

PASSING THE TORCH

With this issue we complete 55 years of publishing *Think*. My father, Leslie Diestelkamp, served as editor for the first 20 years before handing it down to me. After serving 35 years as editor, the time has come for me to hand down this work to the third generation. Beginning with the next issue, my son Andy will assume the role of editor. As long as I am able, I will continue to do the page layouts and handle the finances, including receiving voluntary donations.

~Al Diestelkamp

THINK ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

October-November-December, 2024 • Volume 55, No. 4

Wilderness Warnings

By ANDY DIESTELKAMP

IN GENERAL, throughout time, the gospel of Jesus Christ has not been well received. The Jews of Jesus' day imagined themselves as being more receptive to God's Word than were their forefathers, saying "If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets" (Matt. 23:30). Yet Jesus called them "serpents" who as "sons of those who murdered the prophets" would "fill up...the measure of [their] father's guilt" by their own rejection of Him and those He would send to them (vv 31-34).

After crucifying Jesus, the Jewish leadership focused on squelching any effort to resurrect the idea that Jesus was the Messiah (Matt. 27:62-66; Acts 4:1-3, 17, 18, 21; 5:17, 18, 26-28, 33, 40; 6:9-15, etc.). They failed simply because "it was not possible that" death could hold Him (2:24); and those who witnessed His bodily resurrection boldly proclaimed it (2:32-36; 3:15; 4:8-12, 19; 5:29-32; etc.).

It is in this context that Stephen, when hauled before the Jewish council on false charges, used the opportunity to review Israel's history. He highlighted Israel's pattern of rejecting God's prophets. Specifically, he emphasized Moses as a type of the "Prophet" who was to come and to whom they should listen (7:37). Moses, too, had been rejected (vv 23-28); but it was Moses, though rejected, who God used to deliver His people from bondage (vv 35, 36). It was Moses to whom God spoke and "who received the living oracles to give to" Israel. Yet their forefathers "would not obey, but rejected. And in their hearts they turned back to Egypt" and its idolatry and the bondage that came with it (vv 38-41).

Next Stephen adapted the words of Amos who—centuries after Moses—prophesied to the apostate tribes of Israel about their

future Assyrian captivity. Yet, instead of saying "beyond Damascus" (Amos 5:25-27), Stephen said, "beyond Babylon" (Acts 7:42, 43), making it clear that his present audience could not excuse themselves from his point. *Both* Israel and Judah were historically unfaithful to God. Their captivities went *well beyond* Assyria *and* Babylon as they were presently dominated and occupied by Rome!

Stephen's lesson was masterful and his application blunt. "You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you... they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers" (vv 51, 52). Once again the Jews had rejected the One sent to rescue them. *Still*, Jesus willingly went to the cross to offer them and us deliverance.

The wilderness wandering of the children of Israel serves as a warning to subsequent generations for any with ears to hear and minds to learn from history rather than blindly repeat the sins of their fathers. Israel did not do a good job of this despite being repeatedly reminded to remember. Jesus calls His disciples to do better (cf. Matt. 5:20). Thus, even the earliest Christians were taught lessons from Israel's failures to make them aware of the real threat of apostasy.

Using the events of the exodus and wilderness wandering, Paul presented a compelling comparison that should sober *all* followers of Jesus Christ. He observed "that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink" (1 Cor. 10:1-4). Note that the word *all* is used *five* times to emphasize their common experience. Using Moses as a type of Jesus, Paul inserted the word *baptized* into this historical sketch of Israel's deliverance to make a point to *all*

who had been *baptized* into Christ. Just as *all* who were "baptized" into Moses were saved from Egyptian bondage, so *all* who are baptized into Christ are saved from bondage to sin. Likewise, those so delivered *all* ate of the same food and drink which "was Christ." Again, Paul inserts Christ into the picture to insure that Christians understand the point of this comparison: "But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness" (v 5). All Israel was saved, but most of Israel did not remain faithful and were not permitted to enter the land of promise! To Christians Paul writes, "These things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted" (v 6). "They were written for our admonition" (v 11). "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (v 12). Thus Paul wrote as an admonition to us to do likewise, "I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified" (9:27).

Similarly, the Hebrews' author cited Psalm 95 which admonished ancient Israel to remember their "rebellion in the day of trial in the wilderness" (Heb. 3:8) and warned Christians, "Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God" (v 12). "To whom did [God] swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief" (vv 18, 19). "We have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end" (v 14). Let us who call Jesus Lord beware lest we behave like Israel in the wilderness or like the Jews of Jesus' day. "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" (2:3). Remember Christ. Trust in Him. Obey Him. Hold fast to Him to the end!

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Do You Also Want To Go Away?

By DAVID DIESTELKAMP

SOME PEOPLE SAY that they are “deconstructing” their faith. What they mean is that they are questioning everything they have believed or been taught and rejecting either their own faith or the faith in which they have been brought up. Although this may seem novel to some people, it isn’t anything new. “Deconstruction” is simply going away from the Lord—and people have been doing that ever since people started coming to Him.

I will not try to address all the reasons people give for going away from Jesus. Instead, I’d rather talk about the one reason (and a related one reason) for not leaving Jesus or abandoning faith in Him.

In John 6, Jesus had just fed the 5,000 with five loaves and two small fish. Although the people were amazed by this miracle, by morning they looked for Jesus to feed them again. When Jesus refused to feed them and insisted that they “Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life” (6:27), they started to leave Him. He also did some difficult teaching, “From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more” (6:66).

Do we feel the same way when Jesus doesn’t do or allow what we want or expect? Are we tempted to quit following Him if our physical life doesn’t meet our expectations? And what do we do when Jesus’ teaching is hard to understand or hard to apply in life? “Do you also want to go away?” is what Jesus said to His apostles when He saw other people leaving Him—and that’s what He would ask us, too.

Peter gave the only reason for not leaving Jesus when things are difficult: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God” (6:68-69).

The reason we continue to follow Jesus and worship and obey Him is that there is no one else like Him. He is the Christ—the One chosen by God and proven by miracles and the resurrection. He is truly God’s Son, and as such, is the only one who has “the words of eternal life.” So, who Jesus is affects who we are and our future. No other person or religion or thing can do this. And for this reason, we won’t go away!

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SLEEPY SERMONS

By AL DIESTELKAMP

NOT EVERY SERMON is a “masterpiece” of oratory that keeps the listeners on the edge of their seats. Some sermons may turn out to be quite boring and hard to follow. Add to a boring sermon a listener who is already weary, and you have a combination that may cause some to “drop off” to sleep.

I try not to be offended when someone falls asleep during one of my sermons. Sometimes I do not even blame them. I figure it is my job to keep them awake. However, I don’t accept responsibility for those who are already dozing before I even get started.

We even have a biblical example of one young man who fell asleep while the apostle

Paul was preaching in Troas (Ac. 20). We might be inclined to “excuse” his weariness because Paul “continued his message until midnight.” Eutychus’s big mistake was sitting in the wrong place—in a window. His fall caused his death. (As a preacher, I have to wonder if Paul, while miraculously raising him back to life, was tempted to refrain from removing the aches and pains associated with such a fall.)

What is true about sermons is also true about articles. Some are easier to read than others. Perhaps some have already given up on this article and are not reading this sentence. This might be a good way to judge the readership of this publication. If you have read this, how about sending me an email and simply say, “I got the message.”

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Another Lesson from Mary, the Mother of Jesus

By RICK LIGGIN

IN A RECENT ISSUE of this paper, there was an article entitled, “The Blessed Mary...a Lord’s Supper Talk.” The article pointed us to Mary, the mother of Jesus, as a woman worthy of our admiration and praise, because of her unflinching faith as she quietly endured the heartbreaking event of her own child’s wrongful and brutal execution on a Roman cross. Mary was, indeed, an amazing woman.

As I read that article, I remembered another occasion in the life of Mary that moves me to admire her even more. Do you remember the time Luke tells us about *after* the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus when the apostles were staying in an upper room in Jerusalem waiting for the promised coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:12-14)? You might remember that the apostles were not alone at that time; with them was a gathering of “about one hundred and twenty persons” (1:15). And guess who was one of those one hundred and twenty people? Luke specifically lets us know that *Mary* was there (1:14)!

Now, stop and notice that on this occasion Mary was with the very men who, just a little over a month earlier, had denied her son Jesus and fled like cowards when the soldiers came to arrest Him! And notice that not only was she present with these men, but she evidently accepted their leadership, including that of the man who had denied her son three times in one night with cursing and swearing (Mk. 14:66ff). When the day of Pentecost came and the church was finally established in Jerusalem, it included many of the same folks who had

personally cried out for the blood of her son (Acts 2:23).

Wow! What a forgiving spirit this godly woman, Mary, manifested! You just have to appreciate her and want to imitate her!

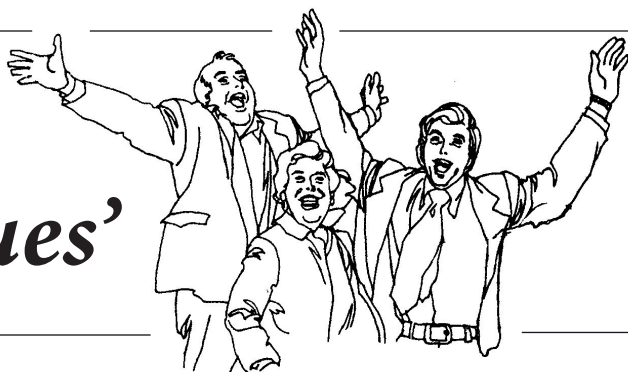
Some Christians today refuse to be a part of a local church because of what someone in that local church did to them (usually something quite insignificant by comparison); and often, it was something that happened *way* in the past. But here, Mary was a part of a church made up of the very people who had rejected and brutally executed her son; and she followed the leadership of the specific men who had so badly failed her son! Ooh! Aren’t we a bit embarrassed now about the silly grudges we sometimes hold and the wrongs we often refuse to forgive!

Evidently, Mary was like the first martyr, Stephen, who had learned from Jesus to say, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing” (Lk. 23:34)! She was there at the cross when Jesus said those words! She learned forgiveness from Him!

The story of the cross is all about forgiveness! At the cross, provision was made for our sins to be forgiven! There we witness the forgiving spirit of Christ and the forgiving spirit of our merciful God! Like Mary, we must learn to be forgiving! All offenses committed against us, all hurts we have endured, all the grudges we want to hold tenaciously to—all of these pale in view of the cross of Christ! We must never forget that the unforgiving spirit is unforgivable (cf. Mt. 6:15)! If we want the benefits of the cross of Christ, we must forgive! If Mary could do it, so can I!

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'Do Not Forbid to Speak in Tongues'



By AL DIESTELKAMP

BELIEVING AS FIRMLY as I do in the Bible as the inspired word of God, and believing also that the gift of tongues has ceased, some might imagine that I cringe every time I read the admonition of Paul, "do not forbid to speak in tongues" (1 Cor. 14:39). With the prominence given to "tongue speaking" in some religious circles today, I must ask myself if I am in violation of the scriptural admonition.

I consider myself to be open minded enough that—were I to witness the same phenomenon as it was demonstrated in the first century church—I would change my convictions. Or, if through a study of the Bible I could determine that what people today claim to be speaking in tongues by the power of the Holy Spirit was truly from God, I would not resist it. Thus, lest I have overlooked something in the Scriptures or have misapplied them, I have decided to make a study of the subject; and I invite you to study along with me.

With the great emphasis that is placed on this subject, you would think that the Bible would be filled with information on the subject. But such is not the case. Even a slow reader can read everything the Bible says about the "gift of tongues" in less than half an hour, so our task is not that great.

The word "tongue(s)" is found 50 times in the New Testament. Half of these have no reference whatsoever to the miraculous gift but only to the actual body member or to a natural language. The remaining references pertain to our subject. These references can be divided into three categories: Prophecy concerning tongues (Mk. 16:17-18); examples of the use of this gift (Ac. 2:4-11; 10:46; 19:6); and commands concerning the regulation of the gift (1 Cor. 12-14). We shall examine these passages and gather information from them for our conclusion.

Prophecy: In Mark 16:17-18 Jesus foretells of miraculous powers that would be demonstrated by believers. He said, "And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

At first glance, this may seem to indicate

that all who believe will be able to speak in tongues. Indeed, there are some who claim that this is the test of a true believer. However, Jesus didn't say that *all* believers would have this gift; He simply said that such signs would be done by believers, and He did not indicate that the signs would be done by believers in all ages to come.

Examples: In Acts 2:4-11 we see the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy when the apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit "and began to speak with other tongues..." Here we can readily see what this gift consisted of by the inspired record. We find that each man from every nation "heard them speak in his own language." The hearers were amazed because they recognized these men as being Galileans who would not know these languages. From this we know what is meant when we see references to the gift of tongues in Scripture. Perhaps with this explanation, the rest of our study will be clearer.

The next example of the gift is found in Acts 10:46 after the Holy Spirit fell on the Gentile household of Cornelius. Here no additional information is given about the gift. They received the power in the same manner as the apostles did in Acts chapter 2—by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

One more example is found in Acts 19:6. Here we see the gift of tongues was given by the "laying on of hands" by Paul—an apostle.

In summary, the gift of tongues consisted of the ability to speak in a language otherwise unknown to the speaker but known to the hearers. It was given either to those who specially received an outpouring of the Holy Spirit or by means of the laying on of the hands of an apostle. Now, we will turn to 1 Corinthians 12-14 for instructions concerning the gift.

Regulations: In the early verses of 1 Corinthians 12, we learn that the gift of tongues is only one gift among many possible gifts of the Holy Spirit (v.10). This, along with the rhetorical questions at the end of the chapter, shows us conclusively that not all Christians were able to speak in tongues (v.30).

In chapter 13, Paul makes passing reference to "the tongues of men and angels" (v.1) and points out that the ability to speak in tongues without love is useless. Today many claim their utterances are in an an-

gelic language. Paul doesn't shed light on what is meant by "the tongues of angels," so we are not at liberty to speculate. Every reference in Scripture to utterances of angels has them speaking in a language that men understood.

Also in chapter 13, we find that, along with the gifts of prophecy and knowledge, the gift of tongues would one day cease (v.8). In verse 10, Paul tells us this would happen, "when that which is perfect has come." The word translated "perfect" means "complete," referring to the Holy Spirit's completed revelation (as we now have it in the form of the Bible). Thus the Scriptures are able to equip us to be "complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Chapter 14 is literally filled with instructions regulating the use and demonstration of spiritual gifts, including tongues. He tells the advantage of prophecy over tongues and limits the use of tongues in the church to that which edifies, explaining that one must be understood in order to edify. Perhaps there was the temptation to use this gift when it was not needed. Evidently men were speaking in languages to others when there were none who could understand and interpret. Therefore, "no one understands" (v.2).

Later in the chapter Paul tells the purpose of this gift: "Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers" (v.22). This gift was of such a nature that it was convincing to the unbeliever. What we see and hear today is *not* convincing; it is more like what Paul referred to in verse 23 where he warned about appearing to be out of their minds.

The latter part of chapter 14 also is an indictment against modern claims of tongue-speaking. Paul limits these utterances to "two or at the most three" (v.27) in one assembly and only in the presence of an interpreter (v.28) that "all things be done for edification" (v.26).

Finally we arrive at our beginning text: "And do not forbid to speak in tongues" (v.39). Find me a man who can do what we have learned was done by some of the early Christians—speak in a language understandable to others but which he has never learned—and I won't try to stop him. But no man does this today.

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TOTAL COSTS	\$ 857.39
Funds available for past issue	1,727.95
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TOTAL DONATIONS	\$ 200.00
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We thank the many brothers and sisters in Christ who have made this work possible through the years. Barring any postage rate increase, we expect this issue to cost approximately \$860 which would leave a surplus of about \$211 for a future issue.

“Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart.”
~1 PETER 1:22

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Philippians 4:8

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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

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‘GREETINGS!’

By ANDY DIESTELKAMP

IT IS COMMON COURTESY in communication to extend greetings to those with whom we interact and even to those with whom we may only briefly intersect. It was typical of Paul in his letters to the churches and to individuals to have some opening and closing remarks which included some form of greeting. For example, at the close of his letter to Titus he wrote, “All who are with me greet you. Greet those who love us in the faith” (Titus 3:15). To the churches in Rome, Paul closed his letter with an extensive list of greetings to specific brethren and then passed along the greetings of other specific co-workers in the gospel as well as the general “the churches of Christ greet you” (Rom. 16:16).

The word that is translated *greet* is the same word that in other contexts is translated *rejoice*. A greeting is something that is generally positive and expressed with joy and a desire for the recipient of the greeting to have joy.

In Paul’s time, a common form of greeting face to face was with a kiss (which would have been much like a brief embrace). Many

are familiar with Paul’s admonition to “greet one another with a holy kiss” in some of his letters to the churches (1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; cf. Rom. 16:16; 1 Thess. 5:26) However, the emphasis of Paul’s command is not on the kissing part but on the need for it to be *holy*. Since kissing to greet was already a cultural norm in ancient times, Paul’s concern was with its *holiness*. Since our culture generally associates kissing with more intimate relationships, we might assume that Paul is concerned with keeping those common greetings morally pure. While certainly, Paul *would* want to encourage holiness in that sense, this is probably not what was foremost in his mind.

Paul wanted their greetings to one another to be sincere and genuine in their joyful expressions. That greetings might be insincere is no better exemplified than in Judas Iscariot’s kiss of Jesus. “Greetings, Rabbi!” he said with feigned loyalty and affection as he kissed Him (Matt. 26:49). This was *not* a holy kiss!

So regardless of the mode of greeting, we ought to be holy and sincere in our greeting of one another as brethren. We Christians ought to be holy greeters to *all* we come in

contact with because we are also admonished to be hospitable (Heb. 13:2); and hospitality begins most simply with a holy and sincere greeting.

When strangers dare to venture into our assemblies, the *least* we can do is greet them, acknowledge their existence and their presence, and welcome them by showing a holy, genuine interest in them. When we leave such greetings only to others (e.g. the preacher, the elders, the extroverts, etc.), we are failing to be hospitable in this most basic and simple way.

Granted, some visitors may find greetings awkward and uncomfortable (as many of us do when interacting with strangers). However, a *sincere* welcome generally will be appreciated, and a failure to be greeted *will* be noticed.

So, let’s greet one another with a holy sincerity and also be aware of and joyful toward outsiders who courageously venture into our assemblies. Introduce yourself with joy and rejoice at the possibilities that may come from a simple, holy greeting.

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GREETINGS!