

## WHAT ABOUT THE LITTLE THINGS?

By Richard Dent

We live in a world today where people are encouraged to dream big, plan for big things to happen in their lives, create big, gigantic projects, and plan big weddings or other occasions in life. Now do not think that I am against big things in life . . . but what about the little things in life? We cannot always be the biggest fish in the lake. There is room in our life for some little things. One of my favorite old songs had a verse that said, "Little things mean a lot." How true that is!

Do you remember that God has often used little things to accomplish big things? In the Old Testament book of Judges we read about Samson, a man of faith in God, who used the jawbone of an ass to smite a thousand men of the enemy of Israel (Judges 15:15-16). It was such a small weapon . . . not like a machine gun or automatic weapon of today's era.

Then there is the story of a young man named David. Before he became a

king, he was a shepherd of his father's flocks. When he went down to take some supplies to his brothers he beheld the Israelites being harangued by a giant named Goliath. No one dared to fight this evil man except young David. David could not use the heavy sword, armor, or shield of King Saul so he took them off and took into battle some small, smooth stones along with his slingshot. Who was victorious? The big old giant or the small and faithful challenger? We all know the answer. God used David to accomplish a big victory over his enemies (1 Samuel 17).

Let us recall God's prophet of fire, Elijah. After a great victory over Jezebel and her followers, he was threatened by her for immediate death if she could catch him. He fled from her presence and lived in a cave. God visited him there and on one occasion used a "still small voice" to get his attention (1 Kings 19:12), and

instructed him as to what to do next. God did not have to speak LOUDLY to get his attention.

Last, let us consider a small man of stature named Zacchaeus. In Luke 19:1-10 we read that he heard about Jesus passing through Jericho. Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus but he was such a small man that he couldn't see over taller people. Ah, but he could climb a tree . . . which was exactly what he did. Jesus saw him and said, "Come down, for today I must abide in your house." Being little did not hurt this man.

Think of all the many good things that have been accomplished by little congregations. Yes, we should always hope to grow in number but we should never diminish the importance of smaller churches of Christ.

— Liberal, KS

## IT'S A MATTER OF LIFE OR DEATH

By Danny Tunnell

"Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit" (Proverbs 18:21).

Theodore Roosevelt once said, "If you could kick the person in the pants responsible for most of your trouble, you wouldn't sit for a month." Roosevelt was saying that we cause most of our own problems; and we could add, often by what we say.

The tongue is disproportionately powerful. The tongue is a little member, and boasts great things. How great a matter a little fire kindles (James 3:5). The tongue is very small but its effects are very large.

Of the seven things God hates, three have to do with the mouth: a lying tongue, a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren (Proverbs 6:16-18). "Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord" (Proverbs 12:22). The Hebrew word for "abomination" means "detestable." It comes from the root word from which we get the word "idolatry." Lying is idolatry to the Lord. It is leaving the throne of God and worshipping at the throne of Satan. When we lie we leave the throne of

truth and we go to the throne of lies. It is the opposite of God's nature. He only speaks truth, and He is truth (John 17:17; John 14:6).

Another way to sin with our tongue is to sow discord. Those who sow discord will reap calamity (Proverbs 6:14,15).

Gossip is sin. "A gossip tells secrets, so don't hang around someone who talks too much" (Proverbs 20:19, NLT).

Slander is sin. Slander is a false or malicious statement or report about someone. You might say, "I would never do that!" But people do it all the time when they pass on reports in which they have no personal knowledge whether the reports are factual or true. "Whoever spreads slander is a fool" (Proverbs 10:18).

Cursing is sin. Paul talked about some "whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness" (Romans 3:14). Most people who curse are bitter. Paul said, "Let your sweet reasonableness be known to all men" (Philippians 4:5, ESV). We can sin by using filthy language (Colossians 3:8). We can sin by using contentious speech, by

being disagreeable and argumentative (Proverbs 21:9; 26:21).

It is imperative that we learn when and how to say, "No," and mean it. The great heroes of the Bible said, "No," when tempted to sin. Daniel said, "No" (Daniel 1:8). Joseph said, "No," to Potiphar's wife (Genesis 39:1-9). Moses said, "No," to enjoying the passing pleasures of sin in Egypt (Hebrews 11:24,25). By quoting Scripture, Jesus said, "No," to Satan (Matthew 4:5-10).

Make the word, "No," part of your vocabulary. But when you say, "No," realize that it may bring persecution. You may lose some friends when you don't go along with them in sin. Later, when they become deeply entrenched in sin, and their lives are falling apart, chances are good that they will ultimately respect you for your stand. Saying, "No," is a good use of the mouth. Are you willing to say, "No," no matter what it might cost you? We can't say, "Yes," to Christ and His teachings without saying, "No," to the devil and his lies.

— Miami, OK

# Old Paths

Vol. 48, No. 1 January 2024

"ask for the old paths" (Jer. 6:16)

## HOW LONG SHOULD THE SERMON BE?

By Cecil May, Jr.

A friend and fellow member of a congregation where I was not the regular preacher attended virtually every service, and commented about almost every sermon. Never a word, though, about whether it was true, or needed, or well delivered; always and only about its length. If the sermon fit the time schedule announced for the service, he noted that with approval. If it was too long he was very critical. If it was unusually short, he was effusively complimentary. Surely, length is not the only thing worthy of attention!

The length of a sermon does require careful attention when more than one speaker is on a program, or when one program is immediately followed by another. Then one speaker going longer than his allotted time intrudes on the time allotted to another. In those situations it is both rude and arrogant to go past the allotted time. "Arrogant" because the speaker who goes over is saying to the one whose time he is taking, "What I am saying is more important than what you have to say."

Beyond that situation, however, factors other than the clock should govern the length of the sermon. A sermon should be long enough to accomplish its desired aim. Some tasks can be completed in twenty minutes; some cannot.

I have promised, "I will quit when I get through." Having sat through some preachers who kept going long after they got through, that is a pretty good promise.

Full disclosure: one church where I preached for several years had a clock in the back of the auditorium where the preacher could easily see it. One Sunday night, following a particularly complex and unusually lengthy lesson, two deacons said, intentionally in my hearing, "Maybe we should take down Cecil's clock and put him up a calendar."

Fuller disclosure: both deacons were good friends of mine and strong supporters of me as preacher there. So I knew it was mostly in fun.

While there are some legitimate reasons to be concerned with time, there are more important reasons to be concerned with devotion, reverence, praise to God, and learning His word. Less important is whether we beat the Baptists and Methodists to the restaurants or not.

"Take time to be holy."

— Montgomery, AL.

## TWISTED BEATITUDES

By Dalton Key

Blessed are the self-absorbed, for theirs is the kingdom of personal fulfillment.

Blessed are those who seek their own happiness at any cost, even at the expense of others, for they shall inherit a life of euphoric contentment.

Blessed are the cynical and untrusting, for they shall inherit a world of unparalleled security.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after entertainment, for they shall be perpetually amused.

Blessed are those who demand to be served, for they shall bask in pleasure.

Blessed are those who avoid commitment and responsibility, for they shall enjoy a paradise of freedom and independence.

Blessed are the revenge-seekers, for they shall be called the heroes and role-models for our children.

Blessed are those willing to compromise their convictions in a relentless pursuit of popularity, for theirs is a life of ease and acceptance.

Blessed are you when everyone knows your name, when you star in your own webcam series, and when you have more money than a superstar in professional sports.

Rejoice and be exceedingly glad: for great is your reward on earth, for this has been the true path to happiness and personal enrichment for those of every self-centered, media-obsessed generation.

THE PROBLEM? THE FOREGOING "BEATITUDES" ARE NOT TRUE, THEY ARE NOT WORKABLE, AND THEY ARE NOT IN ANY WAY SCRIPTURAL!

Listening to God and doing things His way has always been best. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths" (Proverbs 3:5,6).

I think I'll stick with the original beatitudes, the ones found in Matthew 5:3-12.

What do you think?



**ADVICE**

By Joe Slater

Advice – who needs it? Oftentimes I do! (Anyone else want to admit it?) “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he who heeds counsel is wise” (Proverbs 12:15). Effective leaders listen to trustworthy advisors before making important decisions.

No doubt the best advice in the world comes from the word of God. “Blessed is the man whom You instruct, O Lord, and teach out of Your law” (Psalm 94:12).

Too often, though, sinful humans just don’t like His counsel. In fact, we tend to want to reverse the roles!

Maybe we wouldn’t literally tell God what He should do, or what course of action He should approve for us, but that’s the net effect when we reject His counsel and forge ahead doing it “my way.”

Paul rhetorically asked the Romans, “For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?” (Romans 11:34, quoting Isaiah 40:13). In the next verse Paul asked the very question God asked Job: “Or who has first given to Him, and it shall be repaid to him?” (Romans 11:35 quoting Job 41:11).

The obvious answer to both questions: “Nobody!” The omniscient and infinitely wise God has no need whatever for our advice!

We, on the other hand, would do well to seek His advice within that great volume of His revealed will called the Bible. And once we have found it, we would do even better to heed it!

In many cases free advice is particularly unwelcome. But God’s advice won’t cost you a penny.

You will, however, be tremendously enriched by following it.

— Justin, TX

“With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You. Blessed are You, O Lord! Teach me Your statutes” (Psalm 119:10-12).

EDITORIAL . . .

**THE EVER ELUSIVE BOND OF PEACE**

By Dalton Key

Ambrose Bierce once offered this jaded definition for the word “peace”: “in international affairs, a period of cheating between two periods of fighting.”

My cynicism hasn’t quite reached Bierce’s level, especially as I look past global concerns to the peace sought within the body of Christ. Surely the Lord’s church can learn lessons of both Scripture and history while “endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3).

Salvation’s mystery was never intended to touch individuals, only to leave them isolated and insulated from one another; rather, God foreordained the church, the ekklesia, as a collection of saved sinners in fellowship with God and one another.

Peace among God’s people is an important and oft-recurring theme of New Testament teaching. Jesus prayed for the unity of his disciples (John 17:20,21). The Corinthian brethren were rebuked for their divisions and for their divisive spirit (1 Corinthians 1:10-13; 3:3). Paul urged two women at Philippi to “be of the same mind in the Lord” (Philippians 4:2). The Christians at Rome were instructed, “Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another” (Romans 14:19). Countless similar references, both promoting Christian unity and condemning division, may be found permeating the length and breadth of the New Testament text.

How is such unity to be achieved? How is it to be maintained? The few words of Ephesians 4:1-8 make it clear that unity among God’s people is based upon two grand principles:

1. Agreement (vs. 4-6)
2. Agreeableness (vs. 2-3)

We must share a basic agreement concerning the fundamentals of our faith. With no agreement, we have no basis for fellowship. We cannot share in matters not held in common. If true Christian unity is our aim, the singularities Paul emphasizes are non-negotiable. Period.

But we must also be agreeable. With lowliness and meekness, with a long-suffering and forbearing spirit, we must work to get along with one another. Too many of us agree on the issues but are still lacking in the love and understanding, the selflessness and Christlikeness, to actually get along with each other.

Never forget: The world is watching. And heaven is watching as well.

**WOULD YOU WANT TO KNOW?**

By Bobby Key

Some say they would like to know the future. They may be sincere, but this would not be a blessing. God and God alone knows what the future holds. “Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world” (Acts 15:18, KJV). God has said, “Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure’” (Isaiah 46:9,10). God does not need to hear the news to know what is taking place on this planet. He knows ahead of time!

Would you want to know the day of your death? or the day Christ will return? Christ knew what lay before him. The cross must have been on his mind from the beginning. This foreknowledge that was his was not given to us. Would you really want to know the suffering, the disappointments, the sorrow, and the

heartaches that stand between you and the grave?

I know a number of older people who have almost completed life’s journey. They have suffered many cares and trials. Their children have failed them and have become a disappointment. They have endured struggles and sickness. They have lost their marriage partner or their children have died. Would knowing these things from their youth have been a blessing? I think not.

After completing a memorial service for a dear wife and mother, the grief-stricken husband came to me at the open grave and said, “You could not have known, but this very day and hour would have been our fiftieth wedding anniversary.” I asked this dear friend, “Are you glad that you did not know this the day you were married?” With tears streaming down his cheeks he said, “Oh yes! If we had known this then we could not have been happy.”

We must live a day at a time. What lies over the next hill we cannot tell.

**HE AROSE!**

By Milton Smith

Like all other Christians, there was a time in my life that I had to intellectually decide if the resurrection of Jesus actually took place. The reason this is such a critical question is because the entire claim of Christianity rests solely on this historical event. Paul himself conceded the fact that if our Lord’s resurrection did not take place, Christianity is a false religion offering false hope (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:13-19). I, like so many others before me, had to weigh the evidence and determine whether or not I would commit my life to this claim. When I looked at the evidence, the choice was a simple one to make.

The lines of evidence that Jesus rose from the dead are many. The empty tomb must be seriously considered. Who opened the tomb? Jesus’ followers had not the opportunity and his enemies had not the motive. Yet the great stone was rolled away and the tomb stood wide open. But not only this, the open tomb was empty. Jesus’ enemies went to the “nth” degree to guard that tomb and make it secure, yet it was found vacated early that Sunday morning. But

also the shroud was left behind inside the tomb. Robbers illegally entering that sepulcher to steal away the body would have been in a very big hurry to leave. So, why would they have taken the time to remove the shroud from the body? If Jesus himself did not remove this shroud, the reason for it being left behind remains a mystery. We are also told that the headband was rolled up and placed precisely and neatly by itself; it was not hastily removed and thrown to the ground but neatly folded. Whoever removed this headband was in no hurry.

Yet, if the tomb was opened and vacated but Jesus was never seen again, the claim of resurrection would have been less credible. But hundreds of people claimed to have seen the risen Christ. Some even testified that they ate and drank with him after He rose from the dead. Jesus own apostles were persecuted and imprisoned (most were executed) for their claims, yet they never recanted nor repudiated what they had seen. The very existence of Christianity nearly 2000 years later - with those magnificent memorials such as the Lord’s Supper and the Lord’s Day

If we live for God in our little day, tomorrow’s storms and cares cannot harm us.

God has given us the promise of the resurrection and eternal life. He said to John, “Behold, I make all things new . . . Write, for these words are true and faithful” (Revelation 21:5). As sweet as life is, very few would wish to go back and live it over.

I have stood beside the bed of the dying and watched the fevered brow grow pale; I have seen the eyelids flutter and the pulse go still. I have felt the utter helplessness common to all mortals in such circumstances. But when I read from the Bible of a land that is fairer than day, where there will be no sorrow, no sickness, no pain, and no tears, I want to go there.

Don’t you? (1929-2018)

- cannot be brushed aside as irrelevant. All the facts mentioned above demand explanation. Only the resurrection of Jesus from that tomb agrees with every fact. I have always stood secure in my personal, life-changing decision to follow the One who obviously rose from the tomb.

— Tulsa, OK

**Old Paths**

830 W. Fargo Drive,  
Broken Arrow, OK. 74012

On a nonprofit basis.  
Published monthly and  
supported by Churches of Christ  
and individuals.

Dalton Key Editor  
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Prayers Requested;  
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