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The Vine Committee

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The Editor's Ramblings

In the last issue, I briefly mentioned that some people are suggesting that the rider on the Black Horse is galloping across Wall Street causing the financial chaos that will lead eventually to famine. Incidentally, there is now a new president of the United States of America.

When the IR idea was first proposed and apparently adopted even after protests from some sectors, some Christians must be wondering why God cannot prevent Singapore from going the way of Las Vegas. God works in mysterious ways and at His own timing. At this moment, the house that is built by Sands is not too steady and in need of financial assistance.

Let us now look at a story that was repeated in all the 4 Gospels, which is very rare because most stories appear in one or two of the Gospels but seldom all four. The story of the feeding of the Five Thousand with just five loaves and two fishes which can be found in Matthew 14, Mark 6, Luke 9 and John 6. When the disciples saw the crowd of five thousand (probably more if you count women and children), they said, "Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food." (Matthew 14:15b); "That would take eight months of a man's wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat" (Mark 6:37b); "We have only five loaves of bread and two fish" (Luke 9:13b); "Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!" (John 6:7).

What did Jesus say? "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat." (Matthew 14:16); "You give them something to eat." (Mark 6:37) and (Luke 9:13); "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" (John 6:5b). Why was Jesus so confident that He could feed the 5000 crowd? His disciples certainly thought that it couldn't be done with just 5 loaves and 2 fishes.

Where did the 5 loaves and 2 fishes come from? Only in John's Gospel was it mentioned that a boy had these 5 loaves and 2 fishes. Was the boy stupid or what? Surely he should have realized that what he had wasn't able to feed the crowd. If you were the boy, wouldn't you keep the food for yourself? It makes more sense that you have something to eat than to give it away hopelessly. Another curious fact was that there were 5000 grown men in the crowd and none of them came prepared with food.

Two thousand over years later, we are faced with rebuilding the church. The cost would be probably more than \$6 million dollars even without all the frills like a water feature, titanium cladding and world-class fountain. What do I hear? "How can we raise such an amount?" "Our congregation is so small and poor." "Let's borrow money from our sister churches." "It's not necessary to rebuild."

Actually, I think if we had the money, the necessity of rebuilding would not come into the picture. If I didn't have the money, I would certainly question the necessity of renovating my kitchen. After all, we hardly cook at home. Our neighbor's kitchen looks worse than ours even before renovation. How many of us pose the question of necessity when buying a new car? Is it necessary to get that new car after all, the old one is still working?

It is certainly a test of faith rather than a test of rationale. We have our 5 loaves and 2 fishes. We have to believe that God can multiply it. It is reported further down in Matthew 17:20 (after the story for the feeding of the 5000), "**Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.**"

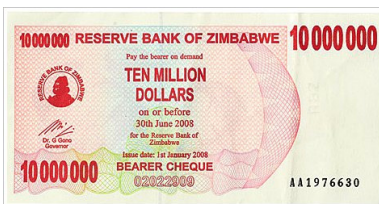
Mark 11:23-24 clarifies this **faith** a little, "I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and **does not doubt** in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, **believe** that you have received it, and it will be yours." James 4:3 clarifies **ask** as, "When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures."

The boy who gave away his five loaves and two fishes, the poor widow who gave away her two copper coins (Mark 12:42) and the widow of Zarephath (1Kings 17:9) all had one thing in common, they gave all – 100%. However, the young man in Matthew 19:20 could not do so when Jesus told him, "If you

want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” Why couldn't he do it? The answer in Matthew 19:22 states: “because he had great wealth.”

So it is not true that a poor church cannot raise the necessary funds to build a house for the glory of God. A church with many rich members may not be able to do it because like the rich young man, they may be too wealthy to give.

In the press recently, there was a report of Zimbabwe currency which is valued at \$100,000 equivalent to US\$1 only and can only buy half a loaf of bread. Have you ever wondered how much is Singapore \$6 million equivalent in Heavenly dollars? I promise you this is the last time I talk about paper money for this year. If you have read my previous Ramblings, you may come to the conclusion that the money you are holding may not be worth the paper it is printed on if the government defaults. The bank of Heaven is the safest place to put your treasures.



What we truly lack then is not money but faith. Faith to believe that God can multiply what we can give. When we buy a car, we have greater faith to believe that one man can afford to pay for a \$50,000 car in 7 years time. If we have just 120 such men who can put aside \$50,000 in 7 years, we would have achieved our \$6 million target.

Regardless of whether we can raise the \$6 million or not, we must start someday to put aside a Sinking Fund for the possible rebuilding of JCC.

Martin Cheah



Do you drink

YAKULT or YAGULT?

Do you practise YOGA or YOKA?

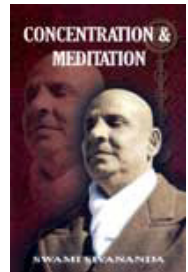
John Lee:

It is in the news that “MUSLIMS in Malaysia may be barred from the ancient practice of Yoga if they engage in Hindu ‘religious elements’ during the exercise, a top Islamic cleric said on Wednesday.” (Oct 29, AFP report) The report quoted an Islamic cleric as saying, “If it involves any faith or religious elements it is definitely not permissible but if it is just a form of exercise that is all right,”

What is Yoga? Is it a form of exercise, a faith-based workout or both?

We can briefly know the answers to the above questions by reference to what an authority like Sri Swami Sivananda says in his book on Concentration & Meditation:

“Concentration and Meditation form the inner core of the practice of Yoga: It is the key to the door of Inner Illumination and constitutes the central pivot round which all Sadhana in the spiritual revolves. Dharana and Dhyana are the Yoga proper, leading to the consummation, Samadhi and Sakshatkara or Realization.”



Yoga, in its different forms, involves the *Sadhana* – “a Sanskrit term for ‘a means of accomplishing something’ or more specifically ‘spiritual practice’”. It includes a variety of disciplines from Hindu and Buddhist traditions that are followed in order to achieve various spiritual or ritual objectives. The word is also used in the same connection within Sikhism.” (Reference: Wikipedia)

Is yoga compatible with Christianity?

Some people may claim that one can pick and choose the parts of Yoga for exercise and leave out the parts that he finds spiritually disagreeable. Put in another way, one may focus on the physical exercise/relaxation part and leave out the mystical/psychic part. To me, this would mean throwing out the inner core of the practice of Yoga and losing the key to the door of Inner Illumination as espoused by the highly regarded Swami on what Yoga is essentially about.

I like to drink Yakult – the probiotic drink made from skimmed milk, sugar, water and live bacteria. I like its taste, which is sweet and nice. However, I don't like the thought of taking in the bacteria; so I suggest some food manufacturer produce an alternative with the bacteria taken out. In the new product, the key essence of the original Yakult is gone, and hence the health benefits; but it tastes as good with no detectable difference. Can we honestly call it Yakult and believe in it having all the benefits that it is claimed to have? We should instead call it by a different name, "Yagult", to be honest to ourselves that it is not essentially Yakult.

Similarly, if we practise Yoga in a pick-and-choose-the-parts manner, taking out its central pivot that gives it the proclaimed benefit for the soul, can we honestly say that we are practising Yoga? Surely not! Perhaps, we can say that we practise a new form of exercise without any spiritual element in it. We can call it "Yoka" or some other name that distinguishes it from the essentially Hindu practice

Yoka (sans spiritual or religious ingredient) will certainly be less controversial than Yoga. Christians, Muslims, Jews and other non-*Sadhana* faiths should find themselves less conflicted with their beliefs if they practise the Yoka and not Yoga. The benefits of breathing exercises, body stretching, relaxation training and other healthful physical workouts of Yoka can still be found in many other types of keep-fit programmes – uncontroversially yours!

Beach House or House on Sand?



Martin Cheah:

Since we are wondering about rebuilding JCC, let us think about Matthew 7:24-27, about the man who built his house on the rock and the man who built his house on sand. Have you ever wondered why anyone would build his house on sand? Is it because in those days there were no architects? Do you need a qualification to realize that the sand cannot hold up your house?

I can think of some reasons why anyone would consider building his house on sand. Firstly, the sand must be quite hardened, not the loose type you find at the beach. This could have fooled the man into thinking that it will hold up the house. Secondly, the man must be thinking that there will not be any rains or storms in that area which could blow down his house. Thirdly, it must be the cheapest alternative, with piling costs at a very minimal and the house could be built within a very short period.

What is the common factor in this parable? It is not the house because one house was built on rock and the other was built on sand. The common factor was that **the rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house**. Apparently, Jesus is telling us that troubles will come, contrary to what some believe, and we must be prepared. “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33b) We must build our house so that it can withstand.

John Ortberg mentions that there is a children's story which is similar to this parable. Can you guess? It is the story of the Three Little Pigs. So now we are facing an insurmountable mountain of building cost. Do we like the first two little pigs build our house with straw and wood?

In 1 Chronicles 22:14, we learn that David provided the building fund to build the Temple but it was Solomon, his son, who was chosen to build it. So do not be disheartened if in our lifetime we may not see the new JCC. Maybe it is God's will that the next generation, if they are willing, take up the challenge to rebuild JCC. However, we can do our part by providing for the rebuilding.

In Genesis 11:6, the LORD said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them." In Luke 1:37 we find that "nothing is impossible with God". (This is the tagline at Tangs store.) Actually, these two verses are taken out of context. However, does anyone disagree that nothing is impossible with God? God can make the COE down to \$2 anytime He so wishes. Why worry about inflation and rising costs? With \$2 and the correct six numbers, the worldly people could have \$10 million by Chinese New Year. I am not suggesting anyone to gamble but let not your hearts be troubled by money. If God is for us, He will provide. Maybe the people in this world have more faith in their own ability to own million dollar houses than we have to rebuild JCC. Why do we shake like our houses are built on sand when we sing that we are standing on solid rock?

I read an article recently about Gideon (Judges 7) and the author reminded me that God does not want us to think that we did it with our own strength. He cut down Gideon's 32,000 strong army to just 300 Israelites carrying trumpets and torches instead of swords. If we look at our own abilities then we are planning to fail. Let us turn to the Lord Almighty, our Provider.

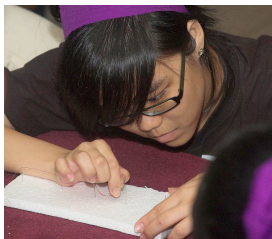
The year of Jubilee will be upon JCC in about 8 year's time. Just enough time to raise up funds for the new JCC.

JCC Olympics

27 Oct 2008



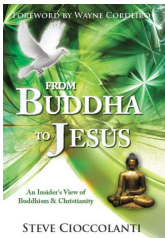
*Wishing Charis a Happy
(belated) birthday
~Vine*



Learning Thai language & the country

Sally Lee

Yay! I finally graduated from my 4-day Conversational Thai Language course last Sunday. Now I can at least speak a little to the Thai people in their own language other than English. Of course I still need to practice a lot. Though *chan poot paa-saa Thai dai nit noi*¹, at least now I have a basic foundation of the language, and I'm able to speak some simple sentences. This will definitely be helpful, be it during my Thai shopping trips or sharing the Gospel with the Thais. It has definitely been an enriching and rewarding learning experience, with all the role plays, singing Thai worship choruses and interaction with the Thai Ministry people. They have been very patient in teaching, and I definitely have enjoyed every minute of it.



It was a coincidence that on one of the days I went for my lesson, I was introduced to this book in our church bookshop. A Thai wrote it. In fact, I didn't enter the bookshop with any intention of getting anything in the first place; just trying to browse around and while away some time I had on my hands. Wonder whether it was God who had led me to this book? Anyway, I didn't regret buying it. After reading, I found it to be indeed very entertaining and informative, and therefore would like to share it with you.

The book is a first-hand account from someone from a Buddhist country, who's now a pastor and living in Australia with his wife. The author took his family name from his 2nd father, who was not the one raising him. His mother had two husbands. The book touches on the differences between Buddhism & Christianity, and Reincarnation – why the Buddhists believe in it. According to the Buddhists, Buddha said that one man's karma will never be enough to be washed away in one's life; that's why people have to keep reincarnating no end.

The author's writing is very humorous. I found it to be an insightful and eye-opening read. There are also some Buddhist parables included which are pretty interesting. I have not just learnt the Thai language, but also known more about

¹ *chan poot paa-saa Thai dai nit noi* (I speak Thai language a little bit)

the country and its main religion. There are also some Thai words inside the book that I have learnt. The objective of the Thai course is for us to be able to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the Thais through the singing of Thai worship choruses, conversing in simple sentences and sharing of personal testimony. Knowing something about their cultural background is certainly beneficial.

I should have learnt it before my last trip to Cha-am and Bangkok, whereby I could practise what I have learnt on the Thai people, and bargained more during the shopping trips.

Here are some simple Thai songs I would like to share with you, just like I have come to like all the Hokkien and Cantonese songs I learnt from JCC, and have shared with my cell members. My colleague has even blessed me with a Hokkien worship songs CD.

THAI WORSHIP CHORUSES

GOD IS SO GOOD

God is so good (3X)
He's so good to me.

Pra-jao saen-dee (3X)
Soong saen-dee dtor chan.

HE IS THE KING OF KINGS

He is the King of Kings
He is the Lord of Lords
His name is Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus
Ohhh... He is the King!

Pra-ong kua jom ra-chah
Pra-ong kua jom jao-naai
Pra-nam kua Yesu, Yesu, Yesu, Yesu,
Ohhh... Ong jom ra-chah!

Blessed are the meek

...for they will inherit the earth.
(Matt. 5:5)

When one thinks of meekness, the following attributes come to mind: humility, patience, gentleness, submissiveness.

Christians look to Christ, the *Agnus Dei* (Lamb of God) as an example; so, as we follow Christ, we can aspire to be like Him – meek as a lamb. There is a hymn (“Gentle Jesus, Meek and Mild”) that has the following lines:

*“Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,
Look upon a little child;
Pity my simplicity,
Suffer me to come to Thee.*

*Lamb of God, I look to Thee;
Thou shalt my Example be;
Thou art gentle, meek, and mild;
Thou wast once a little child.”*

Looking to the Lamb of God, we know that meekness is not equivalent to weakness or helplessness. A child who is dutiful to his parents and a lamb that is docile towards its shepherd both exhibit a trait of meekness, but by Providence they are well cared for by their protectors. As we have learnt in our Care Group discussion on the 3rd beatitude, “the biblical meaning of *meekness* is the submission to someone greater than us. In the context of the 3rd beatitude, Christians submit to God to experience Kingdom living.”

Meekness does not imply Christians cowering before all and sundry; it is not a handle for oppressors to seize on. The virtue of meekness is manifest in a willing submission that is proper rather than a grudging acquiescence. A meek Christian sees himself humbled before one greater than he, and derives strength and potential because someone else willingly suffers in his stead. The willing sacrifice of our Lord on the Cross for sinners and the willing longsuffering of parents for their children suggest that those at the receiving end of love (not that they deserve on their own merits) have every reason to be humbled (showing a meek spirit of deference and submission). The strength and potential in meekness to face up to the challenges of life can be better experienced than explained. Christians can be meek as a lamb, yet possess the strength and potential to be bold and conquering like the Lion of Judah! The Greek word *praus* for “meekness” was used to denote strength brought under control. Clearly, meekness and strength are not incongruous attributes. In Num 12:3 (KJV), Moses was described as the meekest of all men on earth; yet, he was mighty in words and deeds. (Acts 7:22)

Let the meek conquer the earth and inherit it!

Imagine that one day, mankind’s influence and control of the earth is replaced by robots or aliens, and man’s effective husbandry is superseded by wild vegetation and feral animals. This occurrence would suggest mankind losing



its power and authority over the earth, contrasting with the intention of God for man to be “fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” (Gen. 1:28) When such a situation arises, can we claim to inherit the earth? More appropriately, we can claim to having lost the inheritance that God, the Creator of the property called “earth”, bestowed on us. Such a day has not actually arrived; yet, regrettably, the environmental disasters that we are confronted with today suggest that gradually the earth is being ruined.

Instead of being humbled by God for the trust emplaced on us to take possession of the earth and care for it, man arrogates himself to unfettered ownership of the creation.

Notwithstanding man’s “birthright” to the earth upon his appearance thereon, we must not forget that God is still the ultimate owner of the earth. (Ps. 24:1) We have learnt in our CG Bible study that “the Jews wanted to possess the earth of their dream but Jesus wanted them to inherit the earth in God’s way (through meekness)”. Unfortunately, man’s meek spirit of deference and submission is absent. He goes wild with his possession of the earth to do as he likes. Like a son taking ownership of a house from his father to enjoy it, take good care of it and hold it well in trust for future generations, he fails in his duty because his new-found capital gives him new-found ideas that are wilful and at odds with responsible stewardship.

What can we do now? We cannot turn back the clock, but we can change our attitude forward. Once man changes his attitude, wonders can happen. Bad can become good again. When Job abandoned his desires and in meekness submitted to God’s will, “the LORD made him prosperous again and gave him twice as much as he had before. The LORD blessed the latter part of Job’s life more than the first.” (Job 42:10, 12) Likewise, if man changes his attitude, good change can come to the earth. Man ought to discard his cloak of arrogance and put on the spirit of meekness (*praus*) to bring his strength under control and thereby release his full potential to hold the earth in good trust from generation to generation. In a sense, to inherit is to possess as a heritage; and a heritage is usually meant to be kept for passing on. The advertising slogan of a luxury watch brand goes something like this, “You don’t really own it; you are holding it for future generations.” Can we not apply these words to our asset we call ‘earth’? The meek from generation to generation shall inherit and not destroy it!

John Lee





Looking out or the interest to their

If there is one failing characteristic in hard times, it's when people become survival oriented and think only about themselves. They simply do not or cannot think about the interest of others because they are too consumed with their own concerns and problems. In comparison, there has been one Christian quality that has stood out in history. It is when Christians show equal concern for the interest of others when they themselves are facing the same hardships. It was the Roman Emperor Julian (who opposed Christianity) that said about Christians that they not only take care of their own people, but they take care of "our own" as well.

In the current political debate we (the American people) have been flooded with promises about how "political candidates" are going to take care of our interest. It seems that such techniques are getting people to focus on "ME" and "MY interest" almost exclusively. But how can any political system survive by getting people to be possessed with their own self-interest? History has shown that selfishness breeds only more selfishness, on all levels. Eventually, empires and civilizations that only motivate people with such self-interest do not survive difficult and turbulent times. They crumble from within.

But we must not overlook this blight in the church. Many people go to church, and for what? They go to get ME and MY needs gratified. This certainly has not been a distinguishing mark of the Christian faith. The current movements in the church at large promise self-gratification. Of course, you must perform in their way or adapt attitudes conducive to making you feel important and better in their midst. If this characterizes the church you attend, I do not take pleasure in telling you this, but it is doomed to self-destruct in a matter of time. Why? Because the church of Jesus Christ was built on the beliefs and practice that God's love delivers us from the tyranny of the self-serving life (2 Cor.5:14-15). Yes, the love of Christ that is said to conquer us now compels us not to turn inward to serve self, but outward to serve God and others. It delivers us from this self-seeking life and frees us up to consider the interest of others. In just this way Jesus Christ came and lived here on earth. And when the power of Christ's presence is real in our lives, it too will display this distinguishing mark (Phil 2:3-4). If you, as a Christian lack this distinct mark in your life, you need to humbly come to God confessing to Him your need to change. Don't be surprised if the way God answers your prayer is by providing opportunities for you to show your concern for someone else by sharing with them what God has provided you. You see, God's way of living is so contrary to all our political systems, which fill us with self-interest, self-security and false hopes. God's way is that of self-denial, which is not low

self-esteem, but rather it is giving preference to someone other than myself. It is saying that someone else's needs are just as important as my own needs, and then demonstrating this in a practical way.

You may be burdened by all the self- seeking attitudes around you in the workplace. You may think the easiest thing to do is just ignore it and let them do their thing. Well, brothers or sisters in Christ, this kind of darkness is calling for Christians to be light, by showing that our concern and interest for people around us is equal to our own. Simply preaching this or fighting to make it policy is not enough. The light that overcomes this kind of darkness comes only as we practically live it.



So let your light shine in these dark times...

The FCAP Staff
November 4, 2008

Birthday BASH



Some birthday celebrations make it to the Straits Times or Internet like these:



ACJC schoolgirl celebrating her birthday.



Boy having a glad wrap time at Sentosa on his birthday.

The following birthdays were celebrated in JCC and will only appear in The Vine for internal circulation only.



In recent months, we celebrated Charis' and Lynnest's birthdays. There was great fun all around but I wonder how the birthday girls felt to have such a bash for them. One lesson I think they may have misunderstood is Matthew 7:12, "...do to others what you would have them do to you..." I don't know if our girls are now on the planning committee of their friends' upcoming birthday bash. They probably volunteer for the job, which is very rare for a JCCian.

"Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share." (1Tim 6:18). I noticed that Lynnest was very eager to share her birthday cake with everyone, maybe too eager.

Anyway, Happy Birthday, girls. I know I will have to buy a face shield and a sponge cake for Debra.