



**Only one thing
is needed**

Hans Erik Nissen

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Preface

The aim by this book is to preach a simple, clear and life-giving word about Jesus. We all need such words. Several of the daily readings point at that one needed: **Jesus Christ as Saviour and Reconciliator for lost sinners.**

This is my prayer that these daily readings may not only help someone to believe but also to remain as a Jesus-Christian. All your sources must be in him. Jesus is all that you need. In yourself you are poor - in him you have plenitude. When the Holy Spirit reveals blessing in Christ we are sanctified in our innermost and shall carry fruit for God. In our hearts we are given praise and victory and for better or for worse we see our lives as walking in the triumph of Jesus Christ.

Therefore in this book I forward to others, what has enriched my life. May God meet every one with blessings through the word, which stands, when Heaven and Earth will vanish.

Copenhagen 2012

Hans Erik Nissen

1 January

Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved

Romans 10:1

A new year is ahead of us. Many thoughts go through our minds. What will the New Year bring? What can we do in order to make it a good year? Will this year bring us war or other disasters? Yes, the turn of the year calls for seriousness.

In the midst of all that we might be uneasy about, or hope for, there is something which is more important than all else. It's the question of our salvation.

None of us know whether the New Year will be written on our gravestone. Neither do we know if Jesus will come back this year, but we can be sure of one thing: A day will come when all other questions are unimportant - then it is all about salvation or eternal separation from God.

You, who are born again, have to be consolidated in your faith in Jesus in the New Year. You have to grow in acknowledgment of the unimaginable riches you have in Jesus. You won't face anything this year which he cannot help you through. He himself will be your strength, your power, your boldness. Therefore, don't be afraid but believe firmly in him who has saved you. He will continue and fulfil the work he has begun.

If you aren't a Christian, you have to pray that this year may be your year of salvation. You are like a tree, which God has allowed to stay standing in the hope that you will bear fruit. Don't let him seek you in vain! Repent and believe in the Lord!

We need, more than anything else, to see the wind of the Spirit blowing over our country. Let us ask God for revival. Imagine if, once again, we could experience the desert blossoming like a rose garden!

Nothing is impossible to God. He is not dependent on outward conditions; He is the God of miracles who can raise the dead.

Therefore, let us pray to God for salvation, salvation for ourselves, for those who are close to us, for the people we call 'our people' and for the mission field which God has given us responsibility for. It's useful to pray, for God is a God who hears our prayers in this New Year.

2 January

Only one thing is needed.

Luke 10:42

You must inscribe God's word in your mind. You must hear those words again and again, because they are so difficult to maintain there. God's thoughts are not our thoughts.

You think that a lot of other things are more necessary. It's because you don't realize what eternity is all about. Your thought cannot hold a time that never ends. The biblical descriptions of hell fill you with horror; but you never fully understand how horrible eternal judgement is. The thought of heaven's bliss brings joy to your mind, and you realize that heaven holds a glory which far surpasses what you can understand.

If you knew the eternal reality, the way Jesus knows it, it would be very clear to you that there is one thing – just one thing – which is needed.

There isn't one, but two options in the judgement. In the judgement God doesn't speak to all in the same way. There will be some whom he calls blessed, others cursed.

God's judgement is eternal. It cannot be changed. Therefore, all other issues become nothing compared with God's verdict on salvation and eternal hell.

In God's kingdom it's so that if I want to reach my destination, I have to go the way which leads to that destination. If I want to go to heaven, I have to follow the road that leads me there.

And the one thing needed to salvation is to do as Mary did: sit down and listen to Jesus' word. She didn't sit there critical and evaluating. She didn't think that there was anything great about her. But she had found that Jesus spoke blissful words. She had to hear them to be able to live.

Only one thing is needed!

The most important thing in the life of a child of God is the Lord's word. Without that we don't reach heaven, because Jesus is one with the Lord's word. And without him there is no salvation.

Therefore, there is only one thing to do for you and me: we have to take the consequences of the fact that one thing is needful. We must give God's word the leading place in our lives.

3 January

I will go before you and will level the mountains; I will break down gates of bronze and cut through bars of iron.”

Isaiah 45:2

To follow the way of God often causes great difficulties. There you can meet gates of bronze that are spiked down with bars of iron.

Hardship and distress should not make you think that you no longer are where God wants you to be. That holds good in the family, at your place of work or in the Christian fellowship.

After 70 years in Babylon the people of Israel did not have great prospects of seeing Jerusalem again.

However God is God. He led Israel. He will do the same with you. He will smooth out the obstacles.

Perhaps you think that God has led you along narrow and dark ways. It seems as if they will never end. But they do. God never allows his child to end up in despair. Joy will dawn again. To some it does not take place until eternity, however God leads most of us out into open land even here on earth.

If you are so fortunate that you have walked several years with Jesus, you will have gained a blessed experience: Time after time the Lord has led you out of troubles when you called for him in your distress.

You should therefore boldly believe in God even now. Don't look at your own unworthiness, and don't allow it to annul God's promises. No, fix your eyes towards the grace of the Lord. God's love for you does not have its basis in the fact that you are worthy to be loved. It is solely the result of the fact that God's heart burns with his love for you.

The Lord has not forgotten you. He sees you even though he has gone before you. When you get farther on, your eyes will be opened. The Lord has smoothed out the obstacles.

The struggle and distress don't last forever. You are not meant to gain your victories yourself. The Lord will fight for you. Raise your eyes! Don't give yourself over to despondency. You have a future and a hope.

4 January

And he sent a man before them—Joseph, sold as a slave.

Psalm 105:17

I wonder if there was one single person who thought that it was God who sent Joseph into Egypt. Wasn't it his brothers who sold him? Wasn't it the Midianite merchants who led him into Egypt? Wasn't it they who put him up for sale on the market? Wasn't it the wife of Potiphar who, with false accusations, caused his imprisonment? Wasn't it the cupbearer who forgot him?

Yes, that was so.

Where was God when all this took place? He was in on all of it. Behind all the outward appearances was the God who through Joseph would save his people from the famine.

You face a number of outward events in your life. They may seem oddly accidental, but they aren't. God has a purpose with you and with others whom he is going to bless through you.

There are times when we don't see God's way. Neither could Joseph. But he stuck to God's word, and it was by this word of God he stood the test.

You cannot guess God's thoughts, but God has revealed himself through the Bible. That is why you must pay heed to what is written. That is meant to be your help when God leads you through tribulation and trials.

When God disciplines you, there is a lot he can take from you. But he never takes his Word from you. Through it he assures you that all things work together for good to them that love God.

Sometimes God throws light on his conduct while we still live. Joseph experienced that, and many others have experienced that. At other times he gives no explanation this side of eternity.

Whatever God does, either the one thing or the other, you who are a child of God have to rely on the fact that you aren't left to chance. There is a heavenly Father who governs. Hard-hearted and cruel brothers are part of God's plan. Unjust accusations and imprisonment are the same.

You therefore must remain on God's way even though it may be hard. Submit to his will. In his hour he will lead you out into open land again. You will become a blessing to others and glorify God's name.

5 January

What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

Philippians 3:8

It is difficult for a child of God to consider everything a loss. That can happen only by seeing it from the right point of view, which is conditional on knowing Jesus.

That is why you should continually return to the truest, deepest and the only unshakable foundation of your life: the knowledge of Jesus. You don't know much about anything else. A moment can change all your conditions of life. But Jesus doesn't change.

As the years go by you yourself also change. We find it difficult to believe that serious illness or suffering may strike us, but it happens. If Jesus doesn't arrive before, we will be buried someday, that is, if we get a grave. Who knows if we will die during an atomic war where there isn't anyone to bury the dead?

We will lose everything except our knowledge of Jesus. Death cannot put an end to that.

Have you considered how the best things in life crumble away? Gradually God shows you more and more of your own misery. You will see that even your Christianity is infected by sin and selfishness. If God doesn't cover your service in God's kingdom with grace, it will condemn you to God's wrath. It isn't pure and holy for God. He has seen your emotions, thoughts and lacking of zeal. Nothing is left before the face of God. Everything condemns and accuses.

Isn't it a richness then that I am allowed to consider everything a loss – and turn to Jesus? He has never forsaken me, and he will never do so.

Just imagine, I am allowed to know him! He doesn't leave my eyes. In faith I will see him face to face through the Word.

I never get tired thinking of Jesus. Neither will I do so in eternity. He is the first one whom my eyes will look for when I must cross the border. And when my eyes have seen him, I will not let him out of my sight.

To know Jesus is the greatest thing forever and ever.

6 January

This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.

1 John 5:4

Faith is confidence in Jesus. To have a great faith is to have a great confidence.

The unbelieving world counts faith as nothing. It thinks that one is a little naïve if one has confidence in Jesus and builds one's life on him.

God judges differently. He looks for faith in a person. If it doesn't exist, it is impossible to please him.

No matter what you have done or do, you will never be able to overcome the world through your actions. But your faith has prevailed. It is because of the fact that your faith is inseparably connected with him you believe in. It was the word about Jesus that created faith in your heart, and it is the same word that nourishes it every single day.

You have grown together with Jesus. What applies to him, applies to you as well.

Jesus has overcome the world. He did that when it looked as if the world had overcome him. The world thought that it overcame Jesus on Good Friday. But it made a mistake. The opposite was the case. The world was overcome by the cross of Jesus.

The same thing happens again today. To all appearances the world can triumph. It advances from triumph to triumph. Everything which has its root in a Christian outlook on life and view of human nature is thrown overboard. Unfamiliar religions take root in old Christian countries. Neo-Paganism in its thinking and lifestyle spreads. It looks as if the world will overcome the faith, but it won't happen. In the middle of this world there are some who aren't of this world. They have triumphed over it. The faith they have continues when the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.

Faith in Jesus remains.

Faith is the tie between you and him. Death cannot break that. It holds true for ever. That is why you have to remain in this simple faith. It is weak in itself, but it knows the power of Jesus. Jesus completes his action if you remain in the faith. Then you can sing: "Eternal triumph now I possess, always, Lord Christ, in you!"

7 January

You made me bold and stout hearted.

Psalm 138:3

I lack boldness, you say.

You have given up. Again and again you have tried to make an effort. You have gathered all your strength, but it was no use. You hadn't got the necessary reserve of strength.

You have misunderstood something. God never expected that you should be able to triumph by making an effort. You wouldn't be able to go farther than going forward in your own strength. But there are many chances to fall on that way. It goes wrong, sooner or later, and you get yourself into trouble.

No, you have to receive boldness from the Lord. He is the only one who is able to give you a boldness that holds when everything goes against you.

God doesn't give you boldness in a mysterious way. The Lord sends his help from heaven. He does so by meeting you in his Word.

That is why the discouraged ought to live by God's word. You should read and keep to the Word. You have to trust the Word with all your soul, that the facts are as God's word says. Heaven and earth will pass away, but God's word is really "a lamp to my feet". You mustn't let go of this lamp.

And you who stick to God's word are to know that God will let the light of the Word shine on. He will help you and guide you by the Holy Spirit. He will let the Word burn itself into your soul and fill your heart.

Then the wonderful thing happens; you receive boldness. You don't think of it yourself, because you have been overcome by God's word. You have begun to count on it. It has become the rocky ground in your life.

Everything else may shake, but the Word stands firm. Perhaps you don't understand it, but you know that all the Lord's promises and undertakings remain in force forever.

God's word has raised you once more. You go on with wisdom. You have received a boldness that is put into your heart by the Holy Spirit. You can lift your eyes and tell the Lord: "You made me bold and stout hearted!"

8 January

As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods.

1 Kings 11:4

What will you be like when you grow old? Will you become devout and pious? A holy person? Will it be, that the end of your life leads you joyfully to stand before Gods face? Will free hours be spent on prayer?

Many false dreams have been dreamt about the Christian life as an old person. But in most cases, one continues on the line one began in the early years and followed farther in the age of maturity.

It was like that for Solomon. There is a lot of good to be said about him. He looked for true spiritual and human values in many ways. But he didn't do it in all respects.

In the law of the king in Deuteronomy 17:14-20 the Lord says, that a king must not take many wives, he must not accumulate great wealth, he must not acquire a great numbers of horses for himself. Solomon didn't adapt himself to these words of God. For many years it looked as if he was doing well. But the end of his life became shocking. Eventually he became an idolater.

Solomon asks you: Have you entered on a course which leads you to hell when you grow old? Are there areas in your life in which you don't live according to God's word? Do you realize that crucial lapses may have taken place, in the life of a Christian, even though everything, apparently, is going well with him?

It's important to settle accounts with sin. If it has become fully ripe, it breeds death. Eternal death! And then it's too late to repent. You mustn't take comfort in all the right things you do. Neither must you explain away the sin in your life.

And you who are old: it's still time to repent. Perhaps you have wasted many opportunities and been unsuccessful in life, if so, you should know that Jesus came to save sinners. With Jesus there is forgiveness. No matter how far you have got away, Jesus can save you, and everything can become well.

Today Jesus calls you. Give him your yes-answer! Then the ending of your life will be different from Solomon's.

9 January

Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

Psalm 90:12

Why do I shrink from numbering my days? Because death is the last enemy, and because my old nature doesn't like to think of the fact that one day I am to fight with death and that my body has to be buried.

God's word knows me through and through. That is why it shows me the way I am to go. I can ask my heavenly Father to give me the learning which I cannot get of my own accord. It is extremely important because with it follows wisdom in the heart.

The Devil tries to make you forget the fact of death. The enemy of the soul knows that he can make you abstain from thinking of the end of your life; you turn your mind towards this world, and make your arrangements in it, as though you don't have to leave it.

Praying or teaching to number one's days is to pray about getting a sense of reality. God teaches us his piece of homework. He can allow us to realize how the things of the world are perishable in many ways. Painful and serious illness gives food for thought. Bereavement and death among one's friends do the same. If you aren't quite young any longer, the death announcements remind you that several people die before they have reached your age.

You are a blessed person if you have made up your account and are ready to depart. You know that you can die completely unexpectedly. You can look at your past life with gratitude. The Lord has carried you in light and dark days. You have been covered by the grace of the forgiveness of sins through all of them.

At the same time you look forward with confidence. Everything you own in the faith will someday become visible to your eyes. You will be united with a great multitude that no one can count from every nation, tribe, people and language. Then the few have become the many. The eyes of everybody will be turned towards God the Father, the Almighty one, and the Lamb. The Holy Spirit will glorify God, and eternity will be filled with songs of praise.

When God teaches you to number your days, he allows you to see the life in the perspective of eternity. This gives you a heart of wisdom.

Surely it was for my benefit that I suffered such anguish.

Isaiah 38:17

The bitter things in your life are dangerous. They can make you yourself bitter. The mind is always in danger of taking on the colour of what you meet with. It is a natural thing to react like that. Since the day of the fall our nature is corrupt. If we follow it, we turn our backs on God and perish.

King Hezekiah was one of the few god-fearing kings of Judah. In his life bitterness turned into peace. He was dying, but he knew that the bitter and hard things were the disciplining hand of God. That is why he sought the Lord in his distress.

God also wishes you to benefit from the anguish you suffer. That will happen only if you realize something. In everything that happens to you, you basically deal with God only. Yes, even when Satan storms against you, you are to know that God is stronger than the strong one, and God's opponent cannot go farther than the Lord allows.

Through the bitter things God will reveal what it means to live as a lost sinner in a fallen world where the wages of sin is death. The world and its lust reveal its true colours. You realize that the peace that this world offers always ends in trouble.

The world cannot give you what your soul longs for. If you could see behind the façade of those that the world has made happy, you would find the worm of gnawing bitterness by the root of their lives. The world disappoints and deceives – and it does so most seriously at the end.

The bitter things, therefore, are God's call: you must be converted to him who can give peace to your heart. With Jesus and only in Jesus you find the things that can quench your burning thirst.

Jesus has made your cause with God good. By faith in his sacrifice at Golgotha, you are to know that you have peace in spite of everything that comes to you. And peace with God is the most important thing of all. It remains when the elements have caught fire. It saves lost sinners like you and me.

11 January

But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared.

Psalm 130:4

Godliness is useful for everything. It blesses everything in our temporal and in our spiritual life. Yes, godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.

It is therefore a sad thing when one finds so little godliness in one's own life. Again and again I have to fold my hands in prayer: Lord, teach me above all things to fear and love your name.

God comes to our help through his Word. He helps us avoid going the way of the law. He knows that good intentions aren't sufficient. The will is weak. Jesus is right when he says that the body is weak.

So it is our blessing that the Lord shows us a different way to godliness. It is the way of forgiveness of sins.

It may seem odd to our thought that there could be a connection between the forgiveness of sins and godliness. However, that is so.

True godliness isn't the fear of terror, but the fear of love. Perfect love drives out fear and makes room for true godliness.

If you live by faith you know this in your life. You would hate to act against God's wishes. Love makes you want to please God in every way. You want your will to submit to his. And when you realize how self-willed you are, you humble yourself before your Saviour. You want in full that it must be the Lord's thoughts that you are going to realize. Not your own.

You become small in your meeting with God's grace. You realize that you owe everything to the Lord. You cannot understand that God still loves you.

Your Christianity is in a bad shape.

But at the same time you realize that God's grace has become greater. You need it every single day. If you think back, you will realize that God has given you oceans of grace. You also know that you need much grace, if you are going to get well through the stretch of road that you have left, here below.

When your heart is turned towards the ocean of grace, love and godliness grow in your life.

12 January

I shall not be in want.

Psalm 23:1

Perhaps you think you are in want of many things. You are anything but satisfied.

God has given other people much greater gifts than you. Some have a nicer appearance and a more pleasant nature. Others are more skilful with their hands. Others again are better at expressing themselves.

Many are far better Christians when it comes to things spiritual. They live closer to God and are to a greater extent contributing to glorify him.

Yes, you think you are inferior by far. How then can God say that you shall not be in want?

It is because the Lord is your shepherd, when you believe in Jesus. This is so great that you shall not be in want. You aren't meant to find the way yourself. Somebody else guides you. You aren't meant to take the responsibility for yourself either, because Jesus has done that.

As a child of God you don't know what poverty means. You have a share in the whole wealth and abundance of Christ. Jesus will take care of you in every way.

As long as you remain in his arms, no sin will be able to separate you from God. Your shepherd, who seeks out and saves, cleanses you perfectly. His blood reaches down to your innermost heart and makes your soul as white as the driven snow.

No Satanic attack will destroy you as long as the shepherd protects you. When God allows you to be terrified, it simply happens because God wants you to keep even closer to him.

We run into many difficulties, because we want to be the very thing that the shepherd is for us. We want to fend for ourselves. If only we could get our eyes opened to the shepherd we have! Then we would see that in company with Jesus we lack nothing.

He takes care of our mind and body. Day by day he leads us on our way towards heaven, where we will praise him forever and ever.

13 January

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Romans 8:1

This is one of the best known verses in the Bible, and with good reason. You are happy if you have anchored in this verse. That anchorage holds in all storms.

A child of God experiences many accusations in his life as a Christian. Yes, to many their failed Christianity becomes a burden under which they sink. They understand perfectly well how they should have lived as Christians. They have also struggled to become whole-hearted, happy and self-sacrificing Christians. But they never succeeded. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak. Yes, there is much evil in our old self which it's difficult to overcome.

Have you thought of the fact that Romans 8:1 has been written by a person who has worn himself to death in this fight?

In the previous chapter Paul leads us into the fight between the old self and the new self. It is shocking to read what he writes. He has experienced that when he wants to do good, evil is right there with him. The good he wants to do, he doesn't do. On the contrary, he does the evil he doesn't want to do. In despair he shouts: 'Who will rescue me from this body of death?'

So, you are not the first one who has experienced that the fight to become a successful Christian is hopeless. But there is help to be found in the Word: "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

Here Paul found rest. Countless Christians have done the same.

It's possible that other people may condemn you. But if you are in Jesus, you have one who doesn't do it. He is the Judge at the highest court of justice. He acquits you.

God's acquittal has its foundation in the fact that he has condemned another person in your place. He let the sentence hit his beloved Son. Having laid all your sins on his shoulders, he made him a curse. There is no condemnation for you. You are free by virtue of Jesus. You are rich in your poverty. Because of him you have everything.

14 January

The Lord said to Gideon, “You have too many men for me to deliver Midian into their hands. In order that Israel may not boast against me that her own strength has saved her.”

Judges 7:2

Only a little is needed before to take the honour from God. Perhaps you don't do it with words, but you do it in your thoughts. The desire of wanting to be somebody has followed mankind from the day of the Fall of Man. And all of us have the poison in us.

Many trials and humiliations are connected with the fact that God won't let us remain in sin. He wants to teach us the truth about ourselves. We must understand that we haven't deserved anything. Everything is due to God's kindness and grace.

Gideon didn't think that he had too many men. Probably he had wished for more men in the battle against the superior adversary, but he had to realize that God took his own possibilities of victory from him. It was enough that his strength was little. God wanted to show Gideon that he mustn't trust in his own strength.

It is like that in your life too. You think that you have little strength. Often you pray to get more. You cannot understand that God doesn't hear your prayer. It is almost as if you receive the opposite of what you pray for. God makes you altogether weak and helpless. Never allow yourself to be tempted to think that the Lord hasn't heard your prayer. Do not think either that God has left you to yourself. No, he takes care of you. When you aren't anything in yourself and are unable to do anything, God lets you experience his grace and power. It is made perfect in your weakness.

How about the honour? It belongs to God only. You have nothing that you can take pride in. You can only say, “From him and through him are all things. To him be the glory forever!”

And the wonderful thing happens, when only God is great for your heart, that you are being filled with happiness. It is a good thing not to be honoured, and at the same time be what one is: a sinner devoid of honour who owes everything to God.

Here is your God!

Isaiah 40:9

Do you believe that these four words can help you? Or are you one of the many who when disappointed turns to other ways to get help?

There are Christians who have abandoned the belief that God can help them. They ask for the help that the world can give.

However, God has a remnant among us who do hear the words: "Here is your God!" And they cannot hear them without following them.

A Christian has two natures. Your old selfish man has no confidence in God. Basically, it hates God and won't submit to him. The natural man will never fix his eyes on him in faith and confidence.

Jesus has saved you from your old man, so that it won't be lord any longer. That is why you shouldn't yield to those things in you which refuse to follow God's word.

When you were born again Jesus made his dwelling in you by the Holy Spirit. You are therefore a new man who always says yes to God's promises. There sounds a "yes" in your mind when you hear the call: Here is your God! In your heart you are convinced that these words hold the key to get out of all distress, for the time being and forever.

It's no good to analyse oneself and others continually and describe gloomy prospects for each other. It only increases the feeling of powerlessness. No, the help is, to lift your eyes above all the mountains of difficulties and see God. See him who gave his Son for our sins. See him who found us, put us on his shoulders and carried us home to the house of the father. See him who, through all distress and hardship, leads us to the Promised Land.

We will open our hearts for the blessed call: Here is your God! We will give these words room in our mind. And with the eye of faith we will see the God to whom nothing is impossible.

16 January

Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.

Isaiah 49:15-16

The temptation to think that God has forgotten you meets you continuously. It arrives when you have prayed and prayed in great distress and God doesn't intervene. It comes when old sins stand out once more in your mind's eye. It arrives when you have prayed for triumph but you are horrified again owing to new wounds of sin.

Jesus tells you, "I will not forget you!" And he tells you the reason why he will not forget: you are engraved on the palms of his hands. The word engraved also means inscribed. Your name is not written with a handwriting which can easily be wiped out.

You cannot read this word without thinking of the nail marks. When you do that it becomes great to your heart that, when Jesus was nailed to the cross as your burden of debt, you were engraved on the palms of his hands.

You know from Jesus' meeting with Thomas that he still has nail marked hands. The resurrection hasn't changed that. Is there any place you would prefer to have been engraved on, except perhaps on Jesus' heart? But you are there as well. He carries you in his heart in everlasting love.

This love isn't simply words. His pierced hands are the proof that he loves you. He has wanted you and his sacrifice of love to be one. It happens through faith in the work of grace at Golgotha.

If you lose yourself in the price that Jesus had to pay for you, all questions cease. The bleeding heart of Jesus tells your heart that you are not forgotten. On the contrary, you are loved with a love so high and deep that you will never understand it fully.

God doesn't always allow you to understand why he leads you the way he does. However, he doesn't want you to be in doubt about this: he hasn't forgotten you. He has engraved you on the palms of his hands. Your name is there today. It is there when it is darkest of all for you. It is there when you must appear before the court of justice. You are not forgotten by Jesus.

17 January

In whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Colossians 1:14

Do you know of the longing for redemption? Don't we all know that? We long to be released from everything which binds.

The hope of wealth is caused by this longing. Many people want to be released from financial restrictions, so they can do as they like. Others break the ties to their family, friends and acquaintances. They don't want to be bound by ties like these. And who doesn't want to be released from illness and suffering?

More and more people throw themselves into one thing and another to be released, perhaps into some intoxication in order that for a brief moment they could believe that the time of redemption has come.

There is only one way to redemption. That is to be released, not only from the consequences of sin but from sin itself. There is only one who can do that, Jesus. He can release any slave bound to sin.

Jesus doesn't transform us into people who are strong and only released externally. He takes care of our inner man. He gives new birth. He gives a new heart.

It happens when you start believing in Jesus. Then God gives you the power and right to acquire everything that he has promised you in his word.

Even if you feel tied down by many hindrances, you are still released in Jesus from everything that binds. That you are released in Jesus means that you are free from everything he is released from. He is released from the law that is why you are released as well. He is released from death and judgment and that is why you are released too.

If you are a saved sinner you are allowed to say to your heart: Jesus wasn't bound by anything but God's love and will. He has given me all his riches. What applies to him applies to me. I am free indeed. The suffering and the shadows that sin constantly throws over me will last only a short time. Soon I will live redeemed and free before the throne of God with everlasting songs of praise and thanksgiving.

In him we have redemption.

18 January

See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut.

Revelation 3.8

Time after time God's word says the opposite of what we think.

The situation of the congregation at Philadelphia was really difficult. They were few in number. The majority in the city were pagans, and the congregation was living under a strong pressure from the Jews.

Nevertheless, Jesus had placed before them an open door.

How is your situation? Are you standing before closed doors? Has it gradually become so for you that you don't know what to do?

Listen to Jesus' word, "See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut." While we struggle to find open doors, Jesus has already shepherded us to his open door. What kind of door is that?

First of all, it is the door to God's heart. Jesus has opened that door for us. It took place when he was struck by the curse which should have struck us. And behind Jesus is God. He gave His only begotten Son that you should have no doubts concerning his heart's attitude towards you. You should know that whatever happens to you, the way into God's love is always open.

And next, God has time after time intervened when all roads seemed closed. It often happened later than we would have wished. Nevertheless it always took place in due time.

The Lord knows us. He knows what it is that serves us best. He never makes a mistake when he leads us.

He wants to teach us to believe him at his word. He has placed before you an open door, even though you cannot see it. There is a way which is opened for you also, even though you cannot find it. God will intervene at his hour and in his way.

Some day you will stand looking back on your life. Then you will see how God has straightened out that which was bent. And wondering you will say: Lord, you have made everything well.

19 January

Jesus called out to them, “Friends, haven’t you any fish?”

John 21:5

It seems odd that Jesus asks a so down-to-earth question by the sea of Tiberius. It wasn't often the resurrected Jesus appeared to his disciples in visible shape. Was it not then of lesser importance whether they had daily bread?

It was not unimportant for Jesus and he wants to tell his friends so. He wants them to know that the resurrected and glorified Saviour takes care of our daily needs. It was not only when he walked down here that he changed water to wine and satisfied five thousand in the desert. Jesus is the same today.

Not a few Christians are plagued by worry about how to make ends meet. They don't doubt that Jesus has saved them and is their advocate with God, but they have difficulty in believing that Jesus takes care of their daily bread.

The disciples did what you also should do, they told Jesus everything. That night they hadn't caught any fish. Then Jesus ordered them to throw their net on the right side of the boat. There they got a catch of 153 large fish.

The Lord wants to help you, you can rely on that. This experience from the sea of Tiberius was probably a help for the disciples afterwards. This was as you will remember not the last time they suffered hardships.

Again and again you have to return to God's word. The Lord takes care of your daily needs. He will not let you go hungry. Maybe he wants to teach you to manage on less than you have been used to, but he doesn't leave you.

153 large fish – it was no small catch. Some of them they ate, some of them they sold. In this way they got money to make ends meet for some time. After that Jesus had to help them again. Thus they were helped throughout their lives.

It will happen like that in your life too. Tell Jesus how things are. Put your trust in him. Count on his intervention. It is possible that he allows you to wait, but he doesn't let you down. He has never left his children to themselves.

20 January

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

John 14:27

A lot of people ask Jesus to give them what the world gives. But he will not do that.

A man came to Jesus. He wanted to get help concerning a probate case. And he received help. However it was a different help from the one he had hoped for. Jesus told him the narrative of the rich fool (see Luke 12:13-21).

Jesus will not give you what the world gives. The world never gives without demanding your payment. And the price is great, because the world wants your heart. "People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction," says God's word in 1 Timothy 6:9.

Never ask God to help you go down way that will become an everlasting ruin for you. But you should ask for his help never to give in to your old man's desire to get what the world gives.

What Jesus has left you is greater than everything else, that is to say his peace.

It is first of all peace with God. Jesus carried our sin and he received the wages of sin. The punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

Blessed is anybody who is a poor sinner, who receives peace with God's undeserved grace by faith in Jesus. Then no sin hampers our relations with God. There is no condemnation. There is only the peace which Jesus gives us.

When he was on his way Jesus was released from all ties which bound him to the created things. He lived a true human life in gratitude for all God's gifts. He was bound only to God and his gifts.

By faith in Jesus you are ransomed from being bound to bend your knee to the god of this world. Your life doesn't depend on what you own. You have a father in heaven who takes eternal care of you. You are allowed to rest in your childlike relationship with him.

By faith in Jesus you have peace in heaven and peace on earth. That is Jesus' gift to you. Accept it today!

21 January

Jesus Christ . . . has freed us from our sins by his blood.

Revelation 1:5

It's difficult to maintain the fundamental things. The mind cannot understand what is most essential of all. But your heart can believe it. And the heart believes by hearing. Therefore God's word tells you, again and again, that you have been released from your sins by Jesus' blood.

Nevertheless, you feel them. Perhaps you have overcome the sins others can see. But you haven't overcome the inward and hidden sins. Arrogance continually comes up. You want to be somebody. You want to protect yourself. Therefore you sing with the Norwegian poet, Per Nordsletten:

„I weep and sigh: What has the future in store?

Will I reach heaven's delightful shore?”

If only you would pay heed to God's word! It says that you are released from the sins which you cannot free yourself from. You have overcome the sins you suffer from. You have been released from them by Jesus' blood. Your sin or your experience can't shake this gospel.

You aren't released from sin in the same degree as you experience it. You are released as far as Jesus' blood reach. And the Lamb's blood reaches every single sin in your life. When you are released from sin, you are free from thinking of it. Instead you may fix your eyes on your Redeemer and Liberator. You must put your faith in the price which Jesus paid when he released you. Silver and gold weren't able to do it. Nothing less than the Son's blood could do it.

You couldn't release yourself by making up your mind. But Jesus' blood released you. Before you first saw the light of day, you were released. And through faith in Jesus you own his full redemption.

Not even in heaven will you be more released from sin than you are here on earth by faith. God doesn't know the sin which is in you. He has thrown it into the deep of the sea of grace.

You may feel guilty, but you aren't. You are free. The chains have been broken. Jesus has released you. Therefore you can sing:

„Now I own eternal victory

always, Lord Jesus Christ, in you.”

22 January

„Watch out for false prophets.....” “By their fruit you will recognize them.”

Matthew 7:15-16

It is to his disciples Jesus is speaking when he says that they are to watch out for false prophets. They are dangerous for both unbelievers and believers. In a Christian`s old nature lives a yearning for a new and different message.

Our natural man easily becomes tired of the message of the cross. The fact that Jesus is Saviour and Redeemer for lost sinners is nothing new. It has been said and heard so often.

That is why many think it monotonous and boring. If somebody comes up with something new and unheard of, their curiosity is aroused at once. Many think we are in a spiritual stagnation. They long for a new departure. That is why they take up an open attitude to all that is new. Continually they ask: Where is the way to spiritual renewal?

Many who have this attitude have been led away from the life-giving gospel. Intellectually they hold on to it, but it is no longer the bread of life for their soul.

By their fruit you will recognize the false prophets, says Jesus. You cannot recognize them by sight. Neither by what they say about themselves. No, they must be recognized by their fruit.

A true disciple leads sinners to Jesus in order that they can receive the forgiveness of sins and find favour with God. A true disciple can never finish exalting the blood of Jesus. He preaches Jesus as the slaughtered sacrificial Lamb of God.

At the same time the seriousness of sin is revealed. No Christian is allowed to live without being disturbed. Where Jesus goes in sin must come out. God`s grace teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions.

The true prophets follow in Jesus` footsteps. The fruit of their service is therefore saved sinners who praise Jesus. They can never be tired of talking about what their salvation has cost. Again and again they preach that the work of Jesus is finished. They have resolved to know nothing except Jesus Christ and he crucified.

The false prophets preach an anaemic gospel. They are occupied with anything but sin and grace for lost sinners. Watch out for them.

23 January

**For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God.”
Galatians 2:19**

Life will not die. Neither will the life of the self. It tries to survive in numerous ways.

God’s law is God’s holiness expressed in words. The law knows no limits. It requires everything. If you have sinned against one commandment, you are guilty of all of them.

Your old man is afraid of the law. Continually it tries to be evasive. Only when God’s Spirit throws the light of the Word on you, it becomes impossible for you to evade the law. Then you stand convicted before God. Your mouth will be closed. You cannot defend yourself.

It is not only the gross sins which accuse you when face to face with the living God. No, you realize that even the best things about you are unclean. In everything you do, you are occupied with yourself. You even use the most pious and best things to elevate yourself. You want other people to notice you. And if no one else calls attention to you, you take care of this yourself.

The abyss of corruption is deep. God’s Spirit breaks your heart when he is allowed to show you this corruption.

If you must be saved owing to your Christianity, you were lost forever. It is not only a failure. It is completely below the pass mark.

When you realize that, you no longer have anything to lean on. You feel more lost than ever. You have nothing else but sin to bring before God. Everything you try to find becomes a charge against you.

And the terrible thing is that the law is right in its charge. No one can be more lost than you are. All your actions, even the best of them, condemn you to hell.

When God has broken you like this by the law, he gives rise to this question with you, “What must I do to be saved?” There is only one answer to that question, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.” Seize the outstretched hand of salvation from Golgotha.

24 January

When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

John 19:30

Then he lifted up his voice and said, “It is finished!” and better words were never said. It is due to him who said them. He cannot lie. You can therefore count on everything he has said.

Lots of people have spoken great and powerful words. They have often referred to different ways to salvation. Millions of people have been disappointed and bitter, and many others will experience this on the Day of Judgment, when the truth will be revealed. Then lots of people will have to acknowledge that they have followed false prophets.

Jesus has proved that he is God’s Son. He did so when he rose from the dead. He has said, “It is finished!” This has been said to every one of them among whom Jesus lived, publicans and sinners, Pharisees and scribes. Yes, it also concerns you – and everybody with you. No one is excepted. It means nothing if your life is in ruins. Neither does it mean anything that you feel unworthy.

Jesus has said, “It is finished!” His words follow you throughout your life; they are a judgment against you if you ignore such a great salvation.

What is it that is finished?

It is all that you need for salvation. Your salvation is finished. It is finished, and it is yours if you receive it by faith.

How could Jesus say these blessed words?

He could do so because of the fact that he paid for you, on the tree of the cross, with his holy and precious blood. That price was sufficient for God. You can therefore confidently head for the judgment. If you build your salvation on his finished work, you are on rocky ground. You must not add anything. The nail marks in Jesus’ hands tell you that you are bought and the price has been paid. It is finished!

25 January

But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city.

Acts 14:20

In the city of Lystra Paul was called Hermes. But when he didn't want to be worshipped, it wasn't difficult for the Jews to incite a persecution against him. That is why he was stoned by those who shortly before thought that he was a god. There is no stability about the crowd. One moment they shout, "Hosanna", the next, "Crucify".

They dragged Paul outside the city because they thought he was dead. But he wasn't.

What do you think Paul experienced waking up from unconsciousness? The Christians were standing round about him. You can be sure that many of them had been standing there in prayer.

When Paul collapsed, eyes full of hate were turned towards him. When he woke up, he met with eyes full of love.

The situation is moving but it isn't unfamiliar. Many Christians have experienced something like that. They were struck by severe blows. Yes, sometimes they felt that they were completely knocked out. However they weren't left to themselves. Friends gathered around them. These people carried one of those whom they loved to the Lord. They knew that when all other ways are shut, the way of prayer isn't.

There are two reasons why Paul stood up and got courage to go into the city again. The more important reason is that God listens to prayer. Intercession opens the way to God's strength for the one who has been prayed for. When Paul had been stoned, he couldn't pray himself. But there were others who could do that. And God listens to prayer.

The care of the disciples is the other reason why Paul got new strength. It gives us strength to know that one won't be left to oneself.

Let us intercede for each other! Let us in a special way form a ring of prayer round sick people and round those who endure hardships or trials. God is the God of wonders even today. Many children of God can testify to that.

There are Christian brothers and sisters who feel quite overcome. Let us present them before the Lord. Then God lets his blessing overflow them and us.

. . . and they have obeyed your word.

John 17:6

It isn't difficult to draw attention to the disciples of Jesus. Assuredly their lives were also marked by sin. Still, they left everything and followed Jesus. They endured with him in his hardship. They had to make many sacrifices to follow in his footsteps. As far as we know, several of them had to testify to their faith with their blood.

However, it isn't all this that Jesus drew attention to in his high-priestly prayer. It is this one thing: that the disciples had obeyed God's word. A Christian cannot honour God more than that. The one who obeys God's word believes in him. He counts on the fact that when God has said something, then it holds true. No one and nothing are able to destroy his word. He has all authority in heaven and on earth. He cannot lie. His word stands firm.

The Word was put into the hearts of the disciples through Jesus' teaching. He gave it to his friends as the unshakeable basis for their lives. The risen Saviour has done this for generation after generation.

There isn't much in your life that stands firm. But one thing does: God's word. Through hardship, trials and struggles the Lord always leads you back to this rocky ground. When he in his inscrutable wisdom throws you into the deep, he at the same time gives you what you need. No matter how dark it is or has been in your life, still there is a light shining. It cannot be extinguished. It is the light of the Word. Perhaps you think that it is extinguished, and that the word doesn't concern you, but you are wrong. There is no situation where the Word doesn't stand.

When you counted on the Word for the first time, you were saved. Then you were cleansed of all your sins in the blood of the lamb.

It is similar with your life as a Christian. As long as you stick to God's word, you cannot be lost. Jesus vouches for you, and he has said, "Because he loves me," says the Lord, "I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name." (Psalm 91:14)

27 January

It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.

Isaiah 49:6

This is God's word to his Son.

Jesus was to restore the tribes of Jacob. The law couldn't do that. The way of good works didn't lead forwards. Without a substitute, saviour and redeemer no one in Israel can be saved.

God sent his Son to his people. The gospel is first for the Jew that holds good even today. With surprise and joy we will see that the tribes of the Lord will be restored. All over Israel groups are being formed of Messiah - believing Jews. The Lord hasn't forgotten his people.

However, the Lord will not be satisfied with this. God has made Jesus a light for the Gentiles. All over the world Gentiles are being saved through conversion and faith.

At some places there are many, at others few.

But still, it is too small a thing for Jesus to save those who have already been reached. His salvation must reach to the ends of the earth. So there is no doubt about the Lord's will and purpose.

The question is, if what is too small a thing for Jesus is also too small a thing for you? Have you resigned yourself to the fact that the gospel has reached us, or is it the goal of your life that the salvation must reach to the ends of the earth? What is too small a thing for Jesus must be so for us as well! We cannot be content with the fact that we ourselves and some of our friends are on the right side of the border of God's kingdom. We have to get farther with the gospel. We will not finish the missionary work before the ends of the earth have been reached.

More than 1000 years ago there were people who couldn't resign themselves to the fact that we lived in the darkness of paganism – without God and without hope in the world. That was our salvation. Faith comes by the word when it is heard. How should we be able to hear if no one was ready to cross borders?

Today the Lord calls and sends us. We cannot take a rest when pagans perish. God doesn't allow us to be content with what has been obtained till now. It is too little. We mustn't let our hands hang limp. We must go farther – to the very end of the age.

28 January

But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence — Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.

1 John 2:1

Some take sin lightly. They have promised themselves the forgiveness of sins in advance. That is why they never beg for mercy. They count on it as a matter of course. Their life of faith is in poor health. They don't know of agony over sin. Why should one have agonies like this?

Is it a strange thing that a person like that doesn't need an advocate?

What must be done, they easily take care of themselves.

That is why the desire to hear the gospel of Jesus and his work of atonement is lacking.

It is quite different with you who live in a true relationship with God. You know what sin has cost your Saviour. That is why sin is your worst enemy.

You cannot stop praying that the Lord will help you, so that you don't sin against him. Think of heaven, it is the place where you never need to tremble about the possibility of a sinful lust.

You can also feel how the false teachers' promise of a life without sin has a fascinating effect on you. But you don't follow them because God's word says something else. As long as you are here below, you carry a bottomless corruption in your old nature and from time to time sin breaks out. Then you become horrified and ask: what is going to happen?

God's word gives you the answer. You have an advocate with the Lord. He never leaves his place.

God has given him the task to plead your cause, and Jesus has accepted this calling. He doesn't do it by calling attention to mitigating circumstances. The sin stems from your old, utterly depraved nature. That is why Jesus doesn't refer to anything in you. He points to himself, for he is an atoning sacrifice for all your sins. Yes, he has reconciled you with God.

Jesus has carried all your sins. When he had taken them upon himself, he suffered the punishment for them. You don't have to carry the consequences of sin. He has done so in your place, so there is grace for you.

29 January

I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.

John 17:26

How does God's love remain in a Christian? That is an important question. We do not own God's love as we may own a sum of money. Inflation can reduce the value of our capital. But otherwise it is available when we need it.

It is not like that with the love of God. It is life, and all life must be sustained to avoid dying. It remains in you when Jesus is allowed to announce God's name to you. Then he teaches you to know God. What God's name means comes alive to your heart.

Jesus teaches you this first of all through his word. To hear and read the Word is the most important thing for a child of God. If you don't make use of that, his love is not fed, and your life remains without spiritual growth.

Through his leadership Jesus teaches you to know God's name. He allows you to come into darkness, that you may know God as your light. He allows the foundation of your life to shake, so that you may know the Lord as your unshakeable rock. He allows people to meet you with coldness so that you must seek the warmth of love with your heavenly Father.

Jesus makes God known by leading you so that you need him. You always need him, but you do not always recognize it. He opens your eyes that you see it.

Lots of Christians are inquiring about God's way. They think the journey through life includes so many difficulties. And that is true. But it is more important to Jesus that you learn to know God's name, than that you get through life easily.

To know God is to know his love. If the richness and greatness of it dawns upon you, you experience a deep inward joy that hardships cannot take away from you. Far from it! This joy will increase day by day. Nothing is as great as knowing God.

30 January

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.

Galatians 3:13

The greatest curse of your life is the curse of the law. Nothing is comparable with being under God's wrath. Imagine not living to his will in any single area. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. He looks into my heart of hearts, where I can never look myself. He knows the best hidden 'corridors' of the heart.

When you see yourself in the light of God, you have to agree with him. There is no other way out for you, but to perish. You cannot reproach God for rejecting you. In the Judgement you have to bend the knee to him and acknowledge him as God. He has the whole truth, whereas darkness and untruth are in you.

However, that is not all there is to be said about it. A quite surprising and wonderful word remains. It's the gospel. There is one who has redeemed you from the curse of the law. It's Jesus. What didn't it cost him to do that? First, he had to bring himself in a position in which God could curse him. He couldn't do that while he was righteous. God doesn't convict the pure and sinless person.

Jesus had to be made sin for us. He had to become the one who had broken all God's commandments. He had to know an unclean and sinful heart. His whole life of thought had to be contaminated. Yes, his relationship to the Father had to be broken. He had to be led all the way out where he shouted: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'

The answer to this shout of despair is that Jesus became a curse of God for your sake. God laid all the burden of your sin on the sacrificial lamb. He looked at Jesus, and then he saw the sin of the whole world assembled in one single place.

Can you now understand that Jesus collapsed under the burden? Can you understand that you will escape collapsing, when he has done it for you? You, who believe in Jesus, rely on a Saviour who took your place. He did it that you may be allowed to be in his place. You are so dearly loved by him.

31 January

And he said to them, I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.

Luke 22:15

Jesus looked forward to giving his disciples his flesh and blood. It was due to his boundless love. He would give them the best things. It wasn't health, wholesomeness and prosperity. No, it was his flesh and blood.

A child of God can become more concerned with what he gets as a bonus than with the greatest gift of all: Jesus himself. Love for the world incessantly tries to occupy his heart and mind. If it gets freedom to act, you no longer have the same longing for Jesus.

If friends don't meet regularly they slowly drift apart. At first everything seems to be as before. But as time passes, we may discover that we live each in our own world. It becomes obvious when we meet. We haven't got very much of common interest any longer.

Life between friends has to be nourished. It happens when they are together. It is like that in the spiritual area too. If you aren't always to be found where Jesus is, you drift apart from him.

That applies to the Lord's Supper as well. It is good for a child of God to be allowed to sit at the Lord's table. Jesus is longing to strengthen you in the belief that he not only gives you gifts, but that he has given you his flesh and blood. You have been promised this in the Word. The overwhelming thing is that he has made it visible by giving you himself – through bread and wine. He doesn't want you to doubt that he really is yours.

Jesus is waiting for you to receive him. He wants to meet you at the communion table. Your place mustn't be empty there.

It is characteristic of a true and living disciple that he wants to be where Jesus meets him. The question is not if the disciple himself thinks he needs to come to the Lord's table. Regularly throughout his life he receives God's wonderful gift. In that way you preach both for yourself and for others that Jesus' body and blood is the foundation on which you build your salvation.

1 February

He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God.

Revelation 19:13

When Jesus appears to John, as the one who comes to defeat the Antichrist, his robe is dipped in blood. It isn't the blood of his enemies, but his own precious blood.

John sees Jesus, in heaven, as the lamb that was slain. Jesus is forever connected with the sacrifice he had to offer to save sinners. He is always the one who has shed his blood for your sin.

Jesus reminds you of his blood both in the Word and at the communion table. You never meet it for the last time. The blood is in heaven. Jesus is the price that had to be paid in order that your sins could be atoned for. He will therefore be infinitely precious to you forever.

Times of distress hold many mysteries. That applies especially to the last great tribulation. We don't understand how God can allow his children to be tested so severely. How can God put off intervening for the sake of those who are worried by fear and perplexity, when the satanic forces rise against them?

Whether you and I will experience that time, we don't know. But in all these trials it seems as if the foundations are shaking, and we ask: Why?

God doesn't give us the solution to all the mysteries of our life. But he doesn't want us to doubt that we are bought for him with the blood of Jesus.

There is a wonderful strength in having the heart turned towards the blood. When it is allowed to speak to you, everything is being changed. Your questions are of secondary importance, and you bow under the severe blows of God. You say to him, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven!"

At the same time you pray that Jesus may arrive soon. Then you will see his robe dipped in blood. Today you must believe, but then you will see him face to face.

You don't have to fear at the thought of seeing him. The first thing you will meet with is the blood that purifies from all sin. You have been bought. The price has been paid. Therefore, follow the Lamb where he goes.

2 February

She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come.

Proverbs 31:25

The last chapter in Solomon's Proverbs sings the praise of a good wife. The relationship between God and his people has time after time been depicted as a marriage relationship. That fact throws an exceptional light on this chapter.

Clothed with strength and dignity! This Word contains the secret of salvation. A sinner has no strength and dignity in himself. Nothing of ours is sufficient.

Neither is there any honour in us. Perhaps there is towards people, but not towards God. He sees through us. The sin sticks even to the best things with us.

Have you become a dishonourable and lost sinner before Jesus? Have you heard him say the wonderful words: "Your sins are forgiven"? Have you been born again by the Spirit of Jesus?

Then Jesus has taken the filthy clothes from you. Then he has clothed you with strength and dignity. The strength doesn't come from you yourself. Neither does the dignity. Jesus has clothed you with his own strength and dignity.

This is the secret of justification. You receive the garments of somebody else. That is why you can stand the test before God.

If you come to Jesus in your tatters, he gives you all his richness. What do you lack then? You don't lack anything. You have plenty. No matter how miserable you are in your own opinion, you are still without the least flaw in Jesus' opinion.

You can therefore meet the future with a smile. You don't know what it will bring. Nevertheless, you are confident. You know the most important thing: God's grace is new even tomorrow. It is not only today that you are allowed to wear the garments of salvation. For you will be the Lamb's bride not only for a single day. You will be that forever.

Jesus' blood cleanses you from all sin, today and also tomorrow. Neither will he forsake you or leave you tomorrow. The next day is a day with Jesus. Is it any wonder then that a child of God is meeting tomorrow with a smile?

3 February

I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses.

Joshua 1:3

There is a hesitation which originates in unbelief. It is true that we can't cope with anything. It is also true that everything we do is infected by sin. Nothing in us is pure and holy before God. But if these facts make us refrain from venturing out on God's promises, Satan is the one who has prevailed.

There are Christians who go forward in rashness. They themselves invent God's way. But there are more persons still who don't venture to go into the new land which the Lord has promised them. They live in the borderland of the promises, and they don't take possession of the Promised Land.

God could easily have cleared the country of Israel of pagan inhabitants. Their sin had reached its full measure, and God's judgment against them was pronounced. However, he wanted his people to capture the country themselves.

God could have sent angels to preach the gospel of salvation for new nations, but he has set his disciples to do that. It takes the daring of faith to leave a safe and secure existence in this country. But if the Lord calls you, you have to leave. It also takes faith to employ missionaries and send them out. The number of missionaries grows and, in line with that fact, the need of gifts of money. Will the money arrive so that the missionaries can get their bread and butter?

We mustn't go forward in rashness. We are to estimate the costs. We should, first of all, talk with the Lord about everything.

At the same time we should know that God won't excuse us from taking the next step in faith. His promises to Moses and Joshua are promises to us as well. God hasn't changed. He is the same forever. We have to go on his Word. Our security is in what is written.

We should be filled with boldness. We are totally dependent on Jesus. We aren't anything in ourselves. However we will go forward relying on the Lord.

4 February

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

Romans 6:3

To be a child of God is something wonderful. I ask with wonder if it can be true that I, a little man, who am marked by sin and misery, really can be a child of the Creator of heaven and earth? Is it possible that I, someday, at the judgment will be able to stand before him without perishing? How will that be possible?

God himself has intervened. He assures us of his basis of salvation through his word and his sacraments.

The basis is the death of Jesus Christ.

If you believe in Jesus, it is Christ crucified who means everything for you. On the cross he was the Sacrificial Lamb that atoned for all your sins. Lifted up on a tree he hung between heaven and earth as a curse of God. That is why you can be saved.

God wants you to be able to point to a particular day and say on that day I was baptized into the death of Jesus Christ. God doesn't want you to doubt that his Son's death applies to you. All that Jesus finished Good Friday applies to you.

You understand, don't you, that we can't avoid God's judgment, if we ignore such a great salvation? The rejection of the work of salvation and atonement is more serious than all your sins.

If you don't believe in what the Lord has given you in your baptism, you are lost forever. But if you have received it with true faith in your heart, you can sing with Rosenius, "Christ has bought you, cleansed and baptized you, He carries, preserves and blesses your soul."

Jesus' death means that he became one with your sin. God made him, quite literally, to be your sin. He himself was without sin. He dies in your place, struck by God's wrath and judgment.

Fancy being bought into this reality! Jesus took all that is mine in order that I could get all that is his, all his love, all his purity and the abundance of his grace.

Have you any doubts whether you are loved? What else can you do but believe in Jesus and follow him?

5 February

Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him!

Psalm 37:7

Life with the Lord is marked by the feeling of the heart. Therefore the Word reads: "Be still before the Lord!"

God's voice is penetrating. It can put everything else to silence. God has both the first and the last word. On the other hand, it is easy to stifle the voice of the Lord in this world of sin and death.

It is due to the fact that God came to the earth in an insignificant appearance. He didn't shout or cry out. He didn't try to make an impression by external means. His followers have been called to be true to the foolishness of what is preached. In people's opinion there is nothing great about a servant of the Lord who preaches the word of the cross to salvation.

Nevertheless, it is this Word which saves from death. When you had become fed up with listening to the many voices of this world, you became still before the Lord. You had no more to say, the one who is lost and condemned hasn't. You stood in front of your judge and had to cast down your eyes.

Then you met with the incomprehensible. God told you something different from what you had imagined. He didn't crush you in holy wrath. He preached for you about him who was crushed and bore it in silence: Jesus who did not open his mouth when he was led out to be slaughtered.

When the Holy Spirit put the Word about your Substitute and Redeemer into your heart, you were born again. You didn't do anything yourself. God's word did everything. You became a new person.

Stillness before the word of the Lord is an unmissable part of all true life with him. If it goes away, you languish. Then it is no longer possible for God to keep in contact with you. When he cannot do that, faith dies. Faith comes, as you know, by the word of the Lord that is heard.

There is, therefore, a close connection between hearing and waiting for the Lord. If God is allowed to keep in contact with you, it isn't difficult to believe. He cannot lie. When your heart is open for his word, how can you do anything but count on him?

Therefore "Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him!"

6 February

We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat.

Hebrews 13:10

We live in a spiritually unclear and confused time. Sometimes one way to progress and growth in the spiritual life is recommended, sometimes another. Food directions, prayer and fast schedules, exercises of meditation and a lot of other things are slipping in among the Christians. And before they realize it their conscience has been bound. Their interest in all that is new occupies their minds, so that their hearts no longer are turned towards Jesus as the author and perfecter of our faith.

At the intellectual level one sticks to the proper words and opinions, but the truth gets no impact in one's life.

We have returned to the law, and have become occupied with everything we are to do and be.

Then one no longer has the right to the sacrifice that Jesus offered at Golgotha. Most people think that in all circumstances we have the right to the forgiveness of sins through Jesus, but it isn't like that.

The law excludes grace. You cannot be under God's law and under his grace at the same time. Where the law is, there is no grace. Where grace is, there is no law.

A Christian is to adapt himself to God's word. But he is not to submit to the rules and precepts in the Old Covenant which is only a shadow of the good things that are coming. On the other hand, he is to stick to what he himself received in Christ.

You have an altar, and you have a right to eat out of it. In the same way as the Levites received their livelihood from the altar, you receive everything from Golgotha. What you cannot get through the finished work of Jesus, you must not in the least want to possess.

Golgotha makes you as rich as you possibly can be. The blood of Jesus purifies you from all sin, and through his holy life he gives you his righteousness. What more could you wish for? You have plenty forever and ever.

7 February

I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

Revelation 3:8

It is a suffering to have little strength. Then hope ebbs away and one asks oneself what the whole thing will end up with.

But it is different in God's kingdom. There, it is an advantage to be weak. Because it makes you stick to God's word.

When you have power and strength yourself, God's word matters less to you. You know, of course, that you cannot manage without God's help, but you think that you can do something yourself as well.

If your strength is little, then you have to seek strength somewhere else. God can open your eyes, then, to the fact that he has placed you on the unshakeable foundation of the Word. Heaven and earth will pass away, but you will not pass away. Your feet stand on everlasting ground.

God's word carries you through everything. You can't stick to the word without sharing in that power which the Word contains.

Frequently God's word gives you a special word in a specific situation. He makes it alive for your heart and you put confidence in it. Perhaps other people think that it is odd, but you experience that it is said to you directly, and you feel the carrying power of the Word. Therefore you repeat it to yourself.

There is a close connection between holding on to the word, and not denying Jesus.

You deny Jesus if you don't believe his word. Not the smallest letter will by any means disappear. God cannot lie. If not before, you will say it in heaven: The Lord has fulfilled all his word.

To begin with, it hurts when Jesus takes your own power away from you. It is not easy to be made powerless. But the powerlessness is not the Lord's real goal. He wants you to move into the wealth of Jesus. You do that by hiding yourself in his word. Then you must say: It was a good thing that things were going as they did. The Lord's way is always the best. His intention is to open my heart to the greatest gift of all: The whole of Jesus' wealth and grace. And when I have these, I lack nothing. I have everything – yes, I have abundance.

8 February

Christ is all, and is in all.

Colossians 3:11

You don't understand God. You are longing to be a living Christian who is a blessing to others. You have prayed to God for it, but nothing has happened. God is omnipotent, and he could very easily step in, but he hasn't done so. You are still the same person. Why doesn't he fulfil your wish to become more like Jesus?

Your longing to become a holy person is brought about by God. What is wrong is that you think erroneous thoughts of how this is going to take place. You think that something has to happen with you. You haven't realized that the secret of it is that you take possession of all that you already possess in Christ Jesus.

God takes pleasure in you when you believe in Jesus, whom God takes pleasure in. God looks for Jesus in you. Jesus is always strongest in the one who is weakest in oneself.

That is why God pulls down your belief in yourself. You experience it as if he takes everything from you, so that you eventually have to say: Now I have Jesus only.

We think we are poor when no longer we can trust in anything in ourselves. It is hard to lose spiritual self-confidence. We are stripped of everything when God lets the light of the Word shine to the core of the heart, where so much sin lies hidden.

However, God comes to you through his Word. You have to pay heed to that. There is no distress in which the Word can't help. If you submit to the Word, it will create faith in you.

A child of God is an heir of heaven. If Jesus is your saviour, you are as rich as you possibly can be. He is in you. This doesn't apply to special preferred Christians - No it applies to all. It isn't possible that you can be a Christian without having everything in Jesus. Even if you just have the faintest and least faith, he has in spite of that moved into your heart with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms. He hasn't kept it to himself. He has given it to you. You cannot get more. Christ is all and is in all, in you too. You are therefore despite your smallness a blessed child of God.

9 February

They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty.

Revelation 16:14

When sin came into the world, enmity went along with it. War has succeeded war, and World War II won't be the last big war.

Millions of people, all over the world, fear the next war with consequences that will exceed all that we can imagine. People hope that a wish from enough people can prevent war. But that hope will be shattered.

The war is caused by devil-spirits, says God's word. These evil spirits are controlled by Satan. Jesus says about him, that he comes only to steal, kill and destroy.

Satan has the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms as his accomplices. These forces don't allow themselves to be bound by any human wish concerning peace. Only one name makes them helpless; that is the name of Jesus.

If the world would know him and open itself up to his word and spirit, then it would follow him who is stronger than the strong one, and then the endeavours of the demons of war would be in vain.

But the world doesn't know Jesus. Most people meet him with the same hatred which struck against him on Good Friday. The world will follow the Devil who is the prince of the world. That is why the devil-spirits will succeed in gathering all the kings of the world to war.

The odd thing is that the war is called the great day of God Almighty. It wasn't the intention of the evil spirits to promote a day like that. But wickedness isn't its own master. When the cup of sin is full, it becomes a scourge in the hand of God.

The hour will arrive when God has to use this scourge. It is his law that a man reaps what he sows. The world cannot choose Satan as lord without being bound to obey him.

What is God's child to do face to face with this appalling reality?

God doesn't want us to be unaware of this. In the verse after the word about the spirits of demons, the Lord says, "Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake!"

10 February

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Philippians 1:21

For a vast number of non-Christians to live means being in good health and being well off. That is to be as fit as a fiddle, to have a good job and not owe anybody anything.

But it isn't like that for a Christian. He can thank God for the good things in life. They are gifts from the Lord, but not what really matters. The actual gift is Jesus.

If it is a question of life in the strictest sense of the word, you who are a child of God have to point at him and say: Jesus is the life.

You know that what others call life, ends with death. One day it is over. That is why you think that a life, without fellowship with the Risen One, is a life in poverty.

The fact that Jesus is your life means that your heart is turned towards him. Your faith focuses on him. Jesus is the one you trust under all circumstances, because you know his love. It is in your own heart, in a wonderful way. God has poured it out on you by the Holy Spirit. You haven't realized that by analysing yourself. God's word has told you that it is like that. And you keep to God's word.

The fact that life is Christ isn't a truth you have to reach by spiritual exercises. He has been given to you, and you have accepted him. That is why he is the life for you.

No Christian can accept Jesus without accepting him as life itself. That is why you can say, "For to me, to live is Christ." He has entered your heart. There he is the pulse beat in your spiritual life.

Jesus is the resurrection and the life. In him, you own a life that cannot die. He says in John 14:19 "I live and you shall live." This also holds good the last day of your life on earth. Your body will be buried, but you shall not die. He who is life himself takes you to Paradise. You are, by faith in Jesus, united with him. You are connected with him by ties that death can't break. For me life is Christ, and that life continues for ever.

11 February

I am the Lord your God, who brought you up out of Egypt. Open wide your mouth and I will fill it.

Psalm 81:10

The Lord's people were shepherded out of the land of slavery. There was no human way out to liberation. But the Lord intervened.

It is like that in your life as well. You weren't able to save yourself, but God intervened. He set up the tree of atonement on a hill outside Jerusalem, and he let his Son be nailed down on it. Jesus was struck by God's devastating wrath, so that anyone who takes refuge with him will be saved.

You cannot forget about Golgotha. You always have to return to what God has done for you. When you are confronted by God's sacrifice of love, he tells you that his heart hasn't changed.

You must open wide your mouth and the Lord will fill it. You can pray boldly to God for the greatest things. You should not hold back modestly. The Lord will hear your prayer.

The greatest of all is to be saved. Do you know the question: Will I ever reach the goal? Won't I become one of the many who go down on the way? At the same time the hope lives in the heart: If I may be allowed to go into the New Jerusalem some day!

Open wide your mouth! Pray the Lord to save you. He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:6)

It is your worst enemy who wants to fill you with the spirit of despondency. Satan was unable to defeat many by showing them the splendour of the world, but he broke them by paralyzing them with despondency.

You should also pray to the Lord today. He will lead you, the way he formerly led his people through the desert. Listen to his answer. The Lord wants to strengthen your faith through his word. The Holy Spirit carries God's word into your heart. Then you don't doubt. The Lord will complete it for you. You will reach the goal. You will be allowed to be in the crowd who forever will praise Jesus as God's slaughtered sacrificial lamb, not due to you but to your Lord who has led you through to salvation.

12 February

If God is for us, who can be against us?

Romans 8:31

God doesn't treat all his children alike. The course of life is very different for most of us. We know of both good and bad times.

From time to time it seems as if all and everybody are against us. It isn't easy, then, to get through the days.

People misunderstand. Your explanations aren't understood. You fight against a wall and see no way out. Other people ascribe motives to you which you have never had. You feel hurt in your heart of hearts. You also know what self-reproach means. Perhaps the worst accusation is against you. You don't see anything with yourself that you can be satisfied with. You sit in judgment on yourself.

Behind all this are spiritual forces of evil. Their leader is the enemy of the soul. They want to draw your soul down. They want you to go down in despair, and you become worried that they will succeed.

What will you do?

If God is for us, who can be against us?

A great many things can be against us. But what do all adversaries mean before God?

They can't do anything. God forces all their attacks under his plan of salvation. He lets all things serve to your benefit. Paul says that we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered. It isn't easy to be a lamb in the day of slaughter. But whatever we are considered to be, and whichever treatment we are exposed to, we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

The fact is that God is for us. And some day all forces and powers will be on their knees before his feet. Any other power is broken by Jesus. He is the Victor. We do not see it yet, but it will soon be revealed.

If Jesus is your personal Saviour then God is for you. You are in him and God treats you as his Son. Nobody and nothing can harm you. He is your protection – in life, in death and in eternity.

13 February

He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name`s sake.

Psalm 23:3

You do not always think that God`s ways are right. Often they appear so strange that you start doubting whether you have been led by God at all.

The right ways are often ways of suffering. God led his Son to perfection through suffering, and the Son learned from what he suffered.

God also has much to teach us in the school of suffering. We are to take the cross up and follow Jesus. By walking in Jesus` footsteps we cannot deserve what Jesus has won for us. However, the Lord will lead us to heaven along that road.

We often think that if God made the way through life easier, we would be able to serve him much better. We think that our cross only restricts us in the assignments God has put on us.

God knows my proud disposition. He knows how superficial I become in good times. Before I am aware of it, I get away from my deep dependence on Jesus. In my own opinion I am growing.

A servant like that isn`t serviceable. That is why God steps in. He allows me to meet with suffering. It makes me stop and turn my eyes towards him.

God`s ways always lead to Jesus. He uses your life to bind you to him. He makes you weak and helpless in your own opinion, so that you need his grace.

God helps you to remain on the road. It is easier for you to do so when the Lord gives you burdens to bear. It takes more, then, to push you over.

First of all, God`s ways lead to the goal. We easily become too busy with all the duties of life, so the Lord stops us. He wants us to have our eyes turned towards our eternal destination.

Some day you will look back. Then you will evaluate in a different way from now when you look ahead. You will say, that in God`s undeserved grace he allowed you to meet with the very thing which was necessary for you, if you were going to reach the wonderful quiet waters. That day your heart is filled with praise. You praise the Lord. Eternity has begun.

14 February

His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them.

Mark 9:3

The yearning for purity lives in the heart of the soul. The world has not been able to stifle it. Neither has our own impurity. We are created for holiness. Everything impure is caused by Satan. He has, with his snake poison, saturated us and the world we live in. He has made the yearning for purity into a dream.

Human purity seems impressive, and yet all the purity that we can display is only an external thing. Here on earth sin has contaminated everything. You will find perfect purity only at one place. That is with Jesus. He is without sin in the innermost of his soul.

The three disciples saw his clothes so sparkling dazzling white on the Mount of Transfiguration, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. And those disciples never forgot that vision. The purity of his clothes was a picture of Jesus' soul.

Jesus' love of you is so great that he doesn't want to keep anything to himself. He wants to share everything with you, his purity as well. It cost him his life blood. If it hadn't been poured out, we would have lacked the means which purifies us from all sin.

Jesus' blood not only covers the sin, it wipes it out. This means that your sin doesn't exist anymore. God doesn't know the sins which Jesus' blood have removed.

That is why Jesus can present you as a pure virgin to God. In Revelation it is emphasized again and again that those who belong to Jesus will be wearing white robes before the throne of God.

The Word also tells how the robes have become that white. They have been washed in the blood of the Lamb. In spite of that, we mustn't focus our thoughts on our robes in heaven. We are going to see Jesus, and the sight of him makes everything else turn pale. It isn't the rejoicing over ourselves that will unite us. It is the rejoicing over him.

He is the bright Morning Star on whom we are to focus our thoughts.

15 February

So then, the word of the Lord to them will become: Do and do, do and do, rule on rule, rule on rule; a little here, a little there – so that they will go and fall backwards, be injured and snared and captured.

Isaiah 28:13

People were annoyed with Isaiah. They made fun of him. He was a subject of conversation at the drinking bouts. They said: "Who will he lecture? He takes us apart. There is always something wrong with us, in his opinion."

The people are showing a shocking attitude. Isaiah wasn't out in his own business, as you know. He just repeated what God had told him.

No one can with impunity treat God's word the way one treats peoples' words and opinions. What we think and mean are determined by the fact that we belong to a fallen race. God's word remains forever. And every single word God has spoken is true. It applies to the word of judgment, and the word of salvation.

We should note God's judgment against those who despise his Word. He leaves them to themselves and keeps silent. Therefore they become ever more confident that they are right.

God's word is allowed to be, in their lives, what they themselves consider it to be. They think that God's word always remonstrates with them. That is why they only hear God's judgment when the Word meets with them. They never hear the message of the cross which is the power of God to salvation.

What about us?

Have you thought of the fact that there is a close connection between your personal attitude to God's word, and the importance God allows it to have in your life? If you are indifferent concerning God's word, it will become indifferent for you. If you are critical, the reading of it makes you even more critical.

If you read God's word with a broken-hearted heart, God lets you into it by his grace.

Let us pay heed to ourselves. When we hear God's word, we are listening to the living God. We are standing on holy ground then.

Let us believe in the Lord. Let us adapt ourselves to his Word. God's word isn't unimportant. Everything depends on the Word from God.

16 February

He (Uzziah) sought God during the days of Zechariah, who instructed him in the fear (vision) of God.

2 Chronicles 26:5

Uzziah was just sixteen when his father died. To become king that early in life was to have an overwhelming burden put on him. But Uzziah was successful. He wasn't too high-minded to listen to Zechariah the priest who had taught him devoutness first of all.

God has used people to lead me into a life in which I fear him. I don't know where I would have been today if somebody hadn't felt responsibility for me. They took me by the hand and led me into the riches which were the deepest secret of their life.

It is always dangerous to lose one's spiritual directors. It was dangerous for Uzziah, and it is dangerous for you. He became a different person after the death of Zechariah. Formerly he had thought highly of God. Now he thought highly of himself.

What will happen with you the day you no longer have a mother, a father or another spiritual director whom you feel responsible to?

The great question will be will you be conscious of the fact that it is the Lord you are answerable to. It is him you are accountable to.

You cannot live on the godliness of others in the long run. A day is coming when God takes all human support away from you. Then your faith will be tested.

You must have a direct and personal relationship with Jesus. If you haven't, you will last only a short time. In the time of testing you fall away.

When Zechariah died, Uzziah could have entered into a deep dependence on the Lord. Now he had lost his spiritual director, and the Lord could have become his adviser. But he didn't. Uzziah took life into his own hand.

When your spiritual directors pass away, you are standing at a crossroads where the Lord's eye is fixed upon you. What course do you choose? Do you want to decide yourself? Or will you seek the Lord? Do you want to consult him about everything and let him lead you?

17 February

... he who has suffered in his body is done with sin.

1 Peter 4:1

Severe physical sufferings change a person. It can almost feel as if others live in a different world. One feels strange and left out. While the others take an interest in both one thing and the other, the yearning to be spared the suffering constantly arrives in one's mind. Surrounded by suffering it is difficult to let in the others and their problems. One thinks that one has more than enough with one's own problems. The danger just to circle about oneself is obvious. It makes life so poor that one begins to sense something of the significance of Job's words: "I prefer strangling and death, rather than this body of mine." (Job 7:15)

Suffering makes many bitter, but God wants to use it. He wants to fulfil the promise: "He who has suffered in his body is done with sin."

The world and its lust lose their attraction when physical or mental sufferings become part of our life. One doesn't understand that others can reach out for everything that attracts mind and thought away from God. One thinks that they should be immensely grateful, when they are allowed to live without suffering. But remember how you yourself felt, when you were in perfect health. Wasn't your mind, then, often filled with everything which can leave the soul empty?

Now you are helpless. And the worst thing is that it is so difficult to find your joy and rest in God. You are like the bird that flies low under storm clouds. The soul is pressed towards the ground. Your suffering binds and chains you.

God sees your situation differently than you do. In his opinion you are, through the suffering, done with sin. The love of it has been broken. God wants you to adapt yourself to his will so that you, with illness, suffering and distress, put yourself in the Lord's hand and allow him to take care of you.

A bent and broken Christian isn't very valuable in the eyes of others, but you are precious in God's eyes. Your suffering has cut bond after bond. The world has lost its compelling power. At the same time the bond between the Lord and you has become stronger. You don't feel it like that, but God's word says that it is so. "He who has suffered in his body is done with sin."

I left Trophimus sick in Miletus.

2 Timothy 4:20

Why didn't Paul heal Trophimus? He had the gift of healing, and what would have been easier than to lay his hands on Trophimus and help him up from the sickbed?

Paul wanted to take Trophimus with him to Rome, but God wanted something different. And Paul bowed to that. It is not all the Lord's fellow workers who become healed, because God needs sick servants.

For us sickness and weakness may look like a hindrance, but to God it isn't like that. We feel it humiliating that others have to help us when we cannot take care of ourselves. We just think that God needs a congregation that is characterized by mutual readiness to help. It feels hard to be the one who has got to receive help. Paul lets Trophimus stay behind to take care of this task.

It must have been hard for Trophimus who was eager to go with Paul. He knew that Paul needed him. And he had tasted the blessing of following this faithful servant of the Lord.

It was a parting that cost Trophimus when the ship put off from quay in Miletus. It became the last time the two of them saw each other here below. However, both of them were in the service of the Lord. Paul was going to Rome to glorify Jesus by his death. Trophimus had to stay in Miletus to glorify Jesus through his sickness.

You cannot understand God when he puts heavy burdens on you. It is easy to sing: "Give and take as you please!" But it is difficult, when God treats you as he pleases. The Lord's discipline is part of his upbringing. And it is a very important part. It is closely connected with God's love. "Because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." (Hebrews 12:6)

You are being weighed down and humiliated. The Lord wants to teach you perseverance and patience through all the heavy things. And then, he will lead you into a deeper dependence on Jesus. It is the Christian who is most dependent on Jesus who reflects the image of Jesus most clearly.

19 February

He (God) sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.

1 John 4:9

A Christian is to live by Jesus.

Many forget that. They maintain that we are saved by him, but after that they become occupied with what they are to be and do as Christians. When this fills mind and thought, words and opinions may still be right but Jesus isn't the centre in our heart.

Just as your body lives on daily bread, your spiritual life lives by virtue of Jesus. The bread gives your body warmth, strength and life. Jesus gives your heart everything it needs.

There are many tired Christians. One shouldn't be surprised at this. How could it be otherwise? We are contaminated with the world's spirit and way of thinking. Each individual person circles more and more around her/himself. To find your real self has become the goal of life.

Christianity has Jesus as its centre. It isn't about me, but everything is about him.

If you go to the sources of your own life, you become downhearted. You think you have so little to draw from them. From time to time they are completely dried up. It is something completely different to turn to Jesus. The river of life emanates from him. If you drink from it, streams of living water will continuously flow from your inner man.

We are to live through Jesus. We are to live by virtue of him.

You are to believe all that the word says. Living faith sticks to what it believes. It doesn't let go of it. It clings to it.

God's word says that Jesus is my righteousness. It is therefore unshakable and indestructible.

God's word says that Jesus is my redemption. I am therefore redeemed from everything that is heavy, all that troubles and binds me.

Jesus is my holiness. I am therefore holy, in spite of the fact that I feel sinful and unclean.

God wants you to live in what you are in Jesus. This is the way to life in abundance.

20 February

So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well.

John 12:10

Lazarus was a witness of Jesus' divine power. He was God's yes to Jesus' testimony about himself. It isn't empty words when Jesus says that he is the resurrection and the life.

Satan and his servants always want the testimony about Jesus to stop. That can happen by putting the witness to silence. That is why Lazarus had to be killed.

Every single child of God is a living witness of Jesus' power of salvation. He has been led from death to life, as you will remember, from Satan's power to God. That is why Satan looks at every Christian as an enemy.

From time to time the satanic counterattack breaks into direct persecution. There are Christians, even in our day that we should remember as if we were their fellow prisoners. Many hardships are in store for God's people in future. God's word says so. Time immediately before Jesus' reappearance will in many ways be similar to the time of the Apostles.

Satan is going to use violence. Some people will be intimidated. But this isn't without its problems for Satan. An old word says that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church. It was like that and it is like that.

That is why Satan goes a different way. He tries to kill Jesus in your heart. If he doesn't succeed, he tries in another way. The means doesn't matter to him, if he just reaches his goal. As long as Satan is lord in a person's life, what he possesses is allowed to be left in peace. This peace is alarming, because it is due to a deception. It is the peace of death which belongs to hell.

If Satan has lost his prey, he attacks. Jesus says about his disciples, that Satan has asked to sift them as wheat. Satan hasn't stopped doing so. He wants to have them back.

You aren't able to do anything in your own strength. Keep close to Jesus. Live in his salvation. Use his word. Rejoice in his victory.

Then you take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Satan will not be allowed to give you any fatal wound. Should it happen that you lose your life you are to know that your soul belongs to Jesus.

21 February

Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me.

John 14:21

Love for Jesus expresses itself in two ways: You have Jesus' commands, and you obey them.

Love is always built on the words of the beloved. A letter from the person in question is read more than once. It contains a message that means something important owing to the name which is under the letter.

It is also like that with the words of Jesus. He is behind the whole Bible, so its words are immensely valuable for the one who loves him. They aren't like an untouchable investment. No, a Christian takes them out time after time. While you read and hear, you must pray: Lord, help me to stick to your word!

If I haven't a word of God to stick to faith dies. Faith lives live on the Word. If it doesn't receive the Word it will die. However, if it gets ample food from God's word it becomes healthy and strong.

You do not have God's word if you don't use it. Therefore, you have to take nourishment from the Word. If you don't do so, the love of Jesus is empty phrases.

First you must hear and next do.

To hear and to maintain is one aspect of the matter. The other is that you trust what you hear. Build on rocky ground. Let God's word be the oundation for your life. Don't listen to what others think and mean. Peoples' help and guidance aren't enough. It is quite different to what God has said. That stands firm forever. When the Word promises the one who believes in Jesus a whole and full salvation, you have to be content with the finished work. You don't keep the Word if you don't dare to believe God's promises.

Your thought isn't able to understand the greatness of the privileges a Christian has. But you can believe them, because God is the one who has spoken.

That is also true of what Jesus has said about life here on earth.

You are to adapt yourself to God's word. If you don't do so, you don't love Jesus. He has spoken with divine authority. Let us listen, follow and love him.

22 February

Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

Romans 10:4

As long as you are occupied with your own righteousness, you cannot be pleased with the righteousness that is given to you. In vain you hold out your hands towards something which doesn't exist. Then you cannot receive what Jesus gives you as a gift.

Things change the day you give up working on yourself. It happens when you realize that everything you have to do with is contaminated with sin and selfishness. When you think you have found something holy, on inspection, it doesn't turn out to be so. You feel hopeless, miserable and lost.

What are you to do?

You are to seek the righteousness that is given to you. It is the one Jesus has won for you by going under the law in your place. The law hasn't got any more claims on you than those which Jesus has met. Jesus has met all claims. That is why righteousness is given to everybody who believes. He gives you his own perfection, and then you can stand before God.

Turn to Jesus! He is really your righteousness. You cannot become more righteous before God than you are already. You are holy, pure and dear owing to everything he has given you.

This is the secret of both your salvation and your life as a Christian. A saved sinner never goes farther than to receive everything by grace. God doesn't want you to do so at rare intervals. No, you are to draw water from the springs of salvation. Jesus has come with an eternal righteousness. That, only, is to be your precious possession.

When you lose yourself in that righteousness which is imputed to you, the song of praise gets the power to break through. Then you cannot become tired of thanking God for what he has given you already.

Whenever you read the Word, you are assured that your salvation is based on an eternal and immovable foundation. It is an established fact, and nothing in you can weaken it. You are completely righteous through Jesus' wounds.

If you live in gratitude for Jesus' imputed righteousness, the blessing will come to you. Thank God for it today! Do so every day! Then you will do so for ever.

23 February

Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older.

1 Peter 5:5

To know that one follows God's word is a great blessing. Think of the words of the Bible that have changed the course of your life. They have made you act differently from what you usually would have done. Then, when you through preaching and reading come across these words, do they not fill you with a special joy? Your life is woven together with them. You have tasted the blessing that God has attached to them.

It is a rare thing that our reason agrees with God. This rule also applies when it comes down to submitting to older people. Often their advice seems to brake and restrict progress and growth.

Nevertheless, to submit to older people brings about a wonderful peace. It has its basis in the fact that you are blessed. And you are always blessed when you follow God's word.

It is possible that you will protest if you think back. It may look as if the cost is too great when one submits to older people. Then you are in danger of forgetting that God's ways are higher than yours. The Scripture says that if you humble yourself before God and people, he is going to exalt you in due time.

It isn't a rare thing that God lets it happen even in this life. There are older people among us, who aren't great and important in the opinion of the world, but the Lord has exalted them. We who know them are convinced that it is so. The Lord is near them in a wonderful way. And is there a greater exaltation?

One thing is beyond doubt anyhow: The one who humbles himself will be exalted on the day of eternity. God's word says so.

An unsuccessful past with much sin mustn't prevent you from travelling back to the Lord's testimony. Grace elevates you again and puts your feet on the royal road of blessing when you follow God's word.

The blessed word shines in the middle of a dark world: "Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older!" Follow it, and you will be blessed!

24 February

Jesus Christ . . . the ruler of the kings of the earth.

Revelation 1:5

People pay attention to what the great and mighty men of this world say. Many feel that it is those, who have the fate of millions of people in their hands, but it isn't like that.

There is one who is King of kings and Lord of lords. Jesus is the one.

The development on earth is decided by him. It isn't enough to say that he is involved. No, nothing happens unless he is behind it.

It is important to remember that it is God who judges, when war, misfortune and distress cause havoc.

Satan tempts us to believe that sin has no consequences. To all appearances, nothing happens when people deliberately turn against God and make room for scorn, mockery and contempt.

But don't believe him. He is a liar. He has been so from the first hour, and he will continue to be so until he ends up in the sea of fire. Only then will everybody realize what seductive power his lies have had.

Jesus judges.

He did it when he took a whip and drove the tradesmen out of the temple. He didn't tolerate that his Father's house was being profaned.

Jesus judged Jerusalem when the Emperor Titus raised a rampart around the city and razed it to the ground.

Jesus judged the 20th century by letting two terrible wars cause havoc in large parts of The Old Christian World. Now there has been peace for many years. However, it mustn't make anyone believe that the Lord's judgment of wrath is over. It will not fail to appear. God is a holy God. He has said, "A man reaps what he sows."

Abraham prayed for grace for Sodom and Gomorrah. We should do so too. To our surprise we will see that Jesus has held back his wrath. On the other hand, let us realize that it won't fail to appear. People will faint with terror. Not even the greatest persons can get away. Jesus is judge, and he reigns over the kings of the earth.

25 February

You were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body.
1 Corinthians 6:20

Several members of the congregation in Corinth had a wrong attitude to sin. At first they let it control their thoughts. Later on it made itself lord over their body.

If the old man is allowed to rule, it will lead a Christian into sin and misery. It is important to bear in mind that the fleshly nature in a Christian is as sinful as it is in a non-Christian. Our old man will never become holy. Throughout our lives it has to be killed. This takes place through daily repentance.

A wrong attitude to sin is connected with a wrong attitude to grace. The old man doesn't like to be obliged to live on grace. It tries, therefore, to make you interested in something else. In many cases it succeeds far too well. The gospel becomes strangely distant, unreal and theoretical. You are weak, then, in the hour of temptation.

When God wants to help you out of the sin, he reminds you of the fact that you have been bought and the price has been paid. God knows you better than you know yourself. The hatred of sin is always strongest when you see what the Saviour had to suffer in order to break the chains of sin. Then you become terrified and must ask: Has my sin really cost Jesus that much?

It has. That is why one doesn't trifle with sin. It led your Saviour into the darkness of God forsakenness. You mustn't make way for the sin which Jesus had to pay for. He has ransomed you from it. Then you mustn't be a slave under it.

Jesus has ransomed you to honour God.

When you bear in mind the price Jesus had to pay, a holy desire is born to honour him in everything. You don't want to have any area in your life in which Jesus hasn't got the ownership. He has bought you, so he must also be in charge of you. Therefore honour Jesus with your body!

26 February

Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him . . .

Hebrews 7:25

Why is it so difficult to believe that I really am saved? It is due to my weak staggering Christian life which incessantly accuses me. Can I be a child of God when I am as I am? Can I be a born again person, when I feel so little of the strength of the new life in me?

I have made up my mind several times that things must be different. I have also tried to mend my ways. However, there hasn't been any lasting change. Just after I had come to a decision, it seemed that things were going a little better. But after a short while everything is as before.

At the same time, I know other Christians who can tell of progress and victory. That is why the question comes up: Am I a true child of God?

Yes, many sincere Christians ask that. Without their clear understanding they have been captured by non-biblical thoughts of what it means to belong to Jesus.

God's deed is finished. Most people agree about this. There is nothing wrong with God and his deed. The problem is what we are to do.

The wonderful thing is that the Lord has finished not only all work. He has also finished all yours. There isn't anything left to be done by you.

God's word says that Jesus saves completely and fully. It is not a partial salvation he has procured.

It is true that everything goes wrong for us, when we look at ourselves in the bright and penetrating light of truth. At the same time the fact remains that Jesus makes a success of everything he touches. What did he want? He wanted to be the source of an eternal and perfect salvation for sinners. And he became so. God raised him up from the grave. With that the Father declared Jesus' deed finished.

In the midst of your own weakness you possess him, when you resort to him. He vouches for you. You can therefore with confidence raise your head and say: I am saved. Jesus has saved me completely and fully!

27 February

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 1:9

Why is there so little confession of sin?

It is due to the fact that there is so little consciousness of sin. If you don't acknowledge the sin as sin, it makes no sense to confess it. Mistakes can be corrected. What you shouldn't have done, you can do differently another time. Mistakes and defects can be remedied.

Basically it is self-righteousness that always wants to excuse sin. The word sin is an appalling word. It kills self-righteousness. That is why the enemy of the soul wants to make you select other words for sin. He prevents you from settling your account with God.

You cannot be released from sin which you haven't acknowledged and which you, for that reason, haven't confessed. One doesn't need the help of someone else for what one can manage to free oneself from.

Here you have the reason for the many nominal Christians. They are not redeemed because of the fact that they don't let themselves be cleansed in the blood of Jesus Christ. They tire themselves out in failed attempts to redeem themselves. They don't know the joy of grace. They don't count themselves blessed because of Jesus.

If you are one of them, then you have one way to go. That is into the light – the light of the word of God. There all things are called by their right name. There you are found out.

It isn't only your outward actions and the motives behind them that will be exposed. The 'fine' hidden sins in the dark corridors of the mind will come to light. You have to confess the sin. You don't manage to keep silent any longer. It becomes a necessity for you to tell God the whole truth. From the deep of the heart the prayer goes up, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner!"

In this situation you are allowed to hear the Lord's wonderful word. By referring to his righteousness, he assures you that your sins are forgiven, and that you are purified from all unrighteousness. God can never forget Jesus. Your sin has been taken away, and your punishment has been atoned for. This holds good today, tomorrow and forever.

28 February

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Matthew 11:29

Jesus says that his yoke is easy. We can understand that. It is more difficult to understand that his burden is light. But it is like that.

If you agree to learning from him, you come under a burden. At the same time you get something into your life which makes it light.

The burden is to learn from Jesus meekness and humility.

In this world you are brought up to do your duty and demand your rights. But Jesus didn't do that. He went entirely into the calling the Father had entrusted to him. And he finished it. Nevertheless, he didn't demand his right. He left that to his Father.

There is much injustice in this world of sin. And a Christian gets his/her allotted share of it. Our natural response is to protest.

Jesus didn't do so. He reproved the servant of the high priest, but it didn't happen so that he himself must be proved right. He was occupied in relieving others even in the last hours of his life. In each person he saw a brother whom he was to lead into the way of truth. And when the servant of the high priest hit without reason, he had to be stopped for his own sake.

It may look as if the injustice prevails, but it doesn't. God is the judge of the whole world and nothing is decided before he has said the last word.

A child of God has the time to wait. Confidently he puts the matter into the hand of the Lord. No one can conduct it like him. He knows all things completely. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him.

God knows your heart as well. Perhaps your hands aren't as clean as you think. When we have to defend ourselves, we do not always judge ourselves correctly.

It is a good thing to appear before the Lord in meekness and humility. Then it always ends up with the fact that we have to beg for mercy for ourselves. To find grace lightens our heart and mind. It is a good thing to learn from Jesus.

29 February

... those who ... have received a faith as precious as ours.

2 Peter 1:1

Our faith is precious. It's God's greatest and most valuable gift to us. Therefore we have to pay attention to it. We must do everything to preserve it.

We cannot honour God more than by believing him with the faith he himself has granted us. We shall not, first of all, honour God with our own. Basically, we have nothing which we can call ours. We owe God everything. He is the great giver. We are they who have to receive again and again.

If you have given another person something which is valuable to you, you notice if the person in question uses your gift. It always makes you happy to see that the thing you have given is being used.

When God looks at you, he doesn't, first of all, focus on all your activities. He sees how you are getting on with his gift.

Faith is precious to God, because it cost him his own life blood to give it to you. A sacrifice had to be made. It wasn't enough to sacrifice oxen and goats in large numbers. A lamb had to be slaughtered. It was the lamb which was chosen before the foundation of the world had been laid.

This lamb will, for ever and ever, be exalted one as the lamb which was sacrificed.

When God gave you your precious faith, he did it by giving you Jesus. It wasn't Jesus as the exalted or as an example. No, it was Jesus as a sin and guilt sacrifice.

His blood is precious to God. Your faith is also precious, because it's a faith in that blood. You have never been able to provide it yourself. It has been given to you by the Lord. In his boundless love he has wanted to share the most precious gift with you. He wanted the thing which was precious to him to be precious to you also. God will share his joy in Jesus with you.

Through your precious faith you please God's heart. Through faith Jesus is forever present to you just as He is to God.

1 March

Then one of the elders said to me, 'Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals. Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the centre of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. Revelation 5:5-6

The only time we hear that John wept, he was in heaven. God had allowed him to come up there to show him what was going to take place in future. He saw a scroll which contained God's plan of salvation. But no one could open it. Neither in heaven nor on earth was there anyone who could reveal God's way and will. That is why he wept.

Then one of the elders helped him by calling attention to the Lamb who had been slain. In his search for one who was worthy, John had forgotten about Jesus. Now his glance was turned towards one who had been there all the time.

Are you like John? How much distress in your life is connected with the fact that you turn your glance towards all the difficulties and problems instead of looking at him who accompanies those who are distressed and opens the Scriptures?

Yes, the truth is that God already in this life wipes away every tear from our eyes. It happens when he allows us to see the Lamb who is slain. Then we see the marks of the atonement. He was afflicted, smitten and made miserable by God. He was like this for my transgressions. Every time God reveals the richness of the salvation, the sun of grace shines and outshines anything else.

We easily believe that help must be that God does something entirely new. But that is wrong. In Jesus, he HAS made all things new. What we need, is to have our eyes open for the Lamb who is very near to us. Jesus has come to us. He is among us. He has entered into your sinful world, not to condemn you but to cleanse you in his blood.

You haven't prevailed, and you will never prevail. Nevertheless the victory is yours. When you believe in Jesus, you have a share in the victory which the Lion of the tribe of Judah has gained.

There is no reason for weeping. Jesus has triumphed. He assures us of this in his word. Therefore let us already down here sing out the song to the Lamb's praise and honour.

2 March

He has preserved our lives and kept our feet from slipping.

Psalm 66:9

Satan's army of spirits is huge, and his offensive weapons are many. He attacks from all sides and at all times. One never feels safe - least of all when for a long time he has lain low. Then he gathers his strength for an assault.

Will I succeed in coming well through life, or will I end up in the sea of fire with the Devil and his angels?

As the years went by I have got to know myself. My eyes have been opened for new pitfalls. If I look back on life, then it is with horror that I do so. How often have I been just one step from spiritual death? Nevertheless, I walked about carefree and thoughtless.

Is it a strange thing, then, that my heart shouts with joy when I meet the blessed Word, "He has preserved our lives and kept our feet from slipping"?

Here I find the secret. It is entirely due to the Lord that I have been kept as a child of God.

He has preserved my life. I myself have taken far too little care of it. I haven't given it satisfactory nourishment. But the Lord has taken care of it.

How often was my foot close to slipping? There are so many slippery paths on earth. Before I am aware of it, I find myself on one of them. Then I start slipping. But the Lord is surprising. Again and again he intervenes. I haven't fallen into the abyss, because he lives.

When I think of God, I am filled with joy and thanks. Just imagine, he is the same yesterday and today - yes, forever. He will take care of my soul even in the future. In the days to come the Lord will walk by my side and step in every time I am in danger of slipping.

Satan's great power mustn't paralyze you. You know one who is stronger. The Lord is the one. He has shown it through his victory at Golgotha. He comes to your help by virtue of it.

3 March

In repentance and rest is your salvation; in quietness and trust is your strength.

Isaiah 30:15

Sin results in restlessness. The sinner is like a rough sea in constant motion. Something has to happen all the time. Life becomes a search for experiences and amusements.

But there is no salvation in these things. The soul never will find rest there. It tires itself out on emptiness and becomes more and more empty itself.

Lack of quietness is not only the problem of the non-Christian. Even a child of God has difficulties in being quiet. The pressure from the outside is great. Unintentionally, you may be under the influence of others all day long. You never become quiet. And your own mind may worry you. Many thoughts and worries still have a harrowing effect on the mind. On top of these all the demands of life come. You can by no means meet them. That is why they rise accusingly against you.

God's word admonishes us to turn away from anything that makes us worried. Jesus has lived through all our problems and difficulties in our place. He knows everything fully. And he has secured for us a haven: before God's face, in the wonderful rest and peace of the Gospel.

It is a great wealth to be able to turn away from anything that makes one worried, and drink from the living streams of water. You cannot be quiet before the Lord without being filled with trust in him. He appears to your heart and you get to know him. You look into an incomprehensible depth of love. You realize that in all difficulties God has thought thoughts about you. God touches everything and lets it become a blessing.

The Lord shows you grace first of all. Grace for all your sins. Grace for everything that you couldn't manage. Grace for all neglects. Yes, in quietness before God's throne, he shows you how he looks at you. You have been covered with the grace of Jesus – yes, hidden in it.

4 March

In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism . . .”

Colossians 2:11-12

In the Old Covenant there was a sign of the covenant: Every eight-day-old child was to be circumcised. If it wasn't done, the child was to be cut off from the people. Then it didn't belong to the people of the covenant.

In the New Covenant there is also a sign of the covenant: the baptism. Just as children were circumcised under the Old Covenant, so we now carry them to him who has said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." (Luke 18:16)

Many objections have been made against infant baptism. Most of these will also make the circumcision under the Old Covenant absurd.

It is true that a child cannot believe. Neither can a grown-up. Luther is right, when, in the interpretation to the Third Article of Faith, he says, "I believe that I am unable to believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him by my own reason or strength." If a person is going to be saved, God must give faith to him. No one is saved without faith in Jesus. That is why we carry our children to be baptized. We want them to believe in Jesus and be saved.

Baptism is not to be done again. "For God's gifts and his call are irrevocable." (Romans 11:29). If a person doesn't live by faith, he is lost. Baptism makes the perdition more serious in some respects. Just imagine having received the whole abundance of Jesus as a gift, and yet reject him by not believing in him!

If you believe in Jesus, everything which God has given you in baptism is for your salvation. If you don't believe him, you will get an even stronger judgment.

Let us baptize our children and preach Christ to them. That is the way to salvation for both them and for us.

5 March

We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. We do not want you to become lazy .

..

Hebrews 6:11-12

A living Christian is continually exposed to attacks by Satan. Sometimes he comes roaring; sometimes he comes sneaking up on us. Perhaps he is most dangerous, when he tries to lull a Christian to sleep through dullness. Satan doesn't allow a Christian to be left in peace.

What are you to do when you are exposed to this danger?

God's word answers, "You are to show diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure."

You do so by considering, over and over again, what God has said in his word. If you don't do that, it slowly recedes into the background and becomes unreal to you.

What do I build my life on? Where are my roots? What is my unshakeable foundation? What will stand, when everything else shakes?

One of the most insecure things is the life here below. "The wind blows over it (him) and it (he) is gone, and it's (his) place remembers it (him) no more." David sings in Psalm 103:16. Life is like a puff of wind. I don't know if tomorrow will be mine.

However, hope is unshakeable. Jesus vouches for Heaven. He has prepared a place for every single sinner who trusts in him. I don't know what my way here below will be like. But I know where it will end.

At this side of eternity I am on a journey. My home here below is just a temporary residence on the journey. I am a pilgrim who hurries forwards. Each evening I have put a day's journey behind me.

If the journey has lasted several years, the danger of dullness is great. Tiredness arises. Difficulties during the journey increase the desire to settle down.

Don't do it!

Show diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure! Don't give up! Look forward to the day when you will walk through the bright gates in the New Jerusalem. Jesus will go to meet you. He will lead you before your God. That day will soon arrive!

6 March

For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure

2 Timothy 4:6

It's educational to walk in a cemetery. "The length of our days is seventy years – or eighty, if we have the strength". At the same time one wonders at how many are those who must leave before they reach that age.

Then the question arises: When must I leave? It's good to be ready. The time of my departure could be nearer than I think.

What does it mean to be ready?

It's to have a right relationship with God and with people.

Do you have a right relationship with God? Are there shadows between him and you?

Forgiven sin is no shadow. Neither is weakness and frailty. But, if you live in unforgiven sin, you have to confess it. You must settle your account with God. You must give in when the Spirit calls you in before his face, in repentance and by mending your ways.

Do you have a right relationship with people? Are there some that you haven't forgiven? Are there people you should have it out with, before you must leave?

You mustn't forget how soon your departure may come.

Happy are you, who have a right relationship with God and other people. You know that, as far as you can see, there is nothing that you should put in order before you must leave. You are ready. Jesus can come and fetch you whenever he wants. You would gladly stretch out your hands towards him. Your journey is to the country where your heart has been for many years. Now you will take possession of the home he has made ready for you.

Death is not the worst thing to a Christian. Jesus has taken the sting out of death, by going into it. He has made it a homeward journey.

What is it that you must leave for?

It's the Heavenly Wedding Festivities. The life you live today should be in the light of this, and one thing is certain: This day brings you nearer the objective, if you are one of those who are ready to meet your God.

7 March

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Ephesians 1:3

Many Christians are busier with earthly blessing than with the heavenly one. Think of how many of our prayers are about life here on earth.

It isn't wrong to pray to God for our daily bread. Jesus himself has taught us to do so. He has also said that he knows what we need, and that he takes care of us.

However, the blessing God gives his children is first of all the spiritual blessing of the heavenly realms. Yes, often God holds back something of the earthly blessing in order to make room for the heavenly one in our heart and mind.

God has the full comprehensive view. He sees how easily we are caught by everything that this world has to offer. He knows how natural it is for the one who has an ample supply to live on, to rest in the thought that he has enough for many years. God therefore warns us that life is short. You have to be ready to leave. Wealth doesn't last forever.

God doesn't give you what you ask for, when you wish for a life where the sun always shines. That belongs to eternity. Here on earth, the fruits of the Spirit don't ripen simply by sun and pure joy. If you eat your fill of what this world offers you, your heart becomes cold towards the spiritual blessings of the heavenly realms.

That is why God leads you through life, so that you get hunger and thirst for his righteousness. Then you are able to receive his spiritual blessing.

God wants the riches in Jesus to be your greatest and only treasure. If it is so, you will also be happy on earth. Down here there is only one good thing that you should never lose. It is Jesus and all that he is for you.

The treasure you have in him never loses its value. The more you look at it, the more precious it becomes to you. It makes the earthly things turn pale. It creates delight in your heart, so that you must say: Praise be to God who has blessed me in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

8 March

**Truly you are a God who hides himself, O God and Saviour of Israel.
Isaiah 45:15**

When God leads you into hardships and distresses, you cannot understand his way. In the darkness of remorse it may appear as if God has left you. You can cry out and pray without receiving an answer.

Hear what God's word says: God has hidden himself from you, but it isn't the same as saying that he has left you. You cannot see him, yet he is with you. You cannot hear him, but he hears every sigh of yours.

God has hidden himself. He has done so in order to save you. God leads his children into ways where it may look as if he has gone. He does so in order to create a deep longing for him in their heart.

God wants to embrace you. But you are a strange child. You will only allow yourself to be rescued by him when you are in distress. That is why God hides himself from you for a time.

When God becomes the hidden God in your life, you are under his disciplining hand. It is difficult to be there, but at the same time it is blessed. The Lord disciplines you in order to draw you to himself. He lets the darkness fall about you in order to lead you into his wonderful light.

Later you will see it. By hiding himself from you, God brought you a renewed blessing when he revealed himself to you again. You had nothing. You were so infinitely poor. But, then, God came as saviour. Then your eyes were opened and you saw that even though he was hidden from you, he hemmed you in behind and before.

Jesus was forsaken by God. He was forsaken instead of you. If you are a helpless sinner that in your distress clings to him, you will never have to cry out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Jesus cried this in your place.

You are to know that when God for a time hides himself from you, it is in order to save you. God comes in to you with the whole riches of his grace. It may well be that you lose something on earth, but inwardly you won't. Your saviour uses the hard days of your life to lead you to heaven. That day is ahead of you - the day when you will meet the Lord with the words: My King and my God!

We proclaim him.

Colossians 1:28

Paul and his fellow workers knew that basically everything is about one thing, to preach Jesus. This is why they portrayed him as crucified before the audience's eyes.

Times have since changed, but the help is the same. You too are to turn your attention towards Jesus. There is no distress so great that you cannot turn to Him with it.

You cannot look at Jesus without seeing one who stops in front of you.

It is possible that others have become tired, but he hasn't. He listens to you and it is his greatest longing that you let him have access to your distress.

Jesus doesn't always intervene in the way you would like Him to. You want to triumph and have strength, but Jesus gives you grace. He does so because he knows what you need most of all. He knows that even if you became the Christian you long to be, you would still be lost without his cleansing blood.

The deepest need of you and me is to be cleansed of all of our sins. This can only take place through Jesus' blood.

The fact that he gave his blood for us, means that he gave his life in order to save us from God's wrath and judgment. He bore our sin with all its horrifying terror. God's word says that Jesus was made sin itself.

The sin he tasted wasn't his own. God put your sins on his Son. As the sacrificial lamb the Son bore them under God's judgment. God let Jesus receive the outcome of our sin. That is why death was so bitter for him. However, Jesus didn't try to avoid it. He fought the fight to the end, in such a way that he finally could say, "It is finished!"

We preach him, Paul says. He had seen Jesus himself and it had changed everything. Faith in the Crucified and Resurrected Lord made grace overflow his entire life. It is like that for you as well. The word of the cross is God's power to salvation now and forever. It is a help in all distress, danger and temptation – even this day.

10 March

For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him.

Philippians 1:29

There is a difference between a self-taken faith and a faith that has been given us.

A self-taken faith is the fruit of a decision. It is a matter of the will and the intellect. It is a cold and dead faith. It is, therefore, without fruit. Worldliness and urge of discussion follow it – not godliness and a holy life.

Most people with a faith like that say goodbye to churches and places of worship sooner or later. Few of those hold on all their lives. The horror will be greater for them. Imagine crossing the threshold to eternity and only before God's court of law realize not to have a saving faith.

A given faith is the faith Jesus gives. It doesn't come about by human ability and strength. God's Spirit creates it in the heart, when God's word is heard.

The Holy Spirit avoids human control. When and where he wants to, he does his deed in a lost sinner's heart. He creates faith in Jesus.

It is grace as God's word says. No one has deserved it.

As the Lord gives us the faith as a gift, so he also gives us the suffering. Our old nature cannot understand that God gives it to us. But the new nature knows that everything that I face comes from the Lord, also that which is difficult, hard and dark.

Through suffering for Jesus' sake you are led into a relationship to him that you otherwise weren't able to come into. Jesus shares his own pain with us.

Neither we are to or can save. Only Jesus can do that. But we are to bring others into the riches of grace. That cannot happen without sacrifice. The Lord has put it on us while he calls us willingly to follow in his footsteps.

He has given us the faith by grace. By grace he also has made us his followers. God give us to be kept in a true and living faith. God give us not to live in selfishness, but to let him have disposal over us.

For in him you have been enriched in every.

1 Corinthians 1:5

Isn't much dejection in your Christian life connected with the fact that you don't see the riches you have in Jesus?

You look at yourself ten times for every time you look at Jesus. Again and again you have to admit that you and your Christianity aren't as they ought to be. Outwardly you are getting on fairly well. It is worse inwardly. Why is there such a lack of pain for the salvation of souls? Why is your faith so weak when the storms of troubles blow? How can you be so careless when you know that the time on earth is so short? Why doesn't hell terrify you more than it does? Why don't you look forward to coming to heaven?

Have you considered that this distress is based on the fact that you are so little pleased with what you possess in Jesus? No matter how much you exert yourself, it will never be different. If you are a sincere Christian you can never be satisfied with anything in yourself.

You might, therefore, just as well turn to Jesus at once. He is longing to reveal his riches for your heart. With Jesus you find any amount of riches. He is really rich in everything. His love goes beyond all our ideas. His divine purity is so glorious that you must sink to your knees. His patience and endurance towards you are not diminished because of you have a feeling of being rejected.

You mustn't doubt about the riches of Jesus! May God open your eyes! Then you will see that you have a share in all Jesus is. This is the way Jesus' heart is: He cannot keep anything for Himself. He shares everything with you. It is true you are poor, but it does not matter when you, at the same time, through faith have a share in all his riches?

All God's children are poor in themselves. All God's children are infinitely rich in Jesus. And they are rich in every way. When God's word says "every way", then it means every way. Jesus has taken you into all his riches. It is really yours. You are rich in every way in him.

12 March

See, I have refined you, though not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. For my own sake, for my own sake, I do this.

Isaiah 48:10-11

God wants the dross in our life to be removed. It is a hard process. The dross is everything which wants to keep command on its own. And there is much of that. Our old nature wants to be the centre.

The selfish person doesn't reconcile to the faith, which gives Jesus the whole honour and wants to exalt him alone. This is why there is a fight. The Spirit fights against the flesh as the old nature, and the flesh as old nature fights against the Spirit.

In this fight God hasn't left you to yourself. He helps you. He does so by leading you into the furnace of affliction. There the dross will be separated out.

A lot of Christians were led into a new relationship with Jesus when suffering was put on them. They saw how changeable and perishable everything is. A person's earthly happiness may change in less than no time.

The suffering wakes us. We face the truth. We are like a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. All that we possess, we simply have as a loan.

Arrogance and self-confidence disappear when we are melted in the furnace of affliction. We realize how little we are capable of doing. We are nothing if God doesn't give us everything.

Yes, God knows what he does when he leads his children into the furnace of affliction. He wants us to ask for the true values, that neither misfortune, nor illness, nor death can put an end to.

However, he doesn't always achieve his purpose. There is a lot, which not goes God's way in yours and my life.

What does God do, then?

Does he reject us? Passes he the sentence upon us? Says he that we are useless? No, he steps in for his own sake. Everything is wonderful with God. But is there anything which is more wonderful than God's grace? It hasn't its basis with us, but in him alone.

He saves us who are poor, unworthy and unsuccessful, when we take refuge in Jesus. He does so for his own sake.

13 March

He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

Romans 8:32

All things with Jesus!

Hold on to it, you Gods child, who cannot understand why God hasn't intervened. You saw the danger and you cried out to God, but he didn't prevent the accident. It seemed as if God remained passive.

Now you are left behind disappointed and discouraged.

God isn't silent. He who didn't spare his most precious possession, he also gives you all things along with Jesus.

But do I have everything along with Jesus if I lose spouse, health, job, house or home?

Yes, you have! That's the fixed point for a child of God, that God always and under all circumstances gives you all things along with Jesus. It's like that, also when he disciplines you. And God disciplines severely. That's what his Word says. But God never takes Jesus and the blessing in him away from you. You can't suffer any hardships, in which you can't say with cheerfulness: Even now I have all things in Jesus.

You have to learn to take your thought captive under obedience to the Lord's word. Your reason mustn't set limits. The message has to go into your heart, and faith can grasp what thought can't understand.

God isn't unreasonable. When he has given his precious Son, he will also give you everything else as well.

That you get it all along with Jesus means that it works for your eternal good. God has your soul's salvation in mind more than anything else. Aren't you grateful for that?

One day you shall see everything in a transfigured light. Then you will not have doubt anymore. Far from it! It will be radiantly clear to you that God every single day gave you all things in Jesus Christ.

They rejoice in your name all day long; they exult in your righteousness.

Psalm 89:16

To rejoice all day long doesn't mean being successful all the time. From time to time God leads his children through the valley of tears. It is hard when one has to go that way. But God has given you a means of getting through the trial. It is the song of praise.

You cannot praise yourself because you cope well with life. But you can praise the Lord. You can do that both day and night. God is always the same. He stands as an unchangeable and eternal rock in the midst of the turbulent sea of time.

You can also rejoice all day long. There is also something about you that cannot be changed, if you believe in Jesus. It is the righteousness he has given you undeservedly by grace. It isn't a righteousness that he has produced in your life. No, Jesus won it when he lived under the law.

Because of Jesus' resurrection God accepted his unassailable right to life. And it is this right that is granted to everyone who believes. No one and nothing can shake it, if you take refuge in Jesus.

You are not exalted by your own righteousness. If it was so, you would be eternally shut out of the life before the face of the Lord. You are exalted by the righteousness of Jesus. God has once and for all approved that. That is why everybody who wears God's righteousness is exalted.

Life on earth goes through narrow and dark passages. They are caused by yourself and many circumstances you don't control. God often lays his disciplining hand on you. It is easy, then, to think that the Lord no longer is as before. But you mustn't yield to that temptation. Instead you are to flee into what lasts: the righteousness of Jesus.

Then the mind is tuned to praise. Just imagine you have a Saviour who entirely saves you! His heart hasn't changed. He has not taken back his gift. He still has joy in seeing that his salvation become the riches of your life. This is why you rejoice all day long.

Be on your guard against all kinds of greed.”

Luke 12:15

Jesus speaks about all kinds of greed. There are many kinds of greed. Behind all of them lurks the idolatry. Greed binds the soul to the earthly things. That is what the thoughts again and again circle about.

Greed is not only a danger to the rich. There are few Christians who aren't tempted to get a "want-more-disease".

It can be quite different things one wants to have more of. The interests aren't the same here. Materialism, mania for collecting and cultural interests go hand in hand.

It is secondary to the Devil what you choose. He is satisfied if he can make your thoughts cling to the earthly things. He wants to bind you to a wish to get more and more, steadily go further, incessantly become more capable.

Satan knows that if he succeeds in doing so, God and what has to do with God's kingdom will be forced out of your life. Bible reading and prayer will become a painful duty. The desire to hear God's word will disappear. The mind will be captured by something else.

Be on your guard, says Jesus. He knows your soul and mine far better than we ourselves do. Jesus knows that the Tempter didn't come to him only. No, he comes to us, as well, in many shapes.

The greedy man is often admired by others, as they speak of hard work, insight, ability and many interests.

However, God evaluates differently. He looks behind the façade. He knows that greed puts the spiritual life on starvation diet, and it ends in the fact that the life of God slowly dies. Things went on like that for a vast number of Christians. It wasn't gross, obvious sins that suffocated their spiritual life. It was the greed.

The greed comes to an end the night you go to bed for the last time. Then God demands your soul back. But it is too late to repent then. Jesus will call you a fool that night. That night can arrive earlier than we think. Therefore you have every reason to search your soul before the Lord's face. Do not forget either that Jesus hears prayer. If you take refuge with him, he will help you in the fight against the greed. He will wipe out this sin and lead you forward on the way of life.

16 March

Wait for the Lord and keep his way. He will exalt you to inherit the land.

Psalm 37:34

God's way can occasionally appear to be odd. God's blessing follows it, but it doesn't always look so. It is the way of light and the way of truth, and it costs something to follow it in the world of darkness. The majority of people are guided by the time-spirit, and it is a continuous temptation for a Christian to give in and to act like everybody else.

You have to remain on God's way. Although it can be dark and unknown, it is the one, nevertheless, that leads to the goal. What does it help that the way is easy and broad, if it ends in the perdition?

If you are on the Lord's way, you have got a privilege non-existent at any other way. You can wait for the Lord, and you will not do so in vain. The waiting time can appear long, but the Lord comes with his help.

You probably know true Christians who got well through life. They had to go through many difficulties and fights. But, under all circumstances, they remained on the Lord's way.

Follow in their footsteps. Any other way leads to disappointment and trouble. When trouble and distress meet you on the Lord's way, it is an immensely rich thing to be able to say, that you are convinced that you are where the Lord wants you to be. You haven't taken the life into your own hands.

The day will come when God will elevate you. You mustn't hasten it impatiently and elevate yourself. God's call to you is to remain on his way. You are not to worry about the rest. God frequently intervenes even at the present time. He can give you rich blessings of many kinds. Yes, he can prepare a table before you in the presence of your enemies.

At other times God leads his children into the same sufferings which Jesus had to bear. In the opinion of people, Jesus was stripped of everything. He even had to give up his life. However, the truth is that he remained on God's way. "Therefore I will give him a portion among the great" (Isaiah 53:12).

When the Lord elevates you, you will inherit what you haven't deserved. Jesus has gained the kingdom which you are to capture. Remain on his way so that he can give it to you.

You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.

John 13:7

You don't realize a great deal of what Jesus is doing. But he says that one day you will understand.

Peter was upset when he saw that Jesus made himself his slave. He didn't want Jesus to undertake degrading tasks. He wanted Jesus to be elevated to glory.

Jesus doesn't come to us in greatness, power and honour. He is always the one who bends down to the wretched.

We don't understand him when something goes against us. We pray to God for help but, to all appearances, nothing happens. We become more and more powerless and helpless.

By the time Jesus bends down to your depressed and harassed soul, you don't understand that it is the grace that brings you recovery. You think the help must be that Jesus releases you from your distress. You aren't satisfied with anything else.

However, what you are not, you will become. A day will arrive when Jesus opens your eyes to the fact that greatest of all is his grace. It is more important than everything else that you, behind and before – yes, from all sides, are surrounded by him.

When Peter began to sense that Jesus did something great for him, he couldn't get enough. That is why Jesus had to say, that he already had got all that he needed. He was clean already.

It is like that also with you who have tasted God's grace. You want streams of it. But Jesus tells you: You have already got what you have prayed for.

Jesus doesn't give sparingly of his grace. He showers the poor and lowly man with it. When you belong to him, you stand in his grace.

When this truth becomes real and great for you, it won't be difficult to allow Jesus to control the rest. Things work out as he pleases, if you remain in his grace. Then you are completely clean. You don't lack anything then. Yes, in the midst of all distress you have plenty.

18 March

For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.

Hebrews 2:17

Jesus is the high priest.

He stepped in between God and you. He was, therefore, struck by the lightning of the wrath of God. When God demanded payment for your sins, Jesus had to pay. He stepped forward and received the wages of sin.

Jesus atoned for our sin as high priest. He took on himself all the consequences of the many sins in your life. Not only did Jesus bear the sin, he was made sin. He took it on himself, so that he became completely one with it.

What disgust and loathing Jesus must have felt when the sin of the whole world in all its hideousness changed him who was clean!

However, God's sacrificial lamb didn't back out. He is the high priest who always appears before God with you. As high priest he is merciful. He knows all your sin and weakness. He knows that you have failed and fallen; still his love gushes forth towards you.

Jesus feels your distress as his own. When Peter had disowned Jesus at the courtyard of the high priest, he met a glance that made him go outside and cry.

Jesus is like that. He comes to you when you have let him down. Your denial cannot extinguish his love. Your sin hasn't been able to stop Jesus on his way to Golgotha. Compelled by divine compassion he went all the way to the place of sacrifice, in order to pay for all your sins.

Jesus is faithful. You can trust him. Today he is entirely as he was when he walked the way of suffering. Jesus ties God and you together. He has seized God and seized you. He holds on now and forever.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever.

Hebrews 13:8

How was Jesus yesterday?

Concerning that question we are liable to direct our attention to our experience of Jesus. Did I experience the presence and help of Jesus yesterday?

It may well be the case that you got a special proof that Jesus is alive and takes care of you. It is an encouragement, then, to think of the fact that he is the same today. However, it is also possible that yesterday was one of the ordinary weekdays of your life. You don't think, then, that there is much help to get from the fact that Jesus will be the same today.

So you are not to think, first of all, of your own experiences. They can be changing. You cannot get any lasting help through them.

No, turn to God's word.

How was Jesus yesterday? At that time he was precisely as God's word says. Not a single word about Jesus or of Jesus fell flat yesterday. Everything which is written about him was true. It is like that even today. Jesus hasn't changed.

If you think forward towards eternity, you will understand that as Jesus was when he walked here below, so will he be forever. If that thought gets a place in your heart, you will be filled with a deep and quiet happiness. You have found Jesus, who always is the same, in a world where everything changes and alters.

The future is no longer uncertain then. Jesus accompanies you into it. He won't leave you to yourself. He will be with you always. He will cover your sins with his blood so that they cannot condemn you. The troubles and difficulties which he doesn't help you avoid, he will help you through.

Jesus has been like this till now. His word assures you of this. He will also be like this in future. God's word says that he is the same yesterday and today – and for ever.

Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us.

2. Cor. 1:21

Do you know the nagging question: “Will I reach the goal?” You have seen others lapse from their faith, and you ask if the same will happen to you. You aren’t better than they are, as you know. You also know, from your own life, the forces which drew them away from Jesus.

Perhaps you think that your spiritual life was stronger before. Then you were more enthusiastic and zealous than now. Your relationship with God was more intense. Now you are plagued with an uncomfortable carelessness.

What must you do?

You must hear the Word: “It is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ.” If it were up to you and me, we would never reach the goal. But God makes us stand firm in Christ.

When the Lord lets us see how weak we are, and how little we are able to do, it doesn’t happen in order to make us despair. We must hurry to Jesus. There we find everything we need. In him we are rich in the midst of our own poverty and need.

God has anointed us. He has given us the Holy Spirit. It’s the Spirit who glorifies Jesus in the heart of a child of God. If you no longer see Jesus as glorious, you have to pray that your heart’s eye may be opened. Turn away from yourself. Grasp God’s word. It’s no good looking at you. You should not continually think of all the resolutions which never materialized. Rather become absorbed in God’s promises.

What a blessing this Word implies! It’s God who binds you to Jesus. And God is the God of wonder. He can use everything in your life to attach you to him – even the thing which seems heavy and difficult to you.

Maybe we can understand that this word applies to Paul and his closest associates. But Paul includes the weak and immature Corinthians. God is the God of grace. He attaches all of us firmly to the Son. We can rest in that word. The Lord will preserve us. He will lead us forward. God be praised!

21 March

Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam; so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out.

Proverbs 17:1

Many say that a thunderstorm purifies the air. That is true when it is a muggy summer day. But it isn't true when we think of the relationship between people. Heated bursts of anger don't result in anything good.

“Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam; so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out.”

Offensive words are liable to penetrate into the mind of the person they are directed at. For years they will be remembered by the person in question, even though you may have forgotten them. Offensive words dig underground galleries in the relationship between people, and someday the surface collapses. Often it causes more evil than anybody could have imagined.

There are matters which we have to thrash out. It is to take place in a quiet and gentle spirit, and not with the feeling that we have told each other the truth.

Many a dispute begins with gossip. “When words are many, sin is not absent” says God's word in Proverbs 10:19. It is dangerous to talk too much about people who aren't present. Before we have thought the matter over, we end in slander. We ascribe motives to others which they don't have. The relationship to the one of whom we speak is unconsciously influenced. Fuel is added to the flames of dispute. The Book of Proverbs admonishes us to drop the matter. It is wise to ask yourself if what you say can result in a dispute. You are to stop, then, before it comes to that.

How good it is when brothers get it done in time. When there is disagreement, we are to tell each other that we should stop before it results in a dispute. It is true riches, that together we are able to pray to the Lord to unite us small sinful people in his love and grace, and to help us not to become the cause of incurable wounds.

May the Lord give us grace and teach us humility, so that we can walk together towards the day when we will be united in the eternal choir of praise, to the honour of God and the lamb.

Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

John 11:5

Jesus loves everybody. However, there are some for whom he has a special love. Among them were Lazarus, Martha and Mary. The love of Jesus had found a place with the three siblings. They had opened themselves for his word. Everything that Jesus said was written in their hearts. That is why they were at his disposal.

Martha served Jesus by opening her home for him and his friends. Maria served him by pouring a very expensive perfume on him. Lazarus was a living witness of Jesus' divine power. Wherever Lazarus went people knew that he was the man Jesus had raised from the dead.

The more we share the greater the love becomes. Jesus shared his confidence with the three friends. He let them into his counsel, so that they got a thorough knowledge of him.

At the same time they submitted everything they had on their mind to him. That is why they knew whom they should send word to when Lazarus became sick. There was a deep intimacy between Jesus and them.

Jesus has a great wish for you. It is that you are to be like these three. He is longing to give you deeper insight into his Word. He can do so, if only you will sit down at his feet and listen to what he says. Jesus will share his favour with you. He can do so only when you, like Martha, are willing to put what you call yours at his disposal.

First and last, Jesus wants you to be a living witness for him. You are so when he is allowed to fill you with the certainty that you, who were dead in transgressions and sins, have been made alive with him.

Jesus longs for you. Give his word and will space in your heart. It is an immensely rich thing to be loved by Jesus.

23 March

Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore.

Hebrews 13:13

When Jesus hung upon the cross, he was mocked. Most people thought that his dishonourable death was a devastating judgment against his words and deeds. The judgment also hit his friends who stood by the cross.

Now years have gone by, but Jesus is still despised. The same is true of those for whom the Word of the cross became the power of God to salvation.

Many take an interest in Jesus. They cannot get past him. In word and deed he expresses a secret which no one ever has understood entirely. For generation after generation religious as well as non-religious people have been occupied with Jesus.

What shall a child of God do?

You are to go to him “outside the camp” and bear his disgrace. It is characteristic that the people of today’s interest in Jesus is about anything but him as the Lamb of God, who bore all our sins. They don’t see Jesus as the one who was cursed by God in our place.

Jesus speaks to you through all his words and deeds, if you have found life by the cross. But, first of all, Jesus sacrificed himself for all your sins; so you must again and again listen to the Word of the cross.

There has always been disgrace attached to this. It takes all honours from every single person. The cross says that no one could atone for one’s own sin. Jesus had to pay an incomprehensibly high price. If he hadn’t done so, an eternity under God’s wrath and judgment would have been the only possibility for us.

Stick to the word of the cross. Do so in a time when many Christians are occupied with now one thing and now the other thing.

When Paul was in Corinth, he resolved to know nothing while he was with them except Jesus Christ and he crucified. He went “to him outside the camp”. He bore his disgrace. Let us follow in his footsteps. That is the way to life.

24 March

In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

Luke 1:26-27

Century has followed century, but Mary hasn't been forgotten. It is solely because of Jesus. If it hadn't been for him, there wouldn't have been anyone on earth who would have known her.

Mary wasn't from Jerusalem but from the town of Nazareth in Galilee. She didn't come from any influential family circle. Neither was she engaged to a man who by virtue of birth, gifts or education was to become important for the Jewish people.

No, God singles out the insignificant. It is nothing new. He has always acted like that.

When Samuel was to choose the second king of Israel, they didn't send for David. In people's opinion the choice of the shepherd boy was out of the question. But it was different with God. It was like that, when God chose Mary. It was like that, when he chose you. If you are somebody over everybody else, you should know that that isn't the reason why you have been chosen by God.

God most often chooses what in people's opinion doesn't appear to be something. In that way, we aren't the ones who deserve praise. All praise belongs to the Lord.

Mary's and Jesus' life were woven together. Jesus has led his mother into the history of mankind. Yes, he has carried her into eternity.

If you are a child of God by faith in Jesus, your life is also woven together with his. He is the main thread that connects everything. He has wiped all your sins out with his blood. He walks daily by your side. He talks with you, and he calls you into his service.

The fruit of your life is what Jesus has achieved through you. Everything else disappears. But the fruit that he has created remains forever.

25 March

And I will remove the sin of this land in a single day.

Zechariah 3:9

Good Friday is the most important day of my life. Then all my sin was wiped out.

Even if I spent all the days of my life, I would not be able to do, what God did in one day. But it doesn't mean that it was an easy thing for God to wipe out sin. Good Friday is the longest day of all days.

Then God had to take his Son by the hand and walk with him to the mound of sacrifice. It was a heavy walk. Jesus had done what was pleasing to his Father through his entire life. The Father had always been able to look at the Son with joy.

Imagine accompanying Jesus to Golgotha. Life had to be offered as a sacrifice. Yes, more than that. The beloved Son had to come under God's curse. He was the lamb of sacrifice, which God had chosen to bear the sin of the world.

Do you wonder that God never forgot his day of suffering? What his Father-heart suffered when he put all the awful weight of sin upon Jesus, none of us can understand. Even less can we understand that God did this to save us! But God loved us so much!

When the God forsaken darkness had descended on Golgotha, God removed the guilt and misdeed of the entire land. This does not mean that everybody becomes saved. God does not compel anybody. But he offers each individual sinner on earth his grace. You, who have received Jesus, should know that all your sin has been wiped out. It includes all sins that you have committed, and all sins that you will commit until your last hour.

In a single day God has removed them all. Wonderful grace! Before sin is committed, it is wiped out. You are already saved before you enter the gate of Heaven. God has acted. He has intervened. In eternity you will be reminded of Good Friday. On that day Jesus won Heaven for you.

The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head...

John 19:2

If you got the choice between seeing the magnificent crowns of the whole world and the crown of thorns, the choice wouldn't be difficult. If it lay among all the others, then you would stop by it. It was meant to be an object of mockery. But it surpasses all crowns in beauty. Jesus has worn it.

We should not think that it is an easy thing to wear a royal crown. At first it may look so, but royal power demands its price.

The crown of thorns has been worn by one single king. He too was elevated, but it was on a cross. No crown has demanded a higher price to wear. Jesus paid with his life.

When John saw Jesus in Heaven, he saw a lamb, which looked as if it had been slaughtered. He still wears the marks of death.

It can make us wonder if we will see the marks of the crown of thorns in eternity.

God has given Jesus the name above all names. Every knee shall bow to him. His glory is overwhelming. At the same time he is the person who was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

The death of the cross is horrifying. It is a death under torture. The death of Jesus is still more horrifying. It is a death under God's wrath. That is why we are gripped with horror, when we read about Golgotha. Yet God's glory rests upon Jesus. We are filled with a wonderful quiet and deep gratitude, which cannot be expressed in words. The heart finds rest and peace by the punishment which came upon him.

It was soldiers who twisted together the crown for Jesus. But God stood behind them. It was he who handed his Son the cup of wrath. It could not pass Jesus by, if he was to be the saviour of the world.

Jesus is your King crowned with thorns. In him the deepest degradation and the greatest promotion are united. Behind everything his burning heart is beating because of his love for you.

Then they spit in his face and struck him with their fists. Others slapped him and said, "Prophecy to us, Christ. Who hit you?"

Matthew 26:67-68

The soldiers behaved cruelly towards Jesus. They did so, thinking that he didn't know who hit him.

It is curious to think of the fact that one day those same people will have one wish: to be known to Jesus. If he knows them as his then, they will spend eternity with him. If he doesn't know them they will be in the fire, which is prepared for the Devil and his angels, eternally.

If they are converted later, he knows them. No sin condemns those who believe in Jesus; neither the sin of having struck him with a stick nor of having beaten him in the face with fists.

In their revolt and hatred towards Jesus, they wanted to be anonymous. The way to salvation goes lies in being known by Jesus. Everything must come into the light. Everything must be confessed.

It is relieving to tell him everything! Oh, how good it is to live as a child of God, who doesn't hide anything from the Lord. The greatest of all is that Jesus knows me as I am; even so he doesn't reject me. He loves undeservedly. Jesus sees all my uncleanness and my shining glory at the same time. He sees me dressed in his own grace. It covers me from top to toe.

Supposing you were in heaven with those who struck Jesus - it would be great! Because, all things considered, it was also your sins that nailed Jesus to the cross. And he doesn't want his salvation to be in vain for a single one of us; or for the one who has fallen more than anyone else. Let Jesus into all the dark corners of your life. Then it is his grace you open up to. And to do so is salvation.

Then Jesus God's Son knows you forever. Once your sins weighed heavily on him; now you can enjoy his salvation by accepting the grace he is longing to give you.

28 March

“. . . It is better for you that one man dies for the people than that the whole nation perish.”

John 11:50

It was the high priest Caiaphas who said these words. God lets an adversary of Jesus tell the truth through them. Either the whole nation must perish or else Jesus must die.

If Jesus had not died, all of us would have had to die. We would have had to die in the proper sense of the word. After physical death the eternal one is imminent, which God's word calls the second death. That is the rejection in the sea that burns with fire and sulphur.

God is holy. His righteousness requires that the sin must be atoned for. It must be paid for. There is no getting round it. God is a consuming fire.

That is why we were under his wrath. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. That is why the whole nation is perishing.

It is better for them that one man dies for the people. Caiaphas says so without knowing that God has said so before he did. They don't mean the same thing with the words. Caiaphas thinks that Jesus is a false prophet. To God, Jesus is the Son with whom he is well pleased. At the same time he is God's true sacrificial lamb on his way to the place of sacrifice.

There was one who could atone for everybody's sins. He himself was without sin. He was able, therefore, to take up the sin of everybody else. It was of benefit to us that one died in our place; otherwise all of us had to perish. But how was the situation for Jesus? Was it of benefit to him too?

There was no other way to go, if he wanted to remain on God's way. Before the foundation of the world was laid, he was chosen by God to be the one who bears sin.

Drops of blood fell from Jesus when he, in his last struggle at Gethsemane, submitted himself to the Lord's will.

In quiet and deep awe we must say, that it was of benefit to Jesus to accept being rejected by God in sinners' place. Therefore God exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name. Yes, that is why we can be saved.

29 March

They took his clothes . . . with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. 'Let's not tear it,' they said to one another. 'Let's decide by lot who will get it'.

John 19:23-24

Jesus was poor. "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." (Matthew 8:20)

The only thing Jesus owned of value was a garment. We don't know how he had got it. But we know how he lost it.

It was taken from him when he was raised on the cross. The soldiers wouldn't cut it up and share it, because it was woven in one piece from top to bottom. The soldier, who would own it, wanted it undivided.

In the Bible, a garment is often used as a figure of the salvation. We should think of that when we hear about Jesus' garment.

When Jesus was lifted onto the cross under the wrath of God, a whole and complete garment was lying at the foot of the cross. That first Good Friday a sinner could walk home from Golgotha dressed in Jesus' garment. It covered him from top to bottom.

One isn't saved because one has worn Jesus' garment, you know. However, it is a figure of the dress you must own if you are to be saved.

When Jesus was made to be sin, God took the garment of righteousness away from him. It is this dress that is ready for you. You receive it by faith. If you put your faith in the fact that Jesus was sacrificed in your place, salvation is yours. Then you are covered by his blood, and in God's sight you are as righteous as Jesus was. Your holiness corresponds to Jesus' holiness. God imputes his Son's righteousness to you.

You can, therefore, go about confidently here below. You are on your way to the New Jerusalem. When your mind is filled with anxious thoughts, you should look at the dress you wear. You are wearing the clothes of salvation. Jesus has made you perfect. Don't fear; you are covered with a finished work.

Redeemed . . . with the precious blood of Christ.

1Peter 1:18-19

You are really redeemed. It took place at Golgotha, when Jesus gave his blood for you. It is not true, that you become more and more redeemed as you become a better Christian.

No, even before you came to Christ, you were redeemed. It is of vital importance to allow the thought of what Jesus did for you to live in your mind. It cost him his precious blood to save you. That truth means that you are so dearly beloved by God that you can't imagine it.

It isn't difficult to understand that God's only begotten Son's blood was precious to God. What you cannot understand, is that God loves you so dearly that he was willing to give Jesus instead of you. God allowed him to suffer so that you could be redeemed.

How could God do that?

We can't explain it, but our minds are filled with wonder and thanks. We feel that we are on holy ground. And that is just what we are, when the heart becomes quiet – face to face with him who was crushed for us.

There are many things you want to be free from. Sin is a plague and illness can make the days long. Difficulties and problems can settle like a heavy and dark cloud above you.

Turn away from everything which weighs heavily on you. Let in the wonderful gospel with all its abundance. You are redeemed with the blood of Jesus. You are entirely redeemed. And you are in fact redeemed from everything you feel yourself bound by. Jesus has released you from your sin and its everlasting consequences. He did it by becoming your sin.

Therefore you are redeemed.

And if your heart gets cold, there is a place to which you must go. It is to him who paid the price for you with his blood. There the drops of blood become precious to you. When they flowed down, you were redeemed forever.

It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus.

1 Corinthians 1:30

A person cannot take faith by himself. No one can bring oneself into the kingdom of God's beloved Son by one's own will. God is always the one who steps in.

The Lord calls his lost ones in many ways. He does so through illness, loneliness, sorrow, hardship and difficulties of one kind or another. The Lord is always the seeking shepherd who looks for his lost sheep.

My way to God is basically his way to me. I would never have looked for him if he hadn't looked for me first. Neither would I have found him if he hadn't found me; I wouldn't have been able to accept Jesus if he hadn't accepted me.

Your longing for salvation, therefore, expresses that you aren't left or forsaken by God. On the contrary, it is the Spirit of God who calls you. The time God is visiting you has arrived. It is the time when God visits and draws a person. You are to pay heed to it. You are to give in to God and allow him to save you.

Many Christians experience the salvation as something they do. They resign themselves to the will of God. They say yes. They believe in Jesus. And it is true that they have left everything and followed him. Nevertheless, their salvation isn't due to themselves but to God. It is because of the fact that Jesus has grasped them so that they may come home safe and sound.

There is a glorious strength in this gospel. This is a great help when doubts and agony over sin struggle to get the upper hand. Then one asks instinctively: I wonder if I will ever reach the goal? Won't I be one of those who started, but never went further?

Turn your eyes towards God's word. He is the one who has brought you into the kingdom of the Son he loves. It hasn't happened so that afterwards you were to be left to yourself. If you keep to your heavenly Father, he will let you remain in Jesus. God wants, above all, to see you in him. If you are there, you have a share in every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms. You owe God everything. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus.

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Only one thing is needed

This is what Jesus answered Martha when she felt left alone to cover all her duties in the kitchen and blamed Mary for laziness.

What is needed? Jesus gives no direct answer, but points out that Mary had chosen the better part. The place to be, to have, what is needed first and foremost in life, is at Jesus' feet, where he gives, what we need more than anything else - himself!

This is the focus of this book of daily reading. Our desire is that you may meet God in Christ in a way that it may never be lost.

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