



**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 2013

Hans Erik Nissen

1 October

This is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves. If we wait until daylight, punishment will overtake us. Let's go at once and report this . . .

2 Kings 7:9

Four leprous men had discovered that the army which was besieging Jerusalem had taken flight. The Lord had caused the enemy to hear the sound of chariots and horses and a great army. They had abandoned all hope of saving their lives.

Four leprous men, four expelled men, four despised men! What could they do? They didn't think a lot about that. They knew that there was one thing they couldn't do, and it was to keep it quiet. They had to tell the starving people in Jerusalem that they were saved.

This is a day of good news!

It is also like that today. But there are very few people who know it. Most people are still living in darkness and in the shadow of death, and many have never heard that there is a place where one can buy grain and eat without money.

If we ourselves are saved, we have to tell each other: "We cannot wait until tomorrow. We have to tell it today. We know that a night is coming when no one can work. But it is still day, and the word of life is to be given to those who are heading towards the eternal perdition."

Maybe you feel despised and insignificant. The leprous men did so too. Still it mustn't steal your confidence. It isn't ourselves we are to preach, as you know. It is the message about him who leads sinners from death to life. He has prepared the way. Jesus doesn't call us to defeat the sin and the Devil. What he has done, we don't have to do. Because he has gained the victory, we are allowed to drink from the spring with the water of life without cost.

The poor besieged in Jerusalem probably rushed out into the abandoned camp of the enemy in order to satisfy their hunger. It isn't like that in the relationship with Jesus. But everywhere, where the good message is preached, there are some people who are saved. If no one wants to proclaim the salvation, everybody perishes. This is a day of good news! Don't let us keep it quiet! Don't let punishment overtake us!

2 October

In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

Romans 8:37

No one can tell when persecution breaks out. But opposition to Christians increases. In the old Christian countries more and more people turn to strange religions and atheistic philosophy in a deliberate showdown with the Christian way of thinking and lifestyle. It is a curious thing to see the likeness between the intellectual climate which was at the time of the apostles and what begins to emerge for our eyes.

Therefore, neither must we wonder if we are met with the same as the first Christians: distress, fear, persecution, hunger, nakedness, danger and sword. Paul tells us that the Christians were considered as sheep to be slaughtered. For Jesus' sake they faced death all day long.

It can easily discourage us when God's word says that Christendom's last period will be similar to the first one. Our own timid and pain-shy nature is always ready to choose the easiest way. However, don't follow it! He is the one you are to follow, and when he goes with you on the road of suffering, it is a way he has walked before.

You get the strength and power to endure through God's word. Whatever meets you, you are more than a conqueror through Jesus.

God's enemies may take everything from you. Yes, they may even take your life. But there is one thing they aren't capable of: to take away your victory! You possess it in Jesus. The army of evil spirits has with all means tried to annihilate his work of salvation, but failed. Satan got the deathblow at Calvary.

Now he fights a despairing fight, because he knows that his time is short. He can cause a lot of damage, but he cannot wring the victory from Jesus.

You can sing with Christians throughout many centuries: "Eternal victory now I possess always, Lord Christ, in you!" Sing it loudly! Let it live in your heart. The news of the victory has carried countless people through great troubles and distress. It hasn't lost its strength. It will also carry you, when you put your trust in it. It isn't empty words when the Lord says that he loves you. He goes with you all the way. He wants to lead his child all the way to the goal of heaven.

3 October

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God.

Mark 1:14

Now God's kingdom is heading for disaster! It appeared like that for John's disciples. Now there was no longer anyone who went out into the desert. No one was baptized with the baptism of repentance. The revival of the people that they had hoped for was suddenly stopped. John was imprisoned and his voice couldn't penetrate the thick prison walls.

You too may sometimes think that the progress of God's kingdom has stopped. There were servants you valued highly, whom God put aside. You didn't think that you could do without them. But God didn't consider your opinion.

Perhaps you yourself are an instrument like that. You were in a prosperous service for God, but illness, strife among the Christians or something else stopped your service. You were put aside.

Think of what happened when John was put in prison. Jesus went out and preached the good news of God. It is also like that today.

God can employ other people than you and me. We are not indispensable. Jesus alone is, and he will continue his work also without us.

However, it is a difficult thing to be stopped. Many questions arise. When doubt arises, you are to learn from John. He sent for Jesus in order to get help, and he received it. You will receive it as well.

"The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor" (Luke 7:22). This was helpful for John.

What do you think John did, when he received that message? He folded his hands and thanked God. Now the word he had proclaimed was fulfilled: "He must become greater; I must become less." Jesus is the light, which not even the darkest prison could put out.

And, then, John scarcely knew that his being put aside would be of help to countless Christians. As a prisoner, he is a testimony to the fact that Jesus by no means always releases; but it doesn't mean that one is forgotten. Jesus sends a message to you in order to strengthen you. At the same time he lets the kingdom grow, which is also the meaning and goal of your life. And then everything is well.

4 October

“Though I sit in darkness, the Lord will be my light.”

Micah 7:8

There isn't much talk about agony of souls nowadays. But it doesn't mean that Christians aren't troubled. Satan, the world and our own nature struggle all the time against the new life of the faith. That struggle often makes it dark in the life of a Christian.

Then the spiritual world seems to be strangely distant. It is as if God's word no longer reaches the heart. Previously you could be pleased with your salvation. Now a strangely dull indifference has filled your mind. Then you may catch yourself considering if it is better to give up the whole thing.

If you think like that, you are in the darkness of doubt. In the midst of the numbness you are unhappy. You are longing that your spiritual life will come alive again. You have asked God to intervene, but you don't think he has done so. You ask “Why?”

One reason could be that God wants to teach you to understand the text above. “Though I sit in darkness, the Lord will be my light.”

We long with all our heart to be helped out of the darkness. Some of us can probably name situations in life, as well, when God led us out into open land. But God doesn't always act like that. God often wants something else.

Micah was allowed to experience that. It continued to be dark, but the Lord lit a candle in the darkness. Instead of leading him out, the Lord opened his eyes to the light he had lit already.

This is a splendid reality for God's children: that the Lord has revived the light of the Word and it shines, no matter how dark it gets in the world.

By his good Spirit, the Lord wants to open your eyes to see that - even if everything else shakes - God's word stands firm in spite of that.

The Lord has put that Word into your hand. It belongs to you. You never give more pleasure to God's heart than when, in the midst of your deep agony of soul, you count on what is written. Perhaps you don't feel anything, but your hands catch hold of the light of life, and you hold on to it. Then hope is revived. The Lord is leading you out of the darkness.

You have exalted above all things your name and your word.

Psalm 138:2

It is wonderful when the Lord exalts his word. It has to be our continual prayer that this will happen. Then he gives riches that surpass everything else.

Often a difficult and dark time precedes God's answer. It applies to great but also in small matters. Yes, a child of God experiences that it is in the darkness God puts on the light.

It is connected with the natural man's self-confidence. As long as you know what must be said and answered, God's word isn't made great either in you or by you. The Lord, therefore, leads you into difficulties and troubles in which you don't know which way to turn. You are puzzled and do not know what to resort to.

Your great distress and helplessness has made you receptive to God's word. You are no longer occupied with all your own affairs. You don't believe that you can manage anything. You are, therefore, sympathetic to outside help.

You are to know that no one's wisdom can help you. The Lord alone can do so. And he does it through his word.

You don't experience it as something great and mighty. It takes place quietly and in many ways imperceptibly. However there are words in the Bible which begin to shine. You have to return to them again and again. You have found a light in the dark. The more you think of such words the more they give you. You feel their warmth. It is as if the words glow and burn themselves into your soul. Simultaneously they are living. You sense the pulse beat in them, and you feel that your heart beats in step with such words. They create coherence. God's word becomes one with yourself. It is your actual reality and truth.

When this has happened, God has exalted above all things his name and his word. Then he has created a thirst in you, a thirst for the Word. You have realized that it holds treasures that are greater than the riches of the entire world.

Therefore, ask the Lord to exalt above all things his name and his word for you. Lose yourself in the Word. God will answer your prayer.

When he suffered, he made no threats.

1 Peter 2:23

It is a horrible thing to suffer. Suffering threatens spirit, soul and body. Many people have been changed under the pressure of suffering. Some people succumb to despondency, others become aggressive.

Suffering didn't change Jesus. He didn't begin to threaten. If he had resorted to that way out, he could have restricted the suffering. He could have told his opponents what the consequences of their actions were. Many of them would have been afraid, then, to cause the suffering of the innocent one.

It was far from Jesus to make life easy for himself. In his meekness and humility, he submitted himself to scorn and blows. He was silent like a sacrificial animal which is led away to be slaughtered.

There is something in us that rises in protest, when we meet people who cause innocent people to suffer. Have you considered that you have taken part in doing this against Jesus?

He was the one who was completely clean. What suffering it must have been for him to be credited with all your sin and uncleanness? However Jesus didn't hang back. Voluntarily he went under the burden of sin, and he did it in such a way that you can preserve your confidence before him still.

If Jesus had threatened, you wouldn't have dared to come to him. You would tremble under his anger and merely expect his crushing retribution. He meets you instead with his compelling love. Even though he had to bear both your sin and its consequences, he doesn't hate you. He knew what he did when he chose the way of the cross. He wanted to bring about reconciliation between you and God, and he could only do this if he went the way of suffering.

The great question now is, don't you think that Jesus has suffered enough? Do you want to bring a new suffering on him by not being converted and trusting his grace?

Jesus has sufferings even today. They come from those who reject him as Saviour and Redeemer. They let his work of salvation be a vain thing for them. But this suffering of Jesus can be changed to joy. It happens every time a sinner is converted.

**“Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates.”
Isaiah 1:14**

How can God hate what he himself has prescribed? If it was something people had made up, we would be able to understand it, but not when it is the Lord's own commandment. Is it not a display of caprice?

It is by no means this. What God has said in his word must be observed. It was like that under the Old Covenant and it is like that under the New. But under both covenants sin makes all sacrifices into something that God turns against with hatred.

An unfaithful man may give his wife expensive and fine gifts; but if she is a woman of honour, she will hate them. In her eyes they are a cheap substitute for what she is rightfully entitled to; and love cannot be substituted by anything else.

The people of Israel thought that they offered great sacrifices to the Lord, but he couldn't be bought.

If God's people live in sin, God hates what they do in other matters.

If a patient suffers from a deadly disease, it is a terrible thing if the person in question is merely occupied with minor disabilities, and consoles himself with the thought that the doctor is regularly being paid a visit.

It is also like that in our relationship to God. The fundamental things have to be in order first of all. They are so only if faith in Jesus has led to a break with sin.

Therefore the call of the Lord goes out: “Come now, let us reason together,” says the Lord. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.”

A holy life begins and continues under the cleansing blood. The blood annihilates sin. It releases us simultaneously from the power of sin. The words of the cross break the chains of sin. The true grace of God makes it unbearable to remain in sin.

If you live in the kingdom of the forgiveness of sins with hatred towards sin, your service is pleasing to the Lord. Then a festival is celebrated in sincerity; first here below, later on in eternity.

“For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

2 Corinthians 12:10

For the majority of people, the journey to realize one's own weakness is long. We have more strength than we think. If we bogged down on one way, we try another.

But if you remain in God's school, the day of defeat arrives. Then you have got a silenced mouth. Then you not only see how little you can manage. You realize that you are completely powerless.

It is hard to see one's own powerlessness - heavier by far than any of us had imagined. Our last way out is closed. We feel stripped of everything. There is no longer any human possibility of salvation. In our own thoughts we have passed the death sentence on ourselves.

At the same time it is a blessing for a child of God to experience this weakness. How can this be possible?

It is bound up with the fact that a Christian's greatest blessing is to be made completely dependent on God in his distress and need. It doesn't depend on you then. You can no longer lift a finger to your own salvation. The Lord has to take care of you.

Then you no longer pray that God may boost your strength. There is nothing in you that can contribute to what God has done already. The Lord must do everything if you are to reach the goal.

It is when you experience your weakness as hopeless that you learn to place your hope on the Lord alone. To do that is not one option among many. Jesus is your only hope. Without him, you have only despair left.

If your situation is like that towards God, then he can lead you into victory. He does that by opening your eyes to the riches of the Gospel. He teaches you, by his Spirit and his Word, to count on Jesus alone.

A Christian who considers himself bankrupt and counts on Jesus alone is the strongest of all. In him God's strength becomes complete. As long as you have your own strength, God cannot help you. If the Lord is everything for you, you are invincible.

Yes, if you put your trust in Jesus, you are strong in your weakness.

9 October

Day by day the king gave Jehoiachin a regular allowance as long as he lived.

2 Kings 25:30

Jehoiachin was imprisoned nearly 38 years in Babylon. But one day the hour of liberty struck for him. Babylon got another King, and he forgave Jehoiachin.

I don't know how many years you have been the Devil's captive, but I know that he is a harsh lord to serve. In spite of golden promises, his way always ends in the eternal agony of hell.

If you belong to Jesus, somebody else has become king of your life. He has forgiven you and leads you out of the prison. You are now seated at his table, and he takes care of you daily. But you wanted to take care of yourself. Have you not often decided to become a good and whole-hearted Christian? But you will never be one. Every day you have to live by God's undeserved grace in Jesus. That is your condition as long as you are here below.

However, is that so bad? Is it not a good thing that God every day meets you with new grace? Is it not precious for you that you cannot empty the sea of grace? "Where sin increased, grace increased all the more" (Romans 5:20).

You are longing to be like your Master. This longing takes part in preserving your Christian life fresh and healthy. You will get what you want. It happens when you will see Jesus face to face and be as he is.

Grief owing to one's own sin and incompetence mustn't make you forget that you already live at God's rich table of grace. There is no sin which the blood of Jesus doesn't cleanse you from. Everything he has done is credited to you. God looks at you as he looks at Jesus.

And God doesn't keep his treasures back. Day by day he will remind you of everything you possess. During your earthly pilgrimage, you will see more and more of what it means to be a child of the King. That is why it is so good to belong to Jesus. If you don't yet belong to him, you should know that he has prepared a place for you as well at his table.

“Do you love me?”

John 21:16

We find it easy to believe that Jesus, first of all, is interested in our gifts. But he isn't. He wants us ourselves.

Do you think that is odd?

Imagine a husband who showers gifts on his wife. After a time she realizes that he – in spite of his generosity – doesn't love her. From that moment on, all the gifts are a substitute for him himself, and they just remind her of the fact that she is missing the most important thing, that is the love of her husband.

There are many who have done a lot for Jesus, but they don't love him. Without seeing it clearly themselves, they want to buy God's approval with their gifts.

But it isn't possible to buy true love. It seeks one thing only, and that is returned love.

Therefore Jesus asks, „Do you love me?“

A Christian can lose his love for Jesus. It is a continuous fight to keep in this love. Thoughts are so easily caught up with everything which has to do with Christianity. But the love of Jesus wants you to be occupied with him alone. Jesus loves you, independent of what you can give him. It isn't your gifts which have his heart, but it is you yourself. In the same way, he wants you to love him instead of all the things he can give you and help you with in your life.

„Do you love me?“ Jesus asks.

These searching words are a wake up cry to you when your love has become cold. Jesus leads you back to the place where true, deep love to him was born and got its nourishment. It is the lost sinner's place close to Jesus' feet, where I receive his gracious forgiveness for my sins, because I am loved by him.

You will never be higher or deeper than being just there. But at the same time, it is the best place for you to be. There Jesus' love of you constantly calls for your love of him. We love, because he loved us first.

11 October

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

Galatians 3:26-27

You cannot be saved in your own clothes. This is expressed strongly and movingly by the white christening dress. What you have is filthy and unclean, yes your own dress is merely rags and tatters; you have to let it go, so that you can get the best clothing.

Imagine being clothed in Jesus in baptism! As a little child is dressed in the christening dress, Jesus' righteousness covers the baptized person from head to foot.

You are completely white. You are completely clean. "The old has gone, the new is here!" (2 Corinthians 5:17)

For a child of God with growing doubts, there is a wonderful rest in what God has given in baptism. You have, quite undeserved, received Jesus with all his riches. He covers you completely. You are covered by him from all sides. Nothing of your own can be seen.

The christening dress is a ready-to-wear dress. Needle and sewing thread aren't thrown in. The baptized person isn't meant to make his dress himself. Another person has made it. It is also like that with Jesus' work of salvation. Nothing must be added. It is as perfect and completed as it can be.

You are a child of God by faith. God's word states that the reason for that is that through baptism you have clothed yourself with Jesus. What is the connection?

Well, faith keeps to the Word. And the Word says, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16). To carry one's child to baptism is an act of faith. The wonderful thing is that an act like that takes place on the foundation of the word. God creates faith by his Spirit through the word, which is connected with the water.

If you believe in Jesus, your day of christening is the great red-letter day of the year. Then you received a share of the entire wealth of the deity.

If you live without faith, you are lost in spite of your baptism. Then your baptism is a call to become born again through conversion and faith. Give yourself to him who has baptized you. Let him possess you in eternity.

12 October

No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse.

Matthew 9:16

Christianity is not a patch. There are a lot of people who believe so.

They think that it is a solemn patch on a grey and monotonous existence. During or at the milestones in one's life one uses the church. It is the connection to supernatural things. The church has a higher ceiling than the town hall. The feeling of festival, party and seriousness is secured when one includes the church.

Other people think that Christianity is the patch of consolation for the sick, the old and the lonely. It is also a help for weak folk who can't cope with life itself.

And others again think that it is the task of Christianity to give an explanation of all that is incomprehensible. Life may seem chaotic and without coherence. Therefore, Christianity has to give substance to one's existence.

However, Jesus hasn't come in order to patch us up. It is true that he gives a lot into the bargain; but it is horrible if the extra gifts are made into the actual thing. Then a person misses God's greatest gift.

Jesus helps us through life. Praise to him for that! But it wasn't the reason for his coming. He wants to save you from God's wrath. Hell is what you are to be torn away from. He wanted God's judgment to fall on him instead of on you. That is why he died at Calvary cursed by God in your place.

You are the one who should have hung on the cross. You should have cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" You were the one who, in your fear, should have been under a closed heaven with no answer, only darkness.

Nevertheless Jesus took your place. You can therefore be born again by faith in him.

Jesus has saved you from the most horrifying plight of all: having to meet God with sins that aren't forgiven.

Christianity is not a patch on something old. It is Jesus – a Saviour and Redeemer for lost sinners.

13 October

How great is your goodness, which you have stored up . . .

Psalm 31:19

God's thoughts are higher than ours. If we are in distress, we cannot understand God, when he puts off showing us his goodness. Why doesn't he step in? Why doesn't he do it now?

God's word gives you an answer.

He stores up his goodness. It is part of his discipline. He wants you to learn to rely on him.

What God has hidden, is completely covered over. You have no possibility of finding out what he has in his hand before he lets you know it.

You merely see a very small part of God's goodness. The greatest part by far is still stored up. His hand is held out, but you don't know what it holds.

How much joy comes from having your heart opened for the riches which are stored up? Through his word God lets you see faintly what awaits you. For God what is stored up isn't forgotten. In his heart your name is connected with incredible riches, and he is longing to show you grace.

David couldn't always understand God's goodness. His life was filled with hardships, illness and suffering. That is why many of his psalms begin with a cry to God for help. But they don't end like that. God makes known to him that, in spite of his own experience, he is infinitely rich. It is so for you as well. You may think that you lack everything. Sin and neglect accuse you. A divided and troubled mind may give you a feeling of being unsuccessful.

Nevertheless you are rich if, in the midst of your distress, you cling to him who cleanses you from all sin. You will forever meet the lavish wealth of the grace of God.

God has stored up the greatest thing, the richest thing and the best thing till the end.

What is it?

It is Jesus. You own him by faith. He leads you. He is yours forever and ever.

Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer.

Revelation 2.10

This is God's word: "Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer." God's word is realistic, shockingly realistic, because it always tells the truth.

You don't come through life without suffering. It's connected with the fact that you are a Christian. Along with ordinary human sufferings, which most people experience, you will also experience the sufferings which are connected with the fact that you are chosen by God.

You have to be prepared to share Jesus' way of living. You will become aware of it at the workplace, at school, and among neighbours. You have a lot in common with them, but deep down you are different. They know it. You know it. You are a temple of the Holy Spirit; and Jesus, the Prince of Heaven, lives in you.

Satan will use your fear of suffering to paralyse you. He wants you to fix your eyes on yourself and your own weakness. He wants you to give up, the sooner the better.

But don't listen to him! Instead fix your eyes on what Jesus has suffered. God led him to completion through suffering. Fix it in your mind that God has said his powerful word "Do not be afraid!" He won't leave you to yourself. One of his angels was sent to Jesus in Gethsemane. And it wasn't the last time God sent an angel to help those who will be saved.

I want you to know that the Lord gives us what we need for every single day. A suit of armour is ready for use; we have to put it on daily. The people of Israel had to gather, each day, what they needed of manna. It's like this with us also. Our strength will equal our days.

It is the Lord, then, who hands out the cup of suffering to each individual. We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.

It gives rest to the soul to know that anything which happens to us is meted out from the Lord's hand. He will let it work together for the good of us.

Therefore, do not be afraid! Suffering leads you towards the destination.

Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God.

Romans 15:17

Paul says this about his service as an apostle, but posterity is evaluating his service differently. We can see that Paul was a unique instrument in God's hand; however, most of his contemporaries didn't have that opinion. Many people merely criticized him. They continually made attacks on his person. He was therefore tempted to allow others to steal his boldness.

The difficulties were great in the congregations. False teachings cropped up everywhere. Moral backsliding left its frightening mark.

Add to this the huge personal costs involved in preaching the gospel: imprisonment, lashes, and continual danger.

How is it possible, under such conditions, to glory in one's service to God?

Paul could do so because he saw his service in Christ Jesus. Everything he did, everything he had to go through, he associated with Jesus. He got his service from his Lord, and he served with Jesus.

It is also the way for you.

Maybe you have been in Christ's service for many years. The service isn't harder for you than for him. Could you imagine leaving Jesus behind alone, and no longer being an instrument in his hand? Is it not the greatest wish of your heart to be with him?

Because he is in the service, you also want to be in it.

It is a good thing to listen to experienced servants in God's kingdom. They can testify to the fact that when the service was hardest, they received a special blessing. Their hardship drove them to Jesus, and he helped them through. Through difficulties and struggles they were led into a new relationship to him.

Serving Jesus never ceases for a Christian. The tasks may change. The service and the goal are the same. It is always about the salvation of souls. You never serve alone. You and Jesus serve together.

My power is made perfect in weakness.

2 Corinthians 12:9

If we are to understand how Jesus' power is made perfect in weakness, we don't have to read books. Instead we have to look at weak and helpless Christians who live in God's grace.

Such Christians are nothing in themselves, but they don't pretend to be great because of their littleness and weakness. Their own wretchedness and misery is a suffering to them. They think that it is humiliating that they have received so much grace and love, but that the fruits are so few and small in their lives. They don't know that they are reflections of the strength of the grace of God.

They turn to Jesus in their helplessness. He lives in their heart and mind throughout the day. To speak with him about the small things in life comes quite natural to them. They cannot walk alone, yes, not even one step. They have lost the belief in their own ability and skill. Jesus has to lead and give strength in all things.

All Christians have God's strength. Jesus cannot live in a heart without being there with all his fullness and strength. However there is a very great difference between whether the strength of Jesus is allowed to develop or not.

As long as the Lord hasn't led you into powerlessness, your natural abilities and opportunities will set limits to the power of Jesus. Jesus never enters into power-sharing with us. It is not the case that we are to do what we can, and then the Lord will do the rest.

That we are God's fellow workers means that we are at his disposal. What fruit that bears depends on whether he is allowed to use his power. The blessing isn't in anything of our own. It is due to the Lord alone.

According to our way of thinking it isn't good to be powerless. But in the light of God's word powerlessness is a precondition, so that there may flow streams of living water from within us.

Therefore you are not to give in to discouragement, when the Lord makes you powerless. He doesn't do it because you are under his wrath. You are loved by him, and he wants his power to be fully used in you.

Ask the Lord to lead you on his way; it is always the best way.

He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favour from the Lord.

Proverbs 18:22

Favour from the Lord is God's grace. You can receive it only as a gift.

God has many kinds of grace. One of them is a wife.

It is a good thing to stop and think of what one owes to the person who is one's closest relative. Small sources of irritation can easily take possession of your thinking so that you forget to thank God for your spouse. The goodness of your wife, in addition, is often a matter of course when you receive it day by day.

The most important thing is to thank God. What I thank for, I have received from God's hand. The greatest kindness you can do to your spouse is to receive her as a gift from God. Then you connect your spouse with him; by doing so you bring blessing on both of you.

It is also important to thank your wife while you still have time to do so. Many people have had to stand by a grave and think about something they should have said before it was too late.

A thank you creates joy. It gives renewed strength to the many everyday duties of life. Life becomes a misery if one again and again is met with dissatisfaction and reproaches.

The curse of pettiness has spoiled numerous homes. We have to be on our guard against it. It is a good thing to take one step backward and see your marriage in a greater perspective. It is best of all to come into God's light. There I see that my wife is a grace from the Lord. I have never deserved grace. I receive it undeserved. It also applies when the Lord gives it to me through another person.

To see your spouse in this light makes marriage a blessed thing. Then mind and heart are filled with joy. Then love finds its way to help and encourage in the midst of everyday life. God's word is blessed. It is down-to-earth. You are blessed who pay heed to what it says. You are poor who think that you get well through life without receiving the help which is passed you through what the Lord has said.

Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.

John 6:57

A child of God doesn't live only in the power of what is right and good. He lives in the power of Jesus.

Jesus is saviour for the one who cannot manage to live the Christian life. He is the salvation for you who feel judged because of your unsuccessful Christianity.

You have often made up your mind that you would be a real Christian now, but it has constantly been a failure. Therefore you have become despondent and discouraged. Others succeed, but you aren't capable of doing it. You ask whether you have got it in you to be a Christian.

There isn't a single one of us who has it in us to be a Christian. The only thing we have in ourselves is sin, selfishness and rebellion against God. God therefore wants us to live by virtue of Jesus. In Jesus you will find everything you lack in yourself.

There are a lot of Christians who need to be saved from themselves. Every time they look at Jesus once, they look at themselves ten times. It hasn't really dawned upon them that they, in the midst of their own poverty, are immensely rich in Jesus.

When you seek the perfect thing, go at once to Jesus. You will never find it in yourself. But with your Substitute and Redeemer everything is found in abundance. He keeps nothing to himself. He shares everything with you.

Do you seek love? Don't go to yourself. Jesus is the only one who love as God loves. You never go in vain. Jesus pours out his love in your heart by the Holy Spirit.

Are you terrified because of your lack of faith? Go to Jesus. He relies on his heavenly Father under all circumstances. You cannot come to Jesus with your heart's prayer for help, without him involving you in his world and sharing his whole wealth with you.

If in this way you take possession of all that Jesus is for you, you live by virtue of him. You have your pride in him. Then the secret of your life is everything you possess in him.

As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by failing to pray for you.

1 Samuel 12:23

Many people consider intercessory prayer a voluntary matter. It is a good thing if one remembers it and gets it done, but most Christians don't take it so seriously if they don't have the time or forget it.

But the one who knows the Lord doesn't act like that. You can learn that from Samuel.

The people of Israel had sinned against God by demanding a king. They wanted to have what all the nations had. They couldn't become reconciled to the fact that the invisible God was their only king. The people's wish was an insult to God. Under changing circumstances and conditions he had led and preserved them. However, Israel wasn't satisfied. They wanted to have one of their own men as leader.

Samuel made it clear to the people how God was looking at their demands. They were upset and they said to Samuel, "Pray to the Lord your God for your servants so that we will not die, for we have added to all our other sins the evil of asking for a king."

And Samuel gave them a clear answer. He didn't want to sin against God by failing to pray for them.

A Christian's service has many aspects. One of them is intercessory prayer. God wants you to care for some people. It is exactly you who are to carry them up before him on the arms of intercession. It takes endurance to do so, but you cannot neglect this service without sinning against the Lord.

It is possible that you think you have often sinned. If so, you are to know that you can come to Jesus with all your sin—all that you have neglected to do as well, and Jesus will wipe these sins out with his precious blood.

He will help you up by his grace, and install you once more in the service of intercession.

What if you fail again?

You have to go the same way. You have to carry the things you neglected under the cleansing blood, and you will experience that it hasn't lost its strength. Jesus calls you once more to be an intercessor and to be satisfactory in your service.

My son, keep your father's commands and do not forsake your mother's teaching!

Proverbs 6:20

When parents become old, their strength is declining. One feels that they become more cautious. They don't keep up with the times as before. They think that the old things are all very well.

As a young person one has push. New things have a fascinating effect, and many young persons are irritated at the opinions and attitudes of the older generation. This attitude penetrates into the heart of Christian circles.

If you don't attach importance to your parent's good advice, you sin against God. And sin kills the blessing.

A lot of people have strayed from Jesus because they refused to be warned. Parents could see that their children were into a dangerous development. They tried to say it, but could clearly feel that they had to keep it to themselves. The attitude of their children made them silent.

As to temporal circumstances, there are many people who don't listen to what a father or mother say. When they call for careful handling in the financial field, they aren't heard. A lot of young people think that it is the most daring person that reaps the greatest profit. The parent's advice may have a restrictive influence in the light of this.

A young person has something that an older person doesn't have. But an older person also has something a young person doesn't have. And that is wisdom. You don't need to gain every kind of experience. You can keep your life in God and escape many sorrows and misfortunes if you listen to older people's words.

It is a good thing to pray to God for grace to learn from others. However, it takes humility. If you think that you are more intelligent, you will of course always go your own way. And that doesn't lead to blessing.

Part of what your parents tells you, they don't have from themselves. They have received it from their parents. Accept it. It leads you under the blessing, and you get a wisdom that you can pass on to others.

He appointed twelve – designating them apostles – that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach . . .

Mark 3:14

Jesus has first of all chosen you to be with him. You are to be with him. Jesus wants fellowship with you. There is something he wants to share with you. There is something you are to share with him.

Maybe you think that you don't do enough for Jesus. Every living Christian knows that feeling. You look at yourself as a useless servant.

Don't forget that your service isn't the most important thing for you. That is to be with Jesus. Even the helpless can do this. And the truth is that it is simultaneously what you miss most of all. It is your heart's deepest need.

However, is it enough to be with Jesus?

Yes, it is enough forever and ever. With him you can let your heart calm down. He is the only one that can satisfy your soul.

Many people get tired in life and service because they don't rest with Jesus. They are so occupied with what they should do for him. They make plans, and if the results are small it easily ends in despondency.

First of all, you are to rest with Jesus. He is more interested in you than in your service. It is your love he asks for. It means more than everything you can do.

Jesus wants to shower you with grace. His love must reign in you. He wants to please your heart. You will receive the whole blessing only when you rest with him.

Your life with Jesus is the innermost and the most real thing in your relationship with God. Every service begins and is accomplished while resting in Jesus. It isn't basically you who serve. It isn't you who bear fruit. It is Jesus. He lives his life in you. He steps forward through you. Therefore stay with Jesus. There your heart finds rest. There you become a serviceable instrument for your saviour.

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 5:6

John was caught up to heaven. There he saw God's throne. It was an overwhelming sight. In God's hand was the scroll with the revelation, but no one was found fit to open it. That is why he wept and wept. But his weeping stopped when he saw the Lamb.

The slaughtered Lamb stood before God's throne. It means that God always sees the Lamb. For God the Lamb is the centre. His centre must also be yours.

All God's thoughts are summarized in Jesus. All your thoughts must be summarized in him as well. As Jesus is always present for God, he must also be always present for you.

Why didn't John see the Lamb at once? It is because the Lamb didn't have magnificence and outward glory. In God's wonderful decree, he kept John's eyes closed for a time.

It is also like that for you. You don't decide what your spiritual development will be. The Lord may hide himself for a time. His purpose in doing so is that you are to be led into a deeper realization of the riches you have in him. He is the only one who opens up the door for you. He leads you into his eternal mystery. You are to recognize that he wants to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth.

And if you look back on your life, you may sense God's intention. God has constantly wanted to unite you to Jesus. And even though he has hidden himself at times, it was so that that you would find the Lamb that was slaughtered for your sins.

And you will find Jesus – not in your own heart first of all, but in God's heart. He will fill you with delight and joy. God always sees Jesus as a sacrificial lamb that has taken away all your sins.

This is the basis of salvation, and it stands firm forever.

For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.

Romans 6:14

God's kingdom is a kingdom of grace. Everything has its origin and source in grace. A child of God is saved by it, and the power for a holy life is also by God's grace.

Many are saved by grace and after that they imperceptibly slip under the law. They become so occupied with what they and others are to be and do as Christians. The consequence is that sin gains power in their lives. God's law makes sin great.

Lots of criticism and sourness have their basis in the fact that law takes over the place of grace in the heart. One makes great demands on oneself and others.

Then sin gains the control. One compares oneself with others. Self-assertion and envy become powerful, and love becomes cold.

The Lord is longing to break the power of sin among his children. He does it by exhorting them that they aren't under law, but under grace. The way of law leads to defeat. The way of grace leads into the victory and riches of Jesus.

It is important that Jesus' death and resurrection aren't things of the past in your Christian life. Again and again you have to recall the fact that you have been united with him in a death like his, and you will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his.

Jesus has carried all your sins, and he has crushed the works of the Devil. He has done this in your life. You may still be pestered by sin of course, but at the same time you know that its power has been broken. The triumph over it was won by Jesus at Calvary. Your faith in Jesus' finished work is your victory.

When your heart is filled with thanks because of God's grace, Satan has to flee from you. He cannot stand to be reminded of his defeat at Calvary. And sin has to retreat along with Satan. Grace and joy in Jesus stay behind.

But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature.

Galatians 5:13

You have a share in all Christ's wealth. There is nothing that he has won through his Calvary work that he doesn't give you at once. This also applies to the wonderful freedom you have from the law. There is no law that will convict you, because it has convicted Jesus in your place. Jesus is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

Satan tries by all means to take you away from this glorious gospel. One of his ways is to tempt you to think that it isn't so serious to sin, because Jesus has atoned for all your sins.

He doesn't give it to you straight. If he did, you would see through him. Your worst enemy is pleased if your life is marked by an easy attitude to sin. Then he knows that he has defeated you in the long run.

A true and living Christian may fall into sin, but he cannot remain in it. You cannot hold sin in one hand and Jesus in the other. If you try to do so, you are actually trying to build a bridge between Jesus and sin. However, he doesn't want to be tied once more to the sin that he has borne once. That is why he leaves you if you want to draw him into the life of sin.

A Christian cannot be at peace with Jesus and at peace with sin simultaneously. A Christian cannot live in sin. He can fall into it, but that is something different. Then it is like falling into water or fire; you must be rescued quickly or you will drown or be burnt.

May this appear in fiery characters in your soul: it could be fatal to sin against God! You know from experience how sin can charm you. But the lusts of the flesh should not reign in your life. Jesus is the one who has redeemed you and bought you by his own blood.

If sin enters your heart, and becomes the one you love, the fear of God leaves you and you surrender yourself to sin. Your freedom in Jesus is a freedom to a life spent in his service, not to a life in sin's rebellion against the Lamb of God who has taken away the sin of the world.

When I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.

Luke 10:35

Had the Good Samaritan not done enough? Hadn't it taken a lot of effort for him to help the poor creature who had fallen into the hands of robbers? After having bandaged his wounds, he put the man on his own donkey and brought him to an inn, where he paid for him. But that wasn't all. When he returned he would reimburse the innkeeper for any extra expense he might have.

When your heart was run through by the love of Jesus, the light was lit in you and you had to shout with joy over your saviour. Nothing can be compared with finding oneself released from all one's sins. Jesus carried them and he will never cast them back on you. When a sinner's heart realizes it the soul is filled with thanks, and a holy desire is born to sin no more.

Why doesn't it go on being like that?

It is difficult to keep the eye of my heart turned towards Jesus and him only. My mind is attracted in many directions. And when it is no longer Jesus and his wonderful salvation that fills the heart, I lack protection against sin.

The sins I committed before I became a Christian are painful, but the sins I have committed after I became a child of God are far, far worse. Now I feel that to sin is to tread on God's Love. Just think what sin has cost him.

However, what does Jesus do when in my shame I am again in the midst of the uncleanness of sin? He returns. Not in order to blame me for anything, but to let his ransom payments cover my sins.

Where sin increased, God's grace increased all the more. You cannot understand how God can go on forgiving you. That is because you cannot think that anything can be without limit. And God's love is without limit. He loves you as his child, and he cannot leave you. When you have sinned, his deep longing is to show you undeserved grace. In the midst of your guilt caused by sin and your debt caused by sin, you have to wait for Jesus. He always returns to pay.

“I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.”

Isaiah 43:25

There is sin which we call misdeeds. These are actions you shouldn't have done. You know that they brand you in people's eyes. That is why you try to keep them hidden. You don't like others seeing through you. You have the impression that if that happens, you will fall in their esteem.

It is a horrible thought that everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of the Lord to whom you must give account.

What will happen?

The most horrifying thing of all is to meet God with sins which aren't forgiven. But why would you do that, when God is longing to blot out your transgressions and your misdeeds?

Let Jesus into your hard and unclean heart. Confess all your hidden sins to him. He will wipe them out. Not one single sin survives when it is touched by Jesus' blood.

It is difficult to understand that you remember anything the Lord has forgotten. But it is like that for a child of God. You remember sins and failures. Like a shadow they can follow you throughout your life. When they turn up, you constantly feel their accusing strength.

However it is different for God. What he has blotted out, he doesn't remember. It is removed. He has forgotten it.

We are surprised at the strength in the blood of the Lamb. An unclean and dirty sinner becomes white like snow. Broken things become whole. You appear as a person who has never sinned.

So many people think that God forgives for our sake. A lot of fighting and doubts become the result of that opinion. It makes grace uncertain. Continually you have to ask: Am I such that God can blot out my misdeeds? You are set free from that question. Instead you may ask: Is Jesus such that he has grace for me? You are not to doubt the answer. He has given it himself when he said, "It is finished."

They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company.

Acts 15:39

The beginning of Paul's second missionary journey was terrible. A bitter disagreement separated the two brothers. Paul and Barnabas couldn't agree with each other. The subject of the dispute was Barnabas' cousin, John Mark. He had travelled with them on the first part of the first journey, but when they were about to go into Asia Minor, he returned home. Now he wanted to go with them on the second journey. Barnabas agreed, but Paul insisted that he shouldn't go with them because he had left them and hadn't taken part in the work with them. The result was that Paul and Barnabas parted company.

Many pious Christians think that God cannot bless under such circumstances, but they didn't take this view of it in Antioch. They sent Barnabas off with Mark, and Paul with Silas.

Disputes and strife among brothers are unfortunate things. God's word encourages us to keep the peace with each other. Disagreement steals both confidence and joy. Nevertheless God is so great and gracious that he can use small, failing children in his service. We have to be careful not to set limits to the blessing which God's word hasn't set.

Paul and Silas had a beneficial journey; during it they took the gospel to Europe, and there is no doubt that the Lord followed Barnabas and Mark as well. It is sinners the Lord uses in his service.

It also holds good in the congregation today. Disagreement and strife among brothers is a sin, but we shouldn't allow ourselves to be paralyzed. We have to go forward trusting that it is God's grace that gives life, progress and growth.

At the same time we have to live in constant prayer that the Lord, by his Spirit, will heal the wounds that we brought about. In the last epistle we have from Paul's hand, he mentions John Mark. He asks Timothy to bring him with him to Rome, and then he adds, "Because he is helpful to me in my ministry."

God can bring disputing brothers together. It is a good thing when it takes place while they go together on their way to heaven.

Talk it over with Jesus. He works miracles – even today.

His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

2 Peter 1:3

A true child of God lives in a constant longing for a godly life. A vast number of people have been led astray by this longing. They asked for help through some other channel than the one God's word assigns.

Many religious movements have made inroads among Christians by promising a godly life. Many have been left behind disappointed when, after some years, they have had to realize that the way they have followed is a wrong way.

There is only one way to a godly life. It is the one God's word assigns. It is called the way to the blessing.

Jesus is the wisdom of God. That exceeds what we can ever understand, but by the grace of God we can grasp it in our hearts by faith.

We cannot create life, no matter how much we effort make. But if we turn to Jesus in faith, we are changed. We receive life.

God's word tells about a woman who had spent all she had on medical treatment, but she hadn't been healed. In her distress she turned to Jesus. She came and touched him. Then a power went out from Jesus, and it healed her.

It is also like that in your life. If you hold out your empty hands towards Jesus, you won't be disappointed. Life comes from him. He is the secret of a godly life.

Lacking confidence in Jesus is the cause of much spiritual weakness. Far too many asked for help where it wasn't to be found. They should have lost themselves in what the Bible says about him. To adhere to it is to believe in Jesus.

Jesus is the way. Jesus is the life. Jesus is the liberator. He is the spring that never dries up. You can drink from him. If you do so, as Holy Scripture says, streams of living water will flow out from within you.

The knowledge of Jesus is the way to all spiritual growth and blessing.

Therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.

Hebrews 1:9

Jesus has been anointed with the oil of joy.

Do you wonder that you cannot turn your attention to Jesus without meeting a stream of joy which comes from him? You cannot let Jesus in without receiving the joy.

It isn't a superficial and cheap joy. It has its origin in the Spirit that reigns in him.

There is a profound harmony between Jesus and God. Thought, emotion and will are a unity. Jesus is imbued with God's peace, because he is one with God. And no one can be that without being filled with God's joy. There will be rejoicing in heaven when one sinner repents. God is delighted every time a lost sinner knocks at the door of the house of the Father.

Likewise, nothing pleases Jesus more than saved sinners. They are his reward for everything he has suffered.

If you make room for what God is telling you about Jesus in your thoughts and mind, you will experience something wonderful. Jesus shares his joy with you. Living streams of water come from him, and you cannot drink from them without being changed. You get your joy in Jesus. What pleases him pleases you as well. He anoints you with the oil of joy.

I have met Christians who were eager for other people's salvation. They couldn't relax while a vast number of people in our country and all over the world are living without God and without hope. Their distress compelled them into prayer, service and sacrifice.

But don't think that they live a poor life. They have been anointed with the oil of joy. They want what God wants. What pleases his heart pleases theirs too.

They rarely think of their own joy. They are occupied with all the many people that haven't been reached yet. Their lives are devoted to one thing: to please their Lord and Master.

Today Jesus comes to you. He wants to anoint you with the oil of joy. He wants to fill you with heavenly blessing. He wants to save your soul and make you an instrument of joy.

30 October

Then you will say, “We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.” But he will reply, “I don’t know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!”

Luke 13:26-27

The Day of Judgment will be the great day of surprises.

Those who walked with Jesus on earth will meet him again. Joseph and Mary’s neighbours, friends and member of their family –all of them will think that Jesus knows them. But they are mistaken.

There are some people who have eaten and drunk with him; nevertheless they will spend eternity with the Devil and his angels in the unquenchable fire of hell.

How is that possible?

It is due to the fact that they didn’t get the right heart-relationship with Jesus.

Interest in Jesus isn’t enough either sympathy or admiration. Jesus doesn’t ask for pity. No, he asks for your poor, unclean heart.

Have you given it to Jesus?

Has your crushed and broken heart become his home?

On the Day of Judgment Jesus knows only those, he has known, here below, from within. He wants to come into you. If you open the door to him, he cleanses you. His atoning blood makes you white as snow.

If he has been allowed to do that here on earth, you are one of those he knows in eternity.

It will be a remarkable day even then. You cannot understand that Jesus knows you. You think you are poor and unworthy. Jesus could, with good reason, shut you out for ever.

But he doesn’t do that. Throughout your whole life he has walked with you. He has daily covered you with his grace. Yes, he has dressed you in the clothes of salvation. You are his bride, whom he has been longing to take by the hand and lead into the halls of heaven.

Yes, you, who are known by Jesus, are blessed.

I do not set aside the grace of God.

Galatians 2:21

I wonder if any Christian dreams of setting aside the grace of God.

In the middle of everything we disagree about, can we not agree that we will never leave God's grace?

The answer seems obvious. However it isn't that simple. Satan concentrates his efforts on making us misuse or nullify God's grace. His ways are many. One of them is the legalistic mind.

A Christian has two natures: a new one and an old one. The old nature belongs to this world. It cannot be saved, but it will be destroyed in the grave. The old man can only hear the law. Yes, the law reigns in him. If the old man hears the gospel, he will always use grace as an excuse to sin.

It is quite different with the new man who is created by faith in Jesus. He must only hear the gospel. Jesus must live in the heart of a Christian. He is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

Where Jesus is, all requirements of the law are met. He has done it to such an extent that the law is gone. It also applies to the duties of the law.

Satan tries in every way to make you let the law into your heart. He knows that if it is allowed to enter, it extends its area. In the end you think only of how you are to be as a Christian, and what you are to do.

It doesn't happen suddenly. Jesus slowly slips from your mind and thought. You become occupied with your own Christianity.

Without knowing it yourself, you have annulled God's grace. Satan has misused God's law, and the horrible thing has happened.

Therefore concentrate your efforts on preserving God's grace. There is room for only one person in your heart, and that is Jesus. His finished work at Calvary is the only treasure of your heart. That is the foundation on which you build.

1 November

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Romans 8:28

There are some people who are particularly privileged. It is those who love God and who have been called according to his purpose. Not all who have been called love God. Jesus says that many are called, but few are chosen. Among the called there are some people who have accepted the call and love God. All things work together for good to them.

That they work together for good means that they work together for the greatest of all good things: the eternal salvation of the soul. You can of course get pleasure from temporal good things, if only they don't hinder your eternal welfare. God helps his children in countless ways through this life, which certainly isn't easy. However, what help would be for you if you lost your soul?

God has in all circumstances an eye for your salvation. He intervenes in all things and lets them serve you on the journey to heaven.

It applies in good times and in your progress here on earth. If you love the Lord he will help you through, so that in spite of your wealth you will be saved. It is difficult for a rich person to be saved, but Jesus has said that with God all things are possible.

That also applies to our hardships and struggles. This word means a great deal when difficulties pile up, or you fall to crushing defeats. Then you have to say: Even this is in God's hand, and God cannot touch me or my life's varied circumstances, unless it is compelled to work for my salvation.

And haven't you experienced that when many earthly hopes faded in your life, the heavenly hope shone for you as never before?

Yes, God came to you even under the bitter wounds of your sin. And you became a witness to the incomprehensible wonder of his love. The pure One touched your sins and made them white as snow. And you experienced the incomprehensible thing. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more. God took your sins and forgave them by his grace. God deals like that with the one who loves him.

2 November

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.

Revelation 21:1

A lot of people are disappointed because they expect far too many great things from life here on earth. In a way they believe that life as a Christian can be compared to driving on a broad, level and straight road. But the Bible says something else. The way to heaven is narrow. It leads through a world where Satan is the Prince. He doesn't think that it is his task to make it easy for the Christians. That is why Jesus says to his friends, "In this world you will have trouble."

In the time just before the Second Coming, the devil fights with much power. He comes with great fury because he knows that his time is short. A lot of people have been and are being persecuted all over the world. Yes, all Christians feel, in one way or another, that they aren't of this world.

To this must be added the hardship God's children have in common with everybody else. Illness, misfortune and distress with our closest relatives and ourselves can cast dark shadows over our life.

The world hasn't got the peace we are looking for, which is why we long for God's City.

The words of the Lord assure us that we won't be disappointed. Have you thought of the fact that the longing for heaven grows, when the Lord leads you through something difficult? There is a connection between the feeling of uncertainty and the expectation of the city with the firm foundations.

God creates a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. If you belong to Jesus, you are a citizen of heaven. You will spend eternity in the country where the sun never sets. Then there is an end to sin and its countless consequences.

Your spiritual hunger and thirst must be appeased first of all. You must see Jesus as he is. The sight of him is to change you. You are to be just like him.

Everybody's hearts are to exalt and serve the Lord forever and ever.

Let us look forward to Jesus' reappearance. He hasn't forgotten us. He will arrive soon and make everything new!

3 November

When I see the blood, I will pass over you.

Exodus 12:13

Do you know the question: What is going to happen at the end of my life? Maybe you have visited one of your loved ones at a residential home for elderly people, and you can't help thinking whether you too will end up there one day.

Neither can you help thinking of whether you will be so mentally weakened that you cannot grasp anything anymore. It is a wonderful thing to see how long faith in Jesus and the salvation in him can be alive in an impaired mind. But for some people the day will arrive when Jesus' name isn't heard with the joy of recognition anymore.

Do I possess the faith, when I no longer understand anything?

God has the answer for us: "When I see the blood, I will pass over you." That word was fulfilled the first time, when the people of Israel were saved from the hand of the angel of death. Since then it has happened to every single Christian who has lived his life under Jesus' blood.

Your salvation and mine aren't dependent on what we see. It's dependent on what God sees. He doesn't say that he will spare us from his destructive blows if we see the blood. It's not us, but God who must see the blood.

Jesus' blood has infinite value in God's sight. When all is said and done, the blood is the only thing he looks for in us. He doesn't look for our strengths and abilities.

The Israelites were safe inside their houses. The blood testified for them. It's like that for you who have settled your account with God. Jesus' blood is your acquittal. What matters isn't what you can manage, but what somebody else has done in your stead.

The fact that God always sees Jesus' blood gives rest to your troubled heart. Nothing of that we can do is sufficient. But God sees the cleansing blood, when you take your refuge in Jesus. Therefore his hand will not hit you, but he will hold his hand in blessing over you.

Rest in what God sees! Let his grace be your only salvation. It holds in life, in death and in eternity.

4 November

You of little faith, why are you so afraid?

Matthew 8:26

There is a difference between being of little faith and being an unbeliever. The disciples were the first thing, but not the latter.

They believed in Jesus, but their faith was little.

From time to time Jesus' friends are pictured as a bunch of cowardly, weak and self-centered egoists; but it is a completely absurd conclusion. It is true that they were below the mark in many crisis situations; however, it is also true that it was they who left everything and followed Jesus. They stood by him in his trials. They didn't ask about costs and conditions before they followed him. No, they left all and followed in his footsteps.

Still, their faith was little. Jesus was the one who had decided that they were to row across the lake. Jesus himself was sleeping in the boat. But when the waves were entering the boat, they were seized with fear.

Do you recognize yourself here?

Before you went into that crisis you were certain that Jesus went ahead of you. You were convinced that you were in God's way, but when the storm and waves sprang up, you doubted. You started to ask if Jesus really was there.

What are you to do?

Learn from the disciples. Go to Jesus. Tell him how you are. They did so and were helped. You will also be helped.

Jesus knew in advance that the storm was on the way. Nevertheless, he led his friends out into it. Neither was he unaware of how they would react, but it didn't make Jesus spare them. He led them all the way out to where their own thoughts passed a death sentence on them. He wanted to teach them that when any possibility of salvation is out of the question, he stands up and rebukes the winds and the waves.

When the disciples had arrived safely ashore, they saw Jesus in a different light. They had learned to count on him. They were not in the least skilled disciples, but their confidence in Jesus had become greater.

It is like that for you as well. In the crises of your life Jesus shows you who he is, and your faith grows.

5 November

All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.

Psalm 25:10 (RSV)

Some Christians cannot understand that there are paths in God's kingdom. They think that God's kingdom only has roads. When they meet something difficult and heavy, they think that God has left them. Then Satan comes and tempts them to despondency and bitterness.

But God has roads and he has paths. He clearly says so in his word. From time to time he leads you on roads where it isn't difficult to sing hymns of thanksgiving. At other times it isn't like that. You cannot understand it, but you have to believe his word.

You are to pay heed to what the Lord says, "All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness." It doesn't say that they mostly are so. No, God always meets you on these paths with mercy and truth.

Neither does it say that this concerns everybody. It only concerns those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.

There are Christians who use this qualification to rob themselves of both help and consolation. They say that they haven't kept God's covenant and testimonies. Therefore, the promise cannot concern them.

If you feel like that, I have to ask you: What does it mean to keep God's covenant and testimonies?

You mustn't mistake the covenant of the law and the covenant of grace. No one was able to fulfil the covenant of the law. That is why God sent his Son as Redeemer and substitute. God drew up a new covenant. It is the covenant of grace you are under, when you believe in Jesus. God testifies concerning his Son who has fulfilled the law in your place through his holy and perfect word.

If you are one of the Lord's little ones who asks for grace and forgiveness in Jesus, you are under God's covenant of grace. And God takes care of you in every way.

On the narrow dark paths he meets you with mercy and truth. You cannot see that today, but in God's hour your eyes will be opened. It is only mercy and truth that follow you as long as you live, and you will live in the house of the Lord all your days!

6 November

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.

Titus 2:11-12

The cravings of our sinful nature resist the Spirit. There is a continuous fight. There are many Christians who have longed for redemption, because the world tempted them. Again and again they had to ask the question: How shall I become a true and living Christian?

God's word gives the answer.

You don't become a true and living Christian through new decisions; nor through any new attempt at whole-hearted surrender; neither through devotional exercises of various kinds.

No, there is only one way that leads forwards, and it is the way of grace. God's grace teaches a Christian. God's grace is capable of doing what nothing else can do. What God has done for you, makes you live a life that you cannot live in your own strength.

Something sinister overtakes a legalistic Christian person. If that person is able to gain victories, the heart becomes even more self-assured and arrogant. Envy, selfishness and unkindness thrive beneath the surface.

It is something quite different with a Christian person under grace. Grace teaches him to say “No” to what is against God. It doesn't make him great in his own opinion. He knows that he was nothing without God. But he praises God's grace. It must fill his entire heart. It is also grace which makes him act differently from what he otherwise would have done. It isn't something he can boast of. The fruit isn't due to him, but to God.

Do you wonder that you cannot be tired of hearing about Jesus? His action is the bread of life for you. Jesus as your substitute is the source of everything good in your life.

Therefore, remain in God's true grace. Be delighted with this. Let it penetrate and warm your heart.

Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income.

Ecclesiastes 5:10

Since the day of the Fall of Man, the human soul goes without food. In our blindness we don't understand what is needed so that we can have enough to eat. Countless are the ways that we have tried; however, there is no lasting help in any of these.

If a person loves money, it becomes the substance of his life. But no matter how much money one is gathering, the soul will never be satisfied. No matter how rich a person is, he still covets even greater riches.

Why?

We are the object of deception. We think that the persistent hunger of the soul is due to the fact that we still lack money or greater riches. We don't realize that we are on a way that cannot satisfy the soul.

The only one who can help in this distress is the Lord. When he comes to a misled and deluded person, he creates a hunger and thirst which no soul owned beforehand. It is the hunger and thirst for justice.

Jesus shows you that everything you see around you is to perish. Some day your soul will be required of you, and you will be buried. Then you are to appear before the judgment seat of God. There, all of us are empty-handed. We cannot take our gold and silver with us, and even if we could, we couldn't ransom our soul.

Then the questions are few. Yes, there is only one question left: Do I have a gracious God or will he pass the sentence "Lost" on me?

When God by his Spirit makes this alive for a person, the soul begins to long for salvation. Then it turns away from all the springs of this world, which are like cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.

However, God doesn't disappoint. He himself has said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."

And God is as good as his word. He gives you the true riches. He himself takes up residence in your heart. Then you are rich indeed.

8 November

No one cares for my life.

Psalm 142:4

Towards the end of the world, the love of most will grow cold. That is why loneliness increases on earth. Man has always entered the world alone and left it alone. In the last times, the time between birth and death will also be characteristic of the fact that each individual person is alone.

The great ideal of the time is independence. That is why all ties to others are broken – also the ties of love.

Today a lot of people can say: no one cares for my life. Maybe someone care about what you can give. If it is a question of material wealth, there will always be an interest in getting a share of it. But when it comes to you, yourself, your soul; who pays attention to that?

Even if you feel lonely like a bird on the roof, you cannot say that no one cares for your life. Even if you think that spiritually you are like Lazarus outside the rich man's door, there is still one whose eye watches over you.

This one is God.

God is at rest in himself, but even so he needs you. He has bound himself to you in love. He has taken the suffering of your loneliness upon himself. It is part of him. His heart finds no peace until he has communion with you.

Listen to the Lord. He speaks to you through his word. It is so strong and powerful that it breaks through the loneliness, because there is one place where you aren't lonely. That is on the eternal foundation of salvation. Jesus has bought you to God by giving himself for you. That is why God is for you. He is on your side. He is with you.

Don't let him stand outside. Then you are all alone, alone in life, alone in death, alone in the judgment. And then hell is the only thing left.

Let Jesus into your heart. He cares for your life.

Today is the time of grace. Today God is to be found.

9 November

After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

Hebrews 1:3

How difficult it is to believe the gracious forgiveness of all one's sins. It is as if it becomes more and more difficult year by year.

That God forgives a sinner the first time is a great grace. No one can believe and accept this truth if God doesn't give his Spirit. Nevertheless, it is easier to believe that I received grace the first time, than to believe that God forgives again and again.

It is deeply ingrained in our nature to seek help from ourselves. That is why I constantly turn to the way of self-improvement. With increasing worry I have to admit that this is not successful. Gradually fear creeps in - will I ever reach the goal? God saved me and put me on the way, but I am not able to walk it.

During my soul-searching, many memories of my sin appear. Some of these have cast lifelong shadows over my life. They have latched on to my mind and turn up every time my account with God has to be settled.

Yes, it is difficult to believe God's grace. There is only one way to be taken. It is to take God at his word.

God rested when he had created everything and it was very good. Likewise Jesus sat down at the right hand of God when he had finished his work of salvation.

There isn't one sin which Jesus hasn't cleansed you of. Jesus died and paid for your past, present and future sins. It applies both to sins which are confessed and to the many sins that you never think of.

If you take refuge with Jesus and allow yourself to be cleansed in his blood, sin isn't with you anymore.

Listen, you who find it so difficult to believe! Your sins are hidden in Jesus. He has finished your purification before God. What is valid before God is also valid for you.

10 November

Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men.

2 Corinthians 5:11

There is a different fear from that of the slave. It is the fear in the one who loves. The fear of the slave is connected to law. The fear of love is connected to grace.

Something happened to you when you found grace with God. You became a different person. God's love was poured out in your heart by the Holy Spirit.

You received simultaneously a new fear. It was the fear of not pleasing him whom you love. Love is not self-seeking.

Jesus' saviour-mind isn't satisfied. He knows those who haven't believed yet. And they aren't unimportant to him. Jesus loves each individual person.

Jesus shares love for the unsaved with those who love him. He knows that it drives them to action. Love is afraid of not being fully in agreement with Jesus' will. Jesus felt like that towards God. We feel like that towards him.

There are relatives, neighbours and fellow-workers who are to be won for Jesus. And there are a vast number of people in the mission fields that are to be saved. You aren't to reach all of them, but there are some people God wants you to take care of. Neither are you to spread yourself over every missionary work, but there are some areas of the mission fields that God has entrusted to you.

You are to take part in the task of witness. You must ask God to prepare the way for you and help you in this important and difficult task. There is a fight that has to be fought in prayer. Each individual person has to be surrounded by intercessory prayer in order to make the enemy of souls release his hold.

There is no one who, on the day of eternity, will regret what they sacrificed of time, strength and money so that others might be saved.

Jesus wants to share his distress with those who love him. Let his will be yours. Pray, give and go!

11 November

O Lord, how many are my foes!

Psalm 3:1

Do you have many enemies?

On the face of it you will probably say no! You are on good terms with these you mix with. You treat them with kindness and they treat you the same. You go a long way in this world by being at peace with others, if this is possible.

Still, you are to notice Jesus' words that he has come to bring division.

There is a hidden enmity between you and those that don't belong to Jesus. You belong to separate kingdoms with different kings. It will be revealed when persecution against Christians breaks out. It will show that a man's enemies will be his fellow-workers.

Even today it is felt behind their kind and smiling surface, and it will be more obvious in the time immediately before the Second Coming.

However, the enemies of your soul aren't merely around you. You also have an enemy in your own flesh; it is your old selfish nature. It doesn't want to be killed. It will keep you away from everything that leads you nearer Jesus.

If you know nothing of that enemy, you are in danger. The flesh does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. If the flesh prevails, it kills Jesus in you.

Behind all enemies is the principal enemy. That is Satan. In his wickedness, he cannot become reconciled to the fact that you will be saved and honour the Lamb. He wants you to go with him to Hell. He lies in wait like a beast of prey and waits for the moment when he can throw himself on you.

Yes, you have enemies! When you think of them, you have to ask if you will ever reach heaven.

Seek the answer with Jesus! He is your victor! Tell him how weak you are. Thank him because he has defeated all evil powers. Hide yourself in the gospel. Then you are invincible. No one is as strong as the one who in his helplessness clings to Jesus.

12 November

However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.

Acts 20:24

How does one come to the conclusion that one considers one’s life is worth nothing? A lot of Christians, who live in an incessant fight with themselves, ask like that. They know that they think far too much of themselves, and they long for a life where they aren’t continually in the centre of their own world of ideas.

God’s word helps you who are bogged down by your circumstances.

Paul lived for many years as a Pharisee with himself as the centre. It was his piety, his zeal and his service that mattered. It became a life of slavery. He was driven further and further into sin while he was trying to serve God. Yes, he ended up as a violent man and a murderer.

When Paul was saved, Jesus became his all. There was no longer anything he was to do or deserve. He was rich in faith in his saviour. If only he could finish the race and keep the faith. You are to reach one goal. That is to be saved. It is comparable with a race on a running track. It applies to all of us that we have to persevere, otherwise we won’t reach the goal.

As a child of God you know from experience what can help you towards the goal. If you use the Word frequently, the invisible spiritual world becomes alive for you. You realize how uncertain everything is on earth. You are reminded of how short a human life can be. The riches and abundance of grace are portrayed before your eyes, and you see that heaven is what matters.

God’s word says, at the same time, that the Lord has given a task for you. It may be small and unimpressive in other people’s opinion. But fulfil it! It isn’t to other people you are to give an account.

If you let God’s goal and task into your life, everything else becomes secondary. The ties to the world are loosened while you are tied stronger and stronger to heaven. You consider your life worth nothing to you, if only you may finish the race and complete your task.

13 November

You . . . joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property.

Hebrews 10:34

We are amazed at the first Christians. Imagine how they accepted the confiscation of their property. And they accepted it joyfully.

How could they accept it?

They knew that they had better and lasting possessions that never perish. There was a wealth that no one could steal from them. And that wealth was theirs.

A Christian is rich in two senses of the word. He is first of all rich in Jesus. Jesus shares everything he is and has with the one he loves. In addition to these quite incomprehensible riches, the Lord also showers his children with many temporal blessings.

There is a great difference between the two forms of riches. One merely belongs to human life the other belongs to both time and eternity.

Sooner or later we will lose all the earthly gifts of the Lord. That will happen the day we die, if not before. For a lot of people it happens long before. God is both the one who gives and the one who takes.

A lot of Christians have this in common with the Early Church they have learnt from bitter experience what it means to be persecuted for Jesus' sake. Many Christians have lost their job, freedom and family because they believed in Jesus. A person feels poor when s/he is stripped of everything. Nevertheless, a Christian isn't poor in a situation like that. He owns a treasure that no one can take away from him. When God takes the temporal wealth away from him, it is because his eternal wealth is to become more precious to his heart.

It is possible that people will confiscate your property because you belong to Jesus. It is a good thing for a Christian to allow for that possibility. If you live in God's word, the Lord will help you through this trial. He will give you joy in your eternal riches. He will make you certain that happiness of life doesn't consist in what we have of earthly property. Your wealth is Jesus. You have him in heaven and in your heart. And no one can take him away from you. Therefore, you are rich in the midst of poverty and distress.

Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him.

Luke 15: 22

God's word uses the robe as a picture of salvation several times. We can't help thinking of this in the parable of the lost son. The father doesn't want to have the best robe for himself. He gives it to his lost child.

It's like that in God's kingdom. The Lord wants to see us clothed in Jesus. Therefore God's word admonishes us to clothe ourselves with him. We must constantly do this.

It takes place by faith. If you trust in Jesus, he is yours. There is no better suit of clothes than his. It hides all your sins. There is no deficiency or imperfection which isn't covered by Jesus.

We don't know how often the lost son looked at his suit of clothes. I wonder if it, time and time again, assured him of how dearly he was loved by his father.

A child of God can't look at his suit of clothes too often. He wears a robe which makes him certain that he is a king's child.

You are filled with wonder: can it really be true?

You are tempted still to look at the miserable and dirty garment that you previously wore. That garment tells the story of your life. You can't understand that you must be dressed in a suit of clothes, which is the result of the life and death of somebody else. But it is like that.

All thanks and praise to God originate in the joy that Jesus dresses you in his righteousness. This fact goes beyond everything you can understand. Therefore, you must hear it again and again. Then faith can accept the message. By God's grace your heart can grasp the finished work of Jesus.

You are not the only one who will look at the best robe. Your Father in heaven also sees it. He has his joy in this robe. It reminds him of Jesus, his beloved Son. When God looks at you, he sees Jesus. That is the secret and richness of salvation.

Therefore, you should not despair because of your own unworthiness. If you believe in Jesus, you are clothed in Jesus. You have got the best robe. Dressed in it, you can stand before God for ever.

15 November

Much dreaming and many words are meaningless. Therefore stand in awe of God.

Ecclesiastes 5:7

Do you spend much time on dreams? A lot of young people do that. They picture to themselves how it will be some day. They can enter into the spirit of a fantasy world that threatens their sense of reality.

That is not only a danger to young people. Several middle-aged people dream of a time when they will be fit and comfortably off. A lot of people have been disappointed. They took it for granted that they could go on being a couple together. Then one of them was suddenly taken.

Dreams hinder you from carrying out the every day's tasks of life. God has given you a calling. You are to serve the Lord in it. And the service you are to practise now, you cannot practise later. That also applies to your task in God's kingdom. "Night is coming, when no one can work." It also applies to your life. Therefore, the Lord calls you to serve him today.

Do not dream yourself into an unknown future. Do not dream yourself somewhere else either. Serve the Lord where you are.

Paul knew what it is to fear the Lord, and he therefore tried to persuade others. He knew that he lived this life down here once only. He also knew that God in advance had prepared good works for him to do.

You are to appear before the Lord and give an account of your life. If you give yourself up to dreams, you will not achieve very much.

Dreams also make you dissatisfied with the conditions God has given you to serve under. You become an ungrateful Christian. You do not say: "Today I hear. Today I believe. Today I serve."

You are to stand in awe of God. He is disgusted with all your dreams. Instead, he wants you to put your faith in him, because he wants to take care of you.

He has never promised that your life on earth will be easy. He knows that it is always difficult to deny oneself and take up one's cross daily and follow him. But he takes care of you. He wants to give you your daily bread.

And the Lord wants to teach you that it isn't heaven yet. Now is the time to stand in awe of God and serve him whole-heartedly.

16 November

When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise.

Proverbs 10:19

Do you find it difficult to be quiet? Must you talk all the time?

It is a dangerous thing to talk too much. Once most subjects of conversation are exhausted, the conversation gradually gets on to areas and subjects that we had better keep quiet about, because you are not to tell everything that you know. Often you show greater love if you don't pass on what you know.

How often do we set ourselves up as judges? We speak in a way so that others cannot be in any doubt about what we mean.

Gossip is a sin which devastates. It has separated a lot of friends. We said something which love should have covered up. Even though the other person didn't know what we had said, shadows came over our mutual relationship. Our outlook was hardened towards the other person's faults.

Jesus says that in the same way you judge others, you will be judged. The guidelines, which you take for the basis for your judgment of others, will someday be applied to you.

How will that day be for you?

Have you noticed that you are often harsher in your judgment in those areas in which you yourself are weak?

Fancy having to hear one's words again! Fancy having to experience one's own life along with what has been said about others! Fancy having to be judged by one's own words!

God doesn't see as human beings see. He looks at the heart. It is unclean and deceitful.

God's word says that you are to hold your tongue. The tongue is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body.

Avoid much talk. Spend your time pleasing and encouraging others. Speak first of all with God about your own sins. Ask him for mercy, for yourself and your brother.

17 November

The punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

Isaiah 53:5

Sin has broken our heart. We may run away from that truth. We may also try to heal what is broken. That is what millions of people do.

There are many ways to go, but only one leads to the goal. Jesus is the only one who can heal the soul.

Jesus doesn't do so by showing you a way you are to go. He calls attention to the way he went: the way to Calvary.

Your soul won't be healed through one sort of medicine or another. No, you are healed by his wounds.

It is Jesus' blood that cleanses from all sin. Through his action on the cross, he has taken sin out of your heart and put it into his own. That is why God struck him with the blow of his wrath.

There is healing for the soul by Jesus' wounds.

When Jesus has given you healing, you also have peace – peace with God.

You will never get peace with yourself. There is much inward struggle in the life of a sinner. A child of God is in a constant dispute between spirit and flesh.

However, I have peace in Jesus. He was punished. He has atoned for all my sins. Therefore sin cannot separate me from Christ's love anymore.

The price for my salvation is paid forever and ever by another person. I can rest on his finished work.

I don't have to make an effort to do what already has been done.

Sin has ruined us more than we are able to understand. But it is a rich thing to be a sinner who has peace in Jesus. How good it is to belong to a people who say thank you, because he was punished and we were healed by his wounds.

We are homeless.

1 Corinthians 4:11

One of God's great gifts is a door which is yours. When you have closed it, you are in your home. That may be a bigger or smaller home, richly or poorly furnished. Most people don't give it many thoughts. They are happy that they have a place where they belong.

Paul and his fellows were homeless. Jesus was also homeless. They had to live under other people's roofs or spend the night in the open air.

For every single homeless person, it is a blessing to think of the fact that his distress is known by Jesus. Especially in our century, following in Jesus' footsteps has led a lot of people away from their homes to prisons or forced-labor camps because they wouldn't hide that they belonged to Jesus.

Let us not forget the prisoners. They are longing to live in a place where they have the key to their own door. Fear, uncertainty and anxiety make their days and nights long, and no prison wall shuts out the flaming arrows of the evil one. Let us also realize that we have all God's gifts as a loan. Jesus has said that he is with us always, to the very end of the age; but he hasn't said that we will always have a home here below.

Let us first of all be grateful. In his goodness and care, Jesus has wanted you to have what he was without. He has given a lot of single people, and many who are part of a family, a place on earth that is theirs.

Let us remember to thank God! Let us, through hospitality, share the gifts God has given us with others.

Many older people have to leave their homes some day. It can also become your lot and mine. However, God doesn't abandon us. Most people settle down in their new surroundings. And basically a Christian is never homeless. Jesus wasn't homeless; Paul wasn't homeless; and you will not be homeless either when you believe.

You are on your way to the home which you will never leave. Jesus has prepared a place for you there. Therefore, your heart should not be appalled. Neither should you be discouraged. Here below our conditions and circumstances are changing, but they don't change with Jesus. You can live in that light. Every day is a day of travelling which leads you nearer your eternal home.

19 November

We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.

Hebrews 2:1

There are many has-been Christians. You cannot meet them without asking yourself: Why did they lapse from their faith?

Most people begin by drifting before they fall. Only a few decide intentionally that they no longer want God to be their Father and Jesus their Redeemer and Saviour. This apostasy is comparable with a slow-gliding movement that quietly and imperceptibly leads the Christian away from Jesus.

The apostasy takes place on the internal front. God's word is listened to continually, but isn't paid heed to. That is to say, one doesn't take it to one's heart. Sins aren't confessed and acknowledged. The purification of the sinner becomes something far off and theoretical.

If a word of admonition is preached which calls attention to discrepancies, it isn't followed.

Life is allowed to continue as it has done for a long time.

Can one wonder that indifference like that eventually leaves its mark in externals? A critical attitude to the congregation grows strong. One attends meetings less frequently. In the end one stops attending.

Yes, that is what has happened to many Christians.

The whole thing started when they didn't pay heed to what they heard.

I have to live in a close relationship to God's word in which I again and again am exposed. I have to be stripped of all righteousness of my own, while I see the abyss of corruption in myself in the light of God's word.

God's Spirit must, at the same time, vitalize the word about Jesus for my heart. It has to inflame my soul that my Substitute and Redeemer left the glory of heaven in order to save me.

I cannot live without remembering that Jesus' blood also cleanses my unclean soul of all sin. I live by this word. It is the bread of life for my soul. I have to pay heed to it, otherwise I die.

They comforted and consoled him over all the trouble the Lord had brought on him.

Job 42:11

God's word teaches us that the Devil is unable to cause a misfortune to befall a Christian unless God allows it. But God won't permit him to do that, say a lot of Christians. God's thoughts are, as you know, of peace and not of evil.

God truly cares for us. He keeps our salvation in view, and he wants us to serve in his eternal plan of salvation. For some people it involves them being struck by sorrow, distress and misfortune. Job is an example of that.

None of Job's three friends understood what was the reason for Job's sufferings. God wanted to show Satan that he had a servant who feared him and shunned evil even when misfortunes poured over him.

Many Christians have felt that God has treated them strangely. They have not been able to explain his line of action. They have had to be content with believing.

All God's children are in the Lord's hand. God doesn't lead us all alike. He sets some Christians the task of persevering in hardships and sufferings. Others have a difficult mind to fight with. He lets some Christians go through life alone. Others may have a hard lot in their marriage.

God never apologizes for his actions. He takes responsibility for the misfortunes Job met with. That's also how it is for you. Not one sparrow will fall to the ground without your Father's will.

To our way of thinking we would honour God much more if he didn't bend and humble us through trials. But we hardly know ourselves. God knows us completely.

We can get help through God's word in the midst of everything that meets us. To think that no misfortune happens without God! He wants to meet you in the most severe things of your life. He wants to touch your burdens so that they become a blessing for you. You do not always understand God's way, but you have to believe what he has said.

21 November

Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Hebrews 4:16

It is more natural to ask God to help us than wanting to find grace to help us. Without realizing it we brush grace into the background. It is caused by our old nature. It has confidence only in what it takes part in itself.

It is therefore necessary to be instructed and set right by God's word.

In God's guidance everything turns on keeping you in grace. You are to find it again and again. You will do so only when your own supplies come to an end. When you cannot go on anymore, you start to ask about what Jesus can do. When you despair about the selfishness that sticks to you, you can begin to be pleased with him who didn't come in order to save himself.

You cannot find greater help than God's grace. When it fills your heart, you become rich in the midst of your own poverty. You get abundance, even though you think you are without everything.

You have to appear before the throne of God.

Are you afraid of appearing before it? Do you fear that you will be convicted when you stand face to face with the Holy One?

You are to bear in mind that you aren't the first one who stands before the throne of God. Jesus has been there before you. Then he received the judgment for all your sins. And what Jesus has taken on himself, he never throws back on you.

Jesus has made the throne of judgment into the throne of grace for you who take refuge with him. You are therefore to approach God's throne with confidence. God won't refuse you admission. He won't bring to light all the unsuccessful and abortive things of your life.

He will let you find grace. Fancy finding grace! When all is said and done it is all about this one thing: to be surrounded by God's pleasure.

Then all things will be given you as well, also help in our time of need. God doesn't arrive too late. You haven't been forgotten. His eye watches over you. He has saved the best till the last.

22 November

So your servant has found courage to pray this prayer to you.

2 Samuel 7:27

It is difficult to be quiet in prayer. Again and again we have to say with the disciples: Lord, teach me to pray. We cannot pray unless God pours out on us the Spirit of prayer. And the Spirit of prayer is the Spirit of grace.

When God revealed to David what he would give him, he found courage to pray, or as it literally says, he found his heart to pray.

It is also like that for you. The link of prayer with heaven is in order when the riches and wealth of grace are revealed. There is no closed door, then, that has to be opened first. The eye of your heart sees that Jesus has prepared the way right up to God.

A life in the undeserved and fulfilled gospel also means that as Christians we have close communion with God in prayer. Since it is difficult to be kept in the faith of God's undeserved grace, our prayer life can become so poor.

God wanted to build a house for David. These words don't speak of what David is to do. They only say what God will do for him. David became little in his own opinion because of these words. He calls himself a servant. At the same time he sees whose servant he is. A king is never more kingly than when he bends his knee to the king of eternity. Then he has found his place. He has been receptive then to God's riches.

The wonderful thing is that if you find your proper place in your relationship with Jesus, you also find it in your own heart to pray.

Behind all true prayer is the realization of your powerlessness and helplessness. You only find sin, poverty and bewilderment within yourself. In this profound distress you appear before the throne of grace in order to find mercy and help. It is the Spirit of prayer that draws you up to God. You come at the same time with fear and trembling and in full assurance of faith. You know that your God expects you. He bends down to you and hears your prayer. Therefore prayer causes you to listen for the sound of his steps.

You have found your heart to pray.

23 November

He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.

1 Peter 2:22

In the fight against sin it is very useful to think of Jesus. Yes, the secret of victory lies in turning to him. If you do it you accept Jesus, and he has destroyed the works of Satan. That fact has the greatest importance in your life as a Christian.

Jesus committed no sin. Those words cannot characterize your life. You know that it is highly dangerous to sin, because sin separates you from God. Nevertheless you may catch yourself in not being particular. In the hour of temptation sin seems harmless. To your shame you have to look back on your life. How many evil and unclean thoughts are hidden in the depth of your mind?

What are you to do? You are to take refuge in Jesus.

He is different from you. With him there isn't a single thought which isn't pure. The Devil couldn't tempt him with what he wanted him to do. Jesus resisted. Filled with God's word he repelled all the Devil's attacks.

In my unclean world a place is found where sin doesn't exist. That's where Jesus is. Every time I run to him and hide in his righteousness, sin's poisonous arrows don't injure me. Sin cannot pierce the finished work of Jesus.

My trouble is that I live and rest much too little in the gospel. I am much too occupied with what I am to do and be as a Christian. It is so difficult to understand that being a Christian is to remain in Jesus. It seems much too easy. Still it is true. Jesus has said it. And no deceit was found in his mouth.

We often try to follow in Jesus' footsteps in our own strength. When we fail, we pray to God for more strength.

Try a different way.

Put your helplessness before the Lord. Let the word about him fill your heart. Let your victorious saviour live the strong life of faith in your heart. He has defeated sin, and he gains the victory for you, when you put your trust in his finished work.

Honour your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.

Exodus 20:12

Have you ever sinned against this fifth commandment? Have you confessed your sins before God? Or do you look on God's commandments as empty words?

Have you asked your parents for their forgiveness, when you have sinned against them? Or is it something that never happens?

A lot of young people are critical of their parents. They know them intimately and don't find it difficult to see their shortcomings. Day by day they gather firewood for their fire of criticism.

They rarely contemplate that God attaches the promise of a long life to the fifth commandment. Some people have lost the blessing because they were disobedient to their parents.

Many young people think that, when they themselves are married, their marriage will be quite different from their parents' marriage. Things don't always turn out like that however, because it is sinners who are married to each other.

Some people had an unhappy marriage because they hadn't learned to honour their father and mother. Others got into bad financial circumstances because they were too proud to listen to their parents' good advice. Many people have problems at their place of work because they haven't learned to humble themselves. And others again were bad parents because there was unsettled sin against the fifth commandment in their own life. They missed the blessing which God has attached to the observance of this commandment.

And what is still more serious. Many people perish forever, because they don't want to obey God. One cannot disregard what God has said without being lost. To disregard God's commandments is equivalent to disregarding him. God's commandments are his will, and a Christian cannot simply comply with it as far as s/he feels that it is a reasonable thing to do so. God's commandments aren't his suggestions, but his living word. If the law isn't taken seriously by you, grace is not so either.

You are therefore to honour your father and your mother.

25 November

And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

Luke 22:44

God wants to have us with him in Gethsemane. What happened in the dark night was not to remain hidden.

God lets us see his Son. He is bent in heartfelt prayer. While he trembles in fear of death, he invokes his Father with fervent cries and tears.

We see him by whom everything is created. Every creature is connected with him who sustains everything with his strength. God has decided that everything is to serve to his glory.

At the same time Jesus carries the sin of the entire world. That is why his walk was so hard. However, the most difficult thing was to lift the incredibly great burden of sin onto the cross – under God's holy anger and judgment.

Jesus knew what he was faced with. He himself was God. He therefore knew God intimately. He knew what his holiness and anger were. He was therefore aware of the fact that nothing was more horrifying. He was filled with anxiety.

It says in Hebrews that he was heard. But he had to go the way to Calvary. God's cup of wrath had to be emptied, otherwise you couldn't be saved.

It is good for a sinner to follow Jesus into Gethsemane. There you realize what he suffered for you. There is a close connection between his love and his suffering. Love can be expressed in words, but it is proved in suffering. Jesus' sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. So horrifying was his anguish of soul. But he endured the pain. Can you doubt that you are precious to him?

Does it not penetrate your innermost being that another person has had to go through such sufferings as these for you?

You become quiet at Gethsemane. Your sin becomes disgusting to you, because it brought you to your knees. You are being bent in humility and disgrace.

At the same time you are being filled with holy wonder and bliss. God has told you how dearly you are loved.

26 November

If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

1 Peter 4:14

A Christian person loves Jesus' name. This name has lifted you up time after time. Jesus came to you in the darkness when you were got stuck and felt that everything was without hope. How often has he lifted you out of sin's mud and mire and set your feet on the rock? He has put a new song in your mouth.

Is it a strange thing then that you love the name Jesus?

The odd thing is that this name causes scorn, because it is not only loved but also hated. People who are against Jesus' name direct their anger at those who love it. That is why a child of God is mocked for Christ's name's sake.

The Bible emphasizes the fact that the contrast between light and darkness becomes more acute in the time before the Second Coming. The circumstances of Christians then will be more and more similar to the circumstances the first Christians lived under.

We have the blessing of living in a country where God's word has been preached for centuries on end. It grieves us that many people have freed themselves from God's restrictions that forbade their sinful and lustful lives. That is why they only have a scornful attitude to the Christian view of life and view of human nature. Their contempt is directed towards those who love Jesus' name and live according to his words.

Many Christians experience this in their schools, places of work, in their families and wherever they meet non-Christians. And it hurts to feel that one is despised and is considered to be a little odd.

What can help you?

This truth can do so, that – if you love Jesus' name – you are always followed by him. He stands by you. When you are insulted, it is because you possess something that God's enemies don't have.

In the midst of being insulted the Spirit of glory rests on you. You are to give this truth a place in your heart. In the midst of others' insults you possess God's Spirit. He rests on your life with all his glory. What riches – what a blessing!

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin.

1 John 2:1

Sin separates us from God. It acts like poison against a healthy and living relationship to God. Satan therefore does what he can in order to make Christians fall and live in sin.

Once a Christian has fallen, Satan tries to make him do it again. He wants sin to become a habit. When that has happened, you then think that sin is less and less dangerous. In the end you think that you can adapt yourself to sin and still be a Christian in communion with Jesus. But it doesn't do. If Jesus isn't allowed to separate you from sin, then sin separates you from Jesus. Your saviour has atoned for your sins, and has destroyed the works of the devil. To sin is to serve Satan, and you can't serve two masters.

How is a Christian to get rid of sin?

The most important thing is to realize one's own powerlessness. Next, you should pay heed to what John has written so that you do not to sin.

Before the admonition not to sin, John writes: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

The blood of Jesus Christ is the best antidote against sin. One would think that the forgiveness of sins would encourage you to sin. The devil also tries to tempt us to sin by referring to the forgiveness that we can obtain. But if you know God's true grace, you know that nothing can create a stronger hatred to sin than receiving grace upon grace.

Therefore it's important that you live by the truth of the gospel. But if you, as a Christian, are busy only with all the things you should be and do, sin will soon gain power over you. God's word says that the strength of sin is the law.

The law can show the way, but when you try to follow it, you realize that sin is a living reality.

If you live under the cleansing blood, the Lord creates a holy desire in your heart by his Spirit. In your helplessness you take refuge with Jesus. His grace is a shield against all the devil's attacks.

Rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter.

Proverbs 24:11

If a nation is reduced to poverty and distress, large-scale aid programmes are set in motion.

But what is done in order to relieve the long-lasting spiritual distress, which ends up leading all unsaved people into hell?

How is it possible that Christians can remain as passive as they are?

Why don't you warn your non-Christian neighbour or friend, who is staggering toward slaughter in order to be killed by the enemy of souls, who has come only to steal and kill and destroy?

Do you think that you have plenty of time? A day may arrive when you must bitterly recognize that the opportunity is there no longer.

Do you excuse yourself on the plea that it isn't the convenient time? There are situations when it is best to keep silent. However, there are also times when one must speak. A person has said that the first opportunity to witness is the easiest one. These words contain much wisdom.

Is it fear of other people that keeps you back? If we want to talk to other people about the salvation of their souls, the fear of other people must always be overcome. The way to do it is to fear God more than people.

I wonder if the principal cause for many people's silence doesn't lie in the fact that they have lost belief in hell. They don't believe that things will happen the way Jesus has said. They hope that God saves everybody in the end.

Their faith and hope are against God's word, and it is a dangerous, false doctrine. It paralyses any eagerness for missionary work.

No matter how good and pleasant people are, we are born as lost sinners. We die as lost sinners, and we will spend eternity in the fire of hell if we haven't got a living relationship with Jesus.

Therefore, it is time to be saved. It is time to win others for Jesus.

29 November

For by one sacrifice he has made perfect for ever those who are being made holy.

Hebrews 10: 14

Some people think that they are capable of living a mature Christian life from the very moment they start believing in Jesus. It is a misconception that has serious consequences.

A sinner who believes in Jesus possesses a whole and complete salvation. Nothing is missing. Jesus could take a criminal with him on Good Friday to Paradise.

What would have happened if the criminal had been taken down from the cross alive and had to continue his life on earth?

Then he would have had to grow from being a child in Christ to mature manhood. It couldn't happen in a day, or in a month or a year.

A child of God is being sanctified throughout his life. Obvious and hidden sins are to be done away with. The Old selfish Man is to be put to death, and the New Man is to grow.

Much distress and agony of soul are associated with this fight. "For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other." (Gal 5:17)

However, the fight is quite necessary. Spiritual life dies without it, and a Christian isn't being sanctified.

But God gives you a wonderful comfort. It isn't your more or less successful sanctification that will lead you to the goal. In other words, it is not your spiritual growth that saves you.

By one sacrifice he has made you perfect forever. You cannot make the sacrifice that Jesus has already made. He has led you all the way to salvation, and he has done it forever and ever.

There is much comfort in this. But you don't think that you are growing in holiness. On the contrary, you experience it as if sin is growing in you.

Then you just have to rest in the fact that Jesus has saved you by grace alone.

30 November

You know that everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me.

2 Timothy 1:15

These words are in Paul's last epistle. What pain they contain! What hadn't it cost him to take the gospel to Asia? How could Christians turn away from him, when he had been the instrument of their salvation?

Paul was a breakwater in God's kingdom. The foaming waves met him first. That is why he had to go through numerous struggles. He wanted to safeguard the seashore that had been won for the Lord. His heart couldn't bear the powers of evil eating God's land piece by piece. That is why he placed himself farthest out. He remained there. He had the firm ground of the word of God under his feet. The Lord protected him. But he paid a high price in the human sense of the word.

People thought that Paul was difficult to get on with. He wasn't willing to compromise. He didn't know how to adjust. He was far too serious. He wasn't able to give any balanced judgment. To this must be added the accusations of being irresolute and difficult to understand. Yes, many people had a lot to accuse him of, and they succeeded in gaining a hearing. Even his friends deserted him in the end.

God has breakwaters today as well. They are the Christians who have received the grace to test the spirits. When a storm is rising against God's people, they lift up their voice as a warning. However, it is hard for them to gain a hearing. Most people think that they look on the dark side of things, and they are glad that there aren't many of their kind of people in God's kingdom.

They often become lonelier and lonelier because more and more people leave them. The judgment of their day and age is often harsh, but the judgment of eternity will be entirely different.

Love for the truth has its price. We have to pay it without disappointment and bitterness. The promises of the Lord rest on those who are faithful to Him. Their service bears much fruit in the long term. Paul is an example of it, and Christian women and men witness the same thing throughout the history of God's people.

Learn from them! Follow in their footsteps! Follow their faith!

1 December

But our citizenship is in heaven.

Philippians 3:20

If you belong to Jesus, you are a citizen of God's kingdom.

How easy it is to forget that! Our earthly tasks capture our mind and thoughts. At the same time, we live in a world where words and pictures are determined by a non-Christian way of thinking. Without saying it directly, people talk as if this world is everything. Therefore the important thing is to keep one's life, in this world, as long as possible, and to obtain the best possible quality of life.

Can we wonder that many Christians get caught up by this world to such a degree that they forget heaven?

Yes, it's incomprehensible!

When God, through the word, assures us that our native country is in heaven, we must bow with shame. It is incomprehensible that we think so little about the home which Jesus has paid so dearly to prepare for us.

You are a citizen of heaven. You are on your way home. Each day takes you nearer the destination.

Many things in your life fall into place when you see them in the light of the fact that the Lord leads you to heaven. If God gave you everything that you desire, you wouldn't reach the destination. Then you would build yourself a small paradise on earth.

The troubles and the trials which the Lord sends on your way are necessary. They contribute to make you focus your eyes ahead and homewards. Hardships and troubles make it easier to see through the delusion and deception of the world.

You are on your way home.

And what is heaven?

It's Jesus first of all. Here on earth you do not see him, even though he walks beside you. In heaven it becomes different. There you will see him face to face.

In heaven Jesus' glory will be great to your heart. Everything you do is filled with him. You will live in his light. He will wipe every tear from your eyes. Then there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain.

2 December

Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.

Psalm 32:1

There is no greater blessing than having one's sins forgiven. To think that there isn't any shadow of sin between you and God. There is only light, purity, holiness and love.

There is forgiveness of sins with God. You are therefore not to hide yourself from him. You are not to try to clean yourself. Neither are you to do penance for your sins by good works. No, run to him who is the only one that can forgive.

When God forgives, he truly forgives. He covers over sin and then it is removed.

It is not anything that can hide sin. There is only one means that can take it away. It is Jesus' blood.

You are blessed whose sin is covered by Jesus' blood. Then God doesn't see your sin any more. He only sees what covers it. When God turns to your sins, he meets what is more precious than everything else. He sees the blood. And the blood of the Lamb has been shed so that you can go free.

If you come to Jesus with your sin, you are completely saved. Jesus' blood covers you. He doesn't divide your sins into two parts: some he wants to forgive and others, that aren't "worthy" of it. Many Christians are tormented by such thoughts. They have no doubt that Jesus can forgive the sins they have triumphed over. But when it comes to sin that they are constantly tormented by, they don't have the boldness to come to him. They don't think they can come to God with the same sin time after time.

It is a dangerous thought. If it seizes control over your mind, it will slowly lead you away from Jesus.

Whatever happens, you always have to go to the Lord with your sins, so that they can be covered by the blood. To be a Christian isn't the same as having triumphed over sin, but it is having one's sin forgiven by Jesus' blood.

There isn't anything which is perfect in your Christian life – apart from the greatest thing of all: God's grace. But it is yours. That is why you are blessed.

3 December

Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."

Psalm 91:1-2

The Lord is a refuge, a fortress and the God of every single one of his children, but not all call him by these names.

Many Christians own riches which they don't get the proper joy of. It is bound up with the fact that they don't follow the way of God's word. The Bible is the way to the recognition of the riches you already own.

Numerous Christians have so little to tell the Lord, because they don't rest in the shadow of the Almighty. Their minds are drawn in many directions, and they are rarely silent before God.

To rest in the shadow of the Almighty is to live one's life with an open Bible, constantly listening to God's wonderful word of grace.

Scripture proclaims to you what you cannot manage to arrive at by your own thought and speculation.

The sun can burn, but it doesn't consume you. You have a substitute who went in between the strong beams and you. Jesus was struck by the wrath of God's lightning; you are therefore in the shadow of the Almighty. God has come nearer to you, not as the judge, but as the saviour. Just imagine – covered by God's grace you are allowed to rest in the shadow of the Almighty. You are allowed to be there with all your worry. You have to direct your worried thoughts at the wonderful thing that God is for you. It isn't something you are allowed to do now and then. No, you are allowed to do it every single day.

The more you do it, the more you get to tell the Lord. Your heart is filled and your mouth overflows. You see that you always have a place of refuge. It isn't an escape route, but the open arms of your Savior and Father.

You always have a stronghold. Enemies may gather around you. However, you are protected by the stronghold. The earth may quake. But your feet stand on an unshakeable rocky ground. And the ground is the Lord himself.

In the midst of a world where everybody calls attention to their gods, you have the only, true God as yours. God reveals these riches to you who rest in his shadow.

4 December

Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you.

Psalm 73:25

You are allowed to keep nothing of what you possess on earth. It is a truth which many people run away from. But that is to run away from reality. And it will catch up with them some day, as it did in the life of the rich farmer. “But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’” (Luke 12:20).

One day our strength declines; illness knocks at our door, and the day of our departure gets nearer. One day the others remain behind on earth, while you are being buried.

We have everything as a loan. There is nothing that our hand hasn't got to let go of.

There are Christians who are reminded of it in a special way through distress and troubles. Asaph was one of them. All day long he had been afflicted, and every morning brought new punishments, and he was unable to understand the sufferings he had to go through.

However, it changed when the perspective of eternity came alive for his heart. In the light of it everything else shrank to something insignificant. Neither was it important for him any longer to be able to understand God. The certainty about having him in heaven was enough.

When you believe in Jesus, he lives for you in heaven. He is there as your Saviour and Redeemer. When you sin, he appears before God as your righteousness. You cannot deserve the glory of heaven. Nevertheless Jesus has bought it for you with his blood. He is therefore very concerned that you may have a share in the eternal treasures that have cost him so much.

Just imagine: You have him, who has paid the price of the salvation, in heaven. Can you doubt then that God will give you the glory of heaven?

You have no reason to so. You have been bought to God with the blood of the Lamb. The risen Jesus is God's “yes” to your salvation. And where do you have him? You have him in heaven before the face of God.

Therefore you have to say, “And earth has nothing I desire besides you.”

5 December

You stoop down to make me great.

Psalm 18:35

The desire to be a great person is deeply ingrained in our nature. Notice how often you meet it in a child. Yet it hasn't learnt to hide what it thinks, but it will improve as time goes by. The majority of grownups do not show it, but the desire to greatness is still there beneath the surface. It has its effect in all conditions of life, also towards God.

I want to be something myself. I want to distinguish myself over others. I want to do something that will be noticed.

There is a direct line from Satan's desire to be God and my desire to be great. The snake poison has penetrated us. The more you exalt yourself, the more your mountain of sin is increased.

The only one who can make you great is Jesus.

Jesus was debased. He humbled himself and resigned his rights. This is what makes you great.

Jesus came at first from heaven to earth. What it means can only be understood by the one who knows heaven from within. Nevertheless, it isn't Jesus' greatest debasement. When Jesus was to receive the wages of your sin, he asked that the cup might be taken away if it was possible; but it wasn't. Jesus had to subject himself to God's wrath and curse. There was no way for Jesus to escape the cross, if you were to be great in God's sight. Your sin had to change ownership. It had to become a part of Jesus.

Simultaneously he had to let go of his own righteousness so that you could get it. The greatness of Jesus had to be yours.

He has finished the work. Every saved sinner will praise the slaughtered Lamb of God in eternity.

If you are a child of God, you know that nothing of your own will do. But it does not matter either, because you don't want any other greatness than the one you own in Jesus. He is your all.

6 December

Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love.

Revelation 2:4

The leader of the congregation at Ephesus had many of the fruits of love. He was truth-loving, and had perseverance and great patience; but he lacked love itself.

What is first love?

It is not the stormy feelings of love which result in rash decisions. Jesus admonishes his disciples to count the cost.

No, first love streams from a heart that is caught and overwhelmed by the love of somebody else.

You love because he first loved you. And your love is a wondering love. You cannot understand that Jesus loves you. At the same time, you know that you are under the warming stream of his love. He has said this in his Word, and the Word has created the conviction in your heart.

Your love of Jesus holds a secret. His love is poured out in your heart. Still, it is yours. It is you who loves. You do it with that love which you have got from the Lord.

First love doesn't seek its own. It doesn't want to get rich itself, but is longing that Jesus will get rich. It will give him everything. Therefore it follows him wherever he goes.

It is so easy to drift away from first love. It only lives where you, like a lost sinner, get everything by grace. The one who has been forgiven much loves much. First love can, therefore, be kept only as long as the undeserved and free grace is alive for your heart. You are filled with wonder again and again. Just imagine that there is salvation for a lost sinner like me! Together we are allowed to stand by Jesus' feet. We know that we are seen through. But Jesus has something to tell us: "Your many sins are forgiven!"

Love flows towards us through this word of forgiveness. It lets first love live in our hearts. And it is this love Jesus looks for in us.

7 December

For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father”.

Romans 8:15

As a mother or a father you don't think of what great rights you give your child. You find it natural to let it into everything you possess. You don't think of your child as an heir. Nevertheless you act on the words: “All I have is yours”.

A child doesn't think far ahead. It is determined by the present situation. The short-lived good thing is of great importance to the child. But it cannot take responsibility. You have to help with encouragement, advice and guidance, and with reproof and discipline. In everything you do, you are determined by love for your child.

God gave you the Holy Spirit when your heart put its trust in Jesus. A Christian relies on God as Father, and is like a child that confidently runs to meet mother and father and throws itself into their arms.

You are not to run away. God knows that you are a child – and only a child. Of course you are to become mature. A healthy Christian life is a steady growth in faith in the grace of Christ Jesus.

God knows that you will never be anything but a lost sinner in yourself. He will therefore shower you with grace every single day. If this doesn't happen, the adoption of sons cannot be preserved. God doesn't give you his grace reluctantly. No, he has his joy in Jesus' blood, and it is his happiness to make your soul as white as driven snow.

It also pleases God to assure you that the entire riches of Jesus belong to you, because you are his co-heir. The Son has led you into all his rights.

Raise your eyes now! Look into the father-heart of God. It is open for you. The Father acted for your salvation before you were born. Today his thoughts become reality. He begins here below. He continues in eternity. You are God's beloved child, and compared to that, everything else means nothing.

8 December

**When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought me joy.
Psalm 94:19**

Many of a Christian's greatest difficulties are attached to the intellectual life - anxious thoughts associated with life on earth. In addition come all the worries about the spiritual life. They rise as an accusation against you. The Christian life hasn't become what it should have been. There was too little prayer and Bible reading. The boldness of faith and joy didn't break through enough.

Then the question arises: What will the whole thing end in? I wonder if I am so unsuccessful that everything comes to nothing. The whole thing grows into nothing. I don't reach the goal.

The Psalm writer knew these anxious thoughts, but he also knew where help was to be found. He can therefore help us.

We think that the help we need is that our lack of success begins to be successful. However that is wrong. The way out of the distress is that we meet the Lord's consolation.

God's consolation is Jesus. In the midst of all your dissatisfaction with yourself you own incomprehensible riches in Jesus. With him you find everything you lack in yourself. You will never get so far that you feel rich in yourself; neither will any true and living Christian. Our whole riches are in Christ. You do not find a joy either that has its basis in anything of your own. Jesus is the only one you can be pleased with.

How wonderful it is! Even though you are unsuccessful, Jesus is still your all. Doesn't he shine more clearly against the background of everything that is not as you would wish? Doesn't Jesus become still more precious for your heart, when you have nothing yourself?

God consoles you by turning your glance towards the Son with whom he is well pleased. He says: I am content with Jesus. You are in him. That is why I am well pleased with you also! All sin is hidden. You possess an eternal righteousness.

9 December

Because you carried the ark of the Sovereign Lord before my father David and shared all my father's hardships."

1 Kings 2:26

Solomon is the one who says these words to the high priest Abiathar. They reveal how Solomon looked at his father. His life was full of humiliation and sufferings.

For us David is the great king. He captured Jerusalem and made the city his capital. He was outstanding as a leader, and he understood how to choose fine army commanders. He rose up the Jewish people and gave them a strength that filled their neighbours with admiration and awe.

But his life was full of suffering, and it was the precondition for his most important task. Through his words and his life he was to call attention to Jesus.

Perhaps you think that you have a great deal of suffering. You have prayed for release from it, but it hasn't occurred. You cannot help asking: why?

Jesus cannot be reflected in a Christian life without suffering. If you are well off yourself, your words have a hollow ring when you want to help others in their distress. You must have experienced Jesus as your helper in order to witness that he comes to the one who cannot see any way out himself.

David has through his Psalms helped countless people who intimately experienced suffering. They are inspired by God's Spirit and at the same time are out of David's own suffering. They lead you onto holy ground. In your helplessness the Lord is an unshakeable rock that your sufferings cannot shake.

Suffering makes us quiet. We haven't got much to say when we are humbled and bent under what is difficult. At the same time we are longing that somebody else will begin to speak.

The Lord doesn't disappoint us. He has spoken, and he still speaks through what is written. He wants to comfort, help and lead forward. And God wants to use you to witness about the man of sorrows. That is why he has led you down into the valley of suffering. Down there the word about him becomes immensely precious for your heart. When it occurs, you can like David give to others the word which turns into life and blessing.

10 December

I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them.

Isaiah 42:16

A Christian has an unknown way before him. You may think many things, but you know nothing with certainty. Jesus may return any time. It is possible that you may not escape death, but that is unknown to you. In your hour of struggle and anxiety it may be experienced as if there is a great darkness before you. You feel blind and helpless.

You can always get help in God's word. The Lord speaks into the situation of your life and mine. He pictures it so that we know ourselves. Afterwards he reveals his way.

God can open blind people's eyes, but he does not always do it. He can also show in advance what an unknown way holds, but that is a rare thing. Most often God takes his blind child by the hand and leads it through the unknown. If you turn to the unknown future, you are filled with worry, fear and anxiety. Therefore turn your thoughts towards Jesus. He will walk by you and lead you through everything. You are not to fear if God leads you into suffering. The Lord has said that your strength will equal your days. He doesn't say that your days will equal your strength. No, when you enter the unknown and the dark, the Lord seizes you. Then you can walk with firm steps.

Cleopas and the other disciple walked to Emmaus filled with despondency. But Jesus came and joined company with them. He opened the Scriptures to them and their hearts were burning within them.

Jesus is also like that towards you who belong to him. You haven't got the light in you. You walk on a dark road. But he who is the light of life walks by you.

In the end he turns the darkness into light and makes the rough places smooth. A day will arrive when you have struggled up the last hill. Then the light shines towards you from the eternal kingdom of God. You do not walk alone then either; your Saviour and Redeemer, our Lord Jesus Christ, is by you. He follows you all the way, right into his kingdom.

With skilful hands he led them.

Psalm 78:72

A lot of things look differently when they are seen from behind. In the midst of life, you aren't always able to see the skilful hands of the Lord.

You cannot understand why the Lord is reluctant to answer your prayer. It is possible that you have to say with David, "My eyes fail, looking for my God." You think that God postpones the matter unreasonably long. Why doesn't he step in?

You may be in great physical need. You feel that illness devastates you. You recall the years when you were in perfect health. Now you have torments all day long. You know that it simply costs God a word to change everything. Why doesn't he do it then?

Personal sorrows, financial difficulties or an uncertain future may settle like a shadow over our life, and then it is difficult to understand God.

It will be different the day when we can see everything from behind. Then we will see that a child of God, in the midst of all struggles and difficulties, only had to do with God. Basically it isn't other people or circumstances that rule. It is God alone. We aren't at the mercy of chance. Everything is in the hands of God, and his hands are in everything.

Your journey through life is unpredictable. You can only see to the next bend or hilltop. Yet your pilgrimage is a festive journey. The journey in itself isn't a Paradise but it ends at the gate of heaven.

A day will arrive when you will be able to look back. Then you will say: "The Lord has led me with skilful hands" and "Surely goodness and love have followed me all the days of my life." (Psalms 23:6)

During the journey it may be difficult to submit to God's hands, but how blessed it is to do it!

God alone has a perfect knowledge of everything. He knows what you and I can bear. He is the One who allots us blessing and misfortune. He has an eye for our eternal salvation in all circumstances. We will soon be there where all sorrow, suffering and fighting are ended. Then we will praise and thank God for his skilful hands.

12 December

For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace

Romans 6:14

Our natural way of thinking tells us that, if we are to achieve a result, we have to make a decision and carry it out. Our experience has taught us that it is the right thing to do in many situations. Therefore we are quick to think that this holds good in relation to sin. But that is a mistake which brings terrible consequences.

Are you a Christian who has worked yourself tired on this road? You'd love to be true and alive in him. You could wish for nothing better than that Jesus' picture should be reflected in your life. How often have you decided that it must take place now! How many times you have tried to make an effort!

Why won't it succeed?

You never get rid of sin by your resolutions. Sin is so strong that your strength isn't capable of doing anything against it.

In God's word our own ability and strength are called acts of the law. And the law never liberates from sin. Far from it! The law gives the lust to sin greater and greater power by its prohibitions. Therefore sin gets domination when you try to become holy.

Grace alone can break the power of sin. When your mind is opened to the undeserved grace in God's heart, hatred towards sin is created.

When it comes home to you how high a price God had to pay, you can't take sin lightly. If Jesus' cleansing blood is the riches of your heart, then both the means of expiation and the means of redemption are active in your life.

Jesus has paid for all your sins. Therefore Satan no longer has any claim on you. You do not owe anything to sin.

God's Son has set you free from the tyranny of Satan. You live your life under grace. Faith in it releases your fetters. You have also experienced this. Therefore, turn once more to God's true grace. You gain the victory by virtue of the Lamb's blood. The more you turn away from the question of your own victory, and turn to Jesus' victory, the more Jesus is formed in you.

13 December

Who, then, is the man that fears the Lord? He will instruct him in the way chosen for him.

Psalms 25:12

It is not a matter of course to be in a right relationship with God. Neither is it like that even if you were once converted. Your past life is no guarantee that you fear him today.

What is the fear of God?

It is having been put in our place through God's word. You are not his negotiating partner. You and God are not to work out questions together.

God is God. You are his fallen creature. Therefore, you cannot add anything to what he has said. You stand before him with a silenced mouth. God is holy; he looks right into your deceitful heart. He knows every thought that originates from your heart and that you never let pass your lips. It isn't society or unfortunate circumstances that make you a sinner. It is your evil heart.

That is why you go before God with fear. If he had to give you what you deserved, he would have to reject you.

However, if you take refuge in Jesus, the Lord will not disown you. Far from it! He looks in grace at the one who is broken, whose spirit is downcast.

In meeting with the Lord you get to know yourself. You realize that without Jesus you can do nothing at all. You are completely helpless. It applies to the matter of your salvation, but it also applies to all the many conditions of life. Therefore, you have to come before God with anxiety and holy fear. He has to be your support and guide in everything; if he isn't, things will inevitably go wrong.

But listen to his wonderful promise: "Who, then, is the man that fears the Lord? He will instruct him in the way chosen for him."

You so want to get a quick answer. But the Lord doesn't always answer like that. He often waits in order to teach you to rely on him. However, he never arrives too late.

God doesn't excuse you from choosing your way. But he gives you certainty and rest in your choice by his Spirit, so that you confidently can go forward with your hand in his.

14 December

Then the Lord said to Moses, “Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on.”

Exodus 14:15

The situation was as impossible for Moses as it could be; the Israelites had the Red Sea in front of them, mountains on both sides of them and the army of Pharaoh behind them. The people couldn't imagine that God could open a way through the sea. They turned on Moses in indignation, but he didn't let them take his faith from him. He resisted them, in the certainty that God doesn't leave us when we need him most of all.

Prayer holds a secret. David uses the expression that he is “a man of prayer” (Psalm 109:4). We are often displeased with our prayer. Have you not experienced that when words stopped, the prayer turned into a mere sigh? Or your prayer merely became an invocation of Jesus name. You only said one word: Jesus. You didn't say in words what you wanted to say, but you called upon him.

How are we to pray, and what we are to pray for, we don't know. But the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans (Rom 8:26). If you are saved by the grace of God, you are a dwelling for the Holy Spirit, and then groans go up to God from your heart.

When you realize it, you don't stop praying with words. On the contrary, you get a new frankness to appear before the Lord.

Your prayer isn't as hopeless as you think. You pray in Jesus' name and it means that his blood cleanses your prayer from all selfishness and sin. Jesus makes your prayer his. Can it surprise you that it reaches God's heart?

Prayer isn't a question of methods or well-formed words. No, Prayer is the heart's deep dependence on Jesus. Moses had no other possibility of salvation than the intervention of the Lord. And he wasn't disappointed. You are not to be that either. The Lord himself will prepare his way for you straight through the difficulties' dark and threatening sea.

15 December

They will say of me, “in the Lord alone are righteousness and strength.

Isaiah 45:24

How often is your dejection due to the fact that you look for something in yourself that you find only in the Lord?

You have perhaps longed and fought for many years so that righteousness and strength should be found in you. However, you never made a success of it. You think that your Christian life is constantly marked by failure. It is possible that others judge differently, but you know how things are on the inner front. You know your own hidden life which nobody else obtains admission to. There it teems with sins like weeds on a spring day.

God's word agrees with you: in you, that is in your flesh, dwells nothing good. Your old nature can change its clothes, but it continues to be just the same as ever.

Can you see how crucially important it is that you seek righteousness and strength somewhere else than in yourself?

When will you recognize the truth and the reality? When will you seek in Jesus what you will find in him alone?

You cannot help wondering at yourself. At the same time, you must thank the Lord. He helps you through his word. In it he reminds you to seek righteousness and strength in him. All true and eternal riches are in it alone. He is the spring of life. And what is still more wonderful, he gives you what he owns. He does so not as a reward for all your efforts. No, he does it out of grace. You have to receive it by faith. It is quite undeserved.

What you find in Jesus is yours by faith in him. The longing for righteousness and strength is a longing for Jesus. In him you are rich in the righteousness that you cannot produce yourself. You possess strength in the midst of your own weakness.

The kingdom of faith is wonderful. When you realize that riches are in Jesus alone, you are filled with a wonderful joy. You are delighted that you have the fullness of salvation in him. You don't want to possess anything independently of Jesus. You are so happy that your precious saviour is to have the whole honour. From the depth of your heart the cheers go up: “In the Lord alone are righteousness and strength!”

... and he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, ...

Isaiah 9:6

All of us need a counsellor. We aren't equal to finding the way ourselves. It is bound up with various things. The dark shadows of sin have darkened our way of thinking, so that we don't see clearly. We aren't capable of learning the proper lessons from the past, and the future is unknown.

Jesus wants to be our counsellor. The way he shows us doesn't lead us astray. If you listen to what he has said, you will never harm or ruin yourself. Otherwise you are in danger of doing so.

When the people of Israel, during their wandering in the wilderness, received meat they overate. They died with the meat between their teeth. If you and I are to decide, we are in danger of doing the same thing. We choose sunshine and sheer delight without realizing that it costs us our soul.

Jesus forces no one under his control. He comes to the individual and knocks at the door of the heart. After that he listens in order to hear if he is allowed to enter.

Can he enter as the One who is allowed to counsel you in the many aspects of your life? Is it Jesus who is allowed to decide, or do you want to be your own lord?

If you accept your counsellor, he will bind you to his word. You find Jesus' will in what is written. If you are influenced by the Bible, in heart and soul, you become a different person. You will think and act differently from normal.

Jesus is wonderful as counsellor. Your way here below, therefore, becomes a chain of miracles. What happens to everybody else will not happen to you. Things may seemingly appear like that, but the reality is different.

Jesus is the one behind all things, and he comes to you through all things. Again and again you hear his footstep and feel his protecting hand.

He leads you towards the day, when you will look back in wonder. Then you will say: Your works are wonderful, I know that full well! Wonderful counsellor!

17 December

From now on all generations will call me blessed.

Luke 1:48

Mary praises God. She exalts him from the depth of her soul. God has allowed her to look into a reality that shatters all human thoughts and ideas.

She was an ordinary and unimpressive girl from a village in the north of Israel. No one could envisage that she was to become known in the wide world.

But things went as God had told her. Generation after generation have known and spoken about Mary. A lot of people have worshipped her as a saint. They have ascribed an honour to her which God's word doesn't. Mary wasn't born without original sin. Neither does God's word say that she was taken up to heaven in another way than the one that falls to the lot of all God's children. We have to take exception to the worship of Mary.

On the other hand, we are to take part in fulfilling God's word by calling her blessed, because that is what she is. However, it isn't due to herself.

She is blessed because she is a sinner who is saved by her son's precious blood. Mary also owes Jesus everything. If she hadn't possessed faith, she would have been lost. She couldn't have been saved through the great calling and the glorious task God had assigned to her.

But Mary had faith. Her hymn of thanksgiving shows us that as a quite young woman she was familiar with God's word. It lived in her heart. After the death of Jesus, we find her with the disciples. Life didn't become easy for her. To be Jesus' mother implied that a sword would pierce her soul. Nevertheless, Mary submitted to God's will and allowed him to rule in everything.

She is blessed! Yes, every person is blessed when s/he has been cleansed in the blood of the Lamb. There is no sin then that condemns the sinner.

It is a rich thing to be in the centre of God's will with one's life! Then it is not us, but he who bears the full responsibility. He then concludes his case triumphantly. Then you are a living hymn of thanksgiving for him, and you can never be anything greater.

Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you.

Luke 1:28

Gabriel's greeting to Mary goes like that.

We will not find the secret of her life in the good qualities that without doubt she has had. It is due to grace alone that was given to her.

She has first of all a share in the grace of salvation. It is the greatest thing that can be said of a human being. It doesn't make it less wonderful and rich that it applies to a countless crowd of people. In the next place, Mary also has a share in the grace of service. Her task was unique. She was to be the mother of God's own Son.

Mary's life became heavier and more difficult than the lives of most people. And it was just the task God had assigned to her that made it particularly difficult.

We know from the Jews' accusation against Jesus that they considered him to be born of fornication. The denial of the virgin birth is not of a recent date. The Gospel narratives do not allow us to be in doubt either that Jesus' family felt that his ministry was an embarrassment. They had got their part in opposition against him.

How much it cost Jesus' mother to follow her son on the last heavy way to Calvary! How did she feel when she was below the cross?

She hardly felt particularly favoured. Yet she was. Over the task God had given her rested the words: The Lord is with you.

God has a task and a service for all of us. No one can be obedient to the calling unless it costs something. It takes faithfulness and perseverance in every circumstance. Nevertheless, there are some people to whom God has given a particularly heavy and demanding task. Their costs are great.

If you have got a service like that, you are to know that you are favoured in God's sight. That is why the Lord sends you a special greeting today, and he assures you that he is with you.

You are an instrument in his hand. You serve his plan of salvation on earth. You are blessed by him. The Lord is with you.

The Mighty One has done great things for me.

Luke 1:49

There is a lot in Mary's hymn of thanksgiving that each and every Christian can make his own. It also applies to the words: "The Mighty One has done great things for me."

There are many people who allow their minds to be filled with all the problems and difficulties that every single of us meet on our journey through life. And it is true that we cannot manage hardship and trials with a mere shrug of the shoulders, without being superficial. But you are poor if you cannot be pleased with what God has already done for you.

Mary praised him even though his calling raised many questions. What would Joseph say when he realized that she was expecting a baby? How would the family react? Would she be able to bring up God's Son?

The difficulties seemed insuperable. In spite of that, Mary wasn't crushed. Neither did she begin calling for help. No, she praised God for what he had already done to her.

Follow in Mary's footsteps! Think of how the Lord has helped you up to this day.

First of all, he has completed the work that saves you from eternal damnation in hell. That means more than everything else. We are not to speak of earthly distress and suffering, as though trials and discipline weren't serious. But we have to say that they last only a short time. Eternity is before us. Every one of us would be lost without Jesus' conciliatory death. However, the Mighty One has done great things for us. He didn't keep his beloved Son to himself, but sent him to the world. And that wasn't all; he let him become the lamb who took away the sin of the world. God let his Son die under the penalty of the law. That is why the way of salvation is prepared and open.

The Mighty One has done great things for you.

By giving you faith in Jesus he has put the word of salvation into your heart.

We cannot see through many of life's varied conditions. But we know the greatest thing: we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus. The Mighty One has done great things for us.

Holy is his name.

Luke 1:49

Mary lived in God's word. Her hymn of thanksgiving is therefore permeated with what is written in the Old Testament. She knew the Holy God and felt that the distance between him and her was infinitely great.

God broke into her life one day. The power of the Most High was to overshadow her, and the child she was to give birth to would be called holy, the Son of God.

That God came to her, that he spoke to her, and that she was to conceive his Son by the Holy Spirit, didn't make him less holy for her. Far from it! Now she understood as never before, that Holy is his name.

It is also like this for a Christian.

That Jesus has bent down in your misery doesn't make him less holy. There is no sin in your life that he hasn't touched. But he is still the pure and lofty One.

That is why you don't tolerate his name being profaned. It gives a pang in the heart when God and Jesus are spoken about without awe.

Jesus is the lofty One. When he speaks to you through his word, you are humbled. His immense grace is completely undeserved. It surprises you that he can use you in his service. You submit to him when God allows you to be used as a help and blessing. You say: Holy is his name.

For a lot of people there is no longer anything that is holy. Even if they consider God, they make him their equal. It is as though he is accountable to them. If he cannot pass before their tribunal, they reject him or remain severely critical.

An attitude like that is not only an expression of spiritual poverty, it is a satanic seduction.

God is holy. Each and every time we pray the Lord's Prayer, we pray "hallowed be your name." In Luther's exposition of this prayer it is said: God's name is of course holy in itself, but we pray in this prayer that it might also be holy with us.

When that happens, we have a festival before the Lord.

21 December

“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May it be to me as you have said.”

Luke 1:38

The willingness in Mary’s heart was created through God’s word to her. To accept God’s will isn’t first and foremost the result of our own thoughts and decisions. The way to do so is to listen to God’s word.

God’s word achieves what nothing else is able to do. It is also like that in your life. It lifts you out of your old world where you are in the centre yourself. It puts you into God’s wonderful kingdom. Yes, God’s word gives you Paradise in the midst of misery and sin.

Mary was chosen by God from eternity, but his action in her did not begin until she came under the power of the Word. Then her life was woven together with Jesus’ life.

God had decided that Mary was to be Jesus’ mother. Jesus was to carry her features. That call was unique.

But Mary wasn’t unique. She was a sinner like everybody else. She too had to be saved by the work of the Son. Still, she is an example to others. In faith she was at the disposal of God’s plan of salvation: “I am the Lord’s servant, may it be to me as you have said.”

Let us follow in her footsteps. If we do so, we become a blessing.

Mary reminds God of what he has said to her. That is the right way. Remind the Lord of what is written. God’s heart is pleased to meet a sinner who clings to his word. A proper relationship with it opens the way for him into your heart. Then God can come to you with his blessing.

If you live with God’s word, your life is woven together with Jesus. He becomes the heart of the story of your life. He becomes the One who acts through you.

God’s word makes you a blessing when it happens. It lasts beyond the short term of years that are entrusted to you. You pass God’s word to future generations, and you cannot do anything better than that. It is alive and active both in time and eternity.

His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.

Luke 1:50

Mary feared God. That is why he showed her mercy.

There are Christians who are unhappy because they feel unworthy and miserable. It isn't wrong to feel like that. How could one react otherwise?

God lives in a high and holy place. We live in the realm of sin and death. It has marked our entire old man. We never grow out of being poor, lost sinners who have to be saved by grace alone.

If you appear before God, poor in your own eyes, then you fear him. You are surprised that you may come at all. How is it possible that a sinner can appear before her/his holy judge without being destroyed?

The Lord himself will answer that question. He has opened his heart for you through his word, and let you see what lives in there. He has made known his mercy. We cannot understand that it can last from generation to generation. We think that it has to stop some day. What surprises us most is that it can continue towards ourselves.

How can God continue with me year after year? It would be easier to understand if I had been able to become the one I want to be. However, when that hasn't happened, has God become tired and stopped being merciful?

We are to remember that mercy hasn't its origin in us or anything of ours. It comes from God's own heart. As a huge river it floods us. First it covers us, and later on it carries us away.

Think of Mary! She got mercy and became an instrument in God's hand. She wasn't without sin; still, her life was marked by and filled with his mercy. Through her God extended what lives in his heart to future generations.

It began so insignificantly. A young girl in a Jewish town; she was to all appearances like everybody else. But she feared God. That is why he made her his instrument. Fear the Lord! Then his mercy rests on you.

23 December

And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my saviour."

Luke 1:46-47

God's calling to Mary made her life wonderfully rich; but at the same time she came up against people's contempt. Up to this day there have been a lot of people who haven't believed her words about the conception by the Holy Spirit. Jesus brought both blessing and suffering into her life.

The service for the Lord always has two sides. It makes life infinitely rich. At the same time, no one can be in it without having to pay a price.

To serve Jesus is to share circumstances with him. He is the most beloved and the most despised person in the world. Serving Jesus leads the servant into a tension that no one can cope with in one's own strength. We are therefore to learn from Mary. When the Lord called her, she glorified God as her saviour.

If you have received Jesus, he is your saviour in all circumstances. He has saved you from sin, death and Judgment. He is also saviour in the service that you cannot cope with in your own strength.

Your task in God's kingdom fills your life with substance. But it may also rise as an accusation against you. In the hours of self-examination you think that the result of the whole thing is so small. The call was rich, of course, but you weren't able to fulfill it entirely. If you go carefully over it, it is not difficult to see sin in the midst of your service either. How often did you seek your own honour? Where was the happy, willing disposition?

Learn from Mary! Invoke the Lord as your saviour!

Jesus has taken responsibility for all your sins. You can rely on him. You may despair because of yourself, but God doesn't despair when you cling to him. He has known all the time what you were like. He isn't partly your saviour. No, he has saved you completely.

You are therefore to honour the Lord. You are to be delighted with him. If you do so, no one and nothing can take your joy away from you.

24 December

Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.

Luke 2:15

It was a wise proposal the shepherds gave to one another: "Let's go to Bethlehem." Their hearts had been set on fire by listening to what the angel said. Therefore they did something which they otherwise wouldn't have done. Since that night many people have followed in the footsteps of the shepherds. They heard a message. By the hope was created, and they had to go to the place where Jesus was.

They experienced that God is the same as he was on Christmas night. He didn't ask which gifts they could bring. He spoke to the empty-handed and revealed his Son to them.

The angel told the shepherds to go to Bethlehem. Where are we to go?

We must go to God's own word. In it Jesus comes to you.

Perhaps you don't think that the Word appears to be great and rich. Most people are occupied with other messages. But for that reason you shouldn't stop listening. The shepherds, no doubt, wondered at the simple and poor stable. But when they found Jesus, they were filled with joy and praised God.

It's like that for you too. When you find Jesus in the Word, you can't help being happy and delighted because of him. You are surprised that your life, to a much greater extent, isn't about seeking Jesus, where he is to be found.

The shepherds found him in their own world. They didn't have to cross any boundaries. You do not have to do that either. He comes to you through the gospel's simple word of salvation to those who cannot save themselves.

Many think that the crucial thing must be what's going to happen in the future. They don't realize that the most important events have already taken place.

God's own Son was born by the Virgin Mary. He is from eternity. Everything was created by him, and everything aims to glorify him. He is above all. And yet he became a human being. The shepherds have testified that it's true. Follow in their footsteps. Then you come to Jesus, and get a blessed Christmas night.

25 December

Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you.

Luke 2:11

Who needs a saviour?

The one who needs to be saved does.

A lot of people haven't recognized that truth. Some people think that they do very well. Others think that things are going fairly well. And others again find that life goes up and down. In fact, it is only when one is lost that one needs Jesus.

Self-reliant persons have never celebrated a real Christmas. They get all the visible trappings of Christmas, and these are definitely not to be despised. The festival is a gift. Family and friends are also gifts. The same applies to food and drink. Nevertheless, you are poor if Christmas doesn't imply a meeting with Jesus.

Sin lives in the depth of your heart. You are born with it, and you live your life with it. It is due to original sin. It is a basic attitude to God which is handed down from generation to generation.

In spite of joy in a great many things at Christmas, nothing is changed if God isn't allowed to change your heart.

That is what he wants. He didn't send Jesus to us so that we were to celebrate his birthday only with good wishes.

No, he knows us much better than we know ourselves. That is why Jesus was born as a saviour.

One needs a saviour when life itself is at stake. God wants you to acquire possession of eternal life. He can't bear to see us perish. That is why he sent his Son, born of a woman.

It has happened. Christmas night is a milestone in our history of salvation.

However, Christmas night isn't the only night when God intervened. He also goes into your life's dark and cold night. Your unclean heart doesn't hold him back. He wants you to receive Jesus.

If you do so, it has not only become Christmas on earth: it has also become Christmas in your heart. Jesus has entered. You have been born again. This Christmas has made you a new person then.

“Look” he said, “I see heaven open”

Acts 7:56

Today is the first Christian martyr's day. Yesterday we met the word about peace on earth to those on whom his favour rests. Today we are stopped in the face of Jesus' words: "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword." (Matthew 10:34)

Jesus came with the true peace of God, but the majority of people loved the darkness more than the light. That is why they prepared themselves for strife. Stephen wasn't the last martyr. We are constantly reminded of that. Of all centuries in church history there hasn't been any century with so many martyrs as the twentieth century. And ahead of us awaits the great tribulation. If those days had not been cut short by God, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.

If you think of what Christians have had to suffer, you become quiet. You cannot understand that you are doing so well, when many people have spent years in prisons and forced-labour camps. Yes, some people have even been tortured to death. How have they been able to get through it? When we ask that question, we ask as if they only had their own strength at their disposal. However, it isn't like that. None of God's children are at any time outside God's field of power.

God allowed Stephen to see heaven open.

A Christian girl, who had been under torture, said that she felt only the first lash. Then a shining figure entered the torture chamber, and he stayed there until she drifted into unconsciousness.

We are worried, as to whether we can come through the sufferings, when external troubles and persecutions hit us.

Take your refuge with Jesus. He doesn't forsake his child when s/he is reduced to extreme distress. Not at all! Jesus is always nearest the one who needs him most. Let us, on the day after Christmas Day, remember those who are in captivity and those who are ill-treated. Let us fold our hands and pray for Christian brothers and sisters, who have had to celebrate Christmas separated from their dear ones. Let us pray that they may see heaven open.

He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.

Luke 1:32

How can the angel Gabriel say to Mary that Jesus will be great? Has he not always been great?

Yes, indeed! The world has been created by him. He gives life to everything. Everything belongs to him. Everything is to glorify him, yes every knee is to bow before him. God has given him the name above all names. Still, it is true what Gabriel says. Jesus will be great in the hearts that know him as God's Son.

If you live without him, it is possible that you can say a lot of good and right things about him. Even so, Jesus isn't great in your life. That is why you don't love, obey and follow him. It is quite different if you have been born again. Then he has given you a different heart. You have become a new person, and when you see his glory in God's word, you are changed.

So Jesus isn't one helper and a guide among many others. No, he is the only one. You may of course suffer loss in one way or another. It hurts and grieves. You may feel poor and helpless. Yet, you possess everything with Jesus. He is greater than everything else. You are, therefore, rich in the midst of your poverty.

You are loved, you are accompanied and you are saved by the Son of the Most High. Is it a strange thing then that Jesus is everything to your heart?

There is a deep connection between Jesus' degradation and his greatness. Yes, if he hadn't come in the likeness of sinful flesh, he would not have been exalted in human hearts. God has given him the name above all names, because he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross.

The growth of the Christian life isn't a growth in one's own greatness. It isn't you but Jesus who is to become great. You become more and more dependent on him. The need to be cleansed in his blood becomes continuously greater.

God teaches you at the same time what adoration is all about. From the depth of your heart the song of praise and thanks goes up to him who is the greatest. He is your heart's all. That is why you look forward to eternity, where you always will praise him.

28 December

The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David.

Luke 1:32

It is the angel Gabriel who says these words about Mary.

One may wonder at them.

The Son of the Most High has from eternity been Lord of everything and everybody. The entire universe and all that it contains are subordinate to him. What makes him want to have an earthly throne? David's kingdom was great of course, but it must be an insignificant thing for the Prince of heaven.

Jesus didn't look at it like that. He wanted to be King in people's hearts. That meant more than heaven's glory.

We hear in the gospels that some people wanted to make him the king, who was to liberate the people from the Roman power. But he constantly had to turn down those who would make him an earthly king.

He wanted to have the throne of David. God's promise about it implies the thanks and affection of poor sinners.

Jesus' throne isn't built through anything we do. He does it himself. Every time he enters a sinful person's heart and cleanses it in his blood, he confirms his kingdom on earth.

No one can crown Jesus king of one's own life. We cannot in our own strength believe in or come to him. Jesus is the one who has to come to us. By the Holy Spirit he has to throw light on our hearts and give us faith and confidence in his finished work at Calvary.

Every time that happens God regenerates somebody. Jesus' throne is established then.

The Bible leads us into a secret when it says that it is God who gives Jesus the throne. Each and every saved sinner is a gift of God to him.

Is it not the deepest wish of your heart to be that? Doesn't it mean more to you than anything else, that God can take you to Jesus? Don't you want more than anything that your life should be a thank offering?

Therefore, receive him; make room for the gospel in your heart. Let Jesus be your all.

29 December

... he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.

Luke 1:48

That the Lord is mindful of you means that he promises you his grace.

Mary thought that she was of low state. There is a connection between this and the realization of grace. If the Lord is allowed to let his grace overflow your life, you feel unworthy. One feels so little in the company of Jesus. It is quite incomprehensible that he wants to have anything to do with a sinner like me. The light from him lights up my darkness. I see how unclean I am.

It doesn't mean that Jesus makes me an insignificant person. Of course I cannot become what I am already. But he reveals my true reality.

A lot of people run away from Jesus. They feel like a cancer sufferer who doesn't dare to see a doctor for fear of getting to know the truth.

However it is a dangerous way to choose. It ends in death. It applies both to the earthly and spiritual life.

Can you stand hearing the truth about yourself?

You couldn't stand it if there was only one truth about you. However there isn't only one. There are two: the truth of sin and the truth of grace.

With Jesus you are unmasked as lost, but he also looks at you in grace.

It is a wonderful thing to experience that. Fancy standing before Jesus in one's littleness. I had expected that he would reject me. But he doesn't do so. He regards me with grace.

Is it odd that a feeling of happiness thrills my soul? Mustn't I shout with joy when I see that God's grace overflows everything in my life?

And I know that my littleness will last only for a time. It will soon be over. As a worn-out suit of clothes it will be left behind in the grave. It is God's grace that remains.

Your heart rests when you realize that Jesus is mindful of you in grace. He did so once. He does so today. He is the same person in eternity. It is his insignificant servants he sees in that way. His heart overflows for love of you.

30 December

He has raised up a horn of salvation for us.

Luke 1: 69

It is Zechariah who says these words in his Song. As a priest in the temple, he knew what the horn of salvation was. He had seen people rush forward towards one of the four horns on the altar of burnt offering and catch hold of it. Then the criminal had reached his refuge, where no one could touch him. The blood of the sacrifice that the priest had put on the horns of the altar was his salvation.

Perhaps you don't feel a criminal before God. Still, you have offended against his law. In the harsh light of God it emerges that you haven't fulfilled perfectly a single one of God's commandments.

Sin has put its mark on everything you do. All your actions are marked by who you are. Even though your deeds are good and right as far as other people can see, God sees the selfishness and self-satisfaction that stick to everything.

Nothing can stand the test under God's examination and judgment. Even your best is unclean. There is only one question left then: How shall I be able to stand before God? Is there a place where I can go, so that I don't perish under his wrath?

God's word gives the answer.

There is a place of refuge where you can be saved, because another person has taken the punishment for all your sins.

God has raised up a horn of salvation. Its strength is so great that no matter what and how many sins you have committed, you are saved when you catch hold of it.

This horn of salvation is Jesus.

The wonderful strength of it is due to his blood. It isn't the blood of a sacrificial animal, but Jesus' precious blood. There is salvation in it. It saves completely anybody who believes in him. It has atoned for all your sins.

God has raised up the horn of salvation for you. This horn has been raised forever and ever. It is the horn of salvation alone that keeps you upright. You stand in the wonderful place of refuge. You are saved then, really saved by Jesus.

31 December

I have swept away your offenses like a cloud, your sins like the morning mist.

Isaiah 44:22

On the last day of the year our thoughts instinctively go back. How was the year that is over now? What marks has it left in you, and what marks were you allowed to leave?

How will the reckoning be, that you are to make before God's court of justice, concerning the days which cannot now be undone?

That question hangs on your relationship with Jesus. If you have received him as your personal saviour, you won't be alone when God passes sentence. Jesus will be with you. He has paid for all your sins. It means that you won't be responsible for all the evil in you. Jesus is responsible in your place.

Just imagine being able to look back on a year, when a layer of cloud covers up offences and sins! You know that a dense layer of cloud covers everything. It doesn't discriminate. Like a huge carpet it covers small and great things.

Isaiah uses a graphic picture. Still, there may be something in the picture that makes you anxious. What happens when the cloud vanishes? Doesn't God see everything then?

Many Christians fear that it will go like that. Old sins plague them continually. They are collected up from year to year and are carried into the next year. Oblivion hasn't drawn a veil over them. Isn't it an expression of the fact that God hasn't forgotten them either?

It isn't. The layer of cloud that covers sin is the blood of Jesus Christ. What the blood has covered is cleansed from all sin. There is no more sin left.

Any child of God can look back on a year of grace today. All the year is covered by grace. When God will make up your account, you will meet grace upon grace for everything the bygone year holds.

This is the riches of the salvation and the forgiveness of sins. Therefore thanks and songs of praise also are the right way to finish the year with. God is to be honoured. The Lamb is to be honoured. The Holy Spirit is to be honoured!

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Only one thing is needed

Jesus answered Martha when she felt left alone to cover 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. Here is a desire that you may meet God in Christ in a way that it may never be lost.

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