

When Your Number's Up

The damsel is not dead, but sleepeth (Mark 5:39, *KJV*).

Scripture: Mark 5:35-43

Song: "I Am Thine, O Lord"

As the family's pastor, I was summoned to the hospital room of a dying 70-year-old woman. Her two sons, a grandson, a surgeon, and a nurse were huddled around her bed. "I wasn't able to remove the cancer; it was too widespread. She didn't wake up in the recovery room, and she is very close to leaving us," the surgeon explained. Then a few minutes later, he said, "Although there is an occasional faint heartbeat, she is gone." With that, he left the room.

The nurse shuffled in and out of the room, while the rest of us waited for the inevitable. As the night wore on, the sons, grandson, and I took the nurse's advice and went home to await word that the woman had expired. But around 4:00 a.m. one of the sons received a phone call from his mother. "Mom!" he gasped. "They told us you had died!"

"Well, no one told *me*," his mother replied, "and I am hungry." Later in the morning, she called her nurses together. It was Easter, and she wanted to sing them a resurrection song.

I have heard it said many times that when your number is up, it's up. However, what a difference it makes to know the Lord, the one who puts the numbers up.

Heavenly Father, may we serve You every day until You call us home to be with You eternally. In Jesus' name, amen.

Comic Book Superheroes Have a Problem

Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ? (John 4:29, *KJV*).

Scripture: John 4:27-29, 39-42

Song: “Jesus, Name Above All Names”

When I was a kid, I enjoyed reading comic books that featured heroes like Superman, Batman, Captain Marvel, Spider-Man, and Aquaman. Guess which one was my favorite? If you answered “Superman, the Man of Steel,” go to the head of the class! He was supersmart, superfast, super protective, and superstrong. He could do anything. He could leap over tall buildings, travel faster than a speeding bullet, employ X-ray vision, and lift tremendous weights. However, when exposed to kryptonite, he became powerless. But kryptonite wasn’t Superman’s only problem. He had another problem: he was fictitious. And so were all the other comic book superheroes.

Hollywood has recently produced popular movies featuring superheroes, but none of the characters can do anything for theatergoers except entertain them and provide fleeting relief from the stress of living in a troubled world.

Although Jesus is sometimes cast in the role of a fictitious superhero, He is real and able to do for us what no comic book superhero could ever do. He forgives our sins, meets our daily needs, answers our prayers, gives us peace and joy in even the most difficult circumstances, and guides us perfectly through life. We can say what a six-year-old girl said when she gave her version of Psalm 23:1: “The Lord is my shepherd. I’ve got all I want.”

Heavenly Father, thank You for the amazing gift of Your Son, Jesus. Amen.

Priceless Treasures for Every Believer

In [Christ] are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:3, *KJV*).

Scripture: Colossians 2:1-5

Song: “I’d Rather Have Jesus”

When farmer Peter Whatling lost a hammer in a field in 2009, he asked a friend to use his metal detector to help him find it. He retrieved the hammer but also found an oak chest full of fourth- or fifth-century coins, jewelry, and silver spoons. Archaeologists arrived on the scene and found other treasures. The discovered treasures carried a value of nearly \$4 million. Today the treasures—and the hammer—are on display in the British Museum.

Another valuable treasure was found in 1985 under a demolished building in the Polish town of Sroda Slaska. It was a vase containing 3,000 silver coins from the fourteenth century. In 1988, more artifacts were found at another demolished building. They included gold and silver coins and jewelry, including a gold crown and a ring featuring a dragon’s head. The value of these discoveries was set at \$120 million.

Valuable finds inspire such expeditions as scouring a park or a beach with a metal detector or diving deep into an ocean in search of sunken ships, but we don’t have to do more than read the Bible to find truly priceless treasure. The Bible identifies Jesus as the source of “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” If we want to learn what life is all about or how to get to Heaven or how to face each day with confidence, we find everything we need to know in Jesus.

Heavenly Father, please help me discover in Jesus the wisdom to know and do what is right. In His name, amen.

No Vacancy in the Trinity!

Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men (Mark 7:7, *KJV*).

Scripture: Mark 7:1-8

Song: “The Song of the Soul Set Free”

Cult leader Jim Jones was born in May, 1931, and died by suicide on August 18, 1978; but he didn't die alone. Nine hundred of his followers died the same day after he commanded them to drink a mixture of cyanide-laced Kool-Aid. The horror occurred in Jonestown, in the jungle of Guyana, where Jones and his followers had moved from California. Jones had brainwashed his followers into believing he offered a better way of life. No one would have to worry about food or housing, he promised. According to Jones, people had to leave their families and follow him, and he misinterpreted the Bible to persuade them to do so. Upon arrival in Guyana, Jones commanded his followers to hand over their passports and all their money. He also made them sign papers, promising they would never leave the compound.

Strange, isn't it, how some people will obey the commands of a cult leader who promises a bright future in exchange for their compliance? Jim Jones's followers surrendered their wills and their freedom to Jones because they hoped to earn a utopian life.

Being shackled to man-made rules brings slavery and frustration, but following Jesus brings satisfaction and freedom. Jesus promised that if we keep His commandments, our joy will be full (John 15:11). We must not allow anyone to assume the role of God in our lives.

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your commandments that guide me in Your perfect ways and give me joy. Amen.

What's in Your Heart?

There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man (Mark 7:15, *KJV*).

Scripture: Mark 7:9-15

Song: “Cleanse Me, O God”

A popular TV commercial asks, “What’s in your wallet?” A much more important question is, What’s in your heart? What’s in your wallet determines what you can buy, but what’s in your heart determines who you are.

Cardiologists can learn the condition of a physical heart with tests. An echocardiogram uses ultrasound mainly on the chest. A TEE (transesophageal echocardiography) uses an echo transducer attached to a thin tube to take pictures of the heart and arteries. A heart catheterization employs a long, thin tube inserted into an artery or vein to diagnose cardiovascular conditions.

God doesn’t have to perform a test to determine the spiritual condition of the human heart. He already knows it is “deceitful . . . and desperately wicked” (Jeremiah 17:9, *KJV*). Jesus spoke of the heart as the seat of evil thoughts and vile acts, including “murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies” (Matthew 15:19, *KJV*).

A cardiologist devises a plan to try to restore the heart to good health. God’s plan to cleanse and strengthen the heart includes prayer for cleansing (Psalm 51:10), internalizing His Word (119:11), and loving Him with all our heart (Matthew 22:37).

Heavenly Father, search my heart and cleanse it today. Help me to guard it from evil. Amen.

The Source of Sin

That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man
(Mark 7:20, *KJV*).

Scripture: Mark 7:17-23

Song: “I Know a Fount”

Most sins are likely premeditated. In the past couple of years, several well-known public figures were accused of sexual misconduct and adultery. They were said to have trapped their victims. Of course, these sexual crimes were not the first incidents recorded in history. Such sins have occurred almost since our first parents rebelled against God in the Garden of Eden. Even Israel’s beloved King David committed premeditated adultery with Bathsheba. His lustful thoughts led to the illicit relationship. And then he tried to cover up his sin by bringing Bathsheba’s husband home from the battlefield, and then later David devised a way to have him killed (2 Samuel 11).

It is good that David understood that he alone was responsible for his sin, so he cried to God for forgiveness. He prayed to be washed thoroughly from his iniquity and cleansed from his sin (Psalm 51:2). He asked God to create a new heart in him (v. 10). In modern terms we might say David experienced a catharsis.

Evil thoughts may lead to evil deeds. We should be aware of the power of replacing those thoughts—when we have them—with thoughts that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, commendable, morally excellent, and praiseworthy (Philippians 4:8). This catharsis of our thought life will result in clean living that honors God.

Heavenly Father, please cleanse my mind of any thoughts that dishonor You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Answering the Call

[Jesus] went round about the villages, teaching (Mark 6:6, *KJV*).

Scripture: Mark 6:1-6

Song: “I Love to Tell the Story”

Answering the call of God, fearless circuit preachers in the old Wild West rode their horses from town to town to preach the gospel. Known as “saddlebag preachers,” because their Bibles and all their possessions were packed in their saddlebags, these devoted servants of the Lord braved severe weather, swamps, fever, highway robbers, and even starvation as they preached every day in small villages, fields, courthouses, and settlers’ homes. Many circuit-riding preachers died before the age of 30, yet they left their mark on the times and inspired many others to saddle up their horses and carry the gospel across the frontier. In 1784, there were 83 saddlebag preachers, but their number swelled to 3,557 by 1839. The life of a circuit-riding preacher was lonely, and his family members faced loneliness too, as they waited anxiously for his return.

Today’s “circuit-riding preachers” are much fewer than the number of original saddlebag preachers, but they are just as devoted. Each one serves two or more rural congregations, and likely wears out his car prematurely.

God doesn’t call every Christian to minister as an itinerant preacher, but He has commissioned all of us to make Christ known to others. So before we purchase a horse and a saddlebag and ride off into the sunset, we should consider sharing the good news with a neighbor, friend, relative, or coworker who needs to hear it.

Lord, I will go where You want me to go. I’ll say what You want me to say. For the sake of Your name, I pray. Amen.