This is a power He has proclaimed that He will use on every person who dies. "And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God" we are told in Revelation 20. To His children the Lord Jesus says, "Because I live you will live also." This our Lord manifests to us by His resurrection from the dead in power and glory.

FADED INTO THE BACKGROUND (April 7, 2024)

A quick glance at my high school yearbook reminds me of two distinct things. First, in those days of school the people seen in a yearbook lived in the foreground of my life. I saw them every day of the year except for that much too brief period of summer vacation. They were not only friends and acquaintances, but actively so. The second thing, however, is that pretty much all of the foreground people from school have faded into the background. Now I never see them. I don't know how many kids they have or what they do (or did) for a living. I don't know the ups and downs of their lives. I would likely not recognize many of them today. Contrast this to the Lord Jesus. We see Him in the gospels with divine power and infinite compassion. We see Him conquering His enemies and calling His children to Himself. Then we see Him die on the cross. But He did not fade into the background. Instead, "in Him we live and move and have our being." Our Lord Jesus is ever in the foreground, alive and enthroned on high!

A PEOPLE HIGH (April 14, 2024)

When we observe behavior that is something other than orderly and controlled we wonder what that person might be on. Are they on cocaine? Heroin? Prescription drugs? Have they lingered too long over the wine? Some people need to be on nothing other than life to be a little bit wacky. There is one high that is a constant source of drunkenness in our world and not just by a few. Most people are high on people. The natural man lives every minute of the day without a thought of God. Instead, their eyes are distracted by people. By the philosophies of people. By the opinions of people. They greatly hope in the wisdom of people. They believe that people are the solution to the problems that people have caused.

The Lord rebuked His people for trusting in Egypt rather than looking to the Holy One of Israel. "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope is the Lord" (Jeremiah 17:7). All that people in the world see are people, and so it sees nothing. Those who trust in the Lord have the power of God on their side.

MAKING THINGS HARDER (April 21, 2024)

Almost all hard roads begin in a supposed attempt to make things easier. When the plan is concocted the future looks rosy. How much better life is going to be! No one really is against an easier way, in general, as long as the ease does not come with a price of doing wrong. Some don't even care about that part. But overall the sense is one of optimism and hope and expectation of improvement. Yet, such plans often result in a harder life. This is particularly true when our way runs counter to the will and law of God.

The natural man does not have the sense to navigate his own way, although he certainly has the will to do so. Such it was with the naïve youth in Proverbs 7. The enticements of the harlot were presented as a fountain of pleasure. He went after her like an ox goes to the slaughter, or as a bird hastens to the snare. “So he does not know it will cost him his life.” The broad way is the easy way and many enter through it. But it ends in destruction. Departing from the way of the Lord makes life so much harder.

WHOSE FAULT? (April 28, 2024)

Whose fault is it? Who is to blame for my own failures? Why don't I go to church? Why don't I read the Bible? Why don't I pray? Why am I selfish? This may sound like a very difficult question to answer but in the eyes of the world it is quite easy. It's somebody else's fault! One of the hallmarks of being unregenerate is the overwhelming drive to shift blame to someone else. Or something else. Even to people who are no longer alive. To people we don't even know. Many ultimately trace their guilt to God Himself. “Why did God make me this way?” People are always crying to others about how unfairly and unjustly they have been treated, when most often the fault lies within our own heart and actions. “He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion” (Proverbs 28:13). Such a simple concept, but too hard for the proud to accept. The lost hope to evade condemnation with the blame game, but God doesn't play that game. He is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.