THOUGHTS OF MAY, 2011

1. We all know the application of the third commandment about not taking the Lord’s name in vain – “don’t cuss using His name.” How about adding “don’t take His name upon yourself in vain.” That would cover things like using our status or our brotherhood in ways we should not, or calling ourselves Christian when we are not.

2. Augustus Caesar reigned from 31 BC until 14 AD. Jesus was crucified in 37 AD. Simply FYI.

3. Evangelism is not discipleship. I don’t want to diminish evangelism in any way, but Jesus told us to make disciples. Evangelism must be done, and numbers of the born again and their baptisms are common records kept by churches. But have you ever heard of churches keeping record of their disciples among the congregation?

4. Jonah was called to prophesy against the pagan capital of the world, Nineveh. He attempted to turn down the assignment, but the Lord explained it to him more clearly. His message to Nineveh was, “Forty days and you get yours!” The most outstanding aspect of Nineveh’s repentance was that within the allotted 40 days Nineveh repented, on speculation! They reasoned that maybe, if they repented, God might change His mind. They did. He did.

A century later, Nahum was sent back to call them to repentance. That time Nineveh failed to repent and they received God’s judgment.

The other prophet to the Gentiles was Obadiah, but he prophesied to the Edomites, the descendants of Esau. There had been the on-going ancient feud between Edom and Israel because, as you well-remember, Jacob had cheated his brother, their ancestor, out of his birthright. The situation with Obadiah was that he was a prophet from Esau’s enemy, Israel, and was saying bad things to them. In the natural, who would expect them to believe Obadiah’s prophecies? But, the Lord sent His word to offer them life, to heal them. They did not listen.

You have noticed that Obadiah’s prophecy has insights into the second coming of the Lord Jesus, and why some countries will apparently escape the rule of the antichrist. ☺

5. Is your church/Bible study/prayer group training and equipping you to sojourn in today’s world? That’s a large part of the life-message we carry, or don’t carry. You know how easy it is to fall into one’s theology without living it. When Paul talked about theology, he was talking about lifestyle. Commonly, when we talk about theology we are talking about a way to give intellectual assent but not necessarily a way that we live. Our speech and life style shows whether we are settlers or sojourners.

6. What do you suppose is the Lord’s primary model of His love for us? My answer: marriage. In Scripture, both Old Testament and New Testament, He uses marriage to present Himself to this world. As Christians, our marriages are intended to woo people into a relationship with Him. Guys, that’s His challenge. It comes with all necessary grace.

7. On April 27, 2011, at the age of 79, David Wilkerson crossed over the center line and collided head-on with a tractor trailer while driving east on US 175 near Tyler, Texas. He was pronounced dead at the scene. I doubt that David would have chosen that method of being dispatched, but we usually do not have a personal choice.

His last blog post stated: “To those going through the valley and shadow of death, hear this word: ‘Weeping will last through some dark and awful nights, and in that darkness you will soon hear the Father whisper, “I am with you. I cannot tell you why right now, but one day it will all make sense. You will see it was all part of My plan. It was no accident.”’” That adversity was no accident.

8. The nation of Israel was established in the Jewish year 5708. The 5708th verse in the Torah [Deut. 30:5] reads, “And God will bring you to the land inherited by your forefathers, and you will take possession of it, and He will do good to you …” That blessing was no accident.

9. Is your burden too heavy for you to carry? If you want a fast answer to prayer, consider asking for a stronger back instead of a lighter load.

10. When the church cries out for more fire, it may be that what we are asking is for the Lord to put higher octane in our tanks. Instead, He wants us to move over and let Him do the driving. If we have no fire or pep or power, consider that we do not know His word or have filtered out parts of it or have not been obeying it. God will not pour out His Spirit on a selfish people.

11. We cannot really know the Scriptures until we are ready to be changed by them. If we are willing to give our all to the Lord, He will act.

12. As Christians, we have no rights in heaven or on earth. We are either slaves to sin or slaves to God. All of our rights are in the hands of God.

13. Those who know what it means to suffer for Christ’s sake will be blessed by reading Daniel 11:32-35 and 12:3, 10. Therein is a picture of those whose faith is not based on what the Lord does for them in their moment or years of trial. They have insight into their present distress. They know what is going on, who is in charge, and are given over to Him no matter what! Job had this embedded in his soul – 13:15.

14. The U. S. Supreme Court has refused to take up the matter of “so help me God” at the conclusion of the presidential oath. A group of atheists had brought suit to stop the use of that phrase.

15. The Baptist School in Nazareth is having no problem recruiting Moslem teenagers and others for its classes, even though they are taught the Bible. The school’s high academic reputation has been God’s instrument for breaking the religious barrier. The gospel is being taught openly.

16. The 20th century was the century of world wars, genocide and ideological conflict. It appears that the 21th will be the century of natural disasters and technological crises. We are not having more earthquakes but we have more people [7 billion of us] and the majority live in cities. Have you noticed the link between natural disasters and technological crises, and vs.? the Architect and Controller of all things has subtle and obvious ways to show His hand in all things. There are a number of things we can do to prepare ourselves; yet there are things we must go through. Remember Thought 13, above.

17. Sins that defile a place, house, city, state or nation: 1) Blood shed innocently, 2) sexual immorality, 3) idolatry, and 4) broken covenants. These require repentance and cleansing, with expressed forgiveness. [Your Thoughts on this, please.]

18. It is more than interesting to note that 1492 was a hinge-year for eternity. That was the year that Christopher Columbus discovered America, and the year that Spain began the persecution and expulsion of its Jews, who had lived peacefully and productively in Spain for hundreds of years. At our time in history, it is easy to see that the Lord was preparing a friend and a place for His people, Israel. Pray that America continues being a blessing to Israel.

19. It has been said that there are two types of intelligence: 1) Simple intelligence, which is called I. Q, or Intelligence Quotient, and 2) emotional intelligence, having to do with drive and insightfulness. That sounds fine with me. I usually think of that second area as being wisdom.

20. From time to time I get to thinking about “preparation for hard times.” We all do this to various degrees and on various topics. For example, we prepare our cars so we can avoid hard times [flats, breakdowns], by checking our tires, oil, gasoline, etc. We carry windshield scrapers to clear ice, even here in Corpus Christi. In our cars we carry two flashlights – a regular one that uses batteries and, because those batteries tend to be low when they are only occasionally needed, we carry a flashlight that burns [but rather dimly] simply by shaking it vigorously. It never runs out of energy and light. Of course, we carry a spare tire.

Here in Corpus Christi, Texas we are on the Gulf Coast and are subject to hurricanes. Hurricane preparedness is a common and wise thing here. That mostly means food and water, flashlights and some cash. There are a number of other things, some of which are already on hand in most households, like a gun [to be used on varmints of all types], reserve medications, water purification tablets and first aid supplies.

Then there are different kinds of hard times. Severe national and worldwide financial difficulties are probably looking us in the face today, as close as “at hand.” How and where to invest one’s finances, is a puzzler. Gold is the main and almost only real money, but to own it only on paper is precarious in view of several nationwide swindlers who have stolen that which they have been trusted to house. Putting it under the mattress or in a can buried in the back yard exposes it to theft. In addition, the government could declare it illegal to possess gold, as ours’ did early in my life time, and offer a small fraction of its purchased value to those who did not want to go to jail and have it confiscated at zero payment.

Actually, there is no sure course to take in regards to preparedness, but there are reasonable things to do. It begins with a clear-headed appraisal of life and its components, then taking reasonable steps to build some security for those times of more adverse possibilities.

Since I am writing for the faithful, I don’t need to add this next part. But, in case an unfaithful one might be reading over your shoulder, I will say that when we are walking with the Lord He will guide our thoughts and provide us with everything He knows we need to fulfill His purposes in every occasion, including to grace to starve and die peacefully. He is faithful.

21. Not that you or I need any helpful words on marriage, but I will put some in this Thought just for that other person still looking over your shoulder.

No. 1 – At times we feel that we have no “marriage energy.” This does not apply to your mate, but to you [and to me]. In those “blah” times and in those times of contention, when we feel unloved, ignored and unappreciated, we tend to go somewhere else than to our spouse to get our needs met. If it’s the Lord to Whom we turn that’s fine for most of the time, but if we do it too much He will eventually point us back to our spouse. However, I’m talking about our tendency to turn to other people or things instead of our spouse. That is a waste of available, renewable resources.

No. 2 – Am I right in assuming that most of us, especially we men, have poorly developed communication skills? That’s part of the reason we tend to turn to others with whom we do not need to communicate deeply and who will not correct our attitudes or inaccuracies. We can vomit out our attitudes and emotions and they do not need to say or do anything. Perhaps they may offer a word of feigned agreement, but they have no investment in improving our problem. As opposed to our spouse, they receive us without being hurt or fighting back. From them, we get what we want, and sometimes more that we want. If it’s a member of the opposite sex, we are on two slippery slopes, one away from our spouse and the other toward the third party.

No. 3 -- Marriage does not close out other friendships, including those with the opposite sex, but it establishes a new, totally exclusive relationship. When that ring goes on our mate’s finger, we proclaim that we are set aside from others and separate unto ourselves. We are an exclusive single duo and no longer available to others for particular body [physically] and soul [emotional attachment] functions.

No. 4 -- These four Thoughts are not a waste of reading time to any of us. They are not judgments on our capacity for self-control or a call to distrust ourselves or a challenge to God’s ever-present grace. Instead, they are realistic assessments of human frailty and offerings meant to protect the sanctity of our marriages. No marriage is invincible. If we don’t consciously take steps to honor our marriage and to protect its sanctity, and nurture it with love and care, we run the same risk as did the Terminator.

22. Sometimes the success that comes with proving that I am right is not worth the cost.

23. The mental illness with the highest mortality rate is anorexia. By the illnesses’ own nature, as long as the patient is alive she [or he] will believe that to be both beautiful and happy she needs to lose more weight. She believes that whatever weight she is currently at is too high. If left to herself, she would continue starving herself until she dies. She sees those who try to convince her otherwise as those who are cruel and want to see her miserable, and will not allow her to achieve her freedom and happiness. Her illness lies to her. It is a matter of life and death. Ordinarily, the best way to deal with someone who is absolutely wrong and set against others’ advice is to eventually let them go on their own until they fail and then see the error of their ways. That works great in math or situations which allow for trial and error but, remember, this is a fatal disease. There is no value in proving the patient wrong, when the proof is in her death.

Now, let us take that little medical homily and apply it to Israel’s current situation. It seems that no matter how logical and reasonable and historically accurate and etc. our argument that Israel is not an oppressor of others, that the land is theirs by God’s assignment, that they possessed it by international consent to be their homeland and safe haven in a world that has consistently tried to exterminate them, that they want peace and are not warmongers, and that they are an intelligent and productive people [not “pigs and dogs”] -- that there is no changing of the minds of those who see otherwise. Those minds see Israel as Satan’s people, a nation who must be removed from the earth, and that there can be no peace until that is accomplished. Those minds will then turn their deception upon Europe, America and the rest of the civilized world. Our leaders will see this process too late, as they retreat deep within their protective bunkers. It will then be too late, as they see that they were wrong. The West will be dead right.

In the process, the anorexia patient’s family, and Israel with her Western friends, who are trying to prevent mortal damage are labeled as being cruel, unreasonable and uncompromising. Fact: We are right and they are wrong, but we do not have the luxury of trial and error for proving that we are right and they are wrong. The patient will not survive that sort of effort on our part. Those who love the Truth will speak up, take action, and pray for a breakthrough.

24. Desert nomads value their freedom so much that they consider homes to be the graves of the living. Hummm! Can we imagine Jesus as having been a bit on that side of the question? He had no earthly home once He began His ministry. Can we imagine how it would have affected His life and ministry if He had a home? How about a wife and kids? Community responsibilities, public office, etc.?

25. Nancy and I rehearse the negatives of our past years from time to time. That means we have done a lot of rehearsing, because we have been married 59 years. We mostly agree that our sins have been closely related to three things; ignorance [of sin’s depth and ramifications], immaturity [rank self-centeredness] and sin [it’s relationship to the Lord]. To further elaborate; 1) Both God and man “cut some slack” for ignorance, as did Jesus on the cross for those who were crucifying Him. 2) We do a lot of dumb things in our immaturity. That’s why He has us headed in the other direction, toward maturity. Just as some of us don’t mature in the natural, we also don’t in the spiritual. Yet, some do make it. 3) Sins! What is there to say about them!? They make us dead dogs; coyotes shot and hung on the fence for buzzard food. Just because we are running in a pack doesn’t help us; the whole pack is destined for the fence. Thank you, Lord, for redeeming us from destruction in this life and the next. You are so good to us. What is it that You want of us? We are Yours.

26. King Saul died, King David died, King Solomon died, and then the kingdom of God [Israel] split. Jeroboam rebelled and carried off with him ten of the twelve tribes. One message here is that being in the great majority gives us no confidence of being right, or safe. Those ten tribes are known as the northern nation of Israel.

The remaining two tribes are known as the southern nation of Judah, which later had similar problems. The northern kingdom was prosperous but idolatrous. Jehovah pled with them for 200 years before chastising them with their enemy, the Assyrian Empire. The prophets used to proclaim God’s word were Isaiah, then Hosea and Amos. Although there were brief times of repentance, the northern kingdom was eventually terminated and the people scattered across the known world, not to return to the Land. Amos had been sent to Israel when the nation felt secure and prosperous, yet had abandoned their heritage. They had confidence but it was misplaced. They had a strong sense of security but it was in their apostate selves. They had a great nation but it was a house of cards. [sound familiar?]

27. God is always with us. What we lack is the spiritual insight to see Him in every situation.

28. To some of us: Loosen up! Enjoy being loved by our Father. Others depend on us for doing that.

29. I am growing in the knowledge of the necessity of blessing others, especially fathers blessing their sons and mothers blessing their daughters. To make my point briefly, Jesus did not start His ministry until He was blessed by His Father at the Jordan River. Proverb 23:7 tells us that we become as we think about ourselves; that in our minds we form a mold which shapes us. In this Thought, our fathers’ and mothers’ blessed thoughts, pronounced upon us, are a major tool in the molding of our souls.

30. The Lord had one solution for the murmurs in the wilderness, and it still goes for us. No, I’m not talking about the final solution of death. His living solution was “remember.” He told His people to remember their slavery and His deliverance. A thankful attitude and a good memory are God’s tools for Life.

31. In Luke 10:21 is recorded the only time Jesus was excited. That means something to me. He was certainly not giggly or silly. In fact it says to me [perhaps differently to you] that He got thrilled only over high quality spiritual accomplishments, such as His disciples coming onto a higher Holy Spiritual plane.

32. Jesus taught us that if we want to be blessed, we must go beyond learning, into doing it – Luke 11:28. That’s true in farming, in science and in the Spirit. Knowledge is good, but sitting on it shows stagnation, or worse.

33. You had a rough week. Did you get the most out of it? Did you put your most into it?

34. Intimacy can be defined as “in-to-me-see.” It involves transparency, guilelessness, and having no hidden agendas.

35. Do you think you have to say your prayers just right? Check out Romans 8:26-27.

36. When the Lord told us His name, “I AM,” He was offering Himself to us in whatever way or need we needed Him to be because He is and He provides the fullness of everything good. Thereafter, any time He expanded upon His proclaimed name, it was to give us helpful, particularly applicable sub-names of His “I AM” wide-open, all-encompassing self. When His people failed to see the magnitude revealed in “I AM,” He added “I AM THAT I AM” – meaning “I am whatever My people need.”

37. You can’t expect fruit if you have no or inadequate roots. That’s the message of the parable of the Sower. The first three types of soil did not allow the roots to flourish; they were shallow, too shallow to receive the word, too shallow to endure trials and too shallow to sustain the plant through prolonged growth experiences unto eventual fruit bearing. In progressive order; first there is the soil [that’s our souls, highly variable from person to person and individually from time to time], then the seed [which is the same in every case, unchangeable, fully capable of developing the character and ministry of Jesus in every believer], then comes God-designed and God-controlled situations [in the kingdom greenhouse, to develop a mature plant with fruit-bearing capabilities], and then comes the fruit. Fruit enduring in abundance is the purpose of the seed.

Selah