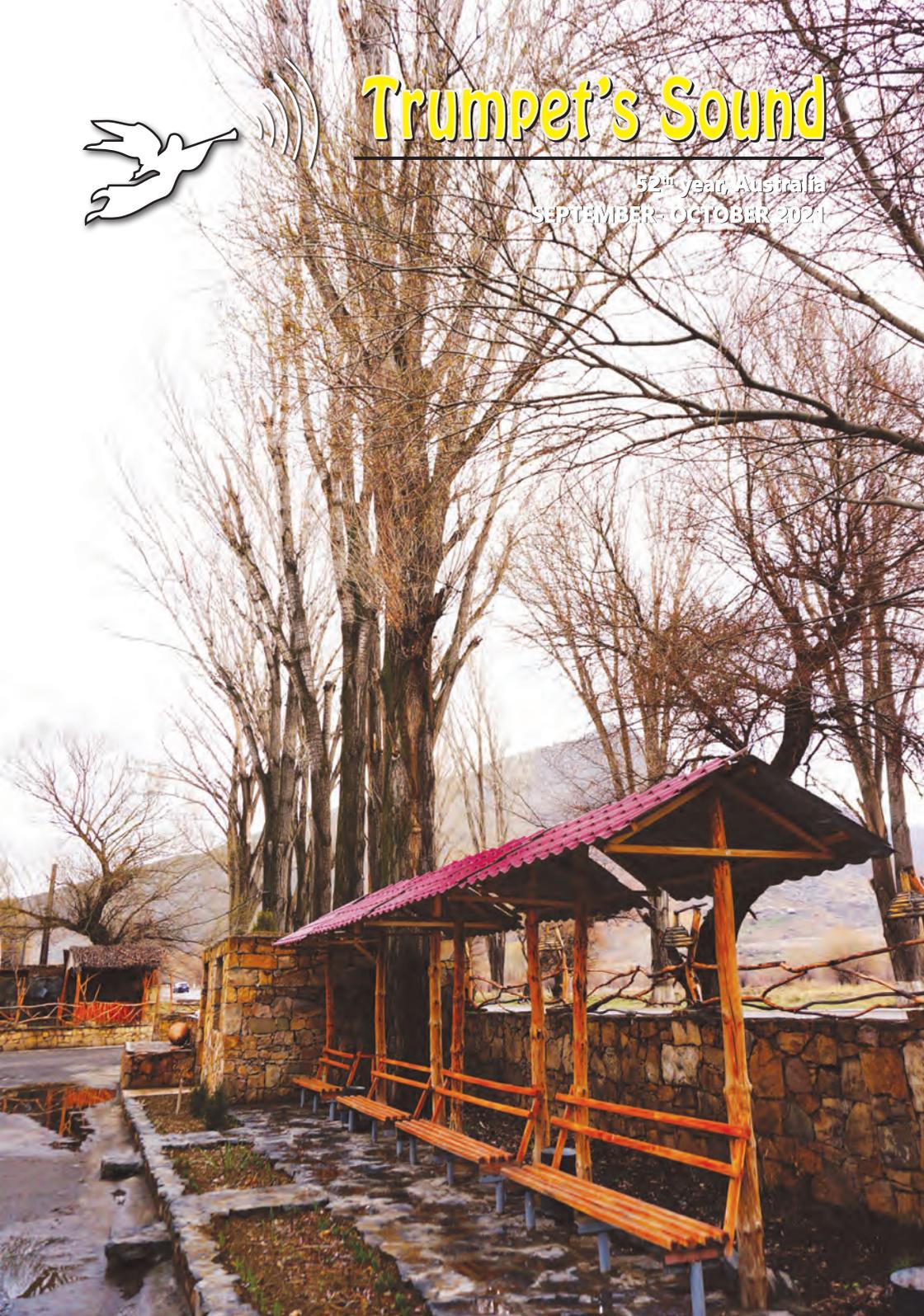




Trumpet's Sound

52nd year, Australia

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Prayer points

- We rejoice in the Lord for all His goodness
- More and more families need support in Armenia and Lebanon
- As winter is approaching support is needed to supply heat
- We need Christmas presents for children in poor villages
- We need Christmas gifts for our ten co-workers
- Please keep Maral in your prayers; she is our latest co-worker in Lebanon
- Pray for Tomik helping in Artsakh
- Pray for Trumpet’s Sound magazine and for Brothers Don Stormer and Vartan Sarkissian who help with editing and translation
- Pray that we can print 10,000 copies of the much needed and loved calendars for Armenia

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Lessons from a fishermen

Are you His follower? Does your life reflect your discipleship? Can others see the Lord Jesus in your life and know that you are one of His followers?

In Luke 5, Jesus asked Simon if He could use one of the fishing boats to be able to see the crowd and preach to them. The fishermen were just back from a fishing trip and were cleaning the nets ready for the next day. That night they had caught nothing.

When we read this story closely, we see three things that Simon did, and these changed his life.

- *He was obedient to the Lord*
- *He was humble*
- *He was a good listener*

Simon did not refuse the Lord's request. He was happy to see Jesus climb into his boat. It is important for us to have Jesus in our lives. If we do not have Him there, we can never be His followers.

After Jesus preached from the boat, He looked at the fishermen who were exhausted, tired, and disappointed because they had fished all night and caught nothing. Jesus asked them to take the boat further into the deep. Simon could have objected and mocked Jesus by saying He was a carpenter and knew nothing about fishing. He could have disobeyed the Lord but with all humility he listened to the Lord's command and took his boat into the deep.

In life if we do not go into the deep with the Lord, we will not see His blessings. When was the last time in your difficulties that you went deeper with the Lord? It may have caused you more pain. Note that the fishermen did not confuse the issue by saying they knew all about fishing. Peter simply said, "At Your word, I will let down the net".

Dear friend, have you tried to take Jesus into the depth of your sorrow, sickness, failures, and pain. Have you obeyed His command,

have you heard His voice, have you followed Him? The Lord commanded Peter to throw the nets into the sea. I can imagine the look on his face because it was the wrong time to fish. However, they were amazed with the result! When they obeyed, their nets had so many fish that they had to call others to come and help. They filled two boats with fish.

Friend, when they obeyed, they saw God's blessing. When we come in obedience, we too will see greater things in our lives. We must humble ourselves as Simon did. When he saw what had happened, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man". Simon came to know and believe in Jesus.

If we do not see our sinfulness there is no salvation for us nor will we ever see His blessing. If we do not accept the fact of our sinfulness, we will return empty handed. Simon was greatly shocked that day. He had been fishing all his life, but this miracle astonished both him and his companions.

Our lives may or may not be similar to Peter's, but we need to humbly come to Him saying, "Lord, what do you want me to do?" The Lord has loved us with an everlasting love. Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will catch men". So, they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything, and followed Him.

However, Simon left the boat a changed man. Do you want to see His power in your life? Are you ready to obey, to be humble and listen, and ready to leave all to follow Him? Friend you will be blessed, because you will see His marvellous power and will return to say that you were once empty handed, but the Lord blessed you with so much. God be with you all.

H. K.

*"It is not how much we have, but how much we enjoy,
that makes happiness." - Charles Spurgeon*

From Egypt to Canaan (1)

The background to Exodus

The story of the exodus must start with an explanation of why the Israelites were in Egypt. Abraham had been promised that his descendants would inherit the land in which he was a pilgrim and a stranger. However, when the Lord made this promise, He indicated that it would be a long time before the Israelites would inherit the promised land of Canaan. God said that Abraham's descendants would suffer until the iniquity of the Amorites had reached its peak.

What caused the Israelites to go into Egypt was a famine some years after ten of Jacob's sons had sold their half-brother Joseph into slavery into Egypt. After Joseph spent thirteen years in slavery and imprisonment, God warned Pharaoh about a coming severe famine. Because God enabled him to interpret Pharaoh's dreams, Joseph was elevated to prominence in the kingdom. Then a little more than twenty years after Joseph was sold as a slave, the famine began to bite in countries around Egypt as well as in Egypt itself. Jacob, in Canaan, learned that there was food in Egypt and sent the same ten sons there to buy food.

Eventually the whole of Jacob's family moved into Egypt and remained there for 430 years. As time passed the government of Egypt changed and a new Pharaoh came to power and, on the basis of some unusually twisted reasoning, decided to enslave the Israelites and force them to build supply cities for him.

The slavery became more and more cruel and vicious. As the Israelite population increased, the Pharaoh commanded the Hebrew midwives to allow any baby girls to live, but to kill any sons who were born. When the Pharaoh realised that his scheme was not working, he commanded that all baby boys be thrown into the river.

A question that arises in our minds is why God allowed this. Was this cruel bondage really necessary? What was the purpose behind Israel's long period of slavery? Perhaps the people had mistaken the will of God?

There are two major reasons for knowing the Israelites had not mistaken God's will for them. First, Jacob has been specifically told by God to go into Egypt at the time the famine was at its height. However, even earlier than that, God had told Abraham that his descendants would be enslaved to another nation for 400 years. The iniquity of the Amorites had not at that stage reached the point where judgment had to fall; there was still time for them to repent. The time would come when repentance would have passed and judgment would fall, but until then the descendants of Abraham were to be away from the country.

However, there is another aspect to this. In the nineteenth century, an American writer, James Barr Walker wrote a book entitled Philosophy of the Plan of Salvation. In this he argued for the truth of the Christian revelation, showing that the plan revealed in Scripture was the only possible way in which God could possibly have revealed Himself to mankind. We follow some of his reasoning.

God needed a nation of people committed to Him to reveal Himself to mankind. If there was only one man who believed, he could be a witness to the truth while he lived. Once he died, there was no further witness to the divine truth. Job is possibly a case in point. We know nothing about the faithfulness or otherwise of his family. To all intents and purposes, the truth died with him.

What was necessary was that there be a nation of people who could preserve the truth. For this, the nation had to be welded together in a way that no other nation has ever been. But how is a nation welded together so that God could use them for His purposes? What ties a people together? There must be a common heritage. To have descended from one man is a good start to achieving this. To add a common language and a common literature strengthens the bond of unity.

However, more than is necessary. There must be something extra that binds the ethnic group together. What bound the Israelites together was a history of common suffering. All Israelites suffered as one person; no one escaped from the suffering which they experienced. This suffering was intensified by the increased ill-treatment experi-

enced after Moses went to Pharaoh with God's message that he had to release His people. For the next few months the Israelites alternated between hope and despair. At times it looked as if their freedom was near and hope would have increased, only to be dashed as Pharaoh reneged on his promise.

Even after the Israelites were released, their hopes were once more almost dashed as Pharaoh pursued them to the Red Sea. It was not till they crossed the Red Sea, that they knew that they were safe.

The release from bondage, accomplished at the time of the Passover is still remembered by Jews today. The event which is celebrated each year at Passover time binds the Jews into a nation that has survived all attempts to exterminate them.

Now this does not mean that all the Israelites have been faithful to the Lord. Far from it. But it does mean that there was a nation in which the truth could dwell. Even in some of the darkest days of the nation's history, there were still 7,000 who did not bow their knees to the false gods around them.

The bondage in Egypt was essential. It welded the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob into a nation that would pass the truth of the one God from one generation to the next until the coming of the Messiah.

With this in mind, we proceed in coming issues to consider the message of Exodus.

Don Stormer

"So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen."

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

The great initiative

I heard a startling piece on news on the radio. A scientist in the United States is preparing to attempt the cloning of a human being. President Clinton, so the news reader said, was appealing for a five-year ban on the experiment. As I was digesting this information, my imagination ran ahead wildly. A sheep was successfully cloned recently. It even made the cover of Time magazine. What would a world with human cloning be like? It would mean that a person could make a perfect genetic duplicate of himself, right down to the colour of his eyes. What would that mean? In some distant amoral future, will we store that duplicate of ourselves in a deep-freeze and keep it for any spare organ we might need? Or what about armies of expendable cloned soldiers? We are standing on the edge of a frightening new age with bizarre possibilities. No wonder President Clinton, suggested to be the most powerful man in the world, experiences fear of the future and perhaps with good cause.

In our personal lives it may not be the problems created by unrestrained technology that grip our hearts with fear as we consider the future. We may have far more immediate issues such as health, relationship, employment, or other changes, that make us wonder just what is in our future.

Theologians have a wonderful word that can steady our souls as we think about all this. It is the word *prevenience*. It is used to describe the fact that God is always there first, taking the initiative. As we travel into an unknown future we find God already at home there, already initiating His own strategic action. *Prevenience* speaks of God working as an initiator, not merely as one who responds to the action of His creatures. It is summed up in the first four words of the Bible, "In the beginning God..." (Genesis 1:1). God began the world, and He will end it when it pleases Him.

God initiated our salvation, and will complete it. "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion" (Philippians 1:6).

“He first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

God is always on the initiative and never has to respond to unforeseen circumstances presented to Him by sinful humans. If we move forward into the future understanding the prevenience of God, it changes our whole attitude. Instead of merely hoping that God can somehow do something in response to the situation, we assume He is already on the initiative, and it is our task to discern what that is and fall into step with it.

The prevenience of God not only changes our attitude to the future. It also changes our approach to people. When we start in a new church fellowship, join a new home group, or meet a new person we don't ask, “How can I get God to make this group or person change to the way I think they should be?” We must see that God is already working in that group or person. Our question then becomes, “What is God already doing here and how can I co-operate with His marvelous plan in this group or this life?” This is what Paul meant when he said, “For we are God's fellow-workers” (1 Corinthians 3:9).

On a personal level, it is wonderfully reassuring to know that we have a relationship with God that He initiated. “For He chose us... before the creation of the world” (Ephesians 1:4). For that relationship to be established, He did not give in to our persuasion, we gave in to His!

The future looks much more attractive when we know that God is already there and already at work. He has seen it all before. Ultimately, the future is in greater hands than ours so let us focus positively on what God has called us to do now and confidently get on with it.

Rex Dearlove

“Parents would think it a great calamity to have their children born dumb; they would mourn over it, and weep; and well they might; but did you ever think of the many dumb children God has? The churches are full of them; they never speak for Christ. They can talk about politics, art, and science; they can speak well enough and fast enough about the fashions of the day, but they have no voice for the Son of God.” – D. L. Moody

The call, the promise, and the answer

(a look at Colossians 3:1-5)

The apostle Paul's writing is characterised by reasoned argument. He begins with great spiritual truths and reasons and continues through to the walk of those who believe. He always has one end in view – to build up the saints so that they know the abundant life (see John 10:10).

Let's follow his reasoning in the first few verses of Colossians 3.

The call

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. (Colossians 3:1-3)

Paul reminds the believers in Colosse of the fundamental truth to which they would have testified in their baptism – that they were not only joined with the Lord Jesus in His death, but they were also raised with Him in His resurrection. This is something that God has accomplished, and this is the ground of our salvation. Paul spells it out in more detail in Romans 6:1-11.

Why did God do this? Because it is not only our sins that separate us from God, but also our sin – the rebellious and corrupt nature out of which our sins arise. But in Christ, God has put the sinner to death and raised him up again. This has accomplished much more than our forgiveness – we are not simply forgiven sinners – we are a new creation in Christ (see 2 Corinthians 5:17 and Ephesians 2:10).

Because this truth forms the basis of our relationship with God, heaven is open to us, and Paul therefore calls believers to “seek those things which are above”, no longer bound to the earth (see also John 17:14).

The difficulty we have with this is that we don't feel that the sinner has died at all. Our sinful nature is a very present reality, and as we

go on with the Lord, we become even more aware of it. But Paul is not talking about what we should be feeling, but what God has done in the spiritual realm. He is describing our standing before God, not our present state. It is very important that we distinguish our standing before the Lord as His redeemed children, from our state or present condition, but never, as we shall see, to excuse a self-centred, lazy, or sinful life.

The promise

When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. (Colossians 3:4)

Paul assures believers that they shall be totally free from sin when Christ appears. John writes of the same coming transformation:

Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. (1 John 3:2)

Christ is now our life – that is, He is the life that, through the Holy Spirit, has raised our previously dead spirit to everlasting life. Receiving His life is new birth. When the Lord Jesus returns in glory and is seen by the world, then the glory of the life that is in us will be seen by all.

The answer

Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. (Colossians 3:5)

We can see here that Paul is fully aware that sin is still present in us, and that in this life it is a potent force to be reckoned with. But because the believers have died with Christ and are risen with Him, he tells them to put that sinful nature to death. In Romans 6 he encourages the same response, where, after challenging the believers to account themselves to be dead to sin but alive to God in Christ, Paul writes:

Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. (Romans 6:12)

Paul is certainly not saying that by human will power we can become righteous. His message is that having been redeemed by the Lord and sealed by the Spirit, we can and should walk in the risen life that He has shared with us. This is made clear in Romans 8.

Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. (Romans 8:12-14)

We cannot defeat the sinful tendencies of our nature alone, nor in one day. We are told to continuously seek and to follow the Holy Spirit's leading so that we are not controlled by sin. He is able to transform our lives so that the Lord Jesus Christ's risen life will be increasingly seen in us.

The call is to live as those for whom heaven is open, His promise is that we shall be changed completely when He comes, and our answer is to turn from this sinful nature to the Spirit, so that the Lord Jesus can reign in and through each one of us.

Neil Buckman

Outsiders became insiders in Damascus (2)

Idol worship

After the Assyrians invaded Damascus, King Ahaz of Judah visited Damascus and was impressed with a pagan altar he saw there (2 Kings 16:10-16). So he commanded the Judean high priest to build one like it in Jerusalem and to use it instead of the bronze altar at the temple. This is an example of Judah following the polytheism of the surrounding nations. This change is opposite to Naaman's conversion. And such behaviour led to the invasion of Judah by the Babylonians.

Paul

In New Testament times, the church (true believers) were God's people and other Jews and other Gentiles were outsiders to their relationship with God.

At the time of Saul's conversion there were many Jews living in Damascus as well as some Christians (Acts 9:2; 22:5-6, 10-12). As Damascus was the hub of trade routes in the Middle East, Saul knew that if Christianity flourished in Damascus, then it would quickly spread to other places within the Middle East. So his mission was to stop this spread by imprisoning Christians.

Saul was travelling to Damascus when he was converted (Acts 9:1-31). This event is so important that it is described three times in the Bible (Acts 22:3-16; 26:9-18). He described it to King Agrippa, "On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. About noon, King Agrippa, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' Then I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' the Lord replied. 'Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of me. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness'" (Acts 26:12-18).

The trip from Jerusalem to Damascus would have been about 250km (150 miles). Depending on how he travelled, this could take Saul 1-2 weeks. Immediately afterwards he began preaching in the synagogue about Jesus. But after a while some Jews planned to kill him. When Paul found out about this, some friends helped him escape one night in a basket through an opening in the city wall (2 Corinthians 11:32-33).

Discussion

With regard to Judaism, Naaman changed from being an outsider

to an insider. And with regard to Christianity and the church, Saul changed from being an outsider to an insider.

This shows that God wants people of all nations to benefit from His promises. Abraham was told, "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Genesis 12:3). Peter had to learn that no nationality is unclean (Acts 10:9-16, 28, 34-35; 11:4-10). This event is so important that it is described twice in the Bible. Believers are all equal before God (Galatians 3:26-28). The distinctions between people under the law of Moses have been abolished. There should be no racism in the church because there will be no racism in heaven (Revelation 5:9).

Although the Arameans in Damascus were the enemies of God's people, one of them (Naaman) was blessed by the prophet Elisha. Through this, a Gentile became part of God's people. Another conversion of an outsider (Saul) happened near Damascus. This resulted in the gospel spreading across the Roman Empire. So in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, God reached out to Gentiles associated with Damascus.

And God eventually punished Damascus for the Arameans' opposition to the people of God. This reminds us of the judgment coming eventually to those who rebel against God's revelation to them. Fortunately, God has given us many opportunities to acknowledge His existence and accept His offer of forgiveness. No one is without excuse.

Lessons for us

Biblical events associated with Damascus show that the good news about Jesus is for people of all nations and not just those in the church. It can change outsiders into insiders.

The Bible teaches that there should be no racism in the church. Believers are to accept one another as they are accepted by God (Rom. 15:7).

But the destruction of Damascus indicates that there is bad news for those who don't accept the good news about Jesus. It's better to heed God's warnings in the Bible, than to be judged by God.

George Hawke

Two words

The Lord Jesus often used just two words to call His disciples. We all know what they are – we have heard them many times. Children know them and there are songs that feature them.

Even though these two words are vitally important, many people seem not to have heard them at all. Being strangely deaf to what the Lord said, they struggle and strive to become moral, pious, or religious, and they often end up bound, empty and miserable.

But if you know these two words, you have the key to an overcoming life, the answer to all your needs, and the door to fruitfulness and joy. Or, to put it another way, if you know these two words, you know what a Christian is and what the Christian life is all about.

Somebody once told me, “A Christian is someone who is a good person and who believes in God.” Is that right? Someone else said a Christian is “a person who goes to church, and not just at Easter and Christmas”. Another said, “Someone who has been born in a Christian family”. And still another, “A person who believes the Bible and tries to do the right thing”.

You may have heard many similar answers, but are these answers correct?

The Bible tells us that the first people to be called Christians were disciples of the Lord Jesus (Acts 11:26). These were people who had committed themselves to the Lord Jesus, both to learn from Him and to obey Him.

Why did they make that commitment? Because they had come to know that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Saviour of the world. They put their whole trust in Him, He became their Saviour, and He gave them the wonderful gift of forgiveness, peace, and assurance. From that day on they were His disciples.

What is a Christian, and what is the Christian life all about? You have the answer in those two words. Do you know what they are?

Winter in Armenia

Some years ago, I used to visit Armenia in winter when the temperatures dropped well below -25 degrees.

I was invited to preach one Sunday morning in Yerevan. It was a winter morning, -12 degrees, and snowing at the same time. As I approached the church building a lady with a baby in her arms approached me begging for money. I was embarrassed to take my wallet out in front of the crowd, so I asked her to step inside, saying that after the service I would see her.

When the meeting was over the elders and the pastor invited me for a cup of coffee in the hall next door. I was in a room with about ten of them. The door was shut, and we were being served food.

There was a knock on the door. Someone was calling to say there was a lady outside waiting to see our guest. I immediately remembered that I had asked this lady to wait for me. The pastor was angry and yelled out saying that this was not a beggar's house, and she was to go away. After we finished our talk and prayer, I immediately walked out to look for her. There was no one inside the building. I walked outside where it was still snowing and as I left the gates, there on my left on the curb this woman was sitting in the snow. Her baby, who was on her chest asleep, had urinated all over the mother. I still remember that picture and cannot get it out of my mind. She looked at me and said that the pastor was a very nice man who had helped her so many times. However, she had another four children at home, and they had no food or heat for the winter.

Will you help us help those who are suffering and are less fortunate. Help us to keep the poor families warm and fed this Christmas.

H. K.