

# **SPEAK UP FOR JESUS**



**LORD, USE ME; USE EVEN ME.**

*Scripture:*

**Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11**

1. The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners;
2. to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn;
3. to provide for those who mourn in Zion - to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to display his glory.
4. They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.
8. For I the LORD love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.
9. Their descendants shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the LORD has blessed.
10. I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
11. For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

**Luke 1:26-38**

26. In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth,
27. to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary
28. And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.'
29. But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.
30. The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.
31. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus.
32. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David.
33. He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.'
34. Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?'
35. The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.
36. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren.
37. For nothing will be impossible with God.'
38. Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.' Then the angel departed from her.



## **SPEAK UP FOR JESUS**

Have you been able to find a real Christmas card? I mean one that says something about Christ. I have received a lot in the mail. I've rummaged through the card shops. I found a lot of interesting things: three bears in a makeshift manger in their den, gaudy wreaths and mistletoe sprigs, even Mickey Mouse, bearded, riding in a sleigh. But there were only a few depicting the Holy Birth of Jesus Christ.

Please forgive me if I scoffed at your choice of cards. But I wonder why Hallmark wants to erase Jesus, and put in His place three stockings hanging on a mantle? Christmas is the birthday of Jesus. Christmas is about His birth, announcing the Prince of Peace. At Christmas, the whole world should celebrate His birth; *we* should be *eager* to celebrate that.

### **A FRIENDLY SEATMATE**

Years ago, I boarded a plane for London after a grueling week at General Assembly. As I sat in my seat, I thought that I would sleep all the way to London. But then the flight attendant came by with a very pretty blonde lady, and when I saw her sitting next to me, I thought, "Oh boy, I hope she's friendly."

And she *was* friendly, and she was a Communist. She let me know that in no uncertain terms. She told me how great Communism was for Soviets, for Cuba, for China and how it could benefit me. I told her I was a Christian. In fact, after listening to her for another twenty minutes, I *insisted* that I was a Christian. No matter how I tried to make believe that I was snoring, no matter what I did to try to hide away from her, she went on and on about Communism.

I finally said, "Are you trying to convert the world to Communism?" She said, "Yes, of course, but one person every day for the rest of my life, and you're it!"

### **ONE CHRISTIAN CONVERT EVERY DAY**

I thought afterward how wonderful it would be if Christians did that too. If every Christian made

one new convert every day, we'd convert the world to Christ overnight.

But instead, we talk about everything else but Jesus. We're quick to speak about our candidates, our football team, our baseball team, Santa Claus, Mickey Mouse or Charlie Brown. In fact, you can talk about Mohammed. You probably do talk more about Mohammed than you do about Jesus. Do we want to erase Him, too?

## **FOCUS ON JESUS**

Our family recently discussed why the classic churches are failing and the store-front churches are doing so well. We went on and on about programs we ought to develop or what we ought to do. Our grandson, whose friends are mostly from store-front churches, said, "You know, Pop, maybe it's because they don't develop programs; they aren't always raising money for new churches or even mission. They focus on Jesus." Ooh – that hurt.

My request to you this Christmas: Please, please, at every opportunity, **SPEAK UP FOR JESUS.**

### **I. TELL OTHERS WHO IT IS THAT MOTIVATES YOUR LIFE.**

**John Templeton, the Christian billionaire who has given millions and millions of dollars to charities all over the world insists when they want to thank him for it that they thank the Lord; He gave it to me. He made me a steward. Don't thank John Templeton; thank God.**

When Dr. Walter Wayne Webb, a Dayton, Ohio surgeon became a Christian, he was really caught by the story of the Good Samaritan. Every summer, he and his wife would take two weeks off. They would go to New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, some city, and they would go to where the derelicts lived or the homeless, and they would find a likely candidate. They would take him to the hotel with them, house him for two weeks, take him to a clothing store, get him new clothes, feed him, get him on his feet again, find out what career he

wanted to follow, take him to an employment agency and pay a fee.

At the end, they would, of course, want to thank him profusely. But Dr. Webb would look them in the eye and say, “Jesus Christ touched my life. I have it; you need it. So God wants me to give it to you. Don’t thank me. Thank the Lord.”

This Christmas, you’re probably going to get a lot of thanks. There will probably be a lot of people who know you telling you how benevolent you are, how charitable you are. When they do say that, will you please pause and think back. Who gave you what you have? Who made you what you are? Who made you benevolent and kind? **SPEAK UP FOR JESUS, PLEASE.**

## **II. TELL OTHERS HOW JESUS HAS COMFORTED YOU OR ENCOURAGED YOU.**

With apologies to the Church and World Committee, I’d like to tell the story of Akkramong, Ghana. When I went to Ghana I couldn’t wait to go to Akkramong, a school that had been supported by Presbyterians quite heavily for quite a while. When I arrived in Akkramong, fifty students were on the campus waiting for me.

One little girl, Gladys, seemed to be attracted to me. I don’t know if it was my good looks – no, it couldn’t have been – or my sweet demeanor – it couldn’t have been that either – because Gladys was blind, as were all the other students. But she was a wonderful, bright little twelve year old girl. When she became an orphan, she was immediately picked up by the missionary and brought to the school, and she had been there for several years. Now she knew Braille. “Isn’t God wonderful teaching me Braille?”

When she knew I was from the United States, she wanted to tell me about Ghana. Akkramong sits on the rim of a crater one hundred and fifty miles across where the tribes from Ghana used to capture blacks from other tribes and other nations and bring them into that crater and hold them until slavers would buy them from them. She knew all that and she told me all about that and told me all about Ghana.

She told me all about Jesus Christ, how kind he had been to her. Had Jesus been kind to me, too? We had a wonderful day together.

When we sat down to eat, the principal came to me and said, “Gladys wrote a poem. Would you like her to recite it to you?” I said, “I’d love it.” So Gladys stood up and this is what she had written:

**I’m glad God took away my eyes  
For I see things others do not see.**

**I see with my ears.**

**I hear the ripples of the river,  
The sweet sounds of birds,  
The rustle of leaves in a breeze.**

**I see with my nose.**

**I smell the sweet scent of flowers  
The precious odor of spring rains,  
And aromas telling me it’s time to eat.**

**I see with my heart.**

**I love the touch of a friend  
The helping hand of another  
And I swoon with hugs and kisses.  
Thank you, Lord, for MY sight.**

Ah, if a tiny blind girl in Africa can say that with all of her heart, I want to tell you, God’s been good to me. I want you to know how good he has been to me. And if God has been good to you, please **SPEAK UP FOR JESUS.**

## **III. TELL OTHERS OF JESUS’ LOVE FOR THEM.**

Let’s forget about *our* feelings this year. Let’s walk in the shoes of others. Seldom has a Christmas seemed so bleak in recent American history.

The stock market is down and the 401K’s and pension funds have dwindled for so many. The housing catastrophe continues to mount. And although the election is over and hope seems to be spilling out of Washington, what of this Christmas faced by the homeless, the displaced and the hungry poor.

Thousands are crying out for some evidence that someone cares. They need to feel God’s embracing

love. They need to feel God comforting them. They need to know that with Him they can go on in strength.

They need to hear it. They need to know that it happened to you. So please **SPEAK UP FOR JESUS.**

When I assumed the pastorate in Anaheim, I was impressed with a couple that sat just about five rows back right in front of the pulpit. Louie and Blanche Epstein were in that seat every Sunday for thirty years, since their nuptials. Blanche was a Deacon and Louis was not a member of the church. But one Sunday, he was apparently very moved by the sermon, and when I saw him at the door I said, "Louie, have you ever thought of accepting Christ as your Savior?" Louie said, "Oh, I did accept Him a long time ago." I said, "Why aren't you a member of the church?" He answered, "No one ever asked me." Everyone had assumed because his family was a well-known Jewish family in town, they wanted to be correct, so no one ever asked him. I did, and he was overjoyed, and he joined the church.

I've driven the streets around the church on Sunday. I've seen young people washing cars and weeding gardens. I wonder if they're not here because nobody has ever asked them. I wonder about your neighbor who watches from the window on Sundays as you're getting in your car to come to church and she's wishing that you would have asked her. Or your co-worker who is really hurting; he's afraid he's losing his job and he's having all kinds of problems that maybe you share or maybe is different from you. But he knows your faith and he wonders why you have never talked to him about it. **SPEAK UP FOR JESUS.**

How many are waiting, waiting, waiting to hear.

As the shepherds heard the angels telling them of the birth in Bethlehem, maybe God is expecting you or me to be the heralds saying that Christ can be born in Petaluma, Sebastopol, Oakmont, Santa Rosa or Roseland if we will but **SPEAK UP FOR JESUS.**

*Let us pray. Lord, give us gratitude and courage to raise our voices to praise you, and to herald your presence in contemporary life. Help us to speak up for you. We ask in His name who taught us to pray, Our Father ... (The Lord's Prayer). Amen.*



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