

EVANGEL

The Good News of Jesus Christ



PASS IT ON

The Gospel of

What happened on Good Friday? Jesus Christ was crucified near the city of Jerusalem, at a place called Golgotha. However, what else happened on Good Friday? Earlier in the day? Before the crucifixion? Jesus Christ had to appear in the court of Pontius Pilate, the governor. The gospel writer Matthew records it in this way. "Early in the morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people came to the decision to put Jesus to death. They bound Him, led Him away and handed Him over to Pilate, the governor" (27:1,2).

So, the chief priests and elders had already come to their decision: they wanted to put Jesus to death. However, they had no authority to carry out their decision. Only governor Pilate could sentence someone with the death penalty. Thus, Christ had to appear in court before Pilate.

Inside that courtroom an amazing thing happened. Even though the chief priests and elders accused Christ of numerous crimes, he did not speak in self-defence. This silence stunned Pilate. "Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge – to the great amazement of the governor" (Matt. 27:14). We will come back to this silence in a moment, but first I would like to mention another court appearance.

Our court appearance

One day we will all have to appear in court. Of course, it could happen, for example, that you have to go to court as a witness to a car crash. It could also happen that you are summoned for jury duty. However, those are not the kind of

court appearances I am talking about.

I am referring to that one day on which all of us will have to appear in *God's* courtroom. Sometimes this day is called the Final Day of Judgment. Other times it is called the Day of Reckoning. Whatever name you give it, though, this is what will happen. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). Inside *God's* courtroom the judicial investigation will be a thorough investigation. Once Christ said, "But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken" (Matt. 12:36).

Is this a frightening prospect? Those who believe in Jesus Christ need not be afraid. Indeed, believing in Him, we can look forward to the day of judgment with comfort and hope. This is the gospel of Christ's silence. So let's return now to this matter of Christ's silence in Pilate's courtroom.

Christ was silent

Jesus did not reply to a single charge that was brought against him. This amazed Pontius Pilate. It might not seem so surprising to us, though. We are rather used to such a scenario. In courtrooms across the country it often happens that someone accused of a crime does not say too much at all. Usually a lawyer does most, if not all, of the talking.

However, this is precisely the point. Jesus Christ had no lawyer. If the accusations were going to be refuted, then Jesus himself would have to do the refuting. Yet so long as He remained silent, and the charges were not being refuted, what else could Pilate do but bring down a guilty verdict? And this was a serious matter, the accusers were calling for the death penalty! So why

didn't Jesus say something?

Timidness?

The chief priests and elders were the religious leaders of the Jews. In that position they had a lot of influence. They had also managed to obtain a fair bit of political clout for themselves.

Was Jesus, then, perhaps intimidated by these powerful men, so intimidated that He did not have the courage to speak up? Not at all. During his years of preaching Jesus had boldly confronted the religious leaders of Jerusalem on numerous occasions. They questioned Him. They challenged Him. Yet Jesus was never left without an answer. In fact, his fearless outspokenness was part of the reason the religious leaders wanted to silence Him by death. Timidness was definitely not the cause of Christ's silence.

No defence?

Let's consider another option. Did Jesus make no reply because He simply had no reply? Were the charges true? The main charge brought forward by the religious leaders was that Jesus was stirring up the Jewish people to rebel against Caesar (Luke 23:14). This was not true. For about three years Jesus had walked from town to town calling people to repent from their sins. He also taught them many things, explaining passages from the Old Testament or telling parables. In addition, Jesus healed many sick people. He fed crowds of hungry people. Yet not once did Jesus stand before a crowd and stir up the people to rebel against Rome.

The religious leaders bolstered their main charge by accusing Jesus of opposing the payment of taxes to Caesar. This was another outright lie. On this very subject of taxes

Christ's Silence



Jesus had stated, openly and publicly, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's" (Matt. 22:21). The accusations were both flimsy and false. Jesus Christ could have easily refuted them, if He had chosen to do this. But He didn't. Why not?

A prophecy fulfilled

Jesus remained silent because He was fulfilling a prophecy that the LORD made through Isaiah. "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth" (53:7). The whole chapter of Isaiah 53 prophesies the suffering and death of Christ, centuries before He was even born. After you finish reading this article, please take some time to open a Bible and read that passage. Jesus Christ came into this world to do everything that was written about Him in the Old Testament. Isaiah 53 says that Christ would go to his death in silence. Therefore, in obedience to this prophecy, Christ does exactly that. He remained silent in Pilate's courtroom early on Good Friday morning.

His silence – our salvation

Yet, at the same time, this silence led to a guilty verdict. Jesus Christ was condemned to die by crucifixion. How can this be right? Jesus was sentenced to *die* for crimes He never committed! This, too, is explained in Isaiah 53. "But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities. . . the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (vv. 5,6). It is true, in and of himself, Jesus was an innocent man. However, it is also true, he was carrying the guilt of all our sins.

This brings us to the crux of the matter and the heart of the gospel of Christ's silence. First and foremost, on that Good Friday morning, Jesus Christ was standing before God as Judge. Yes, He was standing in the courtroom of Pontius Pilate. However, ultimately God was presiding over this court case. God's basic rule of justice has always been that those who sin against Him must be punished with death (Rom. 6:23). Christ stood there carrying our guilt. Therefore, God the Judge ensured that Christ was punished accordingly. He was sentenced to die.

That was an unimaginable suffering for Jesus Christ. Yet it

brings the good news of a great salvation to us. Remember, one day you, too, will have to appear in God's courtroom. Everyone of us is guilty of innumerable sins against God. There will be no point in speaking up to launch into an elaborate self-defence, making all kinds of excuses. God does not accept excuses. Guilty is guilty. And God's rule of justice is: those who sin should be punished with death.

So, is there no way to escape this verdict of being condemned to eternal death on Judgment Day? Yes, there is one way: faith in Jesus Christ. Those who believe in Jesus Christ will be declared innocent by God the Judge. Why? For this reason: Christ has already stood, silently, in God's courtroom. He stood there, silently, in our place. He was declared guilty, even though He himself was innocent, all so that we might be declared innocent, even though we are guilty. This is the gospel of Christ's silence. It gives us comfort and hope as we anticipate our final court appearance.

The apostle Paul summed it up in these words: "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). This is a promise that overflows with God's mercy. This is also a promise that calls for faith. I urge you, don't close this magazine, just leave the gospel of Christ's silence inside and walk away thinking, "That was an interesting (or not so interesting) article." Rather, believe this promise of God with all your heart. Contact the address on the back to find out where this gospel is preached every Sunday. For not one of us knows the day or hour when we will have to appear in God's courtroom. What we do know is this: all of us will have to make an appearance. Believe in Christ. His silence has brought us salvation!

Jason Van Vliet

Is something missing

This is the first issue of the 21st Century and the first issue of the third millennium. I'm sure you will agree with me that when we look back over the past century and even the past millennium, we will notice that we have made tremendous strides forward in the development of this world. All sorts of things which were problems some 50 or 100 years ago, no longer are. As a matter of fact, many new discoveries have been found which most of us never even dreamed of, such as, developments in genetic engineering, reproductive technology and communication technology. At the same time, some old problems never seem to go away, such as, the problem of world hunger.

Sometimes, the intensity of this problem hits you square between the eyes. You're watching the evening news and all of a sudden you are confronted with images of starving parents and children. And then, not just a few, but tens of thousand of them. They stand before you with their stunted bodies, look at you with their hollow eyes and their stomachs screaming to be filled with food. They're always hunger, always anaemic, always unhealthy. And if no help is offered, they will soon die.

When I'm confronted with these type of images, I think of another problem that is even greater than this one. A problem that I would call the spiritual world hunger problem. I find I don't have to wait till the evening news to be confronted with it. I see it all around me every day again. I run into people whose bodies are spiritually stunted and whose spiritual stomachs are screaming to be filled with lasting food. I find their eyes often spiritually hollow and they often sound as if they're spiritually

anaemic. They just don't seem to have any zest for real living. And if no help is accepted, sooner or later, they, too, will die. But then the torment will only continue in a much aggravated form.

Perhaps, also you feel this spiritual hunger. There is a feeling of emptiness in your spiritual stomach. Actually, it's always there in one way or another. For no sooner is it gone than it returns. Something is missing in your life. You don't know exactly what. But you do know it's there.

Well, I would like to offer you the help you need. It's not my own help, but help that comes from God Himself. For in the Bible, the Lord Jesus Christ says, "I am the the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty" (John 6:35).

Jesus is the bread of life

Jesus had just fed some 5,000 people. All He had used were five small barely loaves and two small fish. When the meal was finished, there were no less than 12 baskets of bread left! Amazing, isn't it! Well, that's the type of Helper Jesus is. Someone who is perfectly able to provide for our physical needs. When we're hungry, He's there to provide us with food.

After this miracle, Jesus had returned to the place He lived. But the crowds who had witnessed the miracle followed Him. Even though their stomachs had been filled, they were still hungering for more!

When they found Jesus, they asked Him how He had gotten there. Jesus, however, uses their question to move the conversation to a deeper level. And so He urges them not to work for food that spoils, but for food

that endures to eternal life.

When the people ask how they have to work for this food, Jesus tells them that all they have to do is believe in Him.

However, before they are prepared to do this, they first want another miracle. Apparently, having fed 5,000 people with only five loaves of bread and two fish was not sufficient for them. Now they want Jesus to bring down manna from heaven just like God had done for the Israelites when they wandered in the desert for forty years.

Jesus answers them by saying that not Moses was the one who had given the Israelites manna, but his heavenly Father. And He adds that not manna was the real bread, but the One who had come from heaven! He is the real bread! The One who gives life to the world!

"Well," say the people, "Give us this bread." And then, not just once, but from now on!

This is the moment Jesus had been waiting for. The conversation had been moving along quite nicely, going a level deeper each time. Now was the time to drive home his point. And He does by telling the crowd that He is the bread of life.

Jesus nourishes, strengthens and satisfies

I'm sure you all know what bread does. Just remember those starving parents and children. Well, bread helps to avoid those type of problems. For bread makes you strong and healthy, gives you energy and vitality, makes you satisfied and content.

Well, this is what Jesus does. When people come to Him, place their trust in Him, receive Him as their Forgiver and Leader, then He makes them strong and healthy,

in your Life?



gives them energy and vitality, satisfies the hunger in their hearts and makes them feel full and content.

Jesus is able to do this because He is no ordinary man. He is the One his Father sent from heaven. He is God Himself! The One who would one day lay down his life for sinners like them. Yet, in doing so, He would give life to all who would believe in Him. Life that would also consist in the nourishment and energy and vitality they need to live.

That was very difficult for the crowd of people to believe. For they knew Jesus so well. Moreover, Jesus had not done the miracle they had asked for. He had not made manna come down from heaven like Moses had done for the Israelites. And as for stilling their hunger, they had their own ways of doing this. They had their laws and traditions. As long as they faithfully kept these, then they did not really hunger all that much.

And yet, even though all of this may have been true, what Jesus had just told them was still true. The only way to never hunger again was to come to Him and believe in Him. There just was no other way! All their other ways would not work! And deep down in their stomachs, they knew this, too. Simply keeping their own rules and traditions just did not fill them. It always left them hungry in one way or another. Only a living relationship with a Person would change that. Only “eating” Jesus on a daily basis, would still their hunger, enable them to grow, would give them the spiritual zest and vitality they needed.

“Eating” Jesus on a daily basis

This is also true for you and me. How satisfied are you really? How full is your spiritual stomach? Do you ever have that gnawing, empty feeling in the pit of your stomach? Is

something missing in your life? Something you just cannot place your finger on?

If that is so, then there is only one thing for you to do. And that is come to the Lord Jesus Christ and spiritually eat Him again and again and again. When you do that in faith, the promise Jesus made will also be fulfilled in your life. Truly, you will never hunger or thirst again!

“Where do you find Jesus today?” you ask. Well, you find Him in the Bible. The more you read, study, understand and meditate on the truths of the Bible, the more Jesus will satisfy your spiritual hunger. You also find Him in churches that accept the complete Bible as the Word of God. You will meet Him there as you fellowship with other believers. You will also meet Him as you listen and accept the Word that is preached to you from the pulpit. In that message, the Lord Jesus Christ is speaking to you. The more you listen to this preaching and the more you accept this preaching in faith, the more Jesus Christ will satisfy the hunger that lingers in your heart.

You see, the beautiful thing about the essence of the Christian faith is that it not a belief in a doctrine nor belief in a tradition. How important these things may be – and they are – they are in essence very impersonal things that can never really still the real hunger in your stomach. Only belief in a Person can. And that is what the Christian faith is all about. That is why Jesus said, “I am the bread of life, he who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.”

Why wait any longer? Why not come to Jesus today and begin to have your hunger stilled.

Dick Moes

Stephen's Death

Bible Story

Based on Acts 6:8-7:60

Stephen was a wonderful man. He was soft-spoken and kind. Still, his eyes had power. He seemed to look straight inside of you. Holding your attention with his piercing eyes, he would talk to the people. He spoke about Jesus. He told his rapt listeners that Jesus was the Son of God. Patiently he explained that Jesus had died on the cross a few months ago. But Jesus was alive again. He had come out of the grave and had risen to Heaven. That was Stephen's message. Jesus is alive. He is now in Heaven, sitting at the right hand of God, the Father.

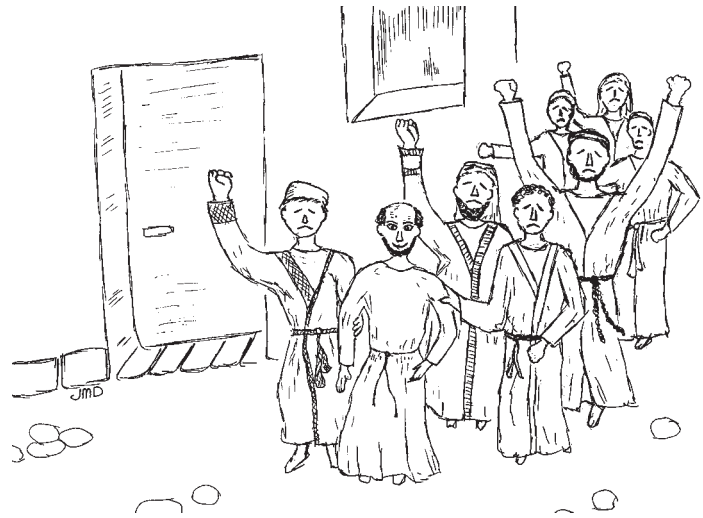
Stephen did not only talk. He showed God's power also in another way. He was able to make sick people better. The lame could walk and the blind could see. These miracles made Stephen almost more special than his words. Yet, Stephen would always tell his listeners that these miracles were done in the Name of Jesus. It was actually Jesus who was doing them. Through his servant Stephen, Jesus was still talking to the people, and healing their sick. But the biggest miracle of all was that Jesus had healed his people's sins. Through Jesus people can live in peace with God again.

Many people respected and loved Stephen. Yet, others hated him. This is no surprise. The people who hated Stephen, had hated Jesus before. And Stephen was a servant of Jesus. He even reminded people of Jesus. He spoke like Jesus. He healed like Jesus. It was clear that the Spirit of Jesus was in him. As Stephen's words of healing were dearly loved by many, they were hated by others.

Some people hated Stephen so much, that they wanted him killed. Especially some learned men became very upset with him. It was impossible to prove Stephen wrong, since the Spirit of God always helped him to find the right answer to their trick questions. Because they could not stand his powerful words, they became upset about his miracles too. They wanted Stephen stopped. They wanted him dead.

These learned men took action. They had Stephen arrested. But Stephen had not done anything wrong. He was a man of respect. How could they condemn him to death? No problem. They were able to find a few men who were willing to tell a lie about Stephen. These wicked men testified against Stephen. They said that Stephen always spoke against the temple and against the holy rules. Surely, Stephen was a rebel.

Stephen heard his accusers. It made him sad that his words were turned around into a lie. But at the same time it made him happy. He was suffering for the sake of his Lord Jesus. Gladly Stephen accepted his troubles, knowing that Jesus had been falsely accused of the same charge. Confidently Stephen looked at his accusers across the table. And as he was holding them with his powerful eyes, something made these learned men scared. Oh. Look at his eyes! These were not the eyes of



a man. Neither was this the face of a man! Oh, fear! Stephen's face was shining like the face of an angel!

In the strength of the Spirit, Stephen answered his accusers. He told them the story of their fathers. "Our fathers did not always listen to their leaders. Many centuries ago they rejected their brother Joseph, whom God had chosen as their leader. In later years they rejected their brother Moses, who was also chosen by God to be their leader. While rejecting their leaders, they became proud of their temple. But God does not live in a temple made with hands. God chooses to live in the hearts of his children. God gives his Spirit to them."

Till this moment the judges and witnesses at the table were still listening to Stephen. But as Stephen comes to the end of his speech, he fixes his eyes on these important men. Fearlessly he speaks, "You stubborn people. You are no better than your fathers. You rejected and killed Jesus, who was chosen by God to deliver his people. You do not keep God's laws, but you twist them to please your own wit!"

This is too much for these learned people. They become very angry. As one man they rise up against Stephen. But he is not scared. "Look, what I see," he cries as they haul him away, "I see Heaven opened. And I see Jesus, the Son of man, standing at the right hand of God." Ignoring his words, they drag him out of the building, through the streets, till they are outside the city.

There they pick up stones and throw them at Stephen. Stephen knows what they are going to do. They are going to kill him. Yet, Stephen is not sad for himself. He is concerned for his killers. By killing him, they show that they reject Jesus, the Son of God. Indeed, they prove that they are no better than their fathers, who rejected God's leaders too! Filled with compassion for those who hate him and his Lord, Stephen falls on his knees, and prays, "Lord, Jesus, receive my spirit. And do not hold this sin against them."

As the last stones are flung, Stephen enters the glory of his Lord.

Jane

Activity Page

Spring is the time to plant seeds and start a garden. People plan which plants they want to grow, when they have to start them, and how they have to care for them. Funny thing is though, that few people wonder who actually makes the plants grow. A gardener does not grow the plant. The plant grows by itself. Or does it?

Seeds are little things that have a lot to tell about life and death. They grow on plants that have flowered and that bear fruit. Then the seeds fall off the plant. The plant is still alive but the seeds are dead. They either roll away, are blown away, fall in the ground, or something like that. But when spring comes around, something happens with those dead seeds. They suddenly come to life and start

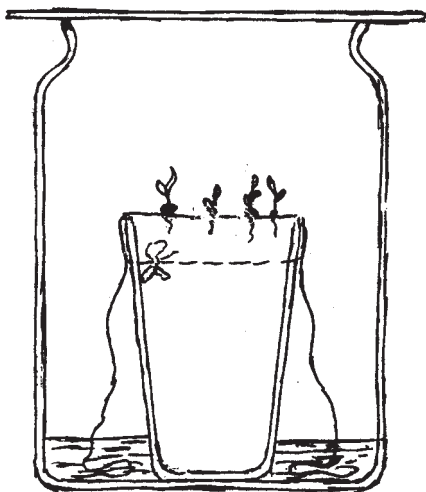
to grow. Does the good soil give them life, or does the warm sun? No, but God does. He not only made the first plants at Creation, but He also gives life to dead seeds to make new plants every spring (Genesis 7:12, Psalm 104:14).

A seed tells you more yet. It takes a dead seed to get a living, new plant. You could say: life through death. With people it works that way, too. Real life, life with God is only possible through death: the death of Jesus Christ. By dying He gave life to all who believe in Him. And you know, Jesus Christ Himself first dies and later came to life again. You think that when you see a seed come to life. Each seed tells you about Jesus.

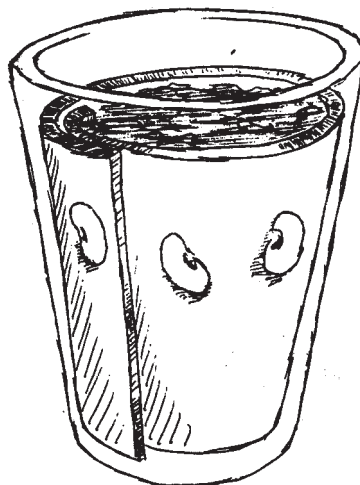
Hugo

Here are some activities with seeds for you:*

1. Tie a piece of cloth over the mouth of a drinking glass. Put the glass in a jar that has about 2 cm of water in it. Allow the cloth to hang down the sides of the glass into the water. Put seeds on the cloth and cover the jars.



2. Cut a rectangular piece of blotter and slip it inside a drinking glass. Fill the centre with peat moss, cotton, sawdust or a material like it. Push a few seeds between the outside of the glass and the blotter. Keep a little water in the bottom of the glass. You have made a tumbler garden.



3. Draw a face on a styro-foam cup. Fill the cup with soil. Spread grass seeds on the surface and gently pack seeds and soil down. Keep the soil humid. After some weeks the face on the cup will be crowned with a bunch of (green) hair.



Adapted from the UNESCO resource book for science teaching.

Following Great Leaders

(David) inquired of the LORD, saying, "Shall I go and attack these Philistines?" 1 Samuel 23:2

Great leaders are a special gift. When you have a good leader, you can do things that would otherwise be impossible. In 1 Samuel 23 David led his men to do something wonderful, something which his men at first thought to be indeed impossible.

The story is about a place called Keilah, a little village on the western foothills of Palestine on the frontier near one of Israel's worst enemies, the Philistines. It was the middle of the harvest season. Their harvest season was much longer than it is today. Nowadays, when a farmer decides to harvest 100 acres of wheat, he does it easily in a single day by using power harvesters. In those days, a five-acre field would take days just to cut down, and then a few days more to glean the kernels of wheat from the plant stalks. In other words, the harvest season was much longer back then. It would take months to complete the harvest.

But every week or so, a band of Philistine men would come at night, break into the barns and steal the crops which the people of Keilah had worked so hard to harvest. The people of Keilah were helpless to stop them because they were outnumbered (because they lived so near to heavily populated Philistine regions) and they were out-gunned (the Israelites had not learned how to produce iron tools or weapons, while the Philistines had – see 1 Samuel 13:19).

It was a bad time for the people in Keilah. They worked hard to raise food for their families, but it turned out that they were doing it mostly for their enemies. After the harvest season comes the winter, and how would they survive without the food they needed?

And what about their king? Where was he when his people needed him? Why wasn't King Saul protecting his most vulnerable subjects against their enemies? Did they not have a right to protection

like anyone else in the land? King Saul was failing them because he was too busy chasing David around the countryside, trying to kill him out of jealousy, even though David had proven time after time to be one of Saul's most loyal citizens.

How good it was for Satan to see Israel divided, their leader distracted by sinful feelings, wasting his energy in chasing a loyal citizen and a God-fearing man, while leaving the common people to suffer attacks by real enemies.

But David was more than loyal and God-fearing; he was a compassionate and powerful leader. When he heard about the plight of Keilah, he pitied them. But what could David do? He had only a small band of soldiers. If he came to Keilah's aid, the Philistine armies would surely attack and crush him. And besides, David was running for his own life, especially now that Saul had recently put a bounty on his head.

Despite the apparent madness of it, David immediately inquired of Yahweh, saying, "Shall I go and attack these Philistines?" Not, "Shall I go and defend Keilah?" David was not interested in half measures. He would go to the root of the problem and wipe it out. David's own men objected and said it was madness to oppose the Philistine armies when

Israel's armies were too great for them already. Yet, when God said, "Go down to Keilah, for I am going to give the Philistines into your hand," David did not hesitate. He led his soldiers and saved the people of Keilah.

The Bible tells what a great leader David was in order to help us appreciate how great a leader David's son was. His son Jesus Christ, like his forefather, suffered constant attacks by the leaders in the land. Yet, when people cried out for mercy, he was moved by compassion for them and went to them, preaching good news, healing their sick, cleansing their demon-possessed. He was only one man, but he was not afraid to take on the whole world, and the powers of hell itself. And just as David overcame his enemies by the power of God, so did the Lord Jesus. He now has become Lord and King over heaven and earth.

We are called to follow our Lord, and, like him, to boldly show mercy to those who suffer, and to deliver those who are perishing. We must share the gospel and God's blessings with others, even if it seems hopeless or if it might seem risky to do so. When we serve under the Lordship of Jesus, we cannot fail.

Paul Aasman

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