



THE BEACON BEAM

July 2023



KEEPING OUR EYES ON HIM

The Most Important Thing

by Jim Elliff

When wars have ceased, international leaders have become dust and the poverty of their souls is revealed; when enterprises crumble and the last dream has evaporated; when death has claimed the final person, and those alive are changed for their eternal future; when everything earthly and mundane is over, and each person resides in heaven or hell—what will be important? And what among all that is important will be the most important?

This is a question worth thinking about, because finding out what is important in the end will, or at least should, tell you what is important now. That which is important for eternity, that is, for billions of years and more, is surely the most important thing to God for this brief wisp of time called human history. And it should be even more important for you, since you live here for only a small fraction of that wisp.

What if, in your hurry and your worry about so many little things, you actually missed the most important thing?

That which is most important for all time, as is well known only

to some, is Jesus Christ. I mean, not just Jesus Christ as a being, but Jesus Christ in the light of what he has done—his life, death, and resurrection. It is a huge gamble to dismiss the one who is the center of everything. There is, in fact, no hope for such a person.

You know what it means to forget the most important element of some concoction—like the sugar in sugar cookies, or the coffee in your coffee and cream, or the lens in your glasses, or the warhead on your nuclear weapon. But some of you have forgotten Christ, and his death and resurrection, as if he were not essential to life and eternity. He is, rather, *everything* related to life and eternity. This is why I say there is no hope for such an omission.

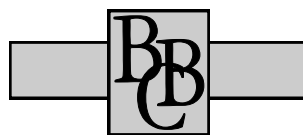
Christ's perfect life, his sacrificial and substitutionary death, and his victorious authenticating resurrection provide the foundation of all hope. As Dr. J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937) stated, "Christianity begins with a triumphant indicative." God declares that something is *done* on behalf of those who will come to him—Jesus lived without sin

as the perfect lamb, took on their sin and died in their place as the adequate sacrifice, and was raised bodily over the power of sin and death *for them*.

To think little or not at all about the centerpiece of history, is to guarantee that you will have no place in heaven. It is not enough to merely be religious by going to church on holidays or even every Sunday, or doing a few other well-meaning duties. It is not religion that makes you acceptable to God. You must be "accepted in the Beloved," that is, in *Christ's merits alone* (Eph. 1:6). Only trusting in Christ, resting your confidence in the one who lived, died, and was raised again, can assure you of heaven.

To believe otherwise, to add your little bit of religious activity to Christ as if you could impress God, is actually insulting to God. Either Christ is sufficient or he stands in need of you to satisfy God's wrath and to provide your acceptance before the Father. The declaration of Scripture is that he does not need

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Michael R. Karns, *Minister of Christian Education*
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Sunday

Morning Worship...9:30 AM
Sunday School.....11:10 AM
Evening Worship.....6:00 PM

Wednesday

Prayer Meeting.....7:00 PM
IMPACT Clubs.....7:00 PM
Teen Ministry.....7:00 PM

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you; rather, you need him, for without a living relationship with him through faith, you could not possibly be received by the Father. Christ cried out on the cross, "It is finished," meaning, it is paid in full. But "If righteousness comes by the law, then Christ died needlessly" (Gal. 2: 21).

You may say, "Anyone can begin a religion like Christianity." But you give away the fact that you think of Christianity as only a system of duties. You are wrong. It is about Christ and what he has done that could not be done by any other. If you are merely a moralist, using some Christian terminology at times, don't think you have become a true Christian. Moralism damns, in and of itself. Christianity is not based on what you do, but on Christ, his death,

and his resurrection. If this is too much to swallow now, you will avow it later, but sadly, when it is too late.

It does not have to be this way. You may put your trust in Christ, terminating your confidence in yourself as sufficient to please God. You may enjoy now, before the end of time and throughout the rest of time, an authentic relationship with him. There is a world, an eternal world, of difference between trusting him and dismissing him as will one day be completely understood.

It is Christ who will one day be seen by all, rightly, to be the center of everything, the apex of history, the hope of mankind, the reference point of the universe, the conversation and exaltation of heaven, the eternal joy of millions, and the eternal bane of even more. And it is *now*

that you should trust him.

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REALITY CHECK

Some say, "Religion is fine for you, but you have to understand that *I don't need Jesus.*" When I hear that, I realize I am talking with someone who has fallen asleep to reality. I can understand that a person might say to me, "R. C., I don't want Jesus." But when they say, "R. C., I don't need Jesus," I ask, "Have you lost your mind? Do you hear what you're saying?"

If there's no God, of course you don't need Jesus. If there is a God, and he is holy and you are holy, you don't need Jesus. But if God is and God is holy, and you are not holy, there is nothing in this universe you need more desperately than Jesus. A holy God will never negotiate justice. His justice must be satisfied or he is no longer good. He is no longer just. He is no longer holy. He is no longer God.

There are only two ways that God's justice can be satisfied with respect to your sin. Either you satisfy it or Christ satisfies it. You can satisfy it by being banished from God's presence forever. Or you can accept the satisfaction that Jesus Christ has made. Jesus was God. God had to go to the cross himself to pay the price.

—R. C. Sproul, *Running the Race: A Graduate's Guide to Life*

How Can I Keep from Singing!

by Greg Barkman

We've had two big events recently, and my heart is overflowing with gratitude for so many wonderful memories. I think I may be one of the most blessed persons on earth.

First, let me tell you about the fiftieth anniversary of our church, enjoyed by an appreciative congregation on the third Sunday of May this year. When we began in 1973, we first worshipped at E. M. Holt school with our original twenty-nine charter members, but soon gathered others as word of the ministry spread. After four months, we moved into a small church building on Moran Street in Burlington, which we quickly outgrew before we were able to construct the first unit of our present location on Kirkpatrick Road in 1976.

Fast forward to May 21, 2023. I was overwhelmed by the approximately one hundred guests who joined our regular congregation for the fiftieth anniversary service. Visitors arrived from Maine, New York, Virginia, Tennessee, South Carolina, Florida, and North Carolina, and likely other states which I cannot immediately recall. Many of these were former members returning to express thanksgiving to God for blessings received while part of this congregation.

Testimonies rendered by members and former members proved to be the highlight of the day, as each one pointed to the goodness of God. I wish we could have heard more, but time compelled us to a final "amen" after a wonderful season of thanksgiving. Someone suggested we repeat the same format in the future. Although we have already discussed a potential program of sacred music for

Homecoming, 2024, this suggestion will be thoughtfully weighed. I can scarcely think of a better way to glorify God for His blessings upon this ministry.

I hope I'm not stating the obvious when I remind you that it's unusual for a church to celebrate a fiftieth anniversary with the same pastor

***"All praise to Him
who reigns above in
majesty supreme,
who gave His Son
for man to die,
that He might man
redeem. Blessed
be the name of
the Lord!"***

for all those years. It does happen, but not often. Pastors move to other churches. Pastors grow old and retire. Pastors burn out and leave the ministry altogether. Leading the same congregation during its entire history is a special blessing from God, not to be taken for granted. I was twenty-five and fresh out of school when we began in 1973. Now, I'm seventy-five, and fresh out of energy in 2023. But no, that's not exactly true! The Lord has renewed my strength, and I do not feel that I am ready to retire just yet. In fact, I am enjoying more energy now than I have had for several years thanks to a recent hip replacement.

When I was diagnosed with cancer in 1984, my doctor at Duke Medical Center told me to expect about fifteen years of good health followed by ten years of failing health leading to an early death. The words of Psalm 118:17, comforted me during the grueling months of chemo. "I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord." I renewed my commitment to faithfully preach the Word as long as God gave me life. When treatments ended and cancer was gone, I asked God to help me declare the sovereignty of God in salvation as represented by the Doctrines of Grace, sometimes called Calvinism. I had embraced these truths in 1979, after an intense struggle, but was reluctant to preach them for fear of serious disruption. God used cancer to overcome my fear of man, teaching me to look to God alone. When one is staring death in the face, the disapproval of men fades significantly. The rest is history. Beacon not only survived, but is thriving on this reformed doctrinal understanding, and we have now arrived safely at a major milestone strong and healthy. I have no idea how long the Lord will enable me to pastor, but as long as He gives sufficient strength and the church desires my ministry, I am willing to continue. I am keenly aware that I live on borrowed time and God may end my ministerial career whenever it pleases Him. What could be a more worthy use of the energies God has extended than to continue to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ? I know of no better way to manifest gratitude to God than to give these unexpected years back to Him in devoted labor.

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The second big event was our recent vacation to Italy. Marti and I previously enjoyed two Italian vacations, first in 2014, and again in 2018, to different parts of Tuscany. We have fallen in love with this beautiful country and its people. The first trip was a generous gift from our church in recognition of forty years of ministry, and the second was to celebrate my seventieth birthday. We decided to do it again in 2020 for our fiftieth wedding anniversary. We booked three hotels and were getting ready to schedule flights when Covid struck, eliminating international travel. We postponed until 2021, but Covid still blocked our plans. Travel resumed on a limited basis in 2022, but with serious restrictions. This year, international tourism is booming again and our long-anticipated trip to the Amalfi Coast finally materialized. We celebrated our fifty-third wedding anniversary and at the same time, fifty years of pastoral ministry in the town of Amalfi, on the southwest coast of Italy.

There is neither time nor space to describe the details of this wonderful journey enabled by God's kindness and the generous encour-

agement of our church. I can tell you that the Amalfi Coast is as beautiful as we imagined. We dined in restaurants overlooking the Mediterranean Sea. We walked amidst the ancient ruins of Pompei, destroyed by an erupting volcano. We swam in crystal blue waters so clear that the bottom, more than twenty feet below, appeared to be only two or three feet away. We explored more shops that I can count, examining wares not often seen in America, a few of which we brought home to family and friends. Driving a small white Fiat Panda, we got lost more times than I can tell, but always found our way eventually, never missing a flight or an appointment. We were able to spend several delightful hours with Renato and Cheri Giuliani, missionaries to Rome whom our church has been privileged to support for many years.

What more can I say? I am blessed. God has been so good to Marti and me. We are grateful for the evidence that our four daughters are following Christ with their husbands. We are blessed to see our nine grandchildren being trained in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. We rejoice that our church is healthy and growing, attracting new people as

never before. We are amazed at the good health and physical energy we enjoy at this stage of life. All this, and heaven too? I am unable to render sufficient praise to God for all His benefits to an unworthy sinner, rescued by sovereign love to belong to the King. "All praise to Him who reigns above in majesty supreme, who gave His Son for man to die, that He might man redeem. Blessed be the name of the Lord!"

Christian ministry is not about technique and it is certainly not about the latest fads or glittering programs. It is about the ministry of the Word—most importantly, the preaching and teaching of the Word of God. Gospel ministry and the preaching of the Word of God are not just an initial strategy—there is no Plan B. God's glory is in the preaching of his Word, and the evidence of the Word's power is a harvest of transformed lives.

—Al Mohler, *Tell Me the Stories of Jesus*

On the Feminine Side

by Marti Barkman

Not something I had contemplated, but here we were, celebrating 50 years of marriage. It was a bit late as most things were during Covid days. We had marked the actual date three years ago with a few days in Abingdon, Virginia, a charming little town to visit when it isn't nearly closed down for a pandemic. Now our destination was Italy's Amalfi Coast, beautiful beyond description. I have to admit to embarking on this adventure with some trepidation, due to having read too many articles about driving the coast. Titles such as "How to drive the Amalfi Coast and come home alive" tend toward a sense of foreboding. But the driving is an important part of the experience.

The trip from here to there was particularly enjoyable, with the long overseas/overnight flight on a European airline. Sitting in roomy seats enjoying incredible Danish served with Turkish coffee versus pretzels and coke...yes!! We arrived in Italy feeling quite refreshed thanks to some good hours of sleep, compliments of Advil PM. The getting-lost part of the adventure began as soon as we picked up the tiny Fiat rental car. The drive was from Naples to the town of Amalfi and tho' we'd never been there before, some elements seemed familiar. Road signs that don't exist, and when they do, we can't read Italian. But then scenes 'just like the pictures', the towering cliffs of the coastline with ancient buildings seeming to rise from the water and reach to the sky, the Mediterranean blue of the ocean, and finding this the region of lemon trees in the season of full fruit. Think of lemons the size of small cantaloupes scooped out and filled with lemon sorbet for a cool treat in the hot Mediterranean summer.

The real driving adventure began the next day and, well, you'd just have to have been there. Hairpin curves going up and up and up the mountains, with traffic flying in both directions on roads so narrow you sometimes had to fold in the side mirror. The ubiquitous motorcycles

took the center as their 'lane', weaving in and out of traffic at terrifying speeds, some with women riders wearing stilettos! But I must include the positives: 1. Not a single fender bender did we see; 2. We returned home alive; 3. And Greg and I are in agreement on this: Once in a lifetime is enough! The scenery, when you could take your eyes off the road, was simply breathtaking. Four beautiful days and nights brought an end to our stay in Hotel Lara, 250 steps up from the road...but with an elevator dug in solid rock.

To get to the Isle of Capri, we took the ferry. Since motion sickness is a reality for me, I purchased something which worked great but which put me into A-fib, so the ferry ride was a bit of a blur. The island is beautiful but like Amalfi, was crowded. The small bed and breakfast where we stayed had fruit-laden lemon trees and ancient olive trees in the garden (yard), where we enjoyed breakfast each morning. Enjoying the beach required a trek of 503 steps down to the water where we enjoyed our anniversary dinner at a beachside restaurant. And then those same 503 steps took us back UP (!) to our room. Driving was less of an event than in Amalfi since cars are not allowed on the ferry, so we were limited to the really crazy taxi and bus drivers to keep our BP elevated.

And then, back across the water to the mainland, where we settled in at Golden View, a traditional style hotel, high on the mountainside, above the large city of Sorrento. We were still in lemon and olive country, and could see the huge nets rolled up between tree trunks which would be unrolled to collect the olives when shaken from the trees. We stayed three nights, and this was the time and place for serious shopping: Something for each of the nine grands, eight sons-in-law and daughters, and a few extras. Main consideration? It had to fit in our luggage and weigh as little as possible. Mementos from our amazing vacation!

Memento—souvenir, token,

keepsake, remembrance. When first I typed the word I spelled it 'momento.' It looked right because that's how it is usually pronounced and an acceptable spelling. But memento is related to remembering, a token kept to remind us of something we don't want to forget. But our memories are often made of moments. Moments of places, of people, of words spoken and deeds done. Sweet or painful, relived with pleasure almost as great as the event, others too painful to bear remembering. They can be long, drawn out events or a scene that flashes past in a few seconds, but evoking emotions that remain for years to come. The souvenirs we bring home to others are not of their memories but ours. We hope when our children wear the caps, eat the chocolate, use the aprons and the lemon bags, they will find them special because they came from a land far away. But it won't be quite the same as going there.

The realities of our present lives are filled with difficulties that become difficult memories. How will we view these trials in the setting of perfection, in the company of saints whom we love and the presence of our Savior? Romans 8:18 gives us a perspective on how we will remember life on earth, and help us with how we view it now. "Our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed to us." And the mementoes won't be a trinket given to us by someone else, but eternal life, bought and paid for by Jesus Christ. That will be glory!

ABIDING IN HIM

by Bob La Tour

Why this? Why now? Why me? In the midst of physical and emotional pain, the most devout believers can be tempted to ask, “Why, God?” The motive that prompts the question, and the attitude with which we ask it, say much about how we respond to the script of a sovereign God for us. In studying the lives of Bible characters like Paul, we learn that the triumphs and tragedies that are personal to us right now can have a far-reaching impact upon others for good or evil depending upon how we respond to them.

Paul begins his second letter to the Corinthians with “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.” Paul knew the meaning of tribulation like few other believers. In chapter eleven, he lists mile-markers on his difficult journey of service that included “stripes above measure,” dungeons, beatings with rods, stoning, shipwrecks, exhaustion, dangerous journeys, threats to his life, hunger, thirst, fasting’s, cold, nakedness, and the burden of his great concern for all the churches. He concludes the list with two questions for his critics. “Who is weak, and I am not weak?” “Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?” With utmost candor, Paul could say, “Been there! Done that!” Yet, he never questioned God with a judgmental attitude! As a matter of fact, in Romans 9, Paul rebuked those who would question God’s sovereign right as Creator. “But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, ‘Why have you made me like this?’ Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor

and another for dishonor?”

One particular on-going struggle in his life is most instructive and encouraging. In chapter twelve, Paul wrote of the reality of personal pain and God’s reasons for it in his

*Glorify God
by going beyond
merely yielding to
His providence.
By faith, embrace
His script for your life
as you trust and obey!*

life. “For though I might desire to boast, I will not be a fool; for I will speak the truth. But I refrain, lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me to be or hears from me. And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.”

Somewhere in the throes of this “thorn in the flesh” Paul came to understand that its purpose was for the glory of God and thereby for his own good. Prior to understanding that God was protecting him from the prideful propensity that we all have, Paul requested that God would remove the thorn from him. “Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord *three* times that it might depart from me.” Paul’s repetition reveals the fervency with which he prayed, much like our Lord in Gethsemane. The response that Paul received was not what he prayed for. He was to learn that God’s response was far superior to his request! “And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient

for you, for My strength is made perfect in (your) weakness.’”

Once Paul understood that God’s providence always has the purpose of glorifying Himself and grooming His children, he exclaimed, “Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. *For when I am weak, then I am strong.*” Paul understood that it is only when we acknowledge our weakness that we can truly benefit from Christ’s strength. There are times when God must “knock our legs out from under us” time and again to show us how weak we really are!

Once Paul understood the reason for the thorn, his attitude was that if trials are the vehicles through which God pours abundant grace, then **I will embrace His trial that I might “glory” in His grace!** Recall that Paul began his letter by referring to God “who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.” “Imagine the impact that Paul’s thorn in the flesh and the trials that he endured had on fellow believers who witnessed his submission and his perseverance. Imagine the impact on believers of David’s day and since who saw and have read about his prayer for his child and God’s providence that took him. Imagine the impact on believers of Moses’ day and since when this one who spoke to God as a man would speak to his friend was denied entrance into Canaan after all that he had endured. Imagine the impact of believers in Job’s day and since when this man whom God Himself considered unequalled in righteousness and piety lost the very ones for whom

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he had interceded. Above all, imagine the impact on believers of Christ's day and since if God had chosen to remove His cup of suffering!" (A. Barnes).

One writer stated that "to glory in afflictions and tribulations is an high pitch of holiness and grace, but attainable." Asaph wrote, "My flesh and my heart fail, BUT GOD is the strength of my heart and my portion forever!" (Psa.73:26). Take heart, believer! Embracing God's mysterious and sometimes troubling providence is a means to glorifying Him, growing through the sufficiency of His Word and gladly resting in His grace! Our weakness often necessitates that, as we embrace His providence, we cry, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24).

Our pain magnifies His grace. The deeper our pain, the greater His grace. The greater His grace, the greater His glory.

Abiding in Him

My heart and my hands were weary
From the burden of my load.
I pled with God to change my lot
And grant an easier road.

From deep within my soul He said,
"I'll strengthen and provide.
Abide in Me, My precious child,
When you are sorely tried."

God showed me that the path I'd trod
Was fashioned step by step
Through fires that purged the dross from me
His image to reflect.

I learned of God as n'er before,
And sought to seek His face.
The greater was my soul-deep pain,
The sweeter was His grace.

THE BEACON BROADCAST

Monday thru Friday

WITA 1490 AM (Knoxville, TN)	9:30 a.m.
WBAG 1150 AM (Burlington, NC)	12:15 p.m.
WBAG 105.9 FM (Burlington, NC)	12:15 p.m.
WTRU 830 AM (Winston-Salem, NC)	2:00 p.m.
WDZY 1290 AM (Richmond, VA)	6:15 a.m.
	10:00 a.m.
WDZY 103.3 FM (Richmond, VA)	6:15 a.m.
	10:00 a.m.
WSKY 1230 AM (Asheville, NC)	7:15 a.m.
WYYC 1250 AM (York, PA)	5:00 p.m.
WYYC 98.1 FM (York, PA)	5:00 p.m.

Sunday

WCRU 960 AM (Charlotte, NC)	9:30 a.m.
WBAG 1150 AM (Burlington, NC)	10:30 a.m.
WTRU 830 AM (Winston-Salem, NC)	10:30 a.m.
WDRU 1030 AM (Raleigh, NC)	10:30 a.m.
WLES 590 AM (Richmond, VA)	10:30 a.m.
WGNQ mixlr.com/wgng-radio (M-F)	8:45-9 a.m. & 4:45-5:00 p.m.
	(Internet station based in Greenville/Washington, NC)

Monday thru Sunday

WXTH-LP 101.7 FM (Richwood, WV)	10:05 a.m.
	10:05 p.m.

BEACON HIGHLIGHTS FOR JULY

CALENDAR

04	Independence Day
05	Fellowship Meal
07	Montana Missions Team <i>Departs</i>
09	Lord's Table
11	Elders/Deacons Meeting
14	Montana Missions Team <i>Returns</i>
16	Members Meeting

MEMBER BIRTHDAYS

02	Darryl McElhannon
03	Johnny Faust
04	Donnan Faucette Tommy Marley
06	Jonathan Freeman
12	Linda Zachary
13	Chris Wilburn
14	Jon Kucewicz
15	Hunter Strength
16	Frances Easley
19	Little Norris
21	Bob Caldwell Bruce Councilman
23	Ryan Cardwell
27	Randy Phillips Joan Zensen
28	Leann McElhannon
30	Jamie Beck
31	Mike Redd

MISSIONARY BIRTHDAYS

06	Lila Green*
07	Eunjoo Andersen Sarah Vahala*
08	David Andersen
09	Tim Bixby
12	Wanda Taylor
14	Hannah Green Armando Borsini
20	David Cassells Amy Jensen
25	Chris Hill

To Our Beacon BEAM Readers:

Please notify us by email — beaconbaptist@beaconbaptist.com
or phone (336) 226-5205 if you no longer desire to receive the Beacon BEAM
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beaconbaptist.com, as well as past issues.

*We express our heartfelt
sympathy to the families of:*

Beth Cheshier
Steve Davis
Ruby Tester

The Beacon Beam
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