

WHAT WILL  
MATTER?

AND OTHER ESSAYS BY JOE R. BARNETT

THE CHRISTIAN  
**Appeal**

## Preface



John Gulley

**S**omeone has said that “when we die, we leave behind us all we have, and we take with us all we are.” Yes! And what lasts is what we’ve allowed God’s Spirit to build as he is at work within us. In this issue, Dr. Joe Barnett asks the important and pointed question, “When we leave this present world, *what will matter?*” Joe’s fine essays remind us of how crucial it is that our answers to that question and our Lord’s are the same.

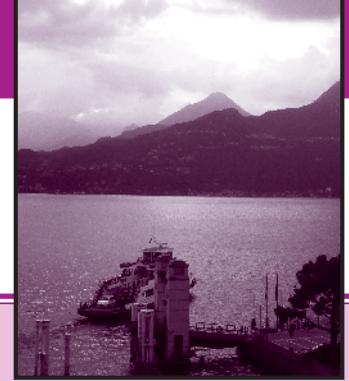
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## Invited Into Christ’s DEEPEST JOY



John Gulley

**W**ell done,  
good and faithful servant!  
Enter into the joy  
of your Lord!  
Inherit the kingdom  
prepared for you . . .”

✱ The Lord Jesus  
Matthew 25

John Gulley



what will  
**MATTER?**

**READY OR NOT, one day it  
will be over.**

**There'll be no more  
sunrises,  
sunsets,  
or birthdays.**

**Positions and possessions  
will be history.**

**Whether you lived in a  
castle or a cottage will be  
irrelevant.**

All you accumulated, both treasures and trinkets, will pass to someone else.

Your proficiency, polish, and pedigree will be meaningless.

Successes and failures, by which your significance was calculated, will no longer matter.

Your resentments, anxieties, and irritations will be gone; also your hopes, ambitions, and plans.

What will matter? How will the value of your life be measured?

What will matter won't be your competence and charisma, but your conduct.

What will matter won't be how well you were known, but what you were known for.

What will matter won't be the impressiveness of your résumé, but the quality of your character.

What will matter won't be how important

**"READY OR NOT, ONE DAY WHAT WILL MATTER WON'T BE HOW HIGH YOU CLIMBED, BUT WHAT YOU DID TO ENRICH OTHERS."**

you were, but how important you made others feel.

What will matter will be that you said or did something that made a difference for someone.

What will matter won't be how high you climbed, but what you did to empower, enrich, and encourage others; not what you got, but what you gave.

What will matter won't be whether you won or lost, but that you had the integrity and courage to do the right thing.

What will matter is how you will be remembered by

**"WHAT WILL MATTER IS HOW YOU WILL BE REMEMBERED BY THOSE YOU LOVED AND WHO LOVED YOU."**

those you loved and who loved you.

What will matter is that you will be missed because you filled a space in someone's life that no one else could fill.

What will matter will be how deeply those who knew you will feel the loss when you're gone.

What will matter won't be how long your life lasted, but how long

your influence will.

What will matter won't be how you started, but how you finished.

What will matter won't be the name that identified you, but the actions that defined you.

What will matter won't be things that happened by accident, but things that

happened because of deliberate choices you made.

Most of all, what will matter is that you committed your life to the Lord, and will now hear him say: "Well done, good and faithful servant . . . Enter into the joy of your lord! Inherit the kingdom prepared for you . . ." (Matthew 25:23, 34).

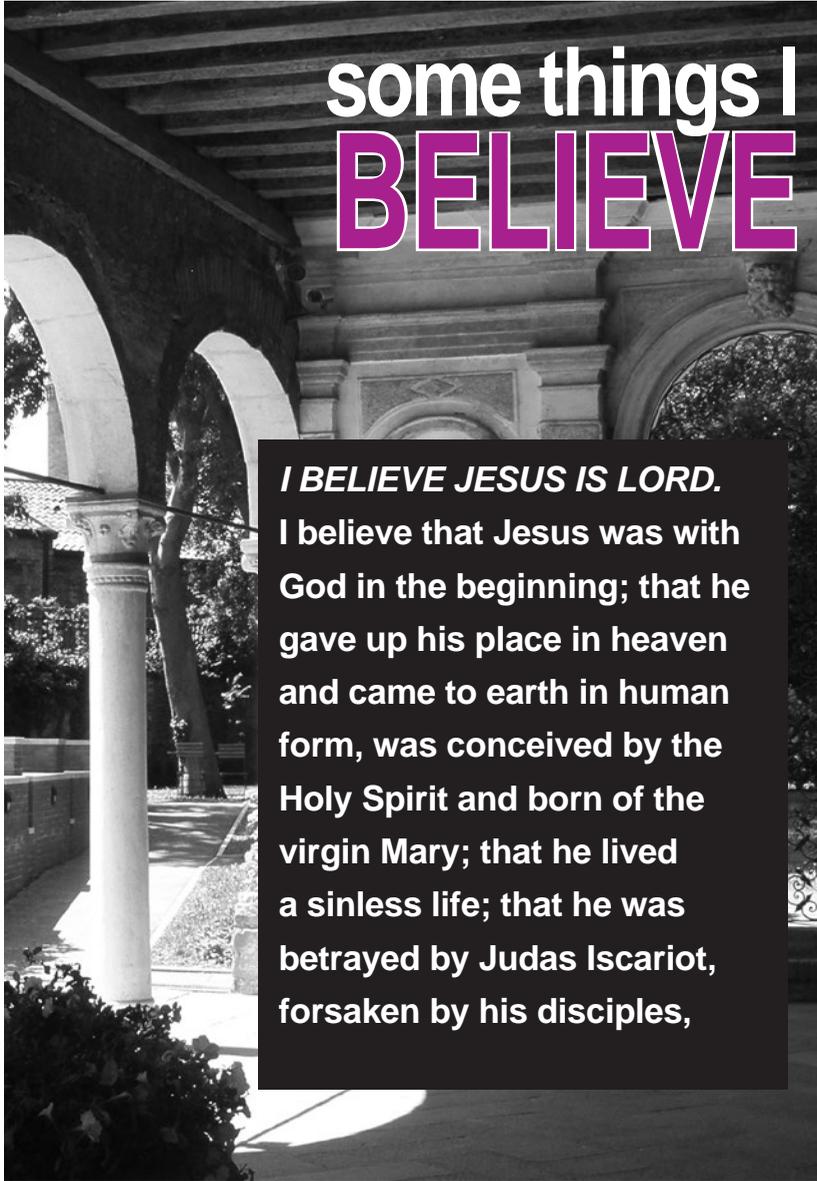
When you hear these words of our Lord, you'll know that the troubles

and triumphs of life were worth it.

*Welcome home!*



Curtis Shelburne



John Gulley

# some things I BELIEVE

## ***I BELIEVE JESUS IS LORD.***

**I believe that Jesus was with God in the beginning; that he gave up his place in heaven and came to earth in human form, was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary; that he lived a sinless life; that he was betrayed by Judas Iscariot, forsaken by his disciples,**

rejected by the religious establishment, and sentenced to death by Pontius Pilate; that he was crucified, buried, resurrected, and ascended back to heaven; that he will come again to judge the living and the dead; that he is at the right hand of God, interceding for believers and reigning over his Kingdom which will never end.

## ***I BELIEVE GOD IS SOVEREIGN.***

I believe that God is all-powerful; that he is God, and there is no other—that he does what he pleases, and what he has planned he will do (Isaiah 46:8–11); that humans hatch their own plans, but it is the Lord’s plan that will prevail

(Proverbs 19:21); that “all things happen just as he decided long ago” (Ephesians 1:11); that he is “the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords”

**“GOD IS INFALLIBLY SOVEREIGN AND IS NOT SHACKLED BY MY LIMITED UNDERSTANDING.”**

(1 Timothy 6:15); that he rules over the nations (Psalm 22:28); that he “brings down rulers and turns them into nothing” (Isaiah 40:23).

If with fallible human reasoning I ever doubt the sovereignty of God, it will carry no weight, for he will remain infallibly sovereign. He is God and is not shackled by my limited understanding. He

has infinite knowledge, unlimited power, and operates on his own clock and calendar, not mine. He, only he, is in control.

“Oh, what a wonderful God we have! How great

**“ I BELIEVE THAT LIFE IS A GIFT FROM GOD, AND THAT THERE IS A GOD-DESIGNED REASON THAT I WAS BORN. ”**

are his riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand his decisions and his methods! For who can know what the Lord is thinking? Who knows enough to be his counselor? . . . For everything comes from him; everything exists by his power and is intended for his glory. To him be glory evermore. Amen” (Romans 11:33–36).

“My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior” (Luke 1:47).

***I BELIEVE LIFE IS A GIFT.***

I believe that life is a gift from God (Job 10:12; 12:10; Acts 17:25); that there is a God-designed reason I was born; that God gives me the freedom

to live this life as I choose, but that my status is stewardship, not ownership; that my talents and abilities are gifts from him, and that I am responsible for their cultivation and use; that I only get one earthly life, therefore only one chance to thank him for this incredible gift by using it to serve and glorify him; that he wants me to act

justly, love mercy, and walk humbly (Micah 6:8); that I start breathing at one end of life and stop at the other, and that what I do in between measures how I value the gift.

***I BELIEVE ETERNAL LIFE IS REAL.***

I believe that Jesus is the resurrection and the life and that those who believe in him, even though they die, will live again (John 11:25).

In Daniel Silva’s novel, *The Other Woman*, Alistair Hughes, an American falsely accused of spying for Russia, is murdered. At the graveside, his

colleague Arthur Seymour approaches Milinda Hughes, Alistair’s widow, to offer his condolence. She requests a word in private, and as they walk among the headstones she asks, “Are you a believer?”

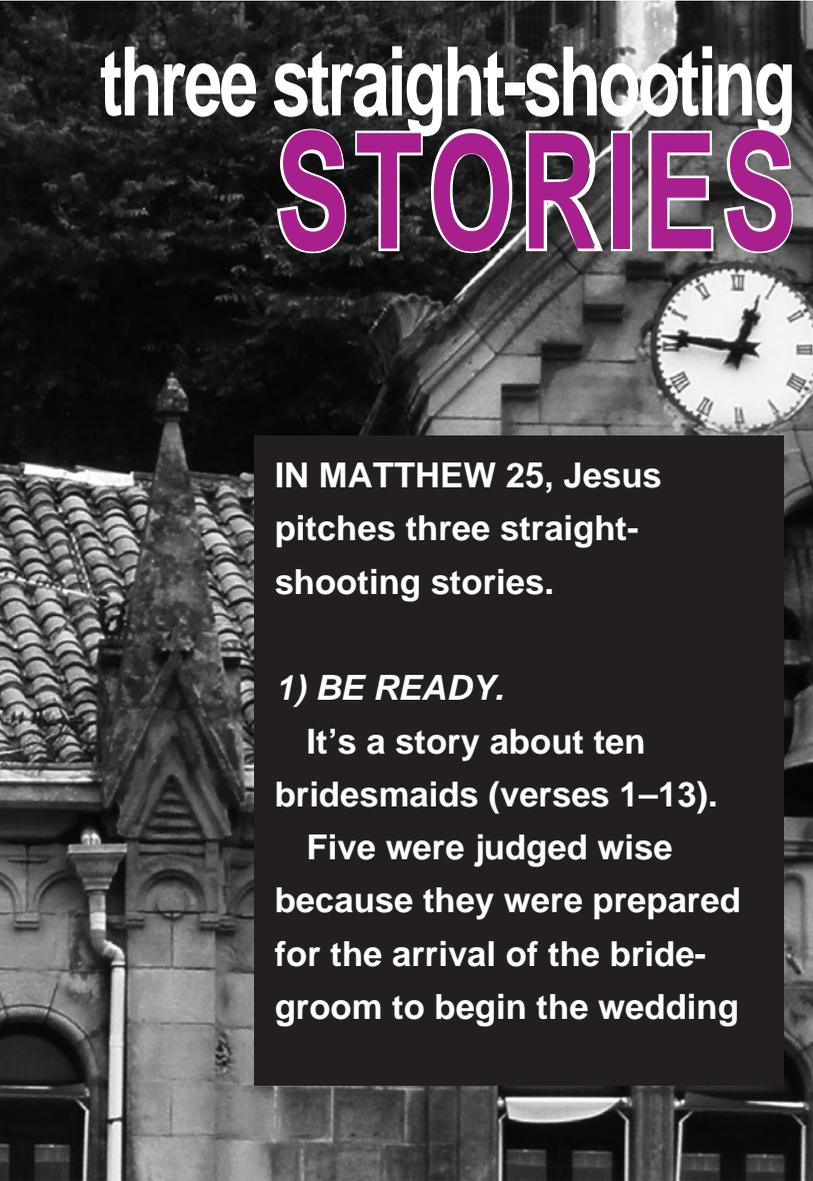
“I am not,” admits Seymour.

“Nor am I,” she says. “But at this moment, I wish I were. Is this how it ends? Is there really nothing more?”

There is more, Milinda, for believers much more—an eternal life where there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain (Revelation 21:4).



John Gulley



# three straight-shooting STORIES

**IN MATTHEW 25, Jesus pitches three straight-shooting stories.**

## **1) BE READY.**

**It's a story about ten bridesmaids (verses 1–13).**

**Five were judged wise because they were prepared for the arrival of the bridegroom to begin the wedding**

banquet and five judged foolish because they weren't.

It's that simple: we are ready for the Lord's return or we're not.

"Always be ready," he said, because two things are certain: 1) "You don't know the day your Lord will come," and 2) He "will come at a time you don't expect him" (Matthew 24:42, 44).

"Unprepared!" is an appalling ending.

## **2) BE RESPONSIBLE.**

A story about three men and the use of their talents (verses 14–30).

The owner gave resources to each, went away, and left the use of those assets up to them; then he returned and

pronounced his verdict on their performance.

He gave to "each according to their ability." No one was required to perform at the level of another's ability, only to

**"NO ONE WAS REQUIRED TO PERFORM AT THE LEVEL OF ANOTHER'S ABILITY, ONLY TO THE BEST OF THEIR OWN."**

the best of their own. The two-talent servant was not required to produce at the level of the five-talent servant—but he was expected to produce, and he did. The one-talent servant was not required to produce at the level of the two-talent servant—but he was expected to produce, and he didn't.

The five- and two-talent

servants delivered a one hundred percent return on their master's investment. The one-talent servant produced nothing. He returned what he had received, nothing more.

**"EACH OF US HAS BEEN GIVEN ABILITIES—A TRUST TO BE USED AND A RESPONSIBILITY TO BE ACKNOWLEDGED."**

He had done no harm; neither had he done any good. The master's verdict for the five- and two-talent servants was, "good and faithful." His verdict for the one-talent servant was, "wicked and lazy."

Each of us has our given share of abilities, a trust to be used, and a responsibility to be acknowledged: "Master,

you entrusted me with five talents . . . I have gained five more."

"Master, you entrusted me with two talents . . . I have gained two more."

"Master, you are a hard man . . . I hid your talent."

The master entrusted talents to his servants in verses 14–18; then went away. He returned

for an accounting in verse 19. You and I are presently living between verses 18 and 19.

The talent we've been given is a coin with two sides: on one side is written "endowment"; on the other side, "responsibility." Our master has gone away. He will be back. His verdict will be, "good and faithful" or "wicked and lazy."

### **3) BE RELIABLE.**

A story about judgment day (verses 31–46).

Our service to Jesus is judged by how we treat his little brothers and sisters. When we see their need and fill it, he says, "You did it to me." His ruling?—"Take your inheritance—the kingdom reserved for you."

When we ignore their need, he says, "You did not do it to me." His ruling?—"Depart from me."

The five foolish bridesmaids and the wicked and lazy servant

were not condemned for doing something bad, but for failing to do something good—turning a blind eye to those in need. It wasn't what they did but what they didn't do that doomed them.

We won't be judged by the knowledge we have acquired, the fame we have achieved, or the fortune we have amassed, but by the help we have given.

We are free to live our life as we choose. But at the end, we must give an account to the One who entrusted us with life.



Phil Kent



# is it too early to have a **PARTY?**

**I SMILED** when I saw the sign in the front yard. It was as big as a bedsheet: **WELCOME HOME, DAVE!**

**Dave** was the son of Jack and Nancy Carter. Fine young man. He had just finished the semester and was returning home to Littleton, Colorado, for the summer.

**You see it when someone**

John Gullley

returns from military deployment. The whole neighborhood rolls out. *Tie a Yellow Ribbon Round the Ole Oak Tree*. **WELCOME HOME SOLDIER!**

But what do you do when the kid coming home isn't a well-behaved son or a patriotic young trooper returning from war?

The boy I have in mind has been acting like a pig, feeding pigs, eating with pigs. Took half of his dad's money, swaggered off to Acapulco and blew it on booze and bimbos; trampled on everything he'd been taught at home and church. Lost his pals, his money, and his morals.

And now he's coming home because he's broke and hungry.

And catch this! His dad

wants to throw a welcome-home party for him.

Do you think he deserves a party? I don't think he deserves a party.

He left broken hearts behind when he left home

**"DO YOU THINK THIS SON DESERVES A PARTY? HE HAS BEEN ACTING LIKE A PIG, FEEDING PIGS, EATING WITH PIGS."**

and left a mess behind when he headed back home.

His speech is ready and rehearsed: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you." That should do the trick.

But is his father's forgiveness the only forgiveness he needs? Not only was he contaminated by Acapulco, he contaminated Acapulco.

He abused and misused people.

We've wagged a shame-on-you finger at his fair-weather friends. Lousy loyalists we say—when he ran out of money

**“IT'S TOO EARLY TO HAVE A PARTY. WE NEED TO WAIT AND SEE IF HIS PENITENCE IS REALLY GENUINE.”**

they ran out on him.

But what havoc did he wreak on them? There were guys he led into debauchery and gals he led into shame. See that old-before-her-time girl carrying a baby on her hip? His baby?

I don't think any of them would go to the party. And I don't think I would go to the party.

We've also wagged a

shame-on-you finger at his older sibling; the one that stayed home, worked hard, went to church every time the door was opened. He was boiling mad when he heard about the party for his ne'er-do-well kid brother. Refused to come to the party. Can't say I blame him.

So . . .

It's too early to have a party.

We need to wait and see if his penitence is genuine. Maybe he just decided it didn't make sense to chow down with pigs in the slums when he could gorge on filet mignon in a mansion. How do we know his remorse is real? Maybe he's pulling a fast one. Give him a bath, clean jeans, and a sandwich—but it's too early for a robe, a ring, and a reception.

It's too early to have a party. We need to wait and see what he'll do when the memories of Acapulco come back and stir the itch for indulgence. How do we know he won't relapse? The lure of lust may be too much for him, and he may cut loose again. We need to wait and see how this turns out.

Let him come home. But don't stake a WELCOME HOME SON! sign on the front lawn. Don't hire a band and a caterer; don't make a list and mail

embossed invitations to the party. Let him show he's on the up and up, get a job, earn his spurs. Don't let him off the hook 'til he proves himself.

What does this lavish “Welcome Home” say to him?

Just this: You were missed, you are loved, you are forgiven, you are home.

So I've changed my mind. I think it's time for a party because . . . because that is exactly how God treats us.

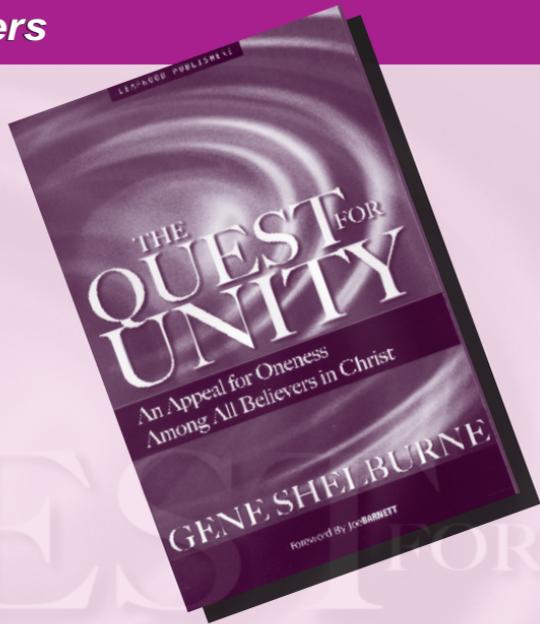


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