

# GRACE

## Great Good News!

March 2004

I gave up all my credentials and all of that inferior stuff SO I COULD KNOW CHRIST PERSONALLY, experience His resurrection power, be a partner in His suffering, and go all the way to death itself.

If there was any way to get in on the resurrection from the dead, I wanted to do it.

(Philippians 3:7-11, Peterson's The Message Bible paraphrase)

John 20:24-29 became *personal* to me this month. Since my heart is to genuinely share true hope with others, I shared these verses at a Boys Home of the South chapel service. Some of the boys are amazingly volunteering to stand up before their peers to share hope through reading Bible verses in their own *personal* way, too. I hope this newsletter encourages you this Easter season.



*The nail-pierced hands of Jesus  
drawn by a boy from the  
Boys Home of the South.*

### LOOK CLOSER AT HIS HANDS

In John 20:24-29, Thomas refused to believe Jesus is alive after the cross until he saw the nail prints in Jesus' hands. Thomas has been labeled "doubting Thomas" because of this, but I relate to him as "honest Thomas." The other disciples had already seen the resurrected Jesus; Thomas could have taken their word for it, but I believe God gave Thomas a deep hunger to *personally* see Jesus. And I believe God has given you and me these verses describing Thomas' pilgrimage so that we, too, can *personally* see Jesus. I have previously read these verses claiming those nail prints for my salvation. Yet, not too long ago, I sensed God prompting me to, "Look closer, Gregg. Look closer, My child." And by His grace I did...and I saw what was right in front of my heart all along...I not only saw the nail prints, I saw His hands...His beautiful hands...His hands are alive! That's what Thomas saw, too! When Jesus appeared to Thomas, Thomas did not say, "Ok then, I see the nail prints, so now I will believe." No, not at all...Thomas saw so much more...he saw the nail prints, yes, but he also saw the living Jesus. Thomas actually said, "My Lord and my God!" What a powerful personal pronoun "my" became to Thomas! After Jesus ascended, the Holy Spirit came to indwell us. Look closer at your own hands. Do you see your hands as instruments of the indwelling Christ...as His very hands? Are His beautiful hands that *personal* to you?

I also shared these verses with a young person who is seeking joy and hope. I held out my hands as a picture of Jesus' hands, and I asked this young person "What do you see besides the nail prints?" She replied, "His hands are reaching out to me." Wow. The formal answer I was wanting her to reply was "I see that His hands are alive." Indeed she saw His living hands, but she also saw His hands reaching out *personally* to her. Jesus the Wonderful Counselor ministered to me through this young person while He revealed to her the foundation of the joy and hope that she has been seeking and is growing in.

### LOOK CLOSER AT HIS CROSS

The next time you see a cross, maybe on a necklace or a church steeple, look closer. Why was the cross such a powerful emblem of the gospel to the early church? Look closely. It's right in front of us all. THE CROSS...IT'S EMPTY!!! Indeed, the cross is an instrument of death, but the empty cross of Jesus proclaims to the world that He was dead but now He's alive! As I have been led to look even closer, the empty cross has become so *personal* to me that I claim it as my own with Christ. I can say with all of heart, without really logically understanding, "I have been crucified with Christ, it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). That's true hope.

### ONE FINAL LOOK

Yes, His hands are alive and His cross is empty...but we should not overlook the foundational truths that there ARE nail prints and there WAS a cross. That's why Paul said, "For I determined not to know anything among you except Christ AND Christ crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). If we focus on the resurrection apart from the cross, we lose sight of true life in Christ. That's what the "health and wealth gospel" does, and what focusing only on heaven can do. But in God's economy, true life comes from our willingness to first experience death in Christ...death to our OWN SELFISH ATTEMPTS to do good, to be loved, to be happy, to escape suffering, to seek security in finances, etc. The gospel is really not very popular. But if you're willing to look closer, you will see the glory of the gospel! I promise.

*See Grace Notes on back*

## GRACE NOTES

### **SPEAKING**

I have been invited to speak at Holly Ridge Baptist Church in Simpsonville, SC on April 14, 21, and 28 starting at 7:00 each of these Wednesday evenings. I'm humbled and excited about this opportunity.

### **TEACHING**

I will present an overview of the discipleship counseling ministry on Saturday evening April 24<sup>th</sup> from 6:00 to 9:00 at the Christ Life Ministries Simpsonville, SC office. Call or email me if you would like more information.

### **BOYS HOME MINISTRY**

A motorcycle ministry called *One In Him Ministries* ([www.oneinhiministries.org](http://www.oneinhiministries.org)) is joining the chapel ministry team at the Boys Home of the South. The founder of that ministry Big Mike Erwin says, "This is God's ministry, not ours. We only exist by His grace, and His blood shed for us. We don't preach or judge...we just share what He has done for us."

You are welcome to visit the Boys Home chapel service Tuesday evenings starting at 7:00.

### Update on Joy

As a result of nearly two years of antibiotics, my wife Joy's physical stamina is at the lowest point ever. However, all tests indicate the staph infection is finally gone; so on March 31<sup>st</sup>, her IV line was removed and antibiotics stopped! The night following the removal of her IV line, she slept all night long for the first time in many months, and all the way through 5:30 pm the next day! And she has been resting each night ever since then.

As her daddy would say, Joy has a "long row to hoe" to re-establish some strength to slowly start to do the things in life she loves. This reminds me of the many years Joy drove her daddy's tractor as he guided the planter behind the tractor to plant his corn. Joy and I cherish the last time we saw her daddy alive two years ago when he reached out with his big, rough, yet tender, farmer's hands to hold our hands, and he prayed, "Lord, I come to you like I have done a million times before, asking you to heal my daughter..." I have fond memories of Joy's daddy gazing with pride at the beauty of a harvest of corn. And right now I cherish the thought that he is in the presence of Jesus along with Joy's mama, with both so proud of the harvest in their little girl...a harvest not primarily of healing but of character and hope...a harvest first sowed with their love and then nurtured for years by their care for Joy...and now still being nurtured by their heritage of grace which never dies.

### GRACE NOTE

The gospel was so *personal* to Paul that he referred to the gospel as "my gospel" in Romans 16:25 and 2 Timothy 2:8.