

Chapter 11

A New Way to Live

Living the Life of Faith

In the previous two chapters we have seen how the historical and legal characteristics of the Bible provide a secure and stable basis for getting right with God. Our standing with God is not based on our possessions or our performance, it is grounded in a mighty act of God, the cross of Jesus Christ. In that event Jesus not only created a perfect history to put in place of our imperfect one, but He exhausted the curses of the covenant that condemned us to death, not only ultimately but in our present experience.

In Jesus Christ we are freed from the shackles of the past. We are freed from the insecurities of depending on our own performance. We have a new history and a new relationship with God. Our lives are grounded on the mighty acts of God. This makes it possible not only to enter into a relationship with God but to live a completely new kind of life. We are freed to love and to give. We are saved to serve. We find joy in helping others find the security and stability that we have found in Christ.

This leads us to the concluding portion of this book. In the light of the mighty act of

God in Christ, how shall we now live? What is different? How can we place Christ at the center of all we do, say or think? How can we put into practice the new life that we have found? Paul summed up the new life in one short sentence (Phil 1:21): *“For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.”*

How does Paul define our response to the mighty act of God in Christ? He says, “For to me, to live is Christ.” Christ is somehow at the center of everything Paul does and says and is. But how do you do this in practice? How do you make it real in everyday life? Paul does not bother defining that too clearly here. So we need to step out a little bit further and ask the question of the whole Bible, “How do you *live Christ*.” What does it mean in practice?

We will start finding the biblical answer to these questions by returning one final time to the Old Testament. We will begin by seeing how the saints of Old Testament times lived out their faith. Imagine yourself being a neighbor of Ruth and Boaz back in ancient Bethlehem (read the romantic story of how they got together in the biblical book of Ruth). How was life different because Ruth and Boaz knew the God of Israel? What was the Old Testament life of faith really like?

The Old Testament Life of Faith

As a fundamental reality, Old Testament faith was God centered, not human centered. True faith is not centered so much on what we do, it is centered on what God does. That's the bottom line. If we want to talk about our part in faith, we first have to talk about God's part. Psalm 111:4: *“He has caused his wonders to be remembered; the LORD is gracious and*

compassionate.” This is Hebrew-style thinking. The mighty acts of God are to be remembered. What did it mean to remember the mighty acts of God in Old Testament times, and what does that mean today?

Psalm 78:5-8: “He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands. They would not be like their forefathers-- a stubborn and rebellious generation, whose hearts were not loyal to God, whose spirits were not faithful to him.”

Here we see the Psalmist rehearsing the mighty acts of God in behalf of the patriarchs and at the Exodus. The bottom line of Old Testament faith was to keep the mighty acts of God constantly on the radar screen, so to speak. It was to remember what God has done, both for the human race as a whole and also for the individual. In Old Testament terms the proper response to the mighty acts of God was rehearsal, telling and retelling the mighty acts of God. But that too is a rather sweeping statement. What does rehearsal or retelling really mean in practice? How did the Old Testament saints rehearse the acts of God? I would like to suggest that there were five different ways that the Old Testament saints rehearsed the mighty acts of God. I could provide a number of texts to illustrate each of these, but I’ll limit myself to one each.

1) Through verbal recital. The most obvious way that the OT saints rehearsed the mighty acts of God was to tell the story over and over. During worship services. At school.

When walking from place to place. When sitting around the campfire. A great example of this is found in Deut 6:20-25.

“In the future, when your son asks you, ‘What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the Lord our God has commanded you?’ tell him: ‘We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. Before our eyes the Lord sent miraculous signs and wonders—great and terrible—upon Egypt and Pharaoh and his whole household. But he brought us out from there to bring us in and give us the land that he promised on oath to our forefathers. The Lord commanded us to obey all these decrees and to fear the Lord our God, so that we might always prosper and be kept alive, as is the case today.’”

God invites them to memorialize the Exodus by telling the story over and over to their children and anyone else who would listen. Each Israelite was to be ready to tell this story on a moment’s notice. And the content of that story was the mighty acts of God.

2) Through the Sabbath and the Feast Days. Deuteronomy 5:15 is a second look at the Ten Commandments, which first appear in Exod 20. The fourth commandment, regarding the Sabbath, reads a bit differently here. *“Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.”*

In Exod 20 the ground for Sabbath observance is the creation, in Deut 5 the ground for Sabbath observance is the fact that God brought them out of Egypt; they were to remember the Sabbath day because they were slaves in the land of Egypt. When they kept the Sabbath each week they were remembering that they were no longer slaves. They were remembering

that the mighty acts of God brought them out of perpetual slavery and kept them free to serve Him with gladness. So Sabbath-keeping was another way that the mighty acts of God were rehearsed in OT times. Through the Sabbath the Israelites rehearsed the Exodus, which freed them from forced labor. Through the Sabbath they rehearsed creation, the basis for all life, breath, food, and drink.

What was true of the Sabbath was also true of the other feasts on the Israelite calendar. Passover celebrated the deliverance from Egypt written up in Exodus 12. The Feasts of Tabernacles celebrated the years they lived in tents under God's protection. What I find fascinating is that archaeologists have discovered that the annual feasts of Israel were largely celebrated by the Canaanites before the Israelites ever got to Palestine. In other words, God seems to have adopted many local traditions that were already there. The Canaanites also followed an agricultural year. At planting time so they would have a planting celebration. At harvest time they would have a harvest celebration. To close the mid-summer drought they would have a rain dance and all that kind of stuff.

But there is a crucial difference between Canaanite worship and Israelite worship. For the Canaanites the agricultural feasts were simply an annual cycle that went on and on, simply a way to produce the rain and enhance the fertility of the soil. What God did was turn these agricultural cycles into history lessons. The Israelites weren't just going through an agricultural routine. They were remembering the mighty acts of God in their past. They were remembering specific historical events. God in a sense sanctified these festivals with His mighty acts. In this God met the people where they were.

3) *Through Obedience.* For the Israelites obedience was never something isolated in its own right, it was always based on the mighty acts of God, particularly the Exodus. Deut 11:1-8: *“Love the LORD your God and keep his requirements, his decrees, his laws and his commands always. Remember today that your children were not the ones who saw and experienced the discipline of the LORD your God: his majesty, his mighty hand, his outstretched arm; the signs he performed and the things he did in the heart of Egypt, both to Pharaoh king of Egypt and to his whole country; what he did to the Egyptian army, to its horses and chariots, how he overwhelmed them with the waters of the Red Sea as they were pursuing you, and how the LORD brought lasting ruin on them. . . . But it was your own eyes that saw all these great things the LORD has done. Observe **therefore** all the commands I am giving you today, so that you may have the strength to go in and take over the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess,”*

When Moses makes this proclamation Israel is on the other side of the Jordan river about to begin the conquest of Palestine. What are they suppose to do? They are to remember the mighty acts of God in the past in order that they may have the strength to go in and accomplish the new task that God has set before them (cf. also Exod 20:2-3 and Deut 7:7-11).

It is clear in this text that the retelling of God’s mighty acts is more than just verbal. It is summed up also in obedience to the laws of God. And every act of obedience was to be in remembrance of the mighty acts of God. This obedience was never to be legalistic, but was always grounded in gratitude to God for what He had done. Everything we do in obedience is in in response to what He has already done.

4) *Through Ethical Behavior.* For ancient Israel the Exodus was the basis for all behavior.

The mighty acts of God also affected the way Israelites were supposed to treat people.

Deuteronomy 10:19-22: *“And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt. Fear the LORD your God and serve him. Hold fast to him and take your oaths in his name. He is your praise; he is your God, who performed for you those great and awesome wonders you saw with your own eyes. Your forefathers who went down into Egypt were seventy in all, and now the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars in the sky.”*

What is an alien? Well, back then they didn’t have three eyes and antennae! An alien in Old Testament times was anyone who didn’t come from your neighborhood. The Israelites themselves were “aliens” in the land of Egypt. God asks them now to treat aliens and foreigners in the light of their own experience in Egypt. Notice verse 18. *“But God, He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow and loves the alien.”* So they were to behave like God who rescued the aliens in the time of the Exodus. And if you know that God has brought you out from slavery with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, the next time you run into a slave you are likely to treat that person differently.

5) *Through the routines of life.* The Israelites were to allow the mighty acts of God to be in their consciousness throughout all the routines of life. Deut 26:1-2: *“When you have entered the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance and have taken possession of it and settled in it, take some of the firstfruits of all that you produce from the soil of the land the LORD your God is giving you and put them in a basket. Then go to the place the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his Name.”*

We come back once more to this interesting text. It was a good example of verbal recital, but notice what else the Israelites were supposed to do in response to the mighty acts of God. They are encouraged to bring stuff from their gardens to the temple. God is saying, “I want every aspect of your life to be focused on the mighty acts that I have done for you. If you want to experience true life, when you plant your seed you will be thinking about Me. When you are cultivating the soil you will be thinking about Me. When you are harvesting the crops you will be thinking about me.” And to encourage them to do this in the routines of life, He even created a ceremony in which they were to take a basket full of the first fruits and bring them to the sanctuary and recite the mighty acts of God.

So Deuteronomy 26 is about verbal recital in the context of the routines of life, it is about learning to remember God every hour of the day. In every detail of our lives we can learn to remember the mighty acts that God has done for us. Every day life is to be a celebration of redemption. Everything that the Israelites did was to remind them of what God had done.

Now how does this all work in practice? Let’s imagine that it is about 1100 BC in the town of Bethlehem, the time of the Judges. In the middle of all the politics and the intrigue of the historical books of the Bible there is a beautiful vignette of everyday life in the book of Ruth. It is a little story about what everyday life was like in Israel before there were kings.

Ruth and Boaz have settled down now after their happy wedding day, they are having children, farming their lands, and living the life God has given them. Let’s imagine that one day a Babylonian merchant is passing by on his way to Egypt. He has some plans for

serious business. He is going to go down to Egypt to talk to some folks he met there the last time and discuss ways to make lots of money together. He has been on his way for more than a month now (800 miles on foot), but it's getting toward the end of the day and he stops for rest under the shade of a tree overlooking a little farm. Since the farm is right near the main highway and he decides to take a break and see what's going on.

As he is watching, he observes some people out doing the farm work and notices that the field manager is treating them with respect. He is surprised by this, in Babylon the average farm worker is treated as worthless scum. But the boss here is being kind to the workers, treating them like equals. Then he notices that the big boss has come over and he is kind to the field manager. They working together like colleagues instead of like master and slave.

And he says to himself, "This is weird, I've never seen anything like this. I've got to find out what is going on."

One of the workers wanders over close to the place where the Babylonian is resting, so he calls over. "Hey, you got a minute?"

The worker looks him over as he approaches and notices that he is Babylonian by the style of his clothes. The worker says, "Sure, you need some directions?"

"No, I think I'm OK. I've been by here before. I just have a question. I notice your boss treats you real nice. Is there any reason for that?"

The farm worker says, "Well, this is an Israelite home, a Hebrew home, and we worship the Lord. You see, a long time ago we were slaves in the land of Egypt. But the Lord brought us out with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. And so He instructed us to be kind to

slaves, whenever we had any.”

The Babylonian was a little suspicious about this, so he asked to talk to the field manager and see what he had to say about it. When the field manager comes over he tells him, “I’ve been noticing how nice you are to your workers here, I’m not used to this, can you tell me anything about why you do it that way?”

The field manager says, “Oh, it’s like this. We were slaves in the land of Egypt. The Lord our God brought us out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, so, you know, we might as well be nice to slaves, because we know what it feels like to be a slave.”

“That’s pretty cool. I like that. I wish people always treated me that way.”

“Hey, would you like to meet Boaz?” the field manager asks, “He’s the owner of the farm. You could learn more about it from him.”

“He would talk to me, a Babylonian? Rich people don’t talk to foreigners unless they have to.”

“Well, I think this rich guy is different than what you’re used to.” The field manager calls Boaz over to where the Babylonian merchant has been resting under the tree.

Before the Babylonian could even say anything, Boaz said, “Welcome to Bethlehem,” and glanced at the setting sun. “You know, it’s getting late, why pay those high motel bills, why don’t you spend the weekend with us?”

This was a little too much for the Babylonian merchant. Maybe this was some kind of trap. For an instant he allows a look of rejection mingled with a little fear to cross his face.

“Hey, relax,” says Boaz, “One of my workers told me you are going all the way to Egypt.

There's no need to rush off, take a break, get yourself refreshed, and then in a couple days you can move on. Don't worry about it, we do this all the time."

"That's really cool. I appreciate it. Nothing like this ever happened to me in Egypt. Nothing like this ever happened to me in Syria. I just don't get it. How come you invited me, a total stranger? I could be a serial killer for all you know."

Boaz looked the Babylonian over briefly and grinned, "I'll take my chances. Live dangerously, they say. Actually there's something else behind all this. You see, a long time ago we were foreigners in the land of Egypt, but the Lord our God brought us out with a mighty hand and an out stretched arm, and we've learned to treat other people with the same kindness that He treated us. That's why we've decided to be hospitable to people in your situation."

The Babylonian replies with an openness that startles him, "Man, I like this religion of yours. Can I learn more about it this weekend?"

So the Babylonian merchant joins them at the main house. It happens to be Friday, so the final Sabbath preparations are taking place. Ruth is setting out candles as the merchant walks in. As they gather around the big table for supper, he hears about the Sabbath for the first time.

And he says, "What's this about, this Sabbath business?"

Ruth responds, "Oh, one day a week we all take off from work and spend it worshipping the Lord and enjoying each other's company."

"Whoa, time out," the merchant interrupts, "You can't do that, I mean, think of all the

money you are losing, taking a day off every week!”

“Well, that’s what we do, and we seem to be doing all right.”

The Babylonian glances around the well-appointed home. There’s no arguing the point. So he asks instead, “Why are you doing this? There must be some reason.”

Ruth responds, “Well, it’s like this, we were slaves in the land of Egypt, and the Lord our God brought us out with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. So He told us to keep the Sabbath, and not only us, but to allow all our workers the same privilege. So that’s what we decided to do.”

And this Babylonian thinks to himself, “What on earth is going on? This is getting real interesting.”

After dinner, Ruth and Boaz started talking about the Passover feast that was coming up the next week, they were planning to travel up to the sanctuary to celebrate.

“Why are you going to do that?” the Babylonian asks, then interrupts himself, “No, don’t tell me! Let me guess. You were strangers in the land of Egypt, right?”

Ruth, Boaz, and the rest of the family explode with laughter. When things settle down, Boaz says to Ruth with a grin, “I think he’s got it!”

With an earnest look the merchant says hopefully, “Do you think I could go along? Would it be all right if I stayed the whole week? I want to know more about this Lord of yours.”

Ruth and Boaz seemed delighted. “Of course it would be all right, hey, you’re a stranger in the land of Israel and that means everything is alright with you. Be our guest. It will

be fun.”

So, Boaz and Ruth had learned that in every detail of life it is possible to remember what God has done. And you treat it as if you yourself had walked through the Red Sea, and it had become your own personal history. That is what the Jewish Passover is all about. Jews gather around a table and say, “**We** were strangers in the land of Egypt.” Not **they, we**. “The Lord brought **us** out.” Israel’s everyday life was to continually remind them of God’s acts for them.

But this was to be no idle remembrance. Hebrew remembrance is always full of action. When the Israelites remembered what God had done, they were to rehearse God’s actions through their own words and actions. Now here we get to a really exciting part, when you rehearse the mighty acts of God, the power of God’s original action energizes what you are doing in the present! The mighty acts of God become real in your own experience.

There is one Old Testament text that unpacks this in detail, 2 Chronicles 20:1-23. It is a long text, so we will only offer the highlights here, but I would encourage you to read the whole story for yourself. The Israelites are being attacked by the Moabites, the Ammonites and the Meunites, it was three against one. If it were football it would be the ultimate blitz (the quarterback is dead). The enemy army has already crossed the Dead Sea (so much for natural barriers) and is less than 30 miles from Jerusalem. This is a serious crisis.

Jehoshaphat the king is alarmed and proclaims a fast for all Judah. From all over Judah people came to the temple to pray to the Lord. Jehoshaphat gets up in front of the crowd to lead the prayers. Now if you were in his shoes what would you pray about? “Oh, Lord help us,

do something please! We're in big trouble!" Prayers get real focused when you are about to die! But Jehoshaphat's actual prayer doesn't sound desperate at all. Let's listen in (2 Chron 20:6-9): *"O LORD, God of our fathers, are you not the God who is in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in your hand, and no one can withstand you. O our God, did you not drive out the inhabitants of this land before your people Israel and give it forever to the descendants of Abraham your friend? They have lived in it and have built in it a sanctuary for your Name, saying, 'If calamity comes upon us, whether the sword of judgment, or plague or famine, we will stand in your presence before this temple that bears your Name and will cry out to you in our distress, and you will hear us and save us.'"*

What is Jehoshaphat doing? He is rehearsing the mighty acts of God in the past. He speaks confidently of God's promise to Solomon (1 Kings 8:22-53), just a few generations before, that if they ever got in trouble with an attacking army, they needed to go to the temple and rehearse the mighty acts of God. So Jehoshaphat was just following instructions. He continued: *"But now here are men from Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir, whose territory you would not allow Israel to invade when they came from Egypt; so they turned away from them and did not destroy them. See how they are repaying us by coming to drive us out of the possession you gave us as an inheritance. O our God, will you not judge them? For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you."* (2 Chron 20:10-12)

Did you notice that he put God in a bit of a corner here? "These are the very guys you told us to leave alone back then, and now look what is happening." So what does Jehoshaphat

do? He reminds God of His mighty acts and he particularly includes the one where He spared the very people who are so ungrateful right now. Immediately a prophet of God stands up and tells them not to worry about the battle. God will fight for them, they don't have to be discouraged. They should go down to the battlefield and take their positions, but they won't have to fight, God will fight for them.

So what does Jehoshaphat do? He sends out the temple choir to lead the army into battle! He even orders the song they are to sing, it was called, "Give Thanks to the LORD, For His Love Endures Forever." 2 Chron 20:22-23: *"As they began to sing and praise, the LORD set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated. The men of Ammon and Moab rose up against the men from Mount Seir to destroy and annihilate them. After they finished slaughtering the men from Seir, they helped to destroy one another."*

The next time the United States is in danger, do you think the president will send a choir out to fight? Not likely. So what was the choir doing that day in Jerusalem? They were rehearsing the mighty acts of God. They weren't singing "Trust and Obey." Trust and Obey is a good song, but it wouldn't have been the right song on that day. They were singing, "Give Thanks to the LORD, For His Love Endures Forever." They were focused on God, not on the problem.

And what happened when they rehearsed the mighty acts of God in their past? The power of the original act, the power of the Exodus, was manifested in their midst. The mighty act in the past became the focus of their lives in the present, and the result was even greater

mighty acts to celebrate in the future! So for Old Testament Israel, all that God has done in the past, became the focus of life in the present.

Now I would like to turn to the New Testament and ask, “To what degree does the witness of the Old Testament represent what we find in the New Testament and if so, how can we carry this out in our own present experience?”

The New Testament Life of Faith

For the New Testament the first thing to keep in mind is that Jesus Christ fulfills the entire life, experience, and history of the Old Testament. All of Old Testament Israel’s history and experience comes together in the Christ event, in Jesus Christ at the cross. And everything in the New Testament era points back to Christ as the ultimate mighty act of God.

If Jesus Christ is the embodiment of Israel’s entire history, when we are united to Him we are united to Israel too. We become united to that whole history, but it is a history that has already been redeemed through the life of Christ. It is now a beautiful history in Him. Just as Old Testament believers kept their eyes focused on the Exodus, so New Testament believers keep their eyes focused on the cross, and in so doing they see the entire Old Testament in a fresh light.

So the New Testament counterpart to the great mighty acts of God in the Old Testament is the cross of Jesus Christ. That is THE greatest and mightiest act of God. It is so great that it is unrepeatable. As Creator, His one death is sufficient to redeem the entire universe. And since it is sufficient, the only way it can be repeated is to retell what has already

been done. So the great, mighty act of God for today is the cross, including the resurrection of Jesus. At the cross all the history and experience of the Old Testament is summed up. This is the greatest act God has ever done in behalf of His people.

How does this mighty act of God work for me personally? First of all, as we saw in the previous chapter, He has given me a new history. I am no longer who I was, I have a new identity. I have received a fresh start in Jesus Christ. It is as if my whole past had never happened, as if it were washed away. And this new history makes a huge difference in the area of self worth, in the realization of how much we are worth.

Is that a mighty act of God? I think so. When a person spends decades wallowing in self pity, wallowing in a sense of failure, wallowing in a sense of never being good enough, what could be mightier than an act that validates you as the most valuable person in the universe? Would it do something for your self esteem if the president of the United States chose to be your friend? Consulted your opinion on a regular basis? I think it would make a huge difference.

But compare the power of the president with Jesus Christ, who made the entire universe. Making the universe is a lot tougher than getting a tax bill passed. It's also a lot more significant. When the greatest person in the universe chooses to be your friend it places tremendous value upon you. So in the first place, the mighty act of God for me is a new history, a new start, a new sense of what you are worth. And there is no greater miracle than that.

That's the historical side of Gods' mighty act, but there is also a legal side. As we saw in

the previous chapter, you also have a new righteousness, a new relationship with God.

Everyone has a sense of failure. Everyone knows that they are not living up to all that they know is right. Everyone knows that they are not “being all that they could be” as the US Army puts it. So it is not enough just to have a new history. You and I need to know that the new history is legal, that it is acceptable to God. We need to know the security of being right with God, of knowing that we are continually acceptable to Him.

This is the secret to secure and stable faith, to realize that our standing with God is grounded in a unassailable legal action. In the United States, when the Supreme Court says, “Your free,” nothing else in this country can change that. No policeman can change it. You can drive by that police car with confidence and say, “You can’t touch me, because the Supreme Court said so.” You may see a couple of soldiers standing there with machine guns, looking threatening. No way. The Supreme Court says, “You can’t touch me.” That’s the kind of security we can have in Christ.

Is it likely that a person freed by the Supreme Court will have troubled thoughts, now and then? Of course. Is it likely that they will make some mistakes? Naturally. But as long as the Supreme Court says they are free, they’re free. The freedom is rooted in a legal action. There is a confidence that comes with knowing that your acceptability is settled once and for all.

So God has done mighty acts not just for us, He has done mighty acts for me. He has changed my whole life in tremendous ways, and one of the most exciting ways is to lose the fear of death. I first realized this in Jerusalem in 1995, when I was walking down a street in the

Muslim quarter of the old city. I came around a corner, and all of a sudden six screaming guys came charging at me. And the strangest thing happened, I just didn't react. I wasn't scared. I didn't run. It turned out to be my students playing a trick on me. They had seen me coming, so they hid out and ambushed. They were quite upset afterward. "That was no fun, you didn't react, you weren't scared or anything."

I thought to myself, "How come I didn't react. You just can't fake that. Something has happened here. Something is different." I realized that something deep inside of me, something I had no control over, did not feel threatened. That was totally awesome for me. There's something very real that happens when you know you are right with God. You may not notice it tomorrow. It may not be next week or even next year, but one day it hits you that God has done a mighty act inside of you. God still does mighty acts today. And the day comes when you wake up realizing that you are a different person. For some people the feeling may take years, but it will happen. And when it happens, it is awesome, it is a mighty act. Master the teachings of the Bible, apply them every day, count yourself dead to sin and alive in Christ, and in His time He will make all the difference. This is the only path of life that really works. I know, I have tried a few.

So how can we celebrate the cross, this incredible mighty act of God for us? How can we do it in the Twentieth Century? I'd like to suggest several ways that the New Testament brings to us.

1) Through Sharing the Gospel. The Old Testament saints celebrated the mighty acts of God verbally, the New Testament equivalent of that verbal rehearsal is the gospel. What is the

Gospel? The New Testament definition of the gospel is found in 1 Corinthians 15:1-8.

According to Paul, the gospel in a nutshell is roughly, “Jesus coming to this earth, living a perfect life, dying on the cross, and being raised on the third day for us.”

Now that never made sense to me before. How can the gospel be a simple series of events that happened two thousand years ago? I understand now. It is a mighty act of God. Sharing the gospel is simply telling people that God has done everything that needs to be done in order for them to become the kind of person they want to be. Sharing the gospel is telling and retelling the story of the mighty act of God in Jesus Christ. It is a mighty act like the Exodus, the creation, and all the other mighty acts of God that we find in Scripture.

The exciting thing about sharing the gospel is that witnessing is never dry, it is never simply an intellectual process. Whenever you share the cross of Jesus Christ the Holy Spirit is present to press the claims on the listener. Like 2 Chron 20 the power of the original act is brought into the present situation. What is the power of the cross? It is the resurrection. Whatever your problem is today, it is nothing compared to raising someone from the dead!

But there is an added benefit that comes when you share the gospel. The power of the resurrection is not limited to the person you are talking to. When the Holy Spirit presses the claims of the cross as a result of your witness, you receive that power too. You are spiritually strengthened by sharing with others. The key to spiritual power is rehearsing the mighty acts of God. Whenever the mighty acts of God are told and retold, there is spiritual revival and reformation. And it is God that does it, not a preacher or a teacher.

The lay leader of a large church felt his spiritual experience going dry. For whatever

reason he couldn't connect with the preaching in his church. His walk with God was slipping away and he was about ready to give up. He decided to give it one more chance. On Sunday morning he went down to the little Baptist church in town. Bad luck. The preacher was away that week and the deacon was up there reading something or other. He was mumbling along and the congregation was half asleep. The elder thought, "Good grief, this is my last chance and this has to happen." But a funny thing happened on the way to the leader's nap. Every five or ten minutes the deacon, who seemed totally clueless, lifted his eyes from the reading and said, "Well I don't know about that, but I do know one thing, God is able," and then he mumbled on for five or ten minutes. Then he said again, "Well, I don't know about that point, but I do know this, God is able."

About twenty minutes into that sermon, the elder began to sense God's presence warming his heart. He says, "I just suddenly I realized God is able. God is able to take me where I am, it doesn't matter who is preaching." It doesn't matter how dead the church is or how out-of-date the worship service is. If you rehearse the mighty acts of God, He is able to resurrect the dead! In order to be effective, worship needs to be God-centered, it needs to be centered on the gospel, centered on what God has done.

2) Through the Ceremonies of the Church. A second way we can rehearse the mighty acts of God in today's world is by performing the traditional ceremonies of the church just as they celebrated the feasts in ancient times. What are those special ceremonies? Some people suggest that in order to be a Christian one has to celebrate the feasts of the Old Testament calendar, like Passover, the Feast of Tabernacles, and so on. While these may be beneficial to

those who are convicted about them, the New Testament doesn't require them for the Christian. But there are uniquely New Testament feasts that offer a setting for the retelling of the cross.

First of all, there's baptism. According to Romans 6 baptism is nothing less than a rehearsal of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Going into the water is like death. The person is then buried under the water and raised up to a new life. It is a rehearsal of the cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. So baptism celebrates the cross just as Passover celebrated the Exodus. We go down into the water just as Israel went down into the Red Sea. And whenever the mighty acts of God are rehearsed, the power of the original act is made real in the present.

That is why baptisms have such a powerful effect on those who observe. I have never performed a baptism without giving people in the audience a chance to indicate their own desire for baptism. One day in New York City nineteen people stood up after such an appeal. Half of them I had never seen before. They were relatives and friends who showed up to see somebody else get baptized. But when you rehearse the mighty acts of God, power of the resurrection is there. People sense the power and presence of God and they are moved to respond.

Another ceremony of the church is Communion, the Lord's Supper. According to 1Corinthians 11, in the Lord's supper "We do show forth the Lord's death until He comes." Every time we celebrate the Lord's Supper we are rehearsing the death of Jesus Christ on the cross and there is tremendous opportunity for the power of the Spirit to work. By celebrating

the “feasts of the church,” such as baptism and the Lord’s Supper, we can rehearse the mighty acts of God in a dramatic fashion.

3) *Through Obedience.* The Old Testament saints saw obedience as a way to rehearse the mighty acts of God. The same is true of the New Testament. In all seven of Paul’s greatest epistles he starts with the gospel, he talks about what God has done in Jesus Christ. Then he uses the Greek word for “therefore,” and follows the gospel with instruction in practical obedience. Let’s look at Romans 12:1 as an example. *“Therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of Gods’ mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God.”* After knocking himself out to make the gospel as clear as possible in Romans 1-11, Paul says “therefore.” The ideal response to the mighty act of God is to offer ourselves to Gods’ service. We don’t offer ourselves to Him in order to earn it, but in grateful response. Whether it has to do with what we eat, what we say or what we do, true Christian obedience is related to the doing and dying of Jesus Christ.

Romans 14:23: *“But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.”* Paul suggests that even good things that are done outside of faith in the mighty acts of God become sin. Eating a vegetarian diet apart from the mighty acts of God is sin. Obedience to parents apart from the work of God will never save anybody. It is through faith in the mighty acts of God that obedience becomes powerful unto salvation. When our obedience to God’s commandments is in response to the cross, the power of the resurrection energizes our obedience for the good of ourselves and for the good of others. In Old Testament times when God remembered He

acted. When we remember the mighty acts of God we are motivated to act like Him. We “do the right thing” in response to what He has done.

4) *In How We Treat People.* In Old Testament times we noticed that people were to treat aliens the way they had been treated by God in Egypt. God’s action toward us become the model for how we are to treat other people. Matthew 25:40: *“The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’”* Through His sacrifice on the cross Jesus became identified with the human race. So when you treat somebody well, when you visit a criminal in prison, you are visiting Jesus. When you visit the sick you’re visiting Jesus. When you feed the hungry you’re feeding Jesus. Through the gospel we learn how God responds to hurting people, to struggling people, to failing people. To God every person is intensely valuable and He invites us to rehearse His mighty acts by behaving toward people the way He does.

Those days of my life when the gospel is most clear I feel like I love everybody. On days when the gospel is not so clear, I have a tendency to despise “losers.” The problem is, when I’m honest with myself, I’m the loser. If there is no hope for “losers” there is no hope for me. If I focus on myself, I become harder on myself and harder on others. But when I rehearse the mighty acts of God for me my screwed up thought processes get turned around and I can treat other people the way God treats them.

How does God want us to treat people who are totally messed up? 2 Timothy 2:24-26: *“And the Lord’s servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, (the Greek there not exactly teachable) not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently*

instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will." You see, messed up people are trapped, people in prison can't release themselves. So unless God releases them from the trap, they can't make it. It takes a mighty act of God to change a heart. The practical issue is, how can we co-operate with God in reaching out to somebody who is totally screwed up? The text basically says to keep quiet. Instead of going in there to set them straight, you go in there to show gentleness, kindness, teachableness, and humility. That's the ethics of rehearsing the mighty acts of God, it is treating other people the way God has already treated us.

5) Through the Routine Activities of Life. Is it possible to rehearse the mighty acts of God in the routines of life as well? If we don't learn to rehearse the mighty acts of God in the routines of life, we will forget, because most of what we do in our lives is routine. Most of our lives are made up of eating and drinking, waking and sleeping, working and resting. Routine activities.

The key to avoiding the ups and downs in Christian experience is to bring the mighty acts of God constantly into the everyday routines of life. But how can we do that? Life for most people is an endless round of eating and drinking, working and resting. Very ordinary things. In themselves they make up a meaningless existence. We get a taste of this in Eccl 1:1-9. Everything is meaningless. People work day after day, but for what? The sun rises and sets, so what? The wind blows one way and then another, so what? Everything is wearisome, there is nothing new under the sun. Very depressing. And all those depressing thoughts can be

found right in the middle of the Bible!

But the writer of Ecclesiastes is right. Life is boring on the whole. Everything is an endless round of routines with no particular meaning. Unless God does one of His mighty acts in our lives. 1 Peter 1:18-19 tells us what the mighty act of God can do for everyday life. *“For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.”* Peter recognizes that the normal way of life is empty, meaningless. His solution is the precious blood of Christ. It is the mighty act of God on the cross that puts meaning into life, that gets rid of the emptiness.

At the Lord’s supper Jesus said, “Do this in remembrance of Me.” I’d like to extend that principle to all of life. Whatever you do in life, tie it to the mighty actions of God in the past, the things He did for Israel and the things He has done for you. When you lay down this book and go back to your daily routines, do them in remembrance of Jesus.

When you sit down to eat, remember that rain, light, and sunshine would all have ceased with sin if God had not been looking down the halls of history to the cross. If it were not for the cross there would be nothing to eat and nothing to drink. So when you drink a glass of water remember that Jesus is the water of life. When you’re sitting at home under that roof and it is raining outside remember that Jesus Christ is your shelter from the consequences of sin. When you get dressed in the morning put on the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

The New Testament is full of metaphors that can make everyday life meaningful. Just as God transformed some of the Canaanite routines in such a way as to remind His people of

His mighty works, so the New Testament applies Christ to our daily lives today. When you go to sleep at night, consider the analogy with the end of life and kneel down beside your bed and say, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit," knowing that you will rise again in Christ, probably the next morning, but if not, soon after. When you rise up in the morning rehearse the resurrection of Jesus Christ and know that His mercy is new every morning. Intercession is still going on up there.

When you attend a wedding, remember Ephesians 5 where it speaks of the relationship of husband and wife as a type of that between Christ and the church. The wedding can be a witness to that relationship. When you or someone you know gives birth to a child, remember Isaiah 9:6: *"Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given,"* and remember that apart from Jesus Christ the birth of that child would be a tragedy. It would be trouble for his or her parents and the prelude to a meaningless future. But in Christ the birth of a baby is a witness to a mighty act of God, the creation of new life!

When you get sick remember the one who bore our sicknesses and carried our sorrows. When you suffer, you can know that He has suffered for you and will suffer with you. Paul rejoiced in suffering because it connected him more closely with Jesus, it made him feel the way Jesus felt on the cross. When Paul was suffering it was easier for him to remember the cross because he had trained himself to do so. And if time should last and you and I come to the end of life we can still rejoice that the deteriorating body of sin and death is about to be destroyed, and that we receive some rest from the curse, rest from the toil and the pain that comes with life in a sinful world. Note the following priceless statement.

DA 660 “To the death of Christ we owe even this earthly life. The bread we eat is the purchase of His broken body. The water we drink is bought by His spilled blood. Never one, saint or sinner, eats his daily food, but he is nourished by the body and the blood of Christ. The cross of Calvary is stamped on every loaf. It is reflected in every water spring. All this Christ has taught in appointing the emblems of His great sacrifice. The light shining from that Communion service in the upper chamber makes sacred the provisions for our daily life. The family board becomes as the table of the Lord, and every meal a sacrament.

“... pride and self-worship cannot flourish in the soul that keeps fresh in memory the scenes of Calvary. . . . He who beholds the Saviour's matchless love will be elevated in thought, purified in heart, transformed in character. He will go forth to be a light to the world, to reflect in some degree this mysterious love. The more we contemplate the cross of Christ, the more fully shall we adopt the language of the apostle when he said, ‘God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.’ Gal. 6:14. ”

In this statement the cross of Christ becomes the sum and substance of all life and experience. As we bring the mighty act of God in Jesus Christ into continual consciousness, we become molded more and more into His image (2 Cor 3:18). And we will also be preparing ourselves for the joys of eternal life, where rehearsing the mighty acts of God is a central part of human experience:

Rev 5:9-13: *“And they sang a new song: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every*

tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.’ Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang: ‘Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!’ Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: ‘To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, forever and ever!’”

Rehearsing the cross, God’s greatest and mightiest act, will be the science and the song of eternity. The difference between our experience here and what we will experience there will be so great that we will never tire of singing the praises of the One who died for us and rose again on the third day. But why wait? We can begin to taste the glories of eternity here and now. You know the drill, “We were slaves in the land of Egypt. . . .”