

Knock Three Times

by Ronald L. Dart

I'm not much into numerology, and I think E. W. Bullinger's list of the significance of numbers is somewhat fanciful. That said, there is something I've wondered about for rather a long time. It has to do with Paul's "thorn in the flesh." In his letter to the Corinthians, he described an incident when he was caught up into heaven and heard things no man could repeat. Then he said this:

And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing *I besought the Lord thrice*, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me (2 Corinthians 12:7-9).

More than one person has asked me what Paul meant when he said he had besought the Lord three times. People wonder, why only three? Or why three at all? Does it mean he went into a season

of prayer and fasting three times? Or just three short prayers, one after another? I think these questions arise in part because of a misunderstanding of something Jesus said. He offered a parable one day to the end that men "ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1).

There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; Yet because this widow troubles me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, Hear what

the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? (vv. 2-7).

The NIV renders "not to faint" as "not give up." This is a common understanding of the verse, and implies ongoing prayers to infinity on any given request. But the Greek word *ekkakeo* is closer to the King James "to faint." Literally, it means "to be weak." Thus Jesus is not suggesting prayer to infinity on an issue like Paul's, but prayer that is not weak or faint—prayer that comes *boldly* to the throne of grace.

Then there is this. God is not the unjust judge of the parable. He doesn't answer prayer because we have wearied him nor to merely get rid of us. The parable is saying that, if this is what *even an unjust judge does*, wouldn't we expect better treatment from God?

continued on page 2. . .

You Make the Difference. . .

"Thanks again for your wonderful programs! I can't tell you enough how much they instruct and reveal a deeper, keener point to things (many) that I have read before but missed entirely. I listen to you on KLT 670 here in Denver and, though the Monday through Thursday broadcasts are important to me, the Friday messages are a pearl!" (JM). Because of your tithes and gifts to CEM, many are gaining a deeper, keener point to God's Word and experiencing the weekly "pearls." As you give, CEM is constantly trying to increase the number of people who can benefit from the *Born to Win* broadcast.

*Knock Three Times
continued from page 1 . . .*

Another parable, in which a man comes to his friend in the middle of the night to borrow bread, is often cited as an example of persistence in prayer. The idea is that he will keep banging on the door until his friend gets up and gives him what he wants. Jesus said:

I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man's *boldness* he will get up and give him as much as he needs. So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you (Luke 11:8-9 NIV).

This time, the NIV has it right. It is not the man's persistence that is credited with getting results, but his *boldness*.

While I was thinking about this, I recalled that Jesus went away from the disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane and prayed, not once but three times. Matthew sets the scene for us. Jesus and the disciples went across the brook Kidron to Gethsemane. Jesus stops, leaves most of the men, taking only Peter, James, and John further into the Garden. Then he posts the three men to watch and goes deeper into the Garden and prays. The only way we know what he said in prayer (he was alone) is because he told the disciples later. Here is all we know of this prayer: "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as

thou wilt" (Matthew 26:39).

Then, Matthew tells us, he returned to the three watchmen and found them asleep. Having awakened them, he returned to his place of prayer, and this is what we know of his later words: "O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done" (v. 42).

When Jesus returned to the disciples and found them asleep again, he did not wake them, but went away and "prayed the third time, *saying the same words*" (v. 44). Some versions inexplicably depart from the clear statement of the original. But the KJV and NRSV are right. According to Matthew, Jesus said the *same words* in the third prayer.

These three prayers of Jesus' are excruciatingly short. And quite close together. Because Jesus, on his rebuke of the disciples for falling asleep, said, "What, could ye not watch with me one hour?" Some have assumed that he prayed for an hour. It is doubtful that we have to take the "one hour" literally, or that Jesus said nothing else in his prayer. That said, it is entirely possible that Jesus was deep in thought for some of the time he was gone and that the recorded words are the whole prayer. At least those words are all we have from Matthew.

Mark adds a little. The scene is the same, but Jesus' words are a little different: "And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt" (Mark 14:36 KJV). Mark is characteristically

more compact, giving only the words of the first prayer, but mentioning the three times that Jesus prayed, once again noting that he prayed using "the same words" (v. 38).

If we had only Luke's account, we would assume Jesus prayed only twice, but Luke also records the words: "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42).

Luke adds that when Jesus went away another time, he prayed so earnestly that "his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (v. 44).

Finally, John does not speak of Jesus' prayer, but only of the surrounding events.

So we are left with the fact that Jesus prayed three times about the same thing, and the prayers were remarkably short, intense, and pointedly said very close to the same thing. You can almost see a progression in Jesus as he asks for this to go away, but in the process, he works his way through it in prayer and comes to see what he must do.

If I take this event alongside Paul's description of what God did with him, I would think that Paul specifically asked God for relief from this on three occasions, and then came to realize (or the Lord literally spoke to him), that his thorn in the flesh was for the purpose he described.

I can't say that I have found a divine formula for prayer, but there may be a principle lurking in the background. I might have dismissed the idea, but then I

continued on page 7 . . .

2007 Feast of Tabernacles

Sermon Schedule

Date/Time	Event	Speaker
Wed. Sept. 26 7:30-8:45 p.m.	Opening Night Service	Ronald L. Dart, Sermon
Thurs. Sept. 27 11:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m. 3:00 p.m.	Holy Day Service Afternoon Seminars	Ronald L. Dart, Sermon* Various topics
Fri. Sept. 28 11:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m.	Morning Service	John Reedy, Sermon
Sat. Sept. 29 11:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m.	Morning Service	Larry Watkins, Sermon
Sun. Sept. 30 11:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m.	Morning Service	Ronald L. Dart, Sermon
Mon. Oct. 1 11:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m.	Morning Service	Jim O'Brien, Sermon
Tue. Oct. 2 11:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m.	Morning Service	Jeff Osborne, Sermon**
Wed. Oct. 3 11:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m.	Youth Day Service	Presented by our youth***
Thu. Oct. 4 11:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m.	Holy Day Service	Ronald L. Dart, Sermon

* A Holy Day offering will be taken.

** **Contemporary Music Day:** Don't miss Tuesday's service this year. This will be our contemporary music service. We will clap our hands, sing new songs that everyone loves, and join in one voice to praise our King.

*** **Youth Day 2007—Standing Fast in the Faith:** Our youth are our greatest resource. They are not only the future church—they are also the heart of our present church. Within them shines that pure heart which Christ seeks in us all. The Youth Day Service provides an opportunity for our youth to let that light shine! Come join us Wednesday, October 3 for the worship service presented by our youth.

High-Impact Youth Classes for Kids and Young People 3 to 20

Pay attention to kid power. They need more than food, shelter, and clothing. You can put a smile on the face of every young person by seeing to it they are in their age-appropriate Feast class or seminar on Friday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday from 9:30 to 10:30 a.m. Your kids will want to be where the action is, where their friends are, and where they can make new friends. They will find all of that in the YEA Feast classes and seminars. Register at the YEA desk on the opening night or the first day of the Feast and pick up your *FREE* YEA book. Below are the class themes and what your kids and young adults will learn each day of the Feast.

Beginners (3-5)

Theme: *What Will You Bee?*

Lesson 1: Bee Joyful!

Lesson 2: Bee Helpful!

Lesson 3: Bee Still!

Lesson 4: Bee Kind!

Lesson 5: Bee-lieve!

Primaries (6-8)

Theme: *Friends Forever*

Lesson 1: A Feast with Friends

Lesson 2: Kindness Makes Friends

Lesson 3: Friends Say I'm Sorry

Lesson 4: Happy Hearts

Lesson 5: A Labor of Love

Juniors (9-11)

Theme: *Stay On Course*

Lesson 1: Stay On Track

Lesson 2: True Colors

Lesson 3: Gaining Momentum

Lesson 4: Flat Tires

Lesson 5: Avoid the Ruts

Intermediates (12-15)

Theme: *Impressions*

Lesson 1: First Impressions

Lesson 2: Impressions of Truth

Lesson 3: Impressions of Friendships

Lesson 4: Impressions of Greatness

Lesson 5: Lasting Impressions

Senior Teens Seminars (16-20)

Theme: *In Search of God*

Lesson 1: A Time to Remember

Lesson 2: Foot Prints of God

Lesson 3: Does the Church Matter?

Lesson 4: In Search of Faith

Lesson 5: A Reason to Repent

Build the Future TODAY! Teach YEA!

Notice to parents and students: The morning of each Sabbath and Holy Day, stop by the YEA desk before the service and pick up a special lesson for Beginners, Primaries, and Juniors to do during the worship service.

Seminar Schedule

Visit the Seminar Information Table at the Conference Center for more details.

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 3:00 p.m.

Jeff Osborn: God's Blessings—Our Package: How often do we miss out on really appreciating the blessings that God gives us?

Pam Dewey: Goodbye Yellow Brick Road: This seminar will help you realize you don't need that man behind the curtain. You just need to find. . . what you already have!

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 9:30 a.m.

Pam Dewey: A Night at the Museum: Explore whether we should be an Exhibit or an Example.

Nancy Vandemark: She Did That!: Learn about surprising biblical examples of women who found ways to serve. Bring your own ideas to share.

Joe Weicks: Touched by Grace: Explore the wonders of God's grace and how its touch changes our lives.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 9:30 a.m.

Jim O'Brien: Brainstroming Session—topic to be announced.

Diane Kleeschulte: YEA! Let's R.E.A.C.H.: The newest addition to the YEA books is the online *FREE* activities that will help parents and teachers **Reinforce** and **Extend At Church and Home**.

continued on page 6. . .

Activities for Everyone

Please check the Activity Table or monitors for complete details of every activity and join in on the fun.

Date/Time	Event
Thurs. Sept. 27	
9:15-10:45 a.m.	Fellowship on the Terrace, every morning
After the worship service	YEA Orientation, with lunch, for all teaching staff
3:00-4:00 p.m.	“The Safe Side, Stranger Safety,” for kids/parents in Ballroom
7:00-9:00 p.m.	Play and Plan Party, for teens and young adults with music, games, and food
7:00-9:00 p.m.	Meet and Greet, with refreshments, CEM & Friends Internet Forum
7:30-9:00 p.m.	“Facing The Giants” movie: How faith plays out on and off the field
Fri. Sept. 28	
2:00-6:00 p.m.	Family Picnic, with games, fellowship, food provided by CEM
6:00-9:00 p.m.	Singles Interactive Bible Study, with food
7:00-9:00 p.m.	Youth Music (Huddle), popular Christian music
Sat. Sept. 29	
7:00-9:00 p.m.	Children’s Luau, with games and crafts
7:30-9:00 p.m.	“The Ultimate Gift” movie: What is the relationship between wealth and happiness?
Sun. Sept. 30	
1:00-3:00 p.m.	Seniors Luncheon. TBA, registration requested
2:00 p.m.	Canoe / Tube / Kayak Trip, \$18 / \$13 / \$23, respectively
7:00-11:00 p.m.	Family Dance at the ECCC, Ballroom II
7:00-11:00 p.m.	“Young at Heart Dance,” music from 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s, 90s, and today
Mon. Oct. 1	
3:00-5:00 p.m.	Dolphin Cruise, \$24 adult, \$13.50 children to 12, 3 & under free, \$20 seniors
3:30-5:00 p.m.	Variety Show Practice, Ballroom I
7:00-9:30 p.m.	Variety Show, an evening of fun and talent in Ballroom I
Tues. Oct. 2	
12:45-3:00 p.m.	Youth Day Rehearsal, with lunch for participants, in Ballroom I
2:00-6:00 p.m.	Deep Sea Fishing, \$36.80, register at the Activities table
1:30-6:00 p.m.	Golf Scramble, 4-person mixed (men/ladies), Indian Bayou Country Club
7:00-9:30 p.m.	Pie/Cake and Ice Cream Social, with games and fellowship
Wed. Oct. 3	
After Service	Festival Associate Meeting, members and interested people, lunch will be served
1:00-4:00 p.m.	Teen Beach Party, TBA, with <i>FREE</i> pizza & drinks, games
7:00-9:30 p.m.	Greet the Sabbath, Emerald Ballroom I
Thurs. Oct 4	
1:00-3:00 p.m.	Farewell Luncheon, TBA, join the CEM tradition before starting home

*2007 Feast of Tabernacles Seminar Schedule
continued from page 4 . . .*

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 3:00 p.m.

Pam Dewey: Times of Refreshing: An overview of the Christian Significance of the Feasts of the Bible including: 1. Introductory overview of the Feasts to the general public; 2. Offer an opportunity to learn more about the Feasts; 3. Provide Feast-goers with a fresh perspective of the Feasts.

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 30, 9:30 a.m.

Jim Owen: Christian Activism: What have we learned so far to form and share our outreach to the community?

Scarlet Stough: Make a Difference by Being Different: Everyone has a worldview, but only a small percentage of Christians have a biblical worldview.

George Constantine: Victory over Darkness: The Bible tells us we live in Satan's world. He attacks our youth, our elderly, pretty much everybody. How can we win?

MONDAY, OCTOBER 1, 9:30 a.m.

Rich Hoot: How We Got the Bible: A lecture/slide presentation that reviews the key people and events involved in the creation, preservation, and translation of the Bible.

Heather Holmes: Service: A Magnificent Obsession: Are giving and serving one and the same? The differences will be outlined engaging the audience to discuss examples of each.

Tony Bosserman: What is Righteousness?: What did Jesus mean when He said in the Sermon on the Mount, "Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and the Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven?"

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 2, 9:30 a.m.

Michael Deering: Star Wars: A Biblical Journey: Multimedia presentation that illustrates biblical truths and analogies of our Christian walk found in a galaxy, far, far away, and how it inspires others to understand what we understand.

Rick Hoot: The Names of God: Review the many different Hebrew names for God and examine the deep spiritual significance attached to each one.

Ron Dart and Pam Dewey: First of Two Sessions—Writer's Workshop: For all writers whether your specialty is fiction or non-fiction, or you're aiming at an audience of children, teens, or adults.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 3, 9:30 a.m.

Heather Holmes: The Paralyzing Power of Fear: How Self Doubt Can Detour Us from God's Path: Examine thoughts and perceptions about ourselves that do more harm than good.

Alethia Prettyman: Bags of Love—Community Service Project Workshop: This program, in conjunction with Child Protective Services, champions the needs of displaced children by providing them with toiletries, a comforter, and age-appropriate toys.

Ron Dart and Pam Dewey: Second of Two Sessions—Writer's Workshop: For all writers whether your specialty is fiction or non-fiction, or you're aiming at an audience of children, teens, or adults.

Calendar of Events

Feast of Trumpets Worship Service, conducted by Ronald L. Dart, First United Methodist Church, 503 College, Terrell, TX at 2:00 p.m. September 13, 2007. This will be followed by a potluck meal. For more information or directions, please contact Ralph Collins, 817-246-1874 or r.collins@sbcglobal.net, or Larry Watkins, 1-888-BIBLE-44, or lsw@cemnetwork.com. See www.borntowin.net for **Atonement Services**.

Feast of Tabernacles 2007, Emerald Coast Convention Center, Fort Walton Beach, FL from September 26 through October 4, 2007. Ronald L. Dart will speak at 7:30 p.m. Sept. 26, at 11:00 a.m. Sept. 27 and 30, and at 11:00 a.m. Oct. 4. Check this newsletter or our website at www.borntowin.net for other educational, spiritually uplifting, and social events. The public is welcome. For additional information call 1-888-BIBLE-44.

*Knock Three Times
continued from page 2 . . .*

remembered another important story from the Book of Acts.

There was a Roman Centurion, the commander of the Italian regiment, who was what the Jews called “a God fearer,” a non-Jew who believed in the God of the Jews and practiced the faith as far as he could. His entire household were believers, and he was one who prayed regularly and, doubtless, at the appointed times. It was at one of those times, the ninth hour of the day (about three in the afternoon) that an angel appeared to him and called him by name. His message was simple:

Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea” (Acts 10:4-6 NIV).

Cornelius could not have imagined what God had in store for him, but being a military man, he knew how to follow orders. He called in two servants and a soldier from his staff who was also a serious believer. Cornelius told the three men what had happened and sent them to Joppa.

Now the scene shifts to Peter who, at his own hour of prayer, has gone up on the roof for solitude and to pray. As the morning drew on, Peter became hungry for his breakfast, and while the smell of food being prepared came up to the roof, Peter fell into a trance. In his vision:

He saw heaven opened and

something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. Then a voice told him, “Get up, Peter. Kill and eat” (Acts 10:11-13 NIV).

This made no sense to Peter. Nothing Jesus said could possibly have told him that he could eat snakes. So he replied, “Surely not, Lord! I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.” Peter knew better than to lay aside a commandment from the Written Law on a mere vision. But the voice spoke a second time: “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.” This happened *three times*.

Peter did not take this to mean that part of the Law had been abolished, but while he pondered what the vision might mean, the three men sent by Cornelius arrived at the house. The voice said: “Simon, three men are looking for you. So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them.” The vision was given *three times*. *Three* men were at the gate waiting. If the number three meant nothing, it served at least to minimize any thoughts of coincidence.

When Peter explained later at Jerusalem, he made a special point of this. He was challenged by the circumcised believers for going to the uncircumcised and eating with them. So Peter told the whole story, omitting nothing. He told them about the great sheet full of animals and then he said:

“This happened *three times*, and then it was all pulled up to

heaven again. Right then *three men* who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying (Acts 11:10-11 NIV).

The rest of the story nailed down a new fact for all the Jewish believers. Their own rules about not eating with Gentiles were pointless, because the Gospel had to go to everyone. But it seems that the idea of three-time repetition carried some level of significance.

The number three crops up again and again in Scripture, so we have to take it seriously. *Three times* in a year all males were to appear before God on the holydays. This in spite of the fact that there were actually seven holydays. Three times Balaam’s donkey saved him from the angel that stood as an adversary to him. Three times the poor animal was smitten for her trouble before she finally spoke to Balaam. When Balaam got where he was going, he couldn’t curse Israel as requested, but ended up blessing Israel three times.

David bowed himself *three times* to Jonathan before they parted. Elijah stretched himself three times upon the dead child, and the child recovered. Daniel prayed three times a day in the face of a sentence of death. Then, of course, Jesus was in the tomb and Jonah in the fish for three days and three nights. Lazarus was three days in the tomb as well. And then, Peter denied Christ three times, and Jesus demanded his reaffirmation of love three times.

There is something about this that I feel a need to understand. I don’t yet, but I think I see this.

continued on page 8 . . .

Special **FREE** Offer

When the Republican party started talking about Compassionate Conservatism, something didn't feel quite right. I wasn't sure what it was, but recognized it as political speak, otherwise called "spin." In a less generous mood, one might call political speak "lying." It has taken some time for me to get this in perspective, but it's coming. Compassion is not just a vague feeling. *It has to have an object.*

You're familiar with the story of the Good Samaritan. Why was this injured man so important to the Samaritan? Because he was a man—nothing more was required. The Good Samaritan interacted with a man. One man. A person. The government can't do that with 200 million people. It can only deal with numbers—you have one in your wallet—your social security number. To the government, you are not a man, a woman, or a child, you are a number. Compassion by the numbers, that is all.

It was real people—Christian people—who put food on the plates of hurricane Katrina victims, sat with them, and helped them solve their problems. This underlines a biblical principle, the dignity of man. The dignity of man arises from the fact that man, male and female, is made in the image of God. It's troubling to think that there are some who abandon their humanity, trash the dignity of man, and degrade themselves to a lower form of life. There was a man in the Bible named Amalek. God's judgment for him was that he would perish forever. What can account for this kind of judgment upon an entire people? Space does not permit me to answer here, but I want you to understand what happens when men break faith with the dignity of man. Return the enclosed card and I will rush you a CD of a broadcast titled *Compassionate Conservatism* that will clearly explain this.

*Knock Three Times
continued from page 7 . . .*

There needs to be an end, a kind of closure to ongoing petitions to God. There is the example of the unjust judge to consider, but that doesn't necessarily suggest unending petitions on a given request. There may come a time when we, like Paul, need to accept God's answer and get on down the road. I don't think God is pleased with whining or nagging. I have long pondered something Solomon said:

Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore *let thy words be few.*

For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice is known by multitude of words (Ecclesiastes 5:1-3 KJV).

Spending an hour in prayer doesn't mean rambling on the whole time. "*Too many words*" seems to constitute the sacrifice of fools. An hour is well spent working your way through the issues and clarifying your request.

There is one other thing. Both Paul and Jesus felt they had their answer after the third request. I don't think it is God's will that we go on in a continual state of frustration. There comes a time when you have to accept that you have his answer and that, while not what you hoped it would be, it is right for you. Learn to relax, to work with what God has given you. After all, when you are weak, that's when you can do great things.



Radio Update

Cincinnati, OH
WCVX 1050 AM
M-F 10:00 a.m.
Sat 11:30 a.m.

Wickliffe, KY
WBCE 1200 AM
M-F 10:00 a.m.
Sun 8:30 a.m.

Christian Educational Ministries

PO Box 560
Whitehouse, Texas 75791
phone: 1.888.BIBLE.44
fax: 903.509.1139
email: adm@borntowin.net
website: www.borntowin.net

*That the man of God may be proficient
and equipped for every good work.*