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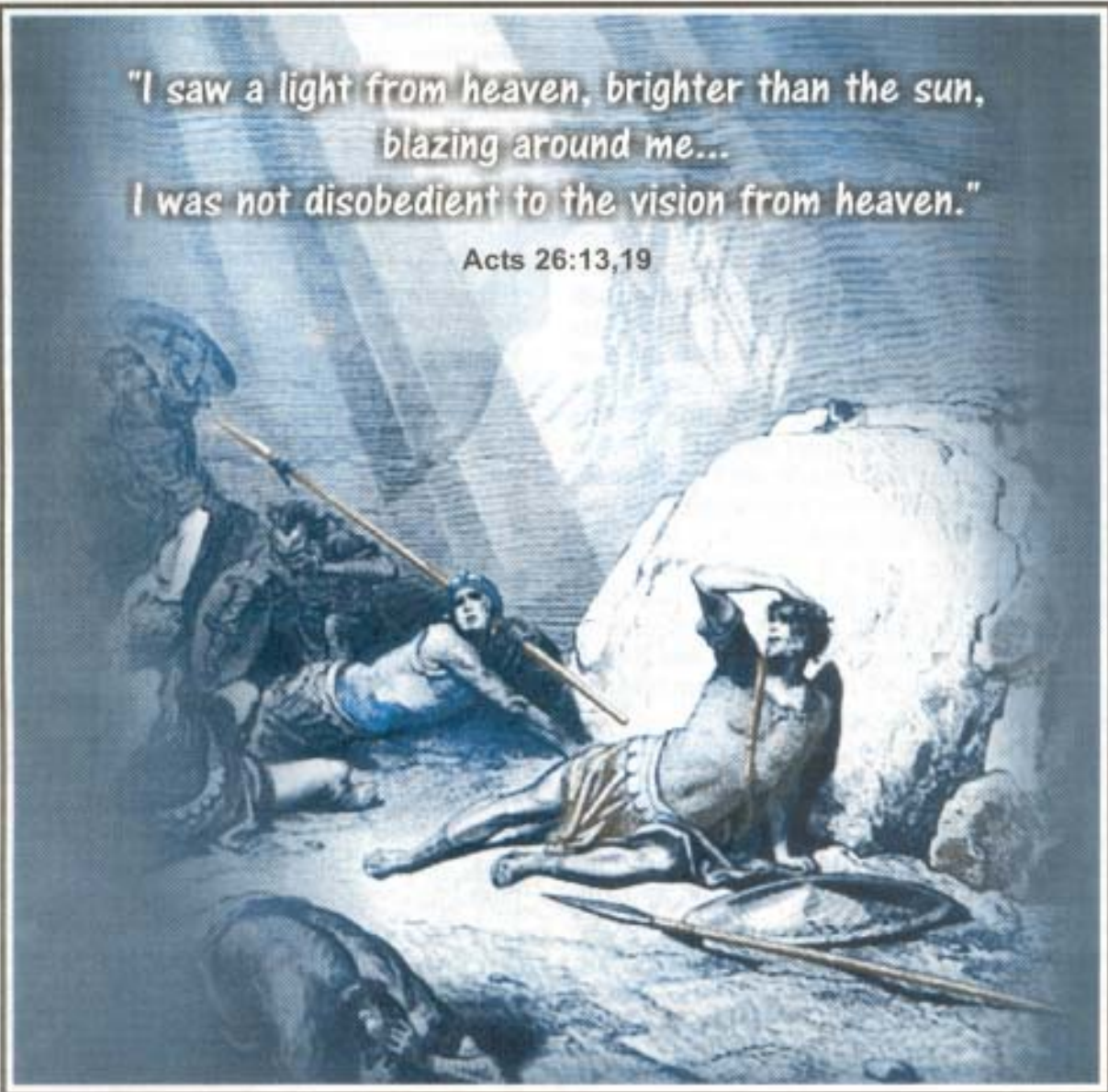
Blessing

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"I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun,
blazing around me...
I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven."

Acts 26:13,19



VISION FROM HEAVEN!

Dr. M. Arthur John

Visions and dreams are agents from God carrying definite messages of His purposes. In the days of yore this was a key channel He employed to commune with His people. The Bible says where there is no vision people perish (Prov 29:18). Catching the right vision is so critical for a God-centered, Christ glorifying life. Prophet Joel prophesied saying, "And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people... your young men will see visions." On the day of Pentecost, God fulfilled this promise and the Church was born. A young man named Saul decided to oppose this move of God and was on his way to Damascus with an intent to persecute the Church. Enroute, he saw a vision that transformed his life and through him multitudes. He calls this 'The vision from heaven.' This vision gripped him such that he committed his life totally to its pursuit and perpetuation. His endeavors to realize the vision are scripted in the Acts of the Apostles. We find a narration of this vision in the 26th chapter as he testified to king Agrippa. This made such an impact on the king that evoked a question, "Do you think that in such short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?" (Acts 26:28). That was the power of the vision that caught hold of Paul. A brief meditation on his vision will warm our hearts and hasten our steps to achieve the vision from heaven. What was Paul's vision?

1. He saw the vision of Jesus

"About noon, O king, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions... I heard a voice ... Then I asked, 'Who are You, Lord?' I am Jesus... the Lord replied" (Acts 26:13-15).

The vision that dazzled Apostle Paul was that of Jesus in His heavenly glory. Initially,

the vision appeared as a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around him and his companions. Then he heard His voice; the pained still voice touched his heart, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads." Saul had heard of a Jesus of Nazareth, a carpenter's Son who was born to an under class, less privileged, Joseph and Mary. They were so poor and uninfluential that they could not muster enough muscle to provide a better cradle than a cattle shed for their first born. Their finances were so low that they could not afford a lamb as an offering during the consecration of the Baby Jesus (Lk 2:22-24; Lev 12:8). Jesus Himself did not don the shroud of influence in the choice of His friends; they were ordinary fisher folk and the less privileged. But ofcourse, He was reported to be a good man helping others and doing good to them. How dare He claim to be the Messiah, the Christ?! This perhaps was Saul's understanding until then. That was the earthly picture that the great scholar had of Jesus. But now he received the heavenly vision! This challenged the knowledge and learning he had gained under the able schooling of Gamaliel. The vision of Jesus tossed Saul off his horse onto the ground, humbled and ready to unlearn!

At the Mount of Transfiguration Peter, James and John were privy to a glimpse of His vision. His face shined like the sun, His clothes turned white as the light, and a bright cloud enveloped them when a voice said, "This is my Son, whom I love. With Him I am well pleased. Listen to Him" (Mt 17:1-5). The vision made such a lasting impact on Peter that he sought to stay with Jesus at the mount forever! Apostle John was blessed with a glorious vision, of which he wrote, "I turned around to see the voice that spoke to me. And when I turned I saw seven

golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone like the Son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to His feet and with a golden sash around His chest. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp double edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance" (Rev 1:12-16). A vision of Jesus brings about a lasting change, an impact that can be paralleled by none. Not one who receives a vision of Him can be the same any longer. The vision of Jesus brought John to his knees, in worship (v 17).

A heavenly vision is a prerequisite for a heaven-anointed, God-appointed ministry. It is imperative that we catch this vision of Jesus. It is note worthy that Saul received this vision in stages; first, a blazing light, then a voice and then the revelation of the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. During his earthly stint Jesus said, "You are from below; I am from above" (Jn 8:23). For the earthly man to grasp the heavenly vision is not easy. We cannot comprehend the heavenly vision of Jesus with our puny earthly minds. We need a renewal in our minds, perhaps, step by step in order to gain the full revelation of Jesus Christ. May the written Word reveal the Eternal Word step by step such that the heavenly vision of Jesus be complete in us to bring forth heavenly fruits.

2. He saw the vision of his own self

"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 Him, 'Who are You, Lord?' 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting', the Lord replied" (Acts 26:14, 15). The heavenly vision of Jesus, got Saul to see his own self in a new light. The vision of Jesus convicted Saul of his gross mis-

demeanor. His perception as a righteous man, a Pharisee of Pharisees, a God-pleaser, rendering service to God was challenged. He saw himself as God saw him; a persecutor of Christ i.e. an enemy of God. The supremacy and majesty of Jesus, got him to realize how small and base he was in the sight of God. This self insight continued to be a part of him for the rest of his life! As a mature apostle of God, while writing to Timothy he mentioned, "I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man... the worst of sinners" (1 Tim 1:12-16). This penitent heart and contrite spirit is the direct consequence of the vision of God. The heavenly vision raises the bar; we cannot afford to compare ourselves against others, the yardstick becomes much more stringent and we begin to see ourselves vis-a-vis God's expectations. This is when our eyes are opened to the concept of our righteousness being viewed as filthy rags by God.

The immediate response of prophet Isaiah, post his heavenly vision was, "Woe unto me!... I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty" (Isa 6:5). When the unholy eyes see the vision of the most Holy God, simultaneously they have a revelation of the most unholy nature of self. This is an accurate reflection of a child of God. Job is another example. He said, "My ears had heard of You but now my eyes have seen You. Therefore, I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:5,6).

Apostle Paul had, in fact, many things to boast in his flesh. "Circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the Tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless" (Phil 3:5,6). But, since the heavenly vision of Christ Jesus, all the above boastings, he considered as rubbish (Phil 3:7,8). His philosophy after the heavenly vision turned, "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord" (and not on his own merits—1 Cor 1:31).

King Nebuchadnezzar's pride and arrogance expressed in his words: "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?", gave way to complete submission and surrender at the vision of the majesty of God: "At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven and my sanity was restored (Dan 4:29,30). Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified Him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; His Kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the people of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as He pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth." (Dan 4:34,35).

May the Lord grant us a vision of our own self such that we are conscious of our sinful nature as Isaiah, Paul and other stalwarts were, to be made useful in His hands.

3. He saw the vision of his calling

"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 of Me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles" (Acts 26:16,17).

God's primary calling of His people is to be His servants and witnesses. John the Baptist was a man chosen by God. It is written of him, "There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a *witness* to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe" (Jn 1:6,7). God chose the people of Israel as His witnesses and servants, "But now, this is what the Lord says—He who created you, O Jacob, He who formed you O Israel: Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine... you are my *witnesses*, declares the Lord, and my *servant* whom I have chosen" (Isa 43:1,10).

In his heavenly vision, Paul received an insight into his calling. It was a divine calling; a heavenly commission to witness the Jesus he had seen and yet to see! The vision of Jesus cannot be an isolated experience. It has to be ongoing. While the initial vision of Jesus brings to light the calling, it is in the ongoing vision of Jesus the specifics are discerned.

In line with Jesus' words to His disciples, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my *witnesses* in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria and to the ends of the earth," on the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit fell upon the believers and they were strengthened to be His witnesses (Acts 1:8). Paul the later addition to the group of disciples was charged with the same mandate as that of those who physically walked with Jesus. In keeping with the calling, Paul testified to the Jews in Jerusalem, "A man named Ananias came to see me... Then he said: 'The God of our fathers has chosen you to know His will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from His mouth. You will be His *witness* to all men of what you have seen and heard" (Acts 22:12,14,15).

The vision and his calling was so compelling that Paul became a Jew to win the Jews, to win those not having the law he became like one not having the law, to the weak he became weak to win the weak and this way he became all things to all men so that by all possible means he might save some (1 Cor 9:20-22). He considered it a woe if he failed to witness this heavenly vision of Jesus (1 Cor 9:16). The vision of Paul's call and commission was sealed with a promise from the Lord, "I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles" (Acts 26:17). When God calls and commissions His servants to witness for Him, He provisions for their preservation. God's calling is complete. He calls, commissions and cares for his servants who obey His call and witness for Him.

Apostle Peter reiterates the calling of God's children, "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light" (1 Pet 2:9). Calling of the church is to witness. How many of our Churches have witnessing in their agendas? Most churches have full fledged committees on building maintenance and social concerns but very few are actively involved in achieving the true calling of the Church. May God help the Church to be His witness in season and out of season!

4. He saw the vision of his Mission

"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 of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in Me" (26:18).

The conflict between Light and darkness – God and satan is perennial. Saul once blind and under the power of darkness when encountered by the blazing light on Damascus road saw the Light dawn into his life. With his spiritual eyes opened Paul busied himself on his journey to open the eyes of other blind men and pull them from darkness to light; from the power of satan to God. His mission was to guide those who did not know the forgiveness of sins to experience the free gift from God. His life mission was to by some means save some (1 Cor 9:22). He derived his life's mission and passion from the heavenly vision of Jesus.

The Mission of Israel was also prophesied by Isaiah, saying, "I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness... I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles" (Isa 42:6).

The Messiah's mission as foretold by the prophet Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Sovereign

Lord is on Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to preach goodnews to the poor. He has sent Me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair" (Isa 61:1-3) and further, " to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness" (Isa 42:7).

The above spelt out mission captures the heartbeat of the Father in heaven. God is concerned about the poor, the brokenhearted, those in captivity, blinded by the darkness of sin, prisoners, and those who are in mourning. The overwhelming heartcry and the compassion of Father God is central to the mission He purposes for those He gives a vision of Himself. It is His yearning that those delivered from the captivity of satan and the power of darkness go after those under the clutches of sin and bondage and deliver them from the snares of the evil one.

Praise God for the Apostle Thomas who landed in India during the first century AD consumed by his vision to fulfil this mission. Praise God for the early missionaries who made India their home and invested themselves for our sake propelled by an undying zest to realize their God given mission. Their burden for those who walk in darkness to see the Great Light and their desire to allow the light to dawn on those living in the land of the shadow of death was so powerful that they counted their careers and their ambitions as of no consequence and pursued their life mission tirelessly (Isa 9:2). Today, we in India are the fruit of their selfless labour. However

there are multitudes today in India who have not heard the Gospel of Light; there are millions who have not experienced the power of deliverance in their lives from sin and satan; innumerable who have not received the joy of forgiveness of sins and have no assurance of a place in heaven. This malady can only be addressed when the sleeping Christians rub the scales off their eyes and catch the vision and respond to their lifes' mission positively.

On receiving the vision, Apostle Paul did not bother to seek a second opinion; he merely obeyed the vision, "So, then king Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven" (26:19). Paul's obedience to his calling was immediate and implicit: "When God, who set me apart from birth and called me by His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man, ... but **I went immediately** into Arabia and later returned to Damascus" (Gal 1:15-17). Praise God for his obedience! That simple act of obedience resulted in

innumerable lives being blessed with the Gospel across the world! God seeks such obedient servants to lay hold of the heavenly vision. However, several who received this vision fail to take the initial step of faith in obedience to His call! May the Lord speak to those readers who at one point received the call of God to be his witnesses and servants, to take a step of faith in obedience to fulfill His call.

In obedience to the heavenly vision, Paul began in earnest to spread the vision: "First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea and to the Gentiles also I preached" (26:20). Further, his writings have spread across the world all through the ages since his time.

In this cause of spreading the vision, Paul sacrificed his very life! "The Jews seized me in the Temple courts and tried to kill me" (26:21). His commitment to the vision was so overriding that he was willing to pay any cost for the cause of reaching the world with the vision of Christ. The troubles he encountered for the sake of the gospel were numerous (Acts 21:27-36.) The cost he paid on account of the gospel is detailed in 2 Cor 11:23-28. Church history tells us that he was beheaded in Rome. The corn of wheat fell to the ground and died and no wonder it has brought thirty fold, sixty fold and hundred fold results!

Jesus is eagerly awaiting to impart His vision as He did to Paul. As God's elect, shall we commit ourselves to catch this heavenly vision of Jesus? Taking hold of this vision should help us realize our base and sinful nature, lead us to respond to His call and commission, see the great need around us and pursue the mission with a missionary zeal. Such a committed life worthy of the vision will merit a commendation from God, "Well done, good and faithful servant." May the Lord grant us grace to lay hold of the heavenly vision and translate it into a reality on earth! **f**

WRITING CONTEST

Here's an excellent opportunity to use your writing skills for God. You can minister to people through your pen and also develop your God-given talent. Write on any topic in English or any of the major Indian languages. The article should be original and within five pages of foolscap paper, neatly typed. Articles already published anywhere will not be accepted. Write your name, address, e-mail id and telephone number (if available) on top of the first page. Include a passport size photograph. Keep a copy for yourself as the manuscript will not be returned. Best wishes!

Last date: 31 April 2007

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Foolishness—The Enemy of Wisdom

Dr. Mrs. Lilian Stanley

In our journey to discover wisdom there are two steps. One is to relinquish foolishness and the other is the pursuit of wisdom. We shall see what foolishness is and how we can hack it off our life.

The Bible unveils a bewildering array of fools. Like a fashion parade they walk before us as we read the Bible through.

The number one fool is the one who says there is no God. He is the atheist fool. David sings, “The **fool** has said in his heart: There is no God” (14:1). There are millions of people who do not believe in the existence of a supreme being. Outwardly they may be no different from the God-believer. He may be Radha-krishnan, Mohammed Ali or Thomasraj, but in his ‘heart’ he denies the presence of God. The Bible says there is no excuse for anyone not to know God because God has revealed Himself in many ways. His invisible attributes are clearly seen in His creation. It is not that someone did not know God; they knew and yet did not acknowledge Him as God. What was the result of this self-deception? Their foolish hearts were darkened. They became blind and brainless (Rom 1:19-21).

There is the other type of person who is brought up to believe in religion and in God. But when trials come, when all is darkness, when it hurts, his heart asks the question, “Where is God?” When heaven is silent he says, “There is no God, no heaven, no hell” and gives up his faith.

Look at a blade of grass. It tells you there is a God. Man who makes so many things has not made life yet, not even an ant or a one celled amoeba. Should that not tell him there is a God? There is a joke that a Chinese said they can do all that God can do. So God told him to create a man. The Chinese bent down to pick up some dust. God said, “Wait, wait, dust is what I

created. You can’t use my materials for your creation.” The Chinese was stumped.

There were two scientist. One was a believer and the other an atheist. The believer made an artificial celestial family in his room with wirings so that at the push of a button the sun would glow and the moon, earth, stars and all celestial bodies would circle around it. He invited his atheist friend to see it. The wonder struck atheist was eager to know who made it. The believer replied, “No one; its just there.” When the atheist laughed disbelievingly the believer said, “You believe there is someone who made this; yet you don’t believe the universe was created by someone.”

The Bible says that you can see God’s glory in the skies (Psa 19:1). Those who do not care to look for God will miss Him by a million miles. But He is close to those who call on Him. Let us not make ourselves fools. Let us call on His name. There is no way to proceed in the pursuit of wisdom except to bow down before the presence of a true and living God, because He is the source of all wisdom. Education gives us knowledge; it does not make us wise. Wisdom is practical application of knowledge which God alone can give.

The Psalmist gives the solution to the fool who says there is no God: “Call on the Lord” (Psa 14:4). Let’s fall prostrate before the great God of the universe, calling on Him.

The second kind of fool now swims into focus. He is the one who does not recognise God’s works in his life (Psa 92:5,6). David sings of God’s faithfulness and loving kindness in verses 1-4 and says, “O Lord, how great are your works! Your thoughts are very deep. A **senseless** man does not know, nor does a **fool** understand this.”

The word 'flourish' is used in this Psalm both for the wicked and for the righteous. The wicked flourish that they may be destroyed forever (v 7). The righteous flourish to bear fruit and to declare that the Lord is upright (vv 12-15). The fool does not understand the loving kindness of God or His faithfulness. He sees the wicked flourish and feels he is not rewarded for his righteousness. He constantly doubts God, blames Him and questions His judgements. He does not wait to see the end of the wicked. Any sickness, accident, failure or problem leads him to conclude that God has deserted him rather than trusting God and abandoning Himself in His bosom. He equals blessings to righteousness and sufferings to wickedness. So he is confused rather than confident. He fails to see that the flourishing of the righteous is more spiritual than physical, to declare the righteousness of God (v15).

In Psalm 73 David exposes his confusion when he saw the prosperous wicked and says, "I was so **foolish** and **ignorant**" (v 22).

Wisdom is understanding God's dealings with us. To constantly declare that God is upright and there is no unrighteousness in Him is wisdom (92:15). If happenings in our life lead us to blame God that He has unjustly dealt with us we are fools. Life is full of ups and downs. While in a trough we are tempted to think that we don't deserve it. Especially if the bad guys are hale and hearty while we are laid down we tend to believe that God has made a mistake. Let us assure ourselves today that God never makes a mistake. Let us, instead of dreading life's minuses, simply enjoy its pluses.

Then the Bible brands a man a fool who gives more weight to the body and material things than to the soul and spiritual things.

Psalm 49 is a string of crystals of wisdom. It speaks of the people who trust in their riches and are proud because of their opulent life style. They do not realize

that they cannot redeem their souls by their amassed wealth. Even though he keeps seeing the fools die leaving their wealth to others, it doesn't get into him. He believes his possessions will last forever. The way he lives influences his children who adopt his foolish ways. The wise and foolish die the same death. But the Psalm says that God will redeem the wise man's soul from the power of the grave. In other words the wise man is laughing at the man who thinks life is all about gathering riches in contrast to the man who puts his trust in God to redeem his soul. The Psalm points its fingers at the fate of the wicked and says, "This is the way of those who are **foolish**" (v 13).

Jesus spoke about such a fool in His sermons. When he had a bumper crop he wanted to store all and take a break. He told his 'soul' not to worry but to relax and enjoy life. He didn't know he had a heart attack waiting to happen that night. God called him a **fool** and said, "This night your soul will be required of you. Then whose will those things be?" The conclusion of the parable is, "So is he (foolish) who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God" (Lk 12:16-21).

The fool is constantly engaged in earning and becoming rich in this world amassing wealth only to find himself cycling into a bottomless pit of unsatiable yearning. He has no time or very little time for God. He is a whirlwind of activity and enterpreneuring. By contrast, the wise man is always giving away, spending for the Kingdom of God and in the bargain becomes poorer and poorer. He spends time with God and His Word. For him soul comes first. Let us be wise. It will not create an international crisis if we spend an hour of prayer and an hour of Bible reading every day. Over committed schedules and exhausting life styles that cut across these cannot be God's will for us. We need to gear down so we can hear His voice. Don't succumb to the high-rev lifestyle.

The Hypocrite comes next in the queue of fools. He is an actor, He wears a mask. He projects himself as somebody who he is not. He shows himself chivalrous to the world. So he is polished in his manners, loving, kind, gentle, giving etc. But all these are done with an ulterior motive, to show himself a gentleman to the world. When Jesus went to dine with a Pharisee and sat down without washing his hands, the Pharisee was surprised. The Lord said to him, "You Pharisees make the outside of the cup and dish clean, but your inward part is full of greed and wickedness. **Foolish ones!** Did not He who made the outside make the inside also? But rather give alms of such things as you have, then indeed all things are clean to you" (Lk 11:37-41).

How often we are worried about what others will think about us? We are so concerned with our outside that our insides rot. How often we show ourselves spiritual in the Church but barbaric at home? How often we are good to outsiders but really mean to our own family? How often we are angels in the pulpit and devils in the kitchen? David prayed, "Search me, O God, and know my **heart**; try me and know my **thoughts**" (Psa 139:23). He had rightly understood God that He likes you for what's going on inside than what can be seen on the outside (1 Sam 16:7).

Quit praying for your outward man and start asking God to clean up your inside thoroughly. That will make you wise unlike the foolish charlatans. Pray that your attitudes be set right. Intercede that you may be filled with the knowledge of God and that your heart may not be wicked and corrupt and that you will know yourself. Allow the living and powerful Word of God to cut through your soul and spirit, joint and marrow, thoughts and intents of the heart. The cleaner you are inside the wiser you are outside.

There is another foolishness that is killing many, that is the unbelief in resurrection and end of the world. Many

do not know what will happen after death or that the world will come to an end. This encourages them to lead a licentious life. We can read the apologetics of Paul in his first epistle to the Corinthians. "If the dead do not rise, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.' Do not be deceived: 'Evil company (of those who deceive you saying there is no resurrection) corrupts good habits' (of fearing God and leading a clean life). Awake to righteousness and do not sin... But someone will say, 'How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?' **Foolish one**, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies... so also is the resurrection of the dead" (1 Cor 15:32-43 Parenthesis mine).

We die once and then face the judgement at resurrection. We are not going to be born again as a cat or snake as some believe. Those who do not believe in the resurrection will waste their life pining over their lost loved ones. They will always live in fear of death. Eternal life will be a brutal truth to them when their life is done. By then it will be too late to choose their destiny. How sad. The wise prepare for their death and await their glorious resurrection. They mourn death but rejoice in the hope of meeting loved ones.

In the parade of fools, next comes the one who afflicts the underdogs, harasses widows, strangers and orphans, bulldozing their way and thinks God does not see (Psa 94:5-10). He says, "The Lord does not see, nor does the God of Jacob understand." What does the Bible say about such? "Understand, you **senseless** among the people and you **fools**, when will you be wise?" The Psalmist proceeds to say that God who made the ear, hears; He who formed the eyes, sees; He who teaches knowledge to man, knows. God keenly observes the way you treat others.

Ignoring, cheating, irking, abusing the helpless and bullying victims is a serious matter before God. Jezebel and Ahab killed Naboth and rejoiced in gaining the property. Was it gain? Think of their ear

tingling end and be admonished. So many helpless students are ragged violently. May be he is a junior in your school or office or a servant in the house. May be it's our own mother-in-law or daughter-in-law or a child who is powerless to fight against the angry blows of parents or a timid spouse or a beggar. How do we treat them? Politely or rudely? The indignities that people in power inflict on those who are less are heart breaking. Authority without wisdom is like a heavy axe without an edge fitter to bruise than to polish," says Anne Brodstreet. Let us not fall into the bracket of these fools. We underestimate the power of the God of the helpless. We put ourselves above God or try to sit in His chair. We think we can escape the scrutiny of the omniscient God.

One more silly fool is the one who despises wisdom and hates instruction (Prov 1:7). Still worse, he loves foolishness (1:22). It is not that wisdom is beyond him. Wisdom is for the asking. It stands on top of a hill and shouts, "Come, take me, I am for you. I speak excellent things in simple language. Don't go after silver or gold or rubies, for I am costlier. I love those who love me and those who seek me diligently find me" (Prov 8). There lies the trouble. These folks neither love wisdom nor care to seek it. Even though they have the means to get it they have no heart for it. They are teetering near the abyss of self destruction.

Especially young people should understand this. Wisdom is not simply praying for wisdom. It is doing the wise things. One needs to look and labour for it. Wisdom is not for couch potatoes. The lazy blame their fate. The fool despises wise words and is brazen towards counsel (Prov 23:9). He is his own mentor. His ways are right in his own eyes (Prov 26:12). Whereas the wise have an unerring sense of direction. Never trust your heart which says you are wise enough rather do all that is possible to get wisdom. That will open the door to a less dismal future.

The fool of fools is the one who does not take sin seriously. Their foolishness cannot be whitewashed, it's there for all to see. Sin is no big deal for him (Prov 14:9). He plays with sin as one plays with a snake (10:23). He has a cynical disregard for God and authorities. Right and wrong mean nothing to him. He doesn't pick up God's warning signals. He has never trained his conscience to hate sin and leave it (13:19b). He shows the slightest twinge of conscience as he enjoys sin. Perhaps he is a Christian and a believer too who has silenced his conscience. He revels in sin with no thought of forsaking it. He may hear counsel, attend gospel meetings to hear about sin and its consequences yet never makes an effort to leave sin and lead a clean life. He strongly believes that holiness is an impossibility in this world.

We can call it a deception. Fools are deceived into thinking that sin is no big problem (Prov 14:8b). We all know the story of the monkey that applied for a job. The master gave him a banana to be kept safe till he returned after a short while. The monkey shut his eyes tightly so as not to be tempted. Then he thought it wasn't a sin to look at the banana. So he opened his eyes. Then he said, surely it wasn't a sin to smell it. Then he licked it and ended up gobbling the whole fruit. This buffoon is self-confident about his self control. He plays with sin and becomes enslaved by it. He thinks anytime he can stop it and soon discovers he is trapped. He tries to overcome his guilt by indulging in pleasures, drugs, drinks. He thinks God is too good to punish sinners. Take care. Take sin seriously. Even a tiny leak can sink a ship. Don't even go near it. The Lord taught us to pray, "Lead us not into temptation." Once you pray this prayer in the morning then you should not walk into temptation.

King Solomon set his heart to unlock the secrets of wisdom. God gave him wisdom. But he failed to act on it. He increased his knowledge but ended up in

grief for the simple reason he could not control his passions. He went in the way of what he knew was foolishness. Then he turned around to see his bygone life and made a sage statement, "Wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness" (Eccl 2:13). He need not have gone into the depths of darkness to make this discovery. If he had stayed in the light he would today be the wisest man ever lived on earth. Let us take the lesson and extricate ourselves from the thicket of foolishness. Let's stop kidding ourselves, reassuring one another, "God is good" without repenting of our sins.

There is a merry fool too for whom life is all enjoyment. "The heart of **fools** is in the house of mirth" (Eccl 7:4b). We need laughter and fun in life. But life isn't all ha, ha, hee, hee. The other side is taking life seriously. Life is labour, hard work, sweating and coming up. The verses following the above quoted verse mention, 'the song of fools' and 'the laughter of fools.' Fools are pleasure loving and love to spend their time in cine theatres, dance rooms, video games and the like. Life should be balanced. We should neither take life too seriously nor too lightly. If we take it too seriously even small failures will crush and break us to the point of no return. If we take it too lightly we will not get much out of life but lie on a rubbish heap tomorrow. If you want to accomplish something in life you don't rock in a chair and hope it will happen. You've got to make it happen.

The worst kind of fools are those who do not believe in Christ. Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 1:18-31 is rich in content. He explains clearly that the message of the cross is **foolishness** to the hell-bound but Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Some think it is idiotic to put your trust in a man who hung on a despicable cross 2000 years ago. To a very few it makes sense. The Jews wanted Christ to work some miraculous demonstration and the

philosophical minded Greeks expected some wise master plan for the salvation of man. The argument about redemption through the crucified Christ sounded absurd to them.

Believers of Christ are looked down upon by the world as fools. But they are the wisest folk on earth. Unbelievers are the most foolish of all. Christ cannot be put in a test tube. It is believe, believe, only believe.

God made foolish the wise ones of the world by deliberately choosing the foolish nobodies. How? Christ Jesus became wisdom for those who are in Him! If you can believe this, Christ becomes your wisdom, removes your foolishness and makes you wise.

In conclusion; every child (everybody) is born with foolishness. "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of the child. The rod of correction will drive it far from him" (Prov 22:15). Great responsibility rests on the shoulder of parents, teachers, leaders and seniors in removing foolishness from children and growing people. And those who are growing (of any age) should take to heart the counsel of the wise, avoid the counsel of the ungodly (Psa 1:1) and clean up their lives of foolishness. Just a reading is not going to make you wise. Figure out what caused you to be foolish and redouble your efforts to become wise. The only way to cure the problem of foolishness is to roll up your sleeves and tackle it. That's the way to win the war—one little battle after another! Then surely wisdom is yours! **f**

Kind Attention: LIFE SUBSCRIBERS

We have sent a 3-VCD pack of Brother Stanley's Talk titled, *HOW NOT TO WORK* to all the Life Subscribers of the *Blessing Magazine* in English and Tamil. If you have not received your pack yet, kindly let us know with your full address, telephone and Life Subscription numbers. We will organise to have one forwarded to you. Thank you!

News from the Fields

Compiled by S. Mohan Deenadhayalan, Regional Coordinator, West

The Blessing Youth Mission has stationed 323 missionaries in 15 States of India, namely Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan, Tamilnadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal, for revival among Churches and missionary evangelism leading to church plantation in churchless places. The news of our fields is compiled here for PRAISE and PRAYER.

ANDHRA PRADESH

Â *Dare to be Different*, a book by Brother Stanley for youth was dedicated and released in Telugu during the *Friends Christmas* programme conducted in Vizianagaram.

Â After many years of married life Manga is in the family way in answer to the fervent prayers of God's children. Praise God.

Â J. Venkatarao, Ramappa, M. Lakshmi, Kanta, P. Shivaji, P. Appa Rao & family, P. Sanyasirao's family, C. Appala Narayanamma & family are new seekers of the Lord. Pray that God may open their eyes of understanding to the Truth.

Â Please pray for the following people: N. Bhavani (Fits); Dharma Rao (Arthritis); Renuka, Rama and R. Manga (For safe delivery); Raja (Anaemia); Sekhar (Paralysis).

Â Pray for the new student contacts of Vijayawada: Rajesh, Moses, Raju, Mahima Kumar, Vijaya Kumar and Kalyan that they may be established in their faith and live exemplary lives in their college campus.

Â Sushmita, a MBA graduate was miraculously healed after she was diagnosed for brain tumor. This miracle led her to believe in Christ.

Â God answered the prayers of Mrs. Florence for her promotion and transfer to her home town. Her husband is gradually showing interest in God's Word and has started reading the Bible after 25 years of their married life.

Â Praise God for the quick recovery of Mrs. Kanakavalli, who underwent a surgical treatment for breast cancer. Pray for the salvation of her family which shows keen interest in prayer and the Word of God.

Â Praise God for the *New Year Preparatory Meet* held in St. John's Evangelical Church, Vijayawada. Mr. P. Selvam shared the Word of God to 300 participants.

GUJARAT

Â 15 people from Samarpada village attended a prayer meeting and rededicated their lives to the Lord. Pray that this weekly fellowship brings spiritual insights and establishes them in faith.

Â Narpath, a native worker is of great help in starting weekly meetings in Samarpada and Tudi villages. Pray that God may use him mightily for the salvation of His people.

Â 15 people gathered for the All Night Prayer in Nadiad and earnestly prayed for our country and the ministry of BYM.

Â Our missionaries Mr. & Mrs. Robin Sam, preached the Word in the Methodist and CNI Churches in Nadiad recently. Pray that the Word of God may spread the fire of revival among Christians in this area.

Â Praise God for Mr. Stevenson and Mr. Stephen, mission partners at Jalod who take efforts in supporting the ministry in and around Jalod. Pray that God may raise many such people for His work.

Â Mr. Gnanamuthu, our pledge collector collected Rs. 7000/- as offerings from Vyara for the literature ministry. Praise God for the labour of love of our supporters.

Â Praise God for the involvement of volunteers who helped distribute 1000 gospel tracts in Vadodara recently. Pray that the Word of God may bring a great harvest in time.

Â Kindly pray for the arrangements of **BLESSO 2007**, at the Spiritual Centre, Anand during 26-28 January 2007. Mr. A Lionel, Mr. Y Paul Dhinakaran and Mr. R. Elisha are the speakers.

JHARKHAND

Â 80 people enthusiastically participated in the *Blessing Meet* held in Hazaribagh and were blessed with the Word of God. Pray that the participants live a witnessing life.

Â The response for Christmas programmes in Behri and Binkorba was superb! 300 people from Mehto group and 150 of Santhali Tribe listened to the gospel for the first time.

Â In answer to prayers, God supplied a Hero Honda motor cycle for our ministerial use. Pray that the Lord's work may flourish in this State.

Â Mr. Kusha, our missionary is engaged in equipping the prayer cell students in Hazaribagh. Pray that student leaders may emerge to conduct these prayer cells.

Â Praise God for Junika, daughter of Sushari, who survived a road accident. Pray for a speedy recovery from the fractures in her leg and hand.

KARNATAKA

Â Christmas programmes were conducted in the following places with a good participation: Hubli (230), Alnavar (500), Soundatti (250), Ramadurg (350) and Yellapur (600).

Â Basavva, a poor widow is advised surgery on her lip; Pray that God may meet her medical expenses.

Â God used Parameshwar, a B.Ed. student to share the Good News to his 35 classmates. Pray that his testimony influences others in that campus.

Â Retired missionary couple, Paul Immanuel and Jebakani celebrated their golden wedding anniversary with their children and grand children. BYM greets them joyfully and acknowledge their services in Tamil Nadu fields. Praise God for their daughter and son-in-law, Mrs. Vasanthi & Mr. S. Regunathan, who serve as BYM missionaries in Karnataka.

Â *Friends Evening*, a SFJ program for students was held in Hubli.

Â Pray for the Ramadurg village ministry, where believers face severe opposition from anti-Christian forces. Shivaji, a believer was beaten twice for his Christian faith.

Â A 3-day revival meeting was held in Alnavar in which 200 participants listened to the Word of God and received the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Praise God.

Â Pray for the divine deliverance of the following: Nagaraj (Demon possession); Renuka (Fever); Pawar (Chickun gunya); Shivalingavva (Hepatitis-B); Yashoda (Operation in the spinal chord).

Â Basappa and Muttappa are the children of Devadasis affected with HIV. Pray for God's intervention in their lives.

Â Lakshmi, a Devadasi shows interest towards the gospel. Pray for her to gain good employment and care for her two girl children.

MADHYA PRADESH

Â Mr. Jeremiah shared the field news and motivated the BYM partners in a special meeting held at Sagar. All participants took part in the intercessory prayer. Praise God.

Â Praise God for the Christmas programmes held in various places without any untoward incidents. Many participated and were blessed with the Word of God: Shahgarh (1240), Banda (500) and Bardsley School (1000).

Â Please pray for: Santhosh (Family problem); Shanthi (Fits); K. P. David (Urinary problem).

Â Kindly pray for the salvation of the following youth contacts: Lakhan, Dinesh, Babu, Mukesh, Charan and Gouri, who have responded positively to the gospel.

Â Praise God for the complete healing of Sevakram's son, who suffered from pneumonia. Pray that they may witness to their near and dear.

Â Praise God for our dear partners, who have given new clothes to the boys of Blessing Home, Katni recently.

Â Praise God for the *Cross Bearers Team*, who conducted a Christmas Carol Programme for their non-Christian friends and shared the gospel of peace.

Â Both the children of our missionary Malar-selvan suffered from jaundice, but in answer to prayers both have recovered rapidly. Praise God.

MAHARASHTRA

Â God blessed the Christmas Programmes with larger participation in the following places of Maharashtra: Vaduj (250); Jath (500) Mendigeri & Guruwarpet (160); Bhilur (80); Gargoti (500) and Murgud (200).

Â Praise God for the villages Rui, Rehimatpur, Kaledoan and Katar-Khatav, where the villagers show keen interest for God's Word in response to the systematic and repeated visits of our missionaries.

Â Bhiku khude, a believer faces family problems after the sudden demise of his daughter. Pray for peace to be restored in their family.

Â Ramesh Sakat of Kaledoan started attending the prayer meetings. Meanwhile his son-in-law committed suicide with his two small children. Owing to this tragedy, the neighbours discourage them from following Jesus. Kindly pray that they may stand firm in the Lord.

Â A 3-day fasting and prayer was held in Gargoti for our staff in Maharashtra. All were refreshed and revived in the spirit and set goals for the year 2007.

ORISSA

Â Our missionaries conducted Christmas programmes in 13 villages of Soura area, 17 villages in Ramagiri area and 45 villages in Gobindapalli area. Praise God for the fruitful ministry in these locations for the past three decades.

Â Pray for the construction work of the Church in Balasing near Berhampur.

Â Thank God for the ministry of EFICOR in Ramagiri area, where 23 tube wells were sunk and drinking water made available to the believers of this area.

Â The construction work of a worship shed has been completed in Khiloguda village on the Gobindapalli hilltop, where 120 people gathered in the dedication service recently.

Â Missionaries from Umerkote and Cuttack ministered to the prisoners in Umerkote jail and distributed special gifts to them.

Â Mr. B. K. Nag shared the Word of God in a 3-day fasting and prayer for our Umarkote staff. It was a good time of fellowship and personal revival for each one of them.

Â Mrs. Haron of Kurmahandi died after the delivery of a baby. Please pray for God's comfort to the bereaved family.

RAJASTHAN

Â Christmas Programmes were conducted in the following places with good attendance: Banswara area (470), Singhana area (300) and Neem-kathana (180).

Â Praise God for Mrs. Virginia Williams, who opened her house for missionary prayer in the Railway colony, Ajmer.

Â One of our well wishers Joyce Antony was operated for gallstone recently. Pray for her speedy recovery.

Â Pray that the new believers Hamji, Ratan, Hurting and Rakesh grow in the knowledge of the Lord and influence their own community for Jesus.

Â Pray for the healing of Kachariya (Debility); Naresh (Fever); Hamji (Mouth ulcer); Laxman (Eye problem) and Jamku (Peptic ulcer).

Â Praise God for the 15 people who are being rooted in the Lord by attending the prayer meetings regularly in Papurna village of Singhana area.

Â God heard the prayers of six year old Angel and miraculously healed her from stomach pain.

Â Twelve elders of our fields were equipped and trained to spread the gospel effectively and reach out to the masses in Balai community. Pray that we may experience a great harvest this year.

Â God helped us to start a Bible study in Ramnagar area. Pray for Mrs. Arun who accepted the Lord from a Sindhi background and is growing in the Word of God.

Â Our partners in Jaipur Mr. Justin and Mr. Tookey lost their 12 year old neice to kidney failure and their mother to cancer. Pray for the bereaved families.

TAMILNADU

Â God enabled our staff to conduct Christmas programmes in Kudumiampatti, Chitling Valley and Sitteri Hills. 2375 people attended and were blessed by the Word of God.

Â The YWAM team screened the gospel film in Kudumiampatti area where 150 people watched the film. Pray for their salvation.

Â A team of 22 partners from Coimbatore celebrated this Christmas with the native believers of Aranuthumalai. Praise God for the care and concern of our partners in the Lord's work.

Â 900 people from Aladipatti, Pungamaduvu, Kankattiala, Sandumalai, Palapadi, Neimalai and Palamalai heard the gospel in this season. Pray for effective follow up of these people.

Â The CSI Church in Thamaraiikulam, Nagercoil has come forward to sponsor our Missionary Durai of Kalasapadi field.

Â 300 patients were treated in the Pungamaduvu Health Center recently for various diseases. Praise God for the facility that has been made available in this remote area.

Â Kindly pray for the following people: Meena, Kalpana and Jaya (Childless); Periasami of Kudumiampatti (Mental disorder); Kandhan, Nalli of Achalwadi (Kidney problem); Lata (Stomach pain); Jangamma, Jayamalai and Rajathi (Safe delivery).

Â Mr. K. Isaac, who was our District Coordinator of Nilgris in Coonoor is sick since a few years. Now he is bedridden. Pray for him and his wife Leela Isaac. This family is a pillar to BYM since its inception.

WEST BENGAL

Â All the churches and para church organisations in Siliguri, unitedly conducted the *Siliguri Christmas Programme* in which many non-Christians participated and heard the Gospel. 1000 Bengali and Hindi gospel tracts were distributed to these non-Christians.

Â 50 non-Christians of Matigara village gathered and heard the Gospel. Seven people responded to the altar call and committed their lives to Christ. Our partners and well wishers joined with us in this programme. Old clothes were distributed to widows and the needy.

Â A Cottage prayer meeting was conducted in Davidanga village where eight people (Biharies) attended. Missionary Regina Chelliah shared the Word of God.

Â Mrs. Mohimita, daughter of Mrs. & Mr. Debnath Chatterjee, our gospel contact is under depression since her husband abandoned her. Please pray for her mental peace and salvation.

Â Adit Kumar Mishra a Hindu boy is mentally affected. Please pray that the Lord may heal him and the entire family may accept the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour.

Â God enabled us to release the Blessing book, *Apples of Gold* in Bengali.

HEADQUARTERS & GENERAL

Â God miraculously protected Dr. M. Arthur John, his wife Lizzie Arthur and their son's family: Pearl, Priya and Divya in a major road accident on the 23rd December 2006 when both the tyres on the left side of their car burst enroute Coimbatore. The car veered to the left and toppled. Mrs. Arthur, Pearl and Priya sustained minor head injuries while Dr. Arthur and his grand child were unscathed! However, the car suffered heavy damages. God sent his angels to protect His children. What could have been fatal was averted through His grace and your prayers. The family expresses its gratitude for the timely assistance rendered by the local partners of Erode. We covet your continued prayers as our missionaries and their families travel widely.

Â Mrs. Leela John underwent a surgery in her thyroid in CMC, Vellore on 16th Jan. Pray for God's healing touch on her for her many ailments.

Â Praise God for His abundant blessings in Aroma 2007 which concluded on 16th Jan. Await the next issue for details. f

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