

The sufficiency of the message



Evangelists of the modern day "gospel" must master flowery rhetoric, meaningful arm gestures, and soothing voice inflections in order to put across their so-called good news. The language has to be beautiful because the message is ugly:

"You are mired in sin and dangling on the precipice of eternal death. If you want to go to heaven, decide now to accept Jesus, because you may be killed in a car wreck on the way home and go to hell forever."

Left to itself, this message is a nightmare. But when meaningful arm gestures are added, and enough verbal flowers are planted around the manure piles, many people go numb enough to believe it.

What a contrast to our message of grace: "For not ashamed am I of the evangel, for it is God's power for salvation to everyone who is believing" (Romans 1:16). The mere announcement of the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice has power. It doesn't matter how one says it, as long as one says it: "Christ died for your sins. It's a completed work that operates in spite of you. What is your reaction to this fact?"

In the Garden of Gethsamane, Jesus merely said, "I am He," and the soldiers fell backwards.

That's the kind of power I'm talking about.



Martin Zender's Clanging Gong News

"If I know all mysteries and all knowledge, but have no love, I am a clanging gong" --1 Cor. 13:1-2



Two out of three isn't bad.

It's the message, not the messenger

JONAH: WORLD CLASS EVANGELIST

In his day, who was the most effective evangelist—Jesus or Jonah? Most people would instinctively answer "Jesus." This would be a wrong answer, however. The question was: Who was the most effective evangelist *in his day*. By the end of His ministry, Jesus had converted only a handful of radicals to His message of love your neighbor as yourself. Jonah, on the other hand, converted 120,000 ordinary men and women from heathenry to God-fearing repentance, all in a single afternoon's work. Why did God do this with Jonah and—here is an even more disturbing question—why did He cause me to write about it? I believe it was to teach us a lesson about God's chosen vessels: It's all about God and not all that much about the vessels.

When God first told him to preach repentance to the Ninevites, Jonah said, "No." The prophet then spent several weeks devising a daring and ingenious plan of how to keep God from bothering him: He would run away from God in a big boat—a *huge wooden boat!* That would teach God. God would never find him in such a huge, wooden boat.

Indeed, it took God many, many hours of intense searching to find Jonah; the sea is very big, and sophisticated navigation equipment had not yet



been invented. While He was looking, God decided to send a huge storm, just to make things interesting for Jonah. When God did finally locate the reticent prophet, Jonah was dog-paddling for his life in the Mediterranean. The mariners had tossed Jonah overboard at his own request. "God sent this storm because of me," Jonah had whined. "No sense you guys dying on my account. Give me the old salt water enema—and have a nice day."

(Continued on page 2)

CGN FUN-FILLED GOSPEL GAME!

Which of the following sayings has the power to persuade people of the love of God?

(answer on next page)

- I am an ordained pastor, so listen up
- You are dead in trespasses and sins
- This is the hour of decision
- It is up to you where you spend eternity
- Ours is an angry God
- God offers you salvation
- Watch this amazing arm gesture
- Christ died for our sins



Thanks for playing!

...world class evangelist

(Continued from page 1)

The clever mariner was near death when God sent a giant fish to swallow him. This was the best thing that could have happened to Jonah, because the fish saved his life.



You know you're having a bad day when the best thing that happens to you is you get swallowed by a giant fish.

The fish regurgitated Jonah three days later on the balmy beaches of Nineveh. God

again commanded His prophet to preach repentance to Nineveh, and this time the idea made a lot more sense to Jonah. It didn't mean he had to like it, however. Even after his Sea World adventure, Jonah's attitude still ranked a little lower than the angels. We know this because we have a record of his exact words as he went about Nineveh doing the Lord's work. Here is the text of his sermon, in its entirety:

"Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown" (Jonah 3:4).

Gospel game answer

Did you take the CGN FUN-FILLED GOSPEL GAME on the previous page? What was your answer? Which saying has the power to persuade people of the love of God? Did you say: "You are dead in trespasses and sins?" I hope not, because that answer would be—WRONG! How can a person dead in trespasses and sins respond to a gospel challenge? Wouldn't believing in God be the most un-sinful thing a person could do?

Did you guess: "Ours is an angry God?" I'm sorry to hear that. God is now conciliated to the world (2 Cor. 5:19), meaning that He is on friendly, peaceful terms with it. In other words, He's smiling on everyone. In other words, He's specifically *not* angry. Strange that no "evangelist" ever tries this message on other people. Well, few "evangelists" even know it's true.

Did you guess: "God offers you salvation?" That's unfortunate. Salvation is a divine accomplishment, not a human offer. It's a fact, not a contingency dependent upon human response.

Did you guess: "Watch this amazing arm gesture?" Close! Amazing arm gestures *are* an important part of

It's hard to imagine whittling a sermon down to less. If a preacher today pulled a sad stunt like this, he'd be fired. Not a church board in the land would put up with it. No organ music? No flaming rhetoric? No altar boys or incense? And why aren't you waving your Bible, Jonah? No, but here's you, waddling through town like a depressed penguin, chin on your chest, preaching from a 3X5 index card, hating your job, smelling like a fish, and not giving a herring in hades whether or not any of your congregation repent.

The result of Jonah's ministry is laid out in lavish detail in the very next verse: "Then the people of Nineveh believed in God." This was 120,000 people. The repentance of the city was so sweeping and sincere and great that God changed His mind concerning what He would do to Nineveh and spared the city. Jonah was so ecstatic over the success of his ministry that "it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry" (Jon. 4:1). What a perfect finish to a man-humbling account. The entire account of Jonah is purposely ridiculous enough to instruct us as to God's use of people. ■



Levi Alpheus (left) and Peter Jonah at the Sea of Galilee, AD 29. (Photo by James Zebedeo)

effective communication, especially for Italians. Some Italian evangelists (I am *not* speaking of the Pope) have actually knocked sinners unconscious with a carelessly thrown elbow.

The correct answer is: "Christ died for our sins." Here is the complete package in five simple words. Being in the past tense, the statement effectually eliminates the idea that sin still stands between you and a righteous God. And the fact that Jesus Christ—the divine Son of God—dealt with these sins, puts failure out of the question. For from that terrible cross, He said: "It is finished!"

Though you may have been a Christian for many years, it is possible that you have just now heard the gospel of Christ. ■

What a Revelation!

MATTHEW'S REAL NAME WAS LEVI ALPHEUS (see accompanying photo below)

I don't know what earth-shattering thing you did last month, but I discovered that the disciple Matthew's real name was Levi Alpheus.

Matthew 9:9 tipped me off: "And Jesus, passing by, perceived a man termed Matthew sitting at the tribute office." As this man was *termed* Matthew, this must not have been his real name. I found his real name in Mark 2:14— "And, passing along, He perceived Levi of Alpheus, sitting at the tribute office."

The name Levi Alpheus brought the man down to earth for me. Here was the name he went by in Grade School, when his teacher took roll call:

"Barney Levinson."

"Here."

"Levi Alpheus."

"Here."

One fine day at the tax shack, our Lord chose Levi Alpheus—Levi *Alpheus*, for heaven's sake—to one day rule the world.

Wait until you see what He does with Levi's impetuous classmate, Peter Jonah.



Q&A

How do I know whether or not I'm a member of the body of Christ? I don't feel called.

Feelings have nothing to do with it. If you believe that Christ died for your sins, then you are a member of the body of Christ. But beware. As simple as this message sounds, Satan has devised doctrines ("doctrines of demons," 1 Tim. 4:1) to keep you from believing it. Do you believe that Jesus is the son of God, or have you swallowed the Satanic lie that He *is* God. If the Son *is* God, then the Son could not have died, because God cannot die. If you believe this, then you don't believe in the death of Christ.

Do you believe in free will? If so, then you believe it was your belief in Christ (rather than Christ), that delivered you from sin. Do you see now why I say feeling is immaterial? God's spirit causes people to intellectually assent to right teaching. If you assent to it, then you're a believer. It's that simple.

Rants & Stuff

The Apostle Paul says we should not murmur.
Therefore, I shall rant (Philippians 2:14).

I'm so powerful right now I could just croak



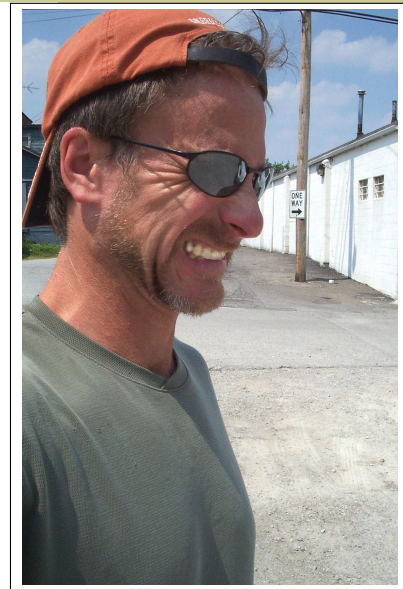
Bedtime is my favorite time of day because it simulates death. Each night when you pull up the covers, it's a mini funeral. It is. You're saying, "Good-bye cruel world. Carry on without me for a few hours, you %\$#@ oblate spheroid with a *^#!&% molten center."

Well, maybe you don't say that, exactly. You probably say something much nicer, like, "Good night, friendly world controlled by the prince of darkness." Even so, I consider "good night" to be a euphemism for the two sentences I just wrote. "Good night" is what we say at funerals. "Good night," we say to the dead. "See you in the morning," we say to the terrible-looking corpses. Then we go eat ham sandwiches and potato salad to sustain our own dying frames.

I am apt some days to envy the dead. For instance, I was reading a 1941 *Unsearchable Riches* magazine the other day, and ran across the following:

Sister Mary Ann Williams of the Lake Worth, Florida, class, passed away November 29. An inspiring funeral message was given by Brother John Clendening. Sister Williams and her daughter, Sister Edith Claxton Grapes, had been regular attendants of this class since 1932, when Brother Loudy first visited there.

Sister Mary Ann Williams, formerly of Lake Worth, Florida, had, for eight years, learned mature truth under the tutelage of none other than Brother Loudy. Thus, she was certainly a member of the body of Christ. Not only this, her daughter was also a sister in faith—speaking of the noble Ms. Grapes. If this was not enough, an inspiring funeral ensued, conducted by none other than Brother John Clendening. (I've never heard of him, but I



would certainly wish for him to dispense inspirations at *my* ceremony, were he available. And yet Clendening is most certainly dead himself by this time, as is the noble Sister Grapes.)

Sister Williams finished her course. The next time she opens her eyes, she will be with Christ. In the meantime, she is delivered from the heat of Lake Worth, Florida—not to mention the devilish insects of the area. No more pain, no more disappointment, no more bills, and no more cockroaches in the kitchen for Sister Williams. And if you're going to die, eight days before Pearl Harbor isn't a bad time. To have never seen the word "Holocaust" capitalized, or associated "Bataan" with anything but the Philippine peninsula, would be considered, by anyone, a blessing.

Now you know how I can write so powerfully about God. "For when I may be weak, then I am powerful" (2 Cor. 12:10).

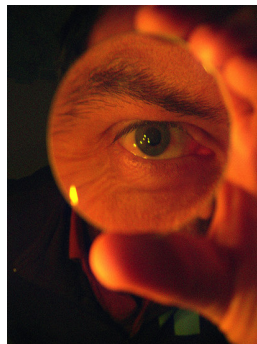
Take this verse literally sometime, and see what it does for you. ■

Paul refused to examine himself

The apostle Paul did the work of God and refused the time-wasting and often debilitating exercise of self-analysis.

"Thus let a man be reckoning with us—as deputies of Christ, and administrators of God's secrets. Here, furthermore, it is being sought in administrators that any such may be found faithful. Now to me it is the least trifle that I may be being examined by you or by man's day. But neither am I examining myself. For of nothing am I conscious as to myself, but not by this am I justified. Now He Who is examining me is the Lord." —1 Cor. 4:1-5

Who had more important work to do than the apostle Paul? And who would require a "cleaner nose" than the administrator of God's secrets? Paul knew the scrutiny he was under, and yet he wasted no



time breaking down and analyzing his actions and motives. He *thought* his motives were pure, but didn't trust that they were. That was God's business. Satan's business would have been occupying Paul with hours of guilt-provoking introspection. Paul refused to play that game.

Be like Paul. Live the best you can. Look to the future, not the past. Be like Paul, and forget those things that lie behind. Everyone has done bad things. No one's motives are pure. We are all weak. We have all hurt other people. May we simply acknowledge it, apologize to whomever apologies may be due, trust God, and move on. ■