

Choose Your Cruise

Echoes of Grace



February 2017 – Vol. 87 – Number 8

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ECHOES OF GRACE (USPS 167-180) is published monthly by Bible Truth Publishers, 59 Industrial Road, P.O. Box 649, Addison, Illinois 60101, USA. Periodical postage paid at Addison, Illinois. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to ECHOES OF GRACE, P.O. Box 649, Addison Illinois 60101.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES: Postage paid to one address within the United States \$10.50 per year (12 issues). Postage paid to one address outside the United States \$13.50 per year (12 issues). Special prices on quantities.

Printed in USA

A large, multi-decked cruise ship is docked at a pier. The ship is white with blue and orange accents. The pier is made of concrete and has several mooring posts. In the foreground, there are palm trees and a clear blue sky. The overall scene is bright and sunny.

Choose Your Cruise

There was a time in my life when I received frequent phone calls from supposed travel agents who were trying to persuade me to take a cruise. Now, I love the sea and I have enjoyed all of the time I have spent in ships on the ocean; so the idea of a cruise was quite appealing to me. But I didn't trust these agents and I never followed up on their offers, and, if you know something about the average salesmen, you probably understand why I was cautious.

So, let us suppose that I were an agent and that I were offering you the opportunity to take the cruise of a lifetime—a historic voyage—and the choice of two different, newly built ships. Please carefully consider your options:

First Choice: Ship A

Ship Builder: We really don't know a whole lot about the qualifications of the builder of this ship—the builder's technical qualifications or skills,

“The foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”

previous ship-building experience or successes. But he seems to be a nice person.

Crew: As in the case of the builder, we do not know anything about the crew's previous sailing experience or training—whether or not they have had any previous, successful voyages, but, on the whole, they appear to be a cut above the average, as people go.

Captain: Well, we don't know much about him either. He seems like a nice fellow, but we have no record of his having had any previous experience on any voyage.

Destination: Well, it appears that we are not told exactly where this ship will end its voyage, but we are assured that it won't be at the bottom of the sea.

Second Choice: Ship B

Ship Builder: This ship has been built by a famous shipyard—a shipyard long known for its successes in producing great ships and for incorporating the latest and best in engineering, materials and technology.

Crew: The crew for this ship is well-trained and very experienced—even internationally acclaimed—the best the famous cruise line has to offer.

Captain: The captain on this ship is very experienced and has been given the privilege of being master of this ship because of the high regard in which he is held—both as a competent administrator and as a great seaman.

Destination: The destination is a great port city—one of the greatest and richest in the world.

Now, which ship will you probably choose for your voyage of adventure?

“Oh,” you say, “that looks fairly easy—an obvious choice.” Have you made your choice? If so, you may want to repeat it to yourself, just to make sure you remember it.

If you chose Ship B, you have a lot of company. Most people, when asked the foregoing questions, choose Ship B. They see it as a perfectly logical choice.

Ship B is the *H.M.S. Titanic*. You may have heard of that famous ship before. How well do you like that choice now?

The *Titanic* was a new ship—supposedly the finest ever made up to the day she sailed into history. She is famous for sinking on her maiden voyage and for taking about half of her passengers down with her.

“Oh,” you may exclaim, glad that you were not actually on the ship of your choice. “Well, what is Ship A?”

Ship A is Noah’s Ark—an even more famous, actual historical ship—the much-mocked Ark of Noah.

The Ark’s maiden voyage was conspicuously successful, despite the perceived ignorance and inexperience of the builder, captain and crew.

Why is Noah’s Ark a better choice?

There is one simple reason: God. The Ark and its voyage were all God’s idea. God



“There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.”

ordered it, God designed it, God guaranteed it, and God preserved it.

The *Titanic* seemed to have everything going for it—but God. And God makes all of the difference.

In God’s Word, the Bible, we read the reason why: **“Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness**

of God is stronger than men” (1 Corinthians 1:25).

No doubt, when Noah built the Ark, he was greatly ridiculed, for as long as it took him to build the Ark. After all, what did he know about building such an odd boat, and what possible use could it have? But Noah had his instructions from God, and he believed God and followed God’s instructions. And both God and Noah were vindicated when the flood actually came—just as it had been prophesied. Read all about it in Genesis 6-8.

Today, a whole world of people still makes choices trusting their own wisdom, ignoring God’s warnings of judgment, forgetting the lesson of Noah’s Ark, and unaware that God says:

“Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly

pardon. For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:6-9).

“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him” (Proverbs 3:5-6).

“There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Proverbs 14:12).

“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6).

“The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. ... For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. ... Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men” (1 Corinthians 1:18-25).

The *Titanic* looked like a perfectly safe cruise ship and Rocky in the following story was a captive-bred and beautifully trained grizzly bear. But odd circumstances have a way of turning pleasure to pain in the blink of an eye.

See what I mean in *Playing With Death*. ◀



Playing With Death

Rocky was a 7½-foot-tall, 700-pound grizzly bear. He was of captive-bred parentage and had been trained from a cub by humans to play and wrestle with them. He was brought up on an animal refuge, Predators in Action, high in the mountains of San Bernardino, California. By all accounts, Rocky was a gentle, well-trained bear brought up by an experienced trainer, Randy Miller.

Rocky had starred in many shows, documentaries and movies and was a huge success. At five years old, he had proven himself to be a trustworthy bear and an excellent performer. Randy Miller was so confi-



dent in Rocky's obedience that he did not hesitate to agree to his cousin's request to film himself and Rocky in a video promotional. His cousin, Stephan Miller, was also experienced in handling exotic animals, and he had even played and wrestled with another bear at Predators in Action when he worked as a trainer there about ten years before this incident.



The plan was for a casual setting where Stephan had his hands in his pockets while Rocky was standing or sitting next to him. Then, later,

they would wrestle. As they were filming, everything seemed to be going according to plan: Rocky was obeying his cues, by staying when told to and sitting when told to. He even stood up on his hind legs and started licking Stephan's face! Everyone was thrilled that it was going so well—but suddenly, without warning, Rocky decided to go into his wrestling routine. He approached Stephan, stood up on his hind legs (just like before) and in one quick, swift motion bit Stephan on the neck. In horrified shock, amidst screams and yells, Randy dove in to wrestle the bear, and the other trainers used canes and pepper spray to separate Rocky and Stephan. The whole incident only lasted a few seconds. Stephan scrambled up from the ground where he'd fallen and stumbled away. But irrevocable damage had been done—Rocky's bite was a lethal one, and Stephan died within a few minutes.



A terribly upset and shaken Randy afterwards said that the incident happened during “playful” wrestling and that Rocky was a “loving, affectionate, friendly, safe bear.”

Rocky is a picture to us of just how deceitful sin is. We know how dangerous and deadly sin can be, but we deceive ourselves into thinking that it is harmless and that we can control it. We think that “next time” alcohol won’t hurt us ... until we become hopelessly addicted. We think that an illicit affair will be without consequence ... until there is a broken marriage, or relationship, resulting in heartache and grief. We see no harm in being “one of the crowd” and smoking a cigarette or taking drugs ... until we become enslaved in an expensive habit that destroys our bodies. We see no harm in twisting the truth to our advantage “just a tiny bit” ... until lying becomes a habit that we cannot break. And so we become entrapped in sin’s subtle and deadly clutches. God’s Word, the Bible, speaks of being **“hardened through the deceitfulness of sin”** (Hebrews 3:13). When we do not repent of our sins, we are spiritually separated from God and dead to eternal life with Him. God is not only speaking of physical death, but also spiritual death when He warns man, **“As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and**

live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die?" (Ezekiel 33:11).

Randy Miller was determined to find out what went wrong—was Rocky's bite a deliberate attack, or was it an accident? After carefully reviewing the film and consulting with other experts, it was ruled an accident. Rocky did not know that they wanted still shots of him and Stephan before going into the wrestling routine. After all, nine times out of ten, when Rocky was standing that close to someone it was to wrestle with them! So when Rocky went into his wrestling routine, Stephan was unprepared and did not have his arm up in the defensive position. Rocky had been trained to stand up on his hind legs (which he did) and to move towards the trainer (which he did) and to grab onto him (which he did) without clamping down (which he did). Rocky grabbed what was available—Stephan's neck. With the caning and commotion that followed, Rocky clamped down and shook Stephan. Though the other trainers reacted quickly, it was too late—at that point, no medical attention could save Stephan's life.

This tragedy could have been prevented. If Stephan had put his arm up, Rocky would have held onto that. Randy Miller later stated, "It was a flash bite and it hit him in a very vulnerable spot. If it had hit his arm or something, it would have been bad, but wouldn't have cost him his life." Not foreseeing this danger resulted in deadly consequences.

And so it is for us. If we do not realize our helpless and lost state before God, we will suffer the eternal consequences in the lake of fire, separated from God forever. That is why the Lord warns us two times over, **“I tell you... except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish”** (Luke 13:3,5). We are all in the same lost condition before God, until we repent of our sins and come to Him for forgiveness. **“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”** (1 John 1:9). Do not delay—come to Him now, while there is still time, while you are able, before it is forever too late!

Little things have consequences—just ask Roxanne Duff. Find her story in *Too Cute*. ◀

Too Cute

The little six-month-old Rottweiler puppy was certainly cute. Roxanne Duff had found it after it had strayed into her yard along with a Golden Retriever. She did the right thing and called the local police and left a message asking what to do with the dogs. But

all that cute, playful innocence got Roxanne thinking. By the time Police Officer Christopher Laird called Roxanne back to advise her to contact the local animal shelter or dog kennel, she'd decided the Rottweiler puppy had "run away."

By that evening the owner of the dogs, Shawn Lerch, had been found and had gotten his Golden Retriever back. His suspicions aroused about the "runaway" Rottweiler, he contacted the police. Officer Laird knocked on the door of the Duff home but was told by Roxanne's husband Scott that they had no idea where the cute puppy had gone. Lerch wasn't easily convinced. He demanded the Duffs return his dog. When they claimed no knowledge of its whereabouts, he contacted the police again.

This time the police chief, Michael Diebold, showed up at the door.

Roxanne wasn't home and neither was Scott—only their five-year-old boy with a babysitter. But their five-year-old son had some interesting information to share with the police chief: His "mommy had given the dog to a woman from the Internet."

Confronted with the truth, the Duffs immediately denied knowing the whereabouts of the puppy. But they were getting scared. A little while later Scott called the police back with a confession. Roxanne Duff had sold the Rottweiler on Craigslist for \$50. Now they've each paid a \$500 fine and done 10 hours of community service. They both have the first entries on their criminal record, including failure to make a

reasonable effort to return lost property. Maybe you weren't aware, but that's considered a subset of theft.

And maybe you weren't aware that any cute little temptation that leads to a "small sin" brings heavy consequences. It may have brought a temporary reward and looked like no one would ever know about it. But **"be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap"** (Galatians 6:7). The Duffs had a day to enjoy \$50.

Then they had fear, confusion, a court case, a guilty plea, \$1,000 total in fines, 20 hours total of community service, and a criminal record. That's a pretty big crop. Pleading the good deed they did in returning their neighbor's Golden Retriever was irrelevant. We can't think that our lying, deceit, "petty" theft, anger, boasting, selfishness and more will have a "crop failure" because we've given to charity and mowed our neighbor's lawn. God will show us what we deserve to reap. We won't be able to claim that our "good deeds outweigh the bad."

Why not admit to your sins today before it's too late to do so. God still offers forgiveness of sins through the blood Jesus shed on the cross of Calvary. But if we refuse to admit our guilt and receive His forgiveness, we will have our day in court. Then we will discover what the full consequences of our sins are. **"Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation"** (2 Corinthians 6:2).



**“Christ
died for
our sins.”**

1 Corinthians 15:3

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“God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

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