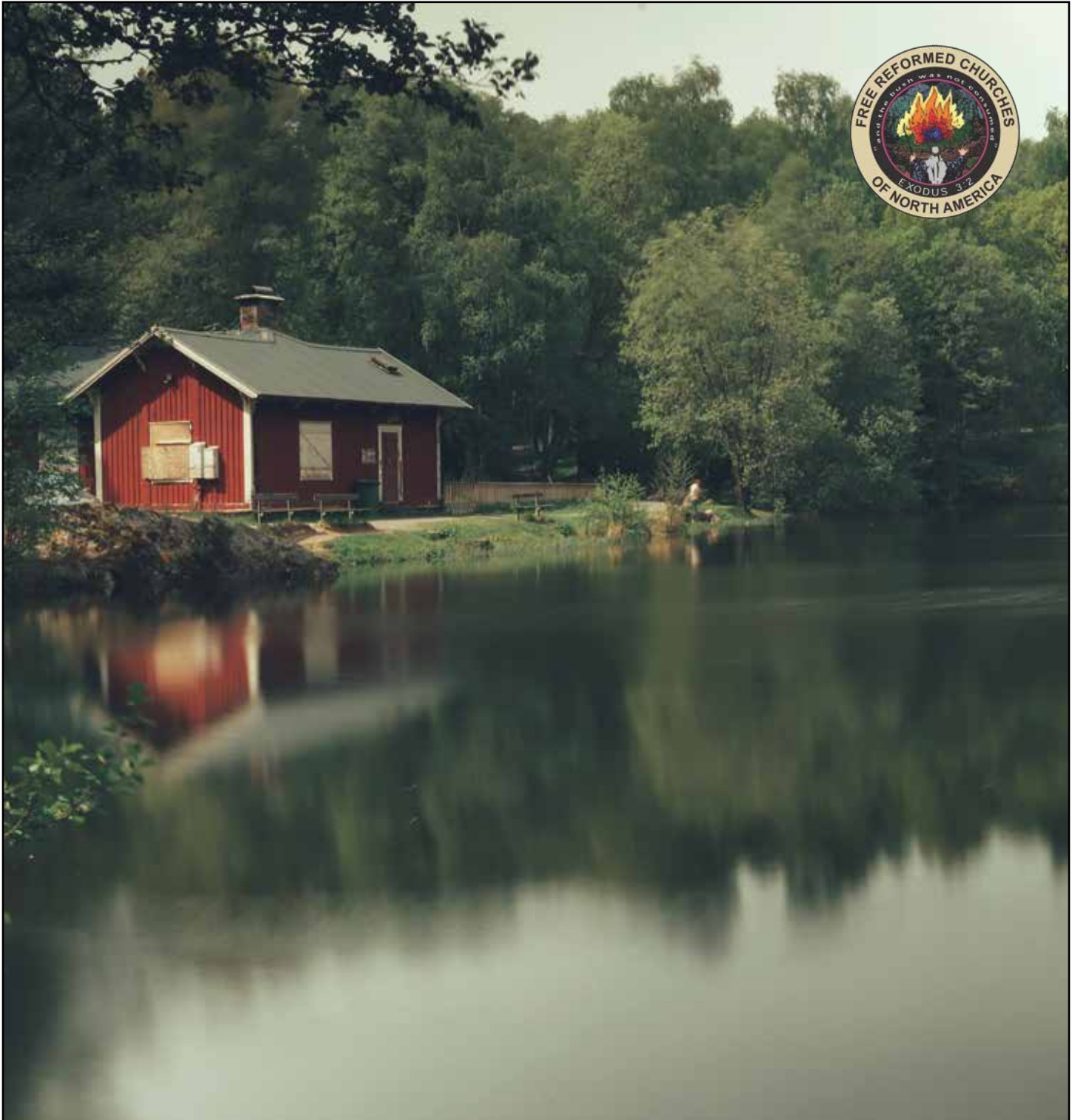


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THE MESSENGER

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE FREE REFORMED CHURCHES OF NORTH AMERICA



02 MEDITATION:
THE LORD'S
KEEPING CARE

06 EDITORIAL:
REMEMBER
TO GIVE (5)

20 PRACTICAL:
ENCOURAGEMENT
IN TRYING DAYS



THE LORD'S KEEPING CARE

Psalm 121

With school done and summer here, perhaps you are travelling or have travelled somewhere for vacation – maybe visiting family, camping, or staying at a cottage. Many of us may have the tradition (as I did when growing up) of reading Psalm 121 just before we travel, perhaps because in a special way we sense our need for safekeeping. It is certainly an appropriate psalm for times of travel because it reminds us of the Lord's keeping care for His people.

In fact, as one of the fifteen Songs of Ascents, Psalm 121 was very likely written for people who were travelling. Three times a year, Israelite males would travel to Jerusalem to worship God for the annual feasts. For many of them, the journey would have been long and tiring, with various dangers along the way. The road from Jericho to Jerusalem, for example, was about 17 miles long, and climbed about 3400 feet. As they travelled, they would sing Psalm 121 for encouragement on the journey.

That journey is really a picture for us of the Christian's journey to the heavenly Jerusalem. Just like Christian in Pilgrim's Progress, God's believing people have left the City of Destruction and are journeying toward the Celestial City, whose Builder and Maker is God. Some of us are closer to that place than others. But none of us who have begun that journey have arrived. This journey is not easy. It is long. It is tiring at times. Along its way are dangers, difficulties, trials, and temptations. At times we can become weary, discouraged, and even afraid.

What are we to do? We need to do what the psalmist does in verses 1 and 2. As he travels up the road to Jerusalem, he says, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth." What a beautiful confession of faith! As he journeys, the traveller looks to the LORD – the sovereign, almighty, covenant-keeping God – to be his help. But he is still not in Jerusalem. He needs encouragement. So do we, as believers travelling to the heavenly Jerusalem. What a blessing when – like with the travellers going to Jerusalem - there is mutual encouragement among us to persevere in the life of repentance and faith.

That is really what the rest of the psalm is about. In verses 3-8, the pronouns change from "I" and "my," to "thee" and "thy" or – in today's English – "you" and "your." It is as if another person, or perhaps a group of people, encourages the psalmist as he looks to the LORD. The core encouragement is the statement in verse 5: The LORD is thy keeper, or protector. What is so encouraging about that? Well, let's notice three things about the LORD's keeping care.

1. His keeping care is constant

In the first part of verse 3, the encourager declares to the pilgrim, “He – the LORD – will not suffer thy foot to be moved.” Sometimes when you go on a hike or even a walk, your foot can slip, and you can injure yourself. That can happen spiritually too, also for Christians, especially when they’re not being watchful. But can true Christians slip so as to fall irreparably and not make it to the heavenly city? The teaching in this verse (as well as the rest of Scripture) is that the LORD will not let that happen. He will not let His people slip and fall irreparably so that they don’t make it to Heaven. His mercy will hold them up.

What a comfort that is in our Christian walk. The life of faith and obedience is not easy. The ground is rough. The path is narrow. But what this verse is saying to you, dear Christian pilgrim, is this: Trust in the LORD. He is never going to let you slip and go over the edge. He is holding on to you every moment. Don’t be anxious or afraid. Don’t turn back. Keep going – persevere in faith and obedience! As you do so, He will keep your every step.

But that’s not all. He also never ever gets tired of keeping you. “He that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.” One of the things about the pagan gods was that they apparently needed sleep. But behold! Israel’s God – the real God – doesn’t! The LORD who keeps you, dear believer, as well as His whole church, His Israel, doesn’t ever “doze off.” He doesn’t take naps. He never needs or takes a rest or a break. He neither faints nor is weary. The take-home point from that for you, dear child of God, is this: In His grace, He never, ever gets tired of keeping you, of guarding you, of caring for you. He will keep you every moment. That should not make you careless, but thankful, humble, and zealous in the way of living for Him!

2. His keeping care is all-sufficient

That is true because He Himself stays with His people. Verse 5 says, “The LORD is thy keeper; The LORD is thy shade upon thy right hand.” In other words, He does not keep you or care for you from a distance. He Himself is your keeper, your shade at your right hand. We all can probably identify with the importance of shade, especially in the summertime. Shade protects us from the heat and harmful rays of the sun. That is what the LORD Himself is for His people spiritually. He is our shade and protection.

Therefore, His protection is all-sufficient. That is the point of verse 6: “The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night.” In other words, no matter what situation you are in, no matter what challenges you face, the LORD will keep you. He will not let anything prevent His people from arriving safely home.

What an incredible blessing it is to have the LORD Himself as our protection! That does not mean He always protects us *from* trials. But it does mean He protects us *in* trials. Think of Job as an example. But most importantly, having the LORD as our shade at our right hand means that He protects us from His own righteous wrath which you and I deserve because of our sin.

Dear reader, do you have this protection? The only way to have it is by being in Christ, through faith in Him. The Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, came to this earth and exposed Himself to the burning wrath of God on the cross. He took God’s wrath on Himself, until it was fully spent, in the place of every sinner who trusts in Him for salvation. He did that to be a shelter and shade for every sinner who trusts in Him. So come then and find shelter under the shadow of Christ’s wings. Then you will have the LORD Himself as your keeper, and so will have and experience His all-sufficient care.

3. His keeping care is total

The first part of verse 7 says: “The LORD shall preserve thee from **all** evil: he shall preserve thy soul.” What does this mean? It is not a promise of a life free from any sickness or suffering. No, it is bigger than that. In the words of Lord’s Day 9 of the Heidelberg Catechism, it is a promise that “He will make whatever evils He sends upon me, in this valley of tears, turn out to my advantage; for He is able to do it, being Almighty God, and willing, being a faithful Father.” What a big

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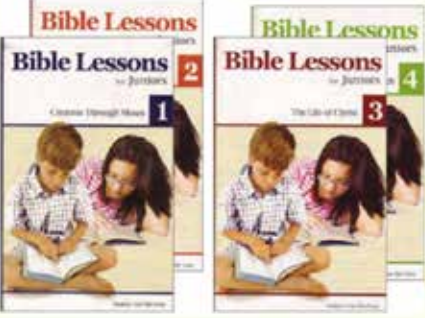
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MEDITATION

promise that is! He promises He will keep and protect you from **all** that would seek to snatch you out of His hand. He shall preserve your life. The word “soul” here refers not just to your spirit, but to your life, the life of your whole person – soul and body.

That means, dear believer, God will keep you. God will watch over and care for you – soul *and* body. As we confess in Lord’s Day 1, He so preserves you that without the will of your heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from your head. And if He wills to let a hair fall, if He wills that your body or your mind suffers greatly from sickness or pain or persecution, then even that apparent evil will turn out to be for your good, for your profit, to conform you to the image of Christ. Yes, even if He wills that your body should die and lie in the grave for hundreds of years, God will not forget about it. He will keep it. He will watch over it. One day He will raise it, glorify it, reunite it with your soul, and you – in body and soul – will be with Him forever.

God’s keeping care is total. Verse 8 promises: “The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in, from this time forth, and even for evermore.” In other words, in everything you are called to do as you journey toward the home Christ is preparing for you, the LORD will keep you. In everything. Even in the mundane, the routine things of life, the LORD will keep you. He will keep you from this time forth and forever.

That is the comfort of belonging to Jesus Christ. What a comfort to have! It is a comfort even in death, as you go out of this life and come into the next. The LORD will be your keeper even then and to all eternity. The LORD is your keeper. What a Saviour He is! What an encouragement to keep going in the life of faith in obedience to Him, also this summer season – whether you travel or not. The LORD indeed bless us and keep us – in and through Jesus Christ, to His praise! 

Rev. Jeff Overduin is pastor of Bethel Free Reformed Church of Monarch, Alberta.



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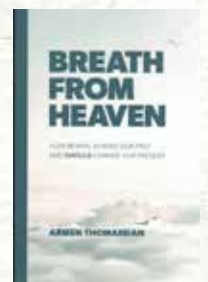
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**Faith is a gift.
All grace is a gift. Christ Himself
is the unspeakable gift (see 2 Cor. 9:15).
What do we have that we
have not received?
(see 1 Cor. 4:7)**

REMEMBER TO GIVE (5)

In this short series of editorials, we are seeking to reorient ourselves by focusing on one or other thing God's Word tells us to remember. We saw the need to remember the days of the right hand of the Lord (Ps. 77:10-11), Jesus Christ raised from the dead (2 Tim 2:8), Christians imprisoned and suffering (Heb. 13:3), and the warnings of the gospel (Acts 20:31). Now we come to the blessing of giving as more than receiving.

"I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

"We should remember the poor" (Gal. 2:10).

Our text from the book of Acts is a special one. It records a saying of the Lord Jesus that we do not find in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. At one level, that shouldn't surprise us, for the apostle John wrote that there were "many other things which Jesus did," and undoubtedly said, enough to write books that could fill the world (John 21:25). For the first years after the ministry of Jesus, these things would have circulated among the early disciples and their congregations. Paul heard one of these sayings (perhaps more), and he shared them. He told these words to believers far away in the city of Ephesus in Asia Minor. Jesus' words are powerful. Jesus' words deserve to go everywhere.

The Blessing of Remembering

The Holy Spirit saw fit to have this saying preserved in the Scriptures. Believers in every age need to know what Jesus said, including what He said about giving and receiving. How easy it is to forget His words. We need to hide them in our hearts so that we do not sin against the Lord in our thoughts, words, and actions.

Paul spoke these words to the elders of the Ephesian congregation (Acts 20:17-18). He encouraged them in the labour God has appointed to them. This true labour involved not only Word and doctrine (Acts 20:28), though that is preeminent. Elders need to remember "to support the weak" in their labours. They need to have a special eye for the weak, the more vulnerable, those with less support around them. They need to expend themselves also for them. To strengthen us in that calling, Paul quoted not himself or another apostle, but the Lord Jesus: "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

This is the opposite of what our hearts think by nature. Our sinful nature is selfish and thinks we deserve and should take, spoil, and consume as much as we can. Herein we reflect the devil, who comes to grab and steal (see John 10:10). We find it hard to give, even what we owe to people or should render to Caesar (Matt.

22:21). At all times we should remember the words of Jesus, but especially when our old nature shows itself and does not want to give or gives only grudgingly (see Rom. 12:8; 2 Cor. 9:7). Jesus said: “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

The Blessing of Receiving

While Jesus’ saying stresses the blessing of giving, it implies the blessing of receiving as well. Though it is less than the blessing of giving, it is nonetheless a great blessing. No living person has any reason to complain, for he or she has received more than any deserves (Lam. 3:39). God showers many blessings on the just and unjust (Matt. 5:45), including “rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with good and gladness” (Acts 14:17). Though there is much suffering in the world, and many have more than others, yet there are many common mercies and gifts God bestows upon all, for which we should be deeply grateful (1 Tim. 4:4).

Then there are the gifts and privileges of God’s Word, the worship of His name, God-honouring parents or other examples of godliness, faithful preaching, well-ordered government, and rest and peace in society, which most of us may enjoy to a great extent. None of these things should be taken for granted. We should very regularly remember to thank the Lord for these mercies, which many do not have as they live out their days in this world. Thinking of what we have received, we should acknowledge the Lord for these undeserved privileges, for which we will all give an account one day.

If we have received not only God’s common mercies, but also His special, saving mercies, whereby He has called us effectually unto His Son, from darkness to light, regenerating us, justifying us, adopting us, and sanctifying us, what inestimable love we should see behind these gifts. Faith is a gift. All grace is a gift. Christ Himself is the unspeakable gift (see 2 Cor. 9:15). What do we have that we have not received? (see 1 Cor. 4:7)

The Blessings of Giving

To receive all of these gifts is immense, unspeakable blessedness. Paul says: God has “blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” (Eph. 1:3). To be blessed is the opposite of being cursed, which we deserve to be. Being blessed means to have the smile of God and the benefits which God alone can bestow. When you know and experience this blessing, you say something like Psalm 103:1: “Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name.” Receiving from God, you cannot but begin to give to God and others. God never saved a sinner who does not become a channel of blessing. The great purpose of salvation is to walk in the works God has foreordained for us to walk in, all for His glory (Eph. 2:10). One of those ways we are called to glorify God is to give. “Freely ye have received; freely give” (Matt. 10:8).

When we give, we live with an open hand as opposed to a clenched fist. When we give in accordance with the Bible’s directions, we may and must do so with cheerfulness. When we give, we acknowledge what we receive is not ours to hold. Though we may have this world’s gifts, when we shut out “compassion,” we may well wonder whether we have the love of God in us (1 John 3:17).

Often tithing receives a bad rap as something belonging to Israel’s civil obligations or as a duty pressed upon the modern world by a legalistic mind that does not live out of Christian freedom. However, the truth is otherwise. Long before Israel’s civil codes, Abram gave tithes of all he possessed (Gen. 14:20). Yes, the civil codes gave specific shape to the tithing during the theocracy of Israel (e.g., Lev. 27:20-32; Num. 18:24-28; Deut. 12:6-17; 14:22-28; 26:12; Neh. 10:37-38; 13:5), but the prophets also pressed this upon the consciences of people of all times (Mal 3:8-10). True, the prophets and Jesus censure hypocritical tithing and tithing out of a legalistic mindset (Amos 4:4; Luke 18:12). However, Jesus endorsed the tithes even of mint, anise, and cumin, provided it was not an excuse to set aside the weightier matters of the law (Matt. 23:23; Luke 11:42). He says: “These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone” (Matt. 23:23; Luke 11:42). Finally, Hebrew 7:8, speaking of Jesus Christ, who lives today as a priest after the order of Melchisedek, says that He “receiveth” (present tense) tithes. It is clear that we cannot set aside tithing as an ordinance belonging to the old economy no less than we can set aside worship, keeping the

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Sabbath, or loving our neighbour (Lev. 19:18). We may give more than a tithe like the widow woman whom Jesus commended (Mark 12:41-44), but we should not give less of what we possess. We realize that the practical applications of this will look different in one case than another, but God's Spirit will guide through His Word those who look to God and remember the words of Jesus.

Remembering the Poor

What to do about "the poor"? Jesus reminded us that poor we have always with us (Matt. 26:11; John 12:8). He was not saying this as a reason not to give to them, for He added, "and whosoever ye will ye may do them good" (Mark 14:7). Many people reason that if people in our societies are poor, it is their own fault, because anyone can make it "from rags to riches" in the Western world. Many add that the welfare state of modern-day governments renders the commands of the Bible redundant today. All such reasoning is wrong and dangerous. There is certainly some more complexity to the issue of poverty and giving to the poor today. However, we should not make void the Word of God by our traditions or reasoning. Especially deacons should be trained to apply biblical thinking to their responsibilities (Acts 6:1-6). Pastors, elders, deacons, and trustworthy organizations raised up to facilitate care for the weak and vulnerable can help greatly. However, the words of Jesus do not allow us to forget the poor and needy in the household of faith, as well as outside of it (Gal. 6:10).

The blessing of giving will be visible in the poor being enriched and in turn enriching others. Paul writes: "Now he that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness, being enriched in everything to all bountifulness, which causeth through us thanksgiving to God" (2 Cor. 9:10-11).

The Bible is full of examples of the cries of the poor and oppressed being answered and God being thanked for His care and love (see Psalm 9:18). There is a compounding principle in giving to others. They are blessed. They can in turn bless others and God receives thanks by all involved. Giving is truly casting "bread upon the waters" and finding it after many days (Eccl. 11:1-2).

The Lord Jesus knew the blessedness of giving being more than that of receiving. From all eternity, the Saviour, who was rich, set Himself to become poor that we might be rich through His poverty (2 Cor 8:9). That included the depths of being made a curse that there would be blessing to us who deserve the curse. Richer grace yet is that he became poor that we might experience His blessing, also in giving, which is better than receiving. Let us remember this Word of Jesus.

VI

**WORD
& DEED**

And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

Colossians 3:17

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LET CHILDREN LEARN FROM HISTORY

Stories of the Pilgrims by Margaret B. Pumphrey (Rand McNally & Company, 1910). Revised by Mitchell J. McHugh and Elizabeth Arwine and published by Christian Liberty Press in 1991. Reprinted 2021. Softcover, 230 pages.

“Let children thus learn from history’s light
To hope in our God and walk in His sight
The God of their fathers to fear and obey,
And ne’er, like their fathers, to turn from His way
(Psalter 213:3)

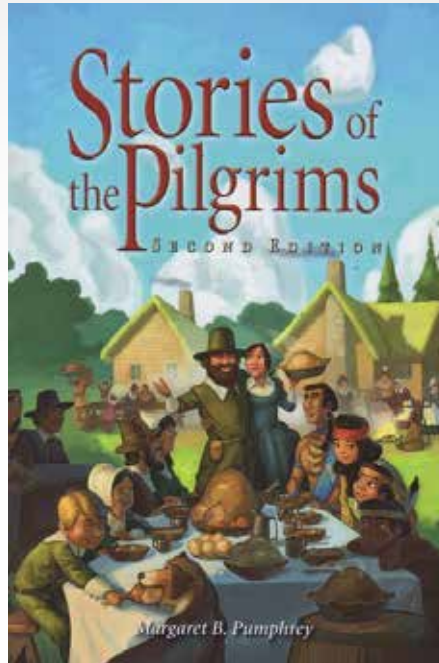
This song, which we teach our children, conveys the purpose of this children’s book: that they would learn not just from Bible history, but also from the Pilgrims who left their cozy little village of Scrooby in England more than four hundred years ago when they were harassed and forbidden to worship separately according to the dictates of their conscience based on the Word of God.

Originally, this book was a teacher’s project to introduce primary children (ages 6 – 12) to “the Pilgrims, their life in England, their sojourn in Holland, and their experience in America.” First published in 1910, the objective was to strengthen their reading ability and give them a strong foundation upon which to build for future study in biography and history. The story line shows the example of the Pilgrims’ strong convictions and courage fed by God’s Word. The more recent editors stress the importance of children knowing their Christian heritage, specifically the faith and courage of the Pilgrims.

As far as I can tell, the historical facts, as well as the details of everyday life, are accurate. What makes the book so interesting is that the author has a wonderful gift of transporting the readers – both children and adults – into the life of the pilgrims. While reading, it is as if one is actually there and experiences the emotions, trials and difficulties of the Pilgrims. One is impressed by these men, women, and children who chose to leave their familiar life, goods, and family. They first went to Holland, where they soon found that they would lose their distinctives and their children would be assimilated into the Dutch culture. Finding two ships to take them from England, they took off after saying a tearful farewell to friends and relatives. But they had hardly lost sight of the shore when the larger of the two ships, the *Speedwell*, sprang a leak, so both boats returned. However, they could not be deterred from their plans which were watered by prayer. Because the larger ship could not be made seaworthy, a small group decided to depart in the *Mayflower*, which meant some had to leave wife and children behind to await another ship to bring them to the New World.

The story contains just enough explanation of customs, domestic items, or geography for today’s readers to understand the difficulties the pilgrims encountered on board. For instance, the *Mayflower* had no engines and needed wind to catch its large sails to move it on. Sometimes fierce and stormy winds drove the ship off course. The *Mayflower* carried one hundred passengers besides sailors and a large cargo which included food, seeds, and tools to make a new beginning where no white man had been. Winter drew near and it became colder, so the passengers and children had to stay below deck. Some became ill. Two babies were born on board.

When land was finally sighted, the pilgrims found themselves further north than they had anticipated, and saw no good harbour or clearing to grow food. The forest supplied wild game for food, which had almost been used up, fresh water, and yes, a place for the women to do their



laundry. The Natives (Indians) they encountered seemed menacing and curious at first but became afraid of the Pilgrims when they saw the power of a gunshot. Even though winter was closing in, the ship did not land until a suitable place to land was found. At one time, a sudden storm ripped the masts from their ship, and it had to be repaired. By a small boat, some of the men went from place to place, and it wasn’t until December that a suitable place to settle was found and the passengers could leave their ship. They named it Plymouth Rock after a place in England and a rock they found in the area.

Hastily, a common house and little cottages around it were built. There were nineteen families. Some of the family heads mentioned are Miles Standish, Elder Brewster, William Bradford, and Governor Carver. The first winter was brutal – they were ill equipped for the cold and had little food. Half of the little band of Pilgrims were buried on Cole Hill. Those who remained alive found comfort in the fact that their departed friends had gone to be with the Lord (p. 120).

The Indians had been watching the Pilgrims. Samoset, an Indian who knew some English, made

himself at home with the Pilgrims. They watched him with suspicion all night, but when the night passed in safety, the Pilgrims asked Samoset to bring his Indian friends to trade. But not on the Sabbath – the Pilgrims had a hard time explaining this. After some terrifying experiences, peace was established by the Pilgrims trading kettles and trinkets for furs, thus winning over the suspicions of the Indians.

The short chapters continue with stories of the signing of a peace treaty with the Indians; the friendship with Squanto, an Indian chief; and the Indians teaching the Pilgrims how to survive in the wilderness by fishing and planting corn, a plant unknown in England. The work of building and planting was accomplished by just twenty men and some boys; the women preparing jellies and preserves for winter use. Squanto showed them how to hunt deer, rabbits, and wild turkeys, which became traditional Thanksgiving fare. With thankfulness to God and the Indians, the Pilgrims celebrated their First Thanksgiving Feast.

Sadly, peace did not continue and soon secular settlers from England came to spoil the peaceful and industrious life of the Pilgrims. As more settlers came, the Indians became defensive, and the terrible “King Philip’s War” ensued. There are exciting stories of encounters with Indians, providential rescues and escapes, and sadly, also massacres. Some chapters explain their survival skills and there is even a chapter on schools for the children. Each chapter includes a vocabulary of difficult words and there are review questions to answer.

Attractive illustrations are scattered throughout the books, including some in colour. The print size and short chapters make it inviting for children to read for themselves, but some parents and grandparents might even like to read this book to children. Both will be inspired and drawn into the experiences of leaving familiar homes to endure an extremely difficult sea journey to make their home in an unknown country. We can learn a lot from the Pilgrims.

This book may be purchased in Canada at Reformed Book Services in Brantford, Ontario, and at Reformation Heritage Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan, U.S.A.

Mrs. Ricky (Frederika) Pronk is a member of Grace Free Reformed Church of Brantford, Ontario.

THE ORDER OF SALVATION (II)

SAVING FAITH AND THE GOSPEL OFFER

Last time, we dealt with the doctrine of conversion and learned that it consists of two inter-related graces: faith and repentance. These two exercises cannot be separated. Spurgeon said: “Like Siamese twins they are born together and will die if you separate them.” John Murray writes: “It is impossible to disentangle faith and repentance. Saving faith is permeated with repentance and repentance is permeated with faith.”¹

Saving Faith and its Counterfeits

We must stress the adjective *saving* when discussing faith because there is only one kind of faith that saves us, just as there is only one kind of repentance that brings us to glory, namely true repentance. Scripture mentions different kinds of faith: historical, temporary, miracle and saving faith.

People with historical faith believe all that is recorded in Scripture. In Acts 8, we read of Simon the magician who, when he heard the gospel preached, believed it and was baptized. But it soon became clear that he lacked saving faith. In the parable of the Sower (Matthew 13), Jesus refers to some who believed but only for a while. They had temporary faith. Others, watching Jesus perform miracles, not only believed in Him but claimed they could do miracles in His name. None of these types of faith resulted in salvation. For that to happen a true miracle is required, namely, for faith to proceed from regeneration.

Saving Faith Illustrated

In John 3, we find Jesus discussing the necessity of this miracle with Nicodemus, a famous “master of Israel” (v. 10). “You must be born again,” the Saviour tells him. “Unless you will experience a new and second birth from above, you will neither see nor enter the kingdom of God.” This new birth, like the natural birth, takes place in secret but will produce visible and audible fruits. Just as a baby starts to cry for its mother moments after its birth, so the new babe in grace will show evidence of its new life by crying out to God.

After telling Nicodemus about the necessity of the new birth, Jesus goes on to explain the nature of saving faith. He does so by referring to the Old Testament story of the serpent of brass. Israel had been rebellious again and complained to Moses. They asked why they had been taken from Egypt into the wilderness where they had almost died due to lack of food and water. They were tired of the daily supply of manna from heaven. This wicked display of ingratitude had so provoked God’s anger that He sent poisonous serpents among the people which bit them so that many died, and others were mortally wounded. But sinful as the Israelites had been, those who were still living were so terrified by God’s wrath that they turned to Moses. Confessing their

sin and acknowledging that they deserved God's punishment, they asked their leader to intercede to God for a remedy for the deadly wounds they had incurred. God accepted His servant's prayer and said He would spare those about to die, but not until His justice was satisfied. Moses had to make a serpent of brass, fasten it to a pole and tell the people that "every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live" (Num. 21:8).

In John 3:14-15 Jesus applies this to himself, saying: "as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life."

These serpent-bitten Israelites picture for us our sinful human race. Just as the poison of those serpents entered their blood stream, so we have all been poisoned by that old serpent, the devil. Just as those Israelites had to look to the serpent of brass to be cured of their terrible snakebites, so Nicodemus, and all of us, must look to Christ, lifted up on the cross, if we are to be saved from God's condemnation. This is not just a command but also a promise extended to every human since the fall, beginning with Adam through whom sin entered the world and death by sin (Rom. 5:12).

Conflicting Views on Meaning of Christ's Death

In the seventeenth century, during the controversy with the Arminians, our Reformed fathers confessed in the *Canons of Dort* that "the promise of the gospel is, that whosoever believeth in Christ crucified, shall not perish, but have everlasting life. This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be declared and published to all nations, and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction, to whom God out of his good pleasure sends the gospel" (Head 2, art. 5). Here they affirmed the universal proclamation of the gospel. But earlier (Head 1, Articles 6-7), they had spoken of a "limited atonement," meaning, that Christ had died only for the elect.

The Arminians saw an inconsistency in their Reformed opponents. They asked, how can you preach the gospel to all people if you believe that Christ died only for a select group of elect sinners? You should agree with us that Christ died for all sinners. But the Reformed said, No, your doctrine of universal atonement is not biblical. Christ died only for His sheep who believe in Him (John 10:11, 26). You teach that Christ died for everyone whether they believe in Him or not. You admit that sinners can reject Christ and perish for their sin of unbelief, but then Christ died for them in vain. Scripture nowhere teaches that Christ shed His blood to save sinners who still die in unbelief. The Arminian message, "Jesus Christ died for all men; believe that and you will be saved," is not the message preached by Christ and His apostles or by the Reformers, Puritans, and others. Their preaching centred on Christ and Him crucified. Their clarion call was: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31).

This is the proper biblical approach to preaching. Why? Because it does not begin with ascertaining who is elect or non-elect or

determining whom God intended to save in Jesus' death. Preachers who believe in universal atonement say: if Christ died for all sinners, you are included; accept Him as your Saviour and rejoice. This message can easily lead to easy-believism and false security. Reformed preachers believe in a limited atonement. But they must be careful not to let election dominate their preaching, lest their hearers are left trying to find out whether they are elect before they flee to Christ. To avoid this, preachers must call sinners to believe in the One who accomplished the atonement and to ask Him to apply it to them by His Spirit. It is wise and pastorally sound not to begin with the doctrine of election when preaching the gospel. As Dr. J. I. Packer once wrote,

The basis on which the New Testament invites sinners to put faith in Christ is simply that they need Him, and that He offers Himself to them, and that those who receive Him are promised all the benefits that His death secured for His people. What is universal and all-inclusive in the New Testament is the invitation to faith, and the promise of salvation to all who believe... The gospel is not, believe that Christ died for everybody's sins, and therefore for yours as well, any more than it is, believe that Christ died only for certain people's sins, and perhaps not for yours. The gospel is, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, who died for sins and now offers you Himself as your Saviour.²

Looking to Ourselves instead of Christ

A problem especially in some Reformed Churches is that people first look elsewhere. Instead of looking to Christ, they focus first on what goes on in their own hearts. To them, faith means looking for evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit: sorrow for sin, forsaking the world and its sinful pleasures, resisting Satan and his temptations, and other indicators of at least the beginning of spiritual life. But when they fail to see these signs, they get discouraged and do not dare to look to Christ because they think they lack the required qualifications. They fail to realize that they should look to Christ and His promises. True, the Spirit's ministry convicts us of our sins. But His purpose is two-fold: to open our eyes to see our sins and to look to Christ to save us from them. As Jesus said, "He shall glorify me" (John 16:14). The Comforter's work is to show us the love of Christ and His ability and willingness to heal all our diseases and redeem our lives from destruction (Ps. 103:3-4).

It is true that no sinner will believe in Jesus unless he feels his need of Him. But Scripture does not tell us how intense our feelings must be before we may go to Him for help. The serpent-bitten Israelites cried out in pain while looking for relief. But when the Lord told them to look to the serpent of brass, He meant exactly that. They were not to look at their wounds but at the remedy for their wounds. That invitation was extended to every snake-bitten person. No matter how many times the victim had been stung by the poisonous snakes, no matter how far the poison had entered the blood stream of a man, woman, boy or girl, as soon as they looked

in the direction of the serpent on the pole, they were healed

In Scripture, *looking* is another word for believing. What a simple word that is! For many, it is too simple. Some of those serpent-bidden Israelites may have thought so too. When told of the divinely appointed remedy, they had their doubts. Maybe they thought it would not help them because they were too far gone in their misery. Others were too intelligent to think

they would benefit from merely looking at a lifeless snake on a pole. Both died a miserable death.

The Real Purpose of the Free Offer

The gospel invitation still stands unchanged. Scripture abounds with offers, invitations and calls to faith. The vast majority of Reformers and Puritans preached the free offer. Why? Why does God want His servants to extend a universal call of the gospel? Some say that God wants us to know that He sent His Son into the world, not to condemn the world but that the world through him might be saved (John 3:17). That is part of the reason. It shows a strong desire on God’s part to save us. That is also why all the Reformed confessions use the word “offer.” But there is also another reason, namely that God uses the free offer of the gospel to draw His elect out of the world and to leave unbelievers to perish in their sins without excuse. One of the great gospel preachers in Scotland, Ralph Erskine, compares preaching with casting out a net. He writes:

By a common offer of grace unto all, or a casting in the net of the gospel promise, Christ makes all who are outwardly called to be without excuse, and at the same time, He fishes out the elect from the sea of sin and misery. Let them venture to shut the door of the gospel offer who will, we must open it in God’s name to all, and tell them that Christ is offered to them, that He may be received by them. If there were no offer, it would not be their duty to receive, and so unbelief would not be their sin.

Erskine is right. By the preaching of this general offer or call, God leaves us without excuse. When God offers us salvation in Christ, we cannot blame Him for our failure to accept His offer. When He promises that He will save us if we repent and believe, He means what He says. If we don’t believe His promise, we don’t take him seriously. We question His sincerity; we don’t trust Him. As another Scottish preacher, John Bonar wrote, “there can be no deception experienced where there is no confidence placed.”

However, there is a form of free offer preaching that is done in an unbiblical way. Some offer a Christ who is quite acceptable to the natural man: a Saviour who saves from hell but allows sinners to live as they please. The biblical Christ, however, does not only save us from eternal punishment but also from the power and love of sin. As John Murray explains: “repentance is that which describes the response of turning from sin unto God. This is its specific character just as the specific character of faith is to receive and rest upon Christ alone for salvation...True faith is suffused with penitence.”³

Rev. C. Pronk is an emeritus pastor and member of Grace Free Reformed Church of Brantford, Ontario

Endnotes

1. John Murray, *Redemption-Accomplished and Applied*, p. 140
2. J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, pp. 68-69.
3. *Redemption-Accomplished and Applied*, p. 143.

**Providence Christian School
Monarch - Alberta**

Providence Christian School is accepting applications for the 2023-2024 school year. We are looking for experienced teachers with training and understanding of Christian based pedagogies and methodologies, and who are acquainted with the history, culture, doctrines, and practices of the Reformed churches and schools.

Full-time Principal Position.

A principal at PCS will:

- provide spiritual leadership
- engage in transparent, ethical, and responsible decision making
- lead staff members in defining, developing, and delivering quality learning for all students
- provide insightful stewardship of resources for the operation of the school
- be a spokesperson for the school to the community

Qualifications:

- **Having an MA in leadership or equivalent training is considered an asset.**
- **Having Alberta School Leadership Certification (LQS) or ability to obtain it.**

Part-time Assistant Principal

This is a 35% admin / 65% teaching assignment.

The assistant principal at PCS will be called on to:

- support the principal in providing spiritual leadership
- engage in transparent, ethical, and responsible decision making
- scheduling
- student discipline
- student attendance
- resource management

Qualifications:

- **Having an MA in leadership or equivalent training is considered an asset.**
- **Having Alberta School Leadership Certification (LQS) or ability to obtain it.**

Full-time Grade 1 teacher

Qualifications:

- Having a BEd or a BA geared to Education
- Having an Interim or Professional Alberta Teacher Certificate (TQS) or the ability to obtain it.

Suitable candidates are encouraged to electronically submit: a letter of application, a résumé containing at least three references, a statement of faith, and a statement of philosophy of Christian Teaching.

- Detailed job descriptions can be found at pcsmonarch.com
- Inquiries and/or applications can be forwarded to Mr. Kevin Slomp, Board President - recruitment@pcsmonarch.com
- For other inquiries check out our website or contact the principal, Mr. Hugo VanderHoek, principal@pcsmonarch.com , 403-381-4418

REDEEMER FREE REFORMED CHURCH INSTITUTION



On Saturday, May 27, 2023, Redeemer Free Reformed Church — a daughter church of the Free Reformed Church of Grand Rapids — was instituted in Wyoming, Michigan. Rev. Pieter VanderMeyden officiated the service of office-bearer installation and church institution.

Redeemer Free Reformed Church is the second congregation of the Free Reformed Churches of North America in the state of Michigan, and only the third in the United States. While it may seem that this congregation was formed very quickly, its full history is significantly longer than the one year it had been meeting prior to its institution. There have been different attempts to begin a Free Reformed church plant in the West Michigan area over the past several decades, but none of these efforts had borne fruit.

For several years leading up to 2019, the FRC of Grand Rapids experienced significant growth in membership. During 2019, the consistory considered the possibility of enlarging the current sanctuary and fellowship area, as well as planting a daughter

congregation. A survey was sent out to the congregation, and the results showed significant support for planting a daughter church. However, efforts were quickly stalled by the pandemic, and all plans were put on hold.

In the spring of 2021, the consistory called an information meeting for all those interested in beginning a daughter church. The consistory asked for the signatures of all families interested; if there were enough families committed to the work, plans would be put in place to begin a daughter church. At the yearly congregational meeting the next month, it was announced that the signatures had fallen short of the number set by the consistory. It was therefore decided that plans for a daughter church would not move forward.

Following this decision, a small group formed of those that had desired a daughter church — not out of discontent or rebellion against the consistory, but that they might test their desire by continuing in the Word and in prayer. The group met together weekly or as often as possible to pray for God’s direction and to study the book of Nehemiah. They saw how Nehemiah saw his calling from God and relied on Him, encouraging the people to take up the work, and remaining steadfast and diligent. They saw also how Nehemiah faced discouragement and attacks from those within and outside the city; but that his trust in God and focus on the work that God had given him helped him to overcome the obstacles and lead the people to completing the work.

Over the next several months, discussions between this group and the consistory of the FRC of Grand Rapids resulted in the formation of a steering committee to guide the process of planting a daughter church. Much work was done, surveys were sent out to the congregation, results were tallied, several discussions and congregational meetings were held, and a search for a suitable meeting place was conducted. All of this culminated with the daughter church holding its first Lord’s Day worship services in the gymnasium of Vanguard Charter Academy on May 29, 2022.






Almost exactly one year later, on Saturday, May 27, 2023, Rev. Pieter VanderMeyden installed the members of the first consistory: brothers Tom Karel, Jr., Gerrit Kleyn, and Will Thies as elders and brothers Joel Markwat and Mark Moerdyk as deacons. Rev. VanderMeyden explained that the installation of elders was also the institution of the congregation. He then opened the words of the apostle Paul, “The church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28), to address this new congregation, under the theme of “The Redeemer’s Church.” He spoke about how God gathers the church by His sovereign grace, and that only He can make a church; how Christ redeemed the church, purchasing it by His blood; and that it is to that Redeemer that we need to come daily for forgiveness, and for the strength to do His work. The newly installed elders were also charged to feed and shepherd the church with the Redeemer’s Word — the church needs to hear His voice, and all things in the church need to be done for God’s glory.

Rev. John Byl brought greetings from the Heritage Reformed Congregation of Grand Rapids; Rev. Bartel Elshout brought greetings from the Kalamazoo Reformed Church; and Rev. Mike Pitsenberger brought greetings from the Overisel Reformed Church. Elder William McQuade from the Free Reformed Church of Grand Rapids spoke of the joy of multiplying the work of the gospel in the area through this church plant. Additionally, several other pastors and consistories sent letters of encouragement to the new congregation.

Elder Tom Karel, Jr. of the newly instituted Redeemer Free Reformed Church gave the closing remarks for the evening and the service concluded with the singing of Psalter 373.

The members of Redeemer Free Reformed Church praise God for His faithfulness over the past two years — providing a way where there was none; supplying a place to worship; having His blessed Word preached every Lord’s Day for the past year, and having His holy sacraments administered; and blessing us with His own presence, and with the fellowship of believers. We pray that God will build us up into Christ our Head, and that we would be a place where sinners will hear and receive the gospel of our Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ. 

Submitted by the Consistory of Redeemer Free Reformed Church



FIRST COLLEGIAL ALBERTA MINISTERIAL



Monday, May 22, 2023, was an historical day for the FRCNA of Alberta. To give a little background, though there were three local congregations at the beginning of 2022, I was the only actively serving FRC pastor in this province. By the end of the year there were four congregations, each with their own pastor. We praise the Lord and King of His church for filling our pulpits. Three of our pastors are brand new to the ministry, so it seems every week there is a first-time occurrence of something in church life. A first wedding, a first funeral, a first administration of the sacraments, and the list continues.

Our emeritus pastor, Rev. Hans Overduin, suggested to me that we should get together as Alberta pastors with our wives for a day of encouragement, fellowship, prayer, and mutual upbuilding. The thought was that we as older, experienced ministers could pass along what we have learned over the years and help our younger colleagues to avoid certain pitfalls we have encountered. So, on May 22, at 10:00 AM, we all met at Pastor and Mrs. Overduin's Calgary home. We chose Calgary because of its central location, about a two-hour drive south from Blackfalds and a two-hour drive north from Monarch and Picture Butte. In attendance were Pastor Isaac and Lydia Epp (with Ezra), Pastor Chris and Connie Mourik, Pastor Jan and Gayle Neels, Pastor Jeff and Mandy Overduin, and Pastor Hans and Nelly Overduin.

Pastor Hans Overduin had prepared a schedule for the day and, for the most part, we stuck to it. Over the course of our time, we discussed topics such as devotions, exercise, sticking to priorities, sermon preparation, time management, pastoral care and visits, consistory relations, and joys and sorrows in the ministry. John Calvin's term "excel in brevity" appeared often while we were discussing sermon length. We had times of singing and times of prayer. Our older pastors and wives, Nelly and Gayle, were able to share many of our experiences and what the Lord has taught us over the years. It was a blessing to be able to direct our young colleagues to look always to the One Who called them. We encouraged them to lean on their elders. We also stressed with them the importance of balancing family life with pastoral work.

We enjoyed a delicious lunch of soup, subs, and fruit. The men assisted with a back-stretching backyard landscaping project, and

after lunch there were a few very competitive games of ping pong downstairs. We planned for our tasks at the Berechiah Youth Camp. At the end of the day, we worked on the Alberta preaching schedule. We try to arrange pulpit exchanges around major events, like Synod, Youth Camp, Thanksgiving Day, etc. If the Lord wills and we live, our plan is to do this maybe twice a year going forward. We consider it a great blessing and privilege to serve the Lord and His church together with our wives. Like the Apostle Paul, we ask for your prayers for all of our pastors and office bearers. "Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as *it is* with you" (2 Thess. 3:1). ¹

LEARN HOW TO REST FREE REFORMED SEMINARY DAY

WHEN: Monday, September 4, 2023

LOCATION: Dundas FRC

SPEAKER: Dr. D. H. Kranendonk

Schedule: 9:15: Singing
9:30: Opening

Address 1: *How to Rest in the Lord's Work*

10:30: Coffee served

11:00: Address 2

Address 2: *How to Rest on the Lord's Day*

Noon: Closing, followed by lunch being served.

Synod has decided to change the format of Seminary Day to have both addresses in the morning, rather than one in the morning and one in the afternoon.

All ages are welcome! Babysit is provided.

Please mark your calendars and pray for a blessed gathering!

FREE REFORMED SYNOD 2023



“Brethren, pray for us!” The 2023 Synod of the Free Reformed Churches was opened with a sermon by Pastor Neels on these words of the Apostle Paul in 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5. Paul appeals for constant prayer and the patience of Christ, knowing that God alone can cause His word to “have free course, and be glorified.” As we meet annually as a federation of churches, the desire is that the word of the Lord may have free course among our churches and throughout our land so that the evidence of God’s work may be seen even as it was among the Thessalonians. Such prayer is desperately needed for all our congregations and our ministry efforts both locally and abroad.

This year, the Free Reformed Synod was held at St. George, Ontario in the same week that the Heritage Reformed Synod took place in Burgessville, Ontario. With much thankfulness to the God of all grace, a spirit of unity was experienced throughout the week and the meetings concluded with the confession that the Lord is faithful.

This week not only serves to bring pastors and elders together for the matters pertaining to the federation of churches, but it also provides a time of special fellowship. As one attendee said, “Coffee breaks and mealtimes seem to go too quickly to be able to spend time with everyone you intended to speak with.” We also appreciate all the kind effort that members of the St.

George congregation put into providing delicious meals and snacks. The worship service, daily devotions, and singing to the Lord serve to unite each other in heart and voice before entering the deliberations of the meeting.

The faithfulness of the Lord was seen in the addition of three new pastors to the Synod floor. Pastors Isaac Epp, Jeff Over-

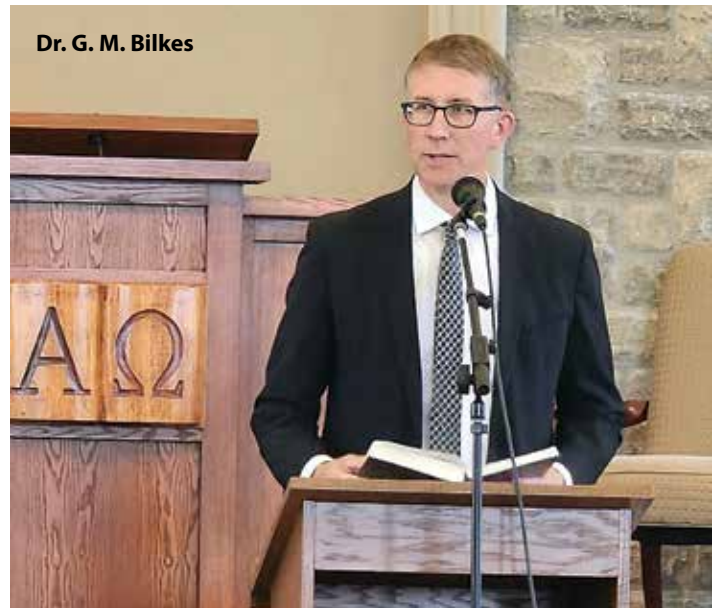


duin, and Chris Mourik all attended Synod for the first time as new pastors of a flock of Christ in the FRC, as did Pastor Slingerland, who is called by the Chilliwack FRC to labour in prison ministry. “Brethren, pray for us!” May this call be laid upon the heart of every soul to uphold not only and especially the new pastors, but every pastor, that they may be enabled to faithfully open and declare God’s Word and see the Lord bless His Word.

Another note for great thankfulness to the Lord was the presence of the newly instituted congregation, Redeemer FRC of Wyoming, Michigan. After years of planning, the Grand Rapids Church was able to establish a church plant in Wyoming. The name Redeemer was chosen as a reminder that the church belongs to the Redeemer. In this context, the call to “pray for us” was again mentioned. Prayer is needed for this young congregation to be faithful in life and doctrine, to grow in spiritual knowledge, to receive a pastor of their own, and for all to be able to know that their Redeemer lives. The thought of church planting can be very daunting, but they were encouraged by the words of a pastor who reminded them that church planting does not depend on our own resources, nor on the circumstances however bad or concerning they may look, but on the Lord of the harvest. Christ gave the commission to go into all the world. May the Lord continue to use us to build His Church throughout the world.

God’s provision was also acknowledged when Carsten Koopman was recommended by the Theological Education Committee as a new student for the ministry. With gratitude, the Outreach Committee reported on the Banner of Truth Radio ministry which is broadcasted on 27 stations throughout North America. May the Lord also richly bless the proclamation of His word through these far-reaching means.

On a more challenging front, Synod decided to wind down the FRC US Urban Mission in New Jersey. Respect was shown for Pastor Lee’s evangelistic labours in the midst of challenging circumstances, including Covid times and being “parachuted”



Dr. G. M. Bilkes



Elder Thies

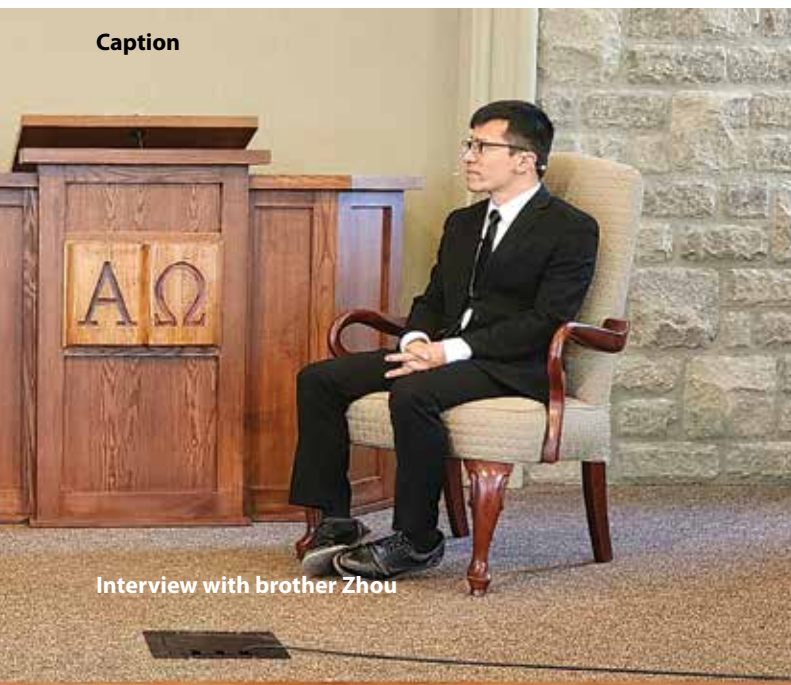


Rev. Wagenaar



Rev. VanDoodewaard

Caption



Interview with brother Zhou



into a location as a family. At the same time, it was felt that the Outreach committee is to support not simply general evangelistic efforts, but intentional church planting efforts. Synod concluded that the current situation was not suited for a church plant endeavour. Once more, we see the great need for the words of Paul, “Pray for us.” Pray for the work of Urban Mission and for Pastor Lee and his family as they seek the Lord’s leading for their ministry.

Tuesday morning’s devotion by (Heritage Reformed) Pastor Macleod emphasized the need to love one another. God is perfect love, existing within the Trinity, and has no need to go outside of the Trinity for that love to exist. Yet God in mercy, chose to display that love in Jesus Christ where His wrath against sin was turned from us and laid upon the second Person of the Trinity. The love of the Triune God towards sinners is undeserved and unsought, for “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” Therefore, “If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.” God’s love for sinners was unconditional, and we as

office bearers and church members were reminded that we are to love others as God loved us, which means that we need to love even the most unlovable and difficult people.

Christian charity was communicated when greetings were brought from various representatives of the worldwide Church of Christ, which is a manifestation of the one Spirit which Christ poured out on Pentecost.

Elder Peter Koppert, on behalf of the Heritage Reformed Churches, extended their greetings and appreciation for the bond of love and ongoing cooperation with the FRC and urged all to continue in the spirit of love.

Elder Walter Rozeboom brought greetings from the Providence Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, where he expressed much appreciation for the help supplied by the FRC with both the pastoral needs in the congregation as well as the pulpit supply from both pastors and students. He called for prayer and faithfulness for the times in which we live knowing that believers in the past, such as John the Baptist, have given their life for

standing in the truth of God.

Elder Bill Thies from the Kalamazoo Reformed Church was able to deliver a joyful report and relay their greetings from the newly instituted congregation. The LORD has richly provided for this newly formed congregation by supplying them with their own building and gladdening them with their own shepherd, Pastor Bartel Elshout. He expressed their thankfulness for the bond of fellowship with both the HRC and FRC, who were instrumental in assisting them and encouraging them along the way.

Pastor Jeremy Veldman brought greetings from the URC and cited the need to work together in the various aspects of ministry to reach the dark places of society with the gospel. The nations are moving into Canada with immigration and refugees, which opens the door for many gospel opportunities.

The Unity Committee reported on the status of the relationship between the HRC and FRC. There are continued efforts to work together as federations for the proclamation of the gospel around the world. The mutual acceptance of ministers between the federations attests to the shared values largely due to the inestimable privilege of having a shared seminary where men can be trained for the ministry both locally and abroad. Various committees continue to work together on projects of shared interest, and other committees of each federation are encouraged to explore how we can better assist each other or join their efforts. May God further direct both federations in mutual sup-

port and cooperation for the expansion of God's kingdom according to His will.

Many other items could be mentioned. The denomination looks forward to the new interdenominational Psalter which is nearing completion. The publications committee reported that the denominational website (<https://frcna.org/>) has undergone significant updates. It gives access to various resources with a new and improved look. The Youth and Ed committee is dedicated to providing the young people with access to many Biblical answers to common questions that they have. The valuable website, Plants and Pillars, can be found at <http://plant-sandpillars.net/>, and an app is being made to make its content even more accessible.

As we reflect on another year of the Lord's faithfulness, may we be found much in prayer petitioning the Lord of the Harvest to bless the proclamation and propagation of His word, whether it be through the preaching, teaching, radio ministries, websites, printed magazines, or the seminaries, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids and Mukhanyo Theological College in Africa. May the God of all grace be pleased to use this small federation of churches for the glory of His name and the expansion of His kingdom in preparation for the Lord's return. 🕊

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Encouragement in Trying Days

Life can be very challenging. Many demands are laid on us in this dynamic world and often stress levels increase. The assessment has been made that a family of four children today demands as much from parents as a family of eight children generations ago. How they assessed that may not be clear, but much does call for our attention today. Children need help with homework and supervision with Internet usage. Parents need to decide what to allow and what not to allow. In the meantime, the world is slowly but steadily invading our homes. Media platforms like YouTube and Netflix are widespread, also in Reformed circles. Screen time has become the dilemma in many households. This all leads to trying days.

New Outlook on Life

Amid this all, a new outlook on life is developing. Like Israel, we are called to be a people separate from the world, pilgrims in the earth, and sojourners who look forward to the coming of God's Kingdom.

There is much drawing away from God's Word. Confusion in theology rules the day. Lewdness is increasing, while the love of many is waxing cold. People wonder what they are living for. The senselessness of life drives people to addictions and even to suicide.

We may fear that if developments continue in our society, there will be less and less room for Christianity. At the last summit of the G20 in Indonesia, it was stated that in the coming world order, the three great monotheistic religions will not be sustainable. Christian principles and ethical values will be undermined. We see before us the contours of a new world government, as foretold in Revelation 13, 16, and 17. We want our own kingdom, not God's.

King Asa Trusted in God

Amid these developments, we may consider one of the kings of Judah, King Asa. He had to face an army of 1 million men in 2 Chronicles 14. He had no power in himself, nor in his trained army. He cast all his burdens on the Lord, confessing: "LORD, *it is* nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O LORD our God; for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude. O LORD, thou *art* our God; let not man prevail against thee" (v.11). The outcome was that the Lord gave them a glorious victory.

The result was that King Asa put away the idols out of the land of Judah and Benjamin and he and the people entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers with all their heart and soul. In all this, he was encouraged by the prophet Azariah's words, "Be ye strong therefore, and let not your hands be weak: for your work shall be rewarded" (2 Chron 15:7).

We need God's strength. He is able and willing to uphold the needy when they cry to Him. This word may be an encouragement for us: "Be ye strong therefore, and let not your hands be weak: for your work shall be rewarded."

The Secret of God's children

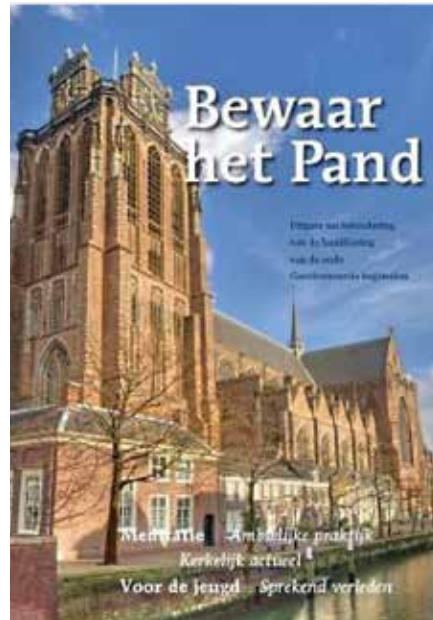
The secret of a child of God is to be strong in the Lord. How can we be strong? We are weak in ourselves. The devil is much stronger than we are. We can experience difficulties and even stand before impossibilities. We can feel that we cannot continue anymore. Then we hear the call coming to us: "Be ye strong therefore, and let not your hands be weak." That is easy to say or to read, but how can we obey this calling? Well, we should not simply look at the difficulties and compare them to our own shortcomings and weakness. There is no support or hope in us. The strength for a child of God lies outside of himself in the Lord. When we hear the calling "Be ye strong therefore, and let not your hands be weak," we are not cast back on ourselves. The Lord does not say that you have to dish up strength in yourself. No, the strength of a child of God lies outside of himself in Christ.

That is why the apostle exhorts in Ephesians 6:10: "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." God has strength to enable you to fulfill the calling He gives you. The Lord Jesus earned every grace and all you need. He is the God who has limitless powers.

You and I are called to be vigilant and strong. How can we do that? We need to know the Lord personally in our hearts. God's Word must speak to us personally. We need to be convicted of our corruption and our need to have a personal bond with the Lord Jesus Christ. We need to learn to love the Lord and His Word. Basically, we need the same convictions that men like John Bunyan, John Calvin, and George Whitefield, and maybe even your own parents and grandparents had. These are the convictions that the Philippian jailer and Lydia the seller of purple in Acts 16 received. This is how God's Holy Spirit works in human hearts. We need to have a deep impression of sin and grace and be grafted in the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the only way we can stand firm in these changing days.

The Strength of God's Children

God's children persevere in the daily struggle and fight of faith as they carry their cross following the Lord Jesus. How do they persevere? God strengthens them. That is why David says beautifully in Psalm 18:29, "For by thee I have run through a troop; and by my God have I leaped over a wall." That was David's



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secret. We see that also when he was in great problems in Ziklag. The Amalekites had just stolen the wives and children and all their belongings. Then we read in 1 Samuel 30:6: “And David was greatly distressed; for the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters: but David encouraged himself in the LORD his God.” We can also translate the last clause as “David strengthened himself in the Lord his God.”

Strength lies not in our own physical power, willpower, or determination of heart. Strength comes from God. The Lord is our strength. He is the all-powerful One.

God’s Power

The Lord can do whatever is pleasing in His sight. God has a will to do what He pleases. He has the power to execute His will. Arthur Pink writes that God’s power gives life and action to

God’s power should lead us to trust in such a God. He is worthy of full confidence. Nothing is too hard for Him.

all the perfections of the Divine nature. How terrible would it be if God would be unable to execute what He considers right? Without power, His mercy would be but feeble pity. Without power, His promises would be empty words. Without power, His threatenings would be no better than a scarecrow’s fluttering arms. God’s power is infinite, eternal, and unstoppable by any creature. Psalm 62 says that power belongs to God. God Himself is even referred to as Power, when Christ says speaks of “the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power” (Mark 14:62). God’s power is self-existent and not dependent on anything outside of God. The mightiest of men cannot add so much as a shadow of increased power to the Almighty One. The fact that His church still exists and is growing is a result of God’s power.

God’s power should lead us to trust in such a God. He is worthy of full confidence. Nothing is too hard for Him. He is clothed with omnipotence and therefore no prayer is too hard for Him to answer. No need is too great for Him to supply. No passion is too strong for Him to subdue. No temptation is too powerful for Him to overcome. No misery is too deep for Him to address. So, David says in Psalm 27:1: “The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?”

God’s strength is a reason to adore Him. Therefore, the prophet Azariah is speaking to us today: “Be ye strong therefore, and let not your hands be weak.” The whole Bible is full of people who were weak in themselves and still did mighty works because God gave them strength. The Lord works faith and gives grace to even suffer for His Name’s sake.

Therefore, let us confess to the Lord that we are foolish and ignorant, weak and helpless. At the same time, we may be encouraged that in God there is strength.

God Has Strength for You

If you are struggling with conversion and you are called to believe in God, but you see that you cannot do that, lay this need before the Almighty God. He has strength to give you what you need. If you are in a personal struggle about which you do not dare talk to others, realize there is strength in God. If you are wondering how you will ever reach the heavenly city, the Lord is willing to strengthen you, not because of you, but because of the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus earned all support and help for you. If you are looking against life and you lack wisdom and grace, you may lay all these needs before the Lord. We may come as helpless sinners to the throne of grace, for Jesus’ sake, God is willing to give you all you need.


If we give up praying, we are left with no strength; but if we persevere, we will receive strength and know the Lord is with us. We read in Proverbs 24:10: “If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small.” There may be times when you think that you cannot continue, but still His strength is sufficient. Do not give up, for if you fail in difficult days, you will indeed have little strength. If you persevere by God’s grace, you will experience that He gives you strength in all your circumstances. Because the Lord strengthens, Azariah can say, “Be ye strong therefore, and let not your hands be weak.”



Rev. G. R. Procee is an emeritus pastor serving in the Dundas Free Reformed Church.

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Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

ISAIAH 1:18

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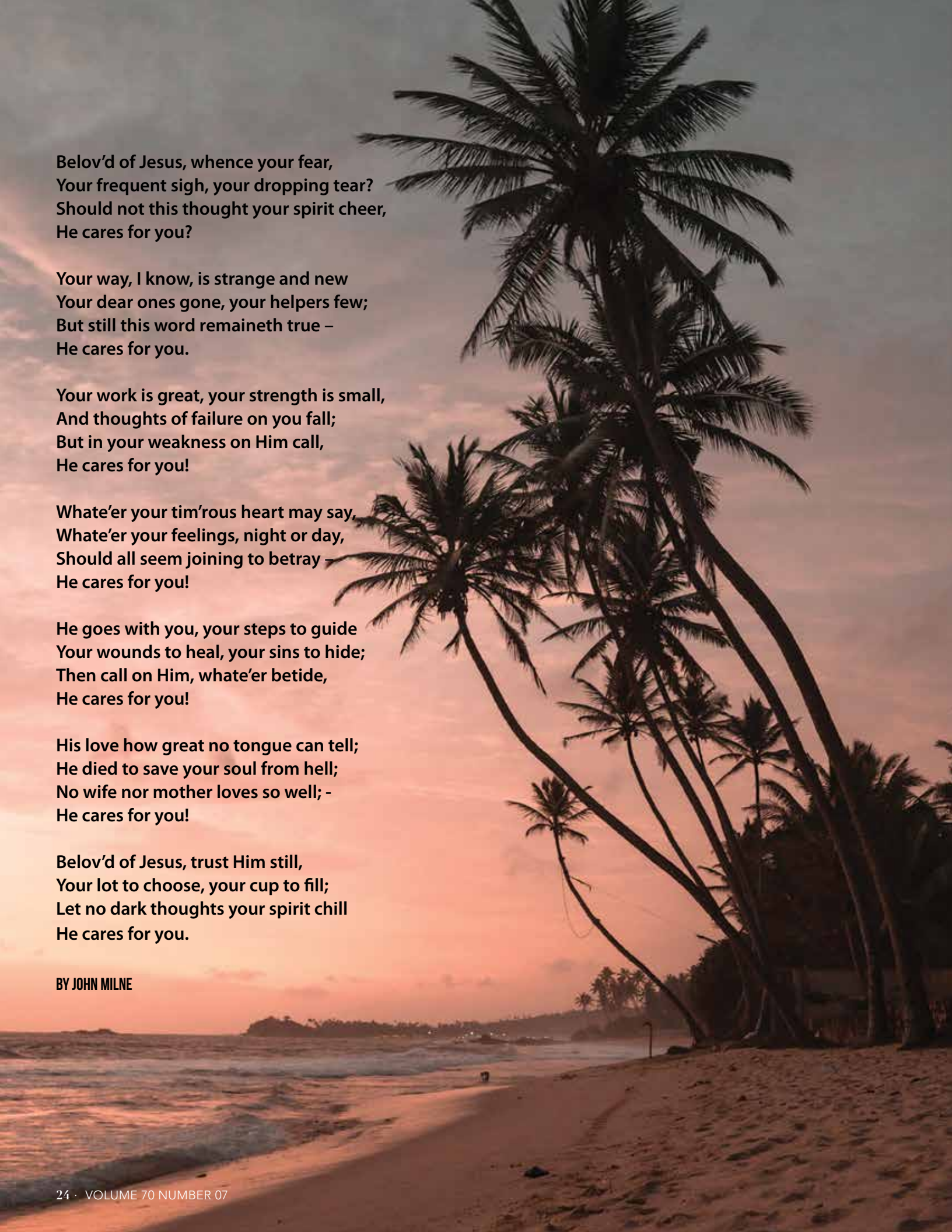
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Belov'd of Jesus, whence your fear,
Your frequent sigh, your dropping tear?
Should not this thought your spirit cheer,
He cares for you?

Your way, I know, is strange and new
Your dear ones gone, your helpers few;
But still this word remaineth true –
He cares for you.

Your work is great, your strength is small,
And thoughts of failure on you fall;
But in your weakness on Him call,
He cares for you!

Whate'er your tim'rous heart may say,
Whate'er your feelings, night or day,
Should all seem joining to betray –
He cares for you!

He goes with you, your steps to guide
Your wounds to heal, your sins to hide;
Then call on Him, whate'er betide,
He cares for you!

His love how great no tongue can tell;
He died to save your soul from hell;
No wife nor mother loves so well; -
He cares for you!

Belov'd of Jesus, trust Him still,
Your lot to choose, your cup to fill;
Let no dark thoughts your spirit chill
He cares for you.

BY JOHN MILNE