

DENOMINATIONALISM
POSTMODERNISM
FALSE TEACHING
PERSECUTION
IMMORALITY
PEER PRESSURE
DISCRIMINATION
MATERIALISM



THINK ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

July-August-September, 2024 • Volume 55, No. 3

Those Who Are With Us Are More Than Those Who Are With Them

By AL DIESTELKAMP

MANY STORIES in the Old Testament have become “favorites” because of the great faith shown by God’s people. Hebrews 11 is but a small sample of faith that produced heroes worthy of imitation.

As a youth, one of my favorite stories was that of the three Hebrews who were willing to die a horrible death in a furnace of fire rather than bowing to a false god. *They did not bow; they did not bend; they did not burn.* In my “senior” days, a story that has become a favorite is one that began—not about faith—but about fear and doubt.

This story, recorded in 2 Kings 6, took place during the divided kingdom when Elisha was God’s prophet to the northern kingdom of Israel. The king of Syria was waging war against Israel but without success because Elisha was warning the king of Israel about the enemy’s plans.

The king of Syria was certain that he had among his servants a “leaker” and called them together and said, “Will you not show me which of us is for the king of Israel?” (v.11). One of his servants responded, “None, my lord, O king; but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedroom” (v.12).

When the king of Syria learned that Elisha was in Dothan, he sent horses, chariots, and a great army by night and surrounded the city. When Elisha’s servant woke up and saw the city besieged, he said to the prophet, “Alas, my master! What shall we do?” Elisha tried to calm him, saying, “Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them” (vs. 15-16). The servant was evidently still focused on the enemy, so Elisha prayed, “LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.” The servant was able to see the mountain full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha (v.17).

The story then takes a surprising twist. When the Syrians made their move, Elisha prayed to the LORD again: “Strike them with blindness.” Then Elisha told them to follow him to the man they were seeking. When they arrived, he said, “LORD, open the eyes of these men, that they might see.” and the LORD opened their eyes, and they saw; and they were inside Samaria!” (vs. 19-20). What a revolting development this was for the Syrians! Elisha had delivered them into the hand of their enemy, the king of Israel, who immediately sought permission to kill them; but Elisha forbade it and told him to give them food and drink and send them home, resulting in peace for a time.

We, just as Elisha’s servant, may be too focused on the formidable sources of evil in our world today. Materialism, violence, drug and alcohol abuse, and many forms of sexual immorality seem to have us surrounded.

Even in religious circles, we see “deceitful workers” who pose as “ministers of righteousness” (2 Cor. 11:13-15) teaching false doctrines and leading multitudes away from the doctrine of Christ. Every Sunday, on our way to worship in modest facilities, we pass impressive edifices of sectarian churches that show little regard for the authority of the Scriptures...and their parking lots are packed!

We even see some of our own brethren who have surrendered to the culture, and we may want to cry out, “Alas, my Master, what shall we do?” The answer is to open our eyes that we might see the truth in God’s Word. Satan is alive and well and will be living among us until the Lord comes in judgment. We will appear to be outnumbered, but with the Lord at our side we will “not be overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:21).

Regarding so-called biblical scholars, we need our eyes open to the truth that “not many wise according to the flesh, not many

mighty, not many noble, are called” (1 Cor. 1:26). Remember, God had to blind Saul of Tarsus to his early training at the feet of Gamaliel and open his eyes to reject the errors of scholarship.

When seeing ourselves outnumbered, we need to accept the truth about numbers. Our Lord said, “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there will be many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matt. 7:13-14).

Finally, I commend to you the lyrics of a gospel song that has encouraged me.

aldiestel@gmail.com

Little is Much When God is in It

By K.J. Suffield

In the harvest field now ripened,
there’s a work for all to do.

Hark, the voice of God is calling,
To the harvest calling you.

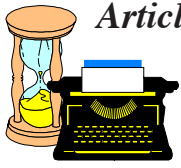
Does the place you’re called to labor
Seem so small and little known?
It is great if God is in it,
And He’ll not forget His own.

Are you laid aside from service,
Body worn from toil and care?
You can still be in the battle,
In the sacred place of prayer.

When the conflict here is ended
And our race on earth is run,
He will say, if we are faithful,
“Welcome home, my child, well done.”

Refrain:

Little is much when God is in it!
Labor not for wealth or fame;
There’s a crown, and you can win it,
If you go in Jesus’ name.



ADVICE TO BEGINNERS

By **LESLIE DIESTELKAMP** 1911-1995

THIS IS NOT INTENDED to be an arbitrary directive to young preachers, but based on 1) four-and-one-half decades of experience; 2) close observation of gospel work and workers for all these years; and (3) scriptural principles, it is hoped that these brief words may be received by young men or any others who are just now beginning regular gospel work.

1. You are an idealist. Don't apologize for this characteristic. You love God and his church and you want to do the very best work you can do in service to God and mankind. Your goals for yourself and for the church are pure and your ambitions are high. Do not allow anyone to deprive you of those goals and ambitions or turn you aside from their pursuit. You have "left all" to follow Christ and you have a "set your affections on things above," which means you are on the right track.

2. But you should also be a realist. It is often hard to reconcile idealistic and realistic attitudes, but to some degree at least, you will have to find a way to do this if you are to succeed at all. Because of environmental background, differing experiences, and other circumstances, many brethren will not—at least immediately—share your concepts regarding ideals. You may conclude that they are without zeal, unfruitful, or even unfaithful. In turn, they may think that you are visionary and

without wisdom. Just as God is "long-suffering" toward us, you will need to be patient with Brethren.

3. First of all, you are a Christian. If Brethren do not behave in accordance with divine principles, you must still manifest Christlikeness all the time. When others are angry, you should be calm. When others frown, you need to smile. When some become bitter, you ought to find reason for gladness. If others waiver, you must stand, stalwart and true, even if you have to stand alone. Some may say I have set a double standard, and that you, as a preacher, have no more obligation in these matters than do other Christians. Forty years ago, and even 25 years ago, I felt as you may feel now. But now I believe you do have *additional responsibilities*. When one makes a commitment to devote himself to preaching the gospel, I believe God may expect him not only to preach the word but to set the highest possible example and to demonstrate a life of real sacrifice as he devotes himself in service to God and to mankind (1 Tim. 4:12-16; 2 Tim. 4:5-8; Mt. 9:9).

4. Remember, you are a preacher (see Rom. 10:10, 14; 1 Tim. 2:7). You have not given up worldly possessions to become a general handyman or even a church administrator. Don't let anyone deprive you of the time to read, study, and meditate. Then, when your mind is filled with divine precepts; when your heart is full of love for

God and His Word; and when your spirit yearns for salvation for lost souls—then preach!

Allow Time

As a preacher you are not commanded to convert the world, but your job is to preach. Many will not hear. Some hear but will not obey. Many who are baptized will fall away. Some who were once strong will become weak. But remember, it is God who gives the increase, and it is His Word that convicts, converts, and sustains. *Give the Word time to work!* Don't try to accomplish by your own eloquence, your persuasion, or your pressure tactics, that which is the exclusive function of the Word of God.

Especially in dealing with brethren—with elders and/or other leaders of the congregation—do your work well—don't try to do theirs.

If the people are stingy, you can't force them to give; but you can teach them how to give and why (2 Cor. 9:6-11; Rom. 12:8; Lk. 6:38). If the church seems to be "at ease in Zion," wake them up, not with mere criticisms, but with warnings and exhortations from the Word (Rom. 13:11; Col. 3:1,2). Sin, in the church and out of it, must be condemned; but you need to remember to hate only the sin, not the sinner! You will not have gained your objective if the people get the impression that you delighted in their sin so that you have occasion to condemn them. God will use you to gain their hearts and reform their lives if you will preach words of truth with sincerity, humility, and love.

If you are a good man like Barnabas (Ac. 11:24), a faithful preacher like Paul (Rom. 1:14,15) and especially if you are a capable speaker like Apollos (Ac. 18:24), some brethren may praise you so highly that they unintentionally endanger your soul. They will tell you "I never heard it said so well," or "We have been needing your kind of preaching a long time," or "Why don't all ministers preach like you do?" But beware of vanity and pride.

A very few brothers may try to pick your sermon apart. How you respond to criticisms will demonstrate your maturity or lack of such. If you are explosive or indignant and if you are exceedingly defensive, life will be miserable for you. If you would be *fruitful and happy*, you will need to accept criticisms graciously and profit by them. The worst thing to do is to respond publicly to every private critic. Be sensitive to the needs of others, not to your own hurt feelings.

This article first appeared in Think Vol. 10, No. 2, April-May-June, 1979

The Blessed Mary...a Lord's Supper Talk

By **AL DIESTELKAMP**

WHEN THE ANGEL Gabriel was sent by God to the virgin Mary, he addressed her saying, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!" (Lk. 1:28). Later, her cousin Elizabeth said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" (Lk. 1:42).

Mary's own inspired words in what is called "The Song of Mary" included "behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed" (Lk. 1:48). Some take this blessing beyond its intent by worshipping Mary, but let us not go to the other extreme and fail to honor the mother of our Lord. She is worthy of honor.

His mother Mary was beneath the cross. A mother having to watch her child die is a most heartbreaking event to contemplate,

especially if the death occurs through agonizing violence.

Even while enduring agony on the cross, Jesus honored His mother. He was concerned for her future. He used some of His last breaths to commit His mother's care to a disciple He loved (Jn. 19:26-27).

Mary is worthy of honor because of her silence at the cross. Jesus claimed God as His Father. Had Jesus been born through the natural means—with a human father—Mary would have felt compelled to cry out that truth. No doubt, she would have said, "Stop! I'll tell you who his father is." But she remained silent. We honor her for that.

But most of all, we honor and worship her Son—Who is truly the beloved and only begotten Son of God—by commemorating His death until He comes again, as He prescribed before his death (1 Cor. 11:23-26).

aldiestel@gmail.com

LIFTED UP TO LIVE

By **ANDY DIESTELKAMP**

LATE IN THEIR WILDERNESS wanderings, the children of Israel again found themselves near the southern border of Canaan where they had been so many years before (cf. Num. 13:26; 14:45; 20:1; 21:3). Seeking permission from Edom to pass through its territory, Israel was denied passage (20:14-21). So, they “journeyed from Mount Hor by the Way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way” (21:4), no doubt because this took them in the opposite direction of the land of promise. Again they asked why God had brought them out of Egypt only to die in the wilderness and, in reference to the manna, murmured “our soul loathes this worthless bread” (v. 5).

For this impatient ingratitude, God sent “fiery serpents among the people; and many ... died” (v. 6). This divine chastening elicited repentance and a plea to Moses to intercede with God on their behalf “that He take away the serpents from us” (v. 7). Yet, take note that God did not remove the serpents as requested. Instead He provided the opportunity and means to be healed from the serpents’ bites. The divine prescription for their healing in this case was that whoever was bitten should look at the bronze serpent that Moses made and placed on a pole and live (vv. 8,9).

Jesus used this bizarre incident in Israel’s ancient history as a type of Himself in His conversation with Nicodemus (an apparently sincere and inquisitive ruler and teacher of the Jews). Their preceding discussion about the concept of being “born again” seemed to befuddle Nicodemus, prompting Jesus to question how a “*teacher of Israel*” could not grasp this concept (Jn. 3:1-10). Later Jesus said, “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” (vv. 14,15).

What may have seemed an odd event in Israel’s history was really a foreshadowing of God’s grace to offer new life to sinners. Yet, it also foreshadowed the manner by which it would be accomplished. The point of comparison emphasized by Jesus is the literal action of being “lifted up.” On a later occasion, as Jesus spoke with the Jews about His going away (8:21-23), He said, “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He...” (v. 28). Jesus later observed, “I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself” which signified “by what death He would die” (12:32,33). If Nicodemus or anyone else who heard Jesus speak about being

“lifted up” would have understood Jesus to be referring to crucifixion, they would not have seen how that could apply to the Christ (v. 34).

Notably, the word translated “lifted up” is often translated figuratively as “exalted” (e.g. Ac. 2:33; 5:31). Indeed, the cross (as bizarre as it might seem) is Jesus’ means of 1) drawing all (Jews and Gentiles) to Himself, 2) offering them new life (“born again... born of water and the Spirit - Jn. 3:3-5), and 3) ultimately being exalted (Phil. 2:9) and exalting us (Jn. 4:10).

As sojourners, we are assured that, in our wanderings, all who have been bitten by the “serpent of old” (Rev. 12:9) can look to Jesus and have new life in Him! “That whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (Jn. 3:16). God has not

yet taken away the serpent from us, but He has provided healing through the lifting up of His Son and thereby hope for all who will look to Him.

There is much that we do not understand about God’s ways, but it is clear that He will test our faith with trials. So, borrowing from another inspired allusion to Israel’s failures in their wandering in the wilderness, “Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief” (Heb. 3:12). “Let us lay aside...the sin which so easily ensnares us, and...run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of God” (12:1,2).

andydiestelkamp@gmail.com



By **AL DIESTELKAMP**

IHAVE A “FRIEND” who occasionally suggests that I should not buy any green bananas. It’s his unoriginal way of reminding me that I am getting *really* old. Of course, the Scriptures do an adequate job of warning about the brevity and uncertainty of this earthly life. In Moses’ prayer-psalm we read, “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” (Psa. 90:10).

It is good to consider the brevity of life. In a psalm of David he prays, “Lord, make me know my end, and what is the measure of my days, that I may know how frail I am. Indeed, you have made my days as handbreadths, and my age is nothing before You; certainly every man at his best state is but vapor” (Psa. 39:4-5). Job described his days as “swifter than a weaver’s shuttle” and his life as “a breath” (Job 7:6-7). In the New Testament, life is compared to “a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away” (Jas. 4:14).

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow is credited with the saying, “The young may die, but the old must!” In his preaching, my father slightly adapted this phrase by saying, “The old *must* die, but the young *may*,” reminding old and young alike that we have no promise of tomorrow; “today is the day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6:2). Most all of us have known people younger than ourselves who have passed away seemingly prematurely.

There is another truth that we ought to consider. As far as this earth is concerned, we are in “the last days.” That is, there is no promise of future life on earth beyond the present. This has been true ever since Jesus ascended into heaven, ushering in the gospel age. Jesus had promised His disciples: “I go to prepare a place for you. I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (Jn. 14:2-3).

I am impressed that the apostle Paul wrote in such a way that leads one to believe that he expected Christ to come in his lifetime—or at least in that generation. In his first letter to the church in Thessalonica he speaks of “we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:15) and describes the “day of the Lord” coming “as a thief in the night” (1 Thess. 5:2), urging them to be watchful and sober (v.6). His words were so urgent that some of the Thessalonians were “shaken in mind... as though the day of Christ had come” (2 Thess. 2:2). It’s possible that some had quit working, having misinterpreted Paul’s words.

Despite the suggestion of my friend, I’m not reluctant to buy green bananas; but I get the message: Because I’m old, unless the Lord comes soon, I’m going to die. Until then, whether young or old, we that are alive until the coming of the Lord should be “looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Tit. 2:13)—and living accordingly.

aldiestel@gmail.com

Voluntary Partners

Cost of past issue:

| | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|
| Printing, folding, tabbing | \$ 302.00 |
| Address certification, etc. | 160.00 |
| Permit postage | 364.50 |
| Bundle, return postage & supplies | 41.64 |
| TOTAL COSTS | \$ 868.14 |
| Funds available for past issue | 896.09 |
| Surplus | \$ 27.95 |

Donations: (as of 6/30/24)

| | |
|--------------------------------|-------------|
| Margaret Lee, IL | \$ 100.00 |
| Larry Curry, OH | 200.00 |
| Bobby Graham, AL | 200.00 |
| Bobbie Gannon, LA | 100.00 |
| Anonymous, WA | 100.00 |
| Anonymous, TX | 1,000.00 |
| TOTAL DONATIONS | \$ 1,700.00 |
| Surplus from past issue | 27.95 |
| Funds available for this issue | \$ 1,727.95 |

We are encouraged and humbled by all who tell us that they appreciate this publication. We are also thankful for our voluntary partners who have once again made it possible to continue publishing even after 55 years. At the current postage rate, we expect this issue to cost approximately \$870, which leaves a surplus of about \$858 for a future issue.

www.thinkonthesethings.com

THINK ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

AL DIESTELKAMP, *Editor*
260 N. Aspen Drive,
Cortland, IL 60112 • (815) 785-0401
e-mail: aldiestel@gmail.com
Web Page: www.thinkonthesethings.com

*Published quarterly by the Diestelkamp family in the interest of purity of doctrine and practice.
Distributed free as ability permits.*

260 N. Aspen Drive
Cortland, IL 60112

Return Service Requested



PRSRT STD
U.S. Postage
PAID
Provident Direct

DARKEST DAY

By SCOTT MILLER

MANY WERE EXCITED to view the total solar eclipse that occurred this past spring. A solar eclipse is a rare phenomenon where certain places along the "path of totality" will be completely dark in the middle of the day for just a few minutes. This is an infrequent but natural phenomenon that can be explained by the moon coming between the sun and the earth and casting its shadow on the earth. It is truly an odd sensation to have complete darkness in the middle of the day.

"Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders, who had come out against him, 'Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness'" (Lk. 22:52-53).

When the Son of God submitted Himself to the evil will of the people for whom He would die, it was the power of darkness (Satan) that encouraged those events to occur. For a relatively short period of time, God allowed Satan to "win" this battle between

our perfect Savior sent to save us and the adversary hell bent on destroying us.

"It was now the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two" (Lk. 23:44-45). For those not familiar with Jewish time keeping, the Jewish day started at 6 a.m. So, the sixth hour is our noon, and the ninth hour is our 3 p.m. Here we have recorded for us that for three solid hours of peak sunlight time, the "sun's light failed" and the people were shrouded in great darkness as Jesus hung on a cross. "Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life.'" (Jn. 8:12). For a period of time, the "light of the world" was extinguished, as it appeared the power of darkness had won. Creation itself reflected the darkness of the moment as the Creator was put to death by His own creation.

The gospel helps us understand that this was a temporary victory for Satan. In just a few short days, Jesus rose again from his tomb, conquering death and providing access to the "light of life" for all those who

obey Him so that we, too, could rise again from the grave. We model His death, burial, and resurrection and show the path from darkness to light when we enter the covenant with Him as His disciple as we are baptized (buried) into Christ. This is where the journey with Him and commitment to Him begins for those who desire to become His disciples. "...that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world." (Phil. 2:15). "And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the lamp is the Lamb." (Rev. 21:23)

As you ponder with amazement God's creation in a solar eclipse, consider how Christ took on the ultimate power of darkness for our sake so that we can have hope of His light in eternal life with Him. No sun or moonlight is needed in heaven because we will be in the glory of God. Let us be like Him in how we also refuse to walk in the darkness of this world and rather shine as lights for all to see reflecting the light of the Son.

hawkifanz@frontier.com