



NON-PROFIT



TAX-EXEMPT

“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” MARK 16:15

December 2019

## FROM US TO YOU

One benefit that comes with getting older is the ability to gain a new perspective on the way society is progressing. The years go by faster, and you realize it's Christmastime once again! We look back at the decades that have gone by and feel sad at the changes in the season. Back in the nineteen sixties when we were children, Christmas was more of a holy atmosphere. It was exciting to go to a department store and hear "Silent Night" or "Joy To The World" playing on the speakers. On the ride home even secular radio stations would play real Christian Christmas music, not just "I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Clause" or "Jingle Bell Rock." As this world is spinning further and further away from Christ, we feel rather nostalgic about the way things used to be. That special feeling of holiness that used to dominate much of the season has diminished over the decades. Even most churches have blended too much of the world into their celebration.

It is such a disappointment to hear children and adults talk about Santa Clause, and treat the birth of Christ as a footnote in history. Such talk does not belong in a church! However, this sinful world has a way of intruding into even holy days among Christians. Easter has become a day of egg hunts and chocolate bunnies. Thanksgiving, a day we give thanks to God for all He has done for us, has become a day of turkeys and gluttony. And the most important ingredient of Christmas, the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ, has been drowned out with talk of Santa Clause, a non-existent fat man in a red suit.

Last year we were dismayed to hear a popular conservative talk show host become furious that a teacher had told her students that Santa Clause doesn't exist. A Catholic guest on his show remarked that people should have more respect for Christian traditions. Christian traditions? What is holy about a fantasy character taking the attention away from Christ at Christmas? And children thinking more about what gifts they can get than the birth of the Savior? The talk show host claims to be a Christian, but would prefer to tell children a lie than the truth! Yet, "Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6 NIV). For more information on the history of the Santa Clause myth, see "A Christian Christmas Book" on our [ebook page](#).

Anne still has fond memories about the happiest time of her teenage years. The church her family attended used to pack the young people into a pickup truck on Christmas Eve every year. They would put straw on the floor, and make the rounds of Christian shut-ins, singing Christmas carols to them and showing they cared. They were not looking for a donation, just the chance to bring some Christian love and cheer. Afterwards, they would all return to the church for steaming mugs of hot chocolate, fellowship, and games. Please note the contrast of this with the popularity of Christmas office parties where everyone mingles with an alcoholic drink in their hand, trying to hold a conversation above the sound of secular music blaring from the speakers.

It is sad that such people don't know of the joy of getting high on

the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:11-18) instead. Or what a wonderful feeling it is to be in the Lord's Presence and feel the warmth of His love and glow of His being so close. We hope that there are many of you who know what inner peace and joy that experience brings (1 Thes. 1:6 & Phil. 4:7). Don't you wish everyone could have the knowledge of knowing that God has everything under control? Do you have financial problems, family strife, trouble at work, a sick loved one, or a personal illness? We too have had all these things. You may be the godliest person, but that will not keep you from earthly problems (Psalm 34:19). Yet we have learned, through experience, that no matter what happens, we can be victorious in Him, as long as we stay in Christ (John 15:5). In fact, "...In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:37-39 NIV).

Are you lonely? Do you have no one to spend Christmas with? Find someone more in need than you are and show them Christian love. There are many agencies that need volunteers to help the poor and the sick. Are you reading this from a lonely prison cell? The darker the abode, the brighter the light of Christ will shine in the lives of those who love Him. Perhaps you love Christ but you just want to have a good time with family and friends. "...Jesus said to His host, 'When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor;

the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous'" (Luke 14:12-14 NIV).

This brings to mind the words of the fictitious character of Ebenezer Scrooge, played by Alastair Sim in the 1951 film "A Christmas Carol." There's a transformation that changes Scrooge, a nasty, miserly old man, after he encounters three spirits the night before. **In real life only Christ can make such a difference!** But in the end Scrooge exhibits all the joy, peace and love that is characteristic of the Baptism in God's Holy Spirit (Acts 19:1-7). It is played so well by Alastair Sim that you can feel his excitement and inner joy as you watch the film. He states, "I don't deserve to be so happy." His materialistic circumstances have not changed. His joy is coming from within Him! That's the new perspective one gets from the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. Near the end of the movie, he goes to the home of his nephew and says to his wife, "My dear, can you forgive the pigheaded old fool for having no eyes to see with, no ears to hear with, all these years?" (See Matthew 13:15-16 and Mark 8:18). Here's wishing you these godly blessings and joy this Christmas season.

In God's love, *Eric and Anne Kaestner*



# HAPPY BIRTHDAY PRECIOUS SAVIOR

By Anne Kaestner

It's Christmas time, a joyful and special time of the year for those of us who consider ourselves Christians! It is also a time that is eagerly anticipated by those who seek to profit from the occasion. Department stores, supermarkets, greeting card companies, bakeries, confectionaries, manufacturers, and many other businesses make a lot of their money this time of year. Many people associate Christmas with children, who in turn, associate it with Santa Clause and stockings filled with gifts. Companies also add to the festive atmosphere with nice bonuses. We all like to receive gifts. But whose birthday is it? It's the birthday of God's only begotten Son, Jesus Christ (John 3:16). Yet what gifts do we give to Him who has endured such agony and shed His own blood for us? What does He want from us? Jesus has no need for a new sweater, a piece of jewelry, or a new car. So what can we give to the person who has given us more than anyone else? No, I'm not talking about your tithes, although our ministry certainly needs them. I'm talking about your talents! Everyone has talents given to them by God. The word "talent" originally came from a passage in the Bible and referred to money.

Jesus told this parable in order to teach His disciples about the kingdom of heaven. He said that it is like a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants and trusted them with his goods.

*"To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.' His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' The man with the two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.' His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'*

*Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.' His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth'" (Matthew 25:15-30 NIV).*

The parallel of this story with the kingdom of God refers to the specific gifts God gives to everyone. One person might have a good singing voice. Another might be able to play a musical instrument well. Some may have a gift for athletics. Others might have an analytical mind, like my husband, Eric, who has an aptitude for computers,

which is so important to this ministry. Some people might have an artistic talent and be able to draw or paint a beautiful picture. There are also some who are eloquent of speech and when they speak they seem to hold people's interest. Some are good at teaching. There are many other types of gifts God has given to people. Some people may have several gifts. Others might excel at only one of them. The point is that, if you're a Christian, God expects a return on the gifts He has given to you. And He takes the matter very seriously! Frankly, I have known some Christians who have had some beautiful talent of which they were very proud. However, they didn't use it to glorify God so, as a warning to them, God took it away!

I used to correspond with a Christian inmate who came to Christ after ending up on Death Row in Florida. Many inmates turn to Christ after being incarcerated. He eventually got off of Death Row and was put in the general prison population. He used to send me colorful drawings, two of which I framed and they are in my office. Several years later I asked him about his talent and he told me, "Anne, I can't draw a thing anymore. I used to brag to people about how good my drawing had gotten. But now I can't draw a thing. God took the talent away from me!" I had a difference of opinion with a Christian rabbi a few years ago who was a dinner guest in my house. He insisted that God just takes away the anointing, not the gift. But that's not what I have been told by people who actually lost their gift, and the anointing that went with it.



In 1980, when Eric and I were making preparations with the pastor of the church in which we got married, he noticed his daughter was standing nearby. She was probably in her twenties at the time. So he said to us, "And my daughter will sing at your wedding." She never said anything to the contrary so I assumed it was all set. I remember thinking to myself, "I want songs that will glorify God. At a wedding it is usually the bride who gets all the attention and glory. But I want the Lord to get the glory, not me." It wasn't even a prayer. I just thought it. However, God knows our very thoughts (Luke 16:15, Acts 15:8)! So I chose two songs that I felt would

serve well, "To God Be The Glory" by Andraé Crouch and "Because He Lives" by the Gaithers. Then, two weeks before the wedding, I saw the woman in church. For her privacy, I'll call her Alice, but that was not her real name. I went up to Alice to make plans for the hymns I chose. But she rebuffed me and said she had other plans. Her husband was the assistant pastor and when I told him what happened he quickly found me another vocalist who agreed to sing. As it turned out he had a beautiful voice. (Eventually I found out that Alice did too.)

Several years went by. In those days my mother was very active in church social activities. I was talking with her one day and she told me that she had been to a luncheon at a "Women's Aglow Fellowship" meeting. They would always have guest speakers. And that day it was Alice. Mother told me that Alice had given a personal testimony about something that had happened a few years earlier. Apparently God had taken away her beautiful singing voice and told her that she had not been giving Him glory. She had been very proud of her talent and badly wanted a recording contract. When Alice found out that she had lost her singing voice she prayed and prayed and begged God to give it back to her. She promised that if He did, she would use it to give Him glory. The Lord eventually gave her back her singing voice. My mother looked directly at me and said that she had spoken to Alice that day and added, "And she remembers you Anne!" I hadn't thought I made that big an impression on her.

In the Lord's parable in Matthew 25:15-30, Jesus was reminding

us that the talents we have were given to us by God. Their purpose was to be used to glorify Him! You might otherwise decide that you can make a lot more money and fame by using it in a commercial way instead of putting it in Christian service. That's like the servant who hid his talent in the ground. In other words, he used his talent to get rich and gain prestige in this world. The "ground" is this earthly kingdom which is run by Satan, "...the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (Ephesians 2:2 KJV). In the parable, the servant's master said he should have put it in the bank instead, so that it could produce interest. Of course, Jesus is speaking about the bank of Heaven! He told us, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:19-21 NIV).

I think one of the saddest stories I have heard on this subject is in regard to the late Whitney Houston. She had one of the most beautiful singing voices I have ever heard! She was raised a Baptist and at age eleven began singing in public at the "New Hope Baptist Church" in Newark, New Jersey. She was also exposed to the Pentecostal faith. She had the ability to take a song, like "The Star Spangled Banner" which some find hard to sing, and bring people to tears with her rendition. Like many people, I came to accept Christ as my Savior and Lord originally after a hymn had played in church. That was many decades ago. God often uses music as the catalyst for bringing people to repentance. So I wonder how many lives would have been changed if Whitney Houston had stayed in the church! She is another example of God taking someone's talent away when they used it for a worldly purpose. At the end of her life she lost her beautiful voice and her singing was raspy and strained. They say she died full of cocaine in a bath of scalding water. It was reported that she was in deep debt to drug dealers. What a waste! Of course, she never would have been such a big star in this world if she had given her talent to the Lord. But what a difference it would make now! Her story reminds me of the words of Jesus, "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mark 8:36-37 NIV). Nothing this world has to offer can even be close to the eternal misery of losing one's soul.

Yes, I know that there is some bad doctrine going around where they mention some worldly person who has lived in sin all their life and died. Then they say, "But he may be in Heaven. Maybe he repented of their sins before they died." People don't believe that. Nothing could be more contrary to the Bible. "And, 'If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?'" (1 Peter 4:18 NIV). You may be thinking, "But the Bible says, "...everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Acts 2:21 NIV). But that means those who have a sincere repentance and shame over their past sins, like the tax collector in Luke 1:10-14 or King David after his sin with Bathsheba. David's sin was so terrible because he committed adultery with another man's wife and then tried to cover it up by arranging for her husband's death.

So in deep remorse and shame over his sin, David prayed, "You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a **broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart**, O God, You will not despise" (Psalms 51:16-17 NIV). You simply cannot fool the Lord with a fake repentance five minutes before you die! For God knows your very thoughts "...for He knoweth the secrets of the heart" (Psalms 44:21 KJV). Therefore,

"do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life" (Galatians 6:7-8 NIV). If you're a true Christian, you know that Christ is our only means of salvation (1 Timothy 2:5-6 and John 14:6). And Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:44 NIV). So, unless God the Father draws you to repentance, you cannot come to Christ. Therefore, "...if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God" (Romans 8:13-14 NIV).

How can you tell if someone is led by the Holy Spirit? The Apostle Paul gives us the answer. "The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires" (Galatians 5:19-24 NIV).

People, you will never even begin to achieve greatness in your



walk with Christ until you learn one simple lesson; we are nothing without Him! We didn't die for Him on Calvary. He died for us! As slaves to sin (John 8:34), nothing we owned had any eternal value to the Lord. Without Christ, no matter how much you may wish to dedicate your life to God's service, a slave doesn't own himself. We cannot buy our way into Heaven! The ransom for our salvation was so high that God paid the enormous price Himself, not with money, but in the blood and suffering of His only begotten Son (see John 3:16)! Now, if we live in Him, through His Spirit, we are no longer slaves to sin. But we are still expected to be bond servants to Christ (Matthew 11:29, Philippians 4:3, Romans 1:1, James 1:1, and 2 Peter 1:1). A slave or bondservant, doesn't

pick and choose where he will live, what he will eat, or what type of work he will do. His master decides that. As a result, if we're going to live for Christ, we don't get a lot of choices over the direction our lives will take.

It's a package deal. We can't say, for instance, "Lord, I want to be a rich and powerful evangelist, with a television ministry and a fancy house." God may want you to live in some inner city tenement, and let His Holy light shine through the darkness thereof. Many missionaries throughout the centuries have left the comfort of their homes and families, because of their great love for Christ. They have followed His calling into the gloomiest jungles on earth, in order to let the Light of Christ shine forth. Most missionaries in foreign lands haven't had air conditioning, central heating, or refrigeration. Some haven't even had a comfortable bed to sleep in! In the early 1980's a famous television evangelist broadcast a Christmas special from northeast Africa. He picked a remote part of the jungle and focused on the efforts of an American missionary who lived among the natives. Satan had gained so much control over that land, due to the worship of demon gods (Deuteronomy 32:17), that God had cursed it (Malachi 2:2, Deuteronomy 8:19, 11:16-17)! The once lush forest had become dry and barren. Not only was there no grass or vegetation to speak of, but the native children had to sleep in the dead branches of thorn trees in order to escape the wild beasts and insects of the ground.

The video footage didn't show much (Continued On Page 4)

of the missionary himself. But when we did see him, he was tall and just about emaciated from starvation. We don't even know if he's alive today! He was a white man, who loved Christ so much that he followed the Lord's calling into the African wilderness to bring the gospel to starving people. Because, "...*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God*" (Luke 4:4 KJV). As the evangelist and his people were about to board the plane en route back to the safety of the United States, he stated, "I've told Jesus that this missionary loves Him more than I do. Because I'm going home to my beautiful house, and my comfortable bed, and he's staying behind in this terrible place." If you really want to live for Christ, it's not what you can give Him that He cares about. It's what He can do **through** you! Are you going to be pliable in your Makers hands? You cannot fool God with your gifts. Do you think your heart is right with God just because you attend a church? "...*The Most High does not live in houses made by men. As the prophet says: 'Heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool. What kind of house will you build for Me?' says the Lord. 'Or where will My resting place be? Has not My hand made all these things?' 'You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!'*" (Acts 7:48-51 NIV).

"...*The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart*" (1 Samuel 16:7 NIV). Sure, there are lots of well-known preachers in this country who have big fancy ministries that preach about Christ. But Jesus said, "*Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your Name, and in Your Name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from Me, you evildoers!'*" (Matthew 7:21-23). Toward the end of the Lord's time on earth, His disciples got into an argument one day regarding who would be greater in the kingdom of Heaven (Luke 22:24-32). Consequently, just a short time before He would suffer and die for the sins of the world, Christ got together with His disciples for one Last Supper. Only the twelve who had been personally selected by Him were there. Many others had believed that He was who He claimed to be, but they did not follow Him. "*Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in Him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved praise from men more than praise from God*" (John 12:42-43 NIV).

It was customary in those days, for people to wear sandals on their feet. The streets were not paved then as they are today. Most were just dirt roads. So people's feet would become dirty and sweaty. Yet knowing that His suffering and death was imminent, Christ attempted to prepare His twelve disciples for His departure. Before they ate, He stripped down to a towel, and on His knees, He carefully washed their smelly, filthy feet. Jesus attempted to show them what God expects from our lives. For speaking of the Kingdom of God, He stated, "...*the last will be first, and the first will be last*" (Matthew 20:16 NIV). How many talents has God given you? Are you willing to serve Him in humility and love wherever He may call you? Or do you want to be a big shot who makes a lot of money with your talent? Perhaps you want to serve God in your own way. Cain tried to do it his own way

and God would not accept it (Genesis 4:5).

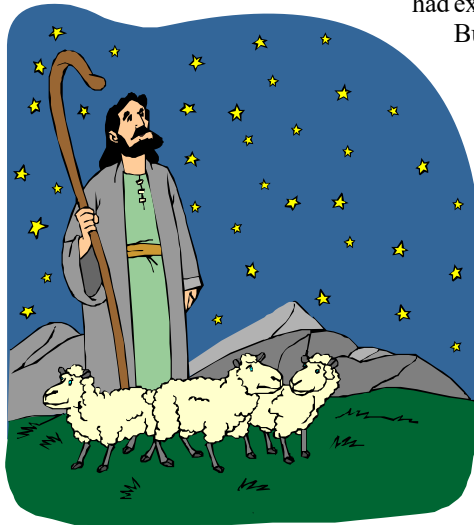
How much do you really want to serve the Lord? Do you want it enough to pay the price? No, your sacrifice won't pay for your sins, because a slave has nothing he can give to free himself. Every possession he has is the property of his master, unless his master gives it to him. However, in Biblical times, a master would sometimes love his slave so much that he would give him his freedom. But if the freed slave loved his master so much that he wanted to remain with him and continue to serve him of his own free will, he was legally known as a bond servant. That's what God expects from us. Christ didn't free us so that we can then become enslaved again to sin (2 Peter 2:20-22). He saved us to **free** us from sin. For our Good Shepherd loves His sheep (John 10:10-15), but sheep have a way of straying off (Isaiah 53:6). And the wolves (Matthew 7:15) out there are just waiting for that little lost lamb to wander in their direction.

However, if you chose to stay with your Good Shepherd, it is going to cost you in many ways. You may lose friends. Your family may turn against you. You may lose your job. But God wants you to trust Him and live by faith. It's not going to be easy. You'll be going against the prince, or ruler, of this world, Satan (Ephesians 2:2), and the demons he controls (Ephesians 6:12). For example, a worldwide ministry in Oklahoma was started by an elderly Christian lady. God had told her He would give her a ministry years before it arrived. She had expected it to be some type of position in her church.

But God had other plans. Like Paul (see Acts 9:8-18), the Lord had to make her totally blind, in order to teach her the simple truth of His ways. As with all those who have gone through the Lord's furnace of testing (Isaiah 48:10), she too went through her own private pity party for a while, until she came to her senses and said, "Not my will but Thine be done, oh Lord" (see Luke 22:42). Her ministry was to the blind.

Back in the 1970's, a demon possessed (Mark 16:17, Luke 8:30) despot named Idi Amin became ruler of Uganda. Christians in that nation were tortured and murdered mercilessly as he attempted to stamp out every vestige of Christ in a dark and heathen land. At that time, there was a prison that was notorious for the evil that took place therein. Only God knows the suffering that His servants went through after being taken to die in such a place, because no prisoner that had ever been sent there, was ever heard from again. That is, until a particular Christian man had been arrested by Idi Amin's forces and taken there. He was a black man, probably in his early forties. Even in the darkest dungeon imaginable, His eyes lit up with the joy of loving Christ. "What happened?" asked the talk show host who was interviewing him. "How did you get out?" His response was simple but direct, "They thought I was crazy, so they let me go. From the time of my arrest until the time they set me free, I was constantly praising Jesus in a loud voice, and giving glory to my Savior."

Friends, "*There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death*" (Proverbs 14:12 NIV). Therefore, those of us who remain in Christ should be aware that the hirelings (see John 10:11-13) of this world will come and go. But we must listen to and obey the words that are "...*given by one Shepherd. Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them. Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body. Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man*" (Ecclesiastes 12:11-13 NIV). "...*And the God of peace will be with you*" (Philippians 4:9 NIV).



Friends, "*There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death*" (Proverbs 14:12 NIV). Therefore, those of us who remain in Christ should be aware that the hirelings (see John 10:11-13) of this world will come and go. But we must listen to and obey the words that are "...*given by one Shepherd. Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them. Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body. Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man*" (Ecclesiastes 12:11-13 NIV). "...*And the God of peace will be with you*" (Philippians 4:9 NIV).