THOUGHTS OF APRIL, 2010

1. God gave His people “the Law” to produce in us the knowledge of our sin. Since the Law was given only to His people [those who knew Him and His nature], the knowledge of our sinfulness was meant to drive us to Him for grace [forgiveness, not having to work our way into being forgiven, strength for resisting future sinnings, etc.]. The Law was not designed to justify us [meaning to work in our behalf so as to present us to God as having never sinned]. It could not keep us from sinning. It could not be kept perfectly, and breaking only one part was to have “broken the Law.” Thus, it had the power to condemn but not to save. Yet, it was perfect. The problem was us, not the Law. When used as a mirror, it shows us ourselves as we are in our weakness and inadequacy.

I said that as groundwork for the following. I have a son who has a son who could not measure up to acceptable behavior during his pre-teen years. While the rules for acceptable behavior were being applied to him daily, that boy’s father also applied loads of grace. That father’s love, like our Father’s love for us, accepted that son, “justified” him, wisely chastised him, bore with him, constantly was “with” him, and gradually developed him into an exceptional teenager. That process was amazing; a miracle of love and wisdom.

1. One reader who has visual/reading difficulties has asked me to revert to usual print, instead of all capital letters. Let’s do it this time and see how it works for him. Readers’ responses to the change will be appreciated but no poll will be taken. Deference in love will be enough to guide us in future issues.
2. Last Sunday, April 4th, at the invitation of a full-time, volunteer prison chaplain, I talked to the church in our local maximum security prison. The key word in that sentence is “talked.” I didn’t raise my voice [but I did have a microphone], didn’t preach [I leave persuasiveness to the Holy Spirit], and didn’t design guilt-trips [the truth in love certainly doesn’t need any further efforts of mine].

 The maximum capacity allowed for the room was 125, but the officer present allowed our 141, and did not force us to close the meeting at the usually required time. You may not be impressed with those two graces if you don’t know how strict maximum security prison regulations are, but you can see that the Lord worked there.

 First there was the usual time for worshipful singing, which lasted about 30 minutes. Almost all of the MEN! stood all during that time, and they really worshipped – arms in the air, tears, and heart-felt worship.

 The Lord gave me only 2 small topics over the 2 weeks that I had to prepare myself and the message – 1) tell them they are MEN!, not scum. No matter what the world and they themselves think of them, no matter what they have done to get long-term sentences, no matter what mess they have created in every aspect and contact of their lives – as born-again Christians they are MEN! in the Lord’s eyes., and 2) tell them they are to stop trying to change themselves, despairing over their failure to make those changes. The Lord is the only soul changer. As you can imagine, I spent some time on those two topics.

 I also told them that the Lord had more of a purpose for bringing them to that place than wanting to punish them or protect society from them. I told them that His purpose in their lives would be fulfilled despite their present situation – that they should be asking Him about that purpose.

 Then, with 30 minutes to go, I asked them what they wanted us to talk about. They asked me to tell them more about what it means to be a man: about Satan, obedience, faith and how to get it, trusting, authority, and how to live as a Christian. They must have requested a dozen or so topics. Their attentiveness and participation were great and they did not argue with me [the speaker] which, I was told, was unusual. They are accustomed to shouting preachers who would argue back with them.

 When I had finished, I was told that we were to have communion, and that I should lead into it. I did, by explaining what Jesus said on the night of His arrest, what communion stood for, and what Paul said [if we are not in love with our brothers, and had not forgiven them of their sins against us, that we were not to take communion. I was told that almost all of them usually took communion, but in this case only about half did. I understand that to be evidence of Holy Spirit conviction.

 At the end of communion, the chaplain started and led “Amazing Grace” in its entirety. During the singing they left slowly and quietly in small groups. Usually they leave grumbling and noisily, amid arguments and complaints.

 That being my first time to be with that church, I had nothing to compare them to [as I said several times above]. The comparisons are from the chaplain, who has been there for about 8 years. What I have been saying, other than recounting the event, is that the Lord moved on all of us during that gathering. And, the door is now open for me to go there for 2 hours every Friday morning and occasional Sunday to teach, counsel or whatever. It is likely that I will do something like that.

1. When kids go somewhere, if they don’t have a fun time the trip is not worth that famous bucket of warm spit to them. That attitude can be found in the church, that, if there are not fun things going on, with laughter and light-heartedness, they don’t want to be part of it.

 I don’t know anyone, including myself, who has anything against laughter and light-heartedness. The point is that something in our flesh, which I will call immaturity, requires laughter and light-heartedness in order to enjoy the trip, whether the “trip” be a party, a vacation, a religious get-together, or life itself. In fact, I have heard religious men say that if it was not for fun things in their Christian lives, they would not have anything to do with the Lord, or that they would have nothing to do with a god who didn’t enjoy humor.

 You have heard it said that the Lord laughs and enjoys those who laugh along with Him. That does not typify Jesus’ life. Perhaps His is too extreme of an example for us to accept.

1. There is a sound arising in America, and perhaps in the world. I thought it was only in the Greater Corpus Christi area, but as the months pass I hear of it much more broadly. It is the sound of “Lord, what do you want of me?” What a wonderful sound!
2. I think that all of us appreciate times of refreshment, when the responsibilities and presses of life ease up, at least for a while. Those are the Lord’s times for us to rest in an additional way than the generic soul-rest that marks the saints’ life of full-time rest.

 Those times chosen by the Lord for our refreshing are different from the ones we take for ourselves, such as when we decide to “not go any further” at least for the moment. We may label it “I can’t take any more” or “I just need to get away from this \_\_\_X\_\_\_\_\_ for a while.” In any case, we call our own “time out,” which results in a spiritual plateau or recession instead of a God-arranged time of refreshment. We may have a time of refreshing of our flesh, which may seem to help, until we meet ourselves and the problem again, soon. Besides, we develop a habit of repeating our plateaus and recessions, which are counterproductive and do not truly refresh our souls.

1. Is it really Christ’s church, or do we call it that because of our tradition and history? If we are attracted to the truth, how does one know the difference between Christ’s church and MY church? One suggestion: Compare your beliefs and practices to those taught in the Bible. If that presents a problem, get a joint consultation from your local “Bible Church” and “Charismatic Church.”

 That approach still lacks somewhat, so here is another. Every week until you exhaust your local resources invite a pastor from another denomination, race, side of the tracks, etc. to tell you what you lack and they have, how important it is, and how you can get it.

 Why are you your type of Christian? Is it because you like the form of religion of your church congregation or denomination? Or that you like the décor of your church building? Or that meetings there are more to your liking [energetic, quieter, shorter, etc.]?

1. It’s difficult for me to imagine what the Lord went through in His soul in His last 18 or so hours. Most of the time, I don’t want to try imagining it. He was beset by a combination of the worst of Satan’s hatred and the maximum of God’s judgment [taken upon Himself for our sins].

 Job suffered similarly at the hands of Satan and of God. He knew Who was in charge [Job 13:15] so suffered the process faithfully. One of the main things I find myself doing while teaching and counseling is pointing others to the Lord of the process they are in. When they see that the Lord is in charge and that He has a specific purpose in their process, the battle is mostly over. They can see that they have fallen into the hands of a wise and loving All-mighty God, and peace begins to reign through faith.

1. Shalom means “peace.” But peace needs some defining. Peace is “authority that destroys all chaos.” That’s real peace. Jesus, the Prince of Peace, has plenty of the real stuff to go around.
2. The devil is trying to bring the world together through the power of money, but the Lord is doing it by the power of His Spirit. The devil’s way is permanently painful to everyone, devious, partial, and then fails. The Lord’s way is temporarily painful to the righteous, but is above board, complete, and successful.
3. The mayor of Corpus Christi joined a small Christian group a few days ago as they marched 43 miles around the town, praying. They carried a cross and it was in the daytime. Next they will march at night into the worst [druggy, crime] area. Their purpose: to proclaim the victory of Jesus over everything that does not align itself with Jesus Christ.
4. Jesus began His ministry by preaching the good news of the coming kingdom of heaven on earth and in the millennium [Matt. 4:17]. He preached that kingdom of heaven for 3 ½ years. He preached the kingdom of heaven to His disciples during those 40 days after He arose [Acts 1:3, 6]. No wonder they thought He was about to set up that earthly kingdom any day, including to the very last minute before His re-ascension to His Father.

 Soon afterwards it was revealed to them that the first form of that kingdom was the reign of Christ in the believer’s heart. Then, after due time, the Father would set up that kingdom on earth just like they had expected. We know that earthly, natural form to be the Millennium – 1,000 years of Christ’s reign on this very planet Earth, preceded at this point by 2,000 years of His reign in the hearts of believers.

1. In our youngest years, to combat our “me-first” nature, proper structuring of our souls was of utmost importance. Things like the Ten Commandments helped a lot. Our families, school teachers, churches, etc. contributed greatly, as did organizations like the Cub Scouts. We needed discipline and structure to give us a good, stable self-image, to get us beyond our “my body” and “my self” image. Needless to say, some who grow up age-wise never grow up maturity-wise. They don’t fit into a society that has grown beyond them. Many in prison have not grown past this first stage.

 Then, as/if we continued growing up into adolescent souls, we began developing meaningful relationships, such as with siblings, cousins, neighbors, Boy Scouts, and possibly gangs. Here we are in danger of learning that our external behavior is who we really are. If we stay at this level as adults, our self-identity is “Doctor Eckert,” or “Pastor Jones,” or “the enforcer in X gang.” Here we need symbols and labels like “Baptist,” gang X, special handshakes, black or white skin, etc. At least that shows growth beyond “me only,” and that we are now looking outside of ourselves. Many of us don’t grow past this stage, either.

 If/as we continue further growth in maturity, we begin to develop individual thinking, begin to identify our feelings and why we have them, to desire and accomplish education and work, and to develop self-discipline. It would be great if more of us grew into this level – but let’s not stop here.

 Beyond is a maturity in which we learn not to blame or worry, which previously had caused us to be stunted in our growth process. We learn to rise above the fray, to forgive, to not need as many absolutes, that “not knowing” is o.k., that flexibility is wonderful and, that there is life outside the box. We are even free to fail and to succeed.

 If we continue growing we gain security. We become aware that we are not entirely capable, that we have faults, sins and inadequacies. If we are religious and holy-spiritual enough, we know of God’s love, of His grace, and at the same time we know ourselves as the worst sinner and hypocrite on earth. That’s security!

 Again, if we continue growing, we begin to see that our cleaned up, moral lives are no substitute for the spiritual life. Our old boundaries no longer apply or satisfy, and we gradually learn to decline new boundaries. Comparison-based living is junked. Self, brother and God begin to fit together by love.

 I trust that I will meet you along the road from time to time, headed for different stations on our cross-walks.

1. Don’t we humans want more and more of that which does not satisfy? Isn’t that defined as addictive behavior? That matches up with the definition of insanity, which is said to be doing the same thing over and over while expecting different results.

 The mature person can enjoy things, but does not need them. That includes steaks or nothing to eat, air conditioning or no climate control, walking or riding, with friends or alone, and in the penthouse or in the dungeon. I have identified that which blocks what the Lord wants to do in and through me – sin.

 In regards to that which the Lord wants from the body ministry [by pastors, etc.], very little can be done from the pulpit. Yet, in addition to much busy-ness, that is where most of the ministry appears to be coming forth. The church is formed by deep personal relationships, beginning with “me and Jesus,” and it is knit together through the deepening of those personal relationships. “Distance” allows all sorts of spiritual diseases to develop and grow, until our divisions are obvious and painful.

1. I talked to a small group of brothers about “unity.” Here is a list of thoughts from that talk:

A. Unity among Christians is their evidence and power of reality. We can expect the enemy to attack and attempt to destroy our best evidence and greatest power. Wherever he is successful, we have no reality [evidence and power] to our gospel message or in our lives. Would you walk across the street to hear a talk on “Healthy Marriages” when you knew the speaker’s marriage was unhealthy, unhappy, and falling apart?

B. Unity is perhaps the most tangible manifestation of love, mainly to the unbeliever. Our problem is not in having so few missionaries, but in dying to self, loving our brothers, and functioning as one healthy body. That will convince the world that what Jesus said about Himself is true. See John 17:23.

 C. Disunity disproves our Christian message.

 D. Unity is costly. That’s why we see so little of it. What is the cost? Answer: the big ME; the cost.

1. We have been made one by and in the Spirit. We have been given all the grace necessary to live out our unity in Christ. He has done it; ours is to keep/preserve/be evidence of it.
2. We are one worldwide body, of one Spirit, one same calling for each person, one Lord, one faith, have been immersed into one Spirit, one God Who is really the Father of every one of His diverse and sinful children, and one God Who is running the universe. That is a perfect set-up for power and peace with a big payoff.
3. In summary, unity is the purest and most powerful evidence that the living God Whom we talk about is among us.
4. The dictionary is the only place where success comes before work. I’m thankful that I grew up in the environment of that truth, not having to learn that one the hard way.
5. Here in Corpus Christi, Nueces County, Texas the Lord is giving us righteous leadership in “all” areas. We have committed Christians as mayor, county judge, superintendent of schools, police chief, sheriff, publisher of the newspaper, district attorney, 9 of 11 on the city council, and the newly elected Republican Party candidate for U. S. Congress. And those are only the ones that I am aware of. Lord, bring up your righteous ones, through whom you will exalt our city, state, and nation [Prov. 14:34].
6. 18. The mainline, traditional, denominational churches in this city are having trouble with LIFE. Their congregations are diminishing and aging. Incomes are down. Some want to do something for themselves or for other churches in the slum/drug/gang-run areas but are stuck in the program mode. However, a clean look at those independent little churches that are in the war zone setting captives free reveals something that imported from across-town programs cannot do.

 That look shows me two things: 1) the ministry is open and active 24/7, mostly because the minister lives on the church-building property. They are available for battle. They tell neighborhood kids that when they are in danger, come to the church. They tell the addicts and ex-addicts that when they are tempted, come to the church. Theirs is a continually available LIFE source.

 2) Almost all of those little, available churches are marked by spiritual freedom and power. The power is beyond themselves. They live in that power. They deal with and minister in that power. They know it is the power of the Holy Spirit, Who is unlimited by time, place, circumstance or problem.

1. Perhaps none of our readership group will be able to identify with this thought. It is described in Hosea 4:17, which reads: “Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone.” Another translation says: “Ephraim is joined fast to idols, so let him alone [to take the consequences].” My paraphrase could go something like: “Bob is wrapped up in worldly things. He has made his decision; let him alone – I will deal with him.”

 When I think of the possibility of hearing that, I tremble and change directions. It’s like the way I felt when Mom told me Dad would deal with me when he comes home. I would much rather Mom [the church, my brothers] help me deal with a problem now than my Dad [my heavenly Father] give me His swats later. “Now” is the Lord’s acceptable day and it should be ours.

1. How is your vision for using those talents the Lord has given you? Perhaps we should have some “low” instead of “lofty” visions because that’s the Lord’s correct evaluation. Sometimes we are too short sighted, meaning that we take what the Lord has given us, bury it, and do nothing to multiply it by accounting time.

 This week I saw an example of “having vision for using talent.” I was at the Juvenile Detention Center. A mid-teenager proudly showed me a free-hand drawing of Texas with some very beautiful lettering. I gave him a well-deserved compliment, and asked him what he thought he might do with his talent. Seemingly encouraged, he said, “Do tattoos!” At first I was disappointed, but then thought that he might be on the right track.

1. Conviction, repentance, confession and forgiveness are just the beginning of the healing process between God and man and between man and man. There remains two very important parts. One is repayment/restitution as ordered by Moses [Ex. 22:1-15; Lev. 6:1-7; Num. 5:5-10; 2 Sam. 12:6] and enacted in abundance by Zaccheus [4 times as much – Luke 19:8]. Notice, too, that in Lev. 6:1-7 the sinner was to first make restitution, then seek Jehovah’s forgiveness. Those other verses do not first require restitution.

 The second is that which is necessary for the healing of the sinner’s soul. He should be “set aside” for a time of being especially loved by his brothers. The setting aside may be from ministry or from a particular part of ministry. It may be from all aspects of his life, such as family, job, etc., while the church takes up the slack during his absence. The church and the world need to see the wisdom and love of God in the church as the sinner is re-molded and restored. The offence may have been alcoholism, drug use, sexual impropriety such as adultery, etc. Explanatory example: If a runner on a team sustains a fracture of a foot by trying to prove that he was man enough to jump from the roof of a two-story building, the coach and team may forgive him, but he needs a time for healing of his unwise judgment, fractured foot and lax regard for covenant-keeping with his teammates.

 One’s willingness to make restitution, and the doing of it as much as is possible, is a good measure of one’s true repentance, is it not? It also serves justice for the victim, embeds instruction in the weak soul of the offender, and provides righteous motivation for society in general.

1. Have you noticed that the more firmly or harshly we assert our correctness on a matter, that we are actually declaring the weakness of our position? The more absolute we are, the more wrong we are in the matter. That has to do with both our facts and our attitude.

 The fundamental here is that the truth will stand on its own. We do not need to add our flesh to it. Our soul knows when we have taken a weak position, so it adds a loud or erroneous support to our partial or weak truth. That support of one’s position is a flag to notify you that your opponent has just presented you with his weakness. Go after him where he is weak or wrong, with the simple, overpowering truth. How you go after him is between you and your better judgment and the Judge.

 Do you often re-examine your numerous presuppositions? The only certain barrier to truth is the presumption that we already have the truth – in fact, perhaps all of the truth, with no modification or improvement needed or possible. An open mind in a saint who is secure in his already-possessed truth is comfortable, even when entertaining contrary ideas.

 Reflect upon Jesus Who was the perfect display of One abiding in the truth.

1. And, no doubt, you have noticed that tough and unsolvable problems are tough and unsolvable because we do not have or use basic understanding and clear-minded mental processes. How can one find his way out of a wilderness without a map and a commitment to trust and use it? Christians have both at-hand, but unbelievers’ natural minds certainly may benefit by using right thinking.
2. I have just completed a ten-lesson series on The Kingdom of Heaven, and plan to start a new series on The All-Mightiness Of The Almighty, probably starting with Job. Because I know each of you, that you have good things to say, I would enjoy your input on the topic. It may be Bible, testimony, etc.
3. It has been suggested that there are 5 bed-rock truths of Christianity, upon which all other truths can be built. They are:
4. The resurrection
5. Kingdom focus
6. Holy Spirit necessity
7. Jesus’ second coming
8. Biblical authority

 Sounds good to me.

1. The spiritual security/maturity of a congregation can be gauged by the attitude of young congregational leaders toward older elders who are visiting their congregations. The older I get, the more I value the accuracy of this gauge.
2. If someone has all of his facts right, may they still not have the truth?
3. Paul wrote that church leaders had to be examples of hospitality, or they would not be allowed to rule. Then, why did John warn against giving hospitality to false teachers? Because extending even the slightest hospitality to false teachers can be construed as an endorsement of their teachings, etc. Remember that John was talking about not being hospitable to fellow Christians, even teachers, who may have many solid Biblical teachings in common with us. The church needs to hear Paul’s tough words. Our hospitality includes sending money for the ministries of those false teachers.
4. Have you noticed in 1 Corinthians 10:6, 11 that those things happened to them as examples? It does not say that those events were recorded for examples to us, but that they happened to them for our sakes. The Lord of all, who calls Himself the Lord All-mighty, designed those events for our sakes. Moses and the Israelites fulfilled their calling for our sakes. They and we did not “fall” into His hands; they lived through those years for our sakes and we were picked to benefit from their example.
5. It is recorded only once that Jesus asked His disciples to pray for Him. When was that? It was the time mentioned later in Hebrews 5:7. He did not receive from them that which he asked, their prayers, or at least did not get as much as He wanted, but His Father sent help another way. What was that other way? Support from both of those ways is available to us, and probably has more of an effect on us than we realize.
6. Why did Jesus not open His mouth to defend Himself? We know that it was related to the Holy Spirit having taught Him Isaiah 53:7, which He had committed Himself to living out. But why? How about this answer: He was standing there in our shoes and we were/are guilty as charged. He accepted that upon Himself, with no defense offered, like a lamb to the slaughter. Thank you, Lord.
7. Who was the first person to: 1) stand righteously condemned under the law, 2) know that innocent Jesus went to the cross for himself, 3) know that Jesus was a true substitute of himself, 4) know that he had done nothing to merit that substitution, and 5) know that Jesus death was for him perfectly efficacious? Before you finished that list of qualifications you knew it was Barabbas, didn’t you! Although we are not the first, we do now stand in Barabbas’ shoes.
8. When we begin to be impatient, whether in the short-term or long-term, let’s remember that time does not flow at the same rate in heaven as on earth. The Lord may do something quickly which takes a few thousand earth years. Or, he may do something in 1,000 earth years that He said would take Him one day.

 But, if He says, “Stand aside; I’m about to [whatever] – MOVE! He is about to remove His disguise and do something overwhelming – either irresistibly loving or irresistibly horrible. Sometimes the difference is in the eyes of the beholder, such as the cross [of Jesus] or of one of His saints [Stephen or you or me].

 We are very much alike and of similar understandings of Scripture, so here are a couple of verses that have caused you wonderment at one time or another. In Matthew 8:10-12, speaking of the

 Kingdom of Heaven [in the millennium] Jesus said that some of the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Our question, after having now settled on when and where that scenario takes place, is “who are those sons of the kingdom?”

 It was “future” to Jesus. The resurrected patriarchs will be present. He directed His comments to a faithful centurion gentile, contrasting his faith to the faith of “the sons of the kingdom,” who are going to be cast out because of their lack of faith.

 Once we know that the occasion is in the Millennium, where only those who have saving faith in Jesus will be [and that all will be there who have that faith], our question, as I have said, is “who are they?” Some believe they are unbelieving [unsaved] Jews, but they are believing [saved] Jews who did little or nothing with their faith in/revelation of Jesus.

 Re-study those verses and see how that fits with your understanding.

1. When will be the Sunday of the greatest church attendance on record? Here is my best answer: “The first Sunday after the rapture.” And what may well be the common topic of conversation [and sermon topic] in the churches all over the world? My answer: No, not: “What happened?” but “What must I do to be saved?” It will be no secret. They had been informed. The disappearance will be so widespread, and so talked about, that those informed but left behind will move to the questions concerning what to do spiritually.
2. Forgiveness is never a problem to a loving father/Father when he/He sees a repentant child. So what may become a problem in such a situation? Forgiveness, not being the end product, is meant to lead to restoration of fellowship and function. That’s why the father invited his penitent son into the house. See Luke 15. He was working to restore unity, fellowship and function. Forgiveness was not enough for that loving father.
3. The labels “clergy” and “laity” do a great disservice to Christ’s church. Other labels, as found in Scripture, are great. They deal with offices, gifts and functions but do not separate the saints into religious professionals and non-professionals.

 One of the problems produced by the clergy-laity labels is that the “clergy” are hired and paid to do the work of the ministry, which is actually the work of the non-five-fold ministers [Eph. 4:12]. The “laity” are incorrectly turned into followers and supporters of the clergy.

 Another problem is that “going full-time in the ministry” comes to mean stopping one’s secular job and doing the more “religious” things, often meaning within the walls of the church house. This

concept obscures the fact that the church house is people, and that all activities, whether religious in appearance or not, are our ministries. Being full-time in the ministry has nothing to do with where it is done or whether it has a religious appearance.

 This thought was stirred in me by a pastor who had departed his religious job and gone to work in a non-religious job. He felt that he had been demoted by God or by himself, although the choice of words is mine, not his. It was a great relief to him when I pointed out that there is no division called laity and clergy, and that being full-time at the church in religious work is no more full-time than being full-time at the factory, farm, office, military, school, etc. Instead, the question is whether we are full-time serving the Lord in either place. Neither is more or less spiritual than the other.

 Again, it was a blessing to him to hear that the Lord, who puts us in non-religious or religious work, may move us from religious to non-religious, and from non-religious to religious work according to His plans. If we have a certain bent to our religious thinking, we may think that some of those moves are promotions, and others are demotions. They are not necessarily either. The non-religious callings [often called “secular”] are ordained of God. As such, those saints who labor in those fields are ordained and anointed spiritually as much as are those in religious settings, and it commonly shows in their labors, not only as solid testimonies to Christ but also as effective pastors, evangelists, etc.

 So, if that has an adequate amount of truth for its application to your setting, why not give some consideration to your church formally ordaining the non-religious to their full-time callings of the Lord? If not, it’s probably because we consider laymen who are in secular jobs to be less called, less anointed, less religious, less spiritual, less informed, etc.

 Do those in religious leadership and authority in the church really mean what they say, that the church is just as much “out there” in society as it is “in here” on Sunday morning?

1. In the largest church here in Corpus Christi, a couple of weeks ago on a Sunday morning, there were 1,500 saved/decisions for Christ. The church that day gave away items worth a total of $1,000,000., having broadly advertised the event beforehand. Everyone got something of value, some getting cars or other major items. The pastor preached powerfully about Jesus, then made the altar call.

 I know your responses, from, “My, oh, my! What is the church coming to?” to “Hallelujah!”

1. Being first-born does not always mean born first. How is it that Israel [the person and the nation] is called God’s first-born son? Israel [Jacob] the person was second-born to Esau. Israel [the nation] certainly was not the first-formed nation on earth. So, how was it that the Lord called both of them His first-born? I’ll tell you up front. They are called [and thus are] God’s first-born because they were/are by God’s choice.

 Jacob, second-born to his brother Esau, was chosen by God to be His first-born. No matter how much Jacob cheated to get that which the Lord would have otherwise given him, the Lord’s selection brought about his being granted first-born status [Rom. 9:6-18].

 “Israel, My first-born” is found in Exodus 4:22. In Psalm 89:27 the coming Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, the eternal Son of God Who was never born and was the uncreated One, is called God’s first-born, as He is also called in Colossians 1:15 - the first-born of all creation. Then, in Hebrews 1:6 Jesus the first-born is referred to as being brought into the world. I think those are the only places in Scripture where being first-born does not mean born first.

 The Lord can make anyone into a first-born, giving us that wonderful inheritance of ruling and reigning with our elder Brother, the first-born from the dead.

1. If you keep your spiritual eyes and ears open you can see and hear a lot from the secular media about what the Lord is doing. Those who do a lot of praying do watch for evidence of God’s progress in the areas in which they pray, being encouraged by the positive evidences and encouraged to continue in pray when they read non-results or contrary evidences.

 Here in Corpus Christi we are praying for righteousness, knowing that righteousness exalts a nation, state, city, congregation, family, person, etc. We have a history of many years of public strife and mediocrity, which has stagnated the public spirit. In every area, that is changing. The saints are praying, expecting the Holy Spirit to fall upon our city, and areseeing the evidences.

 Example 1: Already, I have listed the many [known by me] civic and governmental offices He has filled with faithful, committed Christians over the past 15 months. I’ll do it again, and then add to the list some expanded evidences: 1) mayor, 2) county judge, 3) chief of police, 4) sheriff, 5) superintendent of schools, 6) editor of the newspaper, 7) district attorney, 8) 7/9 of the city council, and 9) the newly elected Republican Party candidate for U. S. Congress. Yesterday I was able to add the Chief of Detectives to this list.

 Our old and storm damaged memorial coliseum is closed and an eyesore. It has been that way for years. No one can decide what to do – tear it down or repair it. The mayor finally accomplished a majority of the city council, for demolishing it. As expected, lots of high pitched voices were raised in opposition. Two citizens’ groups filed suit to halt the demolition and got a restraining order, which costs the city $2,300. weekly in penalties, paid to the contracted demolition company. Lots of people prayed and supported the city.

 Today it has been announced that one of the citizen groups has dropped its opposition, opting instead for a memorial on the site. The agreement came about because of changed hearts and an ability to compromise. A veterans’ committee will give input on the memorial.

 The leader of the citizens’ group said, “It’s time to move forward and make Corpus Christi grow. This is a good opportunity with the bayfront. We are not going to be a part of obstruction to this type of progress anymore.” That’s the icing on the cake – a decision by the usual opposition to become a positive factor. In response, the mayor said, “As humans, sometimes we have differences. But let’s put those aside and move this community forward.” That is a breakthrough!

 Example 2: Our teacher union filed a grievance with the school district, wanting the school district to give them more disciplinary authority so that teachers can remove disruptive students from their classrooms and dole out punishments for those students. That’s a move forward!

 Example 3: After 2 years of surveying citizens and community groups, a communitywide visioning group has come forward with 246 goals that would focus on creating “a vibrant economy; a thriving education, arts and entertainment community; a well-planned region; a sustainable environment; a safe, healthy community; and a community identity.” That’s budding progress.

 Example 4: Nancy goes to Curves for Women regularly. Today she talked to another exerciser, a member of the Second Baptist Church. The lady’s testimony is that the Lord is really moving in their congregation. During their services they have numerous testimonies of God’s healing and working. His hand is on bodies and souls. Then she gave Nancy a copy of a prayer she and their church are praying. It goes like this: “Give ear, O God, and hear; open Your eyes and see the desolation of the city that bears Your name. We do not make requests of You because we are righteous, but because of Your great mercy. O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hear and act! For Your sake, O my God, do not delay, because Your city and Your people bear Your name.” That is Daniel 9:18-19 and speaks of Jerusalem, and perfectly fits Corpus Christi. That’s remarkable!

 Example 5: This is 4 months late, but I heard of it only today. Last Christmas Eve the rabbi of our local Synagogue led his congregation to our largest Episcopal Church for Christmas Eve services with joined Episcopal churches. I had already attended the Seder Service at that synagogue, and I had already shared with the rabbi about the Lord’s word to Corpus Christi of the coming outpouring of His Holy Spirit. That’s the Lord!

 I trust that this long, homegrown thought has not been boring to you. It’s a lesson on prayer, personal and group involvement, watchfulness, and God’s faithfulness.

One of the ways to describe the power behind our prayers is “our personal yieldedness to the Lord.” My focus there is brokenness from self denial and accepting the cross in situations calling for such, which leads to receiving more of Jesus’ life. We may pray perfect prayers according to God’s will, but lack power. Another way to say it is that we must pay the price. Jesus called it “abiding” when He said, “If you abide in Me and My word abides in you, ask what you will and it will be given to you.”

1. From time to time I roll around in my head some thoughts about the Lord’s soon coming for His church. I think that we are fairly well informed of the events of and around the rapture, tribulation and second coming. Here are some items that have aroused my interest lately.
2. In short order recently, there were significant earthquakes in Haiti, Chile, Japan, Taiwan and Sumatra. Those were big-time quakes. Chile took 3 more body blows and had the most powerful quakes, the most powerful of which measured 8.8 and moved Earth 3.25 inches on its axis.
3. Chile has the largest Palestinian population outside of the Middle East.
4. The world’s worst natural disasters all seem to occur when the nations of the world put pressure on Israel to divide their Promised Land. A few of those examples are:
5. The Madrid Peace Conference began on August 24, 1992. That same day, Hurricane Andrew devastated the coast of Florida.
6. When President Clinton was on the brink of announcing an agreement between Israel and Syria with respect to the return of the Golan Heights, the massive Northridfge, California earthquake took place and scrubbed his big announcement.
7. When “The Quartet” decided to create a Palestinian State and met in 2003, it was promptly followed by the worst weather in the history of the United States and the worst heat wave in Europe, killing thousands of people.
8. The U. S. pressured Israel into evicting Jewish settlers from their homes in Gaza in 2005. Some settlers were carried off in cages. At the same time, Hurricane Katrina smashed New Orleans into pieces with the worst flooding anyone can remember.

 Like “Don’t mess with Texas,” “Don’t mess with Israel.” There are many more “coincidences,” as recorded in The Israel Omen, by David Brennan. It’s a book that goes around the world showing the working of God’s silent hand in the background of natural disasters. It pays to read Genesis 12: 1-3, watch and listen. The mighty hand of God is protecting His chosen people.

1. Be sure that you want to know the results of this little self-exam before you start it. It’s a bit difficult to do, so you might ask someone to help. Your results will be more interesting and perhaps more accurate if you are helped by someone other than your best friend. For some of us, it may be difficult to do a self-exam.

 It goes this way: Do you say, “I like your home,” or “I like these steaks,” or “I like this weather” instead of “You have a nice home,” or “Your steaks are delicious,” or “Your weather here is wonderful?” The way we talk shows whether our focus is on the BIG ME or on others and other objects.

 Again, it can be said, “I have received that e-mail already.” vs. “You have already sent me that e-mail.” Or, when someone it telling you about their vacation, do you take over the conversation by telling them about your vacation?

 It seems so innocent, doesn’t it, to say, “That sounds awful to me.” instead of “That sounds awful.” Or, “I can’t believe it.” vs. “That’s unbelievable.” Our words create, and they reveal.

 Happy hunting results!

1. It is said that allegory is one of the most useful methods of revealing truth, from within or outside of the Bible. Common examples are found in John 4:32 and 7:37 where Jesus says He already had had food to eat and that we can go to Him to drink.

 I want to make here a statement that will appear to negate itself. Without changing our allegorical understanding in the least, let me say that it is not accurate to say that those allegories are allegories. Why? Because the natural is the allegory, meaning that we now live and breathe in the allegory. The spiritual truth is the reality; the natural is allegory.

1. God never did plan to give the Promised Land to Abraham and his descendents without their possessing it themselves. He promised them the land, then gave it to them little by little as they trusted and obeyed Him. James told us that faith alone does not have life or power, but faith with works is real. Works without faith is unproductive, as is faith without works.
2. To be continued next month.