

“These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily *to find out* whether these things were so.” Acts 17:11

We have officially transitioned into a new church name. In this newsletter, we look at current changes, those to come, and member reviews.

Pastor’s Pen (The Cornerstone)

March-April 2021

By Pastor Paul Bradford

As of 2/21/21 we officially began using the name "Cornerstone Church." The Apostle Paul tells us that the church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone," and that "the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord." (Ephesians 2:20-21) Our name will serve as a constant reminder that Christ must be at the foundation of all we do, and that our ultimate purpose, as God's temple, is to bring him glory.

In addition to a new name, we've unveiled our new mission statement, "Building courageous, authentic Christ followers."

Building reminds us that we share in Christ's work of building his church. Paul tells us the church "grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work." (Ephesians 4:16)

Christ followers are disciples, those who are following Rabbi Jesus, trusting in him as Savior, and ever growing to more fully live as Jesus would live if he was living our life. That's the Great Commission – the church is called to "make disciples" (Matthew 28:19). That includes leading people to Jesus (Evangelism), and seeking together to more

fully show forth in our lives the life of our Lord (Discipleship).

But we want to be courageous Christ followers, willing to risk, to step out in faith, to proclaim Christ, to reach out to our community, to take steps that bring change in our personal lives and relationships, and to make an impact on the culture around us. Our culture today is becoming increasingly hostile towards Christians, so we must rise up with courage in Christ equal to the task. "Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong." (1 Corinthians 16:13)

And we want to be authentic Christ followers, the real deal, people who are living out our God given purpose as individuals and as a congregation. We want to be a community where we know people will be genuine, and where we can be honest without fear. Where we can grow without being judged, where we can find forgiveness and not condemnation, and where we can find the truth that will

empower us to make lasting changes in our lives and relationships. We want to be a place of genuine love filled genuine people, and that will require courage! "Let love be genuine." (Romans 12:9)

We are Cornerstone Church, founded on Christ, glorifying him in all we do.

Our mission, our end goal, is *building courageous, authentic Christ followers*.

Our calling is great, it's something worthy of us giving our lives to accomplish. Fulfilling God's mission will require us to be bold, to be real, and to give of our time, our hearts,



and our resources. But the one who called us is worthy of our all. So let us give our utmost for his highest!

In Christ our Cornerstone,
Pastor Paul

Organ DVD

By Joyce Boender

As previously announced, our current organ is scheduled to be moved to its new “home” (Trinity English Lutheran Church in Fort Wayne, Indiana) in mid-May. Some of you remember when it was installed in our church and all the fund-raising efforts and planning it took to give it a “home” at Pella II. We are thankful for those efforts and the blessing it has brought to us over the years. It has been requested that a DVD be made with our organists playing some “favorites”. If you are interested in a DVD, please contact Andrea Van Waardhuizen (andreavanw@gmail.com or 641-660-9451).

And “stay tuned” for information about our new organ in the next church newsletter. To God be the glory!

Patterns of Evidence

Reviewed by Joel Vander Molen

For many of us, reading the Bible has been part of regular life since a young age. The accounts in the Old Testament about the Israelites are familiar to us and we have faith the events happened as recorded. Unfortunately, the world around us is rapidly changing. A growing number of

people do not believe God’s Word and say it is only myth and not based on real events. If pressed, could you say why you believe what is written, and not solely by faith?

Filmmaker and researcher Tim Mahoney went out to answer that question. Over a 20-year period, he interviewed top archeologists, theologians, professors, and writers about historical evidence of the Israelites and the Exodus. Some experts had grown up in conservative Christian homes, but had now abandoned the faith due to their findings. Others are teachers or authors that have had their faith increased due to what is found in history. The result of his research came out as four documentaries, over two-hours each, detailing the findings and letting



the viewer decide on the answer, based on the evidence.

Exodus

The first film covers the exodus from Egypt. Mahoney looks at when it happened and what

archaeologists have found. Based on Exodus 12:37, most mainstream archaeologists believe the exodus happened during the time of Pharaoh Rameses.

He was a powerful ruler of Egypt and would have been a formidable force to go against. However, excavations made in the city of Rameses don’t show evidence of the Israelites. Nothing around this time period fits what the Bible documents of the departure from Egypt. As a result, many of the experts say no evidence exists and the biblical record is false. However, Mahoney doesn’t stop his research with this finding.

Looking at what the Bible reports, some archeologists looked for a time when Egypt had a massive famine, as recorded in

Genesis. They also search for a time when the country was destroyed by plagues and a rapid departure of a people group. All of these are clearly seen, but at an earlier time period than most experts expect.

Evidence for Joseph and his brothers has been discovered, including a tomb with a statue of someone wearing a coat of many colors. A writing from an Egyptian scribe also accurately records the plagues as written in the Bible, but it is dismissed as a fable for being earlier than expected. With further evidence showing inaccuracies of Egyptian timelines, the film concludes showing where the events do occur, exactly as recorded in scripture.

The Moses Controversy

Recently, a growing number of skeptics claim that Moses could not be the author of the Pentateuch, or Torah, because writing didn't exist at his time. Mahoney investigates this claim in his second film by looking at ancient writing and how scripts develop. Many experts claim that Hebrew did not come into existence until hundreds of years after Moses lived and the writings attributed to him must have been compiled by later authors based on oral tradition.

In Deuteronomy 6, God commands Israel to write His laws not only on their hearts, but also doorposts and other areas. From this, and other passages, it seemed clear that the Israelites were able to read and write. Researching further, a new form of writing was seen alongside Egyptian hieroglyphs that few had given much attention. Looking at this, scholars in language development showed how different forms of writing were adapted among different people groups. What many dismissed as not being Hebrew, could easily

be read by people familiar with the language.

Christian professors also noted when the first written alphabet was first seen. Using timelines demonstrated from the previous film, the new form of writing appeared around the time of Joseph. Hieroglyphs would not have been able to make records of grain storage during the seven years of plenty when Joseph came to power. Therefore, some scholars believed it was this time period that writing started to change and would have been available to Moses hundreds of years later.

The Red Sea Miracle 1 & 2

Patterns of Evidence concludes with two films researching the Israelite crossing of the Red Sea. Exodus 14 gives four names describing the crossing point of the sea. However, much debate exists as to where these locations were, and even the name of the sea. The Hebrew words Yam Suph are translated as Red Sea in English Bibles, but the word suph can also mean reeds. Two primary ideas exist in the debate, Mahoney called one the Egyptian method and the other the Hebrew method.

Those in the Egyptian way of understanding believe the crossing was done close to Egypt at a shallow body of water. It is an area that could become dry land with a strong east wind and return to a depth of about 12 feet when the wind decreased. Many in this understanding also debate on the word translated as thousand and say the entire nation was only around 5,700 men instead of over 600,000 as recorded in modern Bibles.

For the Hebrew line of thought, the crossing was made at one of three locations at the Gulf of Aqaba on the northeast end of the



Red Sea. A crossing at this point with over 2 million people would have been a great miracle and deliverance for Israel. However, it is also across the desert, about 200 miles, from where the Israelites lived. Further research into how quickly people, and animals, could travel across the desert demonstrated how this further crossing would have been possible. Investigation continued with divers who had explored the Gulf of Aqaba looking for remains of Pharaoh's army, if any could still exist.

Patterns of Evidence is a well-researched, and well presented, series of films I would recommend anyone to watch. They help to show when, and how, the events recorded in Genesis and Exodus happened. The films also work to demonstrate to skeptics that the accounts in the Bible are not just believed in faith, but also rooted in history.

The Prodigal God

By Tim Keller

Reviewed by Will Van Wyngarden

In the Gospel everyone is wrong, everyone is loved, and everyone is called to recognize this and change. Both older and younger brothers divide the world into two groups, both wrong in the other's eyes in the way they approach spirituality.

This book is a retelling of the famous parable of Jesus commonly referred to as "The Prodigal Son." Often the takeaway from this story focuses on the love of the father for the runaway son. We see ourselves as the runaway son, and we sense the compassion of God as the Father showing us undeserved love. But in this book Keller demonstrates the issues that both brothers face, pointing out the fact that many of us are more like the older brother

than the younger, and the older brother is no closer to the father than the younger.

Keller points out that we misunderstand and misapply the word "prodigal." Rather than meaning runaway, as it is often used, it means "recklessly spendthrift." This is an important distinction that changes how we view the story. We see how the younger son is "prodigal." But so too is the father. The father is prodigal with his lavish forgiveness. He unconditionally showers the runaway son with forgiveness and blessing. But, in so doing, he not only fails to deal with the younger son's sin, he also angers the older brother who has so carefully obeyed the father.

Keller's point is that we usually focus on the younger brother. But there are in fact two brothers, and in each one's actions we find different ways of being alienated from God.

Luke says that there were two different groups of people listening to Jesus' sermon. The first group was the tax collectors and sinners, represented by the younger brother. The second was the Pharisees and teachers of the law, represented by the older brother. Keller's contention is that the teaching in this parable is directed at those Pharisees, those represented by the "elder brother." This parable, according to Keller, "takes an extended look at the soul of the elder brother, and climaxes with a powerful plea for him to change his heart."

Keller says that we often read this parable and think of the unconditional love of Jesus for the younger brother. But most of the listeners gathered to hear would have been angered at Jesus' portrayal of the elder brother. Jesus shows that the elder brother is lost because he was relying upon his own righteousness and was angered at the free exercise of grace by the Father towards the younger brother. Keller says Jesus "singles

out moralism as a particularly deadly spiritual condition.”

The younger son comes to the father and asks for his inheritance, which traditionally he would not have received until the death of his father. The son is essentially asking for his father’s wealth, without the relationship of the father. It is also likely that since the wealth was tied up in the land, the father would have had to sell that land to fulfill the request. It is important to note that the elder brother was entitled to a double portion of the inheritance, so the younger brother would be receiving 1/3 of the father’s estate.

We all know how the story progresses, as the younger son wastes all of his inheritance, and is forced to return to his father, hoping to become a hired man. And of course, the father welcomes him back with open arms, throwing a feast in his honor.

Keller says that is often where we like to leave the story, showing the freeness of God’s grace, but not its costliness. We see the unconditional love, but miss that a price had to be paid, an atonement needed to be made. Indeed, this is a problem with many liberal churches today, where the atonement is often rejected.

The oft missed part of the story is the reaction of the elder brother. He is enraged at the treatment of the younger brother. Far from being happy that the brother has returned, he is angered that he, the elder brother, is being treated unfairly. After all,

he has followed all the rules and earned his inheritance.

The Pharisees would have seen that in many ways this parable was aimed at them, according to Keller: “How can the inner workings of the heart be changed from a dynamic of fear and anger to that of love, joy, and gratitude? Here is how. You need

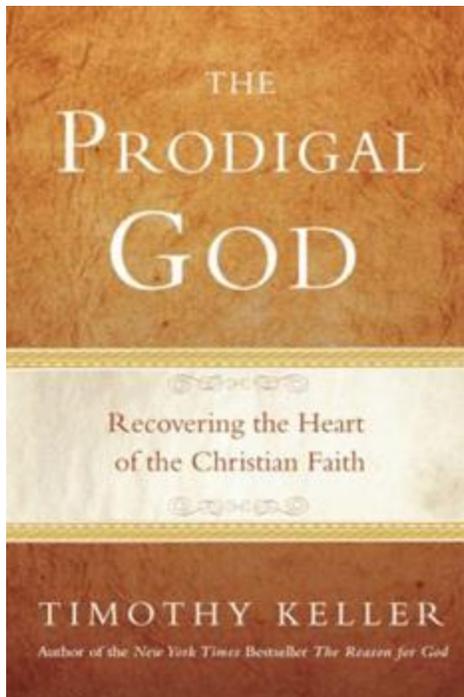
to be moved by the sight of what it cost to bring you home. The key difference between a Pharisee and a believer in Jesus is inner-heart motivation. Pharisees are being good but out of a fear-fueled need to control God. They don’t really trust him or love him. To them God is an exacting boss, not a loving father. Christians have seen something that has transformed their hearts toward God so they can finally love and rest in the Father.”

The two brothers portray two ways of seeking

happiness and fulfillment-moral conformity versus self-discovery. In the first view, the elder brother view, the will of God and community standards are put ahead of personal fulfillment. In the latter view, the younger brother view, self-discovery takes precedence over established norms and authorities. Keller says that in the modern world we see these two in stark relief.

Those of one camp say all the problems of the world reside with those who choose to follow the other path. One side points fingers at the other, claiming they are wrong while we are right.

It is easy for us in the church to see the world through the lens of the elder brother. We try to keep the moral code and probably



look down on the run-away who follows the younger brother path. But it is the younger son who enters the feast, while the elder brother refuses to. Keller says that it is not the elder brother's sin that keeps him out, but his pride. Elder brothers obey God to get things, not to get God himself.

Keller redefines the traditional concept of sin, the failure to keep the law. He says some, like the elder brother, try to avoid Jesus *as Savior* by keeping all the moral laws. This flips the script and puts them in the place of being owed something by God. They have earned their ticket, much the same way that other world religions work. You don't need a pardon, you earned it yourself. Salvation is something that you are due, that God has an obligation to give you. This again negates the need for an atonement. Quoting Keller: "If, like the elder brother, you believe that God ought to bless you and help you because you have worked so hard to obey him and be a good person, then Jesus may be your helper, your example, even your inspiration, but he is not your Savior. You are serving as your own Savior."

Keller says we ought to redefine how we look at being lost. He says "Sin is not just breaking the rules, it is putting yourself in the place of God as Savior, Lord, and Judge just as each son sought to displace the authority of the father in his own life." Perhaps the elder brother approach is more dangerous because you are blind to your own condition. You don't realize that you are just as lost as the elder brother. The younger brother knew he was alienated, the elder brother did not. The elder brother did not know or think he was sick. Are our churches filled with and perceived as elder brother types?

The lostness of the younger brother is obvious. But Jesus wants to point us to

another way to be lost, one no less devastating. It is often characterized by anger. The elder brother seemingly did all the right things and yet was basically now in the same situation as the brother that did everything wrong. Elder brothers end up being resentful of the Father, because they do not receive what they deserve, what they consider to have earned.

Elder brothers often are unable to deal with suffering and hardship, especially when a younger brother seems to reap unearned benefits. They can also have a feeling of superiority. After all, they are the ones who have their affairs in order. Have elder brothers lost their joy? Are they angry, bitter, condescending? Are we perceived that way?

The elder brother is lost, outside of the feast, angry because he believes he has simply done more to deserve reward than the younger brother. When elder brothers sin, they repent and have regret, but that is just part of the self-salvation project. The problem is pride. The elder brother's pride was keeping him out of the feast.

This brings us from what we need to who we need. The younger brother in this parable needed a faithful elder brother. Keller compares and contrasts this parable with the two that precede it. In the parable of the Lost Sheep and of the Lost Coin, we see someone seeking something of great value that was lost. But the Prodigal Son has no such seeker. The seeker in this story should have been the elder brother.

Keller compares the faithful elder brother to Jesus. His point is that there is a costliness associated with grace. In the parable the elder brother bears the cost of his brother's wild living. He must now split the remaining inheritance with the brother who has already squandered his portion. Jesus is

the true elder brother in contrast with the flawed one. The free and unconditional forgiveness afforded the younger brother came at the ultimate cost to the true elder brother. Keller says “Mercy and forgiveness must be free and unmerited to the wrongdoer. If the wrongdoer has to do something to merit it, then it isn’t mercy, but forgiveness always comes at a cost to the one granting the forgiveness...the point of the parable is that forgiveness always involves a price-someone has to pay.”

In some sense, we are all younger brothers, exiled from God to pursue our own ends. But deep down we all long for home. This story of exile runs through the Bible- from Adam and Eve, to Jacob, through actual captivity in foreign lands, we see this theme of wandering and endless frustration. The prophets foretold of a Messiah that would redeem Israel, but many were disappointed when it wasn’t the political redemption they longed for. In fact, it was a spiritual one, a saving from sin, evil, and death itself. Much like the homecoming feast in the parable, we await the final marriage supper of the Lamb.

According to Keller, there are four ways to experience the feast of salvation. The first is that salvation is experiential. There is a difference between intellectual assent and actual experiencing. He quotes Jonathan Edwards: “The difference between believing

that God is gracious and tasting that God is gracious is as different as having a rational belief that honey is sweet and having the actual sense of its sweetness.”

Through the Holy Spirit we sense and feel the love and work of God in our lives. Where is the sweetness of the elder brother experiencing the forgiveness of sin? Is there sweetness in the sense of relief of checking boxes?

Keller also notes that salvation is material. The ultimate purpose of Jesus is not only



individual salvation but the restoration of the physical world. The material world is not an illusion, as other philosophies might dictate. It is important that Jesus physically was resurrected. Both body and soul are redeemed. In addition to preaching the word, Jesus cared for the physical needs of the people by healing the sick and feeding the hungry. Keller says “Younger brothers are too selfish and elder brothers are too self-righteous to care for the poor.” Jesus’ miracles did not violate the natural order but restored it. Keller

contends that Christianity is probably the most material of the world’s faiths.

Salvation is also individual. As Christians, it is important to make the gospel of the grace of God central to everything we do in order to grow spiritually. We must reject the common principles of religion that say “I

obey, therefore I am accepted by God.” Jesus’ message flips that on its head-” I am accepted by God through the work of Christ, therefore I obey.” We must change the inclination of our hearts to look to other things than grace for justification and meaning. We must lose our elder brother mindset of controlling our own salvation through our works. We should operate with the principle that our living should be costly, as God’s grace was so costly to Jesus. We live not under the threat of punishment for wrongdoing, but looking to live sacrificially in the manner of Jesus. “Faith in the gospel restructures our motivations, our self-understanding, our identity, and our view of the world. Behavioral compliance to rules without heart-change will be superficial and fleeting,” says Keller.

God’s free to us grace can be liberating but also scary. If we can earn our way, then in some way that for which we have worked so hard is owed to us. We would be like a taxpayer with certain rights. However, we were bought with a price, of no cost to us, but of great cost to Jesus. Then there really is no limit of what God can ask of us. We must not live a life of libertine antinomianism, but rather one that appreciates the infinite cost to God and the seriousness of sin. If our lives aren’t

changed by God’s grace, we really don’t understand its costliness, and so don’t really understand the Gospel at all.

While salvation is individual, it is also communal. Feasting is communal by nature. In our societies we often value individual desire over those of the community. People want to be spiritual without being part of an organization. Especially in churches full of elder brothers. But spiritual growth is impossible without a community.

“The Prodigal God” is a short book. In fact, you could probably read it in one sitting if you had the time. But I encourage everyone to read it slowly and meditate on the nuances that Keller brings out. He says “Both the worldly life of sensual pleasure and the religious life of ethical strictness fail to give the human heart what it is seeking.” Indeed, the sensual way of the younger brother and the ethical way of the elder brother are both spiritual dead ends. There is another way-through Him.

“If we say ‘I believe in Jesus’ but it doesn’t affect the way we live, the answer is not that now we need to add hard work to our faith so much as that we haven’t truly understood or believed in Jesus at all.”

Saying from Charles Spurgeon

Those who will only believe what they can reconcile in their own minds, will necessarily disbelieve much of divine revelation.

Does the world satisfy you? Then you have your reward and portion in this life. Make much of it--for you shall know no other happiness.

It is better to preach five words of God's Word--than five million words of man's wisdom!

Anything that makes us pray is a blessing!

In Memory Of

Mary Klyn



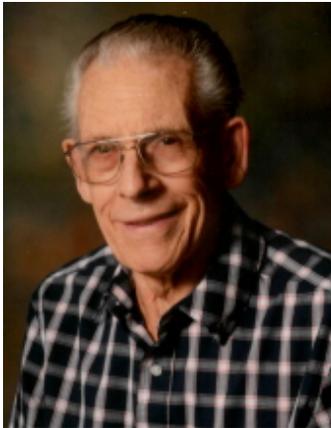
October 4, 1934 – December 5, 2020

Chris Branderhorst



February 26, 1956 – January 3, 2021

Ron Kramer



February 7, 1938 – January 14, 2021

Edith Van Zee



October 23, 1930 – February 11, 2021

Welcome

Bennett Thomas Yoder born on
January 23 to Jon and Nicole

Bernard and Lois Beekhuizen with children
Eric and Amy from Faith CRC

Pella II Newsletter invites your contribution. Drop a note in the mailbox of any one of our editors.

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