

INTRODUCTION

We have completed CONNECTED month, but I encourage you to keep on wearing your CONNECTED bracelets. I originally asked you to wear them for at least 40 days which expires February 20, but you don't have to "disconnect" then. If you've had an interesting bracelet story, please email it to me at pastor@mail.gabc.org. We're putting a lot of the bracelet stories on our weekly electronic Life Support newsletter.

Some of them are pretty funny. Tina Morrison emailed me this week saying she is the office manager for a local real estate company. Her boss passed by her without saying anything, and then she turned back without getting too close and said, "Tina, what's wrong with you?" Tina said, "What do you mean?" Her boss said, "I see you're wearing a bracelet that says you're INFECTED. What do you have?" Tina started laughing and explained to her what it means to be connected. Tina wrote she actually IS infected with Jesus, but she doesn't recommend we use that slogan for a future theme.

There's a lot going on in our world these days. Someone sent me the following email entitled "Why are we still there?" Every night on the news we hear of Americans dying there. It's impossible to police all the territory. The government is unstable and in the process of changing. Troublemakers are crossing the border by the thousands. Why are we still there? Because California is worth saving!

You probably thought that was about Iraq, huh? Well, there are problems all over the world, even here in America. You can't avoid trouble, but you can sometimes keep it from spreading. We need to pray our President and our troops as we face the challenge of this war.

After the detour into "Get Connected" we're back in I Peter, studying God's Word verse by verse. As we consider our text, take a moment and glance at the verses beginning with verse 19. The context is that Jesus Christ, like a perfect Lamb shed His blood for us. Verse 20 says Jesus existed before the creation of this world, but *now* He has been revealed for our sakes. Then pick up with I Peter 1:21-25:

Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your FAITH and HOPE are in God. Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere LOVE for your brothers, LOVE one another deeply, from the heart. For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring WORD of God. For, (Quotation from Isaiah 40:6-8) "all men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the WORD of the Lord stands forever."

Today's message is entitled "The World's Greatest Gospel Quartet." When I was growing up as a child in L.A. (Lower Alabama) I was exposed to a lot of gospel quartet music. I can remember my parents loading the three of us kids into our trusty 1955 Chevrolet station wagon and driving down to Graceville, Florida (about an hour away) for an all-night gospel singing (it's pronounced "sanging" down there). The sanging was held in a high school stadium and different groups sang all night long. I don't remember much about it other than I slept on a pallet my mother made in

the back of the station wagon. It's the closest to camping out we ever did. And every Sunday morning before church, we tuned our black-and-white television to one of the three stations it could pick up and watch "Gospel Jubilee."

Later, when I was in high school I was part of a gospel quartet. We dressed in white suits, white shoes, white hats, dark navy blue shirts and white ties. We named ourselves The Ghostriders. Sideburns were "in" back then, and I couldn't grow them very well, but I discovered my sisters eyebrow pencil. One of our songs was a quartet favorite made famous by the Florida Boys: "On the wings of a snow white dove; He sends his pure sweet love; A sign from above; on the wings of a dove."

So, I know something about gospel quartets. Take a moment to examine our text again. I want to pick out four great words that form what I'm calling The World's Greatest Gospel Quartet. In verse 21 circle the word "faith." Then in the same verse circle the word "hope." Then in verse 22 circle the word "love"—it appears twice. For the final member of our quartet, look at the last of verse 23. Do you see the phrase "enduring word of God?" Circle the word "word." Today we're going to talk about Faith, Hope, Love, and the Word—the world's greatest gospel quartet. Now I could devote an entire series of messages to each one of those great concepts, but for our purpose today, let me just talk about each member of this quartet for a few minutes.

1. FAITH IS THE LEAD SINGER

Every quartet has a lead singer who carries the melody line. In much the same way, faith leads the way in the Christian life. The Bible says, "Without faith it is impossible to please God, for anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." (Hebrews 11:6) Faith is not some obscure philosophical concept God has hidden from mankind. We operate within the realm of faith in many areas of our life. For instance, if you were driving your car and approached a bridge you would make a faith choice: Can this bridge support the weight of my car and all the other cars on it? And chances are, you would make a faith choice and drive your car across it. By doing so you were placing your faith in the architects who designed the bridge, the manufacturers who made the steel, and the contractors who built the bridge. You practice faith every time you drive across a bridge.

If you were driving up toward a rickety-looking bridge, you would be faced with a faith choice. Will this bridge support the weight of my car? You'll probably say, "Nope!" and turn around and try to find another way across the river. In much the same way, you are faced with a faith choice about God. Do you think He can support you safely through this life and the life to come?

You say, "There's one huge difference, I can *see* those two bridges. One of them looked like it would support me and the other didn't." Correct. That's the difference. You can't see God. The Bible says we walk by *faith* not by *sight*.

But we often put our faith in people and things we can neither see nor understand. For instance, whenever you fly in an airplane, you're putting faith in a pilot who is hidden behind the cockpit door. That's faith. Whenever you plug in an electrical appliance, you're trusting that power will be produced from a source generated many miles away that you don't understand. That's faith.

All I want you to see is that faith is not a religious concept. We all exercise faith many times a day. The difference is that for faith to be *saving* faith, it must be faith in God. It's the object of faith that is important.

In verse 21 Peter writes that we believe in God who raised Jesus from the dead. It's not enough to simply believe that there is a God. Saving faith is believing that God literally raised Jesus from the dead. That's the key faith point in saving faith.

The Bible says, "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." (Romans 10:9) Why doesn't it say, "believe in your heart that God created the world you'll be saved?" Why doesn't it say, "Believe in your heart that Jesus died for your sins you'll be saved?" Why doesn't it say, "Believe that God will one day judge the world?" It's because faith in Jesus' resurrection is the only saving faith. Without the resurrection of Jesus, we wouldn't even remember His teaching, or even His death.

Most of you know by now that one of the most controversial films in history will be released on February 25, 2004. It's Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ." It will be shown here in Tyler. Over the years, I've said that if there was ever a realistic portrayal of the horror of the torture and crucifixion of Jesus it would have to be rated R. If you're over the age of 13, I think you should see the movie, and we're even going to show a preview of it in the next couple of weeks. You can see it alone for the first time, but then invite all your unchurched family members and friends and take them. I don't want to give away the ending, but the movie follows the book—after the crucifixion, God raises Jesus from the dead. Do you believe God raised Jesus from the dead? That's the kind of faith that will lead you right into salvation.

2. HOPE IS THE FIRST TENOR

If you've ever heard a gospel quartet sing, you know the first tenor is the one who sings the high notes. If you've ever noticed, when a singer is reaching for a high note, he doesn't hang his head low, instead he stretches his neck and holds his head back and looks up to the sky. To me that's a great picture of hope because hope never makes you hang your head, it always makes you hold your head up and look to heaven.

In verse 21 Peter writes that the object of our hope is that God glorified Jesus. To understand what the glorification of Jesus was, you have to understand Jesus' words in John 7. He said, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." By this he meant the Spirit whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified." (John 7:37-39) It was only after the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus that the Holy Spirit was given on the Day of Pentecost. So, when Jesus arrived back into heaven, He experienced His glorification.

Now that's history, so what does that have to do with hope? Our hope is that just as Jesus received a glorified body, that we, too, will one day experience the same kind of change. Paul writes in Romans 8: "We ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were

saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. If we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently." (Romans 8:23-25)

The testimony of every Christian is that there is more to come. One day, our bodies will be changed to be like Jesus. As one old Christian brother said, "Thank God, I'm not what I *used* to be. And Bless, God, I'm not all that I *ought* to be. But Praise God, I'm not what I'm *gonna* be!" One day we see Him face to face and we will be like Him. He is our *hope*. That's why Paul writes, "Looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ." (Titus 2:13 NKJV)

Remember, our acrostic for HOPE? It's Having Only Positive Expectations! We're waiting eagerly and patiently for that day when we will see Jesus. While so much of the world is facing hopelessness, we are people of hope! Like that first tenor, lift up your eyes, for your redemption draws nigh!

3. LOVE IS THE BARITONE

Most quartets have a baritone. That's the guy with the rich, mellow voice. The baritone has a Bing Crosby voice that adds richness and timbre to the quartet. That's what love does—it adds richness to our lives.

When I say "Philadelphia" what do you think of? A city in Pennsylvania where our forefathers met to declare our independence? Do you think of the Phillies, or Eagles? Maybe you think of a Philly cheese steak sandwich. Or when I say "Philadelphia" you may think of Rocky climbing those steps and standing at the top as the Rocky theme plays—or not.

Peter uses the word "Philadelphia" in verse 22. It comes from two Greek words, *phileo* which means "fondness" and *adelphos* which means "brother." The combination of these two words equals "brotherly love." In this passage, Peter mentions two different kinds of love. The first is this kind of brotherly love we are to show to one another.

Then later in that verse he uses the word *agape* when he writes that we are to love each other "deeply from the heart." The word means "fervently, or passionately." The word literally means "to stretch out." It's a picture of a horse galloping at full speed. As the horse increases its speed, it stretches out its neck. That's the kind of agape love we are to have for each other. Like a mellow baritone, it's that kind of love that adds richness to our lives.

Now, not everyone is easy to love. In fact, some people are downright difficult to love. Once in a *Peanuts* Cartoon, Charlie Brown approached Lucy who is in her Psychiatric booth that says, "The doctor is in—25 cents." Lucy says, "I hate everything. I hate everyone. I hate the whole wide world!" Charlie Brown says, "But I thought you had inner peace." Lucy says, "I do have inner peace, but I have outer obnoxiousness." Maybe you know someone like that.

Remember, love is not a feeling. It is a choice. Love is not some tickling in the heart you can't itch. It's not some emotional spasm, love is a decision.

For a follower of Jesus, love is not an option, it's a command. The Bible says, "Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us." (I John 4:11-12)

The best way to let others see God is for you to demonstrate love. In his book, *The Myth of the Greener Grass*, J. Allan Petersen relates a story told by minister and writer Dr. George Crane. A woman came into Dr. Crane's office full of hatred toward her husband. She said, "I don't just want to get rid of him, I want to hurt him. Before I divorce him, I want to hurt him as much as he's hurt me." Dr. Crane suggested an unusual plan. He said, "Okay, go home and ACT as if you really love your husband. Tell him how much he means to you. Go out of your way to be as kind, considerate, and generous to him as you possibly can. Spare no efforts to please him and to compliment him. Make him believe you really love him. After you've convinced him that you cannot live without him, then drop the bomb. Tell him you're getting a divorce. THAT will really hurt him."

With revenge in her eyes, she smiled and said, "Beautiful. Beautiful. Will *he* ever be surprised!" And then she went home and played her role with enthusiasm. For two months she acted out showing him kindness, caring, sharing, and giving. When she didn't return, Dr. Crane called her and asked, "Are you ready now to go through the divorce?" "Divorce?" She exclaimed. "Never! I discovered I really do love him—and he's a different man." Her actions changed her feelings. Motion resulted in emotion. The ability to love is established not so much by fervent promises as by often-repeated deeds of kindness.

We know the importance of faith, hope, and love. In I Corinthians 13, even the Apostle Paul mentions this trio. But there's another member of this quartet we need to meet.

4. THE WORD IS THE BASS SINGER

Every good quartet has a bass singer who can go low and stay low. It is the bass singer who provides the harmonic foundation for a quartet. He holds that low note that undergirds the song.

In the same way, the fourth member of our quartet undergirds everything in the Christian life. It is the Word of God that provides a strong foundation for our faith. Peter uses three adjectives to describe God's Word in verse 23. God's word is imperishable, living, and enduring. The Bible is imperishable; it doesn't have an expiration date. The Bible is living; God has breathed His life into it. The Bible is enduring; it will never be out-of-date. When you finish reading other books you lay them down and go to another one. But you'll never finish reading the Bible.

Throughout history, the Bible has had plenty of skeptics. But the skeptics are gone and the Word of God endures. In the late 1700s, the French atheist, Voltaire, predicted that "within a hundred years of his life that Christianity and the Bible would be swept from existence and pass into the dust-bin of history." He died in 1778, and by 1828, the Geneva Bible Society had bought his house and was using it for the printing and distribution of Bibles.

Today, people are trying to change the Bible fit their lifestyles, but the Bible is unchanging. One night several naval vessels were on an exercise in which radio silence was being observed. The

captain on the bridge of one ship saw a light ahead on a collision course with his vessel. He signaled, "Alter your course ten degrees south." The reply was signaled back, "No, you alter YOUR course ten degrees north." The Captain signaled back, "I am a captain, alter your course ten degrees south." The reply came back, "I am a seaman third-class. Alter your course ten degrees north." By this time the captain was getting angry and he signaled, "I repeat, alter your course ten degrees south. I am a battleship." Then he got this reply, "To battleship: alter your course ten degrees north. I am a lighthouse."

Many people have tried to alter the Word of God and have ended up on the rocks of a wasted life. His Word really is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our paths. Peter quotes Isaiah's powerful tribute to God's Word, "The grass withers and the flowers fade, but the Word of the Lord endures forever." That promise is repeated throughout the Bible. Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away." (Mark 13:31)

CONCLUSION

I've always loved to read. I started reading the Hardy Boys Mystery series when I was about 9 or 10. Since then, it seems I've always had a book in my hand. I've read all kinds of books: novels, Classical literature, poetry, textbooks, and Christian books. But there is one major difference about all those books and this book. The Word of God will stand forever. All other writers and their writings will one day be forgotten, but this book will never be forgotten. Peter quotes the wonderful words of Isaiah when he wrote "The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever."

From A to Z, there have been some wonderful writers throughout history, but none of their works compare with the Word of God. The artistry of Aesop cannot approach the authority of the Almighty. The best of Browning does not burn with the brightness of this blessed book. The charm of Chaucer cannot compare with this compilation of the comments of Christ! The dreams of Dante dwindle beside this dissertation of Deity! The emotions of Emerson do not equal the excellent expressions of this evangelistic edition! The fantasies of Frost fail beside the fullness of our foundation of faith. The gems of Gandhi give way to the greatness of God's gospel of grace! The heroics of Homer are humbled by the harmonies of heaven. The imaginations of Irving are insignificant beside the inspiring insights of the Infinite One. The janglings of Joyce are jaded beside the journalistic jewels of Jesus. The keenest of Keats can't keep up with the keynote of the King! The lyrics of Longfellow are lackluster beside the language of love from our Living Lord! The manuscripts of Milton melt beside the magnificent message of our Master. The notes of Newton are nullified by the noble nature of this New Testament. The opinions of O'Neill are overwhelmed by the oratory of the Only Begotten. The patterns of Poe are pitiful compared to this powerful prescription for peace. The quotes of Quarlers do not qualify with the quality of these quotations. The rhymes of Ruskin recede before this remarkable revelation of our redemption. The stories of Shakespeare shrink beside the simple salvation story of our Savior. The tales of Tennyson are trite compared to this tremendous testimony of truth. The utterings of Untermeyer are undermined by the unveiling of the Unknown. The virtue of Virgil vanishes beside the verses of this volume. The writings of Wordsworth are weak beside the wealth of this wonderful Word. The exactings of Xenophen are exceeded by the expressions of the Exalted One. The yarns of Yeats yield to the yearnings of our Yokefellow. And the zeal of Zola is zero

compared to the Zenith of Zion! Hallelujah! Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away." (Mark 13:31)

NAMES OF WRITERS:

AESOP

Robert BROWNING

Geoffrey CHAUCER

DANTE

Ralph Waldo EMERSON

Robert FROST

Mahatma GHANDHI

HOMER

Washington IRVING

James JOYCE

John KEATS

Henry Wadsworth LONGFELLOW

John MILTON

Isaac NEWTON

Eugene O'NEILL

Edgar Allen POE

Francis QUARLES

John RUSKIN

William SHAKESPEARE

Alfred Lord TENNYSON

Louis UNTERMEYER VIRGIL

William WORDSWORTH

XENOPHON

William Butler YEATS

Emile ZOLA

(adapted and expanded from something I read years ago by Dr. Lewis Lehman in *Songtime*)

OUTLINE

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"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord' and BELIEVE in your heart that GOD RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD, you will be saved." *Romans 10:9*

2. HOPE IS THE FIRST TENOR

"We ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we WAIT EAGERLY for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this HOPE we are saved. But HOPE that is seen is no HOPE at all. If we hope for what we do not yet have, we WAIT for it PATIENTLY." *Romans 8:23-25*

3. LOVE IS THE BARITONE

"Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us." *I John 4:11-12*

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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes